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Do I Pass?

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Do I Pass?

By Ana Moran

Summary

Ana Moran explores de intricacies of cultural identity and gender while living in a modern time, where the constant is change. This vibrant piece will take the reader to consider his/her own commitment to living in an open society. Do you pass the test?

We live in an age that allows us to be open-minded to change, or at least that is what I thought, hoped. The very rapid transformation of theoretical models within social sciences and global studies allows us to redefine and question all past assumptions and prior knowledge of our worlds. I am, however, concerned with the persistence of what I characterize as a biased and prevalent way of thinking gender and gender norms; an ominous standard determining what is and is not allowed within our society, in other words, what is considered passing and not passing when it comes to gender issues.

One must first recognize the difference between gender and sex; gender is socially constructed (*men don't cry*) whereas sex is a biological attribute (*what you are born with*). There seems to be this blatant way of thinking that the only sex difference is that between males and females and that gender differences are the norms that are divided by sex. However we now see more radical movements for those that don't define themselves for what they appear to be and are redefining these norms.

There are more gays, lesbians, bisexuals, homosexuals, transgenders, and transvestites that are "coming out of the closet" and taking action on the dis-

crimination and violence they face everyday. Even with these radical movements, people can't seem to get past the concept of gender norm and have difficulty to let go of this set ideology that there is no set rule of what is and is not .

I grew up in Los Angeles and I've seen things that were out of the norm. I've grown up with gay and lesbian friends that have been able to get past their own suppression of hiding and allowed the world to see them for who they truly are. I was immune to the radical outburst of gays and lesbians and I was sympathetic to the constant hate that was thrown in their direction. I believed myself to be a flexible person.

A little over two years ago I was working at a local bank. I was a teller and I have dealt with a lot of customers on a daily basis. It's common to see people of all races, cultures, ethnicities, religious practice, and political views to come to the bank; there was no discrimination there. But this one particular day I ended up helping (what I thought then) a drag queen.

This person had traveled all the way from Oregon to California to undergo sex reassignment surgery. This person was in the process of **transforming** from male to female. I remember noticing that *she* had already gone through breast

augmentation and was taking estrogen. She wasn't able to have this surgery in her state for it was not allowed then (don't know if this applies to today) and was traveling to Los Angeles for it. The only method of payment though was cash, hence why she was at the bank and needed to withdrawal \$8000.

It was Kimmel who introduced *Masculinity as Homophobia*, the concept of man's fear of being viewed as a sissy. I remember that the crude jokes arose after she had left the bank; every guy at work was performing on the gender norm by filling the uncomfortable silence with sexist jokes and defining what made a man be a man (Kimmel, 1994).

I still think of this person and wonder if she had anyone for moral support, if everything went well. I recall hearing the buzz within the bank of "this type of person" actually having the nerve to show *himself* as such. As liberal as I thought of myself then, I found myself speechless and sadden by how apparent people showed their dislike.

She was cautious in going to the bank in her mini-skirt, high heels, and long hair. She never showed any fear and I silently cheered her on. I was humbled by how open she was to me and to have given me so much personal information. I think of her now more than ever. It's interesting how this moment has impacted me.

Spade brought an interesting point in that there is a set standard, a binary way, of thinking when it comes to trans men and women. He comments on the lack of laws and regulations for trans healthcare and how there is a need to take action to eliminate or lower the discrimination so that healthcare can be accessible to all genders (Spade, 2006). And I can't help but wonder how much money

she has spent so she could be viewed and "accepted" as a woman.

Post 9/11 there seems to be an escalation of what is acceptable and not. I believe that gender norms have become more of a central issue now than ever. It seems that there is a need to suppress these ideologies in which there IS more than female and male, that there is more to take into consideration other than the biological sex. I consider that trans are more cautious of their surroundings and may still fear of the "repercussions" for showing who they are. Thaemlitz demonstrated this within airport security.

He surveyed security officers, staff and attendants and the consensus seems that it's better to sweep these issues under than to confront them. It saves the time of security if one just displays the traits of what is engraved in passport identification. Yet it is still unclear on how staff and security have been trained to handle situations post 9/11.

I come from a line of immigrants. I can sympathize with Hoffman's paper on the stand of current immigrant rights. When people see me, they see a Mexican woman, a Chicana that is first generation to this country and that is privileged to further her education. People take on the idea that my parents lack in education and accept laborious jobs. It never comes mind to ask what my story is, what my background is. I pass as a daughter of Mexican immigrants which I'm not. But that doesn't mean that I cannot grasp the constant battle of immigration and their rights. I'm torn. I understand both sides – yes, people should not migrate illegally but they do this for their family, for better means of living. Not all immigrants can be categorized or view as undermining people.

I am female; it is my sex and gender. I am a heterosexual. I am of Salvadorian

descent, first generation American. I am an American. I come from a lower class that through hard work and dedication has managed to advance to middle class. I am a short, overweight (by American standards) woman that is prone to diabetes, high-blood pressure, and cholesterol. I was born into the Catholic religion but now am open to any other religion.

So, do I pass? In my eyes I do. But to those who see me, it truly depends how they've categorized me. 

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