

November 6, 2015

Dear Mom and Dad,

I'm writing to you about my gender, and it would mean a lot to me if you would read through this letter.

I know that you've been trying to use my name and pronouns more often, and I appreciate that. But I can tell that you don't use "she" and "her" for me when I'm not around.

Over my last few visits, I noticed that you'd use use female pronouns for me here and there. But whenever one of you were to say something to the other—perhaps "When's his flight tomorrow?" or "I think he'd like seconds"—I couldn't help noticing that "he" and "him" fell back in place. Each "he" or "him" sailed with ease, and neither of you batted an eye. And that's when I came to realize: neither of you noticed the "he"s and "him"s because that's how you normally talk to each other when I'm not around.

Since you're out of the habit of using female pronouns for me, you have outed me without realizing it. For instance, over my visit in July, John and Ceci offered to give me a ride back to the airport. After we had put our cases in the car, John asked, "Is that everything?" At which point Dad added, "I think he had also wanted to put his backpack in the trunk." I could tell from Dad's congenial expression that he hadn't noticed that he had just outed me. But I just wanted to crawl into a hole. And perhaps out of our shared sense of embarrassment, the ####s and I endured a very quiet car ride back to the airport.

Being outed in our driveway was mortifying—but if you were to out me in a public setting, that could put my safety at risk. Suppose that we were to go for a meal at a restaurant, and after the server had taken our wine order, Dad were to chime in to say, "And he had wanted to ask which gins you have" (which has actually happened). Doing so outs me to the server—but it also outs me to anyone else who might have overheard that. And if one of those people were someone with a prejudice against LGBT people, they may decide to do harm by me. You might not believe this is a real risk, but it is—there are transgender people who are beaten or killed each year simply for being who they are. That's a risk that I can't ignore, and if your pronoun habits remain as they are, I'm afraid that I won't be able to go places with you in public.

I can't wait to see you and Adrian and Margaret and everyone over Thanksgiving. But while I'm looking forward to seeing you, I also feel queasy about the many chances that you'll have throughout the day to carelessly out me to people like Celia or Angelos or Scott. If you remain cavalier about my pronouns, I have little doubt that I'll face the humiliation of one outing after the next as you mingle with our Thanksgiving guests. But on the other hand, if you'd be willing to take this on together and work on using my pronouns when I'm not around, I know that you can get the hang of this.

Love,