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I am Jess York
I am 28 years old
I am an identical twin
I am the parent of identical twins
I am a professor
I am an academic advisor
I am addicted to playing contact sports
I am a violinist
I am not into labels, because labels are for jars
I am constantly judged by others
I am constantly labeled by others
Because of the way I look

We live in a society that is strongly sexed and gendered; a society that is overtly concerned with whether or not someone is a woman or a man and how one expresses this within the culturally accepted norms of masculinity and femininity. Our sex is assigned to us at birth based on our genitalia—quite literally by a visual once over. Gender stereotyping, beliefs about what is appropriate for males and females, begins at birth when the doctor holds up a new born baby and expresses the fateful words of “It’s a girl or it’s a boy.” In that instant the world turns either pink or blue with expectations. Many people, for the rest of their lives, live and express the gender identity or their inner sense of self that matches the sex assigned to them at birth. Many do not and this does not make a person more or less human.

Gender expression is the basic ways in which we communicate our sex and/or gender to others; it is the external presentation or appearance of a person. Society prescribes that the only acceptable sex, gender identity and gender expression formulas are born a boy + inner sense of self as male = expresses masculinity OR born a girl + inner sense of self as female = expresses femininity.

A person's gender expression includes appearance, dress, mannerisms, speech patterns, hairstyle, and social interactions. Protection of “gender identity and expression” under the law means that no longer is an individual confined and condemned to function in a society which continues to bind individuals within a rigid dichotomy of acceptable presentation and behavior. Our society is based on a system of ORs. Are you a boy OR a girl? Are you a man OR a woman? Are you male OR female? If you do not answer the question, then the question will be answered for based on the way in which you are perceived to be one or the other.

I identify as gender variant. My own personal definition for this is that I do not conform to the stereotyped images of what it means to be female or feminine in American Society. I view gender expression as a performance, it is an act, and it is a costume. I will admit that I spent absolutely no time wondering what you all were going to wear today or how

you might do your hair or overall general appearances. I assume nothing. Quite honestly, I am wearing what I wear everyday so little thought went into my appearance as well. Think about this: When you went on your last job interview, how long did you think about how you might present yourself, what you would wear, etc.? Thus in that moment you were very concerned about someone might perceive or judge you solely based on your appearance. Try to recall and remember that feeling.

We need to stop judging a book by its cover. Are you all familiar with Connecticut's own Mark Twain's famous quotation, "clothes make the man?" The question you should ask yourself is, do they really?

In closing I would like to say that I am Jess York, I am a **person**. How I dress, my short and sometimes blue hair, that fact that I like neck ties and prefer slacks and comfortable shoes does not change the fact that I am **human**. Nothing else matters.