

Oh, Baby!

by

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Oh, Baby!: Abstracting Queer Identity

For many writers, writing down your personal truth can be dangerous. Being openly queer can be unsafe for LGBT+ writers, and some prefer to insert their LGBT identities into their work in a more abstract manner. This can be done for a myriad of reasons, such as protecting oneself from possibly dangerous backlash, not being prepared to discuss your identity publically, or even just personal preference. This project examines queer fear, about how and if an artist expresses that fear. What does it mean to hide your identity inside metaphors? What does it mean to have your pride pour across the page? There is danger for LGBT+ artists in expressing their identities, in being proud and authentic and honest with their readers. In this project I will be tying together two artistic passions of mine, poetry & photography, to sift through language and display loudly queer pride. The contrast between photography and poetry as story telling devices, and the ability they and I have to tell LGBT+ narratives is what will be examined in my poetry & photography collection titled “Oh, Baby!”.

The poems in my project are rarely straightforward. This is both a stylistic choice, as well as in the context of this project, a survival mechanism. Being transgender & gay means that telling personal stories comes with an element of danger. There are people in the world who don't want these stories to be told at all. But still we tell our stories louder and louder all the time. Our experiences are important, and writing about our experiences means that other queer folks will feel their experiences are worth writing about as well. The poems in this project reflect queer fear, largely from my own real life experiences. This fear is masked in those abstract, animalistic, and occasionally sci-fi-esque images. My work pulls inspiration from several poets,

lyricists, and imagists, including Mark Doty, Kaveh Akbar, and Myung Mi Kim. These artists all take images from the natural and science fiction world to tell stories about their struggles with gender identity, sexual orientation, and race. All of these poets' work interacts with reality in a way that melds the weird and the approachable. They approach their work from different scopes, Doty writing as a gay white man, and Kaveh Akbar as a straight Iranian man, and Kim as a straight Korean woman. All of these poets still are able to interact with reality in a way that brushes against the abstract.

The poem "I'm No Hero, Henry" discusses the fear of being a non-passing transgender man using a public restroom.

"The blue suited businessmen (large, uncoordinated birds in dress clothes) watch you wash your new hands. Focus on the palatal grooves behind your teeth. What sounds live there? Junction an escape route but still feel a tug at your sport coat."

Most trans folks, including myself, have had unpleasant or even violent situations in bathrooms. Though these situations are frightening, there are always reasons to keep fighting and to rebel - and for many, art is a form of rebellion. These poems are a way for me to express my fears, as well as a way for me to cope with the harsh reality that comes with being a queer person in non-queer friendly spaces.

The photography portion of my project deals with what is a difficult part of their identity for many LGBT+ folks; loving it. The photography series I've created views queer bodies through the lens they want the world to see them through. All of the models in the series are queer / trans, and they all have their own stories to tell. I wanted the series to not only view the models, but also to hear what they have to say, so alongside the photoshoots the subjects were

interviewed. These interviews consist of questions regarding their gender identity & their presentation (ex. “Where do you get the most support for your queer identity from?”, “How do you feel your gender factors into your presentation, if at all?”). Not all of the subjects provided interviews, due to constraint of time and their own comfortability. Presentation is a hugely important aspect of anyones identity, and it is especially important in the queer community. The photos are all bright, colorful, and unapologetic. They tell stories about things like euphoria, desire, and anxiety. I asked each subject to wear something they might not feel safe wearing in public, or something that makes them feel euphoric in their identity. These photos all capture a moment in time (however brief) that the subjects felt comfortable in their identities. Being photographed as a queer person, by a queer person, means there is no “straight gaze” to affect how the stories in the photos are being told. We worked heavily with lighting and color in the photoshoots to create a fun and exciting environment for those stories to live in.

In examining my own relationship with queer fear & queer euphoria, I found that poetry and photography are two very different and interesting storytelling mediums. Emily Dickinson’s quote “Tell the truth but tell it slant” has evolved to today encompass the struggles of many writers who are in minority groups. There is safety in hiding truth in metaphors, as well as freedom in not hiding it all.

Nothing Hurts Anymore

Despite everything, there is still more than one
way to skin a rat.

The parts lie kitchen tabled; a man has your feathers for breakfast.
He chews your name, letter by letter. He leaves holes
in your new t shirt.

Heirloom the estranged inching up
of thighs. Turn uncles to fruit juice. A knifed citrus lies
in the sink and I will play

possum licking rind to rim. You are pretty
in short bursts but never in the long bloom. There is no slur
like the overripe - pitted - queer.

Remove context and this can be about your stupid boyfriend.
Remove context and this body sings female.
I'll they until I vomit in virgo. I'll worm into pinker
apples. I'll bury my zodiac.

Motion Sickness

We spiral across the turnpike, a blur of hands and gasoline. I can't hold onto the steering wheel, onto all of these abstract ideas so early in this poem. Mother Mary taps my shoulder and asks if I would consider using the word motor oil instead. We're throwing up and it's like we're kids again.

