



GIRL LIKE YOU

PRESS KIT

Tagline

Could your love transcend gender?

One Line Synopsis

Over six years, a couple battles to stay together as one of them transitions genders; confronting the effects of new body parts, changing gender roles as well as navigating their own evolving sexual identities.

Short Synopsis

When Lauren first saw Lewis smashing out the drums on stage, with smudged eyeliner, knotted hair and ripped jeans, she fell in love. Lewis had been open about identifying as transgender, but was still physically presenting as male and fairly certain he'd stay that way. Six months into their relationship, Lewis tells Lauren that he wants to medically transition genders, change pronouns from He to She, and become Elle. Over six years, we watch a couple desperate to stay together, as they navigate the effects of new body parts, changing gender roles as well as battling their own evolving sexual identities. **Girl Like You** uses the dramatic reality of changing genders while in a relationship to explore the larger thematic questions of the fluidity of gender and sexual identity, and the self sacrifice required to nurture a lover through life.



Directors' Statement

Girl Like You started as an idea for a short documentary by two twenty-three year old filmmakers, with nothing more than a question to one of their friends: **what was it like to be born in the wrong body?** This one question snowballed into a documentary shot over six years, that documents a gender transition from start to finish, and explores the fluidity of gender and sexuality through the prism of one couples relationship.

When we first began shooting in 2015, the focus of our narrative revolved solely around Elle's gender transition. But over time, we started realising what a profoundly important role her girlfriend Lauren was playing in the story. Lauren provided emotional support at times of doubt, financial assistance to supply Elle with hormones, and consistently put her own fears about the transition to one side in order to help her partner. We started gravitating towards the relationship as our central narrative, and as Elle ping-ponged through new stages of the transition, we observed and documented what ripple effect these new phases had on her partner.

Similarly, the feedback from our peers echoed the same sentiments, and all of the questions that started filtering back were about Lauren. **How did she feel about her partner transitioning? How did she label her sexuality? Would the relationship survive?** We discovered that audiences were investing in the couples journey, and even rooting for them to make it to the other side. This proved to be what set **Girl Like You** apart from the crowd, as we explore relatively uncharted waters in a bid to understand what its like to be in love with someone as they changed genders.

We are incredibly passionate about telling this kind of love story, but for us it comes from a personal place. We are the directors', but also best friends with our subjects. Elle and Samantha grew up on the same street in a small suburb in the Perth hills, and Lauren has been one of our best friends since we were teenagers. The battle between our cameras and our friendships hasn't always been easy to navigate, but ultimately Elle and Lauren have always trusted us to tell their story. From that trust, we have been granted unflinching access and honesty, which translates to authenticity on screen.

For us as directors and friends, it is a great honour to project this love story into the social consciousness of our world; normalising transgender relationships on screen, dissolving misconceptions about gender and sexuality, and exploring the otherwise untouched subjects of love in a transgender world.



Directors/writers: Samantha Marlowe & Frances Elliott

Character Bios

Primary Cast – “The Couple”

Elloise Walsh is a contemplative thinker with a dark sense of humour. She is highly articulate, very intelligent, but struggles with inward and obsessive thinking when it comes to her gender dysphoria. She started playing the drums in high school before coming out as transgender, to show the world 'how much of a man she could be,' and now uses it as a way to channel her frustrations. She now plays alongside two of her best mates from high school in the popular Perth band “The Love Junkies,” known for their rugged brand of grunge rock.

*Please note, Elle goes by her now dead name “Lewis” in the first act of the documentary, before transitioning on screen to Elloise, or Elle for short.

Lauren Black is a fiercely stylish and ultra sassy vegan who builds race cars for her family's business, while working in the pits on race days. In serious situations, you can always rely on Lauren to crack an inappropriate joke to ease the tension. She is hard working, self assured, witty, and extremely protective of the ones she loves, however she is a self proclaimed ‘fixer’ - who carries the weight of fixing and carrying other peoples problems on her shoulders, which at times erodes her own emotional wellbeing.

Supporting Cast

Mitch McDonald is the co-founder and lead singer of 'The Love Junkies,' and Elle's best mate since they were thirteen. They bonded over being misfits and music nerds from broken families, a friendship that would go on to last a decade. Mitch is a musical genius, driven and talented, but frustrated that the band is still on the edge of success, and even more frustrated when the band starts receiving attention for Elle's gender, rather than the music.

Peta Walsh is Elle's mother, who lives in the conservative country town of Roleystone, which is fraught with religious fanatics and gossip. Peta loves and accepts Elle for who she is, but she is consistently grieving the loss of the son she gave birth to, and the future that she thought that boy would have.



Elloise Walsh



Lauren Black



Mitch McDonald



Peta Walsh



Style

Set to the eclectic backdrop of the Fremantle arts scene, Lauren and Elle live a typically Australian middle-class, early 20s existence. We enter share-homes peppered with musical instruments and wardrobes bursting at the seams with op-shop dresses. Money is scarce, there are dishes in the sink, and the door is forever revolving with friends and booze. The cluttered, quirky and frugal lives of Lauren and Elle is reflected in the documentary's style, with a mishmash of sit down interviews, video diaries, home videos and fly on the wall observational shooting. This patchwork style of storytelling fits perfectly with the nature of the story - which is personal, complicated, messy and complex - but above all, honest.

