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A Note from The LGBT Sentinel:

We are thankful and grateful to be a servant and a part of this ever-changing masterpiece of a mural we are painting together. Using the colors of brilliance and justice, equality, love, understanding, and togetherness, our work will be one that will be an example and light to those others around the Globe. That we may raise the vibrations of the people and that the peoples raise ours. As our cause and fight is just really beginning.

Please support and be part of us here at The LGBT Sentinel with your thoughts, opinions, ideas, and most of all your suggestions; so we may always be working on the best rendition we can be every day.

Our desire and hope here at The LGBT Sentinel, is that we can return and resonate feelings of freedom and compassion through this simply organic, grassroots community newspaper. You are our voice, you are our community, you are our eyes, we are your sentinel.

Appreciatively Your Servants to the Community,

Here at The LGBT Sentinel we encourage submissions of all kinds! If you would like to be a part of the movement, write, interview, photograph, review, and/or illustrate for us, please feel free to contact us! Email info@thelgbtsentinel.com and put “Submissions” in the subject line. We look forward to hearing from you!

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If you’ve ever been hurt in a relationship you might have considered being alone, regrouping and focusing on yourself. Some of us explore ourselves inwardly and outwardly finding that we ourselves are fluid with all genders.

When it comes to dating many of us want a better answer than exes, right? I consider myself to be a free-ass motherfucker. Miley Cyrus “I don’t relate to what people would say defines a girl or a boy,” and Angel Haze. In an article with The Guardian Angel mentioned “you have to be fearless. If I fall, if I float, I’m going to be me regardless. People are going to hate you and they’re going to love you with a passion you cannot imagine. I’m feeling the love right now and I’m feeling the hate too, it comes hand in hand. I’m happy more love than hate.” Either in their music or on social media people have come forward expressing their love and hate with too. “I’m open to learning more about who I am.”

If we shared a life without the diversity and adversity we wouldn’t know what being at peace with ourselves is like. Curious people want to know what you identify as. Does it matter? Can we come to a common agreement that all lives matter? Is there a way for all to be free and not be criticized about what we love and don’t. All our ideas of ourselves and our neighbors shouldn’t bring fear but be encouraged to see through into the idea that all lives matter and what we decide to do in our private time shouldn’t dictate who we are in our professional lives. How we perform by accepting, respecting and valuing LGBT people and their contributions in our society.

Hayley Kiyoko An Inspiration

Hayley Kiyoko recently came out with her album ‘Expectations’ this year and it has become an instant hit. With every song being about women, her own experiences, and mental health, it has helped many queer women, young and old, discover themselves and realize they are not alone. She first found fame when she appeared on Disney’s Lemonade Mouth in 2011 and Wizards of Waverly Place. Since then she has become a role model for LGBT members everywhere.

Jessie, who runs the Instagram page hayleykiyoko.uk, explained how Hayley Kiyoko is more than just an artist, “I think the fact she openly discussing her sexuality and mental health, two major things to the LGBT community. It’s inspirational to see such a beautiful, intelligent, caring role model for all ages of the LGBT community. It’s amazing to see how far society has come to have a gay woman as a public figure; the representation helps create a safer and educated environment for people questioning their sexuality and people who are LGBT. It’s more than her music, it’s the representation that has influenced the society we live in. Her music gives a safe and identifiable environment for people who would otherwise have very little representation and relatability.”

Even though Hayley has come out many times as bisexual she earned the name ‘Lesbian Jesus’ from her fans, “My fans are really funny they like love to call me like Lesbian Jesus which is hilarious because I didn’t know there was a Lesbian Jesus but there is one apparently and I am the one” Hayley responded laughing in a Fuse interview.

Alexa, who co-owns an Instagram account @expectationstours dedicated to Hayley, explained how much she has grown with the artist, “I have followed her journey since she was a Disney star, appearing in Wizards of Waverly Place and Lemonade Mouth, then when I heard she was making music too I listened and became an instant fan! She’s influenced me into being true to myself, being able to realize that I’m gay was largely due to her music and mainstream appearance as part of the LGBTQ community, and I know many others who feel the same way and have said that she inspires them to be more introspective.”

Hayley Kiyoko will continue for many years to inspire the LGBT community as she continues to do concerts and has a tour starting on May 5th dedicated to her album ‘Expectations’.

