

letters

We all need leaders

To the Editor:

JoAnn Loulan, longtime leader in the lesbian community, is sleeping with a man. "Some will feel betrayed, some will be stunned and hurt, and some will be accepting of her following her heart," writes Renée LaChance [Editorial, *Just Out*, Feb. 7, 1997].

As a bisexual, I agree that we should feel sad when a high-profile woman seems to have broken solidarity with lesbians. In the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans movements, our leaders are precious to us. Each of our movements is small compared to the dominating heterosexual mainstream. Each of us needs every leader we have.

Loulan says that she doesn't feel that she is bisexual, even if her actions might seem to merit that label. I have no desire to force the label upon her—bisexuals are all too familiar with being told that we are "passing through a phase" on the way to our true gayness/lesbianism, too used to being told that "bisexuality doesn't exist, you're just confused." For the sake of my own community, the bisexual community, I feel a strong need to defend whatever identity Loulan chooses.

At the same time, part of me does wish that JoAnn Loulan would now say she's bisexual. The bisexual movement needs all the visible leaders it can muster, just like lesbians do. Furthermore, Loulan has the potential to draw attention to one of the most painful blows that we bisexuals experience: ostracism from our lesbian or gay peers when we come out as "bi."

Over and over again, when women that have identified as lesbian come out as bi, their friends reject them and call them traitors. But bisexuals belong in this movement—when straight men have threatened and harassed me, it's because they see me simply as a queer. We have a mutual enemy; we must be each other's allies. Far too many of my bisexual peers have lost old and deep friendships for coming out. Wounds sting especially when they come from family.

Many women are going to be angry at Loulan for sleeping with a man, and some are probably going to ostracize her, regardless of how she has chosen to identify herself. In short, she's going to know firsthand what bisexuals experience. So, while I would wish this experience on no one, I also see that Loulan is in a valuable position to increase the visibility of what we bisexuals are put through.

I want to see Loulan speak publicly about the ostracism that bisexuals coming out in the lesbian community experience, but still I can't begrudge LaChance's wish: "I can't help but hope that her new relationship won't last forever and that she'll again fall in love with a woman." We both need her, lesbians and bisexuals alike.

Sven Bonnicksen, Political Director
Portland Bisexual Alliance

Judge not

To the Editor:

Instead of judging and condemning lesbian activist JoAnn Loulan for falling in love with a man, perhaps we should thank and praise her for giving us the opportunity to confront our heterophobia and fears of loving the opposite sex?

David Gray
Portland

Fanning the flames

To the Editor:

The [Feb. 7 editorial] is a sad example of how far diversity really goes in this publication.

LaChance lauded Loulan's many accomplishments before dropping the bomb on us. Oh my Goddess, she has deserted the fold, fallen down a dark and unlovely path. The crime? She has fallen in love with a man. LaChance reports that Loulan is now pondering how to incorporate the feelings of being "culturally lesbian" while having a mo-

nogamous relationship with a man.

Welcome to the world of bisexuality, JoAnn, where these kinds of questions are our constant companions. Where it is common to hear of "repercussions" from "the community" toward those who have been lesbian and then come out some time later as bi. Along with LaChance, my hope is also that she not be judged harshly. Framed in this way, Loulan's leap over the sexual fence sounds more like a crime against lesbians than one person's honest journey into unfamiliar territory.

LaChance states that her first response to the news was "shock, sadness and disbelief." Does this remind you of anything? Like the time you came out to your parents, perhaps? Siblings or friends who felt "betrayed" and "hurt" when they found out? Because their dreams for us would never come true, because they thought we might suffer, we might have lives that were not as fulfilling—in short, because we were condemning ourselves to second class citizenry. Did we have a choice?

What ever happened to the great outcry for diversity? In the same issue of *Just Out* in which we have the cover and lead story dedicated to three gay African Americans, we have an editorial that takes a backhand slam at bisexuals. You have fanned the flames of distrust and closed the doors on openness and dialogue. You have created an either/or situation, a right and a wrong way to be, and you have made self-labels more important than learning and self-expression.

I know heterosexuals who are deep in denial about their same-sex attractions. I know lesbians who sleep with men, and bisexuals who have monogamous relationships with either same- or opposite-gender people. Are you still a lesbian if you sleep with men but just neglect to tell your female lover? Are you still straight if you are married but secretly sleep with a person of the same sex?

The fact is, sexual identity, sexual behaviors and romantic attractions are not always congruent in humans, because humans are complex creatures. If you are bisexual, you get used to ambiguity (pun intended), and eventually you learn to embrace it, because every day you learn something new. Openness feeds my curiosity, my intellect and my humanness.

Deborah Samuels
Portland

Dangerously hypocritical

To the Editor:

There is enough hate around us; we don't need more of that, especially in the pages of this publication.

I am angry that someone in your position demonstrates so much discrimination toward bisexuals. Do not try to deny or "cure" bisexuality. This is no different from the standard puritan view of homosexuality as a moral aberration and affliction that needs to be medically and psychologically "treated." The "pure" lesbian that you are cannot ignore the reality of bisexuality, even if you don't understand it or don't approve. Attractiveness based on gender-related traits is societal conditioning. My love for women doesn't define me as a lesbian but as a human being who has to struggle along the narrow path designated by monosexuals.

You are very contemptuous of your friend for what must have been an excruciating decision for her to make. Your hostility toward her new love is a sad reality of what we are facing when we dare to use that B word. Being a lesbian doesn't make one a better woman; being honest is much more rewarding. And if people like you weren't so adamant about putting bisexuals down, there would be more of us who could publicly accept our own identities.

The loathing that dots your editorial is unacceptable and is an insult to bisexuals. Your intolerance is also dangerous, because it furthers our isolation.

Miriam Congo
Eugene



Wayne Boulette

KONA HAWAII

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