

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Name: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon**

**Ali**

**00:00:00:24**

My gender nonconformity led me to a place where I came to terms with the fact that I was never, ever going to fulfil the very stringent requirements of of womanhood, and nor was I ever going to be able to reach the heady heights of manhood. Therefore, the smart thing to do was to absolve myself of the responsibility of having to achieve anything when it comes to gender, and that really being non-binary is about releasing myself from the expectations of of what being a woman today means, or what being a man might mean as well.

**Liam**

**00:00:32:14**

Hello and welcome to Pridecast. This is a podcast about all things LGBTQ+ brought to you by ITV. During the show, we chat about being proud to be LGBTQ+. Today, we speak to people from across the community to find out where they are on their journey and where they're headed. We'll also keep you updated on the latest LGBTQ+ news and the things that matter to you. This is the ITV Pridecast.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Liam**

**00:01:03:04**

Hello everyone and welcome to this episode of the ITV Pridecast. Well, joining me on the show today is Ali Hanon, an award winning communications professional and comedy performer. Now Ali identifies as non-binary and uses the pronouns they/them. In this episode of the ITV Pride ast, Ali talks about what it means to be non-binary through their work as a diversity and inclusion activist. Ali discusses why it's important to challenge the stereotypes and perceptions that society places on gender. They also share their own story of how, at a young age, they didn't feel like they fitted into a specific gender, and that they didn't want to have the expectations put on them. That often come with identifying as a man or a woman. Through Ali's own story of being non-binary, they show that life doesn't always need to be fixed on what society expects of us, and that expressing all parts of our identity is what makes us human. So then, um, Ali Hanon, thank you so much for joining me on the ITV Pridecast. And you're joining us, of course, to, um, to tell it about what you do and, and your life and in particular about being non-binary. And, you know, I'm really, really looking forward to chatting to you about this because I suppose the whole issue around being non-binary, you know, I guess you have to do a lot of work in terms of trying to explain to people what being non-binary is, because it's something that actually, you know, not many people perhaps are accustomed to. And, you know, I imagine sometimes you must feel and you must find yourself in the position of having to change people's perceptions, really?

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:02:57:07**

Oh, yeah. I mean, it's interesting you, you say people's perceptions. So I think that's that's one of the biggest challenges. I am what I am, as many of us are. There's not much getting away from it. You know, in my experience of gender is, I don't think, unusual. Liam, if I'm completely honest, I think what's really interesting is when we when we talk about gender, everybody has a story to tell about gender. It's not something that only affects trans or non-binary people. Gender is something that is a big part of everyone's life. My experience, in a way, is not particularly unusual. Um, being gender nonconforming, I think is something that we have language for and people get. And lots of people I know, cis, trans, uh, are positively and adversely affected by expectations around gender. It just so happens that my gender nonconformity led me to a place where, um, I came to terms with the fact that I was never, ever going to fulfil the very stringent requirements of of womanhood, and nor was I ever going to be able to reach the heady heights of manhood. Therefore, the smart thing to do was to absolve myself of the responsibility of having to achieve anything when it comes to to gender, and that really being non-binary is about releasing myself from the expectations of of what being a woman today means, or what being a man might mean as well. Um, not because I don't think it's wonderful and beautiful. I think there are so many reasons why gender is a, you know, incredible, powerful cultural phenomenon. But I was sick of being a rubbish woman, if I'm honest with you, Liam. Um, and, you know, and I had no control over my gender nonconformity as a kid, you know, it was very apparent, very clear that I was for a long time defying the expectations of the adults around me. So, you know, I had all sorts of justifications and narrative as to why that was the case. And ultimately, rather than internalising it as me being broken, I thought maybe it's the maybe it's the system that doesn't work.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Liam**

**00:04:56:24**

You know, I think it's one of those, isn't it, Ali, that because we're so conditioned to, um, you know, experiencing gender from the day that we're born, you know, we it's a kind of process that. And you've clearly gone through this and of course, you you try and teach people about this, but it's trying to kind of, you know, um, break the kind of the binds there that existed and not break them. But, um, you know, let's, let's unravel it. Let's just, let's, let's unravel this patchwork that we've created and actually, let's, let's get back to the core, really here. And, you know, I know you do a lot of work around this and, um, I'd, I'd love that by the end of this podcast that anyone who's listening, listening to it, who may not really know about being non-binary, may not really, um, you know, at the start of it, feel very comfortable with the idea of non-binary, at the end of this podcast episode. They can actually understand it. Not they might not be able to relate to it, but they might be able to be like, okay, actually, I can see where that person's coming from now. And I, I guess for you, that's all you can ask for, isn't it? For people to just maybe put themselves in your shoes for once?

**Ali**

**00:06:06:24**

Yeah, course. But you know, I'm, I'm, I'm here to to to just exist really in my own small way. I don't have many expectations of other people. I think, you know, I always think about people getting worried about the existence of non-binary people. And most people I come across are just terrified of saying the wrong thing. And that's predominantly the biggest worry that people have. Liam, reassuringly, I very rarely bump into true villains who want mass discomfort for trans and non-binary people. Mostly people are just a bit worried about how to navigate it. And so for that reason, you know, I the worst punishment I can impose on someone for for not getting me is just they might I might not hang out with them, you know, which for some people is a blessing, Liam, let's be honest.

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**Liam**

**00:06:58:14**

Not at all, because it's a blessing for you more than probably for them, Ali.

**Ali**

**00:07:03:17**

So, you know, and I'm also conscious that, you know, for some people, I might be the first non-binary person I've met in person sometimes. And, you know, I don't you know, I don't take that. Lightly that I want to. I want to showcase myself as a complex mammal that's trying to do their best. I don't want to aspire to anything more than that, but I totally get it. It's, you know, the mix up of gender and sex in language and legislation has led to lots of people being really confused.