Our roadmap folds into a fan and shoots into the puckered eye of a toll booth worker. He squawks, collapsing like a great Stork. At home his sons flop around in the mud. Birds in oil. They garble like salmon hungry hounds. A falling such and such. Mother Mary asks if I got lazy here. Even if

I could talk about myself without using my name- Instead; You take off your shirt and say something mean. Farmed flesh. Rivers of legs. It's so hard to look at you when you are so hungry. A jewel falls into my mouth I taste nothing. You hold me in your mouth you say I taste nothing.

Between bodies there are pages of poems dedicated to my queer shame. In a perfect world, you take the wheel. In a perfect world, I don't flinch when we hit water.

I'm Happy Here Just Being With You

The birds stole our protest pins and made tiny
metal sounds , there - the homemade heat of Paris.
Salzburg. There are photos in policemen's pockets of
small, shouting folks. Names fall from mouths
like slaughtered dogs.

In the place where we can't quite reach that itch - anarchy. It's there -
behind the ears.

Carnivores

Before there were men, there were hours of limbs on linen and imaginary cherry-bombs. Great marble bodies outstretched in heat. Orchids tied to bed posts. I was the first infant with an appetite for rats.

A goat's head hangs above my mattress. She wears a prayer over her horns. I cannot name the things I do not love so she is only a goat. In my sleep I name her after myself. In my sleep I am only a goat.

Before there were men there were moths. Before all this skin. Before there were words for things like this. A hideous carnation. A marriage of carnivores.

Once I knew a river so shiny I grew gills. Fish are filthy liars, with all these bones I'll never swim. In my sleep I am only a fish. I'll lie so flat and so still on the water's surface you'll think me a lily pad.

Sonnet For A Cowboy

And I'll carry you on my back to the water.
To frame your figure out West. Let's promise not to
use that word anymore. Let's promise not to touch
anymore. King of the plains. Of things that break,
bend. Play matador on the freeway. Strip like raw
hide. Prey or pray, both end in blood and saliva.

Arizona in June can make anything less
painful. I'll scrub your mouth from the tailpipe. And I'll
carry you on my back to the water.

Holiday Special

Behold! - towering stalks, crimson, and wet. Crouched between blue
American homes two stories high. Here, that suburban silence.

Leftover mercurial ovaries. The fatty parts. I'd sit cross legged in front of white
women; a prize, an offering, a pet. My eyes tired, I'm laughing.

A goldfish limps like his pockets are empty. Gooey eye traces an exit into the lesser side
of a mountain. Several paces, then he is squashed by a can of cling peaches.

We bandage and move on the best we know how. The earth bows under the weight of the high river,
the ant hills sway like daggers in the dark. Optic horror drops to the earth - a passing hawk slices
open its giant pupil. The fluke bird cries. A spaniel barks. Crops everywhere flourish.

The enormous wet hand drags behind me,

sludging 'cross the floor. Heavy, heavy
palmed. I wonder if I'll ever get married,

the thick fingers scratch gnarly these legs o' mine.
But any love worth begging for is no love at all :

My pants dirty with slobber I arrive ugly for dinner : And any love
that does not grab at your ankles and shake, what is it worth?

Copper jewelry stuck slack jawed in your maw for months after. No
matter how many men you licked clean names from. What would I know?

I chew dinner so carefully I forget to say anything. And then-
the peas, stuck in the casserole, glow like tiny chuckling globes.

Someone smart once said there is something,
howling and fluorescent, in a lover. The enormous wet

hand drags behind me. Heavy, heavy.

PASSING

From up your gullet crawls
puberty's late bloom. A goose
eats the letters in your name
like jellybeans. He hides inside
a pulped chamber, sleeps in the pits
and fissures. Hissing with all those
ugly teeth. Molars ripen next to
the carrots, julienned.

I sit on the subway neighboring possums.
They read newspapers and drink wet coffee.
One wears a jade necklace and pats his plump
middle. It's embarrassing really, finding him
wearing all that costume jewelry. Slimy toed,
greasy palmed, pale sprout. I carry a dagger in my red
backpack. I do not know the difference between us
at times. A coyote steps onto the train, a bright purple
fear pours across the platform. His abdomen
produces a hand and waves, I swallow it whole
like a real man.

Pre-Operative (His and Hers Prom Dresses)

As feral as I feel I know I am docile. Pretty
boy. Honey blood. Let's imagine I am
a raven: a creature winged and worth

writing about. Grow those mean spirited shapes. Bury
ovarian in bloom. Pretty boy. Honey blood.
When I fall I will land crooked but I will still be

beautiful. Let's imagine I am something softer.
Let's imagine I am a story in which nobody
dies at the end. Let's imagine I stain

this body in orchids.
Pretty boy. Honey blood.
Faggot. Firecrackers. I need you
to cover my ears.

When you say my name for the first time I
want it to scare lesser animals. Like a serpent!
I will never die

but if I do remember me as a cowboy. Like a sparrow!
Your father will see me like he sees any other girl
and I will let him. I am not crying.
When I fall I will land crooked but I will still be beautiful.

