

Just because I do not agree with you does not mean I hate you

Names and details have been changed here to protect people's identities.

A published version which includes a glossary for the non-British is here

<https://medium.com/@mmacneill123/just-because-i-do-not-agree-with-you-does-not-mean-i-hate-you-9fe163544b67>

Trigger warning: *you might find parts of this story shocking, emotionally traumatic, deeply offensive, the language shocking and a challenge to your most deeply held and cherished beliefs. The views expressed are purely those of the author and no endorsement by any third party is implied or to be assumed.*

It was the summer of 1989 (yes, not '69 – obscure reference to a Bryan Adams song, who was he?) and I was at the end of my first year as an undergraduate Engineering student. I was visiting my family in Leicester and had recently managed to reconnect with two very old friends, Rose and Violet who I had met in Leicester a few years previously whilst they were studying there. I had met them in 1985 about the same time because they used to live in the same floor of small Halls in what was then a nice suburb of Leicester where all the students who were wealthy enough to live in Halls lived (in those days there was no such thing as student loans, overdrafts and the like, you needed cash from Daddy, Mummy and probably Granny and lots of it, to live in Halls). I was then living in a council flat having recently been released from a hostel for homeless young people and it was my first proper place to live. As part of the “rehabilitation” I was put on a government Community program which was a bit like a super-charged Youth Training Scheme (apologies to those readers who were traumatised and exploited by the YTS schemes of the 1980s) where you could “learn new skills” but the best part was you could double your benefit (drinking/dope) money which is why I had agreed to it in the first place as well as to keep the Social Services off my back. I had gone on a week-long training scheme for working with “inner city children from deprived backgrounds” which had a profound and life changing effect on me (I could actually help people answering questions like ‘Is it okay to be a virgin at 12?’ with ‘yeah, I was 14’ and realised, despite all the hatred I had for my step-Dad, I actually had it pretty good growing up compared to some of these). I had met Rose on the same course, and we had partnered up on the last night of the training when there was a party. She was studying at Leicester Uni at the time and on a visit, I had met Violet, I had been warned “she was a bit strange” but we got on really well. In fact, we got on so well I often went to visit Rose and ended up speaking all night to Violet, as long as I finished the night with Rose, she was happy. In fact, she would have been very happy if both of us had joined her, she was that kind of girl. To cut a very long story short though, in the two years following I developed a drug/alcohol problem, Rose got off with an old boyfriend on a visit home when I was in the house at the same time, so naturally we split up and I lost touch with them.

Shortly after, in a rare moment of clarity, I decided to go to university in Bangor to stop me from killing myself by an overdose after losing a couple of friends that way. I had persuaded the LEA I was an “independent student” before you were legally supposed to be able to claim it, i.e. could not get any parental support and they agreed to give me a grant. However, things did not go to plan and after six months of drug/alcohol abuse but this time just as a student, I realised I was the problem rather than where and who I was living with. It led to another moment of clarity and I reconnected with Violet by dropping out a few weeks before the first year exams, getting a coach to Leicester and going round all the houses where Violet used to live. On the 3rd hop I was told she was living in a commune and on arrival I knocked on the door, a guy answered, looked at me as if I had six heads,

asked me to wait (Violet had an enormous heart, worked voluntarily at the Leicester Night Shelter and he had thought I was one of the vagrants come to call on her as they did, so you can imagine what a stunner I was) and in one of the most memorable moments of my life up to that point, she, after being escorted to the door by two heavies in case she was attacked, lifted up her hands and said "Hi". We talked for about 5-hours straight, said she was meeting Rose and would I like to come. So that was really cool too and then she dropped it, "we are going to the Gay pub, is that okay?". This was 1989 in Conservative Leicester (except for the "loonie Leftie" Nuclear Free Zone city council as lots of the Shire towns were during the Tory hegemony of the 1980s) and having a Gay pub out of the closet was the thing of community petitions, resignations, moral outrage in the Leicester Mockery paper (a surrogate of the fair and unbiased Daily Wail) and the like. I said "WTF? Are you a lesbian now?", to my relief she said "No" (because I had always secretly fancied her, and nothing had changed) but Rose is (I was apparently her last proper boyfriend; that happened to me twice, two ex-girlfriends now lesbos, I felt like Bruce Willis in Die Hard II, 'how can the same sh** happen to the same guy twice?') and we are going to meet her fiancé at their engagement party – I said double "WTF", I did not know too much about being gay meant but I did know it was seriously illegal to get married to another woman, so I asked "How does that work?". Actually, just the same as the heterosexuals, they were going to have a ceremony, do all the dress and ring stuff, have a reception and party all night but it would not have any legal standing.