**Liam**

**00:07:30:10**

Well, before we get on to talking about that and kind of dispelling the kind of, uh, the connotations that exist around language, um, tell us then how did you kind of realise take us back to that moment when you perhaps realised that actually you, you are non-binary and that you didn't fit one of the, the gender roles that exist in society?

**Ali**

**00:07:53:02**

Yeah. I mean, gosh, Liam, from the earlier stage and this is the case, I think for a lot of LGBTQ+ people, is that often we have an experience of ourselves long before we learn the language of how to describe that. So when I was very, very young, it was very clear to the adults around me that I was performing gender in a way that they didn't expect. So as I grew older and I began to recognise that there was a difference between my innate preferences and the model that existed around girlhood. So I knew that I was a girl, according to the adults around me. But the way that I performed girl was wrong, that I wasn't really hitting the milestones of girlhood. My sister, on the other hand, knocking out the park like she was banging on every milestone of girlhood. And I was sitting there going, what am I doing wrong? So, you know, for most of my young childhood, that was, for me, something I recognised and dealt with in a way that all kids do,

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which is by just getting on with it and complying. When I really felt like I had to, and pushing back when I didn't. And I had a really supportive mum who didn't push me too hard, who accidentally bought me a Disney princess dress, which I cried about. And then she took me back to the Disney shop where it was bought from and allowed me to buy a plaid shirt and a Peter Pan knife thing, which I loved. Right? Okay, so there was all of that. And then I think by the time I was about, I mean, probably around ten, I knew that there was something going on as well with the people that I was beginning to find attraction to again. So the expectation was being a girl that those posters on the wall were going to be of boys. So I sort of realised again that that probably wasn't going to be my future. Um, and so for a while, I think there was a bit of push and pull with my own internal dialogue around what it meant to be gender nonconforming. So what I found was a word which seemed to answer some of the questions I had, and that word was "gay". So I recognised that that attraction meant that I was gay. And maybe that explained why I had this disconnect with my gender. So, you know, through my teenage years, I was coming to terms with being gay. And then by the time I came out at 16, that seemed to reassure the adults around me that I was still playing by the rules of the game, that being a gender non-conforming gay person was more acceptable than being a gender non-conforming straight person. Does that make sense?

**Liam**

**00:10:23:04**

Yeah. No, absolutely.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:10:24:20**

And so I spent my 20s as a gay person, uh, still struggling with gender and still having some of the same questions coming up for me around what that looked like. And then I began to find language that started to reflect better my experiences. And that's where the word non-binary came into my into my vernacular. And that's where I started to describe my experience. And by having those words, I was able to answer a lot of the questions I had about my sexuality and why that didn't fulfil the full criteria of being a lesbian. I was like, no, I can't be a great woman. Why can't I be a great lesbian? Surely I can be a great lesbian, Liam. Um, I even had the asymmetrical haircut and waistcoat. Um, but I, you know, I wasn't fulfilling the criteria there either. To me, coming to terms with my non-binary ness about age of 28 suddenly absolve me of a lot of the rocks I was carrying about who I was and what what I was meant to be in modern society. So that's my journey, and the rest is me being very boring and very non-binary, really.

**Liam**

**00:11:30:03**

Well, you know, I always think actually that, um, you know, for anyone that that identifies as non-binary, um, you know, for the whole coming out process, I imagine it it takes on another level, I imagine in some ways to what those who are just, you know, identify as LGBT and, um, you know, of course, everyone's experience is individual to them, of course. But I suppose for a lot of people that it is incredibly daunting to come out, you know, as, as as many of us know, of course. But I suppose for the majority of society who aren't LGBTQ+ when someone comes out to them, they can visualise it, they can process it, they can say, okay, we get it. You're attracted to a man or you're attracted to women or you're attracted, you're bisexual and attracted to to both or etc when you come out as a non-binary person and society, perhaps isn't that well in tune with the being non-binary? That must bring a lot of, um, new things for you to deal with, I imagine.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:12:40:06**

Yeah, I think the biggest challenge I had was around, you know, having spent so much time within the gay community that I was worried that I was going to lose my people. You know that we know, right? The LGBTQ community is really close knit. You know, my my family are my friends. And that there was a part of me that was like, actually is- And, you know, this is where some of the language comes in. It's like being non-binary. Am I am I abandoning my lesbians, um, by coming out as non-binary? Am I going to lose my lesbians? Nobody wants to lose a lesbian. They are precious. We must keep them safe at all costs.

**Liam**

**00:13:21:04**

Here, here.

**Ali**

**00:13:21:24**

Um. And so you know that that wasn't my experience. I think, you know, I have a- You know, there's been a process of coming to terms with the fact that I don't consider myself a lesbian. Um, but I certainly have been. And I'm immersed in lesbian culture. And I think that's something that's really interesting to recognise is that, you know, queer culture exists outside of labels. You know, we have a rich, vibrant history, um, which has been heavily influenced by trans people, by gender nonconforming people, by people of colour, by disabled people. And oftentimes those people are are overlooked by the mainstream. And all that people think of is the gay community are, you know, these cis white men that we love so dearly too, but they aren't the only flavour of gay. And so, you know, there's there's something about making sure that we create space for how people identify. And of course, I was always a little bit worried about that. And also you get 'coming out fatigue'. Liam. Oh no, I wish so. I wish you could just send a memo out to everyone. It doesn't work like that. Um, but I'm asking for it, aren't I? You know, I'm an activist, so I have to kind of take it a little bit on the chin and say, you know what? If if I'm going out there and talking about trans and non-binary inclusion, I have to expect people want to want to ask questions.



***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Liam**

**00:14:40:02**

Of course. Yeah, I suppose with that as well. Do you find that, you know, because obviously, you know, if you come out to cisgendered straight society as non-binary, you I guess you expect that that questioning. Really. Yeah. But do you also find that you get it from those who are within the LGBTQ+ community? And is that a frustration in many ways because it's it's your community really that you're having to to kind of, um, still come out to.

