





Daughter Luka and mother Annick:
"I knew it wouldn't matter to my
mum who I brought home"



Find the answers to all your questions on
sex, love and the Genderbread Person:
"What's it like the first time?"



Olympic athlete Kim Meylemans:
"It's important to show that
there's more behind an athlete
than the athletic performance"

Do you confront people or do you prefer to
distract them in difficult situations?
Test which kind of upstander
you are!

Content creator Daniël Mariën:

**"WE HAVE TO BE
INTOLERANT OF
INTOLERANCE"**



BEING YOURSELF TOGETHER

This edition of the PAARS newspaper focuses on the motto 'Being yourself together'. Three words, but all three are equally important.

Together

You definitely don't have to have plenty of friends; sometimes 'alone' is more fun than 'together'. Sometimes 'alone' is just alone and you miss someone. Yet, you're never alone. There's always someone who wants to be in touch with you: a peer, a parent, teacher or another sympathetic ear, such as Awel (www.awel.be).

Yourself

You are who you are. And do you know who you are? Many young people cannot answer that question right away. That makes sense. After all, you're looking for yourself. You're searching for how you experience being in love, you're searching for how you see yourself in this special world, you're searching for what attracts you, you search, search, search.... But don't be rushed, continue your search at your own pace. No stress!

To be

Don't do things that you think others consider right or okay. You don't necessarily have to be like everyone else. Stick to the rules and laws, which you have to respect. But other than that, just do what makes you happy.

I hope that thanks to the info in this paper you can find yourself, that you can be who you are and that you can get together with the two or three of you or with a whole group, without taboos or negative comments.

Jeroen Thierens

– Co-organisator PAARS



Out of the closet into high gear

Our son was in the closet for five years. He knew with 100% certainty from the age of 12 that he was attracted to boys, he said afterwards, but it still took five long years before he dared to share his big secret with us.

Why is it still so difficult for many young people to come out of the closet, especially to their parents? Because young people don't want to disappoint their parents. Many parents don't know anything about gay and trans people and people tend to reject the unknown.

What can we all do to improve this? Make the gay and transgender issue more accessible, both at home and at school. LGBT acceptance starts in the family. On the other hand, the PAARS newspaper is ideal for at school, so feel free to take home a copy.

Be strong and come out of the closet, when you're ready! You may feel that you are LGBT+ and your parents may suspect it, but if it is not spoken out loud, it's not 'real'.

Only then will your coming-out gain momentum and you can be yourself together with your family and friends.

Petra

Chairman Trotse Ouders
www.trotseouders.be

"The conversation with Aïda Yancy has expanded my vision"

Ten curious Journalism students from AP Hogeschool spent several weeks fully immersed in the LGBT+ world. Check out what they thought of it here

Which interview definitely sticks with you?



"I was often warned about how difficult duo interviews can be. For me, the parent-child interview was a super positive experience." -Romy

"I loved getting to know my interviewees. They inspire me and I personally learned a lot from them." -Fleur



"The interview with Aïda Yancy was incredibly interesting. Especially the difference between my and her experiences really expanded my perspective." -Mara

"Interviewing M.L. for the article 'Am I Normal?' has given me more insights. It was a tremendously engaging conversation." -Rune

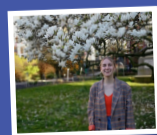


What were your experiences in creating the newspaper?



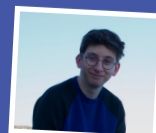
"We were thrown right into the project. As we had to start right away, there was an incredible drive and we went for it together." -Emma

"Working together around one theme and finding creative angles for all the articles was a challenge, but it turned out super well." -Manon



"It was a rewarding experience because I was able to chat with different people about their own experiences. That gave me more people skills." -Lotte

"The cooperation within the group was really at its best. We help each other wherever needed." -Dries



How do you like the end result?

"I'm mighty proud of our end result! I saw this group and thought 'oh yeah, this will be alright.'" -Danté



"We really worked on new angles and a new layout that's visually interesting. I'm really proud of that." -Lauren



It's all in the details

It used to be difficult to come out of the closet as an LGBT+ person. Therefore, LGBT+ members used signs to express their romantic interest. For example, women in the 20th century gave each other a bouquet of violets

The LGBT-ABC

The LGBT+ community is overloaded with abbreviations, new words, etc. These words are not self-evident to everyone and therefore require a clear explanation. LGBT+ is just a collective term for a lot of gender identities, expressions and sexual preferences.

Lesbian:

Someone who identifies as a woman and is romantically or sexually attracted to women.

Gay:

Someone who identifies as male and is attracted to men.

Bisexual:

A person who is attracted to the same and opposite sex.

Transgender:

Someone whose gender identity does not correspond to the gender which that person was assigned at birth.

Queer:

Can be used as an umbrella term for people who are part of the community or for a person who is still exploring their gender identity or sexual preferences.

Asexual:

Someone who is rarely or never sexually attracted to someone else. This does not mean that they cannot have sexual relationships.

Cisgender:

A cis person has a gender that corresponds to the one they were assigned at birth.

Gender vs. Sex:

Gender reveals something about how a person identifies. Sex is about the inborn gender characteristics. Someone's gender can be the same as their sex. For example: a person who identifies themselves as male and has the body of a boy. Gender can also be different from the sex. When someone identifies themselves as female, but has a male body

Gender expression:

The way a person expresses themselves to the outside world. Does a girl wear "typical girl" clothes, or not?

Gender dysphoria:

The sensation someone has of not feeling at home in his/her/their body. This feeling is not constant, but changes depending on the time and the environment.

The LGBT+ flags



The rainbow flag is the symbol of The Pride Month. The Rainbow flag is the umbrella flag for all members of the LGBT+ community.



This flag is for the transgender community. The colours baby blue and baby pink are separated by a white stripe, which represents trans persons who are transitioning, intersex or agender.



This flag represents the bisexual community. That is, a person's orientation in which he/she/they fall in love with persons who have more than one gender identity.



Being yourself sometimes comes with crazy questions. Fortunately, you shouldn't care. These four examples are proof.

Written by Romy van der Heyden

Not typically me

Short hair

"When I walked into class with short hair, a boy asked if I had become a lesbian. The stereotype that all lesbian women have short hair is still very much alive, or that you are a lesbian if you cut your hair short. Even though haircuts and sexual orientation have nothing to do with each other."

— Mara (20)

My sister

"My sister already had short hair, so at home we thought she wasn't straight. She didn't tell us for a long time. When she finally decided to tell us she is attracted to people's personalities, we were all proud of her."

— Peter (22)

What a question

"If you are attracted to guys, people often ask, 'who is the man and who is the woman in your relationship?' Or they say I act feminine. But that goes in one ear and out the other with me. You can ask me anything, as long as you do it respectfully."

— Dries (19)

Showering together

"When I tell people I play football, people ask me if I'm into women. My best friend sometimes thinks I'm a lesbian because I like to talk about football. Some people find it very strange that we all shower together. To me, it's the most normal thing ever."

— Inne (20)



THE GREAT UPSTANDER QUIZ

In everyday life, various pleasant but also less pleasant situations can arise. An upstander is someone who takes action when an individual or group is harassed. Do you see a friend of yours being treated unfairly? Intervene!!

What kind of upstander are you? Take the quiz and find out how you make a difference.

Your friend Lukas is being laughed at by an older student because he is wearing a rainbow backpack. You notice that Lukas does not like this. What do you do?

- A. You report this to a teacher and explain the situation.
- B. You intervene and ask Lukas about his weekend.
- C. You ask Lukas if he wants to come with you to the bathroom.
- D. You ask the older student what's wrong with a rainbow backpack.
- E. You watch from a distance and ask him afterwards how he feels about this situation.

You immediately tell your best friends it is a rumour to prevent it from being spread any further .

C.

When someone tells you this rumour, you ask: "Why are you telling me this?".

D.

You ask Femke how she feels about this.

B.

When you hear someone telling the rumour, you start talking about something else like the upcoming class.

E.

You tell your class teacher what you heard.

A.

There's a rumour spreading about Femke, a girl from your class. Apparently, she kissed a girl last weekend. What do you do?

Tim loves to wear make-up. During Physical Education the other boys block the door of the changing room so Tim cannot enter. They yell: "Go to the girls changing room!" What do you do?

- B. You come up with a plan to get the boys away from the door and yell: "Look out! The teacher's coming!"
- D. You ask the boys why they do this and urge them to let Tim in.
- A. You tell the PE-teacher what's going on.
- E. You tell them you're going to the bathroom so you can sneak out. Once you are out of the changing room, you ask Tim if everything is okay
- C. You tell the boys in the changing room they only have two more minutes to change. This way, you lure them away from the door

You ask Saar: "Was that really necessary?"

D.

You ask Fien if she wants to sit next to you.

C.

After class you ask Fien if everything is alright because getting such a comment is far from pleasant.

E.

You say out loud to your friends: "What the f*ck? That makes no sense!".

A.

You let your books fall on the ground to create a diversion

B.

Fien is attracted to women. Today you are getting new seats assigned. Fien has to sit next to Saar, but Saar refuses. She says: "I don't want to sit next to you or you will fall in love with me or try to kiss me." What do you do?

René is a transgender person who is now a girl. In the group chat of her class, her nickname is changed to dirty man. She doesn't like this, but every time she wants to delete her own nickname, it's changed back again. What do you do?

- A. You take a screenshot and send it to your closest friends, adding: "WTF is this, no way is this acceptable?"
- B. You immediately send something about tomorrow's test to the group chat.
- C. You remove the bully from the group chat, so that they can no longer text bad things.
- D. You remove the bully from the group chat, so that they can no longer text bad things...".
- E. You send a message to René in private, telling her that you understand that it's not nice to hear such things and that she can always come to you.

