

## **To Identify As**

*N. Noel Sol 1/29/2021*

So many otherkin and therians claim to “identify as” their kintype, and perhaps that is where my distaste with those communities begin. I am a dragon, first and foremost. To say that I “identify as” a dragon is redundant in the extreme; to focus around the mere idea of that identity, rather than acknowledging the lived reality that I am a dragon and that such shapes my experiences and understanding of the world, is to open up unnecessary pedantry around nonhumanity as a whole. “To identify as” language is useful to the human, but not particularly helpful to the nonhuman. Within it is the rise of respectability politics, identity policing, and subjective, humancentric hierarchies of worth and community-- nothing that I particularly align with, and which only drives me to further raise an eyebrow at the ridiculousness I see pouring out from so many parts of the otherkin and therian communities and associating itself irreparably with the concepts of real-life nonhumanity.

While I inhabit a human body, to say that I am human is about as accurate as to say a homeowner is a house; I am not that which I exist within, even if I have painted the walls and made it my own to some small degree. It is not a complex idea: I am a dragon. Outside acceptance or denial of such doesn't change that this holds true. I feel no desire to defend my existence to outsiders and strangers, or build a community dedicated to its defense; I don't need extensive, unique, contradictory vocabulary to describe my experiences, and I don't find myself at extreme enough moral odds between my instincts and the various, conflicting human cultures I currently have to deal with and exist in adjacency to that I feel such an anguish that I need to ruthlessly seek out and inflict my despair upon others. And yet, I look at the most popular nonhuman communities, those which I am often told I should feel some sort of alignment to, and I see virtually nothing but the above.

This isn't to entirely disavow the social usefulness of such communities as a whole; it's just that I, personally, find a majority of the otherkin and therian communities in their current states defunct, worthless, and irredeemable. They do more harm to the concept of nonhumanity than they could ever hope to repair. So many

otherkin and therian communities point at the picture of a tobacco pipe and loudly, proudly proclaim, “that IS a pipe!” while throwing complexities of what ‘being’ truly can mean to an individual by the wayside. Largely in these communities, there simply Is, and Is Not, with no room for in-betweens or existences outside.

This Is/Is Not separation, I would argue, mainly comes from the “to identify as” language. One either identifies as, or does not identify as nonhuman. A simple concept, but one so staunchly held as a factual and full way to understand and view nonhumanity rather than merely a guiding point, a beginner’s explanation, the bullet point at the beginning of a textbook chapter that it was most likely meant to be. And because of this, so many otherkin and therian communities’ understanding of what nonhumanity is is terribly, quintessentially, ironically human. On the metaphorical sliding scale between “human” and “nonhuman”--a basic, but efficient metaphor for our purposes--many think that they are solidly in the “nonhuman” side of the spectrum, when in reality they are, at best, merely situated in the middle, just barely dipping their toes into the side closer to nonhumanity than humanity. I look to find others like me, and instead of finding nonhumans, I often can only find individuals who are human first, human above all else. Who from their words and descriptions of their experiences, are just barely to the left of an entirely typical, standard human existence, and yet parade themselves around as the paragon of nonhumanity. Even those who loudly, vocally pride themselves on how their identity is based on “animality” or “animal instinct” fall into this-- inane, vague justifications and defenses against imagined attacks, to defend an imagined idea of what nonhumanity is and what nonhumanity can be.

“But Noel!” You surely cry. “Is it not presumptuous to assume to know others’ identities and experiences of themselves?”

It would be, if it were not for the mountains of evidence I have been unwillingly subjected to over the years, watching the host of my system, Stormy, delve and dive into otherkin and therian communities.

