

## Alternatives to Either/Or Sexuality: Choosing Both/And

by *Diane Pasta*

In the seventies, when choosing between identifying as straight or joining a lesbian-only community, I came out as bisexual. I actively asked to be included in what is now LGBTQ community. Recently I leapt into another “both/and” identity: I am now polyamorous. Just as we can love multiple children or multiple close friends, we can also love multiple partners. When I am faced with a choice of either this or that, I have felt free to choose a third way that embraces them both!

I love spiritual and intellectual challenges that require reconciling differences. I delight in reframing paradoxes into new understanding, so that two seemingly contradictory views become a single whole. For example, at the loss of my child at birth, I had a mystical experience and embraced life and death as part of a single miraculous whole. I thrive on debating a topic until I can see a bigger truth. I embrace a similar unfolding in Quaker business process when disagreement comes to unity. I love truth, and I have increased (slightly) my contentment with not-knowing. I increasingly release my former tenacious persistence to accept all possibilities including indecision. Quakers, with our testimonies and practices, try to include diverse experiences and points of view. Like those who do improv, we say “yes AND” rather than “but...”.

I intentionally embrace *both/and* in other aspects of life. I acknowledge an aspect of myself and then purposefully improve my willingness to engage in its opposite. I am an introvert who prefers to write my thoughts and feelings, *and* I deliberately develop extravert skills for in-person, spontaneous conversation. I am sedentary and all in my head, *and* I resolutely expand to include emotions, movement, and embodiment. I accept with endurance my disability and chronic pain, *and* I try to show my vulnerability, too. (I call that *Whine, Wine, and Whyin'* when I complain, drink to escape pain, and wonder “why me?” Forgiveness and a sense of humor help considerably with the *ands*!)

We can *both* love hosting *and* being a guest, be *both* supportive *and* ask for help, be *both* indifferent to stylish clothing, *and* find an intentional personal style. During my experiments in living a *Both/And* life, I have matured emotionally, deepened spiritually, developed mentally, and re-owned my embodiment. How awesome is that?

Unfortunately, there is a flaw in this thinking. Trying to balance one’s life to be wholeheartedly *both/and* is exhausting and impossible; we are mortal, and our time is limited. We need to face that every moment we must choose. Every activity precludes any other activity for that moment. [Read **Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals** by Oliver Burkeman to see this clearly and get good advice]. I still delight in my *both/and* identities (yes to polyamory!), our *both/and* Quaker process (yes to unity!), and a *both/and* theology (yes to activist and contemplative!). Passionately applying this to a wholehearted life leads to another, bigger paradox.

In ***Virtue: A Novel*** by Hermione Hoby, the narrator, a young man in his early twenties, falls in love with two women, each wholehearted in different cultural niches. One woman is an older, rich white artist, living in the moment, enthusiastic, nature-connected, and embodied, with a life so full of savoring experiences that planning is a luxury. She embraces *both* excitement *and* lingering, *both* human art *and* breathtaking nature. She is a charismatic life force, a human *being*. The other younger woman is a charismatic life force, too. A young, brilliant, black intellectual, she is a wholehearted activist, gaining followers in 2017 as America is facing its failures and shame. She is a human *doing* godly work. I encourage you to read to book to find out how this emotional conflict resolves.

There were scenes with the artist that reminded me of peak moments in my childhood, swimming in the ocean or walking in the woods. Conversations with and about the radical intellectual echoed the essential activist orientation that filled my twenties. Like the narrator, I desire *both* the one's savoring, embodied free spirit *and* the other's purposeful, meaningful, systems change. I want to *both* embrace the current moment with gratitude *and* help form the just future, participating in the transformation of individuals and of society.

Regrettably, while I can be *both/and*, I cannot do both simultaneously. When we think we are double tasking, we are inefficiently switching rapidly back and forth. When I embrace *both/and*, I must constantly choose which to wholeheartedly delight in now. Whichever direction I follow, the other option sits in the back of my mind, taking up space, waiting its turn. Each time I hesitate, procrastinating the moment of choice, some part of my remaining weeks will fill with being "neither." Indecision has a steep price in a short, 4,000 week life, and I've already lived 3,640 weeks.

Your either/or choices may be settled. Choosing the third way of *both/and* is right for me *and* claiming *both* does not release me from choosing. It puts me at risk for settling for "neither." It is not a recommended path for the indecisive!

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