Usually A:

Involving others

You have a great sense of responsibility which makes you more likely to seek help from others, such as a bystander or a person in charge. That way, you are not alone and can discuss the situation together.

TIP: Choose the person who is in the best possible position, such as a teacher.

Usually B:

Distract

You want a subtle approach and divert the attention from the event, for example by pretending to know the person or by asking questions. Staying close to the event may also be enough.

TIP: Talk about a completely different subject in order to interrupt the bullying.

Usually C:

Separate

You will actually take action and physically remove those involved from the situation. Another option is to put yourself between the individuals, which might stop the bullying.

TIP: Assess the situation well and keep yourself safe.

Usually D:

Confront

You're confident and not afraid to confront someone. If you see that a certain behaviour is not okay, you dare to say something. You confront the person who is crossing the line and tell them that what they're doing is inappropriate.

TIP: Keep it short and to the point, don't get into an argument.

Usually E:

Staying present

You stay present when a situation arises. You don't intervene quickly, but afterwards sound out how the person feels. By staying present, you show that you are ready to help.

TIP: Make sure the person feels safe in the environment.

"A talk about the weather"

I'm a boy who has long hair, and sometimes people make a comment on that. My best friend then always begins to talk about the weather, what he would be having for dinner that night, or his favourite TV show. It helps me to distract the attention and that way I feel less targeted.

Mats, 19 years old

"Being able to talk relieved me"

I was walking around the city with a friend, carrying my tote bag with a rainbow on it. We suddenly got a dirty look from a passer-by. Only afterwards did I realise that he probably thought the friend and I were a couple. My friend asked me how I felt about that. Being able to talk about the situation was a relief and helped me a lot.

Lotte, 20 years old

"He learned from our interaction"

My dad recently made a homophobic statement. I totally disagreed with it and immediately made it clear to him that it was very hurtful. Fortunately, he immediately understood why I had such a problem with what he said. I'm glad I confronted my dad about it, because I feel he learned a lot from our interaction.

Stien, 22 years old

"The tutor helped debunk the gossip"

There was a lot of gossip about a boy in my class because he had danced with another boy at a party. Those rumours became so out of control that I asked a study supervisor to intervene. Fortunately, that helped stop the wave of rumours and that boy was able to walk peacefully across the schoolyard again.

Lou, 20 years old

Celebrate 17 May

On 17 May, the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT), and PAARS-day are celebrated. It's no coincidence that on 17 May 2019, Taiwan was the first Asian country that legalised same-sex marriages.

ANNICK IS HAPPY THAT HER DAUGHTER LUKA CONFIDED IN HER

“The term ‘coming out of the closet’ exasperates me”

Luka (19, she/her) told her mum Annick a year ago that she had a girlfriend. Together they look back on the moment Luka called her mum upstairs to break the news. “Luka was so nervous,” says mom Annick.

By Romy van der Heyden

“One evening, I asked mom to come to my bedroom. My girlfriend had already told her parents that she had a girlfriend. This made me feel I was lagging behind.” Mum Annick noticed that Luka wanted to share something with her when she entered the room. She remembers that Luka was talking nervously about a song. “When I opened the door, I could tell Luka was nervous. She was beating around the bush and she never does that otherwise. I realised this was not the reason she called me upstairs.”

“When I opened the door, I could tell Luka was nervous.”

“Luka needed a little push until her mom said, ‘I think you called me upstairs for a reason.’ Then the news arrived: ‘Mom, I have a girlfriend.’ Annick was thrilled when she heard the news. “Luka has so much to give, and she had always deserved someone who liked her too. Who it would be didn’t matter to me”



Big deal

“I knew it didn’t matter to my mom who I’d bring home. Yet I still had a bit of stress because it’s such a big deal to others,” Luka says. “If I had had to introduce a boyfriend, I would have felt uncomfortable too.”

“My girlfriend and I have been together since the lockdown, during the period when everyone went out for walks with friends. I went out regularly with my girlfriend and my best friend,” Luka tells about the start of her relationship. “Whenever I went for a walk with my best friend,

people would ask if he was my boyfriend. Every time I answered ‘no’. No one asked if I was with my girlfriend when I went out with her. That complicated my coming-out. I needed to say every time that I was in a relationship with my girlfriend because it was not obvious.”

“If I had had to introduce a boyfriend, I would have felt uncomfortable too.”

Exasperation

“The term coming out of the closet has a double connotation” Luka thinks. “I prefer to say: ‘This is my partner.’ Which has been my current strategy.” Luka is happy with her approach, though she notices that it’s more difficult for others.

“Some people need a warning. Due to the term ‘coming out of the closet’, there is a lot of pressure when you tell people who you are falling for. This makes it harder for people to tell who they are in love with.”

“The term ‘coming out of the closet’ exasperates me,” Annick says approvingly. “It implies that it’s not okay to make your own choices and experience who you are.” According to Luka, the term mostly proves that being straight is the norm. Everyone else would then be special. Annick: “The term is still used a lot, but really it should all be normal. That’s why I’m glad my daughter dares to tell me everything.” ■

“Being queer is never the problem”

Activist Yancy advocates for LGBT+ people of colour

How many LGBT+ people with foreign roots do you know? According to activist Aïda Yancy (she/her), minorities within the LGBT+ community are still too invisible. “Some people don’t believe that persons of colour can be queer.”

By Mara Claes

As a black queer activist and feminist, Aïda Yancy regularly gives lectures and workshops. In addition, she worked for two years at RainbowHouse Brussels to create more safe spaces for LGBT+ persons of colour. In short: Aïda is not sitting still, although she’s willing to make an exception for our conversation right now.

LGBT+ is here to stay

Aïda resolutely answers the LGBT+ community when asked where she feels most at home.

“I like to connect with people who understand me and accept me as I am.”

This is sadly uncommon, which is why Aïda says



credit: Jean-Christophe Guillaume

we need to address homophobia

“I often get surprised reactions: ‘black lesbian women really exist?’”

“Being queer is never the problem. No one suffers from being trans, bisexual, gay Moreover, there are many LGBT+ people in the world. An estimated 5% of the population is transgender.”

“Back in the old days you never saw a black queer woman on television”

LGBT+ people of colour face not only homophobia, but also racism. “I can’t walk hand in hand everywhere with my girlfriend, but it’s not written on my face that I’m LGBT+. My skin colour, on the other hand, I can’t hide.” Moreover, there are still many misconceptions about queer people with foreign roots. “Some people think we can’t be queer. I often get surprised reactions: ‘Oh, black lesbians really exist?’ You bet: here I am. We’ve always been there”

Black, queer & proud

Aïda applauds the fact that an increasing number of LGBT+ individuals with foreign roots are appearing in the media. “When I was a teenager, I didn’t see myself represented anywhere. A black queer woman seemed non-existent. Now streaming services like Netflix are increasingly bringing LGBT+ people of colour into the picture. Just look at *Sex Education*.”

That representation is especially necessary for queer people of colour themselves. “Obviously it’s nice for white people to discover that black or Asian LGBT+ people do exist, but first and foremost it’s important to show young people of colour that they are not alone. You have queer people of every religion, every ethnicity and every culture.” ■

“Fuck it. I'm just being myself, deal with it”



Daniel Maeriën, spokesperson for Wel Jong, testifies about his experiences as an LGBT+ person

For Daniel Maeriën (25, he/him), the time before his coming-out was difficult. Now Daniel is a spokesperson for Wel Jong and tries to create awareness. In hindsight, I can't complain about how everything turned out," he says."

By Dries De Doncker

“When I was 12, I started to realise that I found boys more attractive. At first, I always tucked it away and never really named it, even to myself. Eventually, in tenth grade, I was able to accept myself, but coming out was another story. I was afraid I wouldn't be accepted. I secluded myself and hung out with girls more.”

“My coming-out is a special story. I was just going to a new school at the time and I was cycling home with a friend from my village. She said, 'Super ridiculous, but the boys in our class all think you're gay.'

I burst into tears. My friend comforted me, on the pavement and after that she helped me tell everyone.”

“I was outed by my new classmates.”

“My surroundings reacted well to it, I was very lucky with that. My family and friends are very important to me. I only surround myself with people with whom I can be myself. I also try to be myself as much as possible in society. Of course, there are obstacles, but I just think: Fuck it, I'm just being myself. Deal with it.”

“I do realise that there is still a lot of work to do in society. There are all kinds of things we can do. Personally, I think it's important to create a society where there is an intolerance of intolerance.”

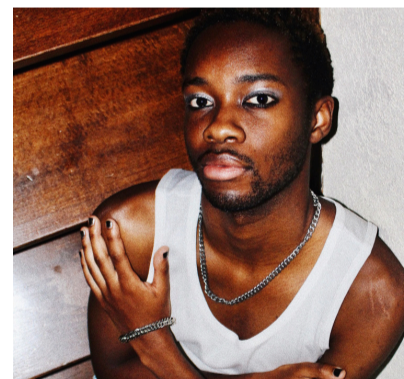
No matter what happens, there will always be people who will stand up for you and let you know that this isn't acceptable.”

“Sometimes, however, I feel unsafe. I find that, especially in the past, I behaved differently depending on where I was. This mainly comes from a fear of not being accepted. You just want to fit in. Fortunately for me, those days are pretty much over now.”

“When I do get bad reactions, I just laugh about it.”

“Now I also make videos on TikTok and other social media. Only at the very beginning I got some negative comments on Twitter but on my TikTok I haven't had five bad comments altogether. When I do get bad comments, I just laugh about it. I usually take a screenshot and post it on my story.”

“In the end, everything works out,' is the last thing I want to say. It's something very simple and a bit predictable. But it's true. Whatever you're struggling with, you can always reach out to someone!”



