

Katie Stripe – PG Medicine conference presentation

Hi

I am Katie Stripe – Senior Learning designer in post graduate medicine. But most of you will know that.

I have been at Imperial for nearly 10 years and most of that time has been spent in different roles in PG medicine. I did take a break and go to Engineering for a while but didn't really like it so I came straight back.

Before Imperial I worked at University of Brighton and as an EFL teacher in Prague.

And before that I was a student of geophysical sciences at the University of East Anglia. I got a degree – just.

Then even further back I went to an all-girls grammar school in rural Lincolnshire – which was a daily joy.

Many of you in the audience will have heard me speak before and will know I usually wing it a little bit.

But in a break from tradition today I have scripted myself. Partly because I am looking at a screen, partly so I don't waffle and partly so I can share.

Like everyone else who has spoken today I am going to share some of my own experiences as a student and as a member of the Imperial College community.

First, I will tell you something that will not surprise many people

hold up sign

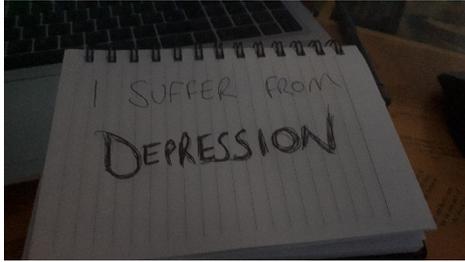


As a staff member at Imperial that has never been a real issue – there is a great community here, particularly in medicine. However, I do not want the take home message from my experience to be that Imperial is always open minded and accepting.

The message is I have been lucky. Very lucky. And I cannot speak to the experiences of others.

Now I am going to tell you something which you may find a bit more surprising

hold up sign



Now I imagine some of you are making assumptions that those two things are linked. They are not. My experiences on this front are less positive than those relating to my earlier revelation. I have definitely experienced people at Imperial that think I need looking after or somehow protecting.

I do not!

I must also add that there are some fantastically supportive people here who have without doubt helped me through some tricky times. Once again I cannot speak for everyone in our community.

So why am I telling you this?

1st because I can

I work in an environment where I feel supported enough to be able to make these statements without feeling like I am being judged.

I AM LUCKY

2nd because I am 37 years old, I have had a lot of therapy and I am ok with it. I know that if anyone has a problem with either of those things – it is their problem.

However, this knowledge comes with experience.

I AM LUCKY!

Here is the important thing. Being able to say 'I'm gay' for me is A LOT easier than admitting I suffer from depression.

For so many reasons that obviously require a lot more therapy to unpick.

However, what I do know is that for me going to university was the place I started to unpack these things and deal with them.

I could do that because I was away from home.

I WAS LUCKY

Your grow up gay (Especially in rural Lincolnshire) and you learn to read people because if you say the wrong thing to the wrong person it may not end well.

As you grow up and move into employment you keep learning that because the majority of people assume you are straight until they are told otherwise. This means that effectively you have to come out to every person you meet.

Which is exhausting.

But I have always been able to read people and know if I need to keep my mouth shut.

I WAS LUCKY

The students and new staff members we are accepting now are not as lucky as I have been.

- They may still be in a home environment where they cannot be 'out'
- They will not get the same physical interactions with others that I have had
- They may be more isolated because the rules of social interaction have changed

We cannot know the situation of someone at the other end of a screen, especially if they are one of 50 and we have a duty to make sure no-one is even further marginalised

that they have a safe space to grow

as students, as scientists, as colleagues and as people.

You may be wondering why in a session that is about inclusion and accessibility I chose to 'come out' via the least accessible method possible.

1. Everyone has the right to come out when and how they like on their own terms (and that is not just about sexuality)
2. Some of you will have missed it – because you are watching on a small screen, because you have a bad internet connection or because you simply weren't paying attention.

That is not a judgement – it just is.

But be aware what else you might miss and how important that piece of information may be to the person sharing.

Finally – I do not have the answers.

I just know that there are things we need to consider. That I am lucky and if my sharing helps us provide a better experience for ALL our students and colleagues then that is good.

Thank you for listening.