



BEING THE CHANGE – MY COMPLEX JOURNEY TO SELF-DISCOVERY

Dylan Tippetts¹

LGBT+ people often go through a painful process to figuring out who they truly are; my experience is no exception. I spent a lot of time in deep denial, fuelled by internalised transphobia and a transphobic family. I will never forget the careful conversations I would have at home trying to convince my family that being transgender is natural, usual and nothing to be embarrassed about. I thought that once I had accepted myself, I would instantly find my place in the world. This was not the case. It became apparent that sharing my true gender identity with the world would only be part of that process, albeit a fundamental factor.

In school, I was a somewhat classic computer nerd. I thought that I was going to pursue a career in cyber security, even though that future never felt real or even achievable. I conflated my escape from reality, my love for gaming, with my dream career. I was never a quiet person. I enjoyed socialising and sharing time with others, but this was never ideal since I was bullied by the people who were meant to be my friends. I also enjoyed public speaking, but I struggled with my GCSE English. I could not possibly imagine a scenario where this love of public speaking could fit into my life. Today, this is a very different story. The only things that are still the same are my ambition to change the world in any way I can, and my love for helping others live authentically and without fear.

¹ Dylan Tippetts is a first-year law student with Plymouth School of Law, Criminology and Government; and LGBT+ Officer, University of Plymouth Labour Society

Finding a support network has played a key part in my self-discovery journey. Surrounding myself with people who truly cared about me helped to change my perspective of the world and understand the bigger picture. This led me to a picket line, an experience I will always



remember as the moment that empowered me. The solidarity and friendship exhibited on the picket line taught me that if we work together, we can galvanize the change we want to see. Support also meant that I could tackle some of my biggest inner challenges. I am proud that I managed to develop my skill of the English language and use it to write articles, sharing my new perspectives to help educate others. I wrote a comment article for LabourList² sharing my experiences living as a transgender man, and gave advice to readers on how to be a better ally to the trans community. This article started conversations and was deemed 'refreshing' by PinkNews³, showing that grassroots trans voices can break through a wall of transphobia in the media.

I am sometimes asked the question, "Why did you choose to study law, considering you are so politically active?" For me, the law is the leading factor in serving long-awaited change to oppressed communities. We have seen politically active lawyers, like Keir Starmer KCB QC MP lead the way in this. He truly understands that the power of the law is a powerful force for good. His work is my biggest inspiration, particularly his efforts in the 1997 'McLibel' case.⁴ When interviewed about the case he noted that "even with limited resources you can win significant victories through a belief in what you are

² Dylan Tippetts, Labour List, How my inclusive local party supports me as a transgender man (23 July 2020) available at <https://labourlist.org/2020/07/how-my-inclusive-local-party-supports-me-as-a-transgender-man/>

³ Vic Parsons, Pink News, This trans Labour member is spearheading efforts to 'tackle anti-trans rhetoric' in the party and maybe, finally elect a trans MP (July 30 2020) available at <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2020/07/30/labour-party-trans-transgender-transphobia-dylan-tippetts-labour-list/>

⁴ *McDonald's Corporation v Steel & Morris* [1997] EWHC QB 366

saying, belief in free speech and the courage to continually put your case forward". In 2005 the case reached the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)⁵. The success of the ECHR ruling shows how two 'ordinary' people forced a change in UK law, proving that anything is possible. This case taught me that the law can in fact transform the future for the better.

The empowerment of the voiceless is the change I want to see. I truly believe in a world where everyone's voice is equal, and nobody is discriminated against. This starts with making sure that the law works the same way for everyone. As someone whose voice was always suppressed growing up, I want to use my experience to engage the disengaged with our legal systems.

I am incredibly proud of myself for persevering through my confusion and despair. It's harder for estranged, transgender people to make it to university to study a law degree. However, this is the first time I have felt like I belong. The University of Plymouth has been such a welcoming institution for people from all backgrounds. This commitment from the university allows all students to thrive, even in the midst of a pandemic. Despite all the obstacles, I have got to the place where I know who I am and who I want to be.

⁵ *Steel and Morris v. The United Kingdom* (Application no. 68416/01) ECHR