**Feeling Like April**

April Lichtman sits in the middle of a rectangle lunch table, laughing jovially and surrounded by her friends. Her light blonde hair is pulled to the side in a low ponytail, and she is wearing a slouchy, cream-colored cable knit sweater and black leggings with tan colored ballet flats. Like any typical freshman girl, she’s enjoying lunch in the cafeteria, chatting with her girl friends and eating a peanut butter sandwich. Except for one small detail: April was born Mark Lichtman. That’s right, she was introduced to the world, wearing a blue beanie with a certificate marked “Its a Boy!”

April knew she was not like the other boys, since she was little. While pals dressed up as Power Rangers, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Superheroes for Halloween, April was enchanted by the glittering princess costumes and “fancy” plastic high heels. Immersed in the arts, music and theater particularly, April was deemed “eccentric” and “creative.” However, around third grade, April realized that she identified more with the female gender.

“I never felt like I was trapped in the wrong body, I may be a unique case but I felt that my body gradually changed over time and that’s when I began identifying as a female.” she laughs, twisting the sleeve of her sweater.

“When I was younger I was uber feminine; I was always in girls clothes and wanted to play with my sisters toys. When I got to third grade it kind of got to the point where it just wasn’t cool to do that. A couple of my peers tossed around the word gay, which I always denied that because it just didn’t fit. I started to care what other people thought, and gay wasn’t the right label. However, as I got older I was in denial about what I wanted to do, because it was so disrespected.” She looked up and nodded, willing to answer any question.

However, April received a healthy amount of parental support that helped her to realize her true identity and full potential. “My dad was very open minded and continues to be very supportive. He would subtly introduce the transgender concept by saying things like: how would you feel about this? My mom tried to be supportive too, but there was a point during my childhood where she would draw the line with the clothes and toys. She wasn’t against my feminism, she just didn’t want me getting hurt, she was just trying to look out for me.”

Recently, social media has played an interesting role for transgender teens. Twitter, Facebook and Instagram have helped to connect other transgender teens and create a huge support network between them. Also, transgender celebrities have reached out to many youths, April cites Laverne Cox of popular Netflix series “Orange is the New Black” as a huge inspiration. “I love Laverne Cox,” she laughs, tossing her blonde head back and laughing.

But while social media has served as grounds for support, it has also enabled bullies to strike in new forms. April continues, “Social media makes it tough with online anonymous apps such as street chat and Yik Yak. I have been street chatted about, and it does hurt when your identity is attacked. But you know, I have learned to brush it off, and I feel like I would only be truly heartbroken if I was ridiculed by a close friend or family member.”

April advised transgender youths to, “Discover it at your own pace. Personally, twelve was the pivotal age when I looked in the mirror and wasn’t happy. I was so so scared, I worried about my sister and what she would think. At first I was like  ‘oh crap” because I worried about losing the friends and family and reputation I needed for support.”

Though April’s decision was met with an outpouring of support from the community and school, being a transgender teen is far from easy. “It just sucks because people in my classes will whisper and gossip about me when I have done nothing to them. I just wish that transgender people weren’t judged straight off the bat for our identity, and instead for our character. I just want people to be more open minded and more accepting of others.”

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