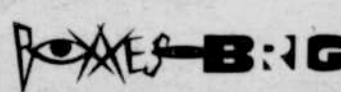


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ADVICE

Dazed and confused When straight friends turn gay

DEAR MS. BEHAVIOR:

I recently learned that Carly, one of my closest straight friends, is having a serious affair with a woman named Alana. She kept it secret for months and even lied to me about a series of things, including who she went on vacation with.

Carly always said she liked the company of lesbians but wasn't one. Through the years she's come with me to a thousand gay bars, movies, even Pride parades. When drunk she would joke that she wanted to have a threesome with me and my girlfriend, but no one took it seriously.

Now I feel misled, hurt and confused. Was Carly gay all along? Why didn't she tell me?

I can't help rethinking every conversation we had about her liking men and being straight. I feel like Carly lied and used me to absorb gay culture and try on our lifestyle to see if it fit.

She says she wanted to tell me about Alana but was afraid. But that's like being afraid to tell the Pope you're Catholic, isn't it?

I wish I could let it go and be happy for her. Your advice?

—*Carly's Fool*

DEAR CARLY'S FOOL:

Some homos come out in one giant burst, telling everyone who'll listen. Other homos, particularly those who are afraid or confused or perhaps voyeuristic interlopers, keep their queerness under wraps for as long as possible.

Some, like Carly, are even reluctant to come out into the warm bosom of their own flamboyantly gay friends and family. This is sometimes because they aren't quite comfortable and can't bear having the focus on them. They also are not in the mood to receive the life-affirming self-help books that include both spiritual advice and grooming tips, which well-meaning friends often give as gifts.

Carly's love relationship with another woman will undoubtedly affect you and your girlfriend. Sometimes a couple rely on a third person to keep them together.

Maybe you feel afraid to lose Carly as your "sidekick," particularly since she flatters you and your partner with her desire to sleep with you both. You may now need to find some other amoebic sidekick to act as the glue of your relationship.

While you're sorting this out, try telling Carly how you feel. She may be able to help you to understand why it was hard for her to



Ms. Behavior

be straight with you. (Or, in this case, queer with you.)

DEAR MS. BEHAVIOR:

I have a question so basic it's embarrassing, and I've asked certain other advice columnists to no avail. I hope you'll indulge me.

What is the correct form of address used, quickly and unambiguously, by a gentleman for a woman not yet introduced to him? I'm thinking of situations like when I see a woman drop her glove and

want to return it to her.

"Ma'am" used to be so easy, but I've found that some women take that as a term only for people older than themselves (however old they may be). "Miss" sounds condescending for anyone older than 12. "Yo, lady!" is (at least to me) literally unspeakable. Any suggestions?

—*Scott*

DEAR SCOTT:

Ms. Behavior assumes you've accidentally stumbled onto her planet, but she'll try directing you anyway.

If you're in a sex club and the dropped glove is made of latex and used for sexual acts, you can safely address the glove dropper as "Daddy." Use your handkerchief to pick it up.

If, however, dropped glove is a winter mitten, you can just say "Excuse me," without dwelling on gender-appropriate or age-appropriate language, and hand the woman her glove. If the woman you're addressing does not turn

around or acknowledge you, you might try something more specific, like, "Excuse me, you in the big puffy white coat with the ostrich feathers at the neck."

If the dropped glove happens to be black or white silk and elbow-length,

"Ma'am" would still be the way to go.

DEAR READERS:

In her last column, Ms. Behavior attributed the song "Lovin' You" to the wrong artist. It's by Minnie Ripperton, not Olivia Newton-John. Thanks to all of the astute homosexuals who wrote in to correct the error. []

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MERYL COHN is the author of *Do What I Say: Ms. Behavior's Guide to Gay and Lesbian Etiquette* (Houghton Mifflin). Her Internet site is www.msbehavior.com. Send questions or correspondence to msbehavior@aol.com.

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