Now I had heard on the Grapevine about this place we were going, £1 coins had recently been issued -- in 1989 £1 could buy 10 cigarettes and a pint of mild, you could have a seriously good night on £10, get chips on the way home, throw up when you got home but feel better the next day because you still had a couple of 50ps in your pocket so you could buy the essentials of some more cigarettes) – and apparently there were £1s stuck to the carpet so that when you bent over to pick it up, expect a close encounter of the buttock kind. Never go to the toilet on your own unless you enjoyed other men massaging your testicles (though because I had spent one year at 14 in an all-boys school that one was not entirely unknown to me). And, most importantly, avoid the pool tables where the lesbians were playing pool, it was a frequent event that anyone who disturbed their shots could suffer a close encounter with the pool cue; apparently, gay men were frequently beat-up by the hard-core lesbians (they were the ones with the shaved heads and tattoos), if they knocked their cues whilst in a drunken stagger. So, I felt like Daniel (as in the Bible) going into the Lion's Den with all these warped perverts from Sodom and Gomorrah. I spent an hour in the commune bathroom, so I could smoke a few joints and have a few shorts before we ever went out that night, I did not know what I was going to find.

Now what I did find totally shocked me. It was one of the most cool, easy-going, laid back places I had ever been to. True, it was a bit unusual for me to see two guys at the bar with their hands in each other's back pockets and them sucking each other's tongues out of their mouths but hey, this is the 1980s after all. Tom Robinson had sung "Glad to be Gay" 10 years previously and people here were obviously *really* "happy that way". There was even someone standing there with a "I am not ashamed of the Gospel" T-shirt talking to us standing around about Jesus dying for our sins, God was just about to rain fire and brimstone on us if we do not repent and no one gave a sh**, everyone was just getting on, "you think that way, I think this way, let us agree to disagree" - patience, toleration and diversity was the name of the game. I met Rose again, all was forgiven for her unauthorised ex-boyfriend encounter with me in the house, I met her fiancé, she was kind and looked like a woman – I was expecting a skinhead with attitude who hated all men (like one of the few lesbians I had met at my old hostel who tried to burn it down with us in it). Hey, she was a bit suspicious of me at first thinking I was going to try and nick her wife to be for old-time's sake one-night reunion (Rose had always been Bi and liked to mix it up at times) but that moment passed

when we were standing at the bar nattering and in a drunken slip of the tongue (the early evening secret vodkas were kicking in), that I was seriously infatuated with Violet and she had nothing to worry about. As far as I know, they got married and lived happily ever after; Violet got married, unfortunately not to me, though we did have three years of closeness. I had no concept of faithfulness other than to the person who was in front of me at a particular time – “you live in London, I live in Bangor, do you seriously think I need to be monogamous after a night out in the pit where Pontio now stands? This is the 1990s you know, not the 1920s!”. Violet was never impressed with my sexual liberation mantra and married an Albanian police chief who had been sent to Britain after the Berlin Wall fell to learn about how to do policing where you do not just beat up and kill everybody, I am sure they lived happily ever after.

