

How to Come Out in Your College Essay (in a Way That Will Actually Help Get You into College) Part 2 of 2

[Click here for Part 1: Should I Come Out in My College Essay?](#)

First, let's acknowledge that there are many ways to "come out" in your personal statement: you could be disclosing a long-kept family secret, for example, or the fact that you or your family is undocumented. (For more on coming out as undocumented, read "[Should I Come Out As Undocumented in My Personal Statement?](#)")

If you've read Part 1 of this post, "Should I Come Out in My Personal Statement" and have decided that yes, you should (or you're at least considering it), here are two things to keep in mind. First:

A great personal statement--no matter the topic--often demonstrates these four qualities:

1. Core Values: (e.g.: curiosity, diversity, social justice, etc.)
2. Insight (aka "so what" moments)
3. Vulnerability (is the essay *personal*?)
4. Craft (Is the essay well-written?)

I'll discuss these qualities in my analysis of the sample essays below, but if you want to learn more about these qualities, check out [The Great College Essay Test](#). The second thing to remember is this:

There are many ways to address your LGBTQ+ identity in your essay.

In the essays below, for example:

- A. In the "This Is Me" essay below, the author describes his LGBTQ+ identity as just one several ways he identifies.
- B. Due to familial and cultural pressures, the author of "My Double (Triple?) Life" is not out yet and her essay describes what that's like for her.
- C. The author of "He Lives Freely" is out and proud and his essay is primarily about his journey towards becoming an advocate.
- D. The author of "My Life Began at 15" describes their transition, which began as a child when (the author writes) "I knew on some level that I didn't feel fully like a girl."
- E. While the author of "Room 216B" mentions his sexual identity in the first sentence, the essay is mostly about other things--primarily their love of math.

In the remaining essays you'll find students taking a wide range of approaches, or even sharing about what it's been like growing up with gay parents in a conservative environment.

In short, there's no one "right" way.

Everyone's different.

Find your way.

I hope these essays will help.

This Is Me

I am Mexican.

The sound of frying empanadas and the smell of burning peppers. My mother calling me 'mi vida' and my relatives kissing my cheek. Running but never hiding from the dreaded chancla and always responding with, "Muy bien, y tu?" Childhood vacations to Puebla and Cancun, swimming in the ocean and playing in the sand. Feeling the need to be good at cross-country, feeling the need to be able to endure spicy.

Those are all me.

I am Chinese.

The utter preference for using chopsticks in every scenario and the unhealthy craving for rice with every meal. The sharing of every dish placed on the center turn table. Hotpot for celebration and tea eggs, of all things, as a favorite dish. My father's musical Cantonese conversations with my grandparents, and their constant inquiry asking, "How is school?" Being named after 龙, the dragon, for strength and living for three years in Shanghai. The constant pressure to get good grades, my father's desire for me to become a doctor, and the never-ending, "How are you so bad at math, you're Asian?"

Those are all me.

I am American.

A citizen with the freedom to vote. The freedom to speak my mind and the representation by all the cultures and countries of the world. Shopping sprees at Target and a constant diet of fast foods. Full acceptance of the consumer society and a rather unhealthy addiction to social media and technology. Going to football games on Friday nights and watching Netflix on Saturday nights. Always watching my weight. Always looking at others. Always wishing, always wanting for more.

Those are all me.

I am Catholic.

Sunday mornings always spent at church. The private Catholic middle and high schools each with masses for special occasions. Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation. Praying before each meal and saying, "Go away in the name of Jesus" to nighttime horrors. Theology classes and realizing there is so much more to religion than faith. Having something to believe in. Questioning what you believe in. Turning to God when I see the horrors in the world and getting no response.

Those are all me.

I am homosexual.

An unusual obsession with fashion and clothing. Watching Game of Thrones not for Daenerys or Cersei, but for Jon Snow and Jamie. Seeing Love Simon for the first time, and crying at least five times. Always conscious always thinking before talking. Going to an all-boys school. Dealing with gay being to go to expression for displeasure. Being called a faggot when I act gay. Fear of my parents finding out.

Those are all me.

I am Jonathan Kei-Lung Eng.

