A person’s gender may change, but his love can still last

BY JACOB ANDERSON-MINSHALL

Recently trans guy Bryden Taylor stirred up a flurry of comments on Facebook by stating unequivocally that a lesbian cannot be a lesbian and date a trans man. Soon afterward he deleted his post, replacing it with the following statement:

“I’m deleting my last status do [sic] to the fact that its blowing up my phone... ... I personally would NEVER be with someone who said they were a lesbian. Sorry if I offended anyone. I personally just don’t understand how that works...”

Taylor isn’t the first person to express this idea, nor is he the only trans person to believe it. In fact, for many trans men, the love of a lesbian is suspect compared to the love of a straight woman or a gay man. Likewise for many trans women, the love of a straight woman is suspect compared to the love of a straight man or a lesbian. And for many trans people of any gender or sexual orientation, the love of a bisexual (man or woman) is also suspect.

This is because trans people worry about being seen for who they are and being seen as “real.” They fear that some attractions and some love can only happen if the other person isn’t seeing them authentically. In other words, in the view of many trans men like Taylor, a lesbian-identified woman would not be with a trans man if she actually saw him as a man.

As someone who has been in a relationship with the same woman for the last 22 years, this certainly is a question I have heard before. After all, my wife, Diane, not only continued to identify as a lesbian after her transition eight years ago, she continued to run the world’s largest lesbian publication for half a dozen years after I became a man.

While some lesbians certainly questioned her right to maintain her lesbian credentials and represent the lesbian community in the media, I fielded far more questions from other trans folk about Diane’s capacity to see and love me as a “real” man.

And over the years more trans people than cis-gender people have questioned whether Diane’s insistence upon retaining her own identity is a slight to my manhood.

The questions I throw back at them are many: Is the partner of someone who goes through a gender transition required to alter their own self-identification? Is your sexual orientation truly determined by the shape of your partner’s genitalia? If so, where does that leave partners of trans people who haven’t undergone genital surgery? Or maybe it’s your partner’s gender identity or gender expression that determines how you should identify? What makes our right as trans people to self-identify sacrosanct, while our partners must have their identities determined for them based on particular attributes not about themselves, but about us?

If a straight woman is married to a man and that man transitions to a woman, then we seem to want to force them into a gay relationship and require them to identify as lesbians. Like...”

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wise, when—after nearly 15 years as part of a lesbian couple—I transitioned, people seemed to believe that Diane was required to alter her identity, because, the theory goes, she could not remain a lesbian while continuing to be with me.

I find it almost offensive that this line of argument originates so frequently from trans individuals.

Trans people have often argued, almost vehemently, that it doesn’t matter what we look like physically, it doesn’t matter what other people think, it doesn’t matter what style of clothing we wear, it doesn’t matter if our voices have changed or if we’ve undergone surgery or if we started hormone treatment—the only thing that matters is how we identify.

Once I verbalize my gender identity, I expect to be taken at my word. If I say I’m a man, I expect you to accept that I am a man. I could be wearing a dress, I could look like Miss America, and if I say I’m really a man, then you are supposed to accept that I am.

So it’s almost incomprehensible to me that we as a community or that individuals who identify as trans would not use the same logic when it comes to other people’s identities. It is not our place to identify someone else as a lesbian or as a straight person or as a bisexual person. It is completely up to them to decide and verbalize what their sexual orientation is.

This double standard is offensive. We can’t demand the freedom of self-identification for ourselves and then not allow other people that same right.

Like everyone else, Diane has the right to choose her own identities and to proclaim, “This is who I am,” and be taken at her word.

I dislike when members of any minority take it upon themselves to police their communities and determine who has the right to belong. When I first came out as trans, I was offended by a listserv moderator who suggested that some people weren’t really trans men because they were too feminine. I’ve seen this kind of policing everywhere I’ve lived and especially on the Internet, where people are more unabashed in sharing their feelings.

So it would be bad enough if the lesbian community insisted upon strict qualifications for a lesbian identity. But when someone outside that community suggests that they have a better idea of what components are essential to that identity, it is even more offensive.

Speaking of identity and being kicked out of your identity for particular behaviors, I have to ask, Since when does dating a lesbian make you less of a man? Some people may never find lesbianism a huge turn-on. And pop-cultural depictions would have us believe that it actually makes someone more, not less, of a man if he can “turn” a lesbian. Indeed, such men are often glorified in popular culture for their masculinity as though somehow they must be even more manly to get a girl to switch teams. But apparently, if you’re trans man and you get a lesbian to switch teams, it simply confirms the artificiality of your manhood.

