TestFile4-Lily Gladstone on How Using She/They Pronouns Is Connected to Indigenous Background, “A Way of Decolonizing Gender for Myself”

Killers of the Flower Moon star Lily Gladstone has opened up about how using she/they pronouns is connected to the performer’s Indigenous background and “partly a way of decolonizing gender.”

In a new interview with People, Gladstone — who was raised on the Blackfeet Nation reservation in Montana by a father of Blackfeet and Nimiipuu heritage and a white mother — says that “in most Native languages, most Indigenous languages, Blackfeet included, there are no gendered pronouns. There is no he/she, there’s only they.”

And within the Blackfeet community specifically, Gladstone says, “we don’t have gendered pronouns, but our gender is implied in our name.”

“Even that’s not binary,” Gladstone adds, explaining how a grandfather had a Blackfeet name that meant “Iron Woman.”

“He had a name that had a woman’s name in it,” Gladstone says. “I’d never met my grandfather. I wouldn’t say that he was nonbinary in gender, but he was given a woman’s name because he kind of carried himself, I guess, the way that women who have that name do.”

Gladstone adds, “And there were lots of women historically and still now who are given men’s names. They fulfill more of a man’s role in society as far as being provider, warrior, those sort of things.”

Speaking about personal pronoun preferences, Gladstone says, “my pronoun use is partly a way of decolonizing gender for myself.”

Beyond that, Gladstone says the she/they pronouns is a way of the performer “embracing that when I’m in a group of ladies, I know that I’m a little bit different. When I’m in a group of men, I don’t feel like a man. I don’t feel [masculine] at all. I feel probably more feminine when I’m around other men.”

“In ceremony, a lot of times where you sit in the circle is a gendered thing,” Gladstone says. “I happen to sit in circles that are very embracing of all of our people. And I’ve seen people change where they sit in the circle based upon how they’re feeling that day.

Gladstone also recalls realizing early on that “they” might be preferable to gendered pronouns.

“I remember being 9 years old and just being a little disheartened, seeing how often a lot of my boy cousins were misgendered because they wore their hair long,” Gladstone says. “It happens to a lot of kids, I think, especially Native boys leaving a community where long hair is celebrated [and then] just kind of getting teased for it. So I remember back then being like, everybody should just be they.”

Gladstone also speaks about gendered awards categories, which have received more attention in recent years as groups like the Gotham Awards, MTV Movie & TV Awards, the Los Angeles Film Critics Association and the Independent Spirit Awards have opted for gender-neutral categories; Gladstone is set to serve as honorary chair of the 2024 Independent Spirit Awards ceremony.

“I think it’s really cool that we’re seeing ‘performer’ and we’re seeing everybody brought in together. I do feel that historically having gendered categories has helped from keeping women actors from a lot of erasure because I think historically people just tend to honor male performances more,” Gladstone says. “I know a lot of actresses who are very proud of the word ‘actress’ or are very proud of being an actress. I don’t know, maybe it’s just an overly semantic thing where I’m like, if there’s not a ‘director-ess,’ then there shouldn’t be actresses. There’s no ‘producer-ess,’ there’s no ‘cinematographer-ess.’”

Gladstone has been receiving awards buzz for playing Mollie Burkhart, the Osage wife of a white man, Ernest (Leonardo DiCaprio) in Martin Scorsese’s Killers of the Flower Moon, based on David Grann’s 2017 nonfiction book about a series of murders of Osage people in Oklahoma in the 1920s.

Gladstone is nominated for Golden Globe and Critics Choice awards for best actress and has been named best actress by the National Board of Review and New York Film Critics Circle.