I love reading and am addicted to fanfiction. I have three siblings and love my two dogs more than anything in the world. I can't eat spicy food and I have the biggest sweet-tooth. I play League of Legends and soccer. I'm a Marvel geek and theater nerd. My friends call me Jenga. My teammates call me Jeng. My teachers call me Mr. Eng. I am Mexican. I am Chinese. I am American. I am Catholic. I am gay. I am all of this and more, and most of all, I am me. My identity is not a singular entity, but a conglomeration of experiences, beliefs, and origins. This is my identity.

This is me.

- - -

Ethan's Analysis: This essay uses the Montage Structure in that the author chooses five different identities (Mexican, Chinese, American, Catholic, homosexual) and uses a variety of specific, visual details to describe each identity. The final paragraph is a montage of other identities (Marvel geek, theater nerd, etc.).

In my opinion, it has all four qualities I mentioned above:

- Core values: In this essay I see culture, family, faith, intellectual curiosity, social justice, vulnerability, humor, sensitivity, fun, adventure, and more...
- Insight: So many moments in this essay give me insight into who the author is. Examples include his awareness of being a product of American culture ("Full acceptance of the consumer society and a rather unhealthy addiction to social media and technology") and awareness that it's possible for contrasting truths to exist simultaneously ("Having something to believe in. Questioning what you believe in.")
- Vulnerability: It's beautifully vulnerable throughout, including the lines, "Always watching my weight. Always looking at others. Always wishing, always wanting for more" and, later, "Being called a faggot when I act gay. Fear of my parents finding out." Note, however, that this is not what I'd call Level 10 vulnerable. I'd say it's like level 7 or 8 vulnerable, which to me is the sweet spot for personal statements. (This is not a scientific scale, obviously; it's more of a gut check thing.)
- Craft: The quality and range of details lets us know these moments were carefully chosen and that this essay went through several rounds of revision. Also, I teared up when I read it for the first time. That's not something you *must* do in your essay, but it is one indication to me that an essay possesses these four qualities.

The next example uses the Narrative Structure and, like the author above, she wasn't yet out to her family.

My Double (Triple?) Life

There's nothing more wholesome than a Persian party: we cook kebab, play chess, and dance. Okay, I'm leaving out the poker, hookah, and belly-dancing but, I believe our vices strengthen our virtues. The same friends I party with, I celebrate Nowruz with and meet every Friday to discuss Persian diaspora. We're modern Persians and we're fiercely patriotic.

But most of us have learned what being Persian means from our elders.

The boy didn't know my name when he said, "Girl, don't study biology, just marry a Persian guy, cook us food, clean the house and we'll take care of you." As an advocate for women in STEM, I picture myself one day expanding the United State's sustainable energy industry, however, I've realized it's my generation who will have to pave the way for Persian women in the sciences. Thus, my growing awareness of Persian social inequities has forced me to examine the other antiquated social constructs Persians clings to.

Persian summer camp and I have a complicated relationship. It's given me a lifetime's worth of fond memories and of microaggressions: "She hasn't worn makeup all week, I bet she's lesbian" and "He dresses a little *too* well, if you know what I mean." One year, a camper told another girl that she liked girls, and within 24 hours she left due to the vitriol she'd endured from both campers and counselors. As she was driving away, it struck me, I could've easily been in her place, because I kind of like girls too. Outing myself isn't an option, however, so to this day I keep my mouth shut and pretend not to hear the homophobia.

Bisexuality isn't a valid option in the Persian community. Thus, I've imposed a wall inside me between my culture, my sexuality, and even my love for chemistry, inducing me to lead a double (triple?) life (and not the cool spy kind). I often struggle with resentment towards my community for denying me role models beyond the tropes of a loving mother. But I've also realized I only have room for one secret in my 5'3 body and I've come out about at least one part of myself.

Biology turns me on and I'm not ashamed. Embracing this has led me to create the Women in STEM club and receiving positive feedback has given me the courage to stand in my power outside of a school environment. I've given speeches to my Persian youth group on both healthcare in sustainable economics. Although I get called annoying by my (male) peers for speaking up, I'd endure much worse if it meant that just one girl in the crowd didn't have to hide who she is to the community she loves.

In my lifetime I'll see a Persian culture that respects its female doctors, and I want to be part of that. I'm not positive that I'll see a Persian culture that accepts same-sex marriage or supports transgender rights, but I might see one that recognizes LGBTQ+ existence. I get lost in this dream where I bring my (non-existent) girlfriend to one of our infamous Persian parties and everyone's ok with it. But the expectation for me to marry a nice, Persian man and have a big, Persian wedding also haunts me.