It’s as though Taylor suggests that by remaining in my long-term relationship with a woman who doesn’t identify as straight, I am less of a man than if I had broken up with her and then insisted on only dating women who are straight or men who are gay.

For many trans men, it is a particular turn-on to be found attractive by straight women or gay men; it somehow validates their masculinity, somehow validates their self-image as a man. But it also suggests that only straight women and gay men have the visual acuity to see and correctly identify maleness in the world. Conversely, this would seem to indicate that only straight men and lesbians can correctly identify women and femaleness in the world. I just don’t believe that there is anything to confirm or validate this kind of assumption.

The question of realism and whether I am seen or not seen by my partner is also at the heart of my response to another query that I frequently receive when someone first discovers that I didn’t transition until I was almost 40 years old.

People want to know why it took me so long to come out as transgender. Personally, I think one of the major reasons that I didn’t think it necessary to declare my trans gender earlier was because of Diane. I feel like my wife has always seen the “real me.”

Maybe she and I didn’t start out with the understanding that those aspects of the “real me” demonstrated that I was more appropriately identified as a trans man than as a lesbian, but she always saw my true essence. Whether you want to call it a soul or something else, Diane always saw my true essence. Whether you want to call it a soul or something else, Diane has had to adjust to these differences.

I started laughing. “What?” she asked. “It isn’t funny!”

But it was. Because, as someone who was born female-bodied, I don’t even have a prostate. Diane knows this.

But she has so accepted my maleness that she forgot I was different from other men. She has accepted this not just in principles but in the deepest parts of her subconscious mind. She has accepted my maleness not as something artificial or created but as utterly natural and all-encompassing.

So I know that Diane sees me as a man. If she can continue to see herself as a lesbian, even though she is married to a man, who am I to say that I have to see myself as part of the LGBT community even though I’m a man in a relationship with a woman? Diane continues to identify as queer, as a lesbian, sometimes claiming it by saying perhaps she’s a bisexual-identified lesbian or as a lesbian-identified bisexual. Either way, together, we continue to identify as a queer couple. And none of this makes me any less of a man.

Jacob Anderson-Minshall is an author and journalist. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, Advocate Editor-at-Large Diane Anderson-Minshall.

This article originally appeared in The Advocate. See www.advocate.com/commentary/2013/07/03/op-ed-being-married-diane-anderson-minshall. See www.dignity-chicago.org

Diane and Jacob Anderson-Minshall. Photo by Ezgi Yurdakul

This doesn’t mean that our transition as a couple was never a struggle. Of course it was. But the truth is that part of that struggle comes not from the inherent issues that arise in such a life-changing event. Part of it comes from the fact that other people project their concerns, prejudices, and issues upon transitioning individuals. When we first announced my new trans identity and told others I’d be transitioning from female to male, a surprising number of our closest friends and family members expressed their utter certainty that we would not survive as a couple because “Diane is a lesbian.”

One of the milestones about achieving true marriage equality will be in gaining validation of same-sex relationships on par with their straight counterparts. Because the truth is that even our own community hasn’t always done a great job of supporting, validating, and helping to maintain long-term LGBT relationships. This is changing dramatically, of course, at least for same-sex couples.

As a trans person, coming out still carries with it the very least the fear that their relationship will end. There is an expectation that the relationship will end. That expectation emanates from societal forces. It seems present whether you’re coming from a queer or straight relationship. Some part of it is internalized but other people make it very clear that they expect you will break up because one of you is transitioning.

No one tells you at that point that “Love Is Love.”

So as we celebrate the Supreme Court victories and herald in an age of marriage equality, let us not forget that some relationships in our community are still fighting for validation. In addition to trans people, I’d say that many bisexuals are also still fighting for the greater society, and the LGBT community specifically, to recognize their relationships as having the same validity and value as anyone else’s.

Although I believe wholeheartedly that Diane has seen the real me throughout our relationship, I also believe that she has had to adjust to this different person because of hormone therapy, testosterone has made me into a different person and this naturally puts unusual stresses on our relationship.