Ask Me What I Call It

I used to be gross
but now everybody loves
me. What that really means is
I can grow a beard now.
I make my dream wife
promise to sleep with the radio
on. In dreams she sees my teeth
attached at her hip like a carabiner -
our dream book asks us what
we're so scared of. She melts
like sugarcubes at sunset. I don't tell her
and she doesn't ask. The spacing
there is intentional.

The blouse in my wardrobe is for riots - red will look nice
against that pale yellow. My wife says I'm just tired.
When you protest at my funeral, at least wear nice shoes.

Four leeches grow fat on the last traces
of my womanhood and soon I will be nothing
but a man - I'm tempted to swallow but hold my jaw tight.
There is so much left to be scared of.

Texaco County

The countyhound dreams a fox. Backyard burials. Alligators and waltzes. Twice he flexes paw in choreo. Attendant stretches in a way only white men can and ma'ams in my direction. The hair on my belly grows Yet the skin stinks of lavender. In my best trousers I do not thank him. In my best trousers I am somebody's son, spoiled feminine. Here the children grow like weeds. Freckles fade in heat. Fleshy women laugh and the countyhound howls. Sound spills from the bodega and onto my sneakers. He laps up the stinking water. To really know somebody you must know what lines their belly and his is mostly Fritos and small stones. My mouth splits open at the sides just like his.

A Photograph of a Volcano

When it's all over, I'll leave a hole shaped like my body in your mother's roof - careful to not disrupt her breakfast of papaya or knock over the terrible vase. The tradition in southern towns; if you see enough birddogs you have to get married. So what does that make us?

In the markets you don't make eye contact or so i'm told. A rabbit lies dead next to the pomegranates. He pokes desperate and weak tongued at these ruby fruits. He, no older than produce. Humans are thieves. If you ask me, he's just resting.

It's easiest to start from the beginning. There's a new type of fish, and then the dancing starts. I hear they had to remove his shoes in the casket. Another eight foot white kid. The smallest sister swallows the canary. No, that's not right. The roosters cry. The sun rises.

She carries a slice of a shattered vase in her apron's pocket. You'll trip and land on your gut, now where would that leave us? She hands over a tissue wrapped gift. It's a photograph of a volcano with browned edges. A holy man lies on his roof. Unlike his children he does not fear death. His gardenias crisp below him. An unbroken vase to his left. Hot rock spills from his mouth. He is smiling.

I AM A STRONG MAN AND A KISS WILL NOT HURT ME.

i collapse; slingshot
to sparrow throat. fall crooked,
flightless. worthless bird.

A Movie About a Horse

He wore red espadrilles and kissed women
on the mouth. He wrote songs about dogs
and outsmarting cowboys, and if you didn't look
at him he sounded just like a real man. Once he
wore a hat and I swore he was my father. If you
didn't look at him he sounded just like a real man.

The end involved a horse shaped hole in the ground.
Either you kill a horse or make a horse lie stiff sided.
I decided it would be cheapest if I laid myself down
flat, stretched against the dirt road. I laid there for days
before anyone started filming.

Howl If You Can Hear Me

I tell you I love you because I am well adjusted.
All the shouting is only planes overhead. I tell you
I love you because I am well adjusted and not because.
There is yellowcake in the cupboard. Remember the planes.
There are mousetraps in the cupboard. I am well adjusted.
Not because. Because. Mattress the dirt. Sift through the wet
sky. Imagine rain and then not. Promise it's only planes
overhead. All the shouting is only yellow
cake. Adjusted. Who knows how many
planes are left. There aren't enough piles
of dirt in the world to fill me. Don't
think about it. The dirt can be
yellowcake. Don't think
about it. I tell you
I love you because
you cannot. I tell you I love you because I am
well adjusted.

Escapism

Ten, maybe eleven pigeons sit inside a crater in the Arizona flatland. Their wings gently stretch the empty pocket walls, splitting seeds, the hockjointed boys club. A rabbit passes by and they screech before realizing it's just a man singing a song about one.

An orange ranch home south of the cavity claims to be an Andy Warhol museum. The television loops a videotape of people trying on wigs. A greasy tarantula holds my hand like a child and asks for a drink of water.

The shrine underneath the sink holds a candle inside a bucket. Hot lightning hits the roof and it all goes dark. Her rumble waves the room like a wild white flag. The owner wasn't home. I slept in his bed.

With no warning, the tenth pigeon explodes into a pile of feathers and twigs. The remaining nine or ten pigeons take turns gnawing at his bones. The savory beak. He is little more than a withered European mouth in the dirt.

The dusty southwest rips through my window like a suicidal bluejay. I hold a pigeon in my hands and squeeze until it pops.

Bad News

This week my horoscope told me to fucking relax. So I'm trying to make peace with the parts of me that are less human. I'm drinking herbal tea. I'm sleeping in warrior pose. I'm not writing poems in first person anymore. I fell into that slipstream of wet and let it carry me uptown. I prayed to the gods on the back of the Kellogg's boxes but still dreamed of driving my car

into the river. A deer passed me. Her fantastic huge legs swung on the riverbed like she was waiting for something. I panicked and told her I loved her. She folds into the foliage and through the slipstream. I'm trying not to take that to heart. I'm trying not to take that to heart.

