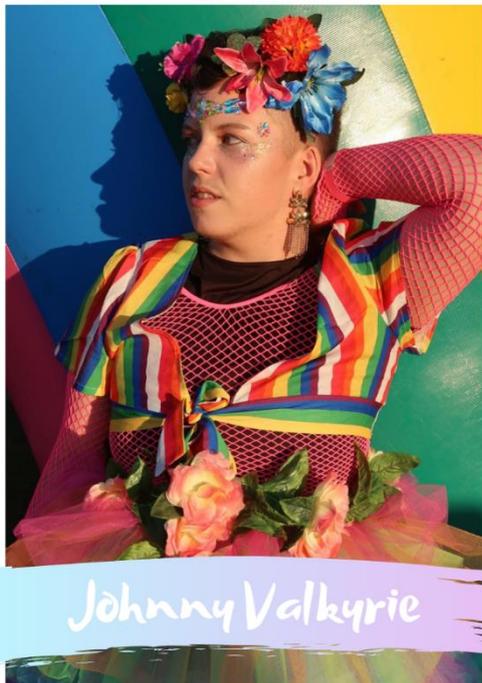


Humans of Our Community



Johnny Valkyrie

Johnny is an activist and community organiser campaigning for LGBTQIA+ equality through activism and community engagement projects. Johnny shared with us his thoughts and feelings about the current state of the LGBTQIA+ community and how we can get involved in the ongoing fight for equality.

Now that marriage equality has been achieved, do you feel that members of the community have checked out of the fight?

Yes; but almost exclusively cisgender people, which is disappointing but not surprising. I attended every marriage reform event that I could, travelling two hours each way from regional Queensland to make it into the city. If you can make it to The Beat, you have time to advocate and support your community. There is strength in numbers. Recently, I organised with the help of the community, an active protest against the Religious Freedoms Bill 2019. This legislation is complex, dangerous and in its current form, unnecessary. We need equal protections for people of faith, but never at the expense of others. I was disheartened at the turnout as compared to the marriage equality. Those who really cared were there, and those who could not make it apologised. Where were the rest of you, watching re-runs of Ru Paul with your fiancée and cavoodle? Do not get complacent. I see you.

What are some other ways you can get involved with activism?

This really depends on accessibility and your preferred method of activism. There are people with disabilities or personality differences; for example, being chronically ill or being introverted affects the way you can access advocacy. I find one of the most simple and powerful ways to advocate is to support your queer friends, and if you are LGBTQIA+ yourself, be kind to yourself. It really makes all the difference. If you have the capacity, another way to advocate is to volunteer your time to organisations such as Open Doors Youth Service Inc. and Out for Australia. You can access support and give back, while increasing your employability. You can also get involved by sharing LGBTQIA+ events on your social media, attending those events if you can, and maybe even running one yourself! The most important rule in advocacy is to respect and allow people to

exercise their own agency. You will get called in at times, so be ready to learn and apply feedback. That goes for me too!

Do you feel privileged?

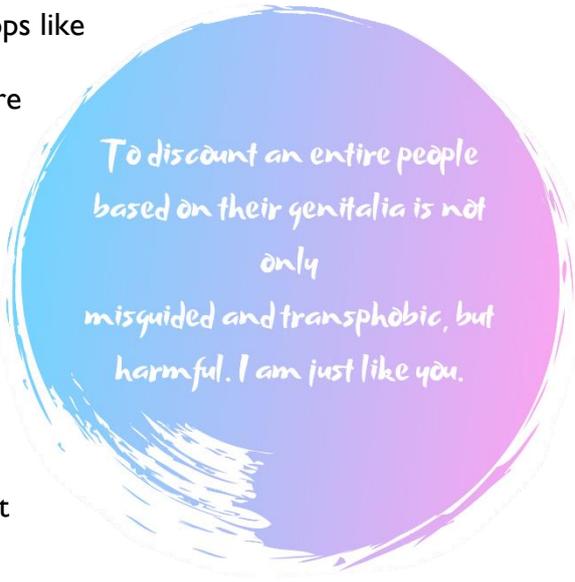
Yes. The fact is, I am. However, I am disadvantaged in other ways. I feel mostly privileged, and it is my duty to utilise my position in the community to empower it. I have supportive family and friends. I am employed. I am white. I 'pass' as male. These are anomalies for transgender people. Conversely, I am queer, transgender, homosexual, neurodiverse, chronically ill and have a history of chronic mental illness. We work with what we have, and that is all we can do, right? We are capable of more than we have been led to believe, and often we are capable of more than we lead ourselves to believe.

How do you feel exploring romantic relationships within the LGBTQIA+ community?