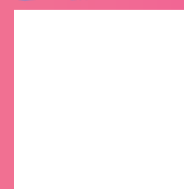
OMG,
AM I
ACTING
TOO GAY?!

Having fun without having to wonder if you don't come across as 'too gay' or 'a bit weird' can be such a delight. At Min19 online and in real life.

On min19.be you can find other young people in your neighbourhood, you can chat, share your stories and experiences on the forum... Create an account with your e-ID, and you're in. Completely safe.

Min19 organises activities all over Flanders and Brussels. Sometimes they do a city game, other times they go to an amusement park, to Pride or they hold a movie afternoon. In the spring and autumn they organise a weekend and in the summer, you can join the Min 19 summer camp .

Are you between the ages of 13 and 19 and gay, lesbian, bi, pansexual, transgender... or are you still questioning your sexuality or feelings? Then definitely check out the website.



www.min19.be, also on Facebook
E-mail: min19@weljong.be



SEX, LOVE AND

I THINK MY BEST FRIEND IS GAY BUT HE DOESN'T WANT TO TELL ME. CAN I ASK HIM?

"If you're good friends, there's no harm in asking. Maybe he's eager to tell you, but he's afraid to bring it up himself or doesn't know how you would react. Talking about LGBT+ more often can help too. You can subtly bring it up now and then in a positive way, so he knows you're okay with it. However, don't push him, and if you ask and he says no, believe him."

How do I tell my mum I'm bi?

"Preparation is key. Choose a calm moment for the conversation and think about what you want to say. Have you had the conversation? Then give your parents time to get used to the idea. If you find it difficult to start a conversation, try a creative way, such as a letter. You can also always ask someone to keep you company to make you feel more secure."

I'm missing something in my relationship and I think I might be attracted to women. How do I explain that to my boyfriend or can I seek help?

"That is undoubtedly a difficult situation! Try to choose a calm moment to discuss it with your partner. Think about what you want to say and give him time to process it. It is important not to stall him. Honesty is the best policy. Would you like to talk to a professional? There are several associations you can go to with your questions or doubts." (See page 16)

I FIND IT DIFFICULT TO USE 'THEY' AND 'THEIR'. HOW DO I SOLVE THAT?

"It's okay to make a mistake now and then. The important thing is that you're working on it and are willing to learn. If you slip, try to correct yourself without too much fuss. For example, "She has, sorry, they have a really cool bike. I saw them cycling to their house yesterday."

A handy summary:

Use 'they' instead of 'he/she'.
Use 'them' instead of 'him/her'.
Use 'their' instead of 'his/her'.

GENDER(BREAD)

CAN I MAKE FRIENDS SOMEWHERE WHO ARE ALSO GAY?

“Of course! Take a look on your social media channels at the different LGBT+ groups. Maybe there’s one that suits you? You could go to a Gay Pride in a city near you or have a fun afternoon at one of the associations. (See page 16) You will definitely make friends there. It’s also possible to meet new people online, but always be careful with this! The internet can sometimes be a scary place.”

WHAT’S IT LIKE HAVING SEX THE FIRST TIME?

“Having sex for the first time happens differently for everyone. Usually, it will just happen spontaneously when you and your partner are both ready. Above all, you shouldn't take yourself too seriously. It can be awkward for a while, especially in the beginning when you don't really know what to do. The first time is mainly searching for what you like and what the other person likes. It’s a bit of experimentation, but communication is very important. Take a look at awel.be or alles-overseks.be”

How do two gay men have sex?

“All the acts a man and woman do can also be done between two men. Everyone has different preferences. The most important thing is to talk about it with your partner. Don't know where to start? Then look up the possibilities together, but above all start with what you feel most comfortable with.”

Should I address a *transgender as he or she?

“There’s no harm in just asking. Better be safe than sorry, right? *Try to stick to transman or transwoman, that's just a bit more personal :)”

All the colours of the rainbow

The rainbow flag was designed by artist Gilbert Baker and originally consisted of two colours more than the current flag.. The colour pink stood for sex and the colour turquoise for magic and art.

GENDERBREAD GOOSE BOARD

I am Genderbread and I need your help! This course must be completed quickly, and who better than real PAARS heroes? After a long search, I've come to you. Will you join me
Gather your friends, survive the obstacles, answer the questions,... and become a real champion!

3, 2, 1... **START!**

3. What does this flag stand for?

9. In some countries it is still not possible to be open + (e.g. Poland, Hungary, Iran,...) - Stay in jail for two turns.

11. What does being pansexual mean

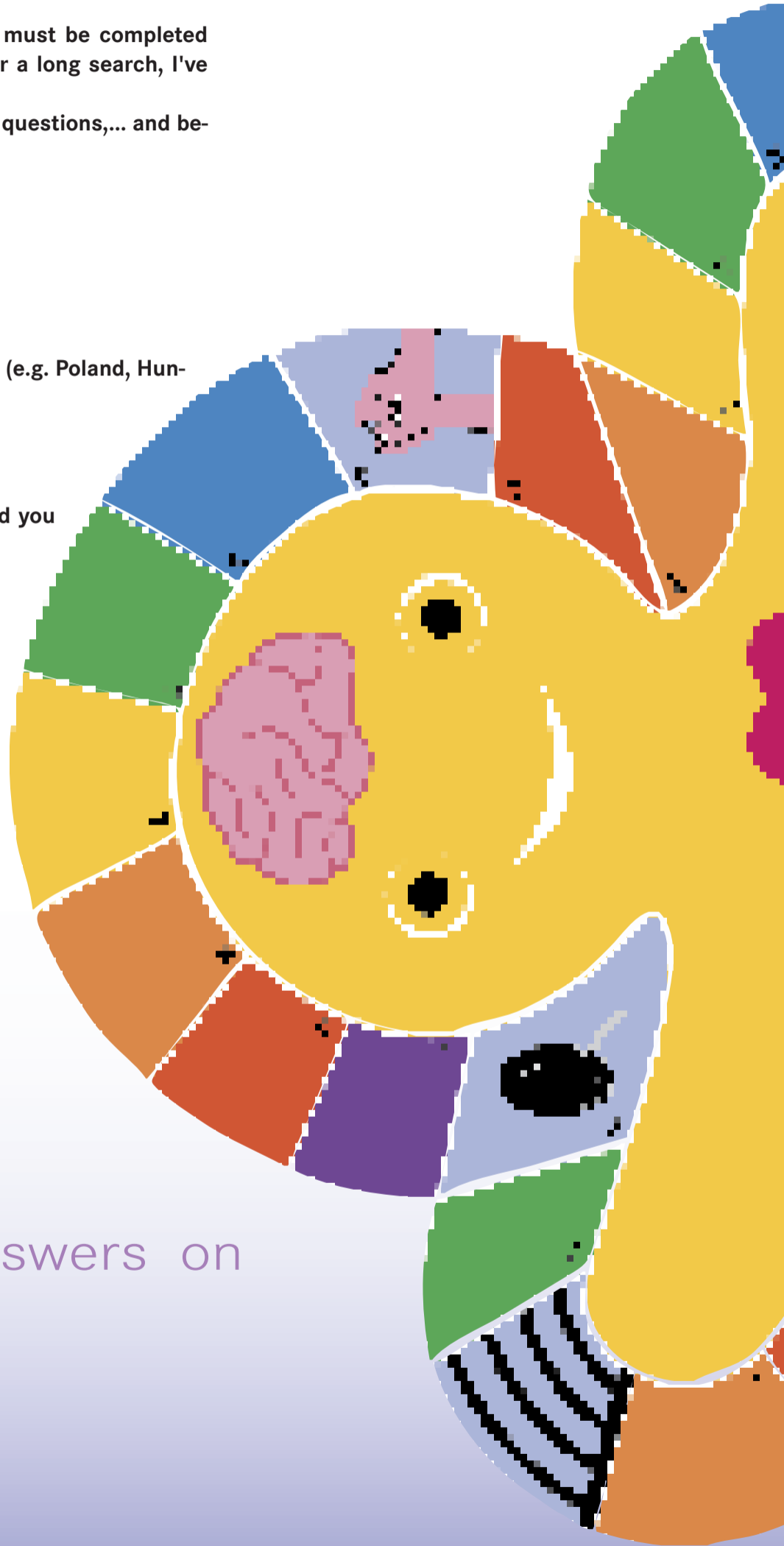
18. Your best friend lets you know she is a lesbian and you don't let them down. Hooray, move ahead two places.