Dante Alighieri Writes An Opera (My First Kiss Was In A Car)

The Northerner composes with fury grotesque,
ink dripping from his tongue, a wild dog drooling
across libretto. An opera in nine parts, trumpets

so loud the mosaics peel from the ceiling. Great
swaths of crimson adorn every soloist, wet with
masculine woe. Youth dissolves like sand on the stage,
He recites something phallic disguised as a love song.
The audience cannibalizes la prima

donna as she bleeds the very sin she was born into.
She howls warnings of rattlesnakes, Dante
rewrites them into rib cages. Beatrice weeps
in the nosebleeds, crunching an endless line of apples.
The applause, to her joy, kills her.

Beatrice's Chicken / Domesticity

He's salting a tomato
even though it's rotting.

The heat rippled its skin, like a red ruffled
thing. He leaves the most honest parts

of the chicken on the porch. We link
hands and watch the rats love a warm meal.

Our scars are shaped the same, like divets in the dirt.
There's that painting of the ballerinas

where they were made to stand still for hours on end.
Alone, I wait for you on pointe.

Leftovers

I dreamt of you in pearls and feathers. Stood across from me
like a promise, a steady prayer. You marvelous mirage, you.
Raspberry jam. An empty church. Peaches,
jarred. Hair clips are so easy to lose, you tell me.
I imagine I am a new type of forever
and I spend it finding barrettes.
With one breath, you blinked into nothingness.
And at the altar I waited for the rest of the angels
to come along, but they never did.

Somewhere, a crow sits on a fence chewing an orchid.
I wonder if you are what heaven looks like.

Plague Beat Blues

That new July wave
 of termites have eaten away
the support beams, they taunt, thump, an
 endless loop of funk. We hum hymnal
at their beat beating wings. The roof
 limps. The doors rattle. All of our oatmeal
fills with drywall.
 I can stand on our porch and waltz
to the earth's crumble.

One and two and one and two-
On and on until we are all that's left.

As Always, Winter

A spoon falls to tile. There's a stench
of oolong. Cinnamon sugar. Then a howl.
Geese careen across the motorway.

Heavy. Heavy. Dawn eats away at
windows. A boy disappears into frost
leaving only his slippers.

Rain seeps through forest's skin.
A jar of preserves sticks thick to
teeth. Possum feet wet with snot.

The boy is now the
bluejay; the boy is in the
brook. A man reaches

into the river and pulls out
a rabbit. Geese careen across
the motorway.

They know something we don't.
But they'll swear
winter looks the same as always.

Numbers Game

I writhe in great company, despite the timing. As I undress
in the hatchback I meet the parental stare of a crow.
She fixates on a pearl in her beak.

I grip the pale collar that holds me
off-center and pull hard.

A rock hits the window- a warning, a pearl, maybe.

The crow rattles and clicks from her perch. There's that flinching red again.
He hums, gingerly burying
and reburying my new name into my neck.

Places I've Been A Man

(we aim) To eat and be eaten, to pick apart the crude
from the marrow. January in the sex clubs. We're all wearing big
coats. Men wade like smooth stones through a pitcher.
Someone runs his hands over the scars on my chest and flinches -
I dance, I buy watered down drinks with rent money.

Those gay mountains last summer; that purple dusted backroad, saturated farmhouse; I tan so easily in
a sundress. I sleep in our spinach cradles - stressed and unstressed implements, mindlessly opening and
closing my mouth. Here - it's where they turn turkey into turkey.

(I don't) Notice i'm covered in spit. I'm spending the better part of my Sundays lying on the sidewalks.

Sober Doom

We will leave suburbia to the rodents,
who will eat our coffee scrapings, our greened
fruit, our aging meat. Garden snakes

will breed in the hoods of cars. Birds will
drink whiskey and coo in long wet phrases and

There is nothing here to be sad about-
there is no one left to be sad about it.

The electric train will pass our usual station over
and over again.

It's Not Usually This Dark at 4pm But Today It's This Dark at 4pm

Envelopes file through front door.

A million little love letters to my lady

Who would pass away in that
deep deep slumber only cows seem to have.

I bring her pumpkin pie and peaches.

Sit cross legged in the grass with her. She
blinks at me, firefly. She sighs and sighs and I kiss her
skull. An airplane flutters past. I do not hear it.

We lay in the field and I read to her.

“She must’ve loved you
something terrible.” I hear her dull sigh and
rub her belly. I hum to her
like my mother hummed to me. They will graze here
for years after her but it will

not ever be
the same.

I'm No Hero, Henry.

I age like a rice field and I root and reroot. No arm hair left ungrown, no sneaker left untied. The red rimmed maze of post pubescence. Every time you think you've found the exit it's just the restroom. The blue suited businessmen (large, uncoordinated birds in dress clothes) watch you wash your new hands. Focus on the palatal grooves behind your teeth. What sounds live there? Junction an escape route but still feel a tug at your sport coat.

Under my shirt is the dead man. Found him turned away from the too early railroad, tearful and angry at the tracks. He pointed to a pair of slacks on the grooved beam. Is this her? We'd ask. After all this time? Right where we left her? A moth landed on the trousers. He produced a notebook from his backpack. Sorry, I just have to write this down.

