

Defection? Rejection! Reflection.

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But their response confused me more—Robyn was branded a tramp by many lesbian friends as well as the straight community because of her own recent “defection” back to heterosexuality. She had been lesbian-identified for 10 years.

When it came to bisexuality, all the gay and straight people I loved so much for their radical politics seemed to have the same attitude as their parents! “It’s just not natural,” they would say indignantly.

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Bisexual Community Forum

Now, a few years later, the topic isn’t any less of a taboo—even among people who pride themselves on their understanding and acceptance of people of color, differing abilities and sexual orientations. Just defining the term “bisexual” is a controversy in itself.

“There is no such thing,” according to Linda Shirley, a gay and lesbian community activist for more than 20 years. “Whoever you’re sleeping with now, that’s what you are.”

“We are indefinable,” says Lori Weiss, organizer of the Bisexual Community Forum for the past ten years. “We’re proud of that. It’s something that always comes out in our discussions—almost everybody is uncomfortable with labels.”

But with the pride comes the realization that a lot of bisexuals are essentially in the closet. One organizer with the BCF, who requested anonymity, said, “We are forever trying to eke out any sense of community at all. Although it’s funny—I feel there are thousands of people who are so identified, especially among men in the Portland area, but no one who’s willing to organize.”

It’s no surprise that these sexual boundaries defy common definition, but it’s a shock to observe the genuine hostility that erupts during discussions of bisexuality. And no matter what side people may take, many agree on one thing: the battle lines cut right into the heart of our own sense of community. Are we just as guilty of sexual discrimination as the rest of society is?

Carla Jean Looney, a former *Just Out* staff member, describes the kind of discrimination directed at people attracted to both men and women. “We get it from both sides—we’re discriminated against by gays and by straights,” she said.

“There’s homophobia,” explains Weiss.

“There’s also such a thing as heterophobia, which gay people won’t even recognize in themselves—it’s just as powerful.”

The divisiveness bisexuality sparks has two sources, according to Weiss. “First, bisexuality implies loving more than one person—so there’s monogamy out the window!

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Theoretically, anyway. But the image is that bisexual people ‘will sleep with anybody.’

“Second, it implies choice - that you can do whatever you want to do, that you can be anybody. Most people who call themselves gay are really bisexual, but they feel like they have to make a political stand.” She said gay isn’t an adjective any more; it’s a noun. “It’s something you are, not something you do.”

Yet somehow, discrimination and resentment by members of the gay community against open bisexuality are seldom discussed—although they are also taken for granted.

“We live in a society permeated in every way by homophobia,” says Donna Cooper, a community activist who has been lesbian-identified since her teen years. “I think the gay community resents the fact that bisexual people have ‘the heterosexual out.’”

She continues, “If we lived in a free world where everybody could act in the ways they think best, then maybe we could see our way clear to love both men and women in an emotional and sexual way. But that’s not the society we live in.”

Cooper said, “I just wouldn’t trust a woman who was sexually active with a man at the same time as me. You know, the bottom line is that when it comes to sex—the grunt level of fucking—the fear is that I’m going to somehow have to compete with a man in bed. That doesn’t seem real to me.”

Cooper’s attitude is not unique. Accord-

ing to Weiss, “The typical complaint we hear is that of a woman-identified woman who has been in the gay community for years, and becomes attracted to a guy—and lets the girls know about it. She’s out of the club. We also hear from married men who are finding out they’re bisexual and have to come out to their wives. Often divorce is involved.”

Groups like the BCF worked to integrate bisexuals into the gay community at first, one organizer said. “Years ago, maybe, back in the ‘60s—there’s certainly no attempt to do it nowadays,” he added. Why? “It’s the constant rebuffing we get,” he said.

Now, according to Weiss, “The group

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tends to be a drop-in forum or crisis group. We’ve even had a number of people who met in the group and ended up living together.” The number of active members fluctuates.

Weiss defines the current status of BCF as “sketchy, bumbling, unsupported by even its friends.” The turnout at weekly meetings is down, money to publish the group’s newsletter is scarce. “Some people would say BCF is a state of mind rather than an organization,” Weiss jokes. “Like Earth First!”

On the other hand, bisexual community groups in other states, such as the Seattle Bisexual Women’s Network, have a more steady and active membership. In fact, 500 people attended the first National Bisexual Conference June 20-24 in San Francisco. The event was sponsored by the Bisexual Political Caucus (BIPOL), which defines itself as a progressive/feminist/bisexual/lesbian/gay political action group founded in 1983 to support bisexual identity and rights.

While the Lesbian Community Project has in past advertising campaigns defines itself as open to bisexual representation, in Portland there is still a big blank spot where bisexuality should be discussed. In all the talk about the need to recognize and understand sexual diversity, is “heterophobia” defeating our own efforts to organize and recognize ourselves within this homophobic society?

Looking back at my lust for Robyn, I can’t help remembering the disagreements that were touched off when I shared my feelings with other friends—and that I gave up on any ideas I had about a relationship with her.

Next time, I plan to dump the boy, throw myself at the girl’s feet, and have the courage to talk about it all in the open.

Ed. Note: Just Out hopes that this article will touch off community-wide discussion of the issues presented and others related to bisexuality. We welcome articles, commentaries and letters for publication in future issues. If there is sufficient interest, Just Out will devote space for a monthly column.

