

The Process of Them

This is not my body.

Well, it is my body, just not *my* body. Or should I say that *I* am not my body?

I am more than what comprises this flesh cage—this body—which carries me from room to room. The person inside this body, the one who is my mind. I am the soul which lights up this body's eyes.

In return for carrying me around, I fuel this body. I feed it, let it rest, I take care of it when it gets sick. Though sometimes I lie dispirited, just outside my body. Detached from its needs, from its aches. As if forgetting that I am housed at the core.

Often, I recede inside this body, mostly when it is being perceived. In order to control the perceptions that people have of this body—and consequently of me—I dress very particularly. I put on graphic tees three times my size, clunky boots to make me taller, to make my feet look larger. I put on men's pants that I have torn to shreds and avoid looking at the hips reflected in the mirror.

Those are not my hips, just part of this body.

This is what I need to tell myself so that I can continue to care for this body. If those hips were mine, I think I would slice them off. If that was my chest I would let it cave in. Allow for my lungs to collapse, for my ribs to fracture. Risk it all for the person inside this body.

Oh, I really would have to. But then I remember that this is not my body and, in the end, I will just be a ghost and a pile of bones. That is what I remind myself, as most of the time I would prefer to be just the bones.

This is what it means to be nonbinary, or rather the dysphoria that may come along with it. Nonbinary, the all-encompassing. Just humoring gender enough to be an identity yet not being confined by such ideas. Existing as neither entirely female or male, and on occasion, lacking gendered feelings entirely.

People like Freud might say I am nonbinary because I have issues with my mom. However, he is just projecting. Conversely, I might be nonbinary because I am an Aquarius and therefore a special-snowflake-liberal-millennial. That is what my conservative brother would argue on Facebook, even though he does not study astrology and neither of us are even millennials, he just likes to mock me.

“Seriously though, why are you nonbinary?” I ask with devious sincerity.

“Well, I feel that way.”

“But how come?” I push further, “How do you know?”

“I guess I figured it out by experiencing dysphoria, like mentioned earlier.”

“Okay but what’s the cause—come on, you study psychology—why are so many people assigned female at birth, coming out as nonbinary?” I probe, each unsatisfied question lingering heavily around my head.

“Hold on, stop! There’s not a—”

“There is a reason.” I spit, heaving forth my words, “THINK!” I demand, the anger flicking from my tongue, “Or are you just another statistic, another stereotype.”

“I’m not a statistic. When will you get over the idea that nonbinary people are just “women-lite.” Nonbinary people assigned male or female at birth exist equally. Your thinking is

flawed and biased. The issue lies in the way we are socialized. Have you ever considered that it is harder for people assigned male at birth to come out? Even if people assigned male at birth realize they are nonbinary or trans, they have been conditioned to reject it, in the same vein is our cultures distain towards femininity. Regardless, nonbinary is not categorized by boy nonbinary and a girl nonbinary. That defeats the purpose. Really, I should not have to compare their experiences in order to prove their validity. Instead, you should think about the social consequences of being queer. Of how many trans women are killed each year for existing. Since you know so much about statistics.”

Those words bite hard, yet I continue, “But what about the Freud type guys? Yeah, you’re avoiding that! What if you have some kind of psychological damage that made you this way?” I state, not wanting to concede, “I think Freud was right, you just have penis envy. Penis Envy! Penis Envy! That's all it is! You're delirious! That’s really why you want to be a boy!”

“First of all, I do not want a penis. Trust me. And I don't even want to be a boy! Have you not been listening?! I’m *N O N B I N A R Y*! Stop trying to find some cause for it. It’s not my trauma. It's not some mass hysteria. It’s not a feminist outcry. Even if it was, is it really that difficult to respect me? All you’re doing is expressing internalized transphobia.”

That one shuts me up. For some reason, my intrusive thoughts cannot embrace the blame of bigotry.

As it happens, I get into these discussions with myself almost habitually. A kind of twisted way to process my experience, to validate my existence. Another direction my brain takes is to attempt to evaluate others.

