

Speaking After the Split

Andy's Story

My marriage broke down approximately a year and a half after I realised I was transgender and came out to my spouse. On the surface, my partner had been mostly supportive of my transition, but had privately been having a difficult time coming to terms with it. As a result, they started having an emotional affair with a mutual friend. Eventually, it all came out, and our marriage broke down. During this time, I had been increasingly struggling to keep up with my uni work. I also had ongoing medical problems which made the situation even more difficult to manage. Had my marriage remained strong, I think I would have been able to cope with the medical stresses with the support of the university's disability services. The relationship breakdown, and the impact it also had on my gender transition, made it impossible to continue. I had to interrupt my studies. When I talked to my programme tutor about my decision to interrupt and my reasons, she was sympathetic and sensitive. She also offered practical support, such as asking whether I needed help finding accommodation. This was very reassuring and validated my feelings; I had thought I needed to roll my relationship breakdown in with the medical issues in order to 'justify' my emotional state. I felt that relationship breakdown by itself wasn't a 'proper' reason, that I ought to be able to continue studying regardless, and that it meant I was 'weak' that I needed a break from study. Talking to my programme tutor helped me to acknowledge the seriousness and legitimacy of relationship breakdown as a cause for interrupting study.

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I have been attending counselling and couples counselling in order to work through the trauma and relationship dysfunction, and I am preparing to return to study soon. I am determined to return and complete my degree, as it is something I am doing just 'for me'. During and leading up to the trauma of my relationship breakdown, I feel that I somehow lost some of myself, that I was trying to maintain the relationship and appease my partner. Now that we are working through it with the help of counselling, I feel more confident and determined to attend to my own happiness and ambitions by returning to study and my gender transition.

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Alice's Story

When I was 17, I met my first boyfriend. I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him. I loved him deeply and my world very quickly started to centre around him. I don't know when it happened, but as time went on, our relationship turned away from love and into control. He stopped me from seeing friends, he decided what I would wear and how I'd have my hair. He'd often hold me round my waist when we were out, not through compassion, but through restriction. I spent hours waiting for him at his house while he was out with his Dad, drinking and doing drugs. He would come home and expect me to be a dutiful girlfriend, providing for him in whatever way he wanted. I isolated myself from friends at school, I lied to my family about my happiness, and I felt incredibly alone. Because I was blinded by those early days of affection, I stayed with him, and, for all the wrong reasons, I decided to go to a local university. I felt like he needed me and that maybe I could nurture the good in him.

During my second year, I began to see things more clearly and how our love had turned to abuse. I spiralled into a deep depression where I questioned where my life was heading. What would my boyfriend say to me if I said I was unhappy? Maybe he would say "this is it for you, we were made for each other," or "you can't leave me alone, I need you. I can't live without you." What would people around me say if I decided to leave him? Maybe they would say "relationships are hard, you have to work to keep them," or "you've been together four years now; it's just a spat, you'll work through it," or "you two are such a lovely couple. You always look so happy!"