For example, testosterone literally thickens your skin, and it seems to have a similar effect on emotions. My emotions are now muted, as though there is now a barrier between me and myself or between me and the rest of the world. My emotions are cushioned, less battered by external forces. Diane has had to adjust to these differences, to the way testosterone has altered my personality and my communication styles, but I still believe that she sees the “real me.”

In fact, I know she now truly sees me as a man, in a way she did not before my transition. I know this not because she tells me, but because she demonstrates it, dozens of times throughout the day. Sometimes it is in very subtle, nearly imperceptible cues. And other times in ways that are blatant (and often unintended) in demonstrating just how far the belief in my manhood has penetrated into her subconscious.

One night we were watching television and a commercial came on, revealing dire statistics about the number of men who die each year basically because they are too embarrassed to get a prostate exam.

Diane turned to me with utter seriousness and concern and asked, “Have you had a prostate exam?”

I shook my head. “Oh, my God,” she said. “You’re over 40 and need one right away.”

I started laughing. “What?” she asked. “It isn’t funny!”

But it was. Because, as someone who was born female-bodied, I don’t even have a prostate. Diane knows this.

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Black, Gay and Living In a ‘Voting Rights-NO, Gay Marriage-YES’ World

BY REV. IRENE MONROE

I now have had ample time to recover—from both shock and in awe—from the U.S. Supreme Court’s historic decisions announced in the final week of June. My “awe” moment was June 26. It was a great day for less than a hundred American. Historic decisions in both Windsor v. United States and Hollingsworth v. Perry were announced. Not only was DOMA finally struck down, but so, too, the anti-gay proponents of Proposition 8.

In a 4-5 decision the progressive and moderate justices of the Supreme Court ruled Section 3 of DOMA to be unconstitutional, declaring it as “a deprivation of the liberty of the person protected by the Fifth Amendment.” Finally, all same-gender married couples will be afforded the same 1,000 plus federal protections and benefits as opposite-gender couples.

The proponents of Prop 8 were finally told to cease and desist, meaning they no longer have a legal homophbic leg to stand on in terms of their anti-gay and obstructionist antics to appeal lower court rulings. California same-gender couples no longer have to do an anxious and cautious walk to the alter worrying about state rulings yo-yoing them around. My “shock” moments were June 24-25.

On June 24, the court, in a surprising 7-1 ruling, sidestepped the hot-button issue of race and gender couples no longer have to do an anxious and cautious walk to the alter worrying about state rulings yo-yoing them around. My “shock” moments were June 24-25.

The present-day argument against employing race-conscious admission policies as a pedagogical benefit for diversity is being usurped, at least in Texas, with debates that class-conscious admission policies would best achieve racial diversity. The Texas Top Ten Percent Plan purports to accept 10 percent of all high school graduating class to their universities. This policy works well so allages the state. But Texas utt sets in them telling your: their neighborhoods and high schools are as unbashfully segregated in 2013 as they were in 1954 when the historic Supreme Court Brown v. Board of Ed ruling, deemed segregated schools unconstitutional.

On June 25, the Court hit with another hard blow. In a 5-4 vote from a glaringly ideologically divided court, the lifetime and heart and soul of the historic 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA) was gutted. The court ruled that Section 4 of the VRA is outdated. Section 4 historically protected African-Americans and other disenfranchised people of color. The ruling contests a fictive post-racial premise that racial minorities, especially in the South, no longer confront discriminatory barriers voting. At the time, the 1965 VRA applied to nine states in South: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia.

But voter suppression is alive and well today. Just last year, Florida deliberately reduced days available for early voting, making it difficult for voters to cast their ballots who relocated to different counties within the state. And in Maryland, 2010 gubernatorial Republican candidate Berry “hired a consultant who advised that ‘the first and most desired outcome is voter suppression,’ in the form of having ‘African-American voters stay home.’”

As a member of one of the early generations to benefit from the gains of the African-American civil rights movement of the last century, these rulings hit hard. Many of us in the LGBTQ community are outraged. But a GLAD (Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders) board member and beloved ally to greater Boston knows the reality of voter suppression first hand.

“This ruling was an enormous setback for the hard fought for civil rights gains of the past. My home state of Alabama is one of those states that continues to try and block voting access, but those efforts has been substantially hampered by the provisions contained in the VRA” Jo Davis wrote in an email blast.