Worries partially aside, I've come to a conclusion (literally and in this essay): if I can come out to a college admissions board and not fear rejection, then I should stop fearing rejection from my community. I'm done agonizing over the hypothetical: it's about time that I begin existing as who I am and fight back against intolerance. There's only so much progress that even I--the Persian bisexual feminist that I am--can make from inside a closet.

- - -

Ethan's Analysis: This essay was written using the Narrative Structure. For a step-by-step guide (and to use the exercise this student used to generate content for this essay), try the Feelings and Needs exercise [at this link](#). The basic parts are these:

A. What challenge(s) have you faced, or are you currently facing?

- B. What have been the effects or impacts of that challenge on your life?
- C. What different emotions did that make you feel?
- D. Based on those feelings, what were (or are) your needs?
- E. What did you do (or are you doing) to meet that need?
- F. What have you learned through this process?

The exercise at the link above will walk you through those more slowly and with more context. It takes 15-20 minutes to complete it, and by the end you may have your essay mapped out.

Here are those four qualities I like to look for:

- Core values: In this essay I see culture, family, social justice, science/STEM, equality, environmentalism, vulnerability, humor, ambition.
- Insight: I learn a lot about her ability to use humor to cope with her situation, in particular when she writes, “Bisexuality isn’t a valid option in the Persian community. Thus, I’ve imposed a wall inside me between my culture, my sexuality, and even my love for chemistry, inducing me to lead a double (triple?) life (and not the cool spy kind).” I also get insight into how much she wants to help others when she writes, “Although I get called annoying by my (male) peers for speaking up, I’d endure much worse if it meant that just one girl in the crowd didn’t have to hide who she is to the community she loves.” My heart aches to read that.
- Vulnerability: As with the author above, just writing this essay was a huge act of vulnerability. And, like the essay above, there are some vulnerable lines along the way, including “As she was driving away, it struck me, I could’ve easily been in her place, because I kind of like girls too” and “I get lost in this dream where I bring my (non-existent) girlfriend to one of our infamous Persian parties and everyone’s ok with it. But the expectation for me to marry a nice, Persian man and have a big, Persian wedding also haunts me.” The most vulnerable moment, however, may be at the end where she acknowledges that she probably still should come out... and still hasn’t. She wants to, but can’t.
- Craft: It’s so well-written. Some of my favorite lines include, “Persian summer camp and I have a complicated relationship. It’s given me a lifetime’s worth of fond memories and of microaggressions” and “There’s only so much progress that even I--the Persian bisexual feminist that I am--can make from inside a closet.”

The author of the next essay uses a chronological approach (Narrative Structure) to sharing his journey toward becoming an advocate for other queer people of color.

He Lives Freely

One of my favorite outfits in fourth grade was a bright purple shirt with dark purple jeans. When classmates saw me, they would giggle and ask why I was dressed “like that”. Though I loved my clothes, I always felt embarrassed walking into school. My mother would tell me that I “shouldn’t wear things like that” if I wanted to fit in. I knew she was trying to help, but I felt that even if I did dress like the other boys, I would still be rejected. I was aware that my clothes weren’t the problem: it was that I was black, that my mannerisms were too feminine, that my voice wasn’t deep enough. The list of things about me classmates perceived as strange was long.

Desperate to fit in, I joined a mostly white, mean-spirited friend group in middle school that made fun of a girl named Alexis. I was so happy to have friends that I ignored their comments. But when Camille told Alexis she was no longer allowed to sit with us because she

was too “ghetto,” I understood that we teased her not because of anything as simple as her bad breath, but because she was black and because she lived on the other side of town. Alexis had a list as long as mine. I stood up, looked Camille in the eyes and said “You’re a bully.” I believe this to be the moment I became an activist. I knew all too well how it felt to be made a stranger in my own community.

The next day, Camille (who, regrettably, I’d told I was gay) outed me. For the rest of the year, people mocked me in “gay voices,” and whispered behind my back. At the end of the year, I left that school, despite everything, still proud to wear my thick-framed glasses and crop-tops that I’d cut myself.

At my new school, I was drawn toward clubs like TRIBE-ONYX, the black activism club, and Spectrum, our Gay-Straight Alliance. I even attended the Student Diversity Leadership Conference, where I finally found a community of shared experience. The discussions there were truly cathartic, and I decided to bring them to my school. I wanted to create not just a black group, which is by nature exclusionary, but a community of diverse students that would both support its members and better our broader community. Thus, People of Color Club (POCC) was born.