Comparable to the Oscar nominated documentary **Stories We Tell**, where the director questions her own family members to unearth a family secret, **Girl Like You** utilises the close relationships between the filmmakers and their subjects to offer a refreshingly candid look into love in a transgender world.

Observational Documentary

The camera watches observational style, as the pair fight in bedrooms, break down in bathrooms, and reconcile at parties filled with friends. This Cinéma Vérité style coverage seeks to completely immerse the audience in the homes and lives of the main characters, while sit-down interviews display confessions and truths too raw for Elle and Lauren to say in front of one another, granting audiences amazing access to conflict and intimacy.

Girl Like You utilises video diaries recorded by Elle over a span of ten years. They provide an unfiltered look into her mind as she battles with her gender identity and the repercussions it has on her life. She began filming these videos, long before the documentary had even begun, as a coping mechanism, something she discovered on 'transgender YouTube.' For transgender people, the online space can be a safe haven. It's a place where they can find other people just like them when the physical world feels overtly cis.* Search engines, medical websites, video diaries and transgender testimonials all feature heavily in this story, as Elle searches for answers by watching people who have gone through, or are about to go through, their own personal transition.

*Cis or cisgender: denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.





Music & Score

Scored by a combination of grunge-rock bangers by 'The Love Junkies' and slow, self reflective score written and performed by Ned Beckley of Envelope Audio, the music sets the tone of an always complicated and warmly messy tale. With each stage of the transition, Ned writes stripped back, acoustic music that not only matches Elle's solo musical style, but also Elle's mental state at the time.

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**Oh my dear mother, your son is half a daughter,
and although I tried to drown her, she can really
hold her breath. For about twenty years in fact,
she's stolen all my air, so unless I drown as well,
there will never be her death.**

Lyrics to **GLORIA TO MY DYSPHORIA** by Elle Walsh





Structure

Told chronologically over three acts, Elle's gender transition is the driving force of the narrative, throwing the couple into new and challenging phases of their relationship as Elle's body and mental state evolves.

The writing process employed the three-act structure model used in drama, focusing on the characters' emotional journey. Each act is bound by Elle and Lauren's separate desires - with unexpected changes shifting the direction of their journey. This dramatic arc is based around Lauren and Elle's need to change, to acknowledge their flaws in order to come out of the transition transformed - with a knowledge and happiness they could have never achieved if not for this on-screen journey.

We see three distinct phases of their relationship play out on screen. Act one **"Love in Limbo"** explores Elle's need to feel complete, the confrontation that all could change, and the stagnation of their relationship until a decision is made.

Act two **"Trans-Formation"** deals with the physical and mental transition that comes with Hormone Replacement Therapy and the severe impact this has on both Elle and Lauren individually, as well as what it does to them as a couple. Due to the enormity of her physical transition, Elle sinks into a place where she is unable to care for anyone besides herself and pushes the most important people in her life away. Lauren's need to 'fix' the gender dysphoria Elle feels drains her of her own happiness, and sinks her into a depression so deep she feels she is downing. Unable to find common ground, we see a harrowing end to their relationship.

And finally, in act three **"Somewhere Over The Rainbow"** Elle and Lauren acknowledge and accept that Elle had to sacrifice everything and everyone in her life in order to get through the gender transition alive, and as heartbreak fades, Lauren is able to feel pride in the profound role she played in Elle's transformation, while Elle is able to go out into the world as her authentic self.



STORY TREATMENT

*Please note: Elle goes by her now dead name "Lewis" in the first act of the documentary, before transitioning on screen to Elloise, or Elle for short.

ACT 1 "Love in Limbo"

When Lauren first saw Lewis smashing out the drums on stage, with smudged eyeliner, knotted hair and ripped jeans, she fell in love. He had been open about identifying as transgender, but was still physically presenting as male and fairly certain he'd stay that way. Six months into their relationship, living together and deeply in love, Lauren finds her boyfriend lamenting all the ways he wishes his body was like hers. She wonders, can Lewis live happily in his male body forever? Pushing down her fears, Lauren helps Lewis as he experiments; advising him on what dresses to wear and how to apply makeup, but she secretly worries how far her heterosexuality can be pushed, and whether female hormones will change the personality she fell in love with.

The couple are thrown into limbo as their relationship is slowly consumed by Lewis' indecision; will he transition? His research promises that once on Oestrogen; he'll stop being so angry, his emotions will make sense and his sexual roles will change. The down side? The side effects are dangerous and irreversible. On a Monday, Lewis wakes up and tells Lauren he is committed to transitioning, but by Friday he isn't so sure. Lewis repeats this cycle for months, which turns into two years, and Lauren has whiplash. Unable to watch the all relationships in his life crumble under the weight of obsession, Lewis decides to take a leap of faith and transition genders. Lauren tries to take comfort in the fact that a decision has finally been made, thinking the worst is surely behind them.