**Ali**

**00:15:08:19**

I don't think I like I mean, I understand why you use the word frustration. It's not frustrating. I think it is. It's interesting how? How as a community, we are susceptible to the same issues as the wider society of getting a bit too complacent in in the fact that we've reached a certain point of progression and that no more is likely to occur. So I think we often see this, particularly in us geriatric millennials. Not saying that you're a geriatric millennial.

**Liam**

**00:15:39:00**

I would agree with you 100% there.

**Ali**

**00:15:41:09**

It's like, right, right. We're done. We've progressed enough, folks. We've done it. We've reached reached the epitome of inclusion and progress. We don't need any more. So I think what we often do is then begin to sort of get embedded in our ways. And the idea that there is a fixed concept of what a bisection is, or a fixed concept of what a lesbian is, or a fixed concept of what a a trans person is or isn't. I think that is sometimes a little lack of neuroplasticity, which we have to keep practising. Otherwise we do end up not wanting change because we're used to things. So I would say that one of the best things we can do as a community is stay flexible, stay open to the fact that our community is going to shift and change over time. And that's a beautiful thing.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Liam**

**00:16:23:22**

With that is the the beautiful thing I think about the LGBTQ+ community is that in itself, in many ways, it shouldn't act as a binary identity because it's not. And and I think you are very right there in that. Um, you know, I suppose we don't want to find ourselves going down a path where this is the way things should be, and we only we say that, you know, this is it. Because actually, that's not where we've come from, is it? When you look back at our history and we, you know, I know the term queer is often, um, you know, people have different reactions to, to queer. But when you think of our queer history, it certainly wasn't binary.

**Ali**

**00:17:04:23**

No. And, gosh, I mean, you look at the history of language when it comes to the queer community, right? Like the I have to say this in a particular way, the 'hoh-mosexual' I like, you know what I mean by the, the not 'homosexual', 'hoh-mosexual'. It's like there's like there's it's loaded, isn't it, Liam? Like it's all the time. The homosexual agenda. Yes. You know, we moved into gay as a reclamation of the joy of of being, um, non straight or non-heterosexual. And, you know, we move into, you know, through reclaiming the word 'queer' and we start to include people who are bisexual because that wasn't always a given. And, you know, I think we are a community that moves and changes. We just need to make sure that we continue to remain all encompassing for the people in this world who don't fit neatly into heteronormative society.

**Liam**

**00:17:55:00**

And also allowing for very natural human expression. Really, you know, that to me, seems, you know, if we if we put such strict perimeters and limits, then actually the allowance of being our true, authentic selves is very much, you know, diminished really. And that that to me seems like a very sad thing.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:18:17:12**

Yeah, absolutely. And look, I think also our experiences of sexuality do shift over time. I, you know, we don't gatekeeping sexuality like we do gender a lot of the time. It's like, you know, there's no test for lesbianism. You don't sort of deny someone the right to call themselves a lesbian because they fancied Ronan Keating when they were eleven, not talking about anyone in particular. Um, you know, it's the reality is that we, we, we describe our experience in the way that's close as possible to reality. And that's never going to be 100% accurate. You know, it's, you know, if somebody is bisexual, whether or not they are in a same sex or opposite sex relationship, their bisexuality is transcends the relationship they're in. So we rely on people's, you know, self-awareness and ability to define themselves. And the respectful thing to do is reflect that back. And I think with gender, we struggle with that belief in people's lived experiences that, you know, me saying 'I'm non-binary' for some people isn't enough. But if I turned around to someone and said I'm a lesbian, I think that would be enough. So that's a really interesting concept to me.

**Liam**

**00:19:21:08**

I was going to get on to this a little bit later on, but it seems the perfect time to mention it actually. But I wonder actually, do you find yourself sometimes being asked by people whether or not this is the phase and that must be completely, you know, it must be very annoying because you know, you've told someone who you are and they should accept that at face value that that's who you are. But I think to myself at times I was thinking about this earlier on actually, that, you know, I, I identify as a cis man and I'm happy with that. But I did think, oh, one day, you know, I maybe I could identify as non-binary. And I thought to myself, well, maybe my cisgendered identity was a phase. Maybe that was a phase, you know, and and to me, why can't that be a phase, you know, and then I then I find myself non-binary and I, um, live happily ever after, you know, that's, um. Yeah.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:20:11:07**

And that the pursuit of being fixed is strange to me. You know, my experience of people in. My life is that I've got friends who've come out in their 30s or 40s. I've got people who've discovered that they were straight in their 30s and 40s. You know, there's all sorts of different ways people experience their sexuality. And I would hate to be the sort of person who wants someone to define themselves at 16 and stick with it for the rest of their lives. Gosh, some of the decisions I made when I was 16, Liam if I was tied to those, I'd be in serious trouble right now. Um, in terms of gender non-conformity, I genuinely think that the maybe this is a slight deviation from your question, but I think it's helpful to talk about that. The vast majority of homophobia that people experience is, is steeped in gender stuff that, you know, very rarely do I see a gay man being berated for the fact that he's in a same sex relationship. Oftentimes it's because he's too feminine, because he's not performing his gender correctly. Or for a butch lesbian, it's not that they're in a relationship with a woman that people are shouting across car parks at them before it's because they're too masculine. They're not performing women correctly. So I think homophobia and transphobia are very close relations in many ways. And I think that that connectedness, that recognition of of how we are so scared of not performing gender correctly, it means that we we want people to choose a side and stick with it. The idea that our gender might flex over time is is scary. Um, to people and actually gay people, LGBTQ people all get berated for not performing their gender correctly. You know, a big part of performing man, for example, is straightness. There is a real correlation between madness and straightness. Even if we know that's genuinely nonsense, that's society's expectation of a man, is that they will want to be in a relationship with a woman.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Liam**

**00:22:04:06**

I do find this fascinating. I really do, because I, you know, even though I've just discussed there, it's me identifying as a cis man. I, I don't identify often with the connotations that come being a man and, and I think this is actually a really good point to, to try and, you know, spell out to people what being non-binary is because I think sometimes people can hear that that term and straight away they close off because they're like, oh, I don't know what that is because I can't see the binary there. It is, the the unknown-ness. And I think this is where we perhaps need to dispel or kind of spell out really the difference between your your gender identity and what your sex is. And I don't know if you want to tell us a bit more about that and kind of provide that explanation.