25. What does this flag stand for?

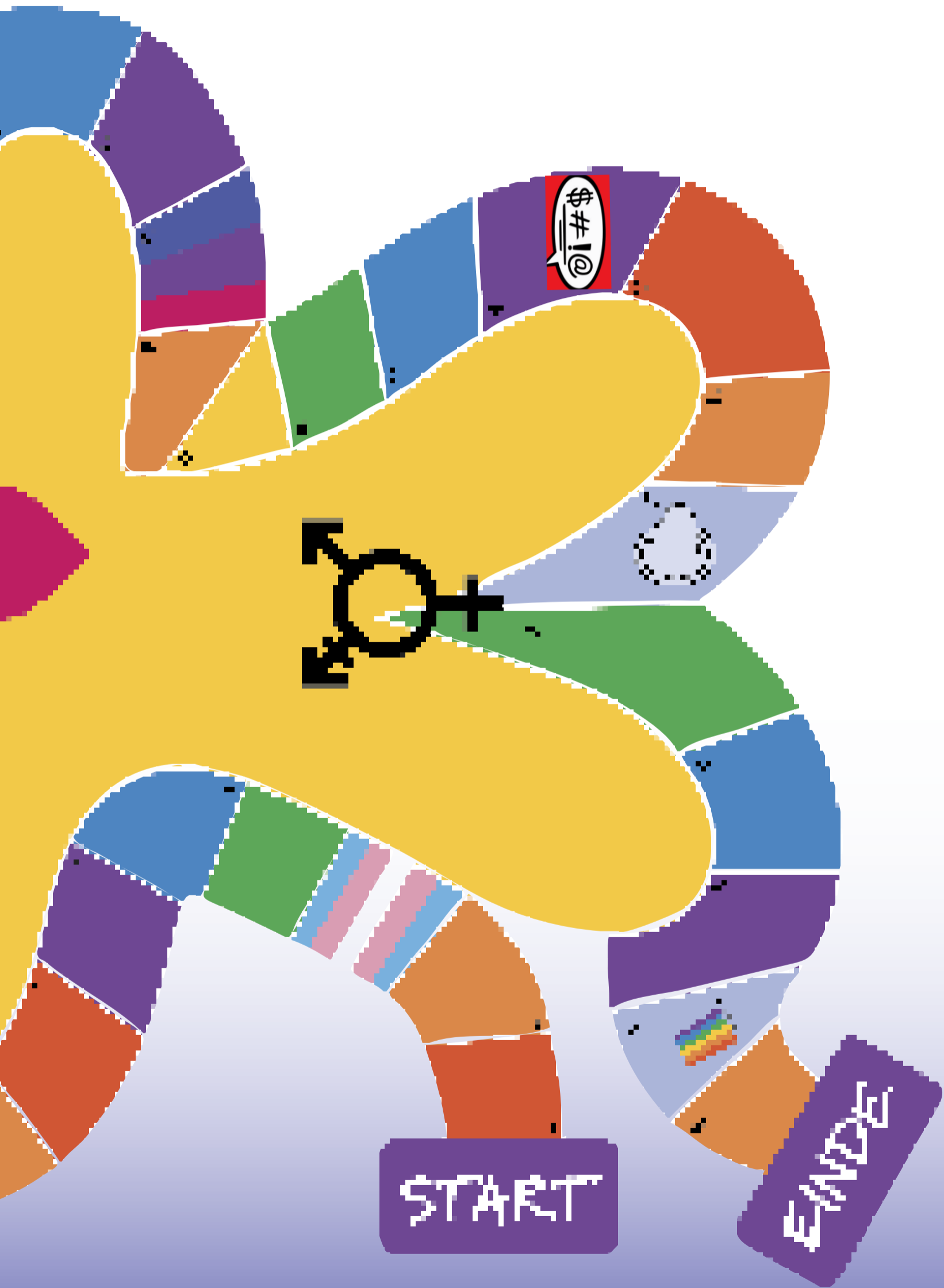
30. Your friend gets insulted for being gay.

34. Name 3 different contraceptives. If you can't: go back to start.

38. You spent the night partying at Pride. Skip 1 turn.



You'll find the answers on
page 14



“I QUICKLY THOUGHT: 'OH, SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT'”

M.L. doesn't find the search for their gender easy



To this day, the gender identity of M.L. (19, they/them) is still a big question mark. This is a sign of the doubts that are haunting their minds. "It's a constant dichotomy."

By Rune Smets

"I was disgusted with myself."

"During puberty, I actively started thinking about my

gender. Quite quickly I started thinking, 'Hmm, something's not right'. As soon as I realised that my orientation and gender were definitely not matched, a whole process of doubting and thinking started in my head."

How do you experience these doubts?

"It's a constant battle. For me personally, it makes absolutely no difference what term I stick on my feelings and gender. Unfortunately, society

has a hard time dealing with people who don't fit into one specific category. I've also noticed this in the way society looks at my gender identity. Especially the idea that I am seen as a woman by others makes me feel very uncomfortable. This, in turn, also made me dislike myself."

"I'm in control of my own gender identity."

Do you feel the need to resolve that doubt

"I've decided that something has to change about one of the two: either my sexual orientation or my gender. My orientation is difficult for me to suppress, while my gender identity is more in my own hands. Still, it took me a while to realise that I am not in the right body. I want to change that now, so that society will see me as the gender I am comfortable with." ■

Four reasons why Pride is still necessary

Whilst the streets may be littered with rainbow flags, Gay Pride is still a protest. This is because the LGBT+ community doesn't feel accepted. These reasons will show why.

By Dries De Doncker

1: Feeling unsafe on the street

Being shouted at for walking hand in hand, being beaten up, being beaten for wearing something that's not the norm, it still happens regularly. Many young people feel unsafe due to this and because of these reactions they don't dare to go out on the streets by themselves.

When straight couples do this, nobody minds, but with the LGBT+ youth, it is too often seen as offensive.

2: Being straight is still the norm

In public, on television, on social media, straight relationships everywhere are in most cases still the norm. For many young people, the standard image they have of a relationship is still one between a boy and a girl. As a result, LGBT+ youths often get the feeling that only straight relationships are normal.

3: In many countries, being part of the LGBT+ community is illegal

In several countries around the globe it is still not allowed to be openly LGBT+. In a few countries, such as Iran and Somalia you could get a death sentence. Even in Europe it's not always peaches and cream. In Poland, for instance, there are LGBT+-free zones.

4: Conversion therapy is still legal in Belgium.

Although many countries have started outlawing conversion therapy, which supposedly cures LGBTQ+ people of their sickness, it is still legal in Belgium. The green party wants to outlaw the practice immediately due to the fact it often has severe psychological consequences. ■

“It's okay to still be searching”



Stan doesn't want to be placed in a box

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Ever heard of a 'coming in'?

In a 'coming in' an LGBTQ+ person gets introduced to the community. For many it brings about feelings of coming home, for it is there that they meet similar people with equally similar stories and experiences.

Labels are ubiquitous in our society, but not everyone finds their way into that pigeonholing society so easily. Stan (18, he/him) does not identify his orientation with any particular label. "I find it too black and white, as if you are definitively one thing or the other," he says.

By Manon Ponchel

People often think I'm gay because they think I dress or act feminine, while femininity, in my opinion, is not fixed at all. People usually ask me things like: 'What are you?' I really hate that question. I always reply: 'I'm just Stan and I'm talking to you right now. That's all you need to know, right?'"

"Some people find it important to label themselves and feel comfortable with that and I can understand that. But for many people, such a pigeonhole is very limiting. I personally just find

it too black and white, as if you are definitively one thing or the other."

"In my opinion, it's a pity that people always want to put labels on others. If two girls or two boys kiss at a party, people immediately think they are gay, but that doesn't have to be the case at all. Two people can just find each other attractive at some point, which doesn't immediately determine their orientation. Besides, my friends and I give each other occasionally a kiss just because we feel like it. That's completely normal."

"The most important thing to remember is that everyone, outside their box, is just a person with their own personality. A label can help you develop your identity, but there will always be stereotypes attached to it. An ideal society for me would be to let go of labels in general and get to know each other as people."

Stan's tips

If you meet someone who is LGBT+, just try to get to know that person and let go of the stereotypes you associate with that orientation.

You may ask people how they identify themselves or what pronouns they use, but do so in a respectful way. For example, instead of "What are you?" you can ask: "How would you prefer to be addressed?" or "Do you like boys or girls?"

If you don't feel comfortable with a label, you really don't have to use it. It's okay to still be searching and tell people you don't know yet. ■

FROM THE WARDROBE TO THE CATWALK

Clothes are a form of self-expression. You share your identity, culture and creativity with those around you, beyond the boundaries of gender and sexuality. You show who you are and what you want to show.

By Fleur Iven

Boran (19, they/them)

Boran describes their style as a mix of punk and rave elements, combined with crazy garments and a touch of whatever.



"If I want to be a cowboy tomorrow, then I'll be a cowboy"

Have you always been into clothing?

"I've been creating my own style since my first year of high school, but rather in stages. How extreme my outfits were at certain times also depended on the zeitgeist and my mood. When I look back on it, some things I wore then were enormously expressive but are pretty mainstream now."

In what ways does your identity express itself in your style?

"I'm very preoccupied with my appearance and how that translates into my own identity and to the outside world. I think it's important to convey the image I have of myself, even if that image is temporary. If I want to be cowboy tomorrow, then tomorrow I will be a cowboy. Even if it's only for one day. Identity consists of so many different aspects, so my style can change quickly, but that's also not bad. I do think I express a certain queerness, but it's not conscious. There is a certain idea of what women's or men's clothes are, but I don't think about that anymore. I shop in both the women's department as well as the men's department and I just buy what I like"

What are your favourite stores?

"I mostly buy clothes at vintage shops like Think Twice and Riot, but you can also find nice things at thrift shops in smaller towns. Less people visit there, so you can find a lot more there. I've had a little Vinted addiction. If you know how to browse and what brands you like, you can find everything you need there."

Do you have any tips for young people eager to discover their own style?

"Don't be afraid, especially of negative comments. Those will only remain words. Be confident and wear what you really want, with conviction everything can be beautiful. People will really believe it then. *Fake it till you make it.*" ■



Jade (22, she/her/they/them)

Jade describes her style as alternative, gay and androgynous. She dabbles in drama and studies Illustration at Sint-Lucas.

"I have days when I feel more feminine and days when I feel more masculine. This also influences what I will wear that day."

Were you always expressive with your clothes?

"Yes, actually I was. Growing up as an autistic child, I always felt I didn't want to be placed in a box, because it wasn't possible anyway. If I tried, I noticed that it was very awkward. So I was working a lot on my self-expression. Ever since primary school actually. My mother doesn't have a typical style either, she grew up in the sixties and dresses hippy-like. I was never told what to wear at home. I remember being really annoyed at school about gender roles and stereotypes. For example, that if a girl has short hair, that she is perceived as a boy.

Does your style reflect who you are?

