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WHAT IS GENDER?

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“WHAT IS GENDER?”: A SHORT FILM

By

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

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University Honors

University of California, Riverside

APPROVED

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ABSTRACT

Within the ever-growing complexity of gender and sexual identification of the LGBTQ+ population, those who still question their gender and sexual identities often experience tendencies opposite of societal norms and/or their original birth gender. The purpose of this short film is to inform its intended audience of the complex narratives surrounding the questioning LGBTQ+ individuals in their pursuit to find their own identity and how higher education can aid in the developmental process of determining one's gender and sexual identity. When creating this short film, the director will provide a short story that is based on the author's perspectives and personal experiences on gender and sexual identity. The director will do this by introducing a character who is similar to them. With the simple, yet intriguing story of a young and gifted college student who is questioning their sexual and gender identity, this film will follow the basic pre-production planning, production filming, and post-production editing phases of filmmaking.

This director also created their own script and filmed the movie. The result of this short film should allow viewers and researchers to survey and understand the complex issues surrounding gender and sexuality questioning and the struggles, insecurities, self-doubt, and isolation of questioning individual experiences while trying to find their place in a society that does not readily accept them. Finally, this short film will further analyze how the queer and questioning individual's involvement in higher education can support, foster, and breed acceptance and tolerance of the LGBTQ+ college student.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank everyone who helped me film this project during the winter quarter. They are all listed in my film credits and they all gave their time and effort to this project. It was a smooth process to film this project during the winter. However, in Spring quarter I met several challenges with rough cuts and the final editing process that I learned valuable lessons from. My entire film crew all graciously and generously gave me their suggestions for improving this project as well. With their advice, I did my very best to submit a solid piece of work to the honors department.

I would also like to thank Dr. Park for giving his own time in facilitating me as my faculty mentor. He told me this is his first time being a faculty mentor for the honors department. I responded by telling him that I was honored and thankful to him for being my mentor.

I thank Latipa for being my second faculty mentor in the times where Dr. Park was on sabbatical. She also helped me get in touch with the LGBTQRC for setting up the presentation.

I would like to additionally thank the LGBTQRC center for helping provide a screening of my short film and set up for this presentation.

I also like to thank the THEATRE, FILM, DIGITAL PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT for allowing me to submit a film to the honors department.

Lastly, I like to thank the HONORS department for allowing me to join the honors department of UCR. Everyone from the department did a fantastic job assisting me with my capstone.

INTRODUCTION

In terms of my short film script and final short film, *What is Gender*, I want to initially discuss why I did this project and why I decided to focus on the LGBTQ community within it. I decided to make this project as an educational film project because I want this university and other universities and schools of higher education to know that we need to focus on the main issues and key areas surrounding the difficulties and strengths of an LGBTQ individual who attends and studies at the higher educational college level.

In doing so, I noticed that there aren't many LGBTQ films produced that show the common issues LGBTQ students face in the academic world and strengths that an LGBTQ student needs to know to have a successful collegiate experience. During my time here at UCR, I noticed there aren't as many resources as there should be for a queer individual to feel welcomed and safe here on campus. I know there are resources available at the LGBTQ Center but there aren't any other resources for those who want to comfortably come out and speak out about their journey in coming out freely and developing as a queer academic student.

Additionally, I wanted to focus on higher education within the lens of an LGBTQ questioning individual because in higher education there needs to be more resources and assistance for the LGBTQ community. I also believe that in higher education, there also needs to be more safer spaces for an LGBTQ individual to feel a sense of belonging and protected within the guidelines and protocols of the universities. I hope that the University of California at Riverside will consider setting a standard and baseline in policies and procedures for all other universities in California to follow in terms of devising and implementing a master strategic plan that focuses on providing more inclusion of the LGBTQ community within all college settings, both academically and socially.

