

Gender and Sexuality

Gender Blossoms

Rowan Percy

SCM

Gender Blossoms

Concepts of masculinity-femininity and male-female are constructs not facts. This binary gender institution is a social divide that serves patriarchy, economic and social structure and world religions. It causes mental health problems, emotional disturbance and social distress. It curbs self-expression, social balance and creativity.

Human beings' biological and sexual gender often vary in ways that defy our binary thinking about gender. What is socially constructed as feminine in one culture may be masculine in another. My partner spent three weeks hanging out with a man in India before he realised she was a woman!

None of this is a problem if our societies embrace a spectrum of gender self-expression that is broad and inclusive. But we don't.

I identify as queer, lesbian and transgendered. I appear as an androgynous middle aged woman who would probably "fit in" in most Anglo cultures. We can neither assume who is behind the image we see, nor can we think gender or orientation identity is static. In some circumstances I might say I am bisexual and often would say I am a woman. Context, speaker, and listener play a part in this.

I was raised Christian and practice Zen Buddhism. Buddhism and anti-racist, feminist, progressive thinking have helped me re-evaluate the binary assumptions of the white Judeo-Christian world-view. Making a choice about what is right or wrong is still necessary at times, but thinking in binary terms pushes us to assume a choice between this and that, to judge, shut down enquiry and not consider context. When we see "opposites" as a continuum we tend to stay open, explore and see with fresh eyes. The world is never what it was even one second ago.

Radical faeries, queens, drag kings, transmen, bois, femmes - shifting queer identities - represent a collectivity of exploration in sexual orientation and gender. Although the two are not the same, they are linked. All are warriors for queer spirit. They blossom as a rag-tag movement, wanting to awaken the static, stuck world of heterosexual, male-female dogma.

Queers and non-queers alike may think these expressions are

only appearances. But appearance and the spirit that informs it cannot be extricated. Queer spirit is a dynamic force for healing not just for that community, but for all people.

As queers challenge “straight” society, will Christians and followers of other religions, like Buddhism, see the possibility for healing of the global obsession with rigid gender formulations?

Can we see how rigidity around gender bruises our thinking about love, war, peace, economics, other species and spirituality? Will we ignore or judge the contributions of these warriors or embrace gender expression?