

Jude Hall

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English 1121

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### Are You a Man or Woman?

“Are you a man or woman?” some may ask me. My response, “I’m not quite sure. Neither?” My earliest memories as a child were when it came time to pick out my Halloween costume. My Mom would let me choose whatever I wanted. I was 5 years old, and I wanted to dress up as Woody from Toy Story. My aunts questioned my mom, “Why not Jessie? She’s a girl, Woody is a boy’s costume.” My mom didn’t care, she let me choose whatever I wanted, which allowed me to be whoever I wanted to be. As I have aged, I have discovered new things about myself. I am nonbinary, meaning I do not identify with either gender. Others believe that you can only be male or female, and that there is no in between. People always want to say that your gender is described as what is in your pants, but that is not true. Some say that people that identify as nonbinary are just “confused” or in need of “help”, but we are just comfortable being our true selves. Although there are many unspoken rules about gender that many follow, there are many people that chose to break those rules and be who they want to be and choose how we want to express ourselves. Nonbinary people are normal people; we should be allowed access to the same healthcare as others, be respected as human beings, and to be seen as equals.

People look at me and assume that I am a woman, but I am not. I understand that there are people who are not familiar with the queer community, specifically the trans/ nonbinary community. It can be very confusing for people who do not have experience or knowledge of this community, but there are immense amounts of resources out there that can help you learn

about the trans/nonbinary community. I have found that the older generation struggles with the topic of pronouns and how they should be used. They have a hard time understanding nonbinary pronouns, but I never give them a hard time about it. There have been plenty of times where I get told “thank you ma’am”, “hello young lady”, and “hey girly”. I tend to put myself in their shoes when they use the incorrect pronouns for me. I ask myself, “Do they know they used the wrong pronouns? Do they understand why some people use they/them pronouns? Have they seen or interacted with a nonbinary person before? Maybe they don’t realize what pronouns they are using. It will be okay, it’s nothing personal.” I go through this inner dialogue every time someone uses she/her pronouns when talking to me or about me. I have done many things to make myself look more androgynous, in hopes that people will use they/them pronouns when speaking to me or about me. I use a preferred name, I have a masculine haircut, and I have my pronouns clearly printed on my badge at work; what more can I do? What I want to do is inform people on using the correct pronouns for others, or even just learning how to ask. Here is what I say, “Hi, I’m Jude. I use they/them pronouns. What are your pronouns?” which tends to lead to a positive response and shows the other person that I have respect for them, especially if they also use they/them pronouns. I know others may have a hard time with pronouns, but I believe that anyone can adapt to something new if they really want to. Unfortunately, not everyone is willing to make changes to show respect for others.

Some say that gender is not supposed to change, but why is that? They say that you are either male or female, and you are not allowed to switch genders. Although it is frowned upon, being transgender can be easier for people to understand. They think, “okay, this person is transitioning from male to female, or female to male”, but when it comes to nonbinary people, it gets confusing. When I think of gender identity, I think of the fluidity of gender. Think about when you were a kid. When I was younger, people always said I was a tomboy. I often felt like

an outcast because I never wore dresses or skirts, was not interested in makeup, and definitely not interested in boys. I was not your typical “girl”, and I was okay with that. Being a tomboy is a form of being a girl, therefore, there is fluidity in gender. There are different types of men and women, which means there can be people in the middle. Those people in the middle can identify as nonbinary. People have the right to choose their gender. I have chosen to identify as nonbinary because I feel that it is what I fit most into currently with my gender identity. I spent years constantly uncomfortable identifying as a woman. I struggled with wearing feminine clothing and using my feminine legal name. At the end of the day, people want it to be more black and white; you’re either one or the other, but in this case, I believe that people need to do what makes them happy and comfortable with themselves. We should be able to choose our gender, and we should be respected by others.

Here’s a bigger topic to cover; gender affirming care. Many people say that gender affirming care is not needed, or is a waste of money. What do you think of when you hear gender affirming care? I will assume that people think of hormone replacement therapy and gender affirming surgeries, such as top surgery. That is a small part of gender affirming care. With the recent political events, gender affirming care could potentially disappear. The big picture here is that gender affirming care is more than just hormones and surgery, it’s the small things too. These small things fall under the category of care for many nonbinary and transgender people because these are the things that make them feel more like themselves and feel more comfortable with how they are perceived in society. It could be something as simple as someone being able to get the proper masculine hair cut that they want, or even being able to put your preferred gender marker on your driver’s license. With the way things are headed, trans and nonbinary people may not have access to the normal things that cisgender people have access to. This could include access to proper healthcare and access to proper legal changes. I have recently started my gender

affirming care journey, which includes taking a low dose of testosterone. I am afraid for my future because I may not have access to my hormone therapy. Without having access to gender affirming care, I don't know what I would do to support myself and my needs. Gender affirming care is needed, even if it's just a few people out of a crowd that use it, it is still very important.

There are those who say trans and nonbinary people are struggling with mental health issues. Many assume it is because they are mentally unwell, but it is because they are struggling with gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria can cause a general discomfort within oneself. It has caused me to have anxiety, mostly around how people view me. I have noticed that since starting my gender affirming care journey, I have become less anxious and have been feeling better about myself. I wouldn't say that I am mentally unwell, I am mostly uncomfortable in my own skin, so starting my journey has helped me feel comfortable with who I am and what I am heading towards. I know that some others have struggled with their mental health because of their gender dysphoria as well. When people respect my pronouns and use my preferred name, I become more comfortable around them and less anxious.

People assume that I am a woman, and that I like girly things, am into fashion, and like talking about boys, but that is not the case at all. Though I do like the color pink, I am not feminine whatsoever. I identify as nonbinary, and I am perfectly comfortable with my decision, though others might find it to be confusing or wrong. I am just like everyone else. People in the trans and nonbinary community are just as caring and compassionate as cisgender people. We should be allowed access to the same healthcare and legal system, and we should be treated with respect. We are open to helping educate people that have a hard time understanding the concept of gender fluidity. We are just like everyone else, and we are allowed to choose the Woody costume instead of the Jessie costume if that is what makes us happy.

