

Transitional Dating

Q: Could you imagine going out with a woman who wants to physically transition to become a man? This is my current situation. I really like her, and this may sound superficial, but I don't want to date a man. Something inside of me says "no" but also "yes" in some way. I feel like I am strange.

A: You are not strange. This is an interesting and complex question. Many of us in the queer community have worked through issues that surround dating a member of the same sex. (Lord knows there are enough of those issues for us to work on for years.) But this particular matter flips things around in a different way. Think about it. You grow up seeing straight couples together, getting the message that straight is "normal." Then, just when you've come to terms with the fact that you like to have sex with women, bam!—you find yourself physically attracted to someone who looks like a woman but identifies as a man.

Wow. And this is nothing compared to what a trans person goes through. I quote my dad, who once said, "I can't imagine how hard it would be to be trans. I mean, that really would be confusing not to feel like your body was yours." Strong work, Dad.

I consider myself a lesbian. I want to have sex with a woman. Physically and emotion-



ask a gay

BY KRISTIN FLICKINGER

Is it the parts that we are born with that define our gender? Is it the parts we die with? Or is it the parts we identify with? I don't rightly know.

ally, that is what I want in a partner. That means I want breasts and a vagina, and also the emotions and softness of a woman.

But there's something even more important for me.

I need to have an immediate and deep personal connection with someone in order to be attracted to them. If it's not there, it's not going to work. So far, those connections have come with biological women who identify as women. I'm not sure what I would do if the person I was deeply connected with wanted to change her physicality to become a man. My sense is that I wouldn't be attracted in the first place to someone who identifies emotionally as a man—but you never know what can happen.

It gets a little tricky when our definitions of gender shift.

What about dating a trans woman, for instance—a person who identifies emotionally as a woman and has taken steps to become one physically? That would meet my wants and needs of dating an emotional and physical woman. Still, I'm not sure it would work for me.

I know what some of you are thinking: "That's not a real woman." But why not? How is this so different from a woman who has had a double mastectomy and hysterectomy? She may have no breasts or uterus, but we still consider her a woman. And a trans woman may have both—in fact, may have chosen to have those parts. So, is it the parts that we are born with that define our gender? Is it the parts we die with? Or is it the parts we identify with? I don't rightly know. I'm not entirely sure it even matters for this conversation, but I digress.

Aside from issues of attraction, however, are issues of compatibility, emotional support and your own capacity to work through new territory. Someone who is about to begin the transition process has a challenging path ahead. Many trans people have experienced incredibly difficult things in their lives. Many will face trials, roadblocks based on their gender identity

and expression for the rest of their lives.

I feel like a jerk saying it, but I think it would be challenging—for me—to date a trans person, difficult—for me—because I don't have a lot of language around the subject. I don't know how to ask questions about being trans. I know that I would need to do a significant amount of work in order to be a supportive and educated partner. That's not to say I wouldn't do it. It's just to say I would want to take the time to learn as much as I could so that my partner wouldn't have to also be my teacher (terribly unfair), and so that I would know how to best ask the questions I might have.

So check in with yourself. It sounds like you're attracted to this person. For you, is it more important to have someone who identifies as a woman, emotionally, or someone who presents as a woman, physically? Do you want both? Need both? Be honest with yourself. Are you willing to put in the time and energy to be a supportive partner? When you have the answers to those questions, you will know whether to move forward, gently and with due communication, or to back away—with the same gentleness and communication. ☐

KRISTIN loves her trans friends and really hopes they still love her. Find answers to questions about trans issues, answered by an actual trans person, at askthegay.com.

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