ACT 2 "Transformation"

Lewis officially changes his name to Elle, and switches pronouns from He to She. With each pill, Elle's testosterone lowers and Lauren mourns the loss of muscular arms and adjusts to new breasts and hips. As she watches her lover's body change, Lauren is faced with her deepest fears, can she be sexually attracted to Elle as a woman? Elle starts seeing all the physical traits that she has longed for her entire life, and enters a phase where she is unable to talk about anything but the transition. While Lauren is still attracted to the changing body, she fears she is being left behind while Elle's head is in the clouds.

Now Elle is presenting as female, lesbian is a term that more people are using to label her. But for Lauren, who's only dated men her whole life, she never contemplated having to 'come out.' But now her boyfriend is her girlfriend, does that make Lauren a lesbian? Her hesitation to call herself a lesbian raises identity issues for Elle, who feels like Lauren doesn't view her as a woman, and therefore won't come out as gay. Despite her hesitations, Lauren pushes herself to 'come out' to her family, colleagues and extended circle of friends. The happiness from Elle is short lived - she is now a year into Hormone Replacement Therapy, and is still getting misgendered. It makes her question why she bothered to transition at all - she wonders, was it all worth it?

As the months go on Elle's body becomes more feminine, but her moods get darker, and the couple are mentally and physically drained. For Elle, the emotional toll of years on an incredibly high dose of Oestrogen results in high irritability, extreme depression and a complete mental breakdown. The level of support Lauren has been funnelling into her partner is no longer sustainable, and she feels herself starting to drown. Lauren is forced to ask; will their relationship survive? She tries to tell Elle that she is struggling, but Elle is not in a place where she can support Lauren as well as herself. Elle finds herself crippled by guilt over the affect her transition has had on her partner, and she contemplates how much easier everyones lives would be if she committed suicide. Incapable of giving anything more, Lauren makes the heartbreaking decision to end the relationship with Elle.



ACT 3 "Somewhere Over The Rainbow"

Completely blindsided by the breakup, Elle is unable to accept her role in its demise, and blames Lauren for robbing them of the future they planned together. Lauren understands Elle's anger, but is completely burnt out, and feels she has lost who she once was. In a breakthrough moment, Elle recognises the profound role that Lauren played in supporting her through her transition, and knows she couldn't have survived it without her. After a tumultuous six years, with dizzying highs and excruciating lows - although no longer together, Elle and Lauren will never forget each other, how much they both grew in love and the incomparable impact they had on each others lives.





Themes & Global Resonance

Girl Like You uses the dramatic reality of changing gender roles within a relationship to explore the larger thematic questions of the fluidity of gender and sexual identity, and the self sacrifice required to nurture a lover through life. It is a deeply personal journey of two people in love, but it's ultimately a story that is innately human and relatable to anyone who has experienced love, heartbreak, or has asked questions around their own gender and sexuality. Drawing on such universal themes means that Girl Like You has the footing to infiltrate the lives of not only the LGBTQI+ community (it's primary audience), but to cast a much wider net, and make it's mark on the hearts and lives of audiences all around the world.







Samantha Marlowe

Director/Writer

Samantha Marlowe is a documentary writer and director who has worked within film and television across many genres. Her directing has won awards and screened internationally, going on to be Officially selected for numerous academy accredited festivals. Her short documentary The Beeman was nominated for "Best Documentary Short" at the ATOM awards (2018) and won in the same category at the WA Unlocked awards (2020). Samantha recently wrote and directed the ABC feature documentary Girl Like You (2021).



Cody Greenwood

Producer

Cody Greenwood is the founder of Rush Films. Recognised by Screen Producer's Australia as 'One to Watch', Cody has since earned herself a reputation as one of Australia's most promising film producers. Her latest feature documentary 'Under the Volcano' premiered at SXSW and is being distributed globally by Universal Pictures. Cody has spent the last decade working alongside some of Australia's most prominent diverse storytellers to create authentic and thought-provoking content. Her most recent productions include Sparkles, Tooty and documentary series Girl Like You.



Frances Elliott

Director/Writer

Frances Elliott is a writer and director from Perth, Western Australia, who has worked across broadcast, film and documentary. Her drama work has won 'Best Film' and 'Audience Choice Award' at Revelation Film Festival, and her documentary work has been officially selected for multiple academy accredited festivals globally; including a nomination for 'Best Documentary Short' at Short Shorts in Tokyo. She has recently completed the feature documentary Girl Like You, which has been commissioned by the ABC.

The Team

A young man and woman are shown in profile, facing each other and kissing. The man, on the left, has brown hair tied in a bun and is wearing a black and white horizontally striped t-shirt. The woman, on the right, is wearing a red top and a blue bandana with a white paisley pattern. They are standing in front of a white fence, with green foliage and trees in the background. The lighting is soft and warm, suggesting late afternoon or early evening.

RUSH

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