As founder, I organized an assembly on microaggressions where I and other members shared our experiences. Mine was that various white teachers had neglected to learn my name and, instead, have called me that of another black student. After the presentation, many teachers and students sought me out to share the impact of the assembly. I felt excited knowing that I was already getting the community talking. POCC is not only a safe space for students of color, but also a group dedicated to community involvement. We have sorted and packaged hundreds of boxes at local food pantries and are currently working on establishing relationships with local homeless women’s shelters

I believe the constant bullying I dealt with growing up was necessary for me to develop the empathy that activism requires. Despite everything, I never attempted to hide myself or change. I took refuge in my favorite works of literature, the fearless self-expression helping me to grow a thick skin. Books like *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and *On the Road* planted in me the knowledge that freedom is out there, and that unabashed self-love and resilience are the roadmap.

As both a writer and an activist, I want to do for others what Maya Angelou did for me. I want the lonely queer kid who can’t keep a friend to pick up my book and say, “He lives freely and without fear of judgement; perhaps there is hope for me.”

Here’s a simple outline of the structure this essay uses:

1. Challenges I’ve faced and their impact on me
2. What I’ve done about it
3. What I’ve learned through this experience

This essay was also written after completing the Feelings and Needs Exercise and follows the elements of Narrative Structure:

- Status Quo
- Inciting Incident
- Raising of the Stakes
- Turning Point

- New Status Quo

While this essay possesses the four qualities I've named (Core values, insight, vulnerability, craft), here's a quick analysis of how the author uses these elements:

- Status Quo: The author is ostracized by his mother and peers.
- Inciting Incident: He stands up to a bully.
- Raising of the Stakes: The next day he's outted at school by one of the bullies. As a result, he endures more bullying. Still, he continues to proudly wear the clothes he wants to wear.
- Turning Point: He switches schools and joins clubs like TRIBE-ONYX, the black activism club, and Spectrum, the Gay-Straight Alliance. He also attends the Student Diversity Leadership Conference, where, he writes, "I finally found a community of shared experience."
- Denouement (i.e. what happens next--useful for showing who you've become): He forms POCC (People of Color Club), which is not only a safe space for students of color, but also a group dedicated to community involvement. He realizes that "the constant bullying I dealt with growing up was necessary for me to develop the empathy that activism requires. Despite everything, I never attempted to hide myself or change. I took refuge in my favorite works of literature, the fearless self-expression helping me to grow a thick skin. Books like *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and *On the Road* planted in me the knowledge that freedom is out there, and that unabashed self-love and resilience are the roadmap."
- New Status Quo: In the end, he writes, "I want the lonely queer kid who can't keep a friend to pick up my book and say, "He lives freely and without fear of judgement; perhaps there is hope for me."

The essays below use either the [Montage](#) or [Narrative](#) Structure, and all pass the [Great College Essay Test](#). Click any of those links for a step-by-step guide.

And enjoy reading the rest of these wonderful pieces.

Have a great essay to share? We love adding to these posts.
If so, please email it to help@collegeessayguy.com.

My Life Began at 15

My life as I know it began when I was 15. As a freshman in high school, life is already confusing, and to add on to that struggle I began to really question who I was as a person. I had known since a very young age that I was different, and I mean that in a distinct way: I knew my sexuality was different than that of the people around me. At the age of 12 I came out to my friends as bisexual, and at the time had full support from almost every one of my peers. When I told my mother, it was in passing, on my way out the door; I didn't think it was a big enough deal to warrant a serious conversation. I appreciate being raised to think like that. But when high school started, things got more complicated -- I began to discover gender.

I was beginning to spend time on social media, and in doing so I discovered the complexity of gender and the spectrum that it entailed, so my mind began to wander and questions of gender started to plague my mind every day.

I didn't think I would be accepted, so I spent a year silent about these questions and confusions. Finally I couldn't take it anymore and I sat my parents down at the dinner table to tell them that I was genderfluid. They didn't understand, but they tried to. They asked questions and I answered them to the best of my ability. That was one of the hardest conversations I've ever had, and once it was over I knew it wasn't really over. Over the course of that year, I felt more and more masculine, spending fewer days identifying as feminine and more days identifying as masculine. I stopped wearing makeup, bought myself a chest binder, wore androgynous clothing, and I told my friends to start calling me Sam -- a solid gender-neutral name.

