

In the Driver's Seat?

from half a life to whole

BY LEELA GINELLE

Dear DMV,

I'm writing to tell you that your gender designation on driver's licenses hurts people. I doubt you set out to do so. To you, it was probably just a handy way to classify drivers: male or female. There are people who don't identify either way, though, or whose identification changes from moment to moment.

I'm one of those. When I was younger, I could block my ambivalence. It was easy to check "male," because I believed I should. Also, the culture seemed to tell me that being male was "better than" being female, so it felt like claiming a prize I'd won at birth. In the last few years, though, checking those boxes has felt more and more fraudulent. Why is that?

Inside, I've had a voice telling me I'm female. It's not always a kind voice. It tends to call me things like "mean girl," "tranny" and "nympho," depending on the situation. And anytime I call myself a man, it's quick to remind me that the label doesn't apply. Where does that voice come from?

It seems so basic: my gender, my identity, my sexuality. I assume it must be "me" who's talking. *If I'm telling myself I'm not a man, then I'm not one*, my thinking goes. What about the negativity, though? Why am I so hard on myself? Perhaps it's status again.

If being male was better than being female,

then what could be worse—or weirder—than going from male to female, or male to some No Man's Land in between? Perhaps that last part doesn't ring true. Being in the No Man's Land has seemed "better" than living full-time as female the last few weeks.

I've always liked androgyny. The people I find most fascinating are the ones who seem to blend genders so seamlessly I can't determine their biological sex for sure. As I begin to express androgyny more in my presentation, I like my body and myself more. Even at this time, though, I'm bedeviled by that voice.

Where does it come from? Is it my soul or spirit? If it is, why is it so negative? Maybe it's repression. I've locked my gender away so long that when it speaks to me, perhaps I hear only hostility. "There's no place for you in the world," the voice tells me. "Hide and be miserable."

As I hide less, though, the world seems more alien. I look at men, and I don't want to be one. They seem crude, boorish and fashionless. I look at women, and know I'm not one, but their trappings—the hair, the makeup, the clothes—seem alluring and taboo. And where am I?

In between. I wear makeup and women's

clothes regularly now, and I do so in fear of the reaction I might draw. To me they still seem forbidden. I'd like to think I'm not trying to be "female," but I know which section I bought the clothes in, and I know which gender goes to makeup stores.

Part of me still identifies as male, as well. *I may look a little weird*, I think, *but I'm not wearing a dress. No one's going to kick my ass*. My manhood still feels like a VIP pass at those times, and part of me hates it. *Get out of my way*, I think. *Let me figure this out without your words!*

Who do I want out of my way? In those moments, it feels like everyone. As I write now, though, it's hard to know. Maybe the female part of me wants the male part gone. The idea of living full-time as a woman still feels exotic and enchanting, as though I could erase everything that's come before and live some fashion magazine life. Likewise, the male part probably wants the female part gone. "If I could only be 'normal,'" it's said, at least once a day, since reaching consciousness.

As I write this, I identify much more strongly with the female side, because writing and fantasizing are where I've always connected with it. When I leave for work shortly, some

switch will flip and I'll identify with the male, and fear all the signs of the female that are showing. How do I integrate?

A part of me thinks the answer is to consciously forget those words. Can one do that, though? "Consciously forget"? If each day I'm constructing an androgynous presentation using male and female signifiers, how do I forget the words "male" and "female"?

And what about my male hatred? Clearly that can't be healthy, nor can my fear/envy of women. Is this just a phase that will clear up soon? I hope so.

So why am I writing to you, DMV? It's because you reinforce our culture's binary gender system. Should I want to legally change my gender on my license, my "proof of identity," I'll need to see a psychiatrist, convince him or her I'm "really" female, get a signed note and bring it to you.

And what if I just want the damned gender designation removed? I don't think there's anyone I can see about that. Male or female? Neither. Will you please give me the option?

Sincerely,
Leela Ginelle JO

LEELA GINELLE is the author of *The Gender Cycle: Three Plays*. Visit her blog at leelaginelle.com.



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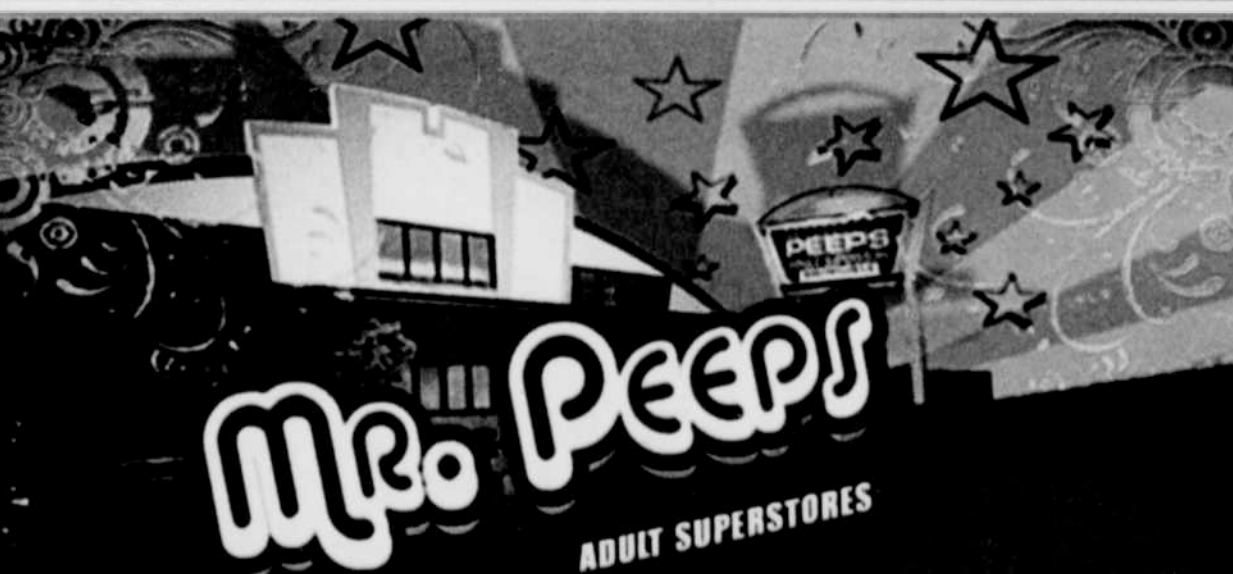
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