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Love is boundary-less. If you can make me feel, if you can make me laugh—and that’s hard—then I can be with you.”

-Angel Haze

The Guardian
In today’s day and age, we are constantly questioning our sexuality. What am I? What do I like? What age is the right age? When do you know? Are you born with it? When do you discuss it with your children? When do you tell your parents? Your friends? Do they care? How are schools taking to the “two dads or two moms” and dealing with kids still feeling the need to bully about this?

As an older sister to a baby girl and six-year-old boy I am hoping to build the environment where if they do decide to come out to me that they feel comfortable in doing so. Growing up I had Uncle T. & W. who were openly gay men living their most fabulous life with martinis and polo shirts, I had a baby sitter that was a woman who liked dressing and acting like a man. I call it childhood, others call it childhood in West Hollywood!

My parents and family did it for my cousins and me. I realize how lucky we were and are. To not feel the burden of having to choose one’s sexuality… of being able to live free.

Everyone deserves a great love story.

But for seventeen-year old Simon Spier it’s a little more complicated: he’s yet to tell his family or friends he’s gay and he doesn’t actually know the identity of the anonymous classmate he’s fallen for online. The setting of a typical American high school lets us imagine being in Simon’s shoes. Simon sets out to discover his anonymous admirer and muster up the courage to come out.

Directed by Greg Berlanti (Riverdale, The Flash, Supergirl), written by Isaac Aptaker & Elizabeth Berger (This is Us), and based on Becky Albertalli’s acclaimed novel, LOVE, SIMON.

This movie is a funny and heartfelt coming-of-age story about the thrilling ride of finding yourself and falling in love. As the romantic mystery develops, the light comedy keeps us amused. Which in these hard times for social acceptance come as a breath of fresh air.

The movie’s roster of compelling performances by some of our favorite actors certainly play an integral role in confirming its success & length in success.

Robinson’s charismatic work as the likeable Simon is matched by an equally amazing supporting cast that includes Jennifer Garner (We all remember how perfect she was in Juno), Josh Duhamel (he is the eternal sexy dad), the tear jerking moments also insure that friends and family will be both confronted to “déjà-vu” moments. The coming out to your best friend, the fear of no longer having the blanket of protection of no one knowing... Without laying too heavy of a layer this movie definitely touches all the subjects that teens are going through. Love, Simon does act as a somewhat erratic drama that nevertheless packs a punch at several key moments.

There are things about Love, Simon that are undeniably cheesy. The goofball vice principal who jokes with his students about his Tinder dates. The coming out to his sister that is uncomfortable for both characters. Without spoiling anything more, I leave you wondering will Simon in the end find out who his anonymous lover is?

The solution? Go and see Love, Simon. Chances are there’s a Simon in your life who’d appreciate the gesture.
Politics and religion have been tested changed and destroyed over the course of time. How we get our information has changed, how we interact with each other has changed and what we classify as disorders or mental illness. What hasn’t changed is fine art and its way to express our truth, having it transcending time even. I see every day an opportunity for better understanding of my own cognitive mind and how it works with others. How I respond to my conflicts and obstacles. Life presented so many ways to see clarity in dispositions. To filter and process content is vital to any successful human, in real life or on the web. Phones give instant gratification when used. A user intends to have their pleasures received through search. The web gives instant gratification when used. A user intends to have their pleasures received through search. The way we express our true selves hasn’t changed just Instagram and our interaction. Life shouldn’t dictate how we are seen or accepted as beings in society. History shows human tendencies to probe what we don’t understand and paid witness to its many outcomes we’ve had as a civilization. Andy had several partners throughout his life. Warhol’s boyfriends included men like Edward Wallowitch, John Giorno, and Jed Johnson, these were also his colleagues and collaborators, helping to inspire shape and define his career. “hom性 erotic drawings of male nudes”, were rejected for being “too openly gay”. Despite the lack of success that came along with his first gallery appearances and submissions. This didn’t stop him from using sexuality as a place to find inspiration. Art is a great way to dive into beautiful and the deep parts of our mind and body. Accepting our greatest challenges and formulating ways to express them. It can also be a way to receive attention when used and managed properly.