**Ali**

**00:22:51:15**

Yeah. And I think it's really important at this point to say I am one of a million different experiences around this, and my experience is going to be very different to other people's. I'm probably one of the least interesting examples. Sorry to break it to you.

**Liam**

**00:23:09:03**

I highly doubt that.

**Ali**

**00:23:11:02**

Um, but you know, my my sex is something that is something that is relatively relevant in some aspects of my life. You know, the, the chromosomal, hormonal realities of my body are relevant to my doctor, to me, in certain ways when I'm managing my health. Um, they're relevant to some other people who might be intimately acquainted with me, for want of a better phrase. Excuse me. Um, but even then, that's only relevant to some people. And it has in my experience, and I'm testimony to this, it's had very little impact on how I've performed my gender. And for me, gender is how I am perceived by the world. Right? So I am what I am. Whether or not you call it masculine or feminine is nothing to do with me really. But broadly, my behaviours have

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

tended towards what society deems as masculine. Again, kind of made up concepts as well. So that's what makes this even more complicated. But I know through other people's experience, and this is the other thing about gender performance and gender nonconformity is that there are two things going on. There's my perception of myself, and then there's your perception of me. And I have very little control over how you perceive me. And in a way, it's sort of none of my business. And the only thing I have real control over is my perception of myself. So I can behave in authentic way. And you might go, that's butch or that's masculine. Or you might say, actually, it's just Ali. I don't have control over that. Um, so for me, gender is everything that society tells me that my behaviour is or isn't. So, um, gender is often defined as, as manliness or man-ness or woman or woman-ness. Um, I say, why not create another option, which is neither. And that's my experience. And it's neither and a bit of both. Because, you know, I wouldn't say I'm particularly butch, but I would say I have a good dose of camp. Um, again, it's super complicated. But my, you know, the femininity I do have is very much access through camp, through masculinity. So there's loads of complexity to this. And I don't want to overcomplicated, but sex is the physical reality of my body. Uh, it is what it is. And for me, I have had to make some adjustments to my physical body in order to make me feel comfortable. So I have a short haircut, which makes me feel good. Um, I wear clothes that make my body feel like it's a shape that makes me feel good. Other people might have medical interventions, others might not have any interventions, and that's totally personal. Gender, on the other hand, is how I live my life. It's how I express myself. And then you might tell me, Ali, that's masculine or that's feminine, um, or that's not womanly enough or that's not manly enough. And I go, don't worry, I'm non-binary. Does that help?

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Liam**

**00:26:05:23**

I mean, personally, I think it really does. And and actually, I do think that we need to get to a place in society where, you know, we separate the issue of someone's genitalia and we'll say it is brutally honest as it is from how they identify, you know, and I go back to what I was saying about my own experience in that, you know, I don't always identify with those connotations that are expected for someone who is a man, you know. Yes, I was born into the male sex, but I don't always relate to the expectation of, you know, what society expects a man to be. And, you know, if anything, I find it quite conflicting, because when we think of those connotations of being masculine and being feminine, often I think, you know, I have both. And I'm sure a lot of people will have elements of both. So, you know, why would we define ourselves solely on one gender identity when, you know, both are part of the the whole human experience? Really?

**Ali**

**00:27:14:00**

Yeah, I completely- I mean, obviously I agree, Liam and I think, you know, the scary thing is, is that the more that we try and reinforce gender as these fixed concepts, the more we do a disservice to ourselves as a species. Um, and, you know, I, uh, I talked to a lot of people about gender by virtue of what I do. Right. And and it's very rarely that I have a conversation with anyone where they say that their experience of gender has been completely brilliant. Most people I know have had some kind of discomfort around their gender. And I'm not saying that they've had dysphoria or any issues with their body, but they've been told that they need to man up, or they've been told that they need to cover up these sort of, you know, linguistic and coercive things that we do to each other to make each other perform our gender better. And, you know, I know men who have given up hobbies because they were deemed too feminine. I've known women who've given up hobbies because they were worried about being less attractive to the people they thought they were meant to be attractive to. And and I know I've been banging on about this for five years now, nearly six years. But there is a reason for me that that suicide and mental health is so poor in men. Um, and I don't

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think it's biological. Maybe it is. And I'm really open to some biological kind of reasons why that's the case, but I genuinely think the way that we socialise men and boys prohibits them specifically prohibits them from working through difficult emotional experiences and my dad was testament to that. You know, I lost my dad, um, young because, um, he suffered with a disease associated with depression. Um, I'm laughing only because it's, you know, it's hard to talk about something that's so personal without it becoming a little bit of a sob story. But, you know, losing my dad young because he couldn't manage his own mental health. I was very angry for a long time. But what I recognise now is he simply didn't have the equipment linguistically, emotionally, to reach out for help, to talk to someone, to say 'I'm not doing okay.' And there was such a huge pressure on him to perform man well that he ended up not being able to do anything. And I and I, you know, I would I think I, you know, I, I'd a big part of my healing from that trauma is to make sure that I continue to pass on the message that, that we should all give ourselves permission to, to break gender norms if it's going to protect us from harm. Um, and that that's really important to me.