Furthermore, in terms of my inspirations for this project, I was mainly inspired by the film works of Jordan Peele and his interpretative methods used in his work regarding the disproportion of equality of African Americans in his horror films. I want to create films in the future that would depict a similar disproportion of equality of queer individuals within modern American society. Since this film is considered my first film and warmup, I want to create my future films without specific guidelines and parameters and within my own timelines since this first film wasn't as what I expected due to the complexity and time limitations that I had. With this film, I found myself pivoting from my initial plan.

Additionally, I created this project with the intention of demonstrating how a queer individual may feel coming to the University of California, Riverside's campus for the first time, and how they may experience the lack of inclusivity on campus from administration down to their peers. I personally noticed the lack of inclusivity when I entered campus for classes and passed through the LGBTQ center for the first time. I noticed there isn't much at this college in terms of resources and events for the LGBTQ community to enjoy and feel safe participating in.

Thus, I wanted to create this project from my own lens as a genderfluid pansexual who is questioning their overall "gender." Gender in my opinion is very complicated to explain to one who is conservative or has traditional values, and at times, it is even complicated to explain to those individuals who are more liberal and non-traditional in their belief systems. It is also complicated scientifically because the overall binary has only two genders which is female and male. But since the 21st century introduced the queer community to almost closest to its fullest potential, gender is defined as a vague term for the LGBTQ community which should be challenged because the term gender is far more complicated than what people think and thus invites much speculation, if not overall general distrust and even contempt for those social and

political classes who do not seek to fully understand the queer individuals. But that is a whole other movie that I will write at another time.

THEMES

“What is Gender,” explains themes of an individual who is heavily questioning their gender, sexuality, and identity. The main character in this short film is a depiction of an individual who enters college and immediately begins to question their gender, sexuality and identity and starts to feel uncertain about their place within their new environment on campus and with their academic community. On a grander scale, this short film also explores the prejudices queer individuals encounter within patriarchal society and translates to queers to be proud of who they are in the face of patriarchal adversities.

My capstone hopes to achieve with the showcasing of my short film is to allow people who are questioning their gender and LGBTQ identity as university students to engage in the process at the university, safely and freely. Since the main character named Alex is an individual who is questioning their identity, they look toward their campus to assess who they are becoming and seek assistance from their campus environment to assist them cement their identity despite societal patriarchy challenges.

Hence, in the short film script and final edit of the short film, I intend for the audience to know that in college universities, there are very valid challenges that an individual who is questioning their own sexual and gender identity must be faced and resolved during their experience as a queer university student. And many times, there are not ample resources at their campuses to aid them in developing their questioning identities. These questioning thoughts that the individual, which is depicted from the short film, are valid as well and the need for these feelings to be addressed by young queer students is necessary for their continued growth toward

stable adulthood. Thus, college LGBTQ students should take the time to evaluate themselves academically and emotionally to find their identity for their own future both personally and professionally. And, if more resources are proved to questioning individuals, the better positioned these queer students are to succeed in college and in life.

CONCLUSION

Hence, within this capstone project and its presentation, I would like to conclude by stating that this project is a call to the university to become more inclusive and to develop a better understanding of the diverse and ever involving spectrum of queers. This project pinpoints the main character who depicts their frustrations and reservation regarding coming out. Since this university in general supports inclusive diversity, I would like to state the fact that we need to provide ample programming and resources for queer students so they can not only safely come out, but also develop into successful academic students and stable and successful career professionals.

I also believe that more inclusivity for the LGBTQ community is needed within all university programs. For these programs to flourish for the LGBTQ community, they will need programs that are welcoming and support the dreams and coming out for all queers. A good starting point for the university is to recognize the pronouns of queer students on their Canvas student profiles. I, for one, was aghast that I had to call myself a “she/her” because Canvas has no other relative option for me or for any other queer female to choose from. This unavailability to correctly identify myself with my chosen pronouns sends a very negative message to me and to all queers that we don’t belong at the university when we worked so hard to get here.