In high school, I dressed more extreme for a while because I was trying very hard to belong within a certain style that was put on me. I had always been more drawn to alternative style and then the 'emo phase' was very much in. I thought that was cool, so I wanted to belong to that. Then I noticed that I thought I couldn't wear some of the things I liked because it didn't fit my style, so to speak. As I got older, I let go of that and started doing my own thing. Now my daily style is more toned down but when I go to a party, I do have the nerve to dress super extravagantly. I have days when I feel more feminine and days when I feel more masculine. This also influences what I will wear that day.



Robin (19, he/him)

Robin describes his style as a throwback to the 60s and 70s with Jimi Hendrix, art and music serving as inspiration.

"I think clothes can give a person their own identity."

Have you always been into clothing?

"I only became interested in it in the fifth year of secondary school. My parents had always bought my clothes up until then. One day I went shopping with some friends and I decided to buy clothes I would usually never normally wear. I wanted to have my own distinct style and not blend in with the group. I think clothes can give a person their own identity, and that's very important to me."

Does your style reflect who you are?

"I'm very open, I like to be involved in music, drawing and painting. I think that artistic side is also reflected in my clothes. My great interest in the 60s and 70s is another important factor. I find the fashion from that era interesting to look at. Jimi Hendrix is therefore my ultimate style icon. Which most definitely manifests itself in my style of clothing.

Often people think I'm gay because of my style. I'm not, but I don't mind if people ask. As long as they are polite, of course."

What are your favourite stores?

"I buy my clothes mainly from thrift shops. You can find a lot of shirts there and I really like wearing those. For trousers, I always go to Weekday, they have nice models with a bit of flare. I sometimes go to Urban Outfitters, though they are quite expensive and don't quite fit my style. I prefer not to shop online for two reasons: I prefer to try on my clothes first and I think it is important to remain environmentally conscious in a way." ■

"AT FIRST THERE WERE DOUBTS, BUT I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO COMPLETELY EMBRACE MYSELF"

Anet outed herself after an uncertain period.

Anet (20, she/her) was going through a period full of doubts concerning her orientation. Eventually she grew into a confident woman who embraced her sexual orientation."

By Emma Van Avermaet

Anet began questioning her sexual orientation in the third year of high school

"At first, I mainly thought 'this can't be me'. You hear about people in your social circle coming out of the closet but you can't really accept that of yourself, though eventually you need to come to terms with it."

At first Anet was afraid of the others' reaction. The feelings of uncertainty and fear got the upper hand. In the sixth year of high school she dared to come out to her friends. A while later she also came out to her sister and parents

Anet primarily looks back on her coming out positively. "First there were doubts but I've been able to fully embrace myself. By telling my friends first I managed to create a feeling of safety. They accepted me as I was. Coming out to my family was the most nerve-wracking since they knew me best. Now I'm very open about it, there's no need to lie or hide it."

There were only positive remarks on her coming out. Though Anet sometimes dreads negative reactions. "Until a few months ago I was afraid to meet new people. You still hear about gaybashing or harassment towards people's sexuality in the news."

"I never initiate talks about my orientation when I meet people. Usually a conversation like this starts with people asking whether I have a boyfriend. To which I reply 'No, I'm not actually looking for a boyfriend since I'm attracted to girls.' If they need to comment on it then that's really their problem. Throughout the years I've learned I don't need to justify myself to others."

To people who question their sexuality Anet has the following to say. You can talk and experiment. "That's how it got started with me" Anet says. "It's just nice to be able to be part of the LGBT+-community. The activism is nice and important to be visible but I don't feel the need to be part of it myself. I support them most definitely, since you still feel the stigma around it."

That one's sexual orientation still remains in the realm of taboo is something Anet still feels through messages she receives. "People sometimes message me because they're afraid to come out of the closet. They think it'd be weird."

The whole thing around coming out of the closet, I would like to see differently. No one should have to answer for the person they are in love with



“I COULD BE 100 PER CENT MYSELF”

Student Fereh on her first LGBT+ relationship

Whether you are LGBT+ or not, a first relationship is always exciting. Fereh (22, she/her) from Westerlo is bisexual and has just had her first LGBT+ love story with a girl. She is happy to share her experiences and doubts for anyone who also wants to take that step one day.

by Rune Smets

Fereh, how do you look back on your first LGBT+ relationship?

“Actually, it was a very nice relationship. We lived a quiet and drama-free life together. I am quite an intense person, so most people would describe me as a drama queen. I'm sometimes prone to make a mountain out of a molehill. But that was absolutely not the case in this relationship. I never had to hold back for a moment and was able to be 100 per cent myself.”

With what feeling did you start the relationship?

“In the beginning, it was of course super exciting, as with any relationship. Yet at the same time, it immediately felt familiar. When we were just in a relationship, I was mostly doubting myself. I was constantly wondering 'am I doing this right?' and 'how am I myself in a relationship?' I didn't doubt the relationship itself for a second. We said during our first dates that we would take things slow, but a few weeks later we were already further along in our relationship.”



Are there certain clichés about LGBT+-relationships that you can confirm or debunk after your experience?

“I think the clichés are mainly found in the area of clothing. For example, people have the idea that lesbians have short hair and dress more sporty or masculine than other women. That is absolutely not true. Both my former girlfriend and I have our own unique style. One stereotype I can agree with though is

“Communication is extremely important.”

that lesbians are quick to take the next step in their relationship. I never thought at the beginning of our relationship that in my head I would already be planning the rest of our lives. But besides that, I haven't had to deal with many stereotypes.”

During most sex education classes in high school, the focus is mainly on straight couples. Do you feel you are well informed sexually?

“In the beginning, my head was spinning a little bit. I didn't know at all what I could do and how it would work. I was left with many questions and tried to find answers to them myself first with the help of Google. Obviously, that's not the best way.”

“I learnt that communication is extremely important. I was constantly asking my partner what she liked or didn't like. In the beginning, I did so because I wasn't sure what all I could do and because I was insecure. As the relationship progressed, I was more likely to ask that question to gauge my partner's desires.” ■

Answers page 10-11

3. Flag for trans people - Right? Stay put. Wrong? Go back 1 place.

11. You fall for personality regardless of the gender Right? Go one place forward. Wrong? Stay put.

25. Flag for bisexuality Correct? Stay put. Wrong? Go back 1 place.

30. What are you doing No correct answer (see pages 10&11)

“EVERYONE SEEMED TO KNOW ALREADY, BUT I DIDN'T”

Karine came out of the closet later in life

More than just sports records

At the Summer Olympics of 2021, 180 LGBT+ athletes participated and 36 at the Winter Olympics. There were never so many.

This summer edition, the number of LGBT+ athletes was higher than at all previous games. At the Winter Olympics, there was more than double.



Karine (52, zij/haar) is lesbisch en vertelde dit pas 10 jaar geleden aan haar familie. Getrouwd met een man en twee kinderen later dacht ze dat dit fout was. Welke weg legde ze af en hoe reageerde haar omgeving?

By Danté Fernandez

“One day you'll meet the love of your life who you will marry,” my dad always said. That's also what happened. I met my husband and got married around the age of 20. Now we have two beautiful daughters. I did what everyone else did. Better yet: I did what everyone expected me to do. But ... I wasn't happy. Something was missing

“Around my 30s, there was a new boss at work and we immediately hit it off together. We would meet up, go out for dinner together or take the kids to the playground. And yes, the more I saw her, the more I liked her. As if I was falling in love again for the first time. When I think about it again now, she was my first real love. However, I haven't told her that. It was a secret I hid in my handbag and never pulled out again.”

“The years passed and things were getting harder. My husband and I were still living together, but we actually lived separately. Some days I hated myself. “I have a husband and children. Then why do I keep thinking back to my boss who suddenly came and turned my world upside down?”

“It felt like I was falling in love again for the first time”

“The fight became so tough that I had to confess. One day, at the breakfast table, I told my family. “I think I am a lesbian,” was my opening line to start the conversation. Before I fully realised it myself, I had told it, that big secret that I had been hiding away for years. I couldn't go back.”

“My husband was understanding. Maybe a bit too understanding? He didn't even seem surprised. I had to tell it to the people close to me. I was surprised at the reactions

People accepted it without batting an eyelid. Everyone seemed to already know, but I didn't. The only people who couldn't accept it were my daughters. I got accused of things like: “You never liked dad, you always lied to us, you're selfish.” They resented me for destroying our family. I was heartbroken.”

“You can't hide behind a mask to satisfy others”

“Meanwhile, all of this was 10 years ago. I still hear from my ex-husband every week. Sometimes we go for a drink together and talk about a handsome woman who passes our table. I still don't hear from my daughters and I don't expect to anymore. I understand them, but for some reason I can't care. Children or not, the most important thing is that you are happy. You can't hide behind a mask to satisfy others. I may have lost my daughters, but I have never been happier than in the recent years.” ■

THE SHADOW STRIKER

Why it is hard to come out of the closet in the football world?



They are out there, but you most likely don't know them: openly LGBT+ footballers. It seems difficult to come out of the closet within the professional sports world. Three Dutch journalists went in search to find out why it is so difficult in a seven-part podcast series, named: The Shadow Striker.

By Rune Smets

Winfried Baijens, one of the journalists and podcast creators, explains why they chose this theme. "Every one of us knew an LGBT+ person within the sports world, whether they were open about it or not. As a result, we quickly noticed that there are still difficulties in that area. LGBT+ footballers stand in the shadows within the football world. They are the misfits of the sport and we would like to change that. We hope that, via the podcast, we can make the taboo and topic more discussable".