***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Liam**

**00:29:51:14**

Oh, Ali, thank you so much for sharing such a personal experience there. And, um, I really do think you're onto something there when it comes around to the linguistics of things. And actually, um, you know, that is a contentious issue. Well, I don't think it's a contentious issue, but society seems to think it's a contentious issue when we when we think of pronouns and when we. You know, when we, you know, hear of people who are non-binary and they perhaps use their pronouns of of they them. And actually, you know, there are a lot of people that in itself is problematic and they can't seem to get their head around that. And just to go back for one moment about, you know, when we think and trying to spell out and explain what being non-binary is to people, you know, I suppose when someone is given, um, the pronoun 'He' or 'She' without they themselves giving it to them. Yeah. That is what brings the connotations of what is masculine and feminine, isn't it? So I, you know, think of the example of, say, for instance, we refer to someone who we think has the pronoun she. But maybe we were to say, oh, 'She's there crying in the corner.' That is a kind of, um, I suppose in some ways, um, we expect that in society, because women are supposed to be emotional beings and therefore, you know, that's expected. But if we say 'He is there crying in the corner', that brings a whole heap of, um, things which are not accepted, and therefore a man can't cry because that's not what men do, and therefore we can't have that. So I know that was quite long winded there, but in, in terms of the linguists, in terms of the language that this is where the origins of this comes from, this is where this kind of, you know, um, to me, it seems where this kind of, homophobia, transphobia, any kind of discrimination within this category can come from really.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:31:52:16**

Is a bit naive of us to think that something like a pronoun doesn't come loaded with kilos of baggage, right? You know, She/Her doesn't isn't just a pronoun. It is a rule for life. Like you say, as soon as you She/Her, someone you are. Bringing with it, or bringing with you everything that is allowed in a girl or a woman. Um, that suddenly we begin to behave differently, whether we intend to or not. And what's scary is that even those of us who think that they've, you know, got through gender and, you know, have moved into a space where that doesn't have such a bearing. I carry with me all of the unconscious bias around gender that anybody else does. I know that if somebody shows me a book that's pink or a book that's blue, that I could tell you which child it's for. You know, I speak the language, folks, but we do. And I think one of the most powerful things we can do if we're trying to tap into to what it means to be gender non-conforming, to be trans and non-binary, is to reflect on on those things that come with She/Her or He/Him. Is it just a pronoun or actually with that, does it come an expectation of what interest someone might have or what we expect from them? As you say, Liam, emotionally, if somebody is she her, or be more comfortable if they are emotional, well. And if someone's he him. Do we reject that emotion in a in a in a way. And you know, this is self you know, self-analysis. This is self-awareness work. And I think something that we can all benefit from.

**Liam**

**00:33:26:21**

Ali, you put that far more articulately than me, of course, in my example.

**Ali**

**00:33:31:22**

No, you did it so well.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Liam**

**00:33:35:08**

I think with this. So it it is a case of, you know, trying to really guide people. And as you spoke before, actually, it's really trying to untangle the kind of the, the ties that have been created for so, so long, you know, since what is often, you know, probably day one of humanity, this has been, this has been a part of our lives. But what you mentioned there actually, I thought it was a really, you know, um, interesting example of, you know, in terms of, um, colours for, for genders and in terms of blue for a boy and, and pink for a girl. And, and it's funny actually, that is something I think is a clear example of, you know, from day one of our lives of when gender is assigned to us because, for instance, you know, I for a few friends of mine who've been having kids and, you know, they've painted the, the bedrooms, you know, in a certain colour or, you know, they've, they've, you know, I was getting them a card to, you know, to say congratulations on the birth of their baby boy. And, you know, all the cards that were there in the card shop were blue. And I was a bit like, oh, you know, and I felt conflicted in buying that card because I thought, I don't want to conform to this because I don't necessarily agree with it, but it is intrinsically part of society, isn't it? Really?

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:34:47:15**

Yeah, and I think, you know, my heart goes out to parents because I think they're in a bind because, you know, the parents I speak to, all they want is a smooth, easy life for their offspring. You know, they don't want difficulty, they don't want challenges. So a big a big way of smoothing things over is, is helping young people navigate gender because it's it's a really straightforward club to belong to, you know, and I you know, I look at my nephew and he's amazing and he, you know, he he knows he's a boy and he performs boy really well. And and you know that that is clear to me. You know, that if you if you want reassurance that there are people in the world who experience gender very differently to yourself is just look around, you know, um, and I hope that he if that changes, if his experience of boyhood changes, that he will have the language to talk about that. Um, but that requires the adults holding space for it, which I, you know, I know my sister and she is an ally, let's say. I think there should be a stronger word. But, um, she is a very proactive ally as my sister. And so I think, you know, she's got she's got the, um, the compassion and language to hold space if that was to ever be the case. But it's hard not to want to reinforce it for kids because it keeps them safe. You don't want a little gender non-conforming kid at school because they are going to get noticed as I did. Um, you know, there is a point where the little gender non-conforming kid gets rejected. You know, I remember the day that the boys turned around to me and say, I'm sorry, we've just found out you're a girl. You can't hang out with us anymore. And I was like, am I? And realised I had to go and hang out with the girls, but I didn't have anything in common with them. So, you know, the gender catches up with you whether you want it to or not, especially for young people.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Liam**

**00:36:35:14**

Yeah. No, it really does. And and actually it does persist throughout life really. And it's only when I suppose doing these kind of things and, um, you know, hearing from people who have these experiences, do we only start to question our own selves? Really, really. Which is obviously that, you know, that's part and parcel of life in many areas. But but actually, when it comes to the issue of gender, it is so loaded. And I think you used a really, really great phrase earlier on when you said in terms of, you know, the gatekeeping of gender, there is a real, um, there's a real kind of. Oh, I was going to say it seems more prevalent than ever at the moment, really, especially when we look at the issues around trans issues. You know, it's so prevalent and and actually, at the moment, I mean, you know, we're hearing such rhetoric from not just, you know, Joe Bloggs, you know, on the, on the street, but actually from those in high office as well, actually. And, and it does seem like the community is going through a real, um, problematic phase at the moment. And I say problematic phase as if it's the community's fault. I don't mean it like that. It's a problematic phase that the community finds itself in through no fault of its own.