Our ideas in America about society can reflect awfully close to those who share the spotlight in our favorite programs. Andy’s passion for film and photography had no creative end. His unapologetic approach to sexuality in a wide range of talents who also sparked their own artistic journey. If Andy had Instagram in the 70’s I can only imagine what he might make as a video or his story mode post. His portraits of Judy Garland and Liza Minnelli in his films such as Lonesome Cowboys and Blow Job, he often drew from the gay underground scene. He even encountered trouble when attempting to find social acceptance with other gay artists. In art expression creatives will often press the button of mystery. As an artist I can sit and appreciate someone’s time and effort in something they truly prize. Cheers to my favorite artists and their achievements. Reaching new heights with their abilities to keep real and authentic to themselves. Giving back to those who are less fortunate. Don’t let society stand in your pursuit to happiness.
Laverne Cox Makes History
by Jo Jackson

Beyond Cosmopolitan South Africa’s choice of cover model, the issue itself does a great job of shining a spotlight on LGBTQI+ issues and personalities including openly gay South African recording and performing artist, Toya Delazy (although you might know her better as the voice of Bliss, the new Powerpuff Girl).

All in all, this historical move by Cosmopolitan South Africa is certainly a move in the right direction and has set the standard for the rest of 2018.

Cosmopolitan South Africa made global history (and headlines) earlier this year by inviting Laverne Cox, “The world’s most vocal trans and LGBTQI+ poster girl” to be the dazzling star of their February front cover.

In honour of Valentine’s day, Cosmopolitan South Africa’s February issue was a response to the question, “What does love mean in 2018?” The world exclusive photoshoot and LGBTQI+ themed issue (complete with rainbow font and the hashtag #SayYesToLove) all go to show that mainstream media is starting to recognise and affirm that queer love counts too!

Here are a few highlights from the historical issue:

It goes without saying that the cover star and glamazon is the heart and soul of the 128 pager. In it she shares all kinds of personal insights such as:

• What #SayYesToLove means to her: “Leaning into the vulnerability required to really love someone and yourself.”

• Her most important relationship lesson: “I can’t change people. I must choose different people.”

• And words she lives by: “Brené Brown’s boundary mantra: ‘Choose discomfort over resentment.’”

Being Queer and Religious
Can the Two Mix?
by Rachel Kyeremeh

I’ve been really trying to find a conclusive answer to this question ever since I realized that I am Bi, and I think that I have come to the conclusion that it is something you need to figure out for yourself and become comfortable with. I remember trying to pray my gay thoughts away because growing up in a strict African and Christian home, there was no way I should’ve been thinking about those thing. Yet no matter how hard I tried to ignore it, it was still there because it is a part of who I am. I started to accept this, and I prayed to God and I said ‘Lord I know that you do not make mistakes and this is who I am meant to be. I want to live in my truth and I want you to give me the strength and courage to do this’ and honest to God I’ve never felt so free.

‘Either I kill myself, because I was simply unable to live up to what at the time I felt God required of me, or I choose life, accept myself, flawed as I am, and try to serve God in best way I can.’

You see the thing is, I have realized that I do not live for any human being but God alone. I no longer care what a homophobic person at church will say to me or try to convert me (although if I am in the mood, you BET I will drag you & pray for forgiveness after lol). I don’t really know if I can call myself a Christian because I don’t take anything from the bible. I personally feel like it is contradictory and just all round problematic to be honest. I know that I have a good relationship with God and that’s really what matters to me. It’s interesting to hear such disgusting homophobic comments come out of a supposedly devout Christian’s mouth at church when it is unbeknownst to them that I am Bi.

‘Religion has and is still being used to justify homophobia and violence against LGBT people’

It is hurtful. But like I said I’m here for God, so you do you and I’ll do me. I also know that there are religious people who accept everyone for who they are and that’s really amazing! I don’t bring up my sexuality at church because it’s actually none of anyone’s business. I am certainly not here to gossip so you can take that attitude somewhere else. Essentially, I’m saying fuck what you think is right and wrong. I don’t want to hear about it. You cannot change me because I am who I am, and I know that God loves me.

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Naked and beautiful, we can still be childlike having curiosity and freedom no matter what age. American men women and kids are gathering for an exposition for the fabulous queens of all backgrounds. DragCon is a 3-day pop culture festival drawing crowds into the beautifully designed LA Convention Center. May 11 through May 13th enjoy performances from sassy and proud drag stars, buy merchandise and see RuPaul herself.

