

Anonymous

Prof. Chris McCarthy

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### Being LGBTQ+ in an Evangelical Christian Household

Growing up being taught to hate who you are changes you. The church I grew up going to, along with my family; primarily my moms' side of the family, believed that being a part of the LGBTQ+ community is wrong and a sin. At church I'd hear all about how the world is full of sin and sometime, not often because it was so taboo to talk about, they would talk about the LGBTQ+ community. I grew up thinking that too until I met my middle school friends and finally saw the world through my eyes instead of my parents.' (I moved this sentence down a spot) Finding out that I am Aromantic, Asexual, and Nonbinary really allowed me to feel like myself and fill a piece that was missing. Being part of the LGBTQ+ community is not a sin, it is natural, and it is not wrong. It took me a long time to finally figure out who I am, and I'm still trying to figure it out. (I moved this line up a paragraph)

Growing up I was taught that being gay was wrong and a sin. This, however, changed in 6<sup>th</sup> grade when one of my friends back then asked me: "What exactly is wrong about being gay?" This question caused me to think about it and when I could come up with no answer besides it just is. I started to rethink everything I was taught. That simple question made me realize that what I thought to be true at the time to be wrong. I soon decided to change the way I think and in doing so I find out who I really am/was. Of course, I didn't know much back then and went with

Bisexual the first sexuality I had heard of, it felt right at first. That was until I found out more and more about the different sexualities and genders.

For a while I knew that I felt the same for anyone no matter their gender, so when I learned about Pansexual, I thought that's perfect. I continued until I realized the reason; I felt the same about everyone and why I felt like dating was a chore and having an intimate relationship looked better on paper than it sounded in real life. It was because I was Aromantic and Asexual (aroace). Aromantic is the lack of romantic attraction. Asexuality is the lack of sexual attraction. So, in other words, I don't want to have any sexual or romantic relationships. Now that may change but for the time being that's how it is for me. It is also different for other people. I personally; this is different for every person, never really had a boyfriend or girlfriend or a significant other of any kind. I have been in relationships before, but they just felt like something I should want. The same with crushes and Celebrity crushes, it was normally just the guy the was the one everyone else liked. When I look back on most of the characters, celebrities, and people I had "crushes" on, they just ended up being gender envy. Gender envy is a feeling when you see someone you want to look like, in this case it has to do with how they look like in the context of gender. It's the whole do I want to be them or be with them idea. It can also be just the feeling you get from someone and not necessarily how they look. Some characters that gave me and still give me gender envy are Jack Frost from any story really, Spencer Reid from Criminal Minds, and Stella from Lemonade Mouth. Like I said I'm nonbinary, I use any pronouns, but I do not like she/her as much; I will still answer to it, but I think it's just because of being used to it, and it is what my parents use because they would never use any other pronouns for me.

When I was first figuring out who I was, I used different sexualities and genders to see what fit right. My friends helped me out, respected me, and were there for me. I first thought that

I was bisexual and gender fluid, those were some of the terms that I learned about when I first started to learn. My mom was going through this thing where my sister and me had to give her our passwords to our phones and leave them in the kitchen at night. She went through my phone and onto my Instagram where she could see my bio. In my bio I had bisexual and gender fluid written down. She never confronted me about it until I was really upset about something that I do not remember and wanted to be left alone. She then brought it up and said, “how could you do this to me” and “what did she do wrong for me to think this way.” It was right then and there that I knew I could never tell her until I was a lot older, moved out, and in a great position. It was and still is very frustrating that I can’t fully be myself around my mom because I would love to be my authentic self and it’s just disheartening to know that she will never fully accept me as me. It’s tiring to have to keep a filter on whenever I am with her in order to keep the peace.

This story highlights my mom’s beliefs in what she was taught. I have a great relationship with my parents, but mostly my mom because she was the one who mainly raised me. My dad wasn’t always working or refereeing hockey, so he was around much in my younger years. I still watch shows, movies, and hang out with my mom, but I can’t be who I really am around her. I always feel like I am walking eggshells when certain topics pop up, and mainly it’s because of that situation. I have never let her know my password or social media accounts now, not like I use them anyway. I am always careful not to show I feel about having to go to church or topics pertaining to the LGBTQ+ community.

Throughout my journey to figuring out who I am one of my friends, my best friend if you will, has always been there for me. They are nonbinary as well and uses they/them pronouns. We met through mutual friends and were in the same friend group. In middle school we even dated; this was before I realized that I was AroAce and before they realized they were also on the

asexual and aromantic spectrum. When I was figuring out my gender and what pronouns I like they would always be happy to use the pronouns that I wanted to try out. They let me rant to them, and their family is always welcoming to me. I can truly be myself around them and their family. If I hadn't realized that I was a part of the LGBTQ+ community I don't think we would have ever got as close as we have. When I still thought that I was Pansexual, we dated. Not for long, and we broke up because we both wanted to focus on school rather than a relationship. After that we continued to hang out and became even closer. Now I am their mom's favorite, and we are even planning to get an apartment together when we are further along in school, or after schooling. If I hadn't been asked the question "what is so wrong with being gay?" I don't think I would be in this amazing friendship.

Speaking about friends, I have a few friends at my old church that know I am aroace and are completely fine with it and are happy for me. However, there are still people, in my small group, who don't know. I will never tell them because either I'm afraid it will ruin the friendship; I have with them or because of how they feel about the LGBTQ+ community. One of them says things like "how could someone choose to be gay" or "why did the pick and rainbow to represent them, don't they know the rainbow represents gods promise to us." and other things like that. Whenever this happens or is brought up in church my friend who knows me always looks at me. Which makes me feel even more targeted than I do already. I know that they are making sure I am ok, but it still makes me feel targeted.

Even though this sounds like I don't like my mom/family, I want you to know that's not the truth. I love them, I just can't be fully around them. I can't be fully myself around the friend I have at church. I grew up thinking that being gay was wrong, I had a lot of internalized homophobia and I know that I'm not the only one who had to go through that. If you are going

through it there are many people who are right there with you, you aren't alone in your journey. Just keep an open mind and don't be afraid to ask for help or to ask questions, most, if not all, of the community love when people ask questions because it should that they want to understand and are open minded. I also want to say that I am not bashing Christians there are plenty out there that support the LGBTQ+ community, these are just my experiences. I grew up hating what and who I am now, but I do not regret it because it has made me who I am; and I love who I am. And I am an Asexual, Aromantic, Nonbinary individual and there's nothing wrong with that.