

Must Be Nice

by James Jackson

It must be nice to not think about gender all the time. I thought as soon as I started transition, I wouldn't have to think about gender anymore. I thought as soon as I leveled up to "passing" that I wouldn't be consumed by gender politics anymore (because yeah, fuck you, it is political). Instead, I think about it at every turn. When I'm at a bar and I overhear someone say, "Was it a man or a woman?" as though those are the only two options. When my co-worker uses the wrong pronouns to address a friend who isn't out yet. When online comments try to argue science they know nothing about.

"I don't see gender."

What is it like existing in a world without gender? What is it like being comfortable with yourself and your gender? What is it like not being terrified of someone outing you? What is it like not dreading to see your family because you know they really see you? What is it like to feel unafraid in a bathroom, sacrificing a human function because you're trembling so hard you can't think straight?

"No one really cares about gender. Transgenders are the ones that are obsessed."

First of all, fuck you. Second, "transgenders" is incorrect and it must be nice not feeling like you have to educate people about something so incredibly basic. Third, our obsession is a direct retaliation to your obsession. If you weren't so obsessed, so judgemental, so restrictive, we wouldn't have to be obsessed. We could be whoever the fuck we want to be and not be labeled as "brave" for that. Our existence is a rebellion because of your obsession with what it means to be a "man", a "woman" - as if those are buckets you can toss someone's attributes into.

It must be nice not knowing how words slice, how they can render people you care about speechless and empty. How slipping up can send them into a downward spiral that doesn't quit until maybe when they're gratified with the reflection in the mirror and people acknowledge them too. Those don't happen at the same time, by the way.

Did you know that being transgender isn't what makes us depressed and suicidal? No, it's the scrutinizing eyes, it's the disdain dripping from every Facebook comment, it's the government's fixation on trying to erase us, it's the headlines that another one of us has been murdered. Even when you can pass as someone who doesn't think about gender or pronouns or what HRT means, you're forced to think about it again and again because your kin are being murdered, because the government still wants to punish you for your existence no matter how much you pass, because you can't afford to exist anyway, because you will never really pass, will you? How could you have carried on such a fantasy?

It must be nice to look in a mirror and recognize the person looking back at you. Thankfully, I can tell you that I can do that now too. I can tell you I'm happy because

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I am most of the time. But I will also tell you that I'll be thinking about gender until the day I die because gender isn't just politics or a psychological study or that topic that one friend posts about on Facebook all the time (#me). It's also a part of who we are and I refuse to be quiet and ashamed about not fitting into your idiotic little buckets. And I am sick and tired of letting the shame eat me up.

It must be nice to not think about gender, but I'll be honest with you: maybe a part of me is glad I do. I understand people better. I understand myself better. Oh, and I don't get irrationally upset about kids who "shouldn't" be wearing nail polish. I don't get upset when they paint those nails purple, pink, rainbow either. I don't get upset when someone wants to wear a suit when they're "supposed" to wear a dress. I don't get upset when someone grows their hair long and finally knows what it's like to pucker lips covered in bright red lipstick.

So tell me, what is it like thinking about gender all the time? It must be hard confining yourself like that. It must suck trying to stuff yourself in that bucket you so readily wanted to throw others into. It must be so boring to not challenge your preconceived notions about gender norms. It must be sad obsessing about gender the way you do.