Even as a child, I knew on some level that I didn't feel fully like a girl. In second grade, I told my mother that I wanted to go by Max, and that I wanted to be a boy. She sent me to my school counselor, of course with good intentions. But nobody, not my mother, not my friends or my teachers, and not the counselor, told me that it was okay to want to be a boy. Nobody explained to me that transgender people exist and have existed for centuries, and nobody told me that there was a word for the way I was feeling. So I ignored how I was feeling and pushed it into the back of my mind for years.

Once I gained the vocabulary to describe the way I felt, it became infinitely easier to put into words. I finally had a label. Society relies so heavily today on labels that it felt impossible for me to be myself without one, so when I found one it was a massive relief, a huge weight off my chest. Now, being transgender is something I'm well known for and I'm able to be a source of inspiration for younger transgender kids. At 16 I had started hormone replacement therapy, and at 17 raised the money and made an appointment for gender affirming chest surgery. I know that I have to be aware of my privilege in this matter, considering how rare it is for physical transition to be allowed this early on in life. I only hope to inspire others and show them that it is possible to be happy, that it is okay to question who you are, and that you are never alone despite how lonely you may feel.

Room 216B

Being gay in a homophobic household, a math lover in a theatre centered school, an atheist in a strict, Muslim family, and an unbalanced ambivert, I have always felt inapposite. Trying to find solace in everyday activities and routines was troublesome because of the detachment I felt from all surrounding cultures and environments. However, that was before I met my Geometry teacher, Mr. Smith, in room 216B on the first day of my freshman year.

I walked into the room, right after my U.S. History class ended, and maneuvered my way in the putrid, compressed room, through infinitely many bags and chairs. The minty residue that my chewing gum from 2 hours ago left worsened my first-day anxiety. I sat down at a bland, beige table, all the way in the back, on my blue, hard-edged, metal chair and took out my notebook. The chilling touch from the chair hinted at its months of vacancy.

At that time my Math skills were sufficient, but math wasn't something I envisioned for my future for a profession; I planned to become a doctor because my father demanded so, without taking much of my needs and wants into consideration.

“Good morning, class!” Mr. Smith exclaimed. He was young, in his early 30s, and full of a drive for teaching math. It came off as atypical at first, but I later admired his colorful demeanor.

“First and foremost, I don’t want this class to be one where I spit out information and you swallow. I don’t want you to just memorize formulas, I want you to learn formulas,” he added. “It’d be crazy if I asked you what 93 is--”

“729,” I confidently answered.

Mr. Smith, with everyone else in the cramped room, turned his head 48° and stared at me. I was like a petite zoo animal, locked in a cage of shame and embarrassment. Heat began to build up in my upper nape and in the back of my head. The air was tight and heavy. Each swallow weighed tons. I didn’t want to develop the “know-it-all freshman” personality on the first day, or at all, even. Mr. Smith sliced the tense environment.

“You managed to do that in your head?” he inquired with an intrigued smirk.

“Yeah, I can do other operations as well,” I replied. Somehow, everyone in the room vanished and just him and I were talking. I sensed a partnership beginning to forge.

“May I talk to you after class?”

“I’d be delighted.”

After class, Mr. Smith introduced me to potential math competitions, math theorems and what I could do in the future.

Weeks had passed since our first encounter and every discussion with him has since resonated with me. Math concepts flourished and thrived in my head and on the tip of my tongue, creating common ground with my afresh intended future endeavors and my newfound admiration of math. The yearn for more mathematical education fed my malnourished soul. A fresh droplet fell on a now germinating seed.

I made a vow to myself before my freshman year had ended: to pursue mathematics in a way that Mr. Smith did, selflessly and with ardor. Since then, I’ve won national competitions and became the founder and captain of my school’s Mathletes team, leading us to second place in the Queens College MathComp. Withal, I’ve established this mathematical personality for myself and aided others through their mathematical plights. Every time I had helped someone, an unrevealed environment grew stronger, both internally and externally. An environment where I was secure and I could be myself without apology. Digging deeper, that environment was the mathematical foundation that I built for my personality and my theatre centered school. No longer did I have to scavenge for an escape from my detachment anymore, for I had contrived my own.

