



## **I'm Pansexual - Fear and Freedom in Self-Acceptance**

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Childhood is often a time when self-awareness blossoms; it's a period for exploring and shaping the contours of one's identity. For me, those early years were spent navigating a landscape of unchecked bullying at a boarding school. The freedom to be who I wanted, or even explore what that might look like, was an unimaginable thought.

It wasn't until I stepped into the vastness of college life, with vibrant clashes of ideas and courageous exploration of identity all around me, that the dormant seeds of self-discovery finally began to sprout. Here, amidst this chaos, I found the space to being understanding myself.

My story begins with a girl - as it usually does in any coming-of-age story. Her fearless blending of masculine and feminine energies, her defiance of easy categorization, all of it drew me to her. It was a pull towards her very essence, a feeling that I just could not understand.

A year and a half into this amorphous feeling, a friend's simple question, "Do you love her?", struck me like lightning. My inner fog lifted, and my world tilted on its axis.

But the euphoria of understanding my feelings quickly turned into a knot of fear in my stomach. Could I truly be myself without consequence? Would I be judged, misunderstood, othered?

Logically, I knew I was privileged. Yet, I knew this privilege couldn't entirely shield me from deeply rooted beliefs that equated difference with danger.

I decided then that it was just easier to love her in secret.

Almost a decade after "the question," I found the courage to love her out loud.

"Hi, my name is Supriti David, and I am pansexual." The words felt heavy on my tongue when I introduced myself at my first Rise with Pride Employee Resource Group session. It was the first time I had uttered these words in a professional setting. It was scary, my heart was beating out of my chest, in stark contrast against the quiet affirmation and kindness of the space.

In that moment, simply stating my truth felt like an act of profound vulnerability, of strength. But again, why such fear in a setting that I knew to be fundamentally inclusive?

It was because saying it out loud was me carving out space for my true, authentic self.

Each time we hold back a part of ourselves, we create a little less room within our own lives. This feeling isn't exclusive to the queer community. Whether it's a woman holding back her

opinions in a meeting full of men for fear of coming across as too “aggressive,” or a man suppressing his feelings for fear of being seen as too “emotional,” so often we deny ourselves the simple act of being.

It was T.S. Eliot who instilled me in a quiet courage. In his poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, he asks, “Do I dare disturb the universe?” Eliot's question resonated with a painful familiarity.

So often in a professional setting, the mere mention of “sexuality” can trigger discomfort, as if love itself were somehow inappropriate for the workplace. “Why are you being so vulgar?” “Why even talk about ‘them’ when there are so few of them?”, I’ve been asked.

So, do I dare challenge ingrained assumptions of my peers, family, or colleagues, and risk the shifts in their perception of me? Is it worth the potential discomfort to speak up when a casual, homophobic joke lands? Do I dare disturb my universe? These are fears I have to confront and make a choice.

The choice I make today is yes. Yes, I dare. I have let parts of me die far too many times because I was afraid saving them would not be worthwhile.

My journey of self-acceptance may not be relevant to the deliverables I am employed for. But, when we are no longer fighting ourselves, we are free to bring our whole selves to everything we do, and that confidence is reflected in our work.

Which is why I share this personal journey with you today. To show you that my own path to self-acceptance has been riddled with fear, confusion, apprehension of the unknown, and avoidance. And if this has been my journey, I believe your journey of understanding and, hopefully, accepting the queer experience will go through similar ebbs and flows.

It’s okay to be afraid of what you don’t know. Curiosity, like love, is yet another fundamental instinct we all share. All I ask of you this Pride Month is to lean into your curiosity. Stop fixating on the differences and worrying about the “why” when it comes to love. Simply try to honour it, and embrace being human.