

STONEWALL YOUNG FUTURES



BY ASHTON
ATTZS

SO THAT'S ME:
ASHTON ATTZS
24 YEARS OLD
ARTIST/ILLUSTRATOR
THEY/THEM TRANS-MASC
NON-BINARY LESBIAN

PUT YOUR FEET UP AND
GRAB YOUR FAVOURITE BREW
BECAUSE I'M GOING TO TAKE
YOU ON A WHISTLE-STOP TOUR
OF SOME KEY MOMENTS OF MY
LIFE SO FAR!



Hey! I'm Ashton Attzs, I'm a 24-year-old Non-Binary Trans-Masculine Lesbian and I'm a painter and illustrator. Put your feet up and grab your favourite brew because I'm going to take you guys on whistle-stop tour of some key moments of my life so far - comic book style!



I'm not going to delve in too much into my time at Junior School. I was a good kid: a tomboy with a larger-than life imagination, passion for art and all things cartoon. I loved my school dinners, my viola lessons, fantasy-role playing, pretending I could fly by flapping my arms and playing under the rainbow parachute with my friends on a warm summer afternoon.

HIGH SCHOOL



It was the first day at my new secondary school and I had just moved to a new town: I was one of the few non-white kids in the entire school. This was probably the first time I realised that I was different. Not just in terms of my mixed-race ethnicity, but my gender non-conforming expression and sexuality

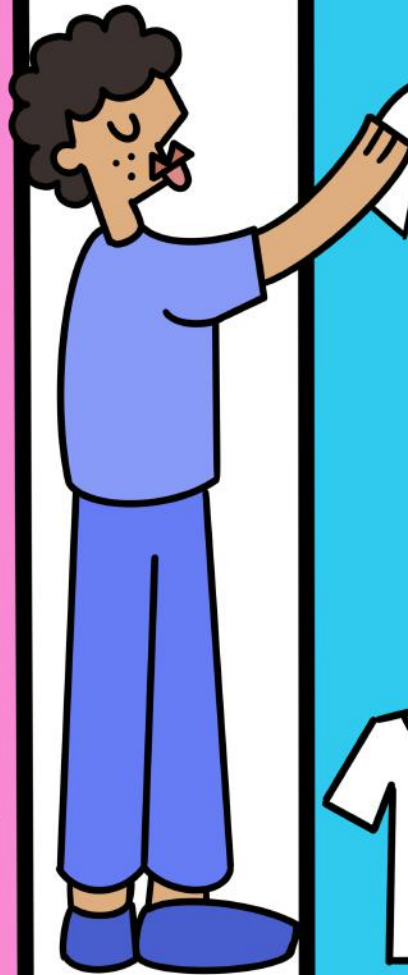
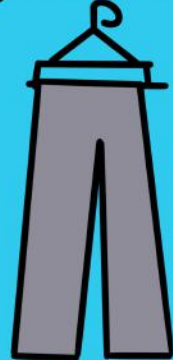
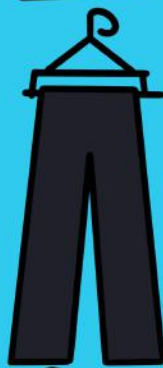
BACK TO SCHOOL

GIRLS



BACK TO SCHOOL

BOYS



I was always a gender-nonconforming kid, a student who preferred to wear the boys' shirts and trousers rather than the girls' uniform. Gendered school uniform for LGBTQ+ kids can be a bit of a hurdle, and I was soon about to experience one of my first stumbles...



We had a PE class and of course I was the ONLY person in the girls' changing room wearing trousers. "EW the school trousers are so ugly" the girl who stood next me to muttered to her friend.