I have ex lovers working in pharmaceuticals. I get my drugs from places that don't ask me to take my clothes off. I age like a rice field and I wither and wet and wear. Check it out, there are grooves built into the side of the terracotta- so you don't drop it.

explorer's log. days 1-6. fieldwork group 17. rocky mountains. wyoming. 2004.

one.

my coat got caught on the carabiner.
mark's.
he promised me he'd fixed it like
he always does,
but still it gripped
my coat like a lost child.
synthetic snowflakes fluttered
down the mountainside.

two.

to hope we gain anything
from this trip is
like hoping you'll grow
wings and fly away, to
garble with the gulls.
~~we dropped a camera today.~~
mark dropped a camera today.

three.

mark swallowed some snow and swore
he saw stars.
he hasn't spoken in hours.
johnny offers me a cigarette, i decline.
he chews his for the warmth.
sometimes i wish i was
not a journalist.

three and a half.

we did not prepare for wolves.

four.

the mother taunts us.
she smiles
tarmouthed and starving.
she swats at our boots like
we are branches. weeds.
we climb rope, cable cars
as if we are going skiing. we shut our eyes.
we pretend we are going skiing.

five.

carlos isn't going to
last much longer.
at least that's
what he tells us.
he threw
his rations down
the mountain in a rage,
the wolves need it
more than we do,
he cried.
it is the first time he's spoken
in days.

six.

we dropped another camera.
johnny says the wolves
can take home videos now.
carlos laughs bright like a comet
then cries
deep and scarlet into my jacket,
into the hole without stuffing.
a wolf's cry.

You Can Have All My Stuff

It'll all turn out alright. Some days its easiest to lie on the lawn and sigh really big like a saint
bernard. You can share your iced tea with something winged and worth naming. They'll thank you
later and you'll feel good, really. The ivy that creeps through the floorboards craves domesticity. To be
like your mother and crush tomatoes with its hands. You'll leave a red chunk on the patio and
it'll be gone in the morning. Promise to love the moon; she's the starring role in the world's puppet
show and she can never lose your attention. Someday I'll want something bigger than all this.
Something moon sized.

Letters and Numbers

It's like - bubbling hot. I'm thinking about the hot chocolate in the cafeteria and something loud tells me to pay attention. There's a therapy animal in the next room who won't stop barking. He eats cancer like tough steak like an old bone like it tastes good. From the hospital window the earth feels wet. Though I guess the ground always feels like that. Bad subject.

The rain runs it's fingers over the blank casket. It's grooved like terra-cotta like a sore throat like a skinned knee. The dirt spits back letters and numbers that mean someone dead lives here. Bad subject.

I drove a bullet through the sand to watch the hermit crabs spill out of the hole. I cut off my cancerous parts but she didn't. She eats lesions like she's giving a speech like she's starved half to death like she's happy to do it. Its like - bubbling hot. Whatever is running through her veins is so tasty it puts her to sleep. I crane my neck to check for a pulse. From the hospital window the earth feels like it wants to say something.

Name: Brandon Barr

Age: 24

Pronouns: He/Him

1. When do you feel the happiest in your body?

I feel happiest in my body when I can wear more "feminine" clothing and receive either compliments or non-reactions.

2. What makes you feel unhappy in your body?

When people make me censor my appearance for their own comfort.

3. How do you feel your gender factors into your presentation, if at all?

It's mostly a non-factor. I like to wear many different kinds of styles on any given day.

4. How would you define your style?

My style is a mouthful of terrible words: slick-feminine-chic. Or European-Man?

5. Where do you usually get your clothes from?

The clothes I have mostly come from thrift stores or the women's sections of department stores.

6. Do you feel at home in your body?

I feel at home in my body when my mental illnesses allow me to feel at home.

7. Tell me about one of the first times you felt like you existed outside of the gender you were assigned at birth / you weren't straight.

I remember passing a female mannequin in a department store and wishing I looked just like her. However, when that feeling came it felt like it was fleeting, so it was harder to pin down.

I started to feel like I wasn't straight when I learned more about gender and started to realize it can be such an arbitrary thing. I realized that I can be attracted to people no matter their gender.

8. Where do you get the most support for your queer identity from?

I get support from my closest friends, a lot of whom went to Purchase.

9. Who are your major style influences?

I have no idea. My brain?

10. Do you feel like there are situations in which you have to “dull down” your presentation for your own safety?

I haven't had to dull down my presentation for my safety, more for other people's comfort. But I'm privileged in that it hasn't been a safety risk yet.

11. Is there anything you want to say to other queer folks?

Talking to your supportive friends can be crucial to improving your mental health.

12. I love you!

You're simply fine.

Name: Jack Shearer

Age: 20

Pronouns: They/Them

1. When do you feel the happiest in your body?

I don't really ever feel "happy" in my body to be quite honest. But if I had to pick, it's probably when I feel like I look sexy and femininely androgynous (like a somewhat masculine girl). I'm not a very sexual person at all, but I feel like being sexy and feminine is the most stereotypical girly thing, as much as I hate to say it. I remember when I used to wear my mom's clothes and feel really girly and free. I don't really have that anymore now that I'm mostly done with puberty. However, whenever I feel like I look girly but on the androgynous side is when I'm happiest. I also like dancing even though I'm terrible at it!

