

When I first came out to my mother, she took me to a psychologist. He listened quietly, then gave me a sheet of paper to jot down the qualities that make me think I'm a man.



He wanted to show me that I was wrong. That I was just unhappy to be a woman in a patriarchal society. Because you know when you are policed all the time by men, you wish for the freedom a man has. But obviously, that wasn't the case. I'm still very much a transgender man.

A lot of water has passed under the bridge since then, but it was one of the first encounters that made me wonder if I'm not man enough.

When people ask me why I think I'm a man, I can't use the same logic as most cisgender men. I wasn't born with the parts that'd assign me as male to the world. I don't know why I think I'm a man, I just do. It's what feels right. When I was younger, I refused to accept gender norms even when I had no idea about LGBTQ people. I did what made me happy. Sometimes that meant insisting my grandfather call me his grandson instead of granddaughter, sometimes it meant dressing up in my mother's colourful clothes. But aside from my instinct which rejected womanhood and felt comfortable in a masculine presentation, I have no way to explain why I feel the way I do.

While I love playing and getting a bit rough, I am not aggressive. Most of the time, I enjoy reading a book in a corner by myself. I don't like fighting. I like wearing gowns. While I don't really like makeup because it makes me look too feminine for me to be comfortable, I occasionally like putting some lipstick on for fun. I cry a river when I'm watching movies. They say a man is supposed to be stoic and confident. I'm neither of them. In short, I lack all the qualities of conventional masculinity.

So, does that make me an impostor? A woman who's trying too hard to be a man?

I don't know. Sometimes my head tells me I'm not man enough. That I need to be more aggressive, more dominant, less feminine. Some part of me cringes when I want to wear too colourful a jacket or when I get too excited at cute things, even though I know men can do these things too, that it is just misogyny that makes it seem effeminate men are less than men. But when you try to make others understand your identity when the entire world tries to prove you otherwise, you are judged at a higher standard than cis men. You feel like you need to perform masculinity accurately to be considered a man by others.



It makes me ask myself — am I willing to sacrifice some things to be seen as a man by others?

I don't want to leave the things I like. I don't want to be fitted into a small box of masculinity. And I certainly don't want someone to tell me how I should behave to be considered a real man. If I'm fighting so hard when people are telling me I'll never be man enough, that I'll always be an in-between, then I'd rather be whatever makes me happy.

I know it's a hard statement to make and it's even harder to put it into practice. Sometimes doubt maligns me and I wonder if other people will ever consider me a man. I wonder if I'll ever feel at home with myself. I don't know. But I hope with time, I will learn to love all of myself and the voices in my head will quieten down.

So what would I tell my doctor if I met him now?

I'd tell him that I might not fit into the definitions of a manly man but I'm a man because I say so.

Yes, I still have doubts, sometimes I feel bad when people tell me that I could've been a better woman instead of trying to be something I can never be. But when I see my chosen name, when people call me by my pronouns, I feel something is right. And that's what I cling to, that's what makes me sure that I'm on the right path, despite some people saying otherwise. I've met some amazing men who don't care if they come across as manly enough as long as they get to do the things they love. They made me realize that it's okay to love all the cute things in the world. Because life is too short to be something you are not.

*Am I Man Enough?*

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