While many of us would like to think voter suppression only happens in the South, let me disabuse you of any hope that voting suppression only happens in the South, let me disabuse you of any hope that voter suppression only happens in the South, let me disabuse you of any hope that voter suppression only happens in the South, let me disabuse you of any hope that voter suppression only happens in the South, let me disabuse you of any hope that voter suppression only happens in the South, let me disabuse you of any hope that voter suppression only happens in the South, let me disabuse you of any hope that voter suppression only happens in the South, let me disabuse you of any hope that voter suppression only happens in the South, let me disabuse you of any hope that voter suppression only happens in the South, let me disabuse you of any hope that voter suppression only happens in the South, let me disabuse you of any hope that voter suppression only happens in the South.

With advances such as hate crime laws, the repeal of the military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” the legalization of same-sex marriage in many states, DOMA struck down, Prop 8 overturned, and anti-gay sentiment being viewed as a national concern, the LGBTQ movement has come a long way since the first Pride marches four plus decades ago. Many note the perceived distance the LGBTQ community has traveled in such a short historic time—from a disenfranchised group on the fringe of America’s mainstream to a community now on the verge of full equality. But not all members of our community have crossed the finish line. Will the LGBTQ community help those of us—like me—who are left behind?

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Lesbian singer Mary Lambert on ‘Same Love,’ tough life

BY TERRI-LYNN WALDRON

The haunting voice of singer/songwriter/poet as a quiet storm against the past and present traumas in her life.

Mary Lambert. Publicity photo

Mary Lambert: “I am so there with them and I’m feeling every- pathetic so when I see someone in pain or when someone is overwhelmed with happiness, too, I am so there with them and I’m feeling every-thing they’re feeling.

WCT: Did you write the chorus for Same Love before turning it into “She Keeps Me Warm?”

ML: I wrote the chorus specifically for Same Love and that was where everything start-ging. That’s something I wanted to say that wasn’t political and I just wanted to write a love song that happened to be about a woman. It’s not for the purpose of writing a lesbian love song; I’m just being honest about the way that I’m writing.

WCT: How did you come to work with the hip-hop duo? 

ML: We have a mutual friend, Hollis Wong-Wear, and she is the singer and songwriter for their song White Walls and we did spoken word poetry together. I got a call from her in the morning and I wrote the book for Same Love in about two hours, went to the studio that day and recorded it that night and the rest is his-tory.

WCT: “She Keeps Me Warm” is, like, the next phase after “Same Love,” where the couple got married and now they are living comfortably in their relationship.

ML: That’s what I think it is, too. It’s sort of post-politics at the base of it all and something that we need to remind ourselves that connects us to each other is this universal love. Everybody has had their exciting attraction and their first crush on somebody.

WCT: In the song “Body Love,” you talk about body image and self-acceptance. Do you still struggle with that today?

ML: I started realizing that I was being self-de-sisti when I was 18. I was partying really hard and I was running my body into the ground and I was ready to die. I hated my body, I didn’t feel attractive and no one wanted me. I was a cutter for awhile and I’ve always had issues with eating and food and I’ve always been a heavy drinker and at the time I was doing a lot of co-caine and screwing up my life.

I was also being very promiscuous because if anybody wanted me then I felt validated. It’s so sad and I realized that I was not alone in that and almost every single woman I knew was re-acting in a similar destructive way without rec-ognizing it and realizing that their validity was contingent upon an attraction to another per-son. And I didn’t know if I was going to be able to stand the pain and I’m still navigating that because I still go through issues with my body and things don’t al-ways fit right and I feel self-conscious at times. But I think I’ve come to this beautiful place of self-worth and love of my own body and I recognize that I’m a fat girl, but I have a great butt and I feel very attractive and it’s not just because someone else thinks I’m cute.

WCT: Tell me about the process of coming out.

ML: When I met my first girlfriend I was 17 and everything made sense and I was like, “Holy cow! Why isn’t everybody a lesbian? They should be because it’s awesome and I’m totally in love with this girl.” So basically it was; I like this girl and I’m going to be her girlfriend and that was the end of the story.

WCT: Your songs are not political, but do you think that you’ve changed people’s views about gay and lesbians?

ML: That’s a big statement and it’s hard for me to swallow that and say that I’ve changed someone’s opinion about a group of people. I got an email from a 60-year-old white woman in the South, which is the demographic of someone who would be homophobic in general. She said that after she heard “Same Love,” her opinions changed. It’s one step and it’s not the solution to everything but I feel that it’s a little victory.

For more on Mary Lambert, go to www.marylambertsings.com.
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