

Sleuth

I read recently the Olympic Committee has from time to time ordered athletes to undergo gender testing. I guess the reason is so male athletes don't parade around as females and win the competition unfairly. I'll bet there are many women who couldn't care less about that, and are willing to take on contenders of either sex. However, I always liked girls who expected to be treated like girls.

I'm seldom in the company of males or females whose sex is a mystery. But since boys and girls in early high school mature at different rates of growth, questions did arise, especially in the winter in snowy upstate New York when we wore lots of heavy sweaters and coats and the kind of hats you pulled down over your face. I remember mornings in high school when I got up, peeked at the thermometer and jumped back in bed. When Mom told me to come out of the bedroom and go to school or she was coming in after me, I agreed to only if I could wear everything I owned.

Kids of all ages bundled up like Eskimos in so many layers of clothing we began to lose our shapes and identities. True, no one seemed to care as we stood on frigid street corners in the morning waiting for a bus to take us from Cornhill to some other destination on the polar ice cap we knew as Utica.

And in the dark of a late afternoon, I waited for the bus on the Busy Corner at minus 4 degrees. As I stood in the crowd, shivering under my coat, vest, sweater, plaid shirt, striped tie, and two undershirts, I got to thinking. "How can I tell if a girl I'm thinking of flirting with is really Mary Lou or her younger brother Bruno?"

Not wanting to make a monumental mistake so early in my career of speaking with girls, and to delay the always difficult task of saying Hello to a young woman, I spent my time on the bus stop looking at my boots and devising a foolproof method to determine gender by way of conversation. All of this was just in case I got up

the nerve to speak. I figured I could ask the following questions instead of having to inquire, "Are you a girl?" So I offer them to young men everywhere. Confining his inquiries to people shorter than himself will greatly increase the odds of success.

"What do you think of my new boots?" A boy will ignore the question. A young woman will always be polite.

"How is your mother?" A girl will look guilty, then immediately begin to complain that her mother doesn't understand her.

"Do you like the new books in the library?" A young man will often look confused, then embarrassed.

"What's the weather for tomorrow?" A guy will reply with specifics, like wind velocity, dew point or thermal convection quotients. A young lady will likely choose more personal words like comfy or horrid, suffocating or chilly. And then she may mention her mother again.

"Have we met before?" A girl ... even your sister ... will invariably say no.

"How much do you weigh?" A young woman will ignore the question or quickly stamp on your toe.

"That's a pretty outfit you're wearing." A girl will move her hips once, very slightly. A young man will flare his nostrils.

"I like where your outfit bulges out." A young woman will walk away, but if not she'll move her hips two or three times. A guy will laugh or walk away or punch you. Any other reaction should cause alarm.

I haven't found anyone yet who believes this story. When I told my wife the yarn on our second date, she said I could make anything complicated. Then she stamped on my toe.

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