

## Gender Folding and Pre-teen Kissing



*Are 'homonormative' narratives, full of labels for identities, becoming as rigid as heteronormative narratives? Maitrayee Basu questions the need for naming relations and argues that the fluidity of desires and identities leads to a better expression of self. This article has been published collaboratively by [LSE Equality and Diversity](#) and [LSE Engenderings](#) blogs to mark LGBT History Month.*

I kissed a girl. I liked it. Long before I had heard of lesbian sex or desires or even contemplated issues regarding sex or gender consciously. She was just a person who I found attractive and who had previously made me blush by publicly announcing that I was the prettiest girl in the class. The kiss, or the attraction preceding it, never made me question my sexual or gender identity. At that age we were already talking about the boyfriends we would have, and although a boyfriend was something I wanted, she was what I desired. Desired in a way that had more to do with the electricity in our mutual gaze and her 'devil may care' attitude than with an interest in her 'lady bits'.

In later years, while reflecting about what this fact might signify about my desires and how it fits into the narrative that informs my sexual and gender identity, I realized that it is a representative slice of the fluid way I experience desire and project it on to the fabric of my identity. By then, of course, I had started to question and reorganise my experiences conscious of (and often rebellious against) the social concepts of gender and sexual orientation.

But the true push to actively pursue the exact nature and politics of my desires didn't arise until an introduction to some issues concerning gender roles, desires and sexual acts raised in Heinlein's seminal time travel novel – *The Man Who Folded Himself* – which I found to be quite pertinent to my experiences and curiosities. The concept of preferring to have sex with a self that has the same gender identity to the one that doesn't due to the resulting sex being more egalitarian and free of gender-based expectations resonated with me. I began to see my relations (sexual or otherwise) with people around me tinged with a desire to go beyond what is expected based on our respective gender identities. The fluid nature of my desires, which had seemed unfathomable before, seemed to make sense in the light of Heinlein's protagonist's choices.

What did the choice mean? More importantly, what did it mean for me? It made me question whether my dislike of categorising my desires and aligning them to fit gender expectations meant I was bisexual. Was the only way to overcome the unequal power relations and rigid expectations in sexual relations to choose to have sex with people who self-identified as women? Did gender roles and power inequalities disappear entirely in lesbian and gay sex?

Above all, though, what stands out in the narrative is that the protagonist's(s') choice of sexual partner(s) was a choice – a rhetoric one does not often find in contemporary LGBT sexual narratives. I think this is sad. Although many individuals identifying as gay, lesbian or bisexual might experience their desires to be beyond their choosing, and despite such desires being 'natural' has been an argument on which most LGBT rights has been based, I think that an active choice in sexual experiences and identity is a rhetoric with the potential to affect some very positive changes in the way we live our lives.

It is this rhetoric that allowed me to challenge deep-seated sexual and gender prejudices and expectations and *choose* to embrace ambiguity in my relations – sexual or otherwise – with people around me. It allowed me to be more creative in my expression of self and in moulding my lived experiences to match my desires more closely. As LGBT History Month comes to an end [this](#) year,

I want to reflect on the ways LGBT narratives and theory helped a whole generation of young people free from rigid heteronormative codes of behaviour. But I also wish to suggest a movement against homonormative narratives which I find are becoming quite rigid too.

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