

NOTE: This was the first article addressing bisexuals and the emerging bisexual movement to be published in a national lesbian or gay publication. The graphic was a black sheep.

OUT & OUTRAGED
Non-Violent Civil Disobedience at the U.S. Supreme Court

For Love, Life & Liberation
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The 1987 March On Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights
Civil Disobedience Handbook

The Bisexual Community: Are We Visible Yet?

By Lani Kaahumanu

Why does the attitude exist that there is no bisexual community, and why is it used against us so effectively? Why do we accept invisibility, and why haven't we projected a more visible presence, creating a prominent community that even the most virulent bi-phobes would have to recognize?

The answer, of course, is that is the way oppression operates, in this case, bisexual oppression.

On some level bisexual people believe the lie that what is shared isn't community, isn't a commitment of any significance, isn't comparable to those communities we are "in" [lesbian, gay, heterosexual, etc.]. The fear is if we come out we will "lose" those communities. We will be isolated, targeted for attack; simply put – rejected.

Anyone who has ever been closeted for any reason can relate to the fear of exposure and alienation. We live in a society that is based and thrives on dichotomous, either/or assumptions. The decision to come out as a bisexual makes the issues surrounding personal behavior and labels confusing. When I was a lesbian and coming out as bisexual, I understood that I would be seen as a traitor, weakening lesbian pride and unity. The self doubt and isolation I felt were very real. It wasn't easy being the center of gossip and trashing. It was a difficult time but I understood how bisexuality appears to give credence to the homophobic/heterosexist belief that there really is no such thing as a homosexual. But I also knew it was true that if I kept myself quiet for another's sense of pride and liberation, it was at the cost of my own. Not coming out as a bisexual undercuts not only the personal liberation of bisexual people, but all people. It also perpetuates the equally dangerous belief that there is no such thing as bisexual.

In some ways bisexual oppression is very similar to lesbian/gay oppression in that bisexuals are hit with the same prejudices in heterosexual society. Homophobia doesn't play

favorites and “heterosexual privilege” doesn’t protect us from queer bashing, losing our jobs or having our children taken away from us when we come out.

As bisexuals, we experience pressure from both sides to make up our minds, to make a final choice. If we don’t, we incur a collective contempt. Bisexuals deal with homophobia, biphobia and even heterophobia. The desire to identify with a community often forces bisexuals to repress a part of them selves. So just as in many cases closeted, fearful and insecure gays [and perhaps bisexuals] are the worst fag bashers/baiters, closeted bisexuals can lead the most vicious or outrageously questionable attacks against bisexual recognition.

As more bisexuals refuse to be closeted, and as we organize more visibly within the lesbian/gay community, we are challenging the stereotypes and proving that they, like all stereotypes, are fundamentally false. As we stand up and define ourselves and our contributions, we and the communities we belong to are seeing who and how many of us there are, thereby recognizing another community existing within the community which makes up the whole. Bisexuals, both in and out of the closet have given time, energy and money, and have been putting our lives on the line for the basic right of sexual freedom of expression without regard for gender since the beginning of the gay rights movement.

Even with the major shift in visibility, I wonder how many hidden “lesbian and gay” people there are who still secretly self-identify as bisexual. My experience as an out bisexual has also been one of confessor. Public “lesbian and gay” people have confided in me that they choose not to come out because “it will ruin [them] me” (i.e. career, politically), or it “will weaken the movement.” But in reality weakness comes in the betrayal of the self. It is the weak link in any liberation movement. It is a key element in the overall strength and wisdom of the lesbian/gay community that it include and validate bisexual people, and the bisexual movement as an ally in fighting the common enemy, heterosexism.

It is clear that homophobia is at the root of biphobia. Bisexuals have no intention of undermining the gains made by lesbians and gay men in the struggle to be a free people. Coming out as a bisexual is not something that is done to acquire or flaunt heterosexual privilege. I am bisexual because I am drawn to particular people regardless of gender. It doesn’t make me wishy-washy, confused, untrustworthy, or more sexually liberated. It makes me a bisexual.

There is no question that heterosexual privilege exists, and because bisexuals relate to the opposite sex, there is an inherent privilege in that scenario. But I am tired of the issue of heterosexual privilege being used to invalidate bisexual existence, and to minimize the considerable energy bisexuals have given and continue to give to the lesbian/gay community. It is as if bisexuals alone can do something to eradicate that privilege beyond being conscious of it and thoughtful not to abuse it. The issue is trust. The issue is building trust. The issue is the right of every one of us to be able to love whom we choose. Each of us must work to end sexual privilege of any kind if we are to accomplish what needs to be done.

Bisexuals are coming to the March on Washington in large numbers in support of the national demands and to express outrage at the Supreme Court’s Hardwick Decision by participating in the civil disobedience action. Bisexuals will show a sense of pride and unity

by demanding that the national media stop scapegoating bisexuals and all other risk groups for spreading AIDS. The National March on Washington gives us the opportunity as bisexual, lesbian, gay people to come together to take a strong, united stand.

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