Dear Alice,

I am a girl, in love with a transgender guy. He was born with the wrong parts, but is truly the kindest person I have ever met. I love him very much, but I am afraid to tell my parents. "Adam" may have been born a female, but he is now a male, and is planning on getting surgery to prove it. My parents are Christians, and I'm not sure they will approve of him. Does me liking Adam, and female to male transgender people, make me a lesbian? Or bi-sexual? My parents deeply disagree with these things and I am afraid to talk to them about Adam.

Thank you so much.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Being in love is a great feeling. Congrats on finding someone for whom you care so deeply! It sounds like there are two separate questions on your mind, though they may be somewhat related: 1) What do these feelings for Adam mean with regards to your sexual orientation, and 2) What and/or how should you communicate with your parents about your feelings for him?

Does liking a transgender man make you a lesbian? Or, does it make you bisexual? There are many possibilities. It could be that you're attracted to men, regardless of what type of genitals they have. So perhaps you're attracted to both trans and non-trans men. Many people report feeling attracted to femininity or to masculinity in general, and genitals are really only a small part of what goes into creating a person's gender expression. Many other factors contribute to one's gender identity and gender presentation, including personality, clothing, hairstyle, interests, identity, and life roles, for example, could all play a part. Some people feel attracted to both masculine and feminine-presenting people, but feel a stronger affinity for one over the other. Still others feel equally attracted to all people, regardless of gender. Adam may have decided to have surgery, but even if he didn't want to, Adam's parts don't make him any less a man. A person's identity as a man, a woman, or as any gender, is ultimately determined by how a person views themselves, not by their body parts.

Being attracted to Adam could mean that you are also attracted to women, but not necessarily. It could be that you'd have the potential to be attracted to other trans men, as well. Or it could be that Adam is the only trans person with whom you feel a sexual connection. Ultimately, you are in the best position to understand your own sexual orientation.
Know that there is no “wrong” orientation. Sexual orientation is part of human diversity and the words you use to describe your sexual orientation (e.g. lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual) are completely up to you.

Now, on to the question about what to tell your parents: You mentioned they may not be supportive. Coming to an agreement about whom you’ll tell and what you’ll say are concerns many couples face. What potential risks do you foresee in telling them? How would Adam feel about your parents knowing he is transgender? Is there any concern they might “out” him or cause major difficulties for him or for you if they knew? If you decide to have a conversation with your parents, there are resources available, such as PFLAG [2], that can help explain transgender identities to parents. Connecting your parents with some trans-positive resources may also help you have the conversation. Overall, deciding whether or not to talk to others about your own sexual orientation is your call. However, the decision to talk about Adam’s gender with others may be a conversation the two of you have together first.

For more resources on transgender identity and dating, see the related Q&As. If you’re interested in talking to someone about your concerns, consider seeking out a counselor in your community. If it would be helpful, you might also seek out any local LGBTQ organizations to connect with a community and garner additional support. Kudos to you for thinking through these issues and for taking the risk to love who you want, despite others’ (potential) objections.

Take care,

Alice!

Category:
- Relationships [3]
- Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, or Questioning [4]
- Questioning sexuality [5]

Related questions

- Transgender partner? How can I provide support? [7]
- How can I tell my religious parents that I’m a lesbian without them disowning me? [8]
- Gender reassignment surgery? [9]
- Coming out to mom [10]

Resources

- Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [12]
- Mental Health Service (CUMC) [13]

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Links