**Page 1:**

Title: I am being - A comic by Atlas in collaboration with YDAS

Visual description: AJ’s persona character called Lil Dude with eyes closed and smiling. There’s an infinity symbol of autism around Lil Dude’s neck.

**Page 2:**

Hi there! Before I start the comic I suppose I should introduce myself!

My name is AJ! I am 17 and from Naarm (Melbourne)! I am Queer & Trans and I am autistic and have ADHD.

My pronouns are: It-He-They

I am an artist.

I have a cat (His name is Harry) and I am pretty new to drawing comics.

You might be able to tell I like decorating with stars.

Visual description:

Lil Dude on top right and bottom left corner

An image of Lil Dude’s cat

The flag for Queer and Trans, and the symbol of autism.

**Page 3:**

This is Lil Dude! It’s just my persona but a tad simpler. I wouldn’t want to be painting a Mona Lisa on every page…

Everything about it is the same as me, same pronouns, interests, cat, etc. Well except for the name. I call him lil dude coz look at him! He’s a lil dude!

Lil Dude says “I will be taking over from here! My story depicts my experience as a queer neurodivergent person. It tells my journey through intersectionality, self acceptance & community!

Visual description:

Lil Dude has a big head, little legs and round hands.

**Page 4:**

Often times when I was growing up I would find myself being “othered”. I felt out of place or different. I was often called a “tomboy” when I was younger, it wasn’t negative and I did feel like and call myself a tomboy (I later realised that I am trans).

While it wasn’t inherently a bad thing, none of my friends were really tomboys. And well, it felt lonely sometimes.

Lil Dude says “Other times I found myself feeling different was when I would get in trouble at school for not having the understanding of unspoken social rules. One specific occasion where I didn’t understand why I got in trouble was when two of my friends were fighting and used me as a messaging system.

Friend “A” would tell me to go tell friend “B” that she was a meanie. Friend B would then tell me to go back and say that friend A had ugly hair. I didn’t quite understand that it was bad and not helping the situation because I was never told why it was wrong. I just did what my friends asked.

Visual description:

An image of Lil Dude wearing the pants version of the uniform (in blue colour) to school every year. There are two female characters wearing the dress vision of uniform (in red colour).

**Page 5:**

As I went into high school, the otherness did not go away, it became much worse. All of a sudden I was one of the very few kids from the tiny school who never went on big camps or excursions. I was no longer above average at school. I didn’t know many people at all or even play any sports.

For a long while high school felt terrible. But over time I slowly started to learn about other people. I learnt about whole communities and eventually about myself. I started to realise that I was queer and that my interests weren’t so odd. I made a lot of friends.

I found myself a part of a small community. Things started feeling not so lonely. I had found groups of people that I could relate to. I began forming a lot of really close and long lasting connections.

Visual description:

Lil Dude sitting on the floor surrounded by faceless grey figures.

Lil Dude in front of a queer flag with question marks and text “Am I gay?”

Lil Dude talking cheerfully with 2 other friends.

**Page 6:**

The more people I met and the more time I spent with all these new friends I learnt thing, I learnt so many things about the world around me. I was also spending much more time online, reading and browsing and that’s when I eventually started to figure out that I was neurodivergent.

A lot of my feelings and experiences aligned with what I was reading and what my ND friends were also experiencing. I questioned and researched for a while. I began feeling really comfortable with my neurodivergent identity, though at some point I hit a rock in the road that completely threw me off. I overall just wasn’t doing well and felt uncomfortable, I felt like myself diagnosis was invalid and I was feeling a lot of internalised ableism. Having worked through internalised homophobia I thought this would be easier.

It was not.

I spent a long time, over a year, rebuilding my relationship with myself and my confidence in who I am, I learnt much more and met new great people like me. Everyone was so supportive and kind.

Visual description:

Lil Dude on his mobile phone chatting with friends

Lil Dude looked worried. There’s a thought bubble with the infinity symbol of autism being crossed through.

Lil Dude talking to a friend. In dialogue bubble there’s the symbol of autism.

**Page 7:**

Atlas Asides!

Here’s a little break from the comic so I can highlight some of my past and present hyperfixations and special interests!

Games!

* Legend of Zelda
* BOTW & TOTK
* Platoon
* Minecraft

Art!

* Lino/Printmaking
* Artbooks
* Music (MXMTOON & Mitski)
* Colours
* Zines

Shows & Movies!

* Spiderman: Into the spider verse
* Fantastic Mr.Fox
* Turning Red
* Bluey
* The Own House

Sometimes I go through periods where I don’t feel so strongly about some of these things and it can be sad but they will always hold a special place in my heart!

Your interests are special don’t be ashamed!

**Page 8:**

As I continued to feel more comfortable in myself, I worked up the courage to address it with my psychologist, and she agreed with myself diagnosis, it was a very comforting affirmation to have. After about 8 months of being on a waitlist I saw a psychiatrist who like my psychologist, also agreed with me.

I have never felt more confident and happier with there I am at. I am still learning how to be kind to myself, but I feel like I’m getting better at it, and the people around me make sure I know I am deserving of love.

One thing I felt very close to when I learnt about it was the term ‘Autigender’, the identity of those who feel that their gender and being autistic are intrinsically intertwined. It was so freeing to finally find something that described me so accurately. For me Autigender makes me feel seen.

I love being who I am and learning about myself and things in this world. And as much as I’ve learnt over the past couple years, I haven’t worked out everything. And that’s ok, I am taking my time.

**Page 9:**

Visual description: Lil Dude floating on air, surrounded with stars. One of the stars has the symbol of autism while another has the pattern of the LGBTQ+ Pride flag.

**Page 10:**

Thank you so much for reading my comic!

This is the biggest project I’ve ever done and I am so thankful to YDAS for giving me this opportunity! It was incredibly fun and I am so happy with how it turned out!

About the author!

Hi! My name is AJ, I am a young queer and trans artist from Naarm (Melbourne). I am neurodivergent so I normally draw stuff about my hyper fixations and special interests!

I have been making art my whole life and have fallen in love with mixed media! I love printmaking/linocraving, sketching, painting and digital art!

Good bye and thanks!

You can find me here:

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