**Ali**

**00:37:50:01**

Yeah. And I think this is not this is not a pattern. I think it's a pattern we recognise as a community. Right. You know, I think what we saw in the 80s, you know, with Section 28 was a very, very reactionary response to a growing awareness of, of LGBT people and the gay um, Pride movement. And Section 28 was a way of attempting to quash that. Right. And what we see now is trans and non-binary people having got a little bit of traction around recognition, and then there's going to be a response to that. And so that's what we're seeing is we're seeing the sort of pattern repeat itself. So in a way that's reassuring because we know that we can get through it. And I believe with all my heart that we will get through this. But what it requires is for us to contain, um, as a group, as a, as a community, um, you know, each other safely and, and continue to advocate for those vulnerable people within our community, um, as it's always been

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

there. You know, we've always advocated for vulnerable people. And I want us to keep doing that. I think the rhetoric we hear in politics and wider society is, is, is fear, fear of the unknown through the fact that many of the rules of, of life don't allow for ambiguity around gender. We've invented a world that that really distinguishes most things that by by gender or sex, depending on how you look at it. Um, sport is a perfect example. We have that right relatively arbitrarily in my mind, carved sport up some sport up into male versus female. But then we look at more nuanced sports like boxing and we say, actually, you know, gender and sex are no longer relevant here. What we're going to what I mean, they are relevant in some ways, but what are we going to do is we're going to distinguish further and say, depending on your weight, uh, you're going to compete. Heavyweight would never boxer bantam weight, for example. And I think when we start to think about creating sports that is more nuanced and more reflective of society, then the question about transportation and participation in sport will start to diminish. We can't win if the rules are always against us. Um, you know, the same with with the brilliant Paralympic movement. You know, again, categories that people compete in are not reduced to the simplistic gender sex binary. There's much more nuance, much more complexity and thought that goes into who competes with who. And I think if we can move towards that model, then we can start to see more and more trans and non-binary people run around a field or chase a ball or push something or pull something. Have a nice play, because really, that's what sport is. It's about having a nice play, I think outdoors or indoors, depending on your preference.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Liam**

**00:40:33:12**

Well, with it getting colder, I think there'll be plenty more opportunities to go inside of course. But but no, I think you're absolutely right there. And and actually one area of society that we started to see a lot more, um, visibility when it comes to people who identify as non-binary is showbusiness, for instance. And I think of someone like Sam Smith or Jonathan Van Ness, who both identify as non-binary and and actually, I suppose for people like them, they have really kind of, um, allowed for the whole identity to be put on the map in some ways.

**Ali**

**00:41:09:07**

Yeah, of course. And I think, you know, bless them, they've had to absorb a lot of the vitriol and fear that that can, you know, is directed towards prominent non-binary people. We, you know, someone like me, you know, somebody meets me and they don't like me. It's sort of we both get on with our day. Um, for people in the public eye, there is such a burden because they can't escape other people's opinions. They can't avoid the the language that's thrown at them. And that worries me because it stops people coming out. Because why would you want to put yourself in front of that kind of, um, prejudice and, and, and language that is so destructive. So that's what I fear is that, you know, you know, people who are non-binary are going to hold back because they're terrified of receiving the hate that Sam Smith has received.

**Liam**

**00:42:07:06**

Do you find that, um, you know, the starting point needs to be a school. In terms of people learning, kids learning about this. Because actually when kids learn about it, you know, hopefully one day they will grow into adults that will fully, you know, embrace and accept this and won't question it. Really. Where does the starting point need to come from? Do you think?

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:42:28:15**

I don't think I have an answer to that, Liam. You know, I don't really know. I think that's the sort of question I, I always say, why don't we talk to trans and non-binary education experts? Why don't we talk to teachers and school leaders and ask them what they think? Because I think oftentimes, like, you know, as the token non-binary person, I'm pulled into arguments or debates that I have no expertise in. You know, I have no expertise in early childhood development. So I'd say, look, well, let's consult with people who know what they're talking about. But I, you know, I think it's a good point to make, Liam, because I don't think we do. We don't we don't lean on experts enough to talk about what they know. Um, and and that's that's a real missed opportunity.

**Liam**

**00:43:13:15**

I think one of the, um, one of the things I wanted to to chat with you about, of course, because of course, you, you, you do go into a lot of organisations and kind of try and help with the understanding of, of these issues in particular. But of course, you also you're a comedian as well, aren't you? And you know, you bring that element to to what you do, I think, and try and use that element to kind of make non-binary fuse much more accessible, I guess, really as well.



***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:43:41:03**

Yeah, I'm like a Trojan horse. Liam. I'll draw you in with my levity and then hit you with the heavy stuff. No, I mean, I just, I my experience is that most people are terrified, right? I'm terrified. You're terrified. And one of the easiest ways to minimise fear is to get people laughing. And I think, you know, for me, humour is a gateway, which we have historically always, um, you know, used as a, as a way of conveying difficult subject matter. Right. You know, Stand-up comedy is often dark. You know, it's dark stuff. It's exploring the, the shadows of society through humour. And so, you know, I think that if I can get people laughing, if I can demonstrate to people that this isn't terrifying, that this is about humanity and the messiness and chaos of our species, then people tend to respond more positively. I also think there's a magical impact on the nervous system that comes with laughing, that people suddenly settle and relax and open up, and there's that vulnerability that people are willing to share. Once you get people in a room making each other smile and naive and optimistic as that might sound, my lived experience every day is that it works.