Respectability politics, the idea of public relations; the hierarchy of “validity” between who can and cannot be nonhuman and in what ways; the villainization and judgemental hatred of certain animalistic feelings, thoughts, instincts: these are

intrinsically, undeniably human. These have no worthwhile place alongside concepts of nonhumanity, and yet, you hardly see one without the others in frequented nonhuman spaces. The idea that you must control what you do with your own body and person, lest society swivel its head sharply in your direction when it notices your sharpened horns and wild eyes? That to have some sort of performatively significant basis for one's very self, filled with theories and hypotheses and scriptures and connections and explanations, makes their essential being somehow more worthy or legitimate than others' who have no desire or interest in pursuing such tragedies? That you must dress yourself in the cloths and scraps of man--*'this is how you walk among men, this is how you pass as one: this is how you stand, how you sit, this is how you eat and talk.(do not growl, do not bare your teeth: you are no longer just beast, you are now man as well).'*--do their dances, jump through their hoops, lest you be labeled some sort of freak, some sort of monster, someone villainous who poisons the very well they were shoved into? None of these are intrinsic to nonhumanity; they are entirely, negatively human in their design, and yet they can be found abundant within the otherkin and therian communities, melded into their very foundation and core. So many individuals demonstrably could not imagine their nonhumanity outside these paradigms, as can be witnessed through their joyful willingness to inflict it so readily upon others within their communities, which brings forth obvious conclusions regarding the nature of their personal nonhumanity...that is, that there is substantially very little "non-" about it.

Stormy calls it a problem of extreme virtue signaling and "Americanization" within the community, but finds the overarching humanity within these communities admirable, charming even; as they once wrote regarding the perplexing nature of the otherkin community in relation to its humanity,

"it must be noted that the otherkin community in its modern state is focused on the unique phenomena of non-humanity *within* the human. [sic] I would argue that otherkin are, if not transcending the human through their non-human identities (for I do not quite believe that the term "transcending" fits the unique importance the human has within otherkin identities), then that they are at the

very least transforming what the human means. It is not going beyond the human into the non-human; rather, it is the contradictory inclusion of the non-human within the human which is the foundation of otherkin discourse. From that seed, the plant of an individual's experience as an otherkin springs forth, shaping not only how they view the world, but, more importantly in this context and discussion, how they interact with their peers within the otherkin community.”  
(Shepard, The Otherkin Community and Bruce Lincoln's Definition of Religion)

And I would certainly be inclined to agree with their conclusions on the origin of otherkin and therian community discourse and relation, though our personal perspectives on the resulting effects certainly differ. I would argue that a status quo of nonhumanity comes tumbling out of the combination, something which is presented not as what it is--societal expectations donning a fur coat--but as the “default” or “standard” for what it means to be nonhuman with very little outside wider interpretation. From this is where you get moral commentary and judgement surrounding nonhumanity as a whole and nonhumans, the “hunting instincts encourage violence!” crowds, the “you can only identify as previously approved animals to be nonhuman” groups, the “how dare you don a tattoo or necklace?!” individuals, the “you cannot use ‘transspecies’ as your preferred term!” people, and so on and so forth.

It's alienating and ostracizing, laughably and annoyingly inhumane and morally inappropriate, and it appropriates nonhuman experiences and existences for ultimately human ends--ill-gained influence and power over a larger network of people, and over the interpretation of the phenomena of nonhumanity in public eye as well; excuses, defences against atrocious acts, against humans and nonhumans alike; shows of faux virtue to gain respect and admiration of strangers; the list goes on.

If individuals truly wish to keep any aspects of nonhumanity they have at an arm's length, only letting the aspects of themselves which they can infantilize and coddle forward and rejecting all else that might reside in their heart for fear of society's rejection, then that is a problem for the individual, not for the community. I genuinely think such people would be better off separating themselves from the idea of any type of

community based around internal nonhumanity since, in such a ever-so-human way, they instinctually pass moral judgement upon it and are only willing to engage with the “unproblematic” aspects of it. Play human games, win human prizes.

And of those who think they can hide behind nonhumanity as a way to escape the responsibility of their actions as I have seen so many attempt, I have to laugh at their assertions that their actions somehow ‘prove’ their nonhumanity. What could possibly be more human, than scuttling off to wear another creature’s coat to try and avoid the cold you yourself threw the door wide open to let in?

Given everything, at this point I would find it significantly more useful to nonhumanity and nonhumans everywhere if the otherkin and therian communities were to be largely reset or replaced. Someone kinder than me would call most of the therian and otherkin communities in their current forms pathetic. But I call them what they really are: miserable, hollow husks that refuse to see nonhumanity without a human skin and judgements attached to it, and who have diseased larger interpretations and understandings of nonhumanity with this incomplete and inaccurate interpretation.