

# Girls will be boys

*Charnah Ellesse founded girlswillbeboys to open up conversations around modern day ideas of gender and tackle the stereotypes often prescribed to women with shaved heads*



**Girlswillbeboys started as a fashion blog with my friends, because we all said 'we dress like boys'.**

I thought, why keep it as a fashion blog, when I can turn it into a platform that can help people? I wanted to find a way to help get these messages out. There are so many feminist platforms, but I didn't feel like there was any speaking out about the whole broad spectrum of gender. I wanted to create content for girlswillbeboys that would be able to reach a bigger audience.

**It's easier to digest something when it's more personal.** Initially, I wanted my first project, *OMG She's Bald*, to be an exhibition, but I'm not a photographer, and I felt like I preferred watching short films or documentaries. People are so passive, so I thought a film, with a screening, was more of an experience and would engage people more. It opened up conversations, and the people in the film came to the screening and were able to talk to each other about their experiences. It was really positive.

**I felt like there was such a stigma around women with shaved heads,** but I also felt like it was becoming a trend - and it's also so much more than that. I shaved my head five years ago, and I was often asked why I'd done it. My story wasn't that interesting, but I knew that other women's were. Some have lost their hair, some have chosen to shave it and it makes them feel good. I wanted it to empower people who didn't have a choice. I wanted to challenge the misconceptions around women with shaved heads: that they have cancer, that they're in the army, that they're gay. Those things can be true, but they aren't always.

**The platform isn't about me, it's about amplifying other voices.** I did a swimwear shoot with clothing brand Weekday, and they understood my vision for girlswillbeboys. I'd shot with them before and they'd seen my body on Instagram; they had a selection of swimwear sizes that they pinned to fit. That was the major thing; they just wanted our bodies as they were. They didn't need my measurements to confirm if they wanted to book me or not. The film I made with them was to find out what 'girls will be boys' meant to people. For some, it means dressing in men's clothes, or it means transgender rights, or it means more understanding for non-binary people. Weekday really loved that message, and so I spoke to people with different backgrounds, genders, sexualities, and asked them how they interpreted that phrase. It's pretty beautiful.

*"In order for something to be normalised, you have to talk about it"*

**I want to pass the mic, and ask people about their experiences.** I don't want to sit here and say 'this is what being transgender means' or 'this is what being non-binary is like'. I never want to speak on behalf of people, because even if it's coming from a good place, things get misinterpreted. The platform means I have a way of letting other people speak and be heard.

**I came out on Instagram. I realised that I'd always suppressed any feelings I had towards women.** I don't know if it was

internalised homophobia, but I didn't want people to make that assumption of me, that I was a lesbian because I had a shaved head. I wanted people to see me, not my shaved head or my sexuality. I didn't want to live up to that stereotype. But the whole point was that this is who I am. A lot of the time, people are scared to really be who they are. But I'm here, and I'm queer, and that's all there is to it.

**There's not really any reason for people to know what genitals other people have.** Unless you're interested in a sexual relationship with that person, it has nothing to do with you. The positive side to having labels is that it lets people who might be struggling with their own gender identity or sexuality know that they're not alone, but the flip side of that is the negativity that comes with being labelled as

something people might not like. It's not really anyone else's business though. If it's not for you, leave it alone.

**It's strange that the ultimate goal of girlswillbeboys is that it's not necessary.** In order for something to be normalised, you have to talk about it, and then eventually it won't be a thing. It's never about likes, it's about reach. Not for self-validation, but so it can help people. ♦





as told to terrijane dow portrait: melanie lehmann

Charnah Ellesse is the founder of [girlswillbeboys](http://girlswillbeboys.com), an online platform opening up discussions around modern-day gender roles. *OMG SHE'S BALD* is a film which explores modern femininity through women who have shaved their heads. Visit [gw-bb.com](http://gw-bb.com), or follow her on instagram at [@girlswillbeboys\\_](https://www.instagram.com/girlswillbeboys_) and [@ellessechar](https://www.instagram.com/ellessechar)

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