



ILLUSTRATION FOR EUGENE WEEKLY BY HILDE ATALANTA

# BISEXUAL INVISIBILITY

Liking both can render you silent BY KELLY KENOYER

So what's it like to be bisexual? Henry Osborne, 22, says it can be confusing. "It's weird to be attracted to both, and people don't believe you a lot of the time," he says. "People will give you kind of a look if you say you're bi. Especially people in queer circles — they don't really believe you."

Bisexual people, despite having a stable sexual orientation of their own, are often assumed to be "going through a phase" instead of being permanently bi. Some may assume they're only halfway out of the closet, while others will say they "went through a phase in college" if they end up with a member of the opposite sex.

Bi people are therefore more likely to be treated with suspicion in LGBT communities, and face increased isolation because of it. As a bisexual myself, I've experienced some of these issues — I'm still not sure my parents believe me about my identity since I came out in college.

Osborne says that others misunderstand his sexuality, expecting that he can "turn it on and off." He says that when he came out to his parents as bi, they didn't understand. "I

was like 'Mom, I'm not gay, I'm bi,' and she was like, 'Oh, but you're gay right now.'"

"When I was in a relationship, everyone thought I was just gay," Osborne adds. "I didn't correct them because I'd get looks and whispers, so I just let them believe I was gay."

According to a 2011 report by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission, *Bisexual Invisibility*, "Other people's assumptions often render bisexuals invisible. Two women holding hands are read as 'lesbian,' two men as 'gay,' and a man and a woman as 'straight.' In reality, any of these people might be bi — perhaps all of them."

Bisexuals are rendered invisible — their identity subsumed by their relationship. Osborne says he often heard derogatory comments about bisexuals when he was part of a queer community during his last relationship. "They told me bi people don't exist," he says.

Bisexual women can face similar issues. Tatiana Enriquez is a 33-year-old student from Guayaquil, Ecuador currently enrolled at Lane Community College. She says she was outed as a lesbian when she still lived in Ecuador, despite actually being bi. "It was awful," she says.

Homosexuality is really taboo in Ecuador, she adds. "Being a tomboy doesn't mean you are a lesbian, it's just part of me."

Though Enriquez prefers serious relationships, she says many people assume she's promiscuous because of her identity. "Sometimes people think that because I'm bisexual I like all the girls and all the men. It's not like that." Most here in the U.S. assume she's straight until told otherwise. "I am a person who loves people, regardless of gender," she adds.

Hannah Steinkopf-Frank is a recent University of Oregon graduate who identifies as bisexual or queer. "I think it's in the nature of being bisexual that you have a tendency to be left out," she says.

"When you're with a man you can feel like a fake member of LGBTQ. You feel like you're an intruder because you're fulfilling a part of your identity that fits in with hetero-normativity," she says.

I can relate to that. Though I'm bisexual, I agonize over checking the LGBTQ box on census forms, scholarships and job applications — since bi people can usually pass for straight, the bi identity can feel like taking resources