2. What makes you feel unhappy in your body?

The fact that whenever I look in the mirror I both recognize and don't recognize myself. Like I feel like I'm in a weird limbo between masculine and feminine, I can't even gauge what I look like. It's sort of like looking when I look in a mirror, I see my sister and my brother at the same time, but they're one person, and that person is me. My beard and big ribcage make me feel pretty terrible to be honest. Also the fact that my body hair is growing in more places all over my body and faster than it used to. Seeing my Adam's apple and brow ridge be more and more prominent makes me feel bad. So basically... any time I notice any very masculine trait becoming more prominent.

3. How do you feel your gender factors into your presentation, if at all?

Oh it COMPLETELY does, both in the sense that it restricts my choices and also makes me feel like I can do more things with it. I feel now that I'm more public with my identity I can do things like wear makeup, grow my hair out, and wear more androgynous clothes like off the shoulder sweaters and feminine shirts. However, the disconnect between my gender and my body still stops me from wearing some of the things I would like to. I don't want to overcompensate by wearing super feminine items that are not my style, but I also don't want to wear all traditionally masculine items. I feel that being transfeminine ironically keeps me on the masculine side of feminine clothes just because of my physical, semi-passing appearance.

4. How would you define your style?

I wouldn't really define it as anything in particular. I'm kind of in a bit of style limbo, to be honest. For the most part, it's pretty basic and casual. I tend to wear jeans and a t-shirt a lot, or something like a cardigan/pullover. The style I want to have (which I'm also not sure of) is way different than what I have now.

5. Where do you usually get your clothes from?

I used to get clothes from H&M, Target, Forever 21, and other stores along those lines. However, I get them from different places now like my aunt's closet or ThredUp.

6. Do you feel at home in your body?

Not really, no. I feel like I'm sharing a body with someone else. I always feel like I'm acting through someone else's body, and I can't actually show what I am inside. Since I don't know what I want to look like, though, that makes it even harder to understand what it's like to feel at home in my body.

7. Tell me about one of the first times you felt like you existed outside of the gender you were assigned at birth / you weren't straight.

I always felt uncomfortable being lumped in with boys, but I couldn't put my finger on why. A time that I remember is when we started getting separated for gym class. I always wanted to get in and out of the locker room as fast as possible for what I thought was fear of ridicule, but I think it was just because I felt wrong in the locker room. One time, someone came up behind me when I had to use the urinal because the toilet was occupied and I felt mortified. I felt nervous already using the urinal since it was very out in the open, but I realize now looking back that it was especially because I felt like a nonbinary person in a man's space.

8. Where do you get the most support for your queer identity from?

You! My friends give me the most support, both from college and high school. However, my mom and aunts are especially supportive out of my family members, but the majority of my family is pretty supportive.

9. Who are your major style influences?

I don't really base my styles on the people I consider my style influences, but there are some people I think have great style. Jenny Mustard and best dressed on YouTube have pretty great styles, but I also like to take influences from people that I know.

10. Do you feel like there are situations in which you have to "dull down" your presentation for your own safety?

Definitely- every day. Not that when I'm at school my physical safety is at risk, but I feel that if I wore more feminine items or heavier makeup I would be looked at weirdly or made fun of. I think that I would have a much different style if I wasn't so unsure of what I wanted in terms of my gender, and I would dress differently if I wasn't so afraid of society's judgements.

11. Is there anything you want to say to other queer folks?

As terrible as it feels to continuously question your gender and not ever land on anything, it's ok to question your gender. It may be hard and awkward when you need to pick a label just to have something to be called, and you may hear your name instead of a pronoun hundreds of times from people that don't want to call you a specific pronoun, but you'll figure it out! Even if you never figure it out, spend less time focusing so much on labels and focus on what makes you feel happiest or the most comfortable. Don't conform to any standards that anyone wants to place on you. There is no right or wrong way to be a man, woman, or nonbinary person.

12. I love you!

I love you more!!! You inspire me every day and your creativity never ceases to amaze me.

Name: Leila Rabia Louhaichy

Age: 21

Pronouns: They/Them

1. When do you feel the happiest in your body?

When I have a good outfit on! It depends on the day, but I usually thrive most in my own body when I feel that I'm presenting in a seamlessly androgynous or flexible manner. Since I cut my hair short last year (after a few years of having it at a relatively long length), I've progressively felt more comfortable in my body.

2. What makes you feel unhappy in your body?

When I find myself attempting to dress/appear in the taste of other people and not to my own comfort and expression. It isn't a conscious thing, but it happens, ya know? For example, when I'm making the decision to wear a binder or not (constructing an outfit and such around it, etc.), insecurity comes into play. There have been days where I won't present in a more masculine way because I feel people will look at me with distaste or that I'll be found unattractive by a particular group of people (not that anything has actually prompted this, just irrational thoughts that get out of control).