Concludingly if a study and more research is done to identify the needs of queer students such as my foregoing examples and if the necessary changes are made including the

implementation of additional resources and programs this will increase the safety, inclusion and overall happiness and satisfaction levels of the queer students while they experience their higher education journeys at UCR. All and all, I can see a bright future for queer college students, if they are provided more programs and resources that will help engage, teach, assist and support them and their dreams of becoming successful in their chosen professions such as myself, a queer student who dreams of much success the area of film and all things creative.

References

Institute, Williams. “Experiences of LGBTQ People in Four-Year Colleges and Graduate Programs.” *UCLA Williams Institute*, UCLA, 17 Feb. 2023, williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbtq-colleges-grad-school/.

Appendix

“What is Gender?,” 8-minute Short Film access link:

<https://youtu.be/KGMc5bPiQLI>

Aria Nanna- What is Gender? (revised script) written by
Aria Nanna

FADE IN:

EXT. OUTSIDE OF THE STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER- THE DAY

The audience hears upbeat background music. Alex walks into the frame and looks at the group of people nearby. Everyone looks straight, men and women. They all look confident and happy. Alex continues to walk by the group and stumbles upon a hallway. Alex starts to think to herself.

ALEX (V.O.)

(in her head)

Wow, everyone has things all
figured out for themselves here
already. And then there's me, who
struggles with who I am.

Alex starts daydreaming and thinking to herself about her dream job.

ALEX (V.O.)

Everyone has dreams and
aspirations, too, right? However,
I bet there's barely anyone here
like me who dreams about working
in the film industry as a film
editor and is pretty sure they are

gay.

Alex walks over to a hallway.

INT. INSIDE ONE OF UCR CAMPUS HALLWAY'S- DAY

An INTERVIEWER comes over and notices Alex.

INTERVIEWER

Can I interview you?

ALEX

Sure.

INTERVIEWER

First question: how do you feel
about movies nowadays? What do you
think filmmakers need to add? What
do you want to do as a filmmaker
and a student here at college?

ALEX (V.O.)

There are barely any movies out
there that discuss gay issues and
gay themes. Why is the film
industry so behind when it comes
to this? It's such an outdated way
of thinking, and I'm over it. This
is why I want to make my films

someday...

Showing a collage of thought bubbles along with film examples.

Alex walks past the women's and men's restrooms. The audience hears Alex's footsteps. She is in deep thought. The interviewer follows Alex.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, do you experience any struggles with college? Can you tell everyone how LGBTQ people struggle within the college setting?

ALEX (V.O.)

In reality, every day, a growing percentage of young people feel like they are struggling to be accepted and understood in higher education. Many queer-questioning students in colleges suffer from bullying of all kinds, including cyberbullying.

Is it that controversial to create an LGBTQ film regarding such

topics of non-support? Nearly over
1/3 (32.6 %) of all LGBTQ
individuals experience bullying,
harassment, and even assault each
year at college campuses across
our nation. For these reported
incidents, far more non-reported
incidents occur (Williams Institute).

ALEX (CONTINUED)

I wish there were more inclusive
restrooms in this country.

A classmate of hers, a guy, comes up to her.

CLASSMATE MAN 1

Why are you looking at the gender
signs?

ALEX

I think there needs to be more
inclusive bathrooms here; There's
not enough inclusive bathrooms for
all the queer students here. There
should be more inclusive bathrooms
in this country, period.

Inclusivity spaces such as proper
restrooms can help LGBTQ
individuals feel safer and more at
ease in schools and public places.

The classmate looks at her and laughs.

CLASSMATE MAN 1

Wow, dude, I don't see any issue
with having barely any inclusive
bathrooms. Why don't you use
regular bathrooms? You're
tripping...

He shakes his head, laughs a little, and then walks away.
The classmate then walks past her. The young lady sighed
again and started walking. The interviewer nodded and
continued to follow Alex.

ALEX (V.O.)

Inclusive restrooms help the LGBTQ
community to feel much safer to do
their business without feeling any
hesitation or fear of being

violated by others. An LGBTQ individual is sensitive and likes their privacy. Far too many incidents of violence against LGBTQ individuals happen every day in non-inclusive restrooms.

