College Is for the Faint-Hearted

When I figured out I was straight, I was honestly quite disappointed. See, my generation is obsessed with being special, different, unique; we’ve been told from birth that we are just that, so we’ll do anything to set ourselves apart from the rest of our poor, unfortunate, simple-minded peers. So, when I realized that I was a part of the majority who can only feel the variety of emotions we classify as love with men (well, boys rather), I was disappointed. I felt doomed to a life of mediocrity, reaching out to complexity but never really being able to touch it.

Then, I fell in love. Yes, I knew I was straight before having any experiences equating to evidence of my heterosexuality. But, I just knew; I would never look at girls the way I did at boys. And then, before I knew it, I had evidence.

It was nothing like how I had imagined it. Growing up, like many little girls, I was enthralled by the idea of love; I was totally satisfied with myself, but I always wanted something more. I wanted the forbidden love I had seen in movies or TV. I wanted that moment where you look at someone and instantly fall head over heels for a total stranger. If I was going to be straight, I’d be the most goddamn unique straight person there ever was: I wanted an earth-shattering, heart-wrenching, soul-intertwining love. I wouldn’t settle for just your everyday romance; it had to be more.

Yet, when I actually fell in love for the first time, it was completely and utterly normal. I met him through mutual friends, we had a class together, and after him and his long-term girlfriend broke up, we started to talk. And no, I don’t mean that was the first time we ever had a conversation, but that’s what you do in the 21st century: you talk, then you become a thing, then you possibly date. Even when I convinced myself that this was enough for me, it never was. Looking back, my desire to be anything but average… that was probably the root of all of our issues.

How? Well, I used to never talk to him about my problems. And at the time, I had quite a lot. I was seeing a therapist once a week before there was any flame between us and I didn’t tell him that I was getting help for things he didn’t even know about until six months later. And why didn’t I tell him? Because of one comment he made in one of our earliest texting conversations. I began to tell him how most of my junior year was spent feeling like I had a weight on my chest, slowly suffocating me. I began to talk about how every time I started to feel something for someone and they reciprocated those feelings, my mind would shut down my capacity for attraction. And his response?

“Every girl has a million problems.”

Well, guess what? I wasn’t going to be every girl. No, I couldn’t be. So, I shut it off. Anytime I was sad, or mad, or uncomfortable… I closed my mouth and smiled. Of course it caught up to me, but I didn’t care. As long as I was different than every other girl in his eyes, I’d be happy.

Until I wasn’t. We even had a conversation about this exact exchange and his comment; it didn’t help. He couldn’t even remember saying that or why he ever would. He apologized but the damage was done. I knew what his last girlfriend was like, I knew how to be different than her. But this was the key to being unique; the girl who has no problems. And if I’m one of a kind in his eyes, everything about us will be just as special.

This theory didn’t really help us in the end. It got to the point where I was incapable of talking about my feelings and therefore incapable of resolving any issue between us. I decided we were wrong for each other and told myself to move on.

But that was almost a year ago. I’m now in college, single, and navigating how to be happy with just myself. Except, that’s really hard to do when you look around and feel very out of place. Not that this should be a shock to anyone, but college is a cesspool of mediocre romance. And calling it romance is generous.

Most of my Friday or Saturday nights are spent lying awake in my bed using the 1975 to drown out the squeaking of ancient twin-sized beds. Now I definitely enjoy the occasional party or two but they tend to not be my scene. Why? No reason you can’t already guess. But let’s boil it down to the fact that the random, drunken hook-ups have never really appealed to me. I want something deeper. Having a one night stand in college with a boy you can’t remember the name of is about as predictable as it gets.

There’s nothing wrong with wanting sex, I do appreciate how accepting our culture has become with human sexuality. But I just want it from someone who only wants it from me, because he feels something other than physical attraction when he looks at me. Call it selfish.

But this is what has always confused me; the irony of it all. Our parents drilled it into our little heads that we are extraordinary and our future will be just that. So, in theory, we won’t be satisfied with scraping the surface. This explains why we are so fascinated with sharing our opinions with the world. We have something to say and everyone should hear it because what we possess isn’t shallow or homogenous. I’m not necessarily condemning this; if I were, I’d be the ultimate hypocrite. But I’ve racked up enough observations to establish a belief about my generation.

Yet, with all of this passion for individuality that’s ingrained into our being, we engage in such meaningless interactions that are anything but complex. Whether it be the lack of face to face conversations, the trivial relationships we form, the emphasis we place on having a presence on social media; things that define our generation are the opposite of what we’ve been taught. Maybe it is true that children will always do the opposite of what their parents tell them.

The foundation of individuality is what drives human connection. In the most literal sense of the word, we are special. We all collect our own experiences, our own beliefs, thoughts, personalities, etc. This difference, this diversity is what has caused genocides, civil wars, world wars… but it’s also what has caused friendship, appreciation, respect and love.

If everyone were the same there truly would be no depth or complexity. Every interaction would be meaningless because there would be no knowledge to possibly gain from trying to connect with someone. Yet, with all of this complexity, especially at a college or university that brings people together from around the world, we resort to what’s easy. And truly connecting with people isn’t easy. Appreciating everyone’s differences and stepping outside of yourself is not easy.

So, that’s why I feel out of place. In love, in relationships, in everyday life; it’s much harder finding people who see the world the way I do than it is to find people who choose to see the world with a little less color.

I’m observing a lot of us not tapping into everything of which we are capable. Instead of searching for something deeper, even if it ends, and moving on being a better person, we limit ourselves so that we don’t have to change. It’s like how they say that we only use about 10% of our brains; whether that has any scientific basis or not, I see the truth in it.

That’s what scares me about what I observe. I’m scared that if I settle for what’s easy, I’ll lose the capability or desire for what’s not.

Sometimes I’ve wanted to suppress my desire for more so that I could see what all of the fuss was about. But that would mean sacrificing one of the things I perceived as what makes me special. And I can’t bring myself to do that. Not after spending my entire life trying to find the things that make me special.

I found this on my computer one night. I wrote it after I was single for the first time in almost a year. I wrote it to remind myself why I want the things I want.

*I remember exactly when it changed.*

*A year can change a lot of things but that day hasn’t changed in my mind. While the idea of destiny and fate have always seemed like wishful thinking to me, I have begun to believe in a reversed concept. Instead of people being predetermined to show up and dramatically change the course of your life, I believe that who you encounter become a part of you. It’s random. It ensures that not only is each person’s existence an existence never before fathomable, but also that the course of one person’s life is formed in a way that could never before have been predicted. I remember the day he first looked at me differently as clear as yesterday but I can’t for the life of me remember who I was. He was my first everything. But most importantly, he was the first person to change me.*

I want to form relationships with people who change me, people who force me to look at myself and the world differently. And if that makes me feel out of place, well so be it. Don’t expect to find me on Tinder anytime soon.

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