3. How do you feel your gender factors into your presentation, if at all?

Some days it entirely factors into my presentation, others not so much or it isn't as realized, but mostly for the same reasons as listed in the last answers.

4. How would you define your style?

My roommate best describes it as "refined kindergartener".

5. Where do you usually get your clothes from?

Thrifted, some retail, and "hand-me-downs" (technically I just steal out of my family member's drawers, and I know they do the same, so we're equal).

6. Do you feel at home in your body?

It changes day-to-day, but recently I have been progressively happier in my own skin. I hope it keeps up.

7. Tell me about one of the first times you felt like you existed outside of the gender you were assigned at birth / you weren't straight.

This is going to sound so dramatic, but I had a real bad case of lice in the first grade and my mother chopped off all of my hair to save time. I loved it. Up until then my hair had been past my butt and I didn't really acknowledge until then that I didn't have to have a gender attributed hair length. So uh, there began my genderqueer journey. In terms of general sexuality, I never really questioned being into all genders. It made sense and I am lucky enough that my parents couldn't care less about who I'm into (sexuality wise).

8. Where do you get the most support for your queer identity from?

From my lovely friends! My parents have, over time, become apart of that support system, which I am incredibly grateful for. I've learned from and grown with a solid group of people during my life (so far). Love the gurls.

9. Who are your major style influences?

80's/90's Keanu Reeves, Susan Sontag, Lou Reed, misc. people in Brooklyn/thrift stores, Ness from Earthbound, Danny Phantom, and so so many other cartoon characters.

10. Do you feel like there are situations in which you have to “dull down” your presentation for your own safety?

Yes, mainly as a result of creepy men when I'm in the city or out.

11. Is there anything you want to say to other queer folks?

Love y'all.

12. I love you!

No.

Name: Sean Gordon

Age: 20

Pronouns: He/Him

1. When do you feel the happiest in your body?

When I am able to wear the clothes that can reflect who I am. I love paring clothes that accentuate my masculine features and beating my face to the extreme. The combination of the feminine and masculine truly makes me feel the best.

2. What makes you feel unhappy in your body?

When I compare myself to normalized standards of how my body should look. In my everyday life, I wish I could wear more traditionally feminine clothes but when I do, I get really in my head about why those clothes don't fit my body the way they fit cis women. I really have to take a step back and realizes that it's not my body it's the clothes.

3. How do you feel your gender factors into your presentation, if at all?

I go back and forth all the time. Some days I will wake up and be feeling my boy self or I will want to high light my feminine features or some days I don't even think about it at all. In my opinion, fuck gender. Certain clothing has become synonymous with gender over the years, and it's true that clothing can be a strong way of presenting gender in a healthy way but for me, too much pressure is placed on what fabrics I chose to put on my body.

4. How would you define your style?

What style?

5. Where do you usually get your clothes from?

I used to shop at places like Forever 21 for both "Boy" and "Girl" clothes but I found that I was able to find a lot more masc clothes than fem. So recently I have been thrifting for both but primarily anything fem I wear doesn't come from typical clothing stores.

6. Do you feel at home in your body?

Most of the time. I would argue that it's never a simple yes or no. Somedays I feel more at home in my body than others, it's never really a complete yes or no there is jut more or less.

7. Tell me about one of the first times you felt like you existed outside of the gender you were assigned at birth / you weren't straight.

These are kind of hard questions for me

8. Where do you get the most support for your queer identity from?

These are kind of hard questions for me

9. Who are your major style influences?

No one in particular. Mostly the people I see and interact with on a regular basis. I will see things out in the world that catch my eye and I want to try out or whatnot but I can't really credit someone as influencing my fashion

10. Do you feel like there are situations in which you have to “dull down” your presentation for your own safety?

I blend in pretty easily but of course, I feel more comfortable expressing myself in groups of people I know well. I am very lucky to not have to worry about my safety when I go to public places.

12. I love you!

<3

Name: Kei Kurakake

Age :21

Pronouns: She/Her

1. When do you feel the happiest in your body?

everyday boiiii

2. What makes you feel unhappy in your body?

idk when i'm sick or on me period.

3. How do you feel your gender factors into your presentation, if at all?

not much, i just wanna look hot.

4. How would you define your style?

imagine you've let me loose in a thrift store and when you've gained sight on me again, im wearing **fashion**.

5. Where do you usually get your clothes from?

thrift stores, Marshalls, or I make 'em.

6. Do you feel at home in your body?

ye

7. Tell me about one of the first times you felt like you existed outside of the gender you were assigned at birth / you weren't straight.

in preschool i thought i wasn't a girl cause i didn't play with the stereotypical girls dolls, and i thought "huh, guess i'm not that", then sorta never again thought about it again. now i know gender isn't real baby!

i knew i wasn't straight when middle schoolers started talking about fucking as if that were a real life thing people gotta do, fucking grow up.

8. Where do you get the most support for your queer identity from?

friends

9. Who are your major style influences?

me, bitch.

also tokyo street wear, wizards and jrpg characters.

10. Do you feel like there are situations in which you have to “dull down” your presentation for your own safety?

if i ever go to the south.