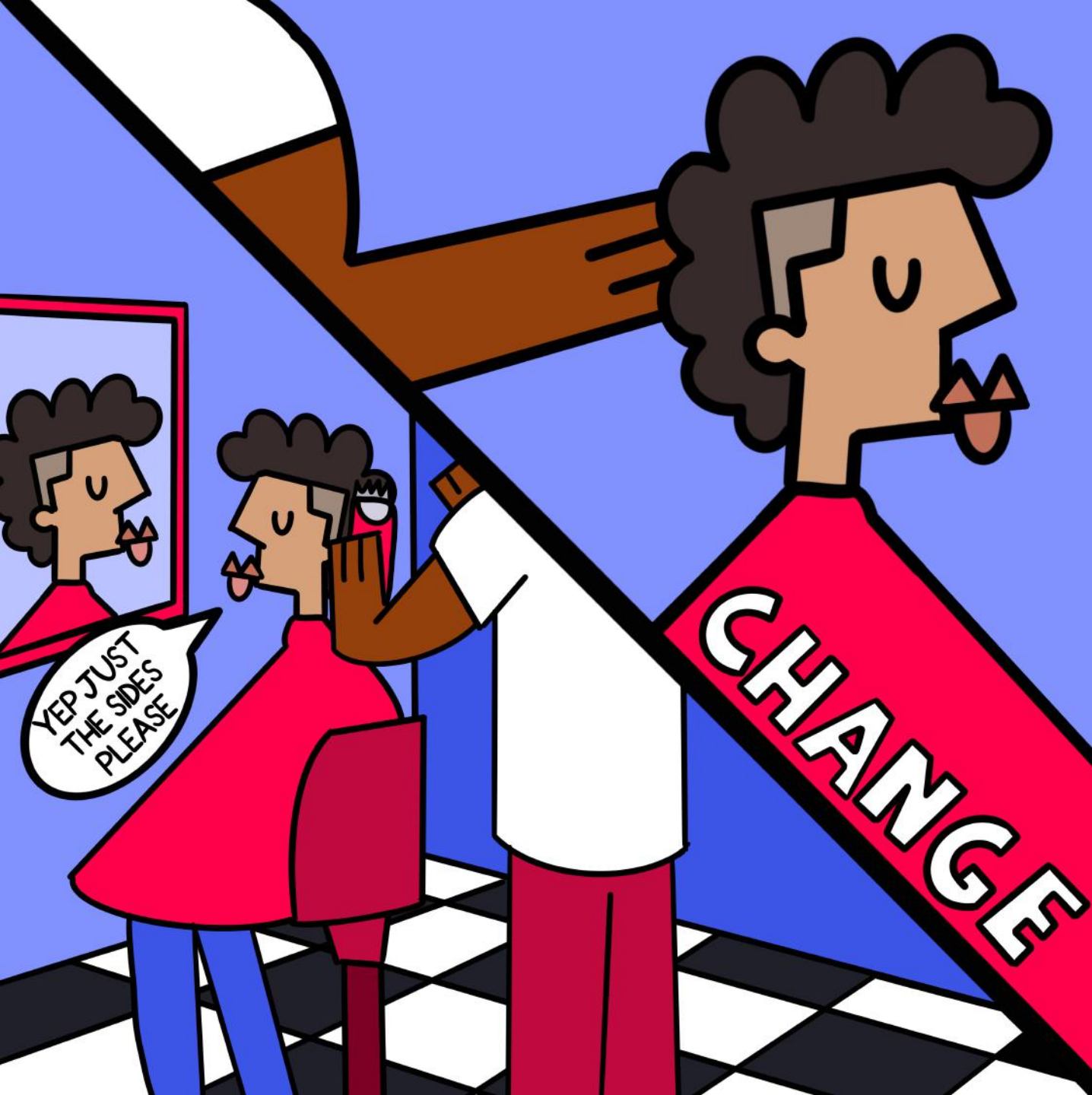
Wait! HOW could I forget to mention... Ashton throughout school had an afro. An afro that other students liked to pull and tug and use as their aim and shoot practice net. I didn't even need to buy new stationary at the start of term because I'd discover handfuls of pens, pencils and rubbers nestled within my curls.



I was carrying too much, not just in my hair, but in my head itself. I'd stumbled too many times and hit a hurdle. I swapped the trousers and shirts to a knee-length skirt in a desperate attempt to fit in.



After receiving my successful GCSE results, awkwardly dancing at my leavers prom in a satin blue dress, an OCD diagnosis, and a summer spent on an unrequited crush, it was time for change...Sixth Form.



I no longer felt the pressure to succumb to gender-norms and hide my sexuality; I was ready to leap over those hurdles and fly. One afternoon, I went to the barbers for the first time and asked them to shave the sides of my hair into an undercut. The skin-fade buzzed sides were sharp and cool to touch and I felt masculine and affirmed in my identity.



