

Ask Matt: What is My Sexual Identity?

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Abstract

A reader writes: “I am having issues determining my sexual identity since transition from female to male. Dating and having a relationship are things I consciously took off the table while I was in the early stages of transition. It is now three years into transition and the idea of having someone in my life [...]

Article

A reader writes:

“I am having issues determining my sexual identity since transition from female to male. Dating and having a relationship are things I consciously took off the table while I was in the early stages of transition. It is now three years into transition and the idea of having someone in my life is sounding pretty good.

“Although I am attracted to the male physique and enjoy the visual of a handsome, sexually attractive man, I just don’t picture myself in a sexual relationship with a man, but I wouldn’t take it off the table. I am attracted to women, especially lesbian women. But I am not so interested in overly masculine lesbians. If she is more masculine than I am, I feel feminine and that makes me uncomfortable.

“But the thought of having my face in close proximity of a vagina just makes me uncomfortable, and I don’t know if that is an act I could perform. I am not sure if that distaste has to do with the fact that even though I have had some surprisingly impressive changes, I still consider myself to have a vagina and I don’t like it at all and I am looking forward to the day I have lower surgery.

“I don’t really care about labels, but my brain wants desperately to find a category to place my sexually identity in. So what defines sexual identity? Is it attraction to femininity or masculinity, a particular type of genitalia or what? I like to believe my sexual attraction revolves around the individual as a whole and not just particular body parts. I am so confused. What are your words of wisdom on the topic of sexual identity?”

Once again, we run into the problem and the necessity of labels. We are a label-making, category-making species, and because of this, labels can be both friends and enemies. They help us define ourselves, but they also limit our choices. The problem with definitions, which evolve from labels, is that many people have many definitions for one label. You asked for mine, so here goes:

Sexual Identity (as a general definition): Who a person is attracted to and what label that person gives to his/her/hir sexual attraction.

Straight: An attraction to what that person considers to be the “opposite” sex. This could include

factors such as primary sex characteristics (genitalia), secondary sex characteristics (breasts, body hair), and outer expressions of masculinity and/or femininity, such as appearance, behavior, and so on.

Gay: An attraction by a man to others whom he considers to be of the “same” sex. This could include any of the factors listed above.

Lesbian: An attraction by a woman to others whom she considers to be of the “same” sex. This could include any of the factors listed above.

Bisexual: An attraction by a person to others whom that person considers to be the “opposite” sex and/or the “same” sex, including any of the factors listed above.

Pansexual, Omnisexual, Queer: An attraction to a specific person, regardless of that person’s primary or secondary sex characteristics or expressions of masculinity and/or femininity.

Asexual: No particular sexual attraction to other people, regardless of the factors listed above.

You asked in your letter (which I edited for length) about “polysexual.” My understanding of poly is that it indicates a person who has or might have multiple sexual and/or romantic relationships at one time. I don’t think this is a sexual orientation so much as it is a personal choice with regard to relationships. Polyamorous people probably have the same labels for their sexual orientation that non-poly people have, such as straight, gay, lesbian, bi, and queer. (Readers can let me know more.)

There are probably other labels out there that people use to define their sexuality. These are just the most standard/familiar. You can even make up your own. But the thing to think about, because it does sound as if you have multiple attractions, is that you don’t want to let a label limit you.

Just because you like to look at attractive male bodies does not mean that you have to sleep with a man. And if you decide you’re not going to and the right guy comes along, then change your mind. If there are certain activities that you don’t want to partake of (as indicated in your original, longer letter), then this will be a negotiation that you will work out with potential partners.

Just because you don’t like the idea of female genitalia next to your face does not mean that you can’t be attracted to women and can’t have sexual interactions with women. There are many ways to sexually interact. And you might decide you like it once you have tried it. If not, this is a negotiation that you work out with potential partners.

If your sexual identity truly revolves around individual people, regardless of their body makeup, then you might want to consider a label such as pansexual, omnisexual, or queer. I realize that queer has negative connotations in some circles, but those tend to be among older gay men and lesbians who have had the word used against them in hatred and discrimination.

Young people have reclaimed this word, and I sometimes even use it for myself, because I like the idea of not having to limit myself to one category of attraction or another. It also allows me not to be sexual at all if I choose. “Queer” allows you a lot of freedom to say yes and to say no.

But I certainly understand why a gay man would emphatically say, “I’m gay,” or a lesbian would say, “I’m a lesbian,” or a straight person would say, “I’m straight.” It’s very clear at that point who that person will or will not date or be sexual with.