The podcast pays close attention to the importance of role models. "Many young children look up to professional footballers", Winfried says. "They are sometimes LGBT+. The children don't know that, but they dream about a career like their heroes. It would have a big impact on the kids if there were more LGBT+ footballers, or athletes in general, telling their stories. This way, the children would see that it is possible and that your orientation is not a problem if you want to fulfil your (sports) dreams", Winfried concludes. ■

"Visibility in cycling as a sport is our contribution to LGBT+ emancipation"

Cycling club Gruppetto is Flanders' first LGBT+ cycling club



Friendship, sports and pushing boundaries. That's what cycling club Gruppetto is all about. They are a cycling club for and by gay men, but the fun of cycling comes first. "We want to be a safe place where, first and foremost, people can go cycling."

By Emma Van Avermaet en Mara Claes

Cycling outfit on, click into the pedals and go. During their monthly 62 mile bike ride, a strong bond has developed between the Gruppetto members. "We want to push our limits while cycling. We are not overachievers who always want to win, but we do want to look after each other." From that attitude, their name, Gruppetto, was born. It's an Italian cycling term to refer to the group that, in the peloton, rides in the middle and never wins, but always crosses the finish line together.

Rainbow flag on kits

At Gruppetto the focus lies on cycling together. "We started with three people and now there are forty of us," says chairman Kristof. "In many other cycling clubs there is a big macho culture. The greatest number of miles, the fastest up

a climb, getting the most points.... That suits us less. We are gay men who like cycling and we want to show that. That's why the rainbow flag is on our jerseys. Being visible in cycling is our contribution to LGBT+ emancipation and we like to do that."

The contribution that sport makes to

"In an ideal world, there are gay Red Devils."

the LGBT+ community is currently insufficient in Kristof's opinion. "During the 2020 European Football Championship, everyone was ready to condemn European football federation UEFA for banning rainbow flags from Hungarian stadiums. The Ghelamco Arena and a lot of other stadiums were lit up with rainbow colours. But has anything actually changed since then? For marketing and profiling, this was a golden opportunity, but in practice it turns out to not amount to much."

Heroes needed

According to Kristof, it's simple. Heroes are needed; daring people who take the lead in the LGBT+ community. People who follow the example of Kim Meylemans (see at the bottom of this page, ed.) or Tom Daley. "I'm looking mainly at men's sports. I don't know a single footballer or cyclist at the very highest level who is openly part of the LGBT+ community. That shows how big the taboo is" "I think it would be great to be able to

"We're gay men and we like cycling. We want to show that."

be completely yourself as an athlete, at amateur or professional level, without taboos. In an ideal world, there are gay Red Devils, bisexual cyclists of the class of Wout van Aert or Mathieu van der Poel. Athletes who definitely pound open the door for the LGBT+ community." ■

"If young people dare to be themselves thanks to my story, my mission has succeeded"

Skeletoni Kim Meylemans on LGBT+ visibility in sports



Skeletoni Kim Meylemans has never made it a secret that she is attracted to women. As an ambassador for Out For The Win, she wants to advocate for more LGBT+ stories in sport. "It's important to show that there's more behind an athlete than the athletic performance."

By Emma Van Avermaet

"Last year, I thought a lot about myself and my role as an athlete. I call it my quarterlife crisis," insists skeletoni Kim Meylemans. "I came to the conclusion that I want to do more for our LGBT+ youth. It remains difficult for many people to come out of the closet in their sports clubs or as athletes." That is why

Kim Meylemans joined Out For The Win. Founder Sharon's goal is to work with other athletes to create more visibility for the LGBT+ community and make young athletes feel good about themselves. On her coming-out, Kim Meylemans received no nasty reactions from the

"As long as you stay true to yourself, it will all work out in the end."

sports world, but she notices that it remains difficult for fellow athletes: "There are athletes who don't come out of the closet publicly. They want to be athletes and don't want their private lives to be

mixed with it. During the Winter Olympics, a lot was written about me and my girlfriend. That is good. It is important to show that there is more behind an athlete than the athletic performance."

As an ambassador, Meylemans wants to normalise being LGBT+ in sport. "If young people dare to be themselves because of my story, then my mission has succeeded. As a tip, I would add that it's important to stay yourself. In your head you create all kinds of scenarios about how your coming-out might go, but as long as you stay true to yourself, it will all work out in the end." ■

“I’M A MAN, ONLY MY BREASTS AND MY PERIOD STILL CAUSE ME PROBLEMS”



Shayden Rahou (23, he/him) is TikTokker, entrepreneur and came out of the closet as a trans man two years ago. He shares his transition with whoever wants to see it and tries every day through his social media channels to be an example for young and old. For him too, the road has not always been easy.

By Danté Fernandez

“Two years out of the closet. It was only two years ago that I really knew for sure: the body I was in then, I wanted to get out of it. It started when I was in a relationship with a straight man a few years ago. I ran away from home to a place that felt familiar. Until... he wanted

to ask me to marry him. No, I couldn't. At the time, I was working at a playground. I got a hug from a woman and then a light bulb went on: that warmth did much more to me than that of a man. I created a Tinder account to discover what it was like to connect with women. It soon became clear that the whole story with men would end for me. To think that at first I thought I was asexual.... I can only laugh about that now.”

“I wanted to shout my head off.”

“If I had to label myself, I would say: just. Myself. Just read all the LGBT+ terms, then you are everything. Everyone should do what they feel comfortable with, but sticking a label on someone doesn't help. People drown under the pressure of labels and that can't be the intention. For me at least, finding a way inside those boxes is hell. Be who you are, and that's it.”

“I feel I have been waiting for ages for my gender and breast surgeries. From pillar to post and back again. Conversations with psychologists, doctors and files being sent back and forth.... I had even seen an example of what my chest would look like if my breasts were removed and suddenly, I was put on a two-year waiting list. The anger you feel at that point is immense. I wanted to shout my head off. To the doctors it doesn't seem urgent, but to me it's a world of difference.”

“Due to too high a dose of testosterone, my gender dysphoria*(see p.3, ed.) is exploding. My ovaries are still active and only cause me trouble. After a year of treatment, I still have this feminine mess that comes with it and it may stop soon. My whole appearance is changing. Everything is male, only my breasts and periods still cause me problems. Since the waiting lists are so long, I took matters into my own hands and contacted a private clinic in Sint-Niklaas. They say they can help me within three to four months and are currently my great hope”

“I myself have been searching for a long time to find the right path. That's precisely why I want

to be open about what I do, about my happy moments and setbacks. I invite TikTok to join me and show what it's like behind the scenes. “Once a woman, always a woman!”, “You are not normal”, “You will never look like a man” ... Those comments are daily reality.”

“Honestly? Nothing hurts me anymore unless they make it really personal. When I respond, I do it for other people. For those who are de-

“People are drowning under the pressure of labels and that can't be the intention.”

vastated by it. Of course they struggle with what is thrown at them. I've already built a wall against that, but how do you do that if you're not standing strong? You don't. Then you languish or maybe become depressed. To prevent that, I want to be a voice: a mouthpiece for those who can't do it for themselves.”

Instagram: @Shayden_mcteamntt

TikTok: @Shayden_mcteamntt22

PLACES TO BE YOURSELF TOGETHER

LGBT+ associations bring young people together all over Flanders. Even if you are not yet sure who you are or who you are attracted to, you can attend to them. “My self-confidence has had a huge boost. You feel appreciated, you feel good, you really feel at home.”

By Lauren van der Pas

Aarschot:

“Being young and having fun”

Mixed starts from the motto that everyone should be able to be themselves. Their slogan is: “I don't fit into boxes...”.

In addition, they want to put the emphasis on being young and having fun. They do this with drop-in moments, a good party and pub evenings at youth centre JC De Klinker.

Ghent:

The oldest in Flanders

Verkeerd geparkeerd is a LGBT+ youth association based at the Casa Rosa in Ghent. They have existed since 1987, making them the oldest in Flanders. Each week, they organise at least one chat café and another activity. Twice a year they even spend a weekend together.

Leuven:

“At &of, it's rarely about orientation”

In Leuven, &of organises various activities. ‘The new members are often also still in the process of discovering their identity. They need contact with people who have similar stories,’ explains Nora, coordinator of &of. ‘For many of us, &of is the place where that rarely revolves around orientation.

Hasselt:

“Just do it!”

Young & Proud is an LGBT+ association for young people, and it was also established by young people in early 2022. They organise a monthly talk café or other activities. “You meet a lot of new people, and after a while we are all friends. That's a unique experience,” says Mitch from Young & Proud.

Across Flanders:

Trans? Welcome!

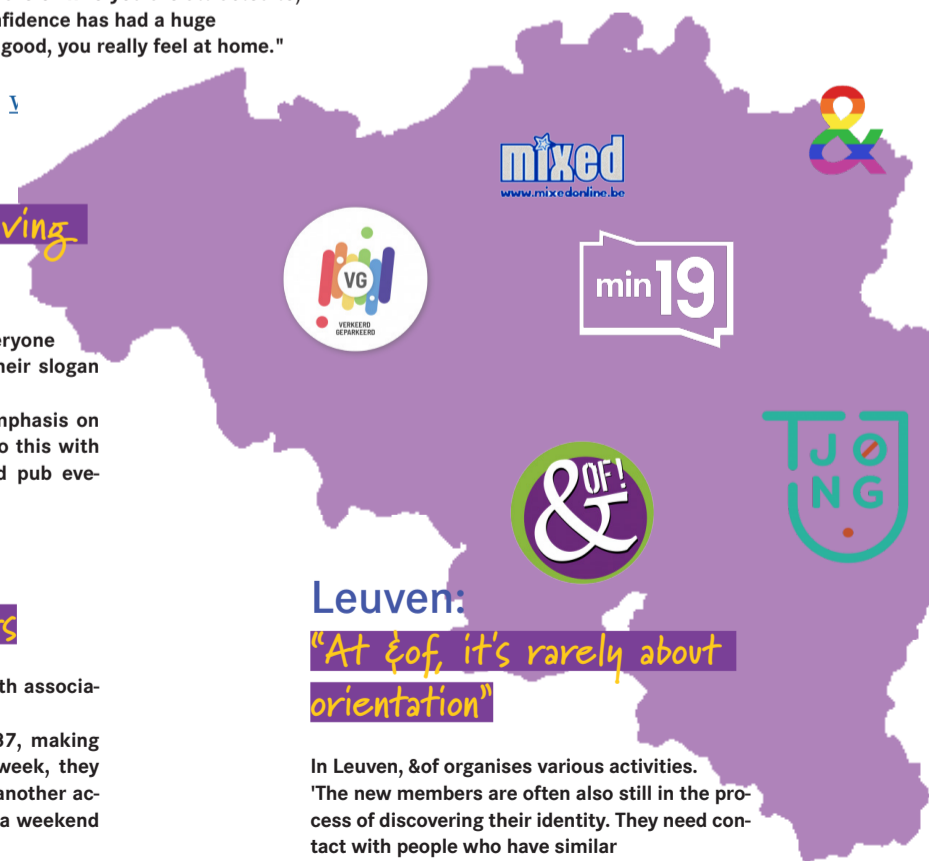
T-jong is a youth movement for trans people that organises activities all over Flanders. Young people aged 10 to 30 are divided into three groups. T-jong welcomes all individuals who feel transgender. Do you want a medical transition? Do you sometimes or permanently live in a different gender role?