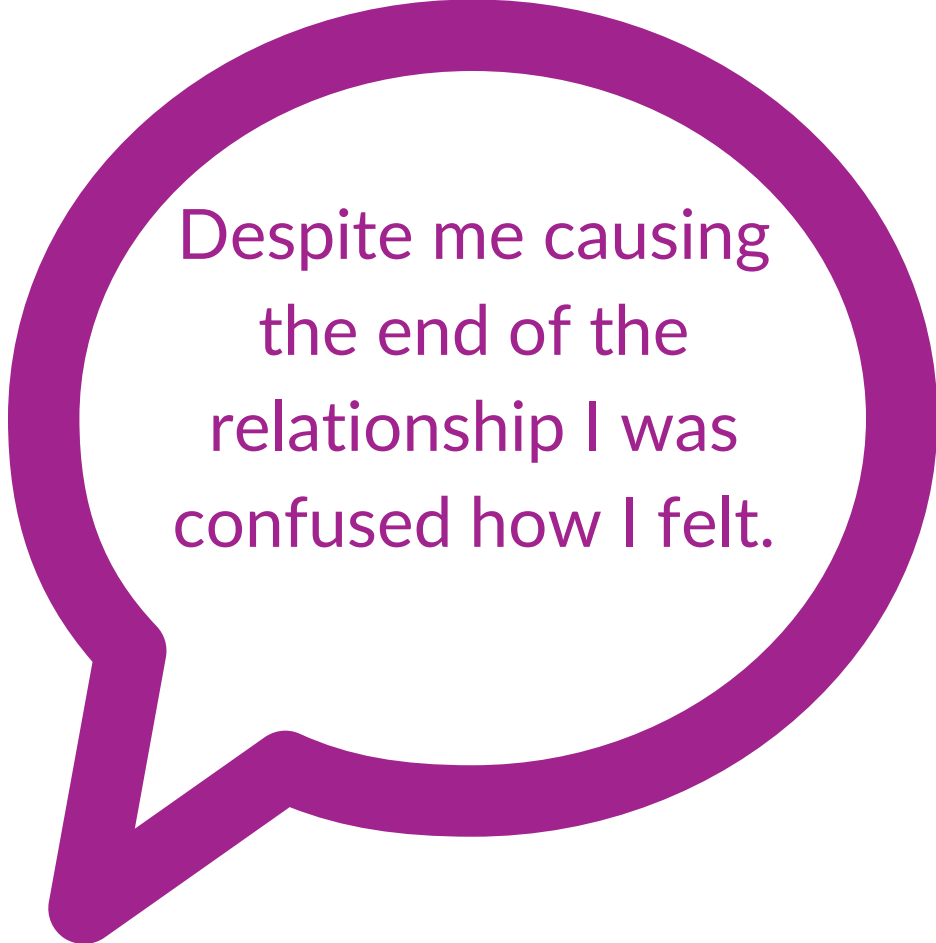
I still remember the day when I took the plunge and spoke to my new friends over coffee. I was nervous as everyone sat down with their different drinks and watched me confess that I was struggling and didn't know what to do. They didn't say any of the things I thought they would say. They told me that I was, and I am more than he allowed me to be, and that they would be there for me whatever I decided to do. University for me was a place of learning, a place of growth in the subject I studied. But it was more than that. I learnt that everyone is on a journey, a different journey but it doesn't mean that we have to be alone.



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Jayne's Story

I was with my boyfriend for about a year when I started to feel things weren't quite right. He was a few years above me and was going to be leaving university in a few months. I was feeling insecure about 'the what next'. Rather than bringing it up with him, I tried to push any doubts down and to carry on as normal. I think a part of me felt afraid to bring anything up in case it rocked the boat or brought forward any difficult decisions. Another part of me felt silly, there was no visible cracks in our relationships, why would one of us moving away change things. I didn't talk to anyone, not even my closest friends, about what I was feeling at this time and my insecurity just grew the closer we got to the end of term. I ended up cheating on my boyfriend – something that ultimately ended our relationship.



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The end of the relationship was messy. There was a period when we tried to work things out, but we couldn't move on. Despite me causing the end of the relationship I was confused with how I felt. Things hadn't felt right for a while – it was like we had been actors playing the part of being the perfect couple to our friends and maybe even to ourselves. But I carried a lot of guilt about how I went about things and how the relationship ended. My social life became complicated. As we had shared friendship groups, I became excluded from some events due to being the one in the wrong or at other meetups with some people things were awkward. At times I felt very lonely and isolated as I had gone from spending all my time with someone to now having a lot of time by myself. Me and my ex continued to argue after we broke-up. I was very distracted which wasn't the best timing with my end of year exams coming up. Luckily, I had a small group of girlfriends that got me through that difficult time – dragging me to the gym, picking up notes from lectures that I missed, organizing study days, and just making sure I ate enough. Focusing on exams and my ex still being in my life I think made it difficult to process things at the time.

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Kate's Story

I was working full time in Marketing and doing a part time distance learning degree when I got dumped by the guy I had assumed I would marry. It came out of the blue and completely shattered my world. Suddenly, my entire vision of my future was gone, and nothing in the present seemed to have meaning anymore. I could get through the days at work because I had bills to pay, but my studies absolutely fell off a cliff. What was the point in studying for a future I could no longer imagine? At the time I didn't really talk to others. I was worried after the first flush of sympathy from friends I didn't feel like I could talk about it anymore, that people might think I was a drag. Looking back on things I realise I could have talked to other more than I thought I could.

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Thankfully, I got through it, but my methods were controversial, so I don't recommend them to everyone! After a long low period, I realised I had to reimagine a different future for myself. To do this, I radically changed my life. I quit my job, deferred my module on my degree, gave notice on my flat, sold my car and moved abroad. I changed my career path; I quit Marketing and started working in education. Once I had made these changes, I found I could start getting excited about the future again, so I picked my degree back up with a switch in focus (luckily distance learning can be flexible!) Now, twenty years later, I am so grateful for the catalyst that led to those changes in my life, as my new path is much, much more fulfilling than the old path would have been. Sometimes things happen for a reason.