At many universities, LGBTQ people can seek assistance from programs such as their campus LGBTQ Center and other programs that will give them the support and assistance that they need to help them navigate themselves and adjust to their new campus environment.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so you're telling everyone that the LGBTQ community needs safer spaces like the LGBTQ center. I agree that we need more safe spaces. How can this center make things safer?

ALEX

Yes, and it will help LGBTQ people fit in and feel safer within their

community.

INTERVIEWER

How do other students feel about

Are you going into such a safe place?

Pan to UCR LGBTQ Center office with gay students smiling and engaging with each other outside of the office.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

Alex walks back outside. Sunlight passes over her. And she feels a sense of warmth and comfort. Alex is greeted by one of her classmates.

CLASSMATE WOMAN 1

How are you?

ALEX

I am doing fine, just on my way to the LGBTQ center.

CLASSMATE WOMAN 2

Why are you going there? You don't seem like a different person to me. I mean, you don't look gay or seem like someone who is gay.

ALEX

(A bit afraid)

Oh, uh...Well, I just thought I would check out the center. I heard the people there are super cool. Also, I tend to believe being gay and looking gay are two different things. I feel gay, so I don't think there's anything wrong without looking gay. Also, this center could provide a safe place for LGBTQ students like me to hang out without being judged.

The classmates shrugged, saying they couldn't understand her reasoning, and they left. Alex continues to walk on her way, satisfied with herself but disillusioned about how the female student judged her. The scene transitions back to Alex and the interviewer.

ALEX

I tried, but others sometimes wanted to stop me from going somewhere safe.

INTERVIEWER

At least you tried. Do you have

any questions that make you wonder
how things can be more equal for
the LGBTQ community?

ALEX

Yes, I wonder how other LGBTQ
individuals get the support they
need at different colleges. How
can college campuses make the
LGBTQ population feel safer, free
from discrimination, and more
welcomed?

INTERVIEWER

How so?

Alex walks by the LGBTQ center. The sign for the LGBTQ
center zooms slowly on the screen.

ALEX (V.O.)

Well, the LGBTQ higher education
community has increased
astronomically in recent years.
Nearly 17 percent are identified
as LGBTQ. However, the majority of
college campuses still do not

provide the essential resources
the LGBTQ community needs to
succeed in gaining their
education, mainly because society
still does not fully accept and
understand the gay community (Williams Institute).

The young lady walks into the LGBTQ center. She looks at the
center building and smiles.

ALEX (V.O.)

Individuals from the LGBTQ
community usually understand their
gender and sexual identities and
are self-aware of who they indeed
are. Others, however, still
question their sexual and gender
identities, especially young
questioning queer college
students. However, because of the
lack of LGBTQ+ mandatory tolerance
education in our colleges, LGBTQ+
individuals struggle to come out
to their peers for fear of

non-acceptance and fear for their
safety.

ALEX (V.O.)

Higher education reform is
desperately needed that would
include LGBTQ+ awareness and
tolerance education for all
college students to help prevent
harassment, discrimination,
marginalization, and violence
toward the queer college
community.

INT. LGBTQ CENTER- MOMENTS LATER

Alex was met by a student in the center. Alex felt she belonged
here, and this made her feel safer since the center was filled
with people who were just like her.

ALEX

Is everyone welcome here?

The student smiled and nodded.

YOUNG STUDENT

Yes, everyone is welcome here. Why

Do you ask?

Alex looked at the student with a curious expression on her face.

ALEX

I am unsure if I belong in the
LGBTQ community, and I'm a little
afraid, to be honest with you.

The student nods with some understanding.

YOUNG STUDENT

Well, in this center, no one is
judged. Everyone who feels queer
or anyone who wants to make
Friends in general are welcome!

Alex smiles at the young student.

ALEX

I'll keep that in mind; thank you.

I'll definitely come back and hang
out.

