

Pansies Against Patriarchy: Gender Blur, Bisexual Men, and Queer Liberation

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John Stoltenberg wrote a provocative book called *Refusing to be a Man* in which he adamantly challenges the cultural codes of masculinity but stops short of subverting those codes in favor of a new understanding of gender. Rather he dick-tates, in alleged feminist dogma, a vacuous and thoroughly phallogentric portrait of masculinity as something to be denounced and avoided by (pro)feminist men. The amorphous conception known as the "men's movement" repeatedly reifies traditional masculinity under the guise of redefinition. At the same time, the "men's movement" perceives feminism as "women's work," an ideological position, project, and movement that men can resent or admire, but in which we can never fully participate.

The emerging bisexual movement has thankfully been shaped by an explicitly feminist vision, but where are the voices of "feminists with penises" in this evolving milieu? John Stoltenberg, while clearly a male feminist, does not go far enough in proposing viable alternatives to the paradigm of male domination that he eloquently denounces. Where are the other "male feminists"? Why are there so few of us? Many gay and bisexual men do not consider feminism, gender politics, and a coherent critique of mainstream masculinity as vital components to their queerness. It should be obvious why heterosexual men often feel threatened by wimmin with a feminist response to sexist remarks and gestures. Shouldn't we expect more of gay and bi men?

The very act of loving other men does affect my gender identity and the manner in which I love other wimmin. Bisexual men have

an important choice and responsibility. If we can transcend heterosexual power dynamics in our gay relationships, does this enable us to have truly liberatory relationships with wommin? We can begin by deconstructing the macho straightjacket of mainstream masculinity. I view these possibilities as challenges rather than achievements for bisexual men. New theories of bisexual politics could collapse into a comprehensive praxis that changes the way we love, the way we live, and the way we work to change a world that still insists on the dualities and dichotomies of heterosexist assumptions.

The formulation of "queer" as a sexual and political modus operandi offers us the opportunity to celebrate a holistic approach to sexual revolution, a polymorphous convergence of gender conception and choice of sexual partners. I propose the convergence of gender blur and new sexual identities as both a theoretical and practical terrain for constructing notions of a postpatriarchal masculinity. My somewhat conflicting desire is to break free of gender constrictions entirely while acknowledging and fighting the tradition of domination and coercive privilege that is our birthright as men in a bitterly sexist and homophobic society. I want to take the *bi-polar* opposition out of *bi-sexuality*. I want to abolish the Kinsey scale. I want to love men *and* wommin all the time. I want to commit erotic sabotage in the corridors of corporate power.

I have noticed a tendency among queer and hetero "(pro)feminist" men to espouse a self-congratulatory stance surrounding their gender attitudes. They seem to mistake the queer, feminist, gender-neutral utopia for which many of us strive in every aspect of our social and sexual lives as a given reality of the present. They get defensive at the mere suggestion that they may harbor deeply ingrained and internalized sexism or homophobia. Because the nature of gender socialization is so pervasive, and at times frighteningly subtle in our society, it is dangerous to deny these realities. The first step for any man, regardless of class, race, or sexual orientation in the fight against sexism and homophobia, is to find those seeds of oppression rooted in his own consciousness and to confront them. We often need go no further than the realm of primal fantasy to discover the manner in which masculine stereotypes shape our consciousness. If what we want is to break down the duality of gender,

the hierarchical binarism of sexual being, we must first understand how we were indoctrinated as children to accept these codes of social behavior as human nature. I have yet to meet a man who has fully healed from, or who was ever wholly immune to, the baby blue bondage of gender enculturation. Sexism is a social disease of domination. No man (or woman) is immune.

Freedom from oppression based on gender, and the re-emergence of blurred or transgendered identities in an evolving queer counter-culture, should not be mistaken for advocating the abolition of sexual difference. One notion of equality, which simply states that women are no longer legally handicapped in the Monopoly-game swindle of capitalist patriarchy, does not present itself as imbued with an insurrectionary stance toward the competitive, domination-based paradigms of modern civilization. Authentic freedom from inequality is also a freedom from the tenets of authority, coercion, and power that define most social relationships in our era.

My vision of gender blur oscillates between a personal penchant for the pleasures of cross-dressing and a desire to break down the gender-based divisions of labor in my daily life (in the context of a living and co-parenting arrangement with my female partner). While my experience as a parent is literally in its infancy, my belief has long been that one of the most radical contributions men can make to revolution is nurturing and caring for children. We can only hope to alter traditional gender codes by offering children loving examples of people who regularly act outside of strictly prescribed masculine and feminine roles. Because queer parents suffer so much persecution, this is one of the riskiest, most rewarding terrains for living out our critique of patriarchy.

When I cross-dress I utilize the signifiers of fashion in playful and political confrontation of peoples' attitudes and preconceptions. I do not strive for a convincing masquerade or "passing." It is important to note that when I wear jeans, boots, a work shirt, and a baseball cap, that is also a form of cross-dressing or masquerade. I am even less interested in a notion of drag as male appropriation of female power, as it has often wrongly been pigeonholed. Men who attempt to steal from women or stereotype them through transvestism are accomplices, rather than opponents, of the patriarchy.