11. Is there anything you want to say to other queer folks?

love yourself, love who you love, love being yourself, and for the love of god someone please help with math.

12. I love you!

mitch thats gay.

Name: Frankie Ryan Timmons

Age: 22

Pronouns: they/them/theirs

1. When do you feel the happiest in your body?

I feel happiest in my body when I am not thinking about how I look. When my mind is occupied with other thoughts that have nothing to do with how my skin is breaking out, or whether or not my thighs are too big, or anything else that relates to my physical appearance, I feel euphoric.

2. What makes you feel unhappy in your body?

I feel unhappy in my body when it is sexualized. Although I primarily express myself in a more masculine/androgynous way, I occasionally do present femininely, and very often I will feel insecure and not confident in what I'm wearing or how I look because of my fear of being objectified. Being harassed or only being assigned value because of my looks or my breasts is something that has happened enough that it makes me sometimes never want to show any part of my body ever again.

3. How do you feel your gender factors into your presentation, if at all?

I would say that my gender does factor into my presentation. I don't want to be seen as a woman, so I try and dress and style my hair as androgynously as possible. When I wear more "feminine" clothing, it isn't because I am feeling more womanly that day or feminine at all. It's because I feel like wearing something that has been deemed society-wise "only for women".

4. How would you define your style?

I'd define my style as "ready to sleep". My main goal with a lot of my every-day clothing (and even some of my business attire) is for the pieces of my wardrobe to be comfortable enough to fall asleep in. I'd say the only article of clothing that doesn't fit this category is my chest binder, but I still occasionally fall asleep with it by accident anyhow. Please don't do that, would not recommend!

5. Where do you usually get your clothes from?

I usually get my clothes from Forever 21 and H&M (gotta love being a broke college student!), but I also do thrift shop and trade/exchange clothing with my friends.

6. Do you feel at home in your body?

I do, on occasion, feel at home in my body. I feel at home in it when I am wearing something that makes me confident, or in pajamas when I'm getting ready for bed or staying in it all day. I also feel at home in it when I get ready for the day/for bed, during the routine in front of the bathroom sink. I like washing my face and brushing my teeth, showering and brushing my hair. The little actions of self care that have an immediate impression on my body make me feel better about being in it.

7. Tell me about one of the first times you felt like you existed outside of the gender you were assigned at birth / you weren't straight.

I have two instances that I can think of, one for each part of this question.

The first time I knew I wasn't straight was when I was around maybe 7 years old. I was violently ill, home from school, and my dad had rented out my favorite "sick-day" movie from Blockbuster, "Ella Enchanted". It certainly wasn't the first time the first time I had viewed the

film, since I had obviously been sick before that. However, that particular viewing, during the scene at the giant wedding where Ella and Prince Char sing together, I couldn't help but think "I want to be Ella, and sing like her, but I also want to dance with her like how Char does".

In regard to gender, my first instance was not too long after, in the second grade. A visiting children's author and illustrator had come to visit the district and was visiting both my class and the one across the hall. As a group, we created a character named Johnny, a baseball-loving, all-American boy who was very funny. The other class' character was a girl, I remember. After establishing the life stories of each of these characters, the two classes voted on which one we would feature in a play that we would perform in front of the whole school. Johnny won, and since my class was the one that created him, we got to be cast in the lead roles. On "audition day", we were all asked to put our heads on our desks, and the teacher read different character names out-loud. If you wanted a specific role, you raised your hand, and she would make note. I have no idea where the courage came from, but when she read Johnny's name, I raised my hand. I was eventually cast for the role, much to my male classmates' misery. I was a huge tom-boy at the time, and wore my Red-Sox jersey way more often than was appropriate, so I loved the opportunity to really be a boy.

8. Where do you get the most support for your queer identity from?

I get the most support for my queer identity with my friends, and a little bit from the internet. As of writing this response, my immediate family does not refer to me by my preferred pronouns or name, so it is really validating to be among my chosen family instead and have no one ever bat an eye or question my identities. I am still who I am, separate and in conjunction with those parts of me, and my friends help me feel like a human being, not some kind of caricature.

9. Who are your major style influences?

My major style influences are probably my friends! More specifically Mitchell Angelo and Leila Louhaichy. I love the amount of stylistic freedom and rule-breaking they do, the anti-conformist attitudes are the kind of confidence I wish to embody in my own wardrobe.

10. Do you feel like there are situations in which you have to “dull down” your presentation for your own safety?

I definitely have had, and will continue to have, experiences where I need to conform my appearance for safety reasons. I have family members who are still unaware of my identity, and have been requested to "tone down" how I express myself, or conform to a more feminine look for certain occasions.

11. Is there anything you want to say to other queer folks?

The most important thing I want to share with other queer folks is to be proud, in any capacity that you feel comfortable/safe to do so. Whether its through expressing yourself through artwork, sporting apparel and accessories with your identity's colors/flag, protesting for legislation that improves/keeps your rights, or just loving yourself as a whole, and surrounding yourself with those who love you too. Your identity/identities are only a small part of who you are as a person, but you should cherish those parts of you with your whole heart.

12. I love you!

I love you too Mitchy!!