

ELLE

JUNE



I went to a comprehensive secondary in the middle of a housing estate in south London. It was rough, but there was a code of respect in the school, and while anyone who didn't wear Reebok Classics and tracksuits was branded a 'hippie', if you were boldly yourself you were left alone by the bullies, and even looked out for. The weirdest kid or the one who said, 'Yeah, actually I am gay', the 'boffin' who genuinely loved maths, and anyone seriously skilled in art, drama or music was celebrated, and the meanest girls would give you props for being different and owning it. Authenticity mattered – it was those deemed 'the try-hards' who were teased most, and while bullying is never OK, I learned a lot from my school's unique moral rulebook.

I was reminded of it when I interviewed Lana Del Rey for this issue of ELLE (p114), because she was previously given such a hard time by the press and online haters for apparently being an industry construct. Conspiracy theories about her looks, background and talent spread like wild fire. Many performers, such as Lady Gaga and Christine and The Queens, cultivate a 'character', but Lana was criticised for her dreamy, melancholic performance more than any of them. On the flight over to Los Angeles to meet Lana, I tried to analyse why this might be and concluded that it was because, at the time, she hadn't projected a sense that she was sure of herself beneath the beguiling exterior. The fantasy was convincing, but the reality seemed nebulous and fragile. 'If I had more of a persona then, I definitely have less of one now,' she told me in the recording studio where she was creating her latest and most exciting record yet. As we spoke about what she looks for in friendships and relationships, I realised that she's stronger and more comfortable in her skin than she ever has been. This does nothing to belie her magic, but it does make her seem more powerful, both as an artist and as a real woman in the real world. Just like I learned in the school playground, being true to yourself can create a kind of force field around you, and if you 'own' your otherness, then no one can use it against you.

Fashion is all about presenting an idea of your best self, and this issue is full of summer clothes to suit every wonderful side of you. From the blue Jigsaw swimsuit on p86, perfect for the beach on Italy's Ponza island (it's the place to be this summer, see p171), to the red Bally suit on p63 you wear for your first day back at work (note to self: 'smart' has ditched the 'casual' when it comes to this season's most stylish office attire, see p65), your clothes say more about who you are than you may realise.

Authenticity and 'doing you' was a theme that came up again and again when I worked with a group of talented students from London College of Fashion on guest editing The Collective (p93). The final five went through a rigorous application process to win the opportunity to work with the ELLE editors on the project, and we all learned such a lot from each other. I now know what an Instagram witch is, and they now know how to put a magazine section together. I'm a big believer in opening our world to new voices and ideas – it's doing this that keeps ELLE fresh and relevant.

New York Times bestselling novelist LS Hilton, whose novel *Maestra* and its sequel *Domina* (out now) are erotic thrillers for 'the thinking woman' and make for perfect pool-side reading, had the same idea when she got in touch asking to intern at ELLE. I wondered, what could a famous 42-year-old writer with a hefty book and film deal possibly gain from a week running around fetching coffee and organising the fashion cupboard? Quite a lot, it turned out – as you'll see on p106. It brings me back to the idea of personae – LS, or Lisa as she's also known, started off feeling like an imposter in the office, but once she realised she didn't need to pretend to be someone else, because the proudly open-minded ELLE team never once questioned the fact that she was 20 years older than our other interns, she discovered something new and valuable about herself.

My point is, there are times when you need to put on a bit of an act and pretend to be strong or in control when really you're feeling anything but. There's a difference, though, between this and being scared to let people see the real you. Personae, Latin for 'masks', can be useful armour. They can also be fun – particularly if your fierce work persona, for example, has a fabulous wardrobe to match. But 'masks' are meant to be taken off, and the question for all of us should be, who are we then? True happiness is about being confident, secure and, most importantly, being able to like the real you. And as Lana Del Rey told me: 'Happiness is the ultimate life goal. It is the only thing that matters.'

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lotte' in a cursive, flowing script.

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