

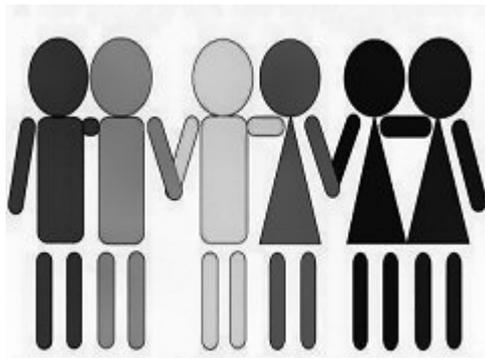
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On Gender and Sexual Orientation

Viewpoints that Challenge Long-Standing Notions

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Am I bisexual because I am interested both in men and women or am I bisexual because I am interested in the person behind the gender?

In the time since I first acknowledged my bisexuality (about four years ago), I've done a considerable amount of soul searching and self-analysis, especially in regards to how gender relates to

sexual orientation and how both relate to my perspectives on the world as a whole. This article is intended to share perceptions and viewpoints which, I hope, will challenge many long-standing notions as to how we construct gender and sexual orientation and how they intertwine.

Furthermore, I hope that in writing this article I will not only open minds to some, somewhat unusual points of view, but will help address concerns which I know are not unique to myself or specifically to transsexuals or bisexuals but which should, instead, concern us all.

If a lesbian is interested in a woman who has a penis is she still a lesbian? If a gay male is interested in a woman who exchanges her penis for a vagina is he still a gay male?

At this point in my life, I am in what some people would call "transition mode". In other words, I am living part-time as a woman, but many people still perceive me to be a man. My attire tends to be entirely androgynous. In stores and places of business I often get called "ma'am" or "sir" regardless of my attire. I introduce myself to most people by initials which are gender-neutral and try to avoid to give them any excuse to assign a gender to me. The reason I do this is simple; I do not feel quite capable at this point of "passing" full-time as a woman and I absolutely refuse to live as a man. So I choose something which is neither male nor female, nor exactly a hybrid of the two since I think that gender goes a great deal beyond a binary system.

More often than not, gender is viewed in some sort of continuum. It is common to think of aspects of a person as being more "masculine" or "feminine" and not leave ourselves much room outside those models. That's partially because we are so fixated on gender in this world as an "either/or" proposition that we can not allow ourselves to see beyond it.

My own opinion is that this is nonsense. I say now that there are as many genders in this world, if not more, as there are people with gender. I am not a man, but the body I possess has many male aspects to it. I have breasts, but I also have a penis. I can grow facial hair and have a lot of muscle, but I have relatively soft skin. Am I a woman? In my own view, yes. However, it would be arrogant for me to assume that I can share all experiences that women experience. I can never have a period. I can never bear a child. Of course the same can be said for some women. Furthermore, many women are more "masculine" (in purely "traditional" terms) than I am, just as there are many men who are more "feminine".

So what am I? To classify me as "in-between" indicates that my gender is relevant only in terms that relate to more traditionally gendered people. I am not gendered in the same manner as anyone I know and I have to say that it has been my experience that this disturbs a great many people. The same way that people who are not heterosexual are seen and perceived as a threat by many people who are, those of us who are not gendered in a traditional mould may represent some great danger to those of us who are.

Alfred Kinsey created a scale which defines sexual orientation on a scale of 0 - 6, with people who are considered "more heterosexual" leaning towards the lower end of the scale and people who are considered "more homosexual" leaning towards the higher end. Thus, an unwavering "utterly straight" person would be a "0" on the Kinsey Scale whereas a person who has never been anything but gay their entire life would end up as a "6". A "perfect" bisexual would be a Kinsey "3", since three is the median point between 0 and 6. However it is my opinion that this scale falls short. As I mentioned in the previous paragraph, to consider my gender only in terms of how it relates to other genders is as simplistic as to only address the topic of bisexuality in terms of how it relates to heterosexuality or homosexuality.

What about people who have shown sexual interest specifically in me? If a lesbian is interested in a woman who has a penis is she still a lesbian? If a gay male is interested in a woman who exchanges her penis for a vagina is he still a gay male? Are we interested in the person behind the sex organs or are the sex organs our primary motivating force in determining to whom we are attracted? Do I, to be at a particular point on the Kinsey Scale, have to demonstrate my interest in people in terms of how their appearance, actions and attitudes relate to their perceived gender? Is sexual orientation constructed in a manner which even allows for such perspectives as my

own?

So where is the room for shemales, hermaphrodites, drag queens, non-op transsexuals, transgenderists, cross-dressers and all other forms of gender benders, blenders and breakers in our "spectrum" of sexual orientation? Am I bisexual because I am interested both in men and women or am I bisexual because I am interested in the person behind the gender? Or is it some combination of the two? Does gender play a role but not one to the point where I would not be attracted to someone based specifically on their gender?

The closest thing I can get to a definitive statement on this topic is simply and utterly that I am Julie. That is my name; the name I have chosen for myself as my own form of self-identification. I am to my own view a woman who also happens to be somewhat androgynous, just as there are very androgynous women who were born women and very androgynous men who were born men. We need to get beyond the point where we feel this need to pigeon hole ourselves into boxes which define our gender and our relative "success" as members of our gender to the point in which our gender defines our identity more than our identity defines our gender. Only then can we truly understand and accept our own individual selves at face value, rather than at value of the faces we put out for others to see.

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The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.