So after that chilled out night, there followed a time in my life in a year away from Bangor before starting a Masters where virtually all my friends were gay and I considered “coming out” for about 10 seconds one evening after being propositioned by one of the friends of my best friend Ryan (who was gay but struggled with it because he had a degree in Christian guilt). Ryan was Mr Super-Social and I got to know a huge quantity of the gay scene, where to get funny drugs, where to go cottaging at the weekend (ask your favourite gay friend what that means), job opportunities for male gigolos in London (Ryan’s previous vocation) and all sorts of other things peculiar to male gay culture. Yet one thing I noticed whenever I had long talks with Ryan or any of his gay and lesbian friends, it became very obvious they had not been “born that way” but had “chosen that way” or been “made that way” by the dysfunction in their family. None of them covered it up and were completely open about it. Whereas I was a druggie and alchie for the same reason, they were gay. Most of my friends and me were a mess, I and they knew it and that meant my 10 seconds of considering gayness passed.

Now mainly because of the influence of Violet and their commune, there was a big change in my life shortly after once I started the Masters, I got clean from stuff and except for occasional lapses which were less and less frequent, have stayed completely clean the last 20 years. I moved to Newcastle Upon Tyne to train as a teacher for sentimental reasons (where I had been born) and I lost touch with Ryan and the Leicester gay scene. Now, in the 30 years that have passed, occasionally I have run into some of those guys and girls, though some have died of AIDS or committed suicide, to my absolute shock some of the ones that were as gay as a New York Christmas tree, introduced me to their heterosexual husband/wife and kids (much as Mr Tom “Glad to be Gay” Robinson married his female partner), had a nice car and were living in a semi-detached in the nice part of the suburbs. The conversation always went something like this, “what the * happened?”, one was bold enough to steal *Stonewall’s* campaign phrase of a few years ago and change it slightly “I was gay, but I got over it”. Remarkably, this phrase was later censored by the now Prime minister, who whilst Mayor of London vetoed an attempt to use the same slogan on a modest A3 counter-poster on London busses in response to that *Stonewall* campaign that stuck it across the side of the busses. It went all the way through the courts and they eventually won the right in law but never managed to get it done because of technicalities around the judgment. It was a charity of ex-gays and lesbians who were offering support to people who like them, felt like they wanted to get out of the gay scene they no longer liked. Such people do exist.

So, let us jump forward 33 years to last week and get down to the controversy. I was reading how Franklin Graham, the son of the late Billy Graham, has been branded as a “hate speaker, far beyond what is acceptable as free speech”. For what? Well, apparently, he disagrees that LGBTQ+ is a positive lifestyle but that is a tiny part of what, after all, is his mildly conservative Christian message. He also dislikes lying, cheating, stealing, swindling, polygamy, paedophilia, racism, sexism....so let us

cut him some slack, we can probably agree with him to a greater or lesser degree there, he is hardly an Osama Bin Laden that is about to fly into the Twin Towers or a Chowdhury that preached hate of all and everything Western openly in Regent Park mosque. Yet, apparently that is enough for all sorts of major venues in the cities he was due to speak at to break their contracts, citing “incompatibility with our inclusive values”. Now the “inclusive” values obviously do not include Mr Graham or the apparently 1000s of churches that are supporting his tour – now I certainly will not be going to see him but to paraphrase Voltaire I also say I will die first to ensure other people have the right to do so if they wish, we live in a democracy and people have a right to offend me to my core if they so wish provided they give me the courtesy to do the same favour for them. Remember what I said impressed me so much about that gay pub in Leicester, you could get a milk-crate, stand on it the bar, preach that fire and brimstone were going to engulf us all and then sit down and have a chat, and to the shock of us all, have this strange guy pray for you and what was worse, some people would leave us and never come back because they were now members of the Jesus Army; next time you see them 3 months later, straight as the Pope is Catholic. It certainly worked for some of them and I am happy to indulge Mr Graham, he can come and stay in my house if Hilton refuse to give him a room because they do not share his offensive religious values.