Alex thanks the young student with a handshake.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you leave?

ALEX (V.O.)

I guess I just struggle to find
who I am, especially in a higher
educational setting.

INTERVIEWER

Ah, I get it.

ALEX

Yeah, it's hard to find others who
can relate to me.

INT. INSIDE THE HALL OF COSTO BUILDING- MOMENTS LATER

Alex walks through the hallways of Costco Hall. But she has
something on her mind.

ALEX (V.O.)

I wonder how GPA can affect the
LGBTQ community and its success.

INT. INSIDE STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER- AFTERNOON

She walks by the student success center and walks in. The camera pans to the student success center sign.

ALEX (V.O.)

Yes, what is success?

Specifically, what is success to those who identify as still questioning or even gender nonconforming in higher education?

She walks around the student success center.

ALEX (V.O.)

We college students have many opportunities to succeed at our universities. However, for LGBTQ students, our opportunities are sometimes limited, and this stinks. LGBTQ individuals are often alienated in the United States, even in schools of higher learning.

JUMP TO:

INT. INSIDE ARTS BUILDING- MOMENTS LATER

JUMP TO:

INT. INSIDE STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER- MOMENTS LATER

ALEX (V.O.)

(to herself)

Hmmm... if getting good grades is a
measure of success for the
academic individual, would getting
good grades also help those
individuals who are still
questioning their gender and
sexual identity? How does this
impact such a community?

Alex thinks to herself once more.

ALEX(V.O.)

Having a high GPA could impact the
LBGTQ community because the LBGTQ
community is sometimes viewed as
less intelligent than others
because they choose same-sex
people as partners. However, I
feel as if most of the people in

this community are misunderstood,
and they demonstrate intelligence
in all areas.

FADE TO:

EXT. ELEVATOR- MOMENTS LATER

Alex walks out of the elevator.

EXT. 3RD FLOOR OF ARTS BUILDING- MOMENTS LATER Alex walks
near a film class. Alex looks at the camera.

ALEX (V.O.)

Higher education within the LGBTQ
community could also inspire and
help those who dream of becoming
artists, such as filmmakers.

Alex walks through the hallway. Alex looks at the camera.

ALEX(V.O.)

Higher education can aid those who
are still questioning their gender
and sexual identity in finding out
who they are and what their
purpose is among their LGBTQ
communities. Universities can

assist their queer students by
providing better resources and
social centers, better health
insurance, support programs, and
behavioral and career counseling
for LGBTQ individuals.

EXT. MIDDLE OF HALWAY- MOMENTS LATER

Alex stops at her classroom.

ALEX(V.O.)

However, recently, our American
government has been thinking of
removing the rights of all LGBTQ
and transgender individuals. That
means no transition care or no
loving the same sex.

Alex looks at the camera once more.

ALEX(V.O.)

If we allowed this to happen, just
like how the people took away
abortion rights, then the LGBTQ
The community would be in jeopardy.

It's up to the community to stay
true to who they are and stand up
to the extreme right-wing
community and say we aren't aliens
at all!

Alex meets her friend, an LGBTQ individual who identifies as transgender. She waves at them; the transgender woman waves back, and they both walk together and exit the hallway. The interviewer smiles and leaves.

EXT. ELEVATOR- LATE AFTERNOON

Alex's friends are in the elevator. They both smile. The young lady looks at the camera.

ALEX (V.O.)

Everyone should be welcomed in
higher education environments and
any industry. In the future, we
can all be united and free from
prejudice. Love is love!

EXT. THIRD FLOOR OF ARTS BUILDING- MOMENTS LATER

Alex and her friend walk out of the elevator and walk in front

of the camera. (Both have their backs to the camera.)

ALEX

Want to go out and get some food?

Her friend looks at her with a smile.

FRIEND

Sure! What are you craving?

The young lady thinks for a bit and responds.

ALEX

Habit?

FRIEND

I'm down.

FADE IN:

FADE OUT:

THE END