“it's a competition reality show, where we are looking for Americas next drag superstar and every year we have a winner. the truth is...there really is only one winner and that's RuPaul... RuPaul is the winner every year” 
- RuPaul

The bridge from suits to dresses and contoured faces has been played well in the last decade by men who aspire to show their feminine beauty through Drag. RuPaul’s Drag Show is a reality competition introduced to me by my girlfriend who was highly entertained by the men doing their own make up and costume designs. She said the show gave her life and if they can spend time on their faces so could she. I found her by a mirror with all her cosmetics on the counter just going to town on her face. “I'm contouring’ she said. RuPaul in 94’ was the first drag queen to be named a spokes-model for MAC a major cosmetics brand headquartered in New York City, which is RuPaul’s backyard. He became the first drag queen to get a star on the Walk of Fame and introduced by Jane Fonda.

I'm not LGBTQI+ but you don't have to to be to enjoy these queens slay runways. I've shared an interest learning about the drag awakening and all its “Herstory” thinking about what I might look like in drag attire too. When I was younger exploring my adolescent years, I played in my parent's closet getting dressed up like in a fashion show. I would VHS record my brother and sister's parts when they performed. Over 10 seasons, RuPaul’s Drag Show is a cultural highlight that defined Drag placing it in the limelight of mainstream. “This competition is designed for a person to break themselves down to their core and build themselves back up again.” If acceptance is what most people seek these queens don't need it. They are confident in their abilities they are free to express themselves. Ru Paul in 2013 quoted “If you can't love yourself, how in the hell you gonna love somebody else? Can I get an amen?”

After Hours of preparation and process these men clean up into fabulous queens without all the surgeries. being fierce & comfortable in their own skin. After the competitions the show guides us backstage with queens who open up to each other and the world about their obstacles they have overcome and continue to overcome. People can relate and admire their honesty, I can too. When being kids we had no fear until a group with enough influence could make us fear the basic things that once set us free from caring what anyone thought. In Season 5 Alyssa Edwards said “I don't get cute, I get drop dead gorgeous.” Naked and beautiful, we can still be childlike having curiosity and freedom no matter what age. This is a drag awakening. Prepare your best outfits and be ready to “werk”, it's showtime in LA! Find RuPaul in the Uniqueness Room May 13th at 4 - 5pm.

SOURCES AT WWW.LGBTSENTINEL.COM
Drag Queens of the World
Rainbow Nation

The Dragscene in Colourful Cape Town, South Africa

by Jo Jackson

South African queer film photographer Lauren Brits has been bearing witness to the different facets of Cape Town's colourful, creative, and cutting edge LGBTQ scene for years. Despite the fact that film photography has its challenges - requiring money for film and development, a great relationship with her local developer, and the added element of competing with digital photographers, who are able to edit and share within an evening - Brits is both dedicated to the medium and prolific. "There is such a nostalgic and timeless essence to film that just doesn't compare to digital," she explains. That nostalgic quality is exactly what characterizes her body of work, which captures the queer underground zeitgeist of South Africa's Mother City in dream-like stills.

While the rainbow flag of the LGBTQ nation unites us under an ever-increasing acronym, the reality of the community tends to be more fragmented. The queer scene of any city is not just one thing, but rather the sum of its multiple facets, and Cape Town's queer scene is no different. Add to the equation the fact that, despite all hopes to the contrary, the supposed "Rainbow Nation" of South Africa remains economically and racially fragmented, and the result is a queer scene that is at once dynamic, diverse and divided.

South Africa boasts the world's most progressive constitution, which protects, amongst other things, the right to same-sex marriage, making South Africa the only country in Africa to do so. The freedom allowed by its constitution has given South Africa's queer community the unique opportunity to break new ground and lead the way for the rest of the continent. Cape Town's drag and performance scene in particular is a place of many firsts.

Cape Town's Next Drag Performer is a competition created by Tashreeq Lee that gives performing drag or cabaret artists a platform to compete. "In the drag community of South Africa, there has only been a platform for drag queens to compete in beauty pageants, but not as performers as well," explains Lee.

