

“I’M NOT SCARED”: HOW NIKKIETUTORIALS DEFIED HER BLACKMAILERS

If you’ve paid any sort of attention to the fast-evolving beauty guru community within the past decade, you are most likely familiar with Nikkie de Jager, better known by her YouTube channel name NikkieTutorials. First gaining online popularity for her video “The Power of Makeup,” in which she inspired others to reveal their faces with and without makeup, Nikkie has gone viral both for her striking artistry and for her unwavering confidence. She sets the stage for estheticians and casual viewers alike, inventing definitive eye-makeup looks and partaking in experimental challenges. She has gained so much online traction that her impact has spread worldwide—in 2017, she was named one of the top ten beauty influencers of the year in *Forbes* magazine, and by 2019, it was announced that she would be serving as the Global Beauty Adviser for Marc Jacobs. The Dutch YouTuber has even collaborated with Lady Gaga, surging to the radars of celebrities and well-established makeup artists, her success all stemming from her first video in 2008, uploaded at the young age of fourteen.

Last month, however, Nikkie’s image in the media majorly shifted to the forefront of everyone’s minds. On January 13, she uploaded a video to her channel titled “I’m Coming Out,” in which she revealed, “When I was younger, I was born in the wrong body, which means that I am transgender.” She went on to say that she’d literally transformed in front of her audience; while she’d been wearing girls’ clothes and growing out her hair since age six, she didn’t feel that she had fully transitioned until she was nineteen, five years after she’d first started her channel. Despite amassing over 12 million subscribers, she kept her story private for so long because, as she explained it, she’d wanted her channel to be more about her art than about social convention or labels.

Fans flocked to support her in her decision to come out, but many were rightfully furious with the circumstances in which she’d been forced to reveal her story to the public. Nikkie admitted that while she was unashamed of who she was, she was not necessarily ready to open up—but that she was doing so now because someone had threatened to publicly out her. Though she never named who was behind the attempt at blackmail, she did speak out about the emotional effect of it, calling it frightening and vile. The blackmailers allegedly claimed she was lying about her identity and that she was too scared to tell people who she really was, to which Nikkie emphatically stated in her video that she wasn’t scared and that she knew they were watching, flashing her middle finger at the people who “thought they could really mess up my life with that.”

Nikkie’s seventeen-minute video is as empowering as it is heartbreaking. On the one hand, she defiantly stared down the face of ignorance and delivered an earnest “fuck you” to anyone who tried her, receiving widespread support for the confidence fans all knew and loved about her. The fact still remains, however, that despite her net worth of \$6.5 million, Nikkie is still a transgender woman facing terrifying threats merely for her own existence. Since 2013, the Human Rights Campaign has documented more than 150 transgender and non-conforming people who were victims of fatal violence (and at least 127 were people of color). Additionally, four out of ten transgender adults report having attempted suicide, and 39% of transgender adults say they are currently experiencing serious psychological distress, which is nearly 8 times the rate of the U.S. general population. NikkieTutorials is another disturbing example of this aggressive transphobia; even with the amount of fame and success she has cultivated, she was still forced into a terrifying position by perpetrators that found a way to hold that power over her.

This is a reality nearly every transgender individual may face in a system that actively works against them.

The HRC highlights steps that we can all take to eventually lower this rate of violence and distress, including elevating transgender voices (both in the media and in the political climate), educating loved ones about transgender inclusion, and combating misinformation about transgender people in schools. In the end, all forms of progress are important, and Nikkie's courageous decision to voice her experience should be celebrated—but this act of violence cannot be encouraged again, for the sake of transgender youth across the globe.