The other thing to be careful with is stereotypes about particular sexual practices (which was more evident in your longer letter). Not all gay men have or want to have anal sex, for example (and a lot of straight people and lesbians do). Not all lesbians, no matter how traditionally feminine they are, insist on receiving oral sex. Not all people with vaginas want to be penetrated, and not all people with penises want to penetrate. Some people care very much about their partner's genitalia. Some people couldn't care less.

Each person's sexual desires are as unique as that person is. That's why communication and negotiation is so important (and why labels are often so difficult and confining). I would also suggest that you not rule out anything and try a few things that you think you aren't going to like. You might be surprised.

That said, don't let anyone force or coerce you into doing something that you don't want to do. If a partner wants to do something that you find distasteful, don't do it. Your discussions will determine whether or not your partner will let that go or if your partner can get that need met somewhere else.

Of course, I want to tell you not to stress out over a label or category to put yourself in, but labels and categories are the reasons you wrote in. Because your original letter indicated possible attractions to trans and non-trans people, men and women, both or neither, my suggestion would be to try out "queer" for a while and see how it fits. You can always narrow it down later, if you feel that you must. But honestly, only you can make that determination.

Readers, what do you suggest?

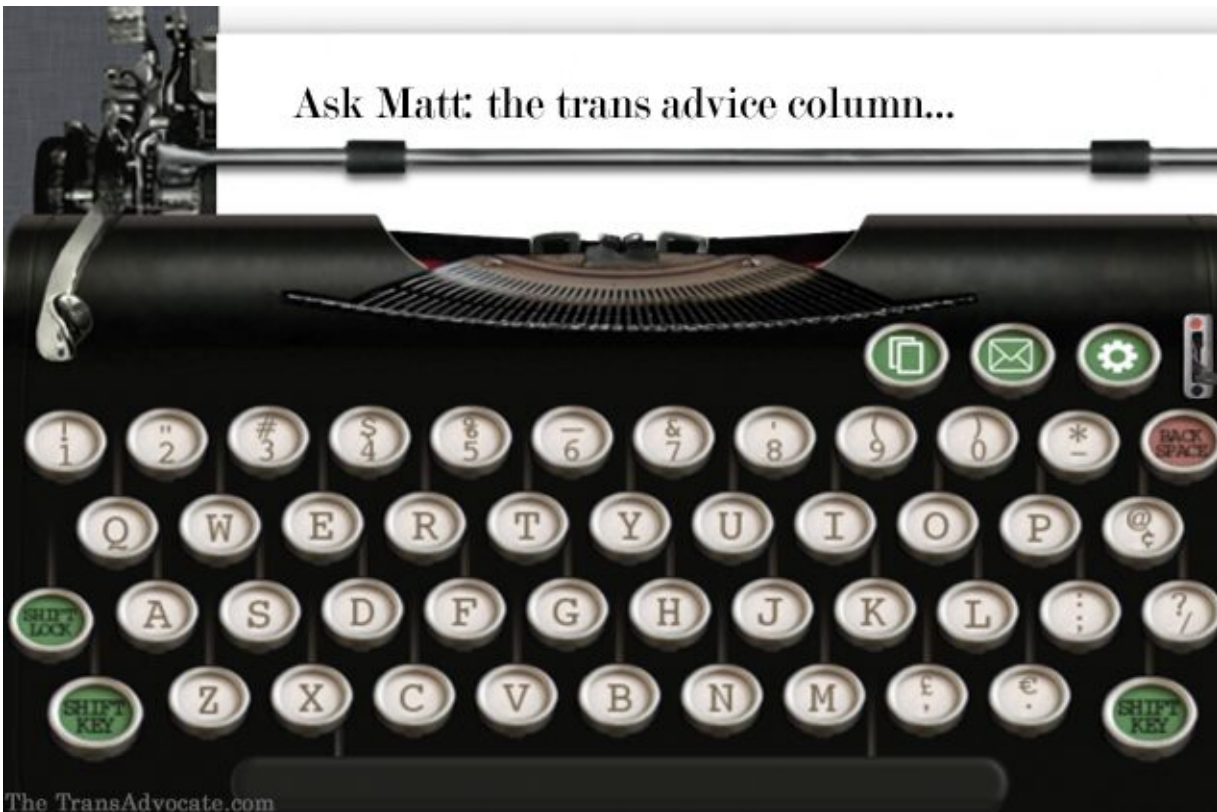


Figure 1. matt

Cross-posted from Tranifesto

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