Now I am speaking as someone who was a fellow-traveller and concerned with social justice. I did my time in the radical left with Militant, SWP, RCP, WRP, WP.... But I now find the ignorance, bigotry and intolerance displayed by some of the activists within the LGBTQ+ community and their sympathisers breathtakingly arrogant and most of the hate I hear comes from that direction, not from Christians, Muslims or social-conservatives protesting about LGBTQ+ content as “normal” to be honest. It is justifiable to assert that “normal” is not socially constructed, normal has an objective definition – it is the most common frequency within a population or we might say it is between certain ranges in a population distribution (the famous Bell curve). On any vaguely scientific measure, LGBTQ+ is not “normal” (though science recognises that 1 in c10000 have a genuine claim to be “Intersex”) but that does not mean a democracy can discriminate against it. A democracy tolerates its minorities by giving them space in the marketplace but a pluralist one does not require the population as a whole to be bound by my extreme ideology. The greater problem is that this activism does not so much target people outside the LGBTQ+ movement (which is to be expected) but also people who have been feminists and gay rights campaigners for decades of my generation. That should tell you alone of its bigoted nature.

It is particularly the “T” part where this intolerance and bigotry has been displayed most forcefully. One of the co-founders of the *Stonewall* charity has recently left *Stonewall* to form the LGB alliance because of the “mishandling” of the “T” issue where the debate has been foreclosed. That there should be a debate seems self-evident to radical feminists like Germaine Greer who has been “no-platformed” by our very own NUS for having the audacity to say “post-op trans women are not real women”. A similar fate befell veteran gay-rights activist Peter Tatchell for his “transphobic” comments at another venue. Actually, they were just well-informed comments by people that understand the subject matter rather than the no-platforming student mobocracy factions that should go and listen to the lectures they had been asked to give by their hosting University before rushing to judgment. Greer’s interest is in the protection of the concept of a woman and the right to privacy for women – the biological differences between men and women are not just one or two, or an argument about chromosomes, they are hundreds of them so much so that you can dig a bone up from the middle of a wilderness, analyse it and tell whether it was male or female. Just because someone has an operation, that is not the end of the story, they are on medication and hormones for the rest of their life. People who have transitioned and then regretted it (particularly women) find permanent artefacts of the effects of these potent medications even after they have stopped

them. Some dissenting psychologists (now numbering over 50) who used to work at a particular NHS Youth Gender Reassignment clinic have called it “unregulated experimentation on young people”. Even the BBC had a recent programme on people who transitioned and later regretted it, saying the approach of “unconditional affirmation to prevent possible suicide of the gender dysphoric” meant they were never given the opportunity to talk through their dysphoria in any type of way that could have challenged their psychological state and that their view of themselves might actually have been inaccurate, or even more terribly in our socially constructed world, “wrong”! Most of us realise reflecting on our earlier years we were wrong about some really important things and would have seriously benefitted from someone having the moral courage to tell us that. There exists an objective world out there called reality; gravity does not care what I feel about it. Similarly, there is such a thing as a strong standard of right and wrong, regardless of our subjectivity.

Perhaps the most shocking aspect of this issue for myself as a lifelong engineer and scientist now studying philosophy when I can is the incredibly bad science that surrounds it. People have been hunting for a “gay gene” and apparently found it a number of times until their work was peer-reviewed by people honest enough to challenge their ideological agenda with just a bit of scientific objectivity. But peer review is not always as robust as that in the soft social sciences which are known for tendency to subjectivity which is understandable simply because we are dealing with non-deterministic subjects called people. Yet, we really should strive for as rigorous and honest social science that we can get. In an article in online magazine *Quillette*, as a sort of confession before I die (rather like the guy who faked the Loch Ness monster photos admitted it but people still believe in “Wor Nessie”) former gender historian Christopher Dummitt explains how he and his fellow academics simply ignored the innate differences between men and women. In this way they “proved” that “sex was wholly a social construct” and somehow people bought it. What was worse, he said, was that everyone was at it. “Everyone was (and is) making it up. That is how the gender-studies field works”, he confesses. Over the past 30 years, whole university departments have been taken over by identity politics, subjects like “gender history” and “gender studies”, which perpetuate the fiction that sex is not a “biological reality”. Social science operating in epistemological silos of their own making. The peer review process, far from providing a check on this groupthink, only made it worse. It was no better than a “form of ideological in-group screening”. Dr Dummitt says that “critics of the social constructionists are right to raise their eyebrows at the so-called proof presented by alleged experts”.