For instance, the ideal trans person has known since birth that they were born in the wrong body. At five-years-old they declare war on their assigned gender. Persistent in their

gender crisis and remaining consistent till adulthood. Finally, they magically and literally transform into their true selves, living happily ever after. This early sense of knowing and consistency somehow justifies transness. Even better is when they lean right, boasting their conservative outlook on LGBT issues. Keep your allies close and keep the people voting on your rights closer, am I right?

Instead, when I was little I had this intense bitterness towards femininity. A strange sort of resentment that I chalked up to rebellion and defying social norms—or the equivalent for an elementary schooler. Specifically, I found myself becoming increasingly frustrated when being told my interests were for boys. How nefarious of me for wanting to watch Dragon Ball Z and Teen Titans. I never thought that liking “boyish” things meant that I was nonbinary. Moreover, maybe it was in third grade when I wanted to play werewolves with the boys, but was forbidden because girls had to be vampires, that should have cued me in. No, I was not yet nonbinary. I was simply just not like other girls, a tomboy if you will.

Again, maybe something should have clicked in fifth grade, when I was in charge of my own haircut for the first time. I remember being unsure of what kind of haircut to ask for. All I knew was that I did not want it to be “girly,” but what did that mean?

I did not know and neither did the poor hairdresser. I asked once more with a cry lodged in my throat and tears teasing my eyes. I had no idea that having short hair was an option. Often, events identical to this occurred. I would get worked up but did not have the language to express how I felt. Actually, the first time I heard vocabulary to express queerness was in late middle school, early high school. I remember how scandalous it was when certain celebrities came out. The way everyone had an opinion. Then when my one of my close friends came out as a lesbian I decided it was time to form my own opinions. It was important for me to become a good ally.

Of course I wanted to be an ally! Recall that I am an Aquarius, passionate about social justice and equal rights. So, I became educated on LGBT issues and terminology. I can assure you there was no underlying meaning to this hyperfixation.

This claim was not convincing anyone.

It did not convince my parents who blatantly asked if I was being “turned gay” by said lesbian friend. They clocked me. It was too late. She had turned me gay and I was blissfully unaware. In the same respect, the YouTube algorithm audaciously outed me to myself in freshman year. A coming out as Agender video had popped up on my home page and curiosity took over.

When one thinks of epiphanies, they may think of a profoundly clear realization. However, mine was like trying to interpret being absolutely bodied by a truck in the midst of fog, headlights off, AirPods in.

“Wait... I think that is how I feel.” I say, frantically pausing the video. It was as if I was conscious for the first time. Not necessarily having clarity, but rather being flooded by swift, elated lucidity. Just pure awareness. Like learning the answer to a desperate question I did not realize I was asking.

Then of course that little voice had to chime in, “What do you mean you *think*?”

“Shut up, I’m figuring it out.”

“It’s probably a phase anyway.”

“Fair, but at least I’m starting somewhere. Can’t you just be happy that I’m figuring myself out. Can’t you feel what I’m feeling? It’s—”

“Euphoric...”

It is looking the way my favorite song feels, resembling a glowing entity rather than simply a person, and the marvelous self-recognition while gazing into the mirror. It is radiating dapperness and being addressed as sir. It is the feeling of my freshly shaven head. The way my fingers graze the close-cropped fuzz, sending tingles across my scalp while my mother fumes a room away. It is the awe in children's eyes when I saunter down the street. That is gender euphoria, the final step which secures me in my identity.

Because this is not my body.

Rather it is a canvas that I paint as I please. A mosaic of how I want to be perceived. I protrude from the confinement of this body with ease, breaking free of the expectations it has set for me. Then I realize that this *is* my body. It is mine in autonomy and in who bosses it around. My body is a benevolent temple, willing to be demolished, to be remolded at the extent of my will. And with this I am practically shouting for people to perceive me. To be confused at what they see. So that I can revel in being nonbinary.