A more radical sensibility toward cross-dressing subverts gender

codes entirely. A "man" who collapses his own "masculinity" by borrowing visual signs of "femininity," or a woman who inverts this strategy, creates a personal subjectivity beyond the limitations of gender. In many indigenous cultures, gender-benders of this ilk were regarded as a "third gender" rather than as impersonators. These precedents to the "butch" and "fairy" archetypes in our contemporary queer culture challenged the strict duality of sex and gender. Similarly, the modern bisexual movement has dissolved the strict dichotomy between "gay" and "straight" (without invalidating our homosexual or heterosexual friends and lovers). We have insisted on our desire and freedom to love people of all genders. We have refused to be "half-gay" or "half-straight."

Currently, voices within our movement are breaking down borders once again. We are no longer simply bisexuals. We are also autonosexuals, omniseexuals, pansexuals, polysexuals, ambiseexuals, triseexuals (because we'll try anything!). While the *real* meaning of these terms is presently implied, exotic, vague, and opaque, their very existence is promising. What all these new terms and sexual identities suggest is an expanding consciousness vis-à-vis sexuality. They are saying: "The limitations of language, the existing terms, do not encompass the enormity and explosiveness of my sexuality. My sexuality exudes a manner of being in the natural world that extends beyond simply loving both genders. It includes the entire scope of sensuality. I also love trees, rivers, the sky, and food. My sexuality is bigger than words." *We are very queer.*

Many of my views regarding gender blur and queer identity have evolved from my experiences with the Radical Faeries, a movement of gay men who meet primarily at gatherings held in rural settings, but also have contingents in gay pride marches and other queer events. While Faerie events are predominately gay male, most gatherings welcome the participation of lesbians, and bisexuals of both genders. However, all Faeries do not agree on the issue of inclusiveness. Biphobia in the Faerie milieu has recently generated a great deal of debate. For instance, influential Faerie Harry Hay, in an address to the Malibu Radical Faerie Gathering in 1992, stated: "Inviting Bi-sexuals [sic] to join and make common cause with us, we have in effect reduced our collective image from that of being a

cultural and spiritual minority . . . to being merely a heterosexual variation once again . . ." (Hay, 1992, p. 12).

Though Hay's views represent a common blind spot among our potential gay allies, the prevalent spirit among Radical Faeries distinctly deemphasizes the sectarian squabbling that his comment imbues. "Faeriedom" is a movement of kindred spirits rather than a political organization. We generally emphasize gay liberation accompanied by pagan spirituality, connectedness to the earth, anarchist politics, and frequent festivals or gatherings which celebrate free love in the Faerie community (and are excuses to adorn ourselves in the most lavish drag). As Faeries, we often distinguish ourselves from gay rights advocates and assimilationists, understanding our sexuality as woven into our entire being and shaping our spiritual, political, and psychic view of the world. Faeries reclaim and recontextualize many cultural stigmas of queerness. Faggot, sissy, camp, and queen are sacred words in our lavender lexicon.

Rejecting the notion of an "essential" bisexuality, I do not think bisexuals are naturally inclined to be less sexist or subscribe to non-traditional gender roles. I do think our bisexuality affords us a unique opportunity to incorporate gender blur and feminism into our radical, sexual politics, and that these tenets have immense liberatory potential. I certainly believe many bisexual men could experiment more with genderfuck or be more queer identified. But at this point, I wish more bisexual men would simply come out of the closet. More men are bisexual than readily admit it, though I've recently encountered a flurry of men coming out as bi before ever having sex with a man. A certain locker room ideology of fear lingers with many of us from our youth, a time when being a faggot was synonymous with a fate worse than death. This fear prevents innumerable men from coming out, whether they are bisexual or gay. I presently am acquainted with many more bisexual women than men, and I perceive this to be a trend everywhere. Many of us are clinging to those last strands of "heterosexual privilege" (god, I hate that term!) by falling back on the *image* provided by our heterosexual relationships, for emotional security, when the going gets rough. While I am "out" to my parents and my co-workers, I

am not "out" to the employees at the post office, the plumber, or my aunts, uncles, and grandparents.

Bisexual brothers: borrowing both from feminism and the Radical Faeries, we can blur our collective masculinity and build an army of lovers who love to change the world. We can begin by listening to our feminist sisters and gay brothers, and by loving and conversing with each other. We can form discussion groups, reading groups, direct action affinity groups. We can visit a gay bar, bookstore, or community center. We can attend a queer or feminist demonstration. We can volunteer our time in the fight against rape and domestic violence. We have nothing to lose but a tradition of male domination.

Disinvesting ourselves from the litany of power afforded to heterosexual men in our culture will not be easy. It includes accepting how we as men have consistently used that power to our advantage and have hurt our friends and lovers in the process. It means aligning ourselves with feminists in the fight against patriarchy. It means coming out to a straight acquaintance who makes an anti-gay remark.

Let's do it, brothers. We have humyn liberation to gain. We have a world of pleasures to win.