

Bisexuality: What's in a Label, and Who Cares?

BY NIKKI HENDERSON

"You just can't decide which way you want to swing, now, can you?"

—Query from the grandmother of a bisexual friend of mine

"Bisexual" does not mean "unsure about one's own sexuality" or "afraid to admit to being gay/lesbian."

Neither is "bisexual" a synonym for "promiscuous."

And "bisexual" certainly does not mean "is willing to liven up the sex life of heterosexual couples."

So what does "bisexual" mean anyway?

I polled a few of my acquaintances to see what their definitions were.

"Attracted to both sexes somewhat equally, but not 50-50."

"Someone that has sexual relations with a person of either gender? Is there another definition?"

"Bisexual equals a person who can enjoy sexual intimacy with a person of either gender. How'zat? Key word here is 'enjoy.'"

"Joe says one who would have sex with a guy or a girl."

"I'm not trying to say that bisexuals are the only ones being honest with themselves — because I don't believe that — but I think maybe most people have some bisexual tendencies, to varying degrees."

"Someone who is, on some level attracted to other

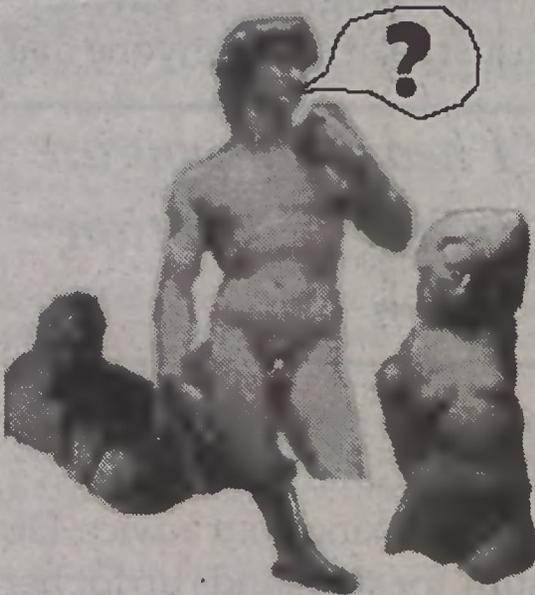
someones of both genders."

"Interested in having both boyfriend and girlfriend? Hopefully not at the same time"

"Umm... I guess someone who is, for lack of a better word, 'receptive,' to romantic feelings from members of both genders?"

"Ummm... I don't have one. I find definitions limiting."

I've heard lots of other definitions that follow these same general lines. They don't seem



to be particularly "bi-phobic" in content. However, for those of us who identify as bisexual, there seems to be plenty of "bi-phobia" out there, not only among heterosexuals, but among those who identify as gay, lesbian or transgender as well.

In the movie "Better than Chocolate," the token bisexual woman was portrayed rather stereotypically as promiscuous. One of her more memorable lines was "I like all the chocolates in the box" (or something to that effect). I rented the

movie for the first time, expecting something that would make me feel all warm and cozy.

Instead, the film left me feeling a bit more cold inside. Why is it that so often bisexuals are portrayed as outsiders to the GLBT community? "Not quite gay, not quite straight," caught in limbo, outsiders in both worlds.

I didn't expect to meet up with this particular brand of homophobia within the GLBT community. I thought: we're all queer (use whatever umbrella term you prefer, but you know what I mean). We all know what it's like to be harshly judged and discriminated against because of those we love. We're all here to help and encourage each other, right?

Please tell me I am not wrong on this one.

Back to my original question: What does "bisexual" mean anyway? I refer you to one of my favorite answers I received during the informal poll.

"I could define bisexual if you could define sexual ... I'm so disillusioned with sexual orientation boxes."

I agree. Love and desire are tricky little devils. When you least expect it, they will knock you flat or send you soaring through the clouds.

We are who we are, regardless of what labels society gives us, or the labels we choose for ourselves, and we are all creatures of love and desire.

Nikki can be reached at lacryma@hotmail.com.