**Liam**

**00:44:53:17**

Well now, I. I completely appreciate that. And what you what what got you into it?

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:44:58:13**

The comedy. Yeah. Or you know what? It's a it's a funny story. So I mean, calling me a comedian makes me laugh because I just, you know, I it's, it's such, you know, for me, it's about performing. It's about teaching comedy. It's about being in the, you know, comedy. Um, scene in Brighton. And, you know, I'm a dabbler by anybody's standards. It's not my, you know, it's not my core, you know, roof over head activity. It's a joy for me. Um, but I was I was in my second year of uni, Liam and I was desperate to find a hobby that didn't involve beer because I was playing rugby at the time. And my entire life sort of, sort of revolved around beer. And so I saw a little advert in local newspaper, which was about a comedy course, and I thought, that sounds like fun. So I answered it. I turned up, did the day course, and it just so happened to be run by, um, ironically, Liam, the, uh, then UK's longest running all female comedy improv troupe. Um, are they a few years later? Little did they know. And so, um, I was really a privilege to get a call back from the producer who asked me to join. And so we ended up doing tours of the UK and Women in Comedy festivals and Camden Festival, Brighton Festival, uh, Manchester Comedy Festival. And so we did a lot of touring. And, you know, subsequently, I've kind of built a little bit of a of a community down in Brighton who perform and we play together, play together. I mean, it sounds, but you know, for those who know improv, it's really just playing. It's nonsense most of the time. Um, and it has kept me well and it has given me access to a community, a community of people that are, without a doubt, some of the most extraordinary and joyful people I've had the privilege of spending time with. And it intersects with the queer community beautifully. There are a lot of improvisers who happen to be queer, and I don't know, you know, is it a coincidence or are queer people just funnier? I don't know.

**Liam**

**00:46:53:05**

Well, I'm sure plenty would agree with that sentiment, but with that as well, I guess a lot of it you're able to learn from people, you know, those who you're amongst. Really. That must be a really lovely thing. Through comedy, of course.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:47:06:08**

Yeah, absolutely. You know, I think, you know, improv teaches us lots of interesting things. It teaches us about being in the moment. It teaches us about collaboration, it teaches us about accepting and building, and all of those are incredible platforms on which to build relationships, build communities, build ideas, create art, creates work. And so what I see is a lot of creatives coming together to do improv in a way that allows them to to innovate, to create things with other people. And that's that's magic for me. You know, we're not a species that's designed to be on our own, and having access to others is powerful.

**Liam**

**00:47:44:06**

No, no, absolutely. And for anyone that I mean, this kind of is a question of of advice now, but in terms of, you know, for anyone who, you know, maybe starting their journey in terms of, you know, whether or not they're a younger person or maybe an older person and think, actually, I could be non-binary, what would you what would you say to them, really? Because I imagine that must be a first. Quite maybe it's quite a daunting prospect for people. You are going against. You know, I say the "norm" in, in inverted commas their of course. And that is daunting really.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:48:17:18**

Yeah, I mean, gosh, what would you say? I mean, you know, there is there's very little, you know, that is for sure or certain in this world. But I think the one thing I do know to be true is that the most informed person about our experiences ourselves. So if we feel non-binary, then that's great. You do and are experiencing something real. I think before we had language, it's really hard to understand that something is real because you can't put words to it. And there's, you know, there's this whole, you know, chicken and egg scenario. Does culture create language or does language create culture or a bit of both. And I think that's where we're at with being non-binary is that I know that I'm gender non-conforming. I know that my experience of gender is different to what people expect of me. How do I put that into words today that we call that non-binary? But in 50 or 100 years time, we might have a completely different word for it. Who knows? But you know, for anyone who's gender non-conforming, anyone who finds that there is a gap between their experience of their gender and how people perceive them or want them to be, you exist. I see you, uh, there is space for you in our LGBTQ+ community. The best way to discover yourself is to talk to other people, listen, read, connect with people who have different experiences to you, and discover yourself through others.

**Liam**

**00:49:36:16**

I think what you were saying there about, um, in terms of language changing, of course, I mean, you know, we see that all the time that that's that's the whole purpose of language. But do you think that one day maybe, you know, in terms of pronouns, like the way we see, for instance, They/Them, you know, often most people look at that and see it as a collective term rather than just something to define the singular. And actually, you know, maybe one day that's going to change in terms of how we perceive that.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:50:08:21**

Oh, yeah. And, and actually grammatically that I mean, maybe this is, this is old news, but, you know, grammatically we use They/Them all the time. You know, Liam, I say to you, oh, I went to the shop the other day and I found a wallet on the floor. I didn't know who it belonged to. So I went to the counter and I said, somebody dropped their wallet. I can't see anyone about. If you see them, will you give it back to them? You know, I'm talking about one person, right? Or if I say to you, oh, 'I went to the doctor about my rash, Liam and they said that it was, I don't know, bedbugs.' And you know, you know that I'm talking about one doctor. You know, we use them in lieu of he or she all the time. We just, I think, sometimes get caught up, um, in the psychology of resisting change, rather than acknowledging the reality of how language is used.

**Liam**

**00:50:54:23**

Oh, no. Absolutely. And, um, but for you, then, I mean, you, you were mentioning there in terms of, for people who may be in this position and actually kind of, you know, being around other people in a similar situation or, you know, reading and finding out as much as you can. Is there any kind of thing that you've read or watch that you that you've been really struck by, actually? And it's really kind of told the story of someone who's non-binary perfectly?