My future occupation became clear, I want to major in math and become a professor, to inspire others like Mr. Smith did and to help others like me. Those without a solace or a personal escape. My desire for helping others also geared my educational path towards minoring in Psychology because I aspire to understand how one can mentally find their solace and benefit from it.

Drag Race

By Edward Wolfson

“Beat your face!” “Looking fishy hunty.” “You betta work!” These quotes don’t come from a school fight, a fish market, or a demanding boss. They come from *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, the only show featuring an eclectic mix of dancing, modeling, lip syncing, comedy, drama, fashion, and of course drag queens. It’s a beautiful whirlwind of a little bit of TV and a whole lot of

crazy—but *Drag Race* isn't just a source of entertainment for me, it has shown me the beauty of pure, uninhibited self-expression and empowered me to be me.

Throughout 9th and 10th grade I was overwhelmed by the barrage of imagery that told me that being gay was about being the “right” body type and saying the sassiest, most opinionated things I could think of. This left me, a chubby pubescent 15-year-old, obsessed with losing weight and walking around the halls exclaiming “That’s faabbuullooouuss!” I was determined to become the type of gay boy that popular culture suggested I was meant to be. *Drag Race* showed me the endless possibilities of what being gay could mean. I saw men who looked like me being praised for their “delicious curves;” I saw gay men who liked sports or math or exercise or all of the above or none of it. I learned that I can define my own queerness; I could love biology, be oblivious as to what a “sophisticated color palette” is, and still want to experiment with drag and gender and what “me” is.

The queens on *Ru Paul’s Drag Race* have created a space in which they give each other unwavering love and support. They’ve shown me an ideal to aspire to, a community in which inner truths are more than accepted, they are embraced. Before watching the show, I was deathly afraid of putting on pride socks, even though they were hidden beneath my clothes. I wasn’t able to speak about things that mattered to me without a shaking voice and sweaty palms. The queens’ courage to show the world their most inner selves demonstrated to me that being brave and speaking out doesn’t only open you up to failure, it opens you up to greater success. They inspired me to march in DC Pride, wearing a rainbow tutu, dancing like nobody was watching. They gave me the strength to speak up in class, to push past the nerves and allow my voice to be heard. I took leadership positions in clubs, fostering safe spaces for my peers to share their perspectives without inhibition. As a president of poetry club, I created a platform for queer students to share their stories. I was selected to attend the NAIS Student Leadership and Diversity Conference. At the conference, I learned how to expound upon my beliefs and was inspired to make a difference in my community. I developed an independent study focused on diversifying the English and History curriculum, to give a voice to the unheard minorities at my school. Now I have a newfound confidence, a passion for leadership, and a motivation to make change.

Today, I walk through the halls unafraid to be me—to dance in the middle of the hallway, to put on my pride socks and a pin too, to sing *Chicago* in the airport. My hope is that I can be to others what *Drag Race* was for me; I want to share my experiences with my peers and reach new conclusions with them, to be brave and inspire braveness in others, and to help create a community where all can share their beliefs without fear of rejection. I can’t wait for the next season.

While the author of the next essay identifies as heterosexual, I felt this example was well worth including due to its content and quality.

Waving Out the Window

I was too young to understand why my parents responded with silence. As a curious, naive seven-year-old boy, I questioned just about everything, but my parents, they always had answers. After a productive day at school, I skipped into my parents’ Volvo and sunk into the black leather seat. As I was riding home, my innocent eyes peered out the window, and I spotted a large group of men and women surrounding the road in front of us. Rolling closer to the group, I was stunned to see so many men and women chanting with signs in their hands. Curiously, with a sneaking grin on my face, I raised my hands and began to wave at them—my dad’s head

snapped back at me. "Don't wave at them, Ryan." Panic filled his eyes. "Why dad?" He stared at me for a few moments with a look of pity and then turned back around. "Dad, what's wrong?" Silence.

"Kids, let's go. We're going to be late!" While hastily adjusting my crooked blue tie, tripping over myself just getting into the car, I was exceptionally giddy thinking of the celebrations that were soon to come with my parents' marriage. My parents sped straight past the church and parked by a courthouse. The celebrations never came. Inside the courthouse, strangers gave us daring side glances. I felt judged, but I didn't understand why. There was no fancy wedding, no party, no cake, no family members, no celebration. Rather than happiness and celebrations, I was scared and upset. What is wrong with us? my innocent seven-year-old self thought. Why are we different?