Disheartened. I have found that most cisgender gay men are very interested in me up until the point they learn about my transgender status. I have had time to brood over this, and I feel that people are simply confused. Their understanding of their own sexuality is incomplete; that is, without understanding gender entirely they reject what they see as another identity crisis. They have centered their sexuality around genitals, which is an error of judgement. To discount an entire people based on their genitalia is not only misguided and transphobic, but harmful. I am just like you.

Do you think online dating apps promote exclusive dating?

Personally, dating/hook up apps make it easy for me to filter out people that have an issue with my identity. I can be forthright about my intolerance of transphobia. That is harder in person, however. It saves time, you know? I feel that apps like Grindr are one of these necessary evils we use to connect with people like us. It rarely gives that outcome, though. These apps are also hotspots for people to go 'unicorn hunting'; or the practice of seeking the impossible posterboy to fulfil fantasies rather than connection with other human beings. This is not the fault of the apps, but this culture of insecurity, internalised homophobia, transphobia and toxic masculinity is rampant in the community. When you reject transgender people, you deny yourself experiences to maintain a status quo. That is so unhelpful to yourself and the community you belong to. I wish I could wake up tomorrow and everyone would be supportive of each other. There is huge division in our community, especially in Queensland, that need to be repaired. The difficult thing is, that often this is not the intention of the perpetrators either.



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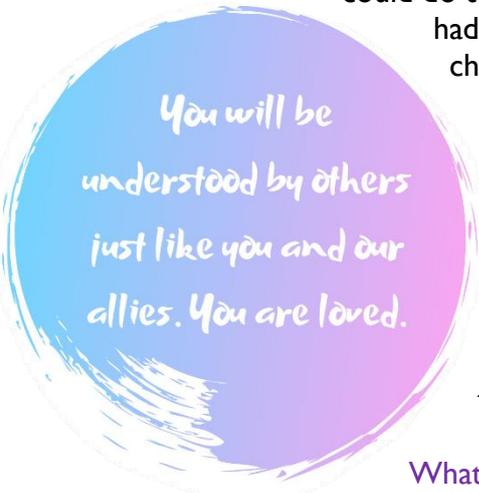
What was the process of realising your gender?

I have so much to say, but I will share some key points with you. There is this narrative that most lot transgender people tell reinforce because it helps others understand us and accept us. You know, "I knew since I was five... I played with trucks instead of Barbies..." This is not my story, and I dare say not the true story of others' gender realisation. When I was young, I played with lots of different toys, they were just toys. I could explore and that made everything easier for me. It was gradual...gender was never imposed on me nor the objects I interacted with, so I had less to fight against. Like, I had long hair because I wanted to. My Dad also had long hair. I liked to dress up

because it was fun, not because I was being 'girly'. It wasn't until I was fifteen where I fully grasped the concept of gender. I went to this gender segregated school and once I started developing sexually, the language people would use in reference to me changed. Suddenly it was "young lady" and "miss". You can be female and reject that type of language, but it was different for me. It felt wrong. I was dysphoric. Then, I blamed my body. There is this narrative of being born in the wrong body. I reject it. This is MY body. The Russian roulette that is gender assignment is faulty. When people are labelled based on genitals, mistakes are going to happen. I repeat, genitals do not correlate with gender identity. We must abolish gender assignment, and interference with intersex people. We are as diverse as the universe and going against that is immoral, unnatural and harmful.

Can you share with us a story about acceptance?

I used to mentor clients of Mission Australia in regional Queensland. My speciality was LGBTQIA+ Youth, and I was the only contact in the area. I met a young person who was assigned female at birth in an openly queerphobic, conservative family. This young person came out to me. When they shared their identity with me, I thanked them for doing so, accepted them and asked what I could do to help explore that with them. They burst into tears. They told me they had never had an adult in their life accept them for who they are. I got chills, and this drive to keep doing advocacy. The process of sitting, listening, and accepting someone for who they are, makes a huge difference to people. It is the difference between someone feeling loved and safe and feeling alone and rejected. Whatever your cultural or religious beliefs are, treat people with dignity. That is where change starts; charity begins at home, right? Can you imagine your own parents rejecting you? Can you imagine society rejecting you, and debating your right to exist as you are? This is the reason we have mental illness at alarming rates in this community. I command you to LOVE each other!



You will be understood by others just like you and our allies. You are loved.

What advice do you have for a young person who is questioning their identity?

You do not have to understand everything right now. Please, be gentle with yourself. Please, reach out to someone you trust. The safest option is to talk to an icon of the LGBTQIA+ community. My inbox is open! LGBTQIA+ people will accept you, respect your privacy and have wisdom. It is vital that your first experience questioning identity, is comfortable and safe. The same advice applies to people who are questioning when and how to come out, or what to do next. You are not alone. You will be understood by others just like you and our allies. You are loved.

Interview conducted by James Fowler.