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:51:19:13**

No. I think the reason I say that is because I think everybody I come across as experience is different. So the idea that there's like one person who can encapsulate non-binary ness, I think kind of does a disservice to what being non-binary is. I think there are so many incredible non-binary people in the world, and so many trans people who are who are defying our expectations of what even being trans means. You know, you know, the one person that I am entirely obsessed with, um, is Susie Izzard, right? You know, she has been part of my comedy, you know, hierarchy, royalty my entire life. And seeing how she's navigated her gender is just extraordinary. And seeing what she's doing today and how, you know, she's dealing with with so much resistance and meeting it head on is, you know. Testament to her really. And again, someone who can do it whilst making people laugh. Yeah, ten out of ten. But ultimately, I think the value that we get from from understanding more about non-binary people is found in the pages of every story that we can come across, not just in one person's story.

**Liam**

**00:52:30:02**

And I suppose in some ways it's kind of- your message to anyone who you know, regardless of how they identify, is just to maybe open up to that other the other the and I say the other in a way that, um, makes it makes it seem like it's not part of the norm, which I don't want it to sound like that because the other is perfectly normal. And 'normal' shouldn't be a term. Actually, I think

**Ali**

**00:52:54:11**

It's a horrible word, isn't it - it's so loaded!

**Liam**

**00:52:56:03**

We should, I do I feel guilty in saying it. I, I feel like we should rip it out of the dictionary and lose it. Cast it away.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:53:02:22**

Yeah, I mean normal. I think, you know, it's it's about coming to terms with our own. Our own, you know, our own fears and what worries us and and why we're fearful and digging into that. And there's so many things out there that are different and unusual to us because we, you know, we see the world as we are, not as it truly is, that we sort of are consumed with our own self-interest. And and that's not because we're, you know, you know, narcissists or whatever is because we're, we're we're worried about what people think of us. We're worried about our place in the world. We're worried we're not good enough. And so oftentimes we we, we worry about other people more than we worry about ourselves because we're fearful of what that means for us, that, you know, maybe if I worry about the existence of non-binary people, it's reflective of the fact that I've made decisions based on my gender my entire life. And the existence of a non-binary person maybe makes me question whether I needed to do that. And there's all sorts of stuff that comes up for people when we talk about gender. So yeah, openness is key. But also get to know yourself. What is it that scares you? What's the concern? How does it impact you? And is that because I'm walking around being quietly non-binary? Or is it because that you have something in you that you need to resolve? Um. It's that stoicism right. I draw a line down the middle of a page, and on one side of the page I write all the things I have control over. And on the other side of the page, I write all the things that I have no control over, and the right hand side of the page is full. Um, the things I have control over are limited to one thing, and that really is my next action. Everything else is up, up for grabs.

**Liam**

**00:54:37:06**

Oh indeed, you know what a great you know, what a great sentiment there. And, um, looking forward then. What's on the agenda for you then what's coming up?

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:54:47:15**

Good question. Well, I think this year has been a really exciting year for, for me growing leading culture in my business. You know, we've, we've we've got some really cool clients that we're working with in various ways, whether it's doing training and development or working with them on events that elevate the voices of trans and non-binary people and other marginalised people. I think next year I'm really excited to start, you know, building what we do and reaching new, new clients. Um, we have got some exciting things. I wish we had had this conversation in a week's time because I've got some really exciting news, but I can't say it yet, so watch this space. Keep an eye on my LinkedIn. In the next few weeks, I'll be announcing something that is really important to us as a business and to me personally, and I'm really, really excited about, um, and, you know, we'll continue to, to, to plough away in the background trying to help organisations be places that are safe for everyone and, and help people to, to stick around in organisations that that want them. Uh, that's my aim is to create comfort and security for people who haven't always had that guaranteed.

**Liam**

**00:55:54:04**

And I imagine for, for workplaces especially, that is is crucial, isn't it really? Because if people can feel comfortable in the place where they probably spend most of their time, then that is, uh, that can be a big change for for people.



***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Ali**

**00:56:07:16**

Oh, hugely and I tell you now, um, we think that the millennials are demanding. Right. And me being a millennial, I can say that. But Gen Z are coming and boy, do they know what they're talking about. I think they they are by far my favourite generation so far, quite frankly. I'm sorry to every other generation, but they are so clued up. They know what they like, they know what their values are and they are coming into the workplace thick and fast. So we need as organisations to be ready to meet them where they're at. Otherwise we're going to not learn from the mistakes of the past. And by hook or by crook, Gen Z will will live their values. And if that means quitting work and setting up an Etsy page, then they will do it.

**Liam**

**00:56:53:04**

Well, hopefully. Of course, that will mean that you know, more of them will be, you know, much more receptive and open to, you know, the issues that we've spoken about today and that that can only be a wonderful and good thing, of course. So, um, well, Ali Hannon, thank you so much for joining me on the ITV Pridecast. It's really, really lovely. To chat to you and, and hopefully, you know, from the end of these people, you know, who may have not really been aware of non-binary issues, will be much more aware and much more open to to learning about it.

**Ali**

**00:57:24:23**

I hope so, and you know, much as we, you know, might appear terrifying on first glance, I think underneath we are just soft, squishy humans with weird hobbies.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Ali Hannon***

**Liam**

**00:57:36:06**

Quite right, quite right. Indeed. Uh, Ali, thank you so much again. It was lovely to chat with you. Thanks, Liam. Well, a big thank you once again to Ali Hannon for coming on to the ITV Pridecast to discuss what it means to be non-binary. And thank you for sharing your own very personal story about it as well. And if you want to find out a bit more about the work that Ali does, as well as around the subject of being non-binary, there will be a series of links within the show notes of this month's episode. And a reminder if you're looking to meet fellow members of the LGBTQ+ community, there's plenty of ways that you can do that. If you work for ITV, why not join the ITV Pride network if you haven't done so already? Thanks again for listening to this edition of the ITV Pridecast. I hope you can tune in for the next episode.