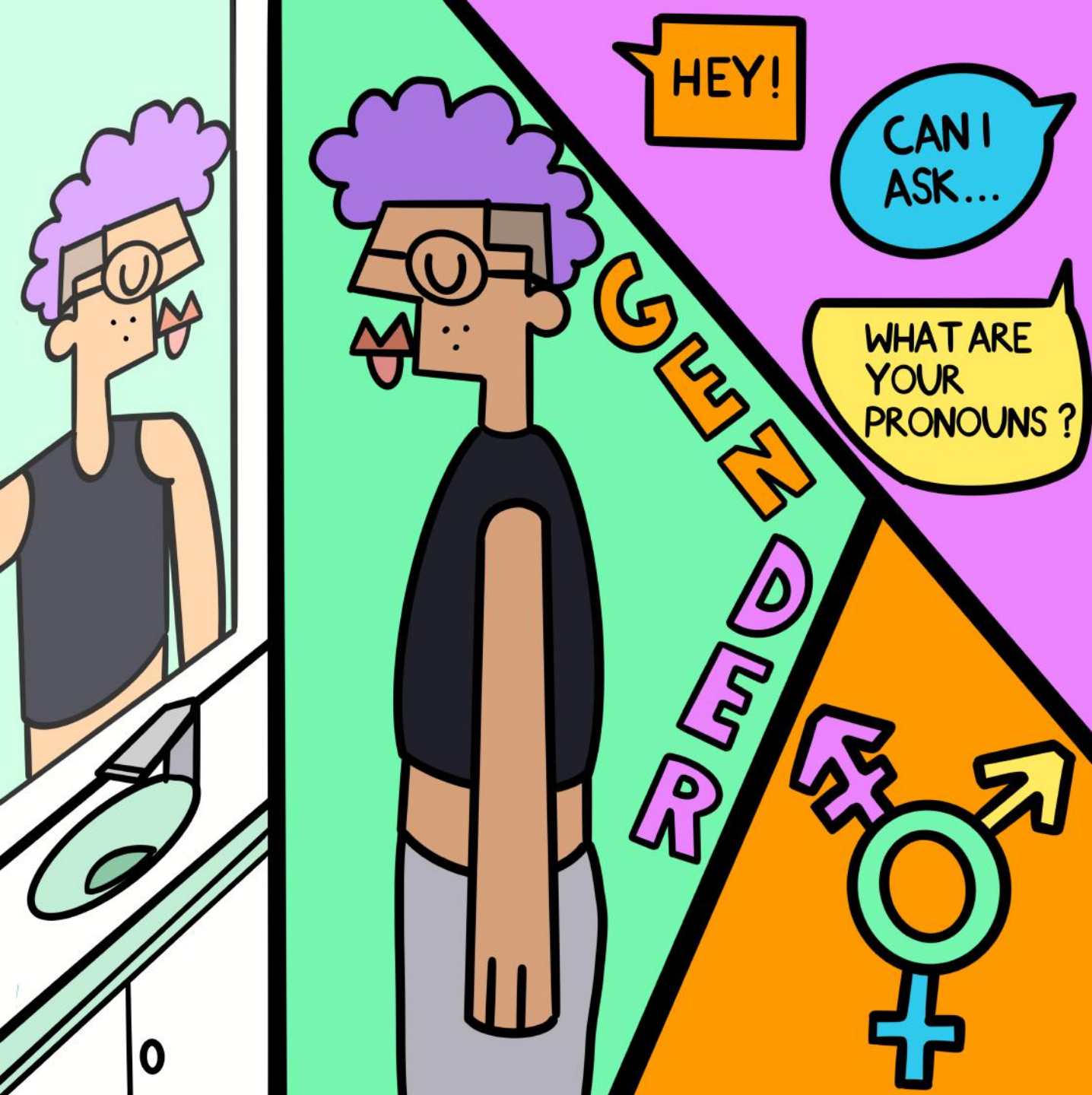
In the summer of 2016, I received my A level results and I felt ready to fly! At the Sixth Form Leavers' Dinner, I danced a lot less awkwardly in a white tailored suit.



When the time came for me to choose ‘what comes next’, I took my time to figure things out and decide. I worked for a year in my local supermarket as I quietly mulled things over. Do I follow the thing I love and I’m great at (painting and illustration), or should I do something that society deems as valuable? Looking back, it seems like a no-brainer. But back then, it took me a lot of thought and deliberation.



Thanks to my mum's encouragement to follow my heart and choose the thing that I truly enjoy, I made the right decision and went on to pursue art. After studying an Art and Design Foundation Diploma for a year, in 2017 I made the decision to go to University and Study BA Fine Art. For the first time in my life, I lived away from home.