Inspired by the likes of RuPaul who continues to groom and provide a platform for younger queens, Tashreeq's goal is "to give drag artists in Cape Town and South Africa at large, a platform to showcase their performing talent."

"To me, drag means to simply be yourself," says Lee.
“Be yourself; everyone else is already taken,” Oscar Wilde once said. This is an easy thing to write, but tough to put into practice. Alex Mathew, a 28-year-old who identifies as queer and takes to the stage as one of India’s few drag artists, is one such person who had the confidence to be himself and be confident about it.

One can be changed according to the things that happen in life, but no one should be reduced by it. Not one to hide his zest for life and passion, Alex began performing as a drag queen in September 2014 and came out of the closet a month later.

“My initial dream was to perform on Broadway. I wanted to get there somehow. So I took part in various theatre plays and sang in karaoke bars,” says Alex. Inspite of his initial forays in the world of performing arts, he didn’t feel the adrenaline rush. It felt like something was missing. When he auditioned for plays, his thick Malayali accent was pointed out as a flaw. “People at the auditions would say, ‘Darling, if I get to work with you for 6 months, I can get it crisper.’ Everybody saw it as a weakness,” says Alex.

Despite this, Alex’s voice and singing abilities were appreciated. Unfortunately, this also turned out to be a disadvantage as directors used to sideline him to the choir.

“That’s when I decided I should sit down and think about what I wanted to do and create an out-of-the-box experience for myself,” Alex says. It was while watching the old-time favourite Mrs. Doubtfire that the idea struck him. “I saw Robin Williams in drag. And I thought to myself, if he can do drag, so can I!”

The tiny spark soon developed into a raging fire. Alex began researching other people who had experimented with drag: Kamal Hassan in Chachi 420 and Avvai Shanmughi. He sought inspiration from drag queens around the world such as RuPaul in the US, and Dame Edna from Australia. Not long after, his stage persona – Mayamma – was born.

Alex first discovered drag as performance art at a fancy dress competition in Class 12, and rediscovered it when he was 25. His favourite drag movies include Hedwig and The Angry Inch, The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of The Desert, Hairspray and Birdcage.

But things weren’t always easy for the artist. Alex comes from an orthodox Christian family in Kerala who were initially against his choice of profession.

“After my first drag performance, my mother told me not to perform again. I became a rebel and came away. We didn’t keep in touch and it took about one and half years for us to realize that we were hurting each other. They moved to Bangalore shortly after that,“ he says.

True to the actor in him, Alex created an interesting background story for the character of Mayamma. Born into a fisherman’s family, Mayamma means ‘the mother of illusion’ or ‘mother of magic’. Her father named her after he came home with a big catch of fish the day she was born, considering her to be lucky. However, her father was a drunkard who beat his wife. He would ask his wife to sell the fish he caught and then use the money for himself. Mayamma silently watched the abuse for years. On the bright side, she grew up to be a performer and that’s when she met her lover – Anandaraaja from Pudukottai, Tamil Nadu. It was he who inspired her to leave home and go to places like Bengaluru where she could get the opportunity to perform more. Meanwhile, her parents told her of a marriage alliance from the fisherman community. Since she was in love, she refused and told them about Anadaraja. Her father became furious. He took to the bottle and blamed his wife for Mayamma’s words. He began beating her. Maya, unable to watch her mother suffer anymore, took a coconut branch and hit her father with it. He fell unconscious and began bleeding.

continued >>
Her mother gave Mayamma all the money she had, telling her to go to Bangalore, follow her dreams and never return. That’s just what she did, and has since married her love and taken to the stage.

When questioned about the elaborate backstory he created, Alex says, “I wanted people to connect to it. In my life, I’ve seen women abused. I wanted to write a background story where women could relate to it as well as the LGBT community who undergo a lot of abuse too. The intention is to make people relate to Maya well as a character.”

His inspiration for creating a woman like Mayamma is his mother, Renu Mathew. In the past, she has helped many abused women leave situations of domestic abuse. “Whenever I saw my mother, I saw her as a superwoman. I wanted Mayamma to be a superwoman too,” shares Alex. He wanted Maya to be from Kerala, like he was, and portray her as a woman of substance. “I wanted her to be simple, yet outspoken, dainty but fierce, and classy, a woman who stood up for individualism, gender equality, feminism – themes which run strongly through my performances,” he adds. As far as labels go, Alex sees himself as a performance-based activist.

