

COMMENT: The Validity of My Humanity

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I believe that transgender rights are human rights. I grew up in a household that instilled the ideology that no matter who you are, or what your identity is, we all deserve respect. Within the United States government, respect is given as our constitutional rights. But nowadays, as a transgender male, I wake up in my dorm room and wonder what I have done to not be worthy of respect.

There was no distinct day that I woke up and decided I no longer wanted to be in this body. It's like questioning when you first discovered your sexual orientation. Because I used to identify as a cisgender female, I am now able to see the disparities in treatment from society. Presenting as a female with long brown hair, there was no reason for any strangers to raise suspicion towards me. I was able to walk into a store and receive pleasant, trustworthy smiles. Now, with short hair and "masculine" attire, the questioning looks I receive daily begin to add up. It's always "Sir, how can I help you?" before I open my mouth to speak. But before you question why I decided to come out as trans, it more important to question why society views me as a lesser individual.

For most of my life, I have been secure in knowing that I had freedom of thought, freedom of expression, and my right to education. Where is the distinct binary in life that deems someone justified in negating my existence once they find out I am a transgender male? Every American citizen is granted their unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Now, the U.S. government has deemed my human rights as no longer fundamental, but rather a privilege. Being classified as the

“other” and facing constant dehumanization, I know I am strong for coming out as trans. And I will never stop fighting for my rights and for what I believe in, because my parents raised me better than that.

When you hear something repeatedly – things like “disgusting,” “no one will love you,” “you are worthless,” or “you are a burden” – it is hard to remember that those violent words don’t mean anything. It is sad to see the U.S. federal government fueling stigma towards transgender people by classifying our transition as a mental illness, “Gender Identity Disorder”. There is no choice in being transgender, but I am also not victim to a disorder. I will never be able to explain how it feels to wake up and helplessly see my rights being taken away every day in relation to healthcare, the military, Title IX, and Title VII. Every battle against me just makes me want to work harder and live stronger. I refuse to be another statistic added onto the list of transgender hate crimes or the number of transgender suicides in a year. I am full of worth and surrounded by loving souls. (And in this day and age, it is so important for allies to be active. Show your support, be there for your loved ones.)

In sum, I believe that transgender rights are human rights. I shouldn’t have to wake up every day in fear that the government no longer cares about my safety and well-being. I believe this because when I put on my binder or when those around me use my correct pronouns, I feel human. I feel that my existence is validated – and my validity should always be a right. It may seem like the odds are against me, but I refuse to back down. I am strong, I am brave, I am Jai, and I won’t be erased.

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