

ES.269-Class 12

Reading: *Nobody Passes: Rejecting the Rules of Gender and Conformity*. Edited by Matt Bernstein Sycamore

The class continues to discuss *Nobody Passes*.

“Why Mahmud Can’t Be a Pilot”-Naeem Mohaiemen

A group of Bangladeshi professors go to dinner in New York City. The waiter is from Bangladesh, and they begin to talk together. They find out he wants to be a pilot, but it’s problematic, because he has a Muslim name. This piece is reflection about what it means to be Muslim and South Asian. The two identities can overlap, but can also be mutually exclusive. It’s a meditation on how a name can identify you, and how people can fit it into different categories. This piece brought to mind experiments where people apply to the same job using different names; often times if they use an ethnic name they don’t get a response.

“F2MESTIZO”-Logan Gutierrez-Mock

This essay is about a man who is trans and bi-racial. He is half Mexican, but doesn’t speak Spanish and has light colored skin. His racial identity parallels his trans-identity. This questioning led him to be estranged from his family. Later in his life he was able to better integrate his Mexican identity and was able to reconcile with his family. There’s a passage on page 234 that described what passes as reconciliation. He felt he had a different experience transitioning than other people. He reconstructs and reclaims identities. His parents construct him as a white woman, and he is on a journey to undergo both a gender and a racial transition.

“Persephone” by Helen Boyd

This essay is about a woman whose partner continues to switch gender. This essay begs the question, is it okay for a person to not define their gender? Is it okay to live in the space in between. This concept can be very unsettling for many people. The author’s identity is also tied up with that of her partner. At times she can be perceived as a lesbian. I’m not sure why she chose to call this story Persephone.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persephone>. The story has to do with the explanation of seasons; it’s winter when Persephone is in the underworld. Perhaps the author is comparing her partner’s gender changes to the changing of the seasons.

“Hat” by Tucker Lieberman

Lieberman is a Jewish transman. He started wearing a yarmulke. People would see it and think he was an Orthodox Jew. Jewish strangers would assume a familiarity with him, and do things such as invite him over for Shabbat dinner. On page 248 talks about how he was in a mall on Friday night, and an Israeli vendor asked him why he wasn’t in temple celebrating Shabbat. This essay also illuminates the assumption that transgendered people can’t be religious. Lieberman’s Judaism is enmeshed in his

transitioning process. He becomes a real man and a real Jew when he went into a holy cave in Israel. It was a male only environment and the men undressed in front of each other. He was worried he would be outed, but nobody said anything. Was a real moment of triumph for him. Often Jewish trans men, use the yarmulke as a signifier of their male-ness, but he doesn't use it as such.

“And Then You Cut Your Hair: Genderfucking on the Femme Side of the Spectrum”-Amy André and Sandy Chang

This is an interview with Amy, who is mixed race and has multiple religions. She talks about the legitimacy of being femme, especially for Asian women. Before she cut her hair, she would pass for straight. Amy talks about African American women, their hair, and outsiders' reaction. When it was long, she received much more attention from African American men, who acted more aggressively towards her. When her hair was shorter, their approach was softer. It was the difference between being viewed as an object when feminine and viewed as an object in a drag performance. Hair is a symbol of sexuality, a racial signifier, and a queer signifier. Hair and passing are intertwined issues

“Surface Tensions”-Jen Cross

Cross is queer and a survivor of sexual abuse. The scars of abuse are hidden, invisible. She spent some time being masculine as response to the abuse, but later she wanted to be with someone more masculine. She is now with a butch who sometimes passes as male, and Cross is then read as a heterosexual female. Her sexuality becomes invisible.

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