His drag shows include an eclectic mix of songs like Madonna’s Vogue, Lady Gaga’s Born This Way and Queen’s Bohemian Rhapsody, all re-interpreted to suit the context. The underlying message is to believe in yourself and not be discouraged over what others tell you.

Through his performances, Alex wants to clear up misconceptions about performing drag.

“Cinema portrays guys playing women as comical. I don’t portray that, but show Mayamma as a woman, a drag queen, and not a caricature,” he says. The biggest misconception people harbor about drag is that it is an art performed only by those from the LGBT community. “It’s completely false! Queen Harish, one of India’s well-known drag queens, is straight and married with kids. He is comfortable enough with his sexuality to be a drag queen. It should be understood that drag and sexuality are two completely different things.”

Alex has faced many ups and downs in his journey. There have been instances where people thought he was transgender simply because he was a drag queen. After one of his performances, a female researcher came up to him and said that drag should be integrated into the hijra community since there were many similarities. “I was mortified. Hijra is a culture or community while drag is a performance art,” he says. Similarly, photographers, fascinated by his profession, have approached him with propositions of working with him, but refused to offer any pay.

“They tell me I would be doing it for the LGBT community and that they wouldn’t pay me. Make-up, wigs, saris, heels — they cost a lot nowadays,” Alex says.

This doesn’t mean he undermines the impact he has as an inspiration. His message to aspiring drag artists and the LGBT community is to strongly love oneself and believe in oneself. “Be bold and unique about whatever you want to do. Become independent and get a job. It is like what RuPaul says, “If you can’t love yourself, how the hell can you love somebody else?” To tackle the stigma surrounding the LGBT community Alex feels it is important for people within the community and outside it to speak up. The media projects a contorted image of being a gay person, something one needs to stand up and say no to. “It’s not okay to say I respect gay relationships, and then go make fun of it,” says Alex.

He is happy in the space he is in at present. His future plans include doing more videos, and working on making Mayamma mainstream and popular throughout India. “I need to put her out more as a character. In 2018, I think I want to go international. Next year I would like have to a talk-show about it called ‘Chai with Maya,’ concludes Alex. You can contact Alex at alexmathew88@gmail.com
Brazil and The LGBT Community

**Brazil and the LGBT community**

by Charly More

Brazil, we know it for its beautiful people, colorful landscapes, amazing beaches, Carnival & of course Mojitos!

However, a very dark side is coming to light with the media being able to transmit information freely thru internet and social media. In 2017 there was a 30% increase of deaths from 2016. Research proves that those deaths were almost directly related to Homophobia.

With the insane numbers of 387 Murders and 58 suicides, Brazil is becoming the most violent country. The Transgender community of Brazil is still scarred from the horrific video of Dandara Dos Santos who was beaten to death in Fortaleza in March. The assailants shared the video on social media. We can see them beating and screaming homophobic slurs… Only 2 out of 12 men were arrested in connection with her killing last year.

In September, a Federal District judge authorized psychologists to use unethical and harmful so-called “conversion therapies” in an attempt to alter individuals’ sexual orientation. “Beat them straight” were his exact words.

So why all the hate in a country that gave us the thong, amazing dance moves, and approves of same sex marriage?

Well, Brazil is one of the world’s most violent and corrupt countries, 62,000 homicides in 2016 alone. The government is so corrupt they’ve asked their President to step down amidst allegations of a corruption and embezzling money. The rising violence towards LGBT community is owed much to the prominence of ultraconservative politicians, many of whom are linked to the country’s powerful evangelical caucus in congress.

They compare the LGBT community to the devil, and even animals. Homophobic “Hate Speech” is not a federal crime in Brazil. Grassroot organizations are hoping to create “safe spaces” for the community.

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We recommend if you are interested in being of help to the Brazilian community, to donate and contribute to the *Grupó Gay de Bahia*: [http://www.ggb.org.br/ggb-ingles.html](http://www.ggb.org.br/ggb-ingles.html)

They are the most dynamic group for the Brazilian Homosexual Movement and do their best to protect the Human rights of the LGBT community.