At T-jong, you are always welcome.

Brussels and Flanders:

Online AND in real life

Min 19 is not only an online community but also an activity team. During the weekends and the summer holidays, they organise various activities for the LGBT+ youth aged between 13 and 19. Min 19 operates in both Flanders and Brussels.



“Being queer is one of my biggest superpowers”

Climate activist Anuna De Wever wants to get rid of pigeonholing



Climate activist Anuna De Wever (20, she/he/they) is non-binary and is attracted to women. As a famous queer person, she gets a lot of negative comments, yet she remains committed to the LGBT+ community. “I get more comments about my orientation and gender identity than about my activism.”

By Mara Claes

Anuna identifies as non-binary: she does not see herself as male or female. “Gender is not about a biological sex, but about identity. Do I have a biological female body? Yes. Do I always feel good in it? Definitely not. And does that mean I want to become a man? No. Man and woman are two extremes of a gender spectrum on which I am constantly moving.

Being LGBT+ hasn't always been easy for her, but even then, she wouldn't have it any other way. “Being queer is one of my biggest superpowers. This has made me question society's rules from early on.” As a child, she realised that she didn't quite belong in society.”

As a result, I have been an outcast all my life, but my family and friends have never made my identity a problem. As a public person, she notices how many people still struggle with LGBT+

people.

“It's crazy that as a climate activist, I get more comments about my orientation and gender identity than about my activism.

Non-binary people break the traditional male-female relationship and that makes many people uncomfortable, whereas it can in fact be a liberation not to be constantly pigeonholed.”

“The pigeonholes we have invented for men and women are not only ridiculous but also limiting,” Anuna believes. For two years, she tried to be a woman, date boys and fit in completely. “That didn't work out and I broke down. Now that I am myself, I do have the strength to resist typical gender roles.”

“As a queer person, it's super important to surround yourself with LGBT+ people. That helps you to discover yourself and make new friends.” That's why Anuna joined Min 19 (see page 16 below, ed.). “In the meantime, I have succeeded well in that. I have my own small community AND I belong to a larger community that fights for the rights of people like me.” ■



Francisco Schuster

“The representation for children is very important”

Francisco Schuster hopes to see the LGBT+ community more represented on screen

On TV, we still very often see straight couples. Especially in series for children, the LGBT+ community is not yet well represented. Francisco Schuster plays Yemi, a boy who is actively searching for his sexuality, in the popular Ketnet series #LikeMe.

By Dries De Doncker

“Yemi is really everyone's friend who always wants to bring a positive touch into someone's life. He is fully exploring his sexuality.”

“The representation for children is very important because many people didn't have it before and that often made it difficult. So I am very happy that I can make sure that today's children and young people benefit from the person I play: a black boy who is part of the LGBT+ community.”

“I think the community is under-represented on TV. The balance is not right yet. People watch television to recognise themselves in characters. Why should you show one person more than another? I hope that the LGBT+ community can be more strongly represented on TV and that we do our best to show stories that are as realistic as possible but also unfortunate stories because it's not all sunshine and rainbows.”

“Lastly, I want to say that it really is okay to be who you are. I hear you all and you are all beautiful, inside and out!” ■

“As a friend, it's important not to stay on the sidelines”

Tiktoker Emma Ceuppens komt op voor de LGBT+-community

Emma Ceuppens (19, she/her) is popular on TikTok and Instagram thanks to her unique style and fun videos. She has many LGBT+ friends and tries to contribute to the community

By Mara Claes

“Many of my LGBT+ friends are in the youth movement with me. We are a really warm group where everyone can be themselves. I find it enriching to have a diverse group of friends. By connecting with people who are different from you, you hear other stories and perspectives.”

“My friends fortunately haven't had too many negative experiences yet. Once, at a party, the DJ made an inappropriate remark about gay people. My group of friends called him out for it and after he reacted rather bitterly, we just left the party. Such comments are really unnecessary and hurtful to LGBT+ people. As a friend, it's important that you don't stay on the sidelines or minimise the problem at those moments.”

“I actively try to make a small difference by posting my pronouns on Instagram. I want to help normalise that, because if everyone does that, it will lower the threshold for LGBT+ people to also mention their pronouns.”

“At school, we should also pay more attention to that. Now I often find it difficult to address someone, because I don't know their pronouns. Moreover, the youth doesn't yet understand the point of it. For example, when you first get to know each other in class, you can immediately mention your pronouns. Asking someone's pronouns will hopefully become natural.” ■



Instagram: @Emma.ceuppens

TikTok: @ceuppens



"It's nothing more than love"

Author Doreen Hendriks does not want to focus only on LGBT+ relationships

Zout is a book with a mission. Doreen Hendriks is an author with a mission. In her debut novel Zout, she raises the issue of how it is to be LGBT+, and she talks about the influence of social media. I especially want to convey the message that being yourself is good enough, in every way," says the author
By Emma Van Avermaet

Zout tells the story of Maud. Every year she and her best friend Remi give each other a challenge. This year, Maud has to reach 2,000 followers on her foodstagram account. She starts it reluctantly, but eventually she loses herself in the world of social media and she develops an unhealthy relationship with her body and with food

Maud is attracted to girls. Is that an important storyline?

"That's definitely not the main storyline. It's no more than a fact: Maud is attracted to girls and that doesn't need to be a major problem in her life

Why did you feel it was important to raise that issue?

"Not everyone is straight. That's the point I want to make. In the media, it seems like being queer is the biggest problem in our lives. That is often not the case, not with me and not with Maud. There are many more things at play in our lives than being LGBT+. It's normal, we're normal. It's sometimes nothing more than

"There are many more things at play in our lives than being LGBT+"

love."

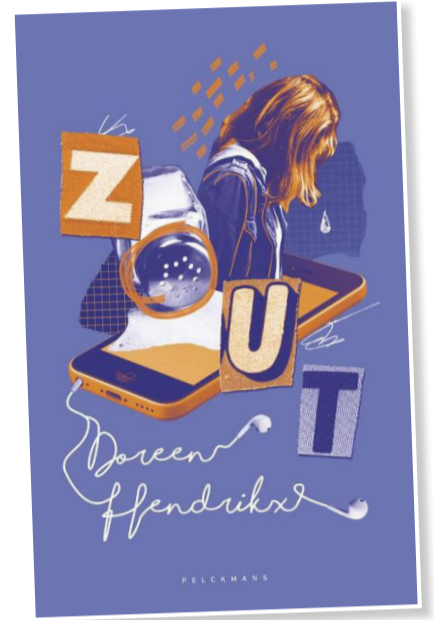
Can a heterosexual person write a book about LGBT+ relationships as well as a queer person?

"In the past, I would have said it would never be as good, but so much has changed since then. We shouldn't assume that someone is queer, but neither should we assume someone is straight. That's important to keep in mind."

"In addition, it's important to realise that people in a queer relationship experience doubts that people in a straight relationship do not experience: safety, discrimination, reactions from your environment. This is often ignored, but it remains a reality for many people."

Was Zout written with a specific target audience in mind?

"Zout is written for people who are searching for themselves and are seeking affirmation. Above all, I want to convey that being yourself is good enough, in all areas. When I get a message from a reader who has really been touched by that message, it makes me intensely happy. That's why I do it."



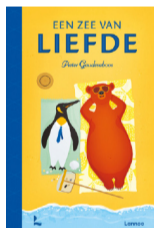
WHILE THERE IS READING: LGBT+ READING TIPS

FAQ gender - Mandy Wwoelken's and Thorn de Vries



How do you know if you are non-binary? What should you do if you misgender someone? What pronouns do you use? The authors, who are queer themselves, answer these questions and many more.

Een zee van liefde - Pieter Gaudesaboos
All ages



It's a picture book for all ages about Bear, who has something very important to tell Penguin and comes to spend the summer with him for that.

De jongen die van een klif sprong (en zacht terecht kwam) - Stefan Raatgever
15+



Refreshing book about a class of final-year high school students. 19-year-old Alec talks gives a first-person account of his search for his identity and how love can fit into that. You immediately empathise with Alec.

Tips

Katrien Temmerman:
boekenboekenboeken.blogspot.com

Caroline Elskens: volunteer at the Holebibib of the Pink House.
www.holebibib.be

Johanna Pas:
www.kartonnendozenlgbt.be

Gewoon mezelf - Luc Descamps
14+



A beautiful, realistic story about a teenage boy's infatuation with another teenage boy. Friendship and music go hand in hand with these beautiful perils.