Maturing into my early teens, I discovered that my parents rushed their wedding plans in the wake of the Marriage Equality Countermovement, fearing that if they waited too long, gay marriage would soon become illegal. I discovered that those crazy men and women with signs were yelling slurs at our car.

I was a black sheep in a white herd. Most of my vivid childhood memories weren't of Disneyland or of Santa Claus but rather the uncomfortable experiences I faced growing up with an unconventional family. These experiences planted the idea that people would judge me for having gay parents. Throughout middle school, I kept the identities of my parents secret, going to great lengths to invite friends to my house when my parents weren't home. Realizing my attraction to males in 7th grade closed me off even further-I used to hate myself for being something I thought society viewed as wrong. Not anymore.

In high school, I snapped the leg cuffs from my ankles and took my own steps. No longer would I live my life by other people's standards. This was my life, no one else's. After three years of secrecy, I confronted my friends about my own sexuality-I heard only words of support. Unhappy playing my lifetime sport of soccer, I pursued my passion for running-becoming the captain and one of the most successful runners in school history. I dreaded going to Spanish class every day, so this past year I dropped it to double in a field I love: Science-that decision paid off as I uncovered a drive for engineering. By being myself, by being different, I'm not only much happier but also more successful.

Living my authentic self, I'll be that guy to break college's social and academic norms. Give me a presentation on Shakespeare's Othello and I'll find a way to administer an amateur psychological evaluation of my classmates. I actually did that last week. I'll be that guy to wear a dress when presenting on "Queen Elizabeth." Because in the end, being unique is so much more rewarding than fitting in with the rest.

I'll continue to look out the window and wave.

Princeton University Writing Supplement

"Culture is what presents us with the kinds of valuable things that can fill a life. And insofar as we can recognize the value in those things and make them part of

our lives, our lives are meaningful.” Gideon Rosen, Stuart Professor of Philosophy and chair, Department of Philosophy, Princeton University.

My being has long been bordered by the Ohio River to the North, the Appalachians to the East, the Pennyroyal Plateau to the South, and the Jackson Purchase to the West. Within this geographical compass rose is my Commonwealth. Kentucky, as I have grown to know it, is a land in which paradox is commonplace. As a Kentuckian, I am no exception to this rule. My own Commonwealth Catch-22 is one that has guided my life: how I can love a place that has hated my family for so long.

I will begin with a tale of two Kentuckies—mine and the one you have probably heard. Mine is a tale of same-sex parents whose love was born in the bluegrass, a love so strong that it supported me even as I seemed to have stopped deserving it. Their love is my Kentucky, and it was a love I thought normal until proven otherwise. Mine ends with a realization of difference: as I took a seat in my third grade open house, I noticed that I was the only child accompanied by a mother and a stepmother. The story of the Kentucky the newsmen know begins with my discovery that all of the rescinded sleepover invitations, nervous whispers, hostile stares, and solitary lunchtimes had a source. The tributary of this Ohio River of exclusion was none other than a family that loved each other unapologetically.

This epiphany was followed by an anger reflected in a myriad of principal’s office visits and friendship counseling sessions. Through this period, my family held my quickly unraveling ends together, even as I began to blame them out of a place of confusion. In this time that spanned the rest of my elementary and middle school, I screamed out of fury rather than purpose.

I found my voice in silence. It was two days of no words in protest of LGBTQ bullying and discrimination during my freshman year of high school. In that silence, I could no longer drown out the dreaded whispers but was forced to consider how they could be stopped. Those 48 hours still echo through my life, as they represent my triumph over hopelessness into purpose.

The parts of my identity I once resented, my family and my state, have become what I treasure most. In my family, I see a love capable of transcending hate and turning it into tolerance. In my state, I see a beautiful land I can help overcome ugly unfairness. In all I advocate for, whether that be women’s equality, teachers’ pensions, LGBTQ rights, or drug prevention, I strive to personify the love that made me and fight for the state that gave me a home. More than anything, I share my story to empower all those in my community who feel voiceless.

Regardless of where life may take me, the voice I discovered in silence and the purpose I found in prejudice guides me. I will always be the once directionless girl born in a compass rose seeking to find the true North of progress.

Have a great essay to share? We love adding to these posts.
If so, please email it to help@collegeessayguy.com.