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I reached out to one of my oldest friends, Sayonara came out to me when she was 16, I always knew. She didn’t like boys. She liked being one of the boys. Sayonara is a beautiful soul and woman living in between Paris & Rio De Janeiro… I asked her to give us her perspective on what was happening in Brazil.

**How do you feel as an openly gay woman in Brazil?**

Even if in Brazil a lot of people dare to assume their sexual orientation, being gay is still a taboo because of the religion and the sexist culture. Honestly, I feel in danger, because people are lacking of tolerance and they can be very violent. Now, the African American and LGBT community is mourning Marielle Franco (state councilor, african american, lesbian and from a favela) because she stood for our rights and her murder symbolize what is going to happen in the next years if the mini-moi Trump, running candidate for president, Bolsonaro, win.

**Were you able to come out to your parents easily? Or were you afraid they would shut down due to their religious or cultural beliefs?**

My parents live here in Europe and they are very open-minded. My mother who is a real Brazilian girl from a very religious family was really upset but now she understands and supports me. Well, I still can’t take my girlfriends home to introduce them, I have to wait at least two years: “I want to be sure of your commitment”. That’s not the case with my straight brothers and sisters, they are very welcome at home independently of their status and I feel kind of “marginalized”. I’m very close to my grandmother in Brazil and she is a very religious person. I introduced my ex-girlfriend to her, we stayed together for almost 6 years and when we broke up I told her everything because she liked Meli very much, but she told that she thought we were just friends (lol). I think maybe it’s my fault because I never told her properly “I’m gay”. When I was back in Brazil two years ago I decided to tell her with real words “I’m gay” and she felt very attacked, she told me horrible things, we argued for 2 weeks and she finally told me that “Being Gay is not the problem, the real fact is the Brazilian society. They can kill you”.

**Is Brazil a scary place for the Gay Community who chooses to travel there?**

I don’t think so. Big cities as Rio or Sao Paulo are very gay. You can be surprised. There are many gay parties going around. This is very contradictory, I know. I would say that the real danger is when you are a poor black gay person from a Favela. In Brazil when you are white off/and rich, you are safe. **How often do you go to Brazil to visit? Do you still have family out there? What is their take on the LGBT community?**

Well I was there 3 months ago for holidays and now I work between France and Brazil so I’m there 2/3 times a year. I love being there because gay life is really intense, much more than in Paris! On one hand I feel excited but on the other I feel the pressure of the Brazilian society I still have family there and they try not to give their opinion in front me but I know that they think homosexuality is “dirty”. My grandmother says that homosexuality does not exist.

**What movements do you know of that are helping the community?**

There are so many that I can’t even begin to mention them all. First of all, I’m very proud that in Rio state council, many left-wing politicians are openly gay and trans persons. Those people help our community giving visibility and fighting for our rights. “baphos periféricos” this collective is giving power to LGBTIQ+ people from poor suburbs “Casa Nem” is a welcoming space, in Rio, for LGBTIQ+ people in a situation of social vulnerability, focusing on transvestites and transsexuals people. It is a self-sustaining space and parties are held to help to finance, various types of donations are also received. In this place oppressions are forbidden and several projects exist to empower people. “Piranhas Team” is a group that promote auto defense for women and LGBTIQ+. They also want to deconstruct the sexist culture. “drag-se” YouTube channel starring drag kings and queens from Rio “marcha das vadias rio de janeiro” it’s a march that is organized by a feminist group. They want to change the Brazilian racist, sexist and homophobic society. Etc.

**Anything you would like to add to end the interview? A wish for Brazil?**

Well, I hope Brazil will not turn onto a dictatorship again and I want that people stop basing their beliefs on religion one day. I also hope that one day African descendants people will be treated as humans being in this country where 53% of the population is african descendant... by Charly More
Since the last attempt of Trump’s transgender blanket ban last year many have become outraged at the United States’ president. Many protested and contacted their state’s representatives but Donald Trump has still gone forward with his ban. On March 23, 2018, Trump released a new memorandum that states that transgender individuals that require or have undergone gender transition cannot serve. Also, individuals who have a history of gender dysphoria cannot serve because they bring a burden to the military. Gender dysphoria means to have the experience of distress or discomfort as a result of a disparity between a person’s biological sex (assigned at birth) and what they feel their gender to be. The only way they might be able to serve is under “limited circumstances”. Recruits may be allowed in if a medical provider certifies that they’ve been clinically stable in the preferred sex for 18 months and are free of significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas. Transgender individuals receiving hormone therapy must be stable on their medication for 18 months.