De laatste halte - Casey McQuiston
Erica Disco (transl.)
15+

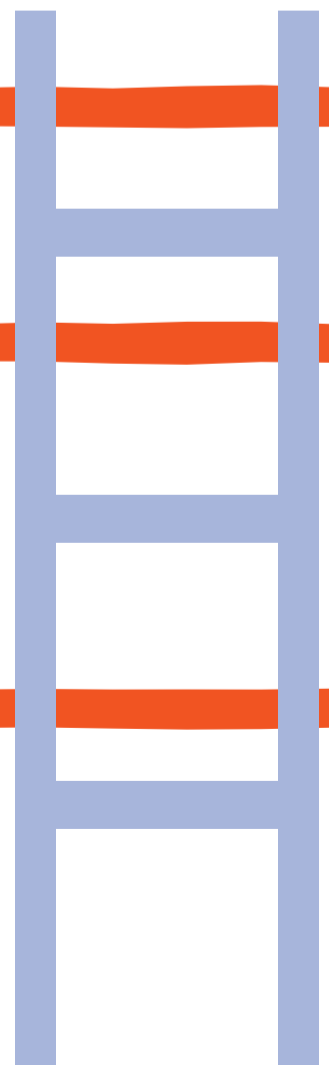


Two girls meet on the underground and hit it off immediately. Yet several things stand in the way of their love. Believing in the impossible will provide the solution here.

Heartstopper - Alice Oseman
Niels van Eekelen (transl.)
14+



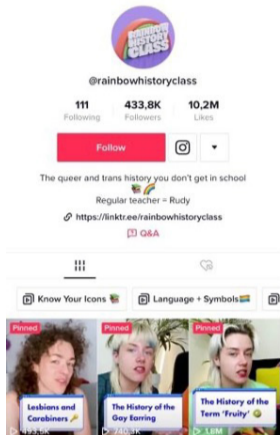
Graphic novel series in four parts about 14-year-old Charlie, who is unsure whether the two-year-older Nick has feelings for him. Charlie, in fact, is very much bullied because he came out of the closet. But Nick has a crush on Tara. Everything changes when Nick and Charlie sit next to each other in class one day... Wonderful series about how love and life are, or should and could be.



TikTok unites LGBT+

Queer history à la TikTok

@rainbowhistoryclass is a cooperative of teachers who make TikTok videos. They want to use their videos to inform people in a fun way about topics such as LGBT+ history in fashion, film, historical figures and events. It is THE place for all the queer history you didn't learn in school.

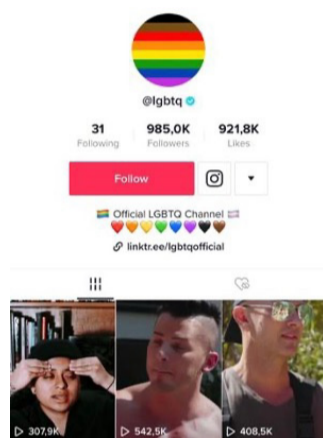


TikTok provides an online safe space for queer teenagers. You will find videos of people with similar interests and questions. So it's the ideal place to be yourself, meet like-minded people and learn.

By Fleur Iven

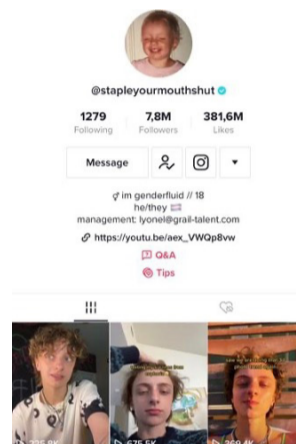
LGBTQ all-round

@lgbtq is THE official LGBT+ platform on TikTok. Anyone can submit videos to this account. Besides TikToks on various topics, such as interviews and frequently asked questions, the account links to interesting articles, sites and organisations.



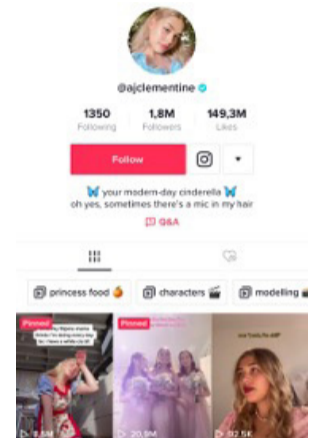
Notable transformations

@stapleyourmouthshut is the account of an 18-year-old influencer who identifies as genderfluid. Their videos creatively show the transformations between male and female that Alex undergoes.



Modern-day Cinderella

@ajclementine is a trans girl who talks about her gender transition in her videos. She alternates stories about difficult moments with funny anecdotes. Her account is the perfect combination of fashion, lifestyle and information.



Bona to vada your dolly old eek

Or in other words, Nice to see you, pretty face. Polari is a code language that was used by gay men in the UK. Homosexuality was a crime there until 1967. By using Polari, men could check whether someone belonged to the community.

Watch clips from the series on the website.

Scan the code



LGBT on TV

In recent years, more and more LGBT+ characters have been popping up in TV series and films. This is very important, because the media has a huge impact on our worldview. Thanks to more diversity on TV, more people can also recognise themselves in characters. Here are 6 suggestions of quality LGBT+ representation. Have fun watching!

By Manon Ponchel

One Day At a Time (series)



"Me gay too!"

In this sitcom about a Cuban family, 15-year-old Elena comes out as lesbian. In a beautiful and humorous way, the series portrays how Elena's parents, brother and grandmother learn to accept this in their own way, and how her first relationship with the non-binary Syd develops.

wtFOCK (series)



"When you start pushing away who you are, you f*** everything up"

In wtFOCK, Robbe is unsure about his sexuality while being with a girl. When he meets Sander and develops feelings for him, he does have to face his sexuality. A storyline about a first homosexual relationship, doubts and drama but also the euphoria of finally being able to be yourself.

Sex Education (series)



"I'll be hurt either way, isn't it better to be who I am?"

'Am I normal?' is the core question of this show. In Sex Education, Otis starts a sex therapy clinic at school, along with the rebellious Maeve. From a first crush and doubts about orientation to difficulties with ejaculation and sexual fantasies, this series covers it all. +

Pose (series)



"The category is...live, work, POSE!"

Damon has a passion for ballet but is evicted for being gay. Blanca, a trans woman, takes him under her wing. Together they create a new family and participate in runways in New York's underground ballroom scene. A show full of glitz, glamour and strong transgender representation

The Half Of It (film)



"Love is not finding your perfect half"

Paul is madly in love with popular girl Aster, but is not good with words. He asks the clever loner Ellie to write her letters in his name. Through Ellie's words, Aster begins to fall for Paul. Everything seems to work out until Ellie herself begins to have feelings ... for Aster.

Heartstopper (series)



"You're just gonna assume they're a she?"

This series, based on the graphic novel (see reading tips), is about teenagers Charlie and Nick who discover more and more about themselves through their friendship. It's a series full of positive vibes, just like the books, that shows how carefree love can be.

LGBT+ in all genres

You can find LGBT+ artists in every style of music, only they are not all equally well-known. From pop to hip-hop and soul, these six top songs belong in your Spotify list.

By Mara Claes

INDIE / POP

GIRL IN RED - GIRLS



*They're so pretty, it hurts
I'm not talking 'bout boys, I'm talking 'bout girls
They're so pretty with their button-up shirts*



Girl in red became a phenomenon with her recognisable indie pop songs. The Norwegian singer-songwriter is openly queer and a role model for many LGBT+ youth. On TikTok, the phrase "do you listen to girl in red?" is even code language for women who are attracted to women.

ELECTRO

KIDDY SMILE - TURN IT UP



*Turn it up! Trust and believe
Turn it up! I can make it
Turn it up! Ain't no stopping me*



Parisian Kiddy Smile is a DJ, singer and dancer. As a gay man of colour, he also fights for LGBT+ rights in France. His collaboration song 'Que du Love' with singer Angèle was a hit, but this electrosong is also a real dance record.

HIPHOP / RAP

YOUNG M.A. - FRIENDLY REMINDER



*And I got shooters that'll shoot
When you live by the gun, you live by them rules
If you ever did me wrong, no sympathy for you
Blame what I went through*



Young M.A. is one of the few openly lesbian rappers on the hip-hop scene. The American wrote her first songs as a 10-year-old girl. Meanwhile, she has already played as a support act for Beyoncé and collaborated with Eminem on the song 'Unaccommodating'.

INDIE / R&B

ARLO PARKS - HURT



*I know you can't let go
Of anything at the moment
Just know it won't hurt so
Won't hurt so much forever*



Arlo Parks makes music that transcends all genres. The London native throws indie, soul, pop and R&B into the mix and turns it into her own thing. She sings about personal themes such as her mental health, roots and bisexuality. Harry Styles and Billie Eilish are already fans.

PUNK

CONTROL TOP - ONE GOOD DAY



*You're not the only one with problems
We're all fighting for one good day
Just tell me something positive
I don't care if it's cliché*



If you like real punk, Control Top is the place to be. The trio Al (he), Ali (she) and Alex (they) love screaming guitars and rough outfits. The Philadelphia-based band screams out all their frustrations in 'Office Rage', and you can go wild on this song too.

SOUL

SHEA DIAMOND - I AM AMERICA



*Baby, I am America
I'm a stranger just like you
Baby, I am America
You been begging for the truth*



Shea Diamond is guaranteed to put a smile on your face with her music. The danceable song 'I am America' is the theme song for the HBO series 'We're Here', a reality series about three American drag queens. Diamond is a black trans woman and fights as an activist for trans rights.

Listen to this and other LGBT+ songs in the PAARS playlist on Spotify.



Scan the code