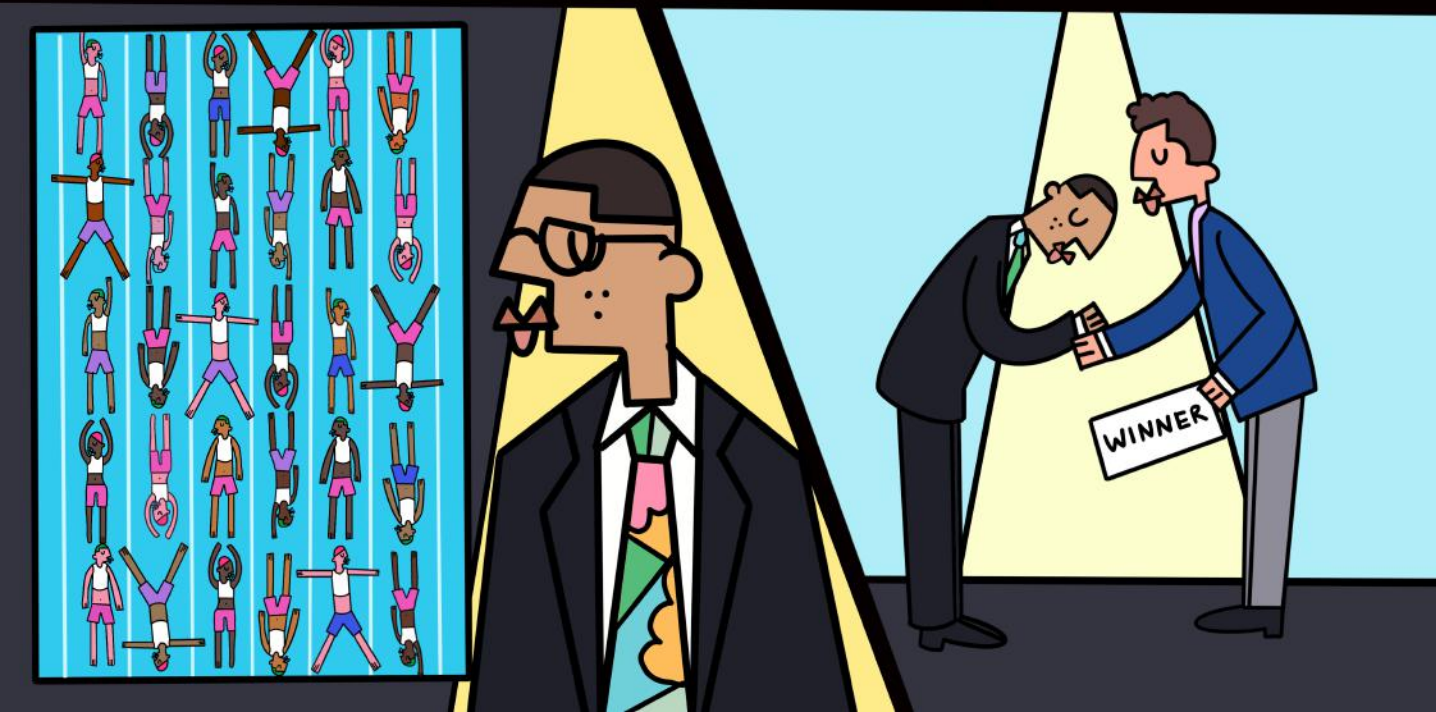


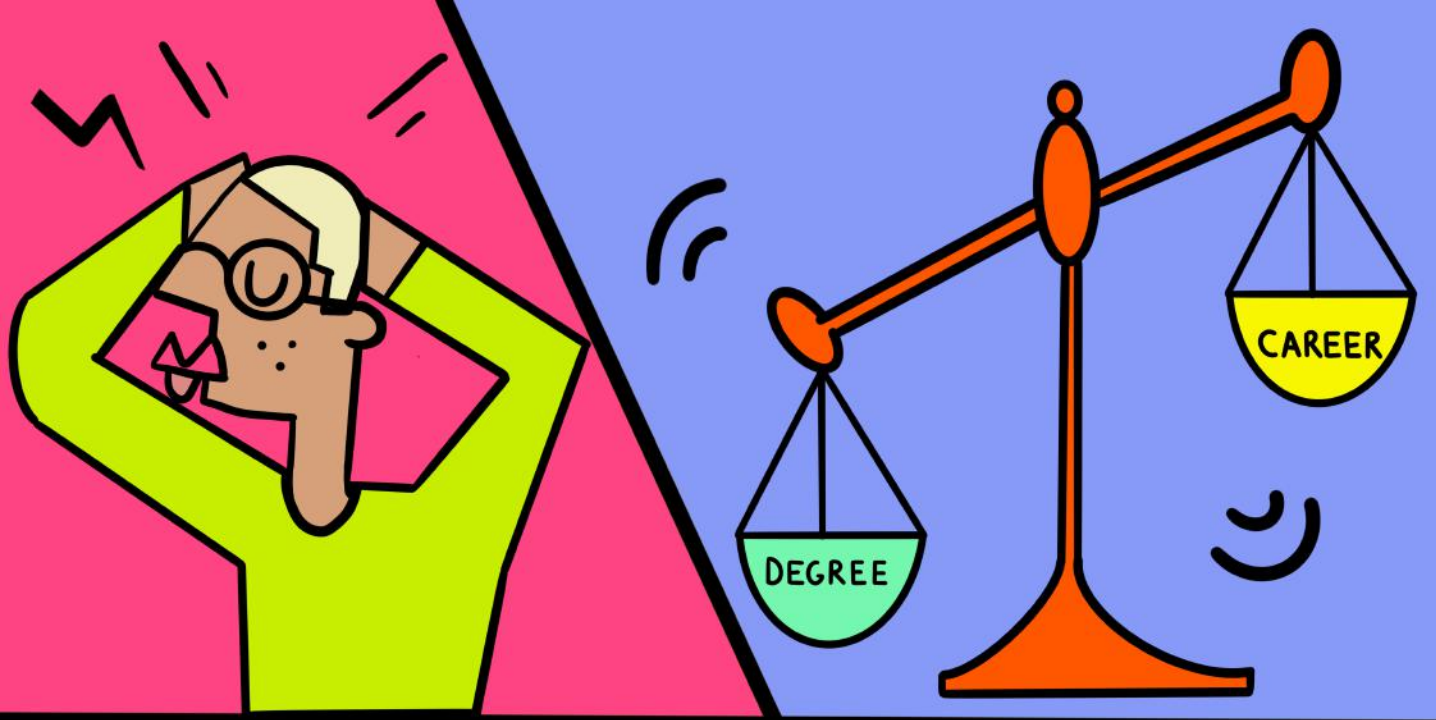
That big 'who am I?' question about my gender identity started to get bigger and bigger. My gender dysphoria was getting worse, and so was my mental health. I bought my first chest binder which helped alleviate a lot of it and really did change the trajectory of my life as a young gender non-conforming person.

On my first day of term, I was asked this monumental question for the first time, "what are your pronouns?". My peers at university approached my gender with tenderness and sincere respect, asking how I identified and how I would like to be referred to, which was something I had never been asked before.



At the end of 2018 I had my first ever solo show, and I won The Evening Standard Art Prize for my painting of Transgender swimmers called: Don't Stay in Ya Lane. It was becoming difficult to balance my budding professional career whilst studying the first years of my BA Fine Art Degree.






I was becoming stressed and burnt out and after an un-related health issue requiring me to have surgery, I took a year out from my course. This led to me taking another year out due to professional commitments, which led to me never going back. I dropped out of my course having completed the first 2 years. To some people's surprise, this was actually one of the best decisions I've ever made.



Fast forward to now! I'm full-time artist. I illustrate, I paint, I design and I make a living from it which is such fantastic thing to be able to say. It's what I really always wanted for myself and I'm proud that I've done it. I work from my childhood home, where I still live with my parents. I don't have a studio or anything fancy like that right now.



There's a lot of wonderful things about this career, I could go on and on, but one really special thing is when fellow LGBTQ+ people tell me that they see themselves in my artwork. There's nothing more beautiful and affirming I could hear than that.



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If I could give advice to an LGBTQ+ young person thinking about their future, I'd assure them not to rush it. I'd tell them that they can and should take all the time in the world to navigate things and discover themselves, including who they are and what they want to do. You know best.

As LGBTQ+ people we sometimes feel like we're playing catch up because we spend a lot of our formative years figuring other things out like our gender or our sexuality, whilst others can steam ahead with first relationships, new friendships, career options and so on. But there's absolutely no deadline for becoming yourself and working things out.

I'd also reassure LGBTQ+ young people that school is not a reflection of the rest of their life. Not everyone at school or college has a good time, and it can be easy to think that future spaces and communities are going to be similar, but it's not the case.

If you're an LGBTQ+ young person who has read this comic, just know that whatever you choose to do and whenever you choose it, there's a whole community behind you cheering you on. As long as your joy is at the forefront, that's what truly matters!