This has brought outrage to the LGBT community, Democrats, and their supporters. House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi tweeted, “No one with the strength & bravery to serve in the U.S. military should be turned away because of who they are. This hateful ban is purpose-built to humiliate our brave transgender members of the military who serve with honor & dignity.”

Rep. Ted Lieu, Democrat of California, tweeted about the issue saying, “As a veteran who served on active duty, we focused on the mission. We didn’t care if you were transgender, bald, gay, or had freckles. No evidence a trans sniper is less accurate or a trans pilot is less effective.”

“There is simply no way to spin it, the Trump-Pence Administration is going all in on its discriminatory, unconstitutional and despicable ban on transgender troops,” said Human Rights Campaign President Chad Griffin.

Even though it may seem hopeless to change the president’s mind there is still more that can be done. Memoranda are often used to carry out routine executive decisions and determinations to perform duties consistent with the law or implement laws that are presidential priorities. Memoranda can work as an executive order with can be stopped and modified by Congress. So, if you feel strongly about the situation you can try to contact your congressman/woman through their office or directly. Another option may be to join an organization that supports transgender rights and contribute to helping to stop the possible executive order.
Social media has given a voice to many who have been silenced in the real world. By being able to voice themselves and express themselves through words and art, transgender individuals and others being put down have been able to be themselves. March 31st is a day when support and expression go hand and hand, many individuals have taken to social media, online support groups, and writing platforms to share their stories and challenges. Below are stories that I have been told by individuals who have gone through challenges and oppression and how they have grown from their experiences and become who they are meant to be. Reading and rereading these stories have inspired me so much to be the most loving and supporting person I can be.

Roy, an absolutely brave young man, shared his journey with me of his transition from female to male, “I realized I was trans my freshman year of high school. It was something I had been struggling with since I was little, but I was never allowed to question my gender because I live in a very religious household and things like that were viewed as sinful and disgraceful to god. But I had reached a point in my life where I knew I couldn’t lie to myself anymore and I let myself question my gender and who I was. At the end of my freshman year I got my hair cut short and slowly started dressing more masculine. Of course, it got to a point where I couldn’t hide it from my parents and friends anymore and I decided to come out. That was definitely the hardest decision I had ever made considering how all the people in my life were religious to some degree, and after I came out, they all cut me off. Being excommunicated from my church was painful but it honestly helped me grow a lot. I moved on and met newer and better people, and I now have a wonderful group of friends who love and support me just the way I am.”

Elliot, a spirited young man, also shared the story of his female to male transition, “Growing up felt weird and that I was always on the outside of where I should be. I hung out with guys, I didn’t like ‘girly’ clothes, some pieces of me just didn’t fit right. Going into my first year of high school was hard and confusing. I dated different people and tried different things but it still didn’t feel quite right. During my second year, I identified as non-binary. I used they/them pronouns and didn’t tell anyone other than my immediate friends. After months of using different pronouns and still not feeling right, I asked a friend to start using ‘he/him’, and since that day on I’ve been going by those pronouns. At first, people stared at me, when I came out it was like everyone immediately knew I was the weird outsider. I lost most of my friends and ended up eating alone at lunch and spending weekends on my phone in bed. I felt right but the world around me didn’t accept me. Moving forward into my senior year nothing mattered anymore. I have a strong few friends, and I got voted into my school’s competition for the ‘most popular guy’. Although I didn’t win, it was a huge accomplishment. The more visible I became the more people accepted, and some still belittle me, but I know I’m higher than them. I’ve just recently made my first appointments to talk about starting testosterone, and plan to start before the year ends. Basically, the moral of my story is to never give up on who you are or how others may view you. Although I lost everything I stood my ground and made sure I was seen as the man I am today, and I would have that any other way.”

These two individuals who shared their story with me are extremely brave, many children, teens and adults across the world cannot share their story or even be themselves due to oppression, fear of consequences or even death. That’s why I encourage you this Transgender Day of Visibility, please do your best to be there for a friend in need and be aware of people like Roy and Elliot. Even respecting, using the correct pronouns, showing love and support for an individual can change their life.
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