Now whether or not you agree with every point he makes before we carry him to the crematorium, it should at least make us smell what is being shovelled by social scientists with an ideological axe to grind. For as extreme and disturbing this sounds (it is indoctrination to anyone who wants to stand back from their personal emotions and feelings that surround it), it gets worse. In the South-West where I now work, the local NHS Trusts are introducing an LGBTQ+ policy with the centrepiece assertion “anatomy is not a guide to sex in all cases”. Notice the term used is “sex” not “gender” – this is one step beyond asserting that gender is socially constructed (as most of us will agree to a certain limit, that *is* the technical definition of gender as opposed to “sex” which was biological), this is actually denying there is even anything *biological* that makes humans what they are. It is weaponised social science that is denying that natural science has any legitimacy to assert an objective category of biological sex. Such policies are profoundly unscientific and not based on anything but prejudice - even the various professional bodies that represent the professionals have not approved these materials and had recommended they be reviewed before adoption. Those recommendations were ignored by rainbow flag-waving unelected ideologues in these bureaucracies.

Those of us who profoundly or even mildly disagree with LGBTQ+ or aspects of the movement or the lifestyle and mythology that surround it, have a moral and a democratic right to dissent without being called “hate speakers” and non-platformed at NUS meetings, demoted because of private social media posts or fired by social services departments because they decline to counsel gay couples. It might be offensive to me, but it is not a sackable or even a disciplinary offence, a pluralist society accepts this and gives them another counsellor who is glad to offer gay people counsel. If the guest house down the road run by a couple in their mid-70s does not want to give you a room because you are a gay couple, give an appropriate finger gesture and say someone else can be blessed with my money instead of dragging them through court and them losing their business. If someone does not want to bake you a penis-shaped cake (there are quite a few of these in the US court system atm), accept their recommendation and go to the baker’s down the road who are – as gay activist Peter Tatchell commented about the similar NI case, the discrimination was not because he was gay but because he considered it in bad taste and had a right as an artist to withhold their service on the basis of conscience. I would be a glad advocate of Peter to have a role in the DoE - New Department of Education guidance encourages schools to “gather intelligence” on any parents that express reservations about the nature of LGBTQ+ content in their primary school curriculum or “Relationship Education” lessons at Senior level and share it with the police; police are arriving at people’s workplaces and announcing “we are here to check your thinking on LGBTQ+” – this was a front page story in *The Times* recently where a man had tweeted a controversial opinion about LGBTQ+. The guy rightly went to court to challenge the police action and the High Court judge proclaimed, “we are not living in an Orwellian nightmare...Mr...has a democratic right to express himself even if he offends and upsets. It is not the role of the police to police thought”. Some of us remember the days of passionate debates on the abortion issue at Bangor SU, the best attended debates in SU history, today those debates would be foreclosed and labelled as “misogynistic hate speech”. The power of people being able to take a position and being able to argue it is a foundational part of Western civilisation and is one of its greatest strengths that we are losing as we slide towards totalitarian declarations by social engineers masquerading as social scientists of what is “acceptable” and what is not.

As a closing thought, I long for those days again of my youth where those of us on different extremes of the argument could sit down, pass the bong and get drunk together. It is not so much the passing of the bong or the drunkenness I miss but the real diversity and inclusiveness of it. These days I am often in board meetings or as a technical engineer working through problems with peers or like today, when I can get some time for my studies, talk honestly with peers of divergent and often opposing opinions. Most business entrepreneurs and engineers value “perspective”, i.e. different views and interpretations, sometimes radically off the wall from where you are sitting. I can be gay, and I can get over it is one of those propositions. Just because I disagree with you, does not mean I hate you and you never know, you might learn something from the disagreement.