

# Sinan Jarrad

## Yikes! He's a she!

Disclaimer: The following story describes my personal experience, as well views and opinions of life in the Middle East. Views and opinions should not be generalized towards my ethnicity and/or religious beliefs. An alias name has been chosen for the individual mentioned in my story.

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Growing up in the Middle East, culture plays a vital role in people's lives, which can be both beneficial and detrimental to the growth of individuals. On the one hand, I personally love how it promotes for things like kindness, generosity, chivalry, and close family ties. Don't be surprised if you see two friends fighting over who's paying the bill after a meal, this is the norm rather than the exception. I'm also a proud Muslim who wishes the media would convey a more neutral image about Muslims. After all, the name of the religion "Islam" is derived from the word "Salam", which literally translates to "peace" in Arabic. On the other hand, by being so tapped into culture, this may restrain people from stretching their comfort zone, and lead them to blindly follow customs and traditions.

Even though I've lived in the United States for 6 years as a child, coming to London was still an eye-opening experience, first of which hit me and I had no clue about it. It all started in my first week at university. I bet everyone was excited as I were to meet new people and start a new chapter of our lives. Things were going great and I met lots of interesting people. Strangely though, most of the friends I made during the first week or two of university were female, which made me look forward to meeting new male friends.

On a weekday during that first week, a group of mates and I were having lunch, and had a conversation about whom we have met and found interesting, so that we could introduce each other to those persons later on, and that's when I mentioned Chris, whom I have met the day earlier. I told everyone how glad I was for at least meeting one male acquaintance in university, although not in my same course, which was totally fine. For some reason, confusion struck everyone, they started asking "wait a minute, Chris is a dude?", unsurely I replied "well, I guess so", everyone had second thoughts, they would get back to me on his/her gender soon.

A few days went by, and I see those whom I had lunch with previously, they had told me that Chris was indeed a young lady. I wasn't that surprised, have I had a closer look and an actual conversation with her, I would have obviously been able to tell that she was a young lady.

Nevertheless, as naïve as I sounded, I was not used to being around girls with a bit of a masculine side, after all, in the Middle East, girls are raised to being feminine and showing a much softer side than men do. It simply is not acceptable for someone to have a homosexual orientation, not from a cultural perspective nor from a religious perspective.

Looking back at the situation, I'm glad I didn't hurt Chris' feelings, all of this happened within a span of a few days, and I have only seen Chris once or twice before this happened. However, I truly hope this wasn't the case with a clerk at a supermarket which I shopped at, as she once helped me with finding a product, and as naïve and polite as I thought I were, I thanked her by telling her "thank you Sir". I found out that she was a lady after going there with a friend, I told her how nice I thought that gentleman was, my friend corrected me "you mean the young lady?", on the surface I remained calm and said "yeah yeah, the young lady", yet deep inside I was thinking "Yikes, he's a she!".

As an ending paragraph to my short story, I believe that everyone deserves to be loved, respected, and appreciated in life, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, skin color, or sexual orientation. Never judge anyone based on faulty assumptions or prejudices, I'm not saying that I had any assumptions towards Chris or the clerk, I'm expressing how glad I am that I didn't, and it took a lot of time and going through many experiences for me to get to this point. As a society, we should preach for people to feel comfortable in their own skin. Only when that is achieved, we can stop judging others to hide our own insecurities. Always remember that life comes at you the way you perceive it, you can own very fundamental things in life yet feel that you have the world in between your hands by being positive and grateful. There is always room to make the best out of what you have. Never take things for granted, whether it's your family, friends, health, wealth, education, or any big or little thing that matters to you...

God bless...