

Humans of Our Community: Dr. Charlie Rose Crimston

Dr. Crimston is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Queensland whose research looks into the psychology of morality. Last year, Dr. Crimston took a brave step forward and publicly transitioned and was kind enough to share her story with us.



When did you know that something was different?

It took me a fair amount of time before I was finally able to make sense of the feeling that “huh, something isn’t quite right here”. I remember a moment of sudden realisation when I was able to put a name to it quite clearly. I was still in my undergraduate studies and was walking across the green bridge towards UQ and thought to myself “wow, yeah, transgender, geez that would make a lot of sense”. It was some time after that though before I could actually talk about it and tell people who were close to me. We are talking about twenty years between when I first noticed something wasn’t right to the point of seeking professional advice and actually transitioning. A ridiculous amount of time in hindsight, but I try not to fret about that. I’m just glad the realization did hit me over the head eventually.

What did you feel was different?

It’s hard to explain to those that haven’t felt it. It was just a sense that things weren’t quite right. At certain times I was able to ignore it and live my life, but before long it would come rushing back. It was always there somewhere and just got stronger and stronger as I got older. Physical changes in my teens were a bit of a nightmare for me. Seeing my masculine body develop made me really uncomfortable. Having masculine pronouns felt increasingly wrong and out of place. I had these feelings for quite a while and honestly just reached a point where the fear of NOT doing something about it finally exceeded the fear of facing up to it.

Charlie is a beautiful name – tell me your name story!

I love hearing other people’s name stories too. Mine is kind of weird as the origin of the name is actually from an important male in my life. My middle name was Charles, after my Grandfather who was an amazing person and very important to me. I was OK letting go of my first name and truthfully, I didn’t really like any feminine variations of my first name. So, I decided to keep Charlie as that name meant a lot to me and thought it was actually quite cute. After pairing it with a very feminine middle name (Rose) I knew that was it.

Were you worried about how transitioning would affect your academic career?

Yes! Absolutely. In my personal life I had incredible support from my amazing wife, Jodie, and from my family and friends, but I also had some amazing support here at



UQ. Dr. Fiona Barlow was one of my amazing mentors that I approached when I was considering making the public transition. We spoke together about how this transition could potentially affect my career. Ultimately though, I knew transitioning was something I had to do, so any career-related anxiety I was wrestling with wasn't ever going to stop me.

In general, the overall response has been really positive! I remember the day that I sent the email out to everyone at work explaining that I was transitioning and that I had a new name and new pronouns. I still get emotional when I think about the overwhelmingly positive responses I received from people in my department. Lots of people wished me well and offered their congratulations. Later that same day I walked into the mail-room to find the wonderful reception team had already gone and changed the name on my pigeon hole. I walked home that day with happy tears in my eyes.

Are you able to change the names and initials on published work you have so far?

Unfortunately, no. They are pretty strict on those types of things, but it really doesn't bother me much. It's quite nice that people are becoming more aware that I have transitioned, which might mean more visibility I guess. In time I'm assuming it's something I will think about, and encounter issues with, less and less.

Has coming out changed your research interests?

I think that my primary research interests haven't changed. Though my knowledge of moral psychology certainly helps me understand how individuals come to hold intolerant and bigoted views towards members of the LGBT+ community. Beyond this it has definitely made me more aware of important research that I was potentially less familiar with, such as stigma, stereotypes and prejudice. It also makes you very aware of how privileged you were prior to transitioning. Ultimately, I think that transitioning has made more mindful of a lot of different factors which has helped infer the research I continue to do.

What steps do you think Australia needs to make to move toward a more trans-inclusive society?

I think we have taken some very important steps over the last few years. When I was younger, the term transgender (or some variation thereof) almost always carried negative connotations. Positive portrayals of gender diverse individuals in books, film and T.V. were pretty hard to come by... if you encountered them at all. This is slowly starting to change, and I think people in general are more aware of transgender existence. There is definitely a long way to go, though. I think it's scary how little the general population understand about what it means to be transgender. This confusion leads to fear, which in turn leads to intolerance and transphobia. I think we need to shine a brighter light on trans people in the community. Ultimately, only time, education and exposure can change people's outlooks. Maybe also a trans PM – that's the ultimate goal!

It's hard that time is what we have to rely on to change people's attitudes as there are so many people suffering in the trans community who don't have the strength to wait for tolerance.

I think that's absolutely right, and really highlights how important time and education is. It is frustrating to see some of the fear associated with education initiatives aimed at educating children on what it means to be transgender. For example, the controversy over the Safe Schools Initiative. Teaching kids to be compassionate for their peers who might be struggling... isn't this something we should be striving for? Kids tend to have very open minds about these things and they need to be taught that it is OK. Having something like that available when I was at school would have made those years so much easier.

It really does warm my heart to see how kids in my life have reacted to my transition. My niece giggled the first time she saw me as Charlie and said she liked my hair, which was really cute. My nephew didn't even say a word about it, he just grabbed my hand and asked me to go play.

Do you have any advice for people out there who are questioning their gender identity? Or who have begun transitioning?

I would love to take my younger self aside and reassure them that YOU are OK, and it is all going to be OK. You're not these horrible things that the voices in your head are telling you. Sure, I may be statistically uncommon, but now I see there is something special about that. The best science we have on this says that, like sexual orientation, there are innate biological factors that contribute to gender identity. That explanation, to know potential causes, to know that it wasn't my fault, it wasn't anyone's fault, would have gone a long way in helping me to accept it. Over the last few years what has helped me the most has been listening to compassionate stories from other trans people who are successful and thriving. I recommend that anyone interested in trans issues seek out these stories and consume them... they help.

So, to others going through it I would say, yeah I know there are times when everything sucks and you are really struggling, but it does get better. I know at times might seem hard to believe, but I promise it does.

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