

I want to be androgynous, neither man nor woman. I'm not a girl trapped in a boy's body, or a boy trapped in a girl's body. I'm me in the body I was born in, only I'd like to make my body look more like me. To me, that means more androgynous.

The problem is, my mind sees *either* man or woman everywhere I look, and I ask myself, "What's wrong with me?"

I don't want to pose that question. I want to love myself, and I want to love what I want to become. Right now, though, the world, and my mind, seems to be standing in my way.

In reading gender and sexual history, I find there have always been two poles: male and female. People who blurred the lines, men who became "effeminate" and women who grew "masculine," were considered outcasts.

They upset the culture's unwritten rules about power, the women considered presumptuous for trying to rise above their station, the men disgraced for allowing themselves to fall. What I've been reading is what my mind's always told me, only now it's in black and white for me to question. Is it true?

How can I answer that? It's our culture, the shared story that we live every day. Being angry at the reality is like being angry at English, or crosswalks, or clothes. The problem is, clothes seem to be what I'm most angry about these days.

I want to wear whatever I want to wear, but a lot of the time I don't want to wear it. For

Skirting The Issue



from half a life to whole

BY MIKKI GILLETTE

Objectively, a skirt is a piece of fabric; culturally, it signifies something, and signifies it so strongly it stops me in my tracks.

example, tonight I'm going dancing, and it would be fun to wear a skirt. Or rather, it would be fun if my mind didn't race at the mere suggestion of it.

"A skirt? But I'm not becoming a woman. Plus, it would look weird. Also, I don't want to get my ass kicked. Besides, what would it mean?" That last question comes up a lot.

If I'm a biological male, and not currently trying to pass as anything different, what would it mean for me to wear a skirt in public? I hate that question. I'd prefer it simply mean I like wearing skirts, but my thoughts don't stop there. Part of me wants to know *why* I like wearing skirts, and its conclusions aren't kind.

"Is it because I look down on myself?" I wonder. "Because wearing a skirt is like . . . abdicating my status." I wish I could say that's all in my head, but my eyes tell a different story. At the last transwoman support group I

attended, there wasn't a skirt to be seen.

"Well, maybe wearing a skirt isn't androgynous," I think. Maybe. But I wear a scarf on my head, women's sweaters and jewelry. Why is a skirt a divide?

This is where culture is so tricky. Objectively, a skirt is a piece of fabric; culturally, it signifies something, and signifies it so strongly it stops me in my tracks. I don't have to let it, but I do, because I don't want to give up what I think not wearing a skirt in public gives me.

In my twenties I wore skirts, but only when I was in drag: wig, makeup, breasts, etc. In public I was androgynous: I wore men's and women's clothes, had long hair and painted my nails, but the skirts were the dividing line again.

To wear a skirt or a dress I thought I needed "permission," and that meant turning myself into a girl. I had lots of rules about it—or maybe I just said I did. I went out in drag to clubs, but also to parties and on dates. No matter what the situation, I felt shame about it in retrospect.

Is it because of the bargain I made, "You can wear a skirt if you're not you"? Perhaps, but there's a part of me that rushed toward

drag, that longed to not be me. Perhaps the shame was already there, attached to my gender in whatever form it took.

Could I wear a skirt in public and be myself today? I believe so, but I fear how it would look. I don't relish attention, and I fear it would attract some, if not violence. Is that just in my head? I'd like to think so. I don't like having to censor myself.

Choosing to don a skirt would likely parallel every step of the coming out process. At first it would seem overwhelming and perilous. My initial try would be an out-of-body experience, and eventually it would become the new normal.

Except that it's hard to imagine this ever feeling normal, simply because I don't see anyone else doing it. You don't know me, but rest assured, I'm not a trendsetter, and I don't believe I'm on to the next fad here. Would I want to be the only one doing something just because I liked it?

Yes, as strange as it sounds to me. I remember when I lived in Berkeley, a guy walked around downtown a lot sporting a business style haircut and wire-rim glasses, a tight white T-shirt, mini-skirt and women's pumps. I thought he was the weirdest thing I'd ever seen.

I hope he didn't agree. **JO**

MIKKI GILLETTE is a journalist and author. Visit her blog at leelaginelle.com.

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