

Note:

This essay, in its original form, caused quite a stir among members of our community -- and has been dramatically revised since its creation.

In particular, words such as “choice,” “lifestyle,” and “orientation” seem to have different – even contradictory – uses and meanings within our own community, and become quickly divisive. I therefore ask the reader grant some leeway to the current incarnation, with the understanding that it may ultimately be impossible to please all of us.

To be clear, this is an essay about hypocrisy, and as such is about the few and not the many. Further discussion about it has widened my own perception of bisexuality and the plights of our often-divided community.

Our understanding of bisexuality and all the issues it entails; along with our unflagging insistence on complete inclusion of bisexual people -- can only serve to bolster our numbers, thereby strengthening our position in the quest for complete equality and recognition as human beings with human rights.

Bisexuality and the Conservative Agenda

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Much of the rhetoric surrounding the issues of LGBT equality has to do with the topic of “choice.” Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, there remains a large vein of extreme conservatism (the Religious Right and the Republican Party) who insist that a person’s sexual orientation is determined by a decision made by each individual.

How can that be? How can so many so-called intelligent people simply ignore all that evidence and all of our sworn statements and all of our testimonials that we, too, would have probably “chosen” to be straight... if that had only been an option for us. The idea that any persecuted class of citizen would “choose” to be persecuted is itself such a ludicrous proposition that it begs the question, “Why are we still arguing about choice?”

“Choice” is, after all, a central tenet to continued denial of human rights. The “choice” between straight and gay becomes, in the minds of conservatives, the choice between good and evil, and becomes therefore the singular point from which they are empowered to deny our civil liberties. Take away the issue of “choice,” and you take away their rationale for punishment. Take away the issue of “choice,” and they would have to start treating us like human beings.

The LGBT community, in all our activities and lobbying efforts, seem to pay little attention to the “B” in “LGBT.” I’ve heard some bisexuals refer to themselves as “invisible,” and many seem to feel (and perhaps they are) mistreated within our community as the “stepchildren” of the current equal rights movement. To be fair, many of us seem to have our own issues of prejudice and have difficulty “placing” bisexuality

in the realm of loyalties. This divisive trend makes little sense to me, since I've found bisexual people to be among the strongest advocates of the LGBT movement.

In 1948, noted biologist and entomologist Alfred Kinsey introduced the "Kinsey Scale" suggesting that human sexuality can be measured on a continuum that ranges from 0 (completely heterosexual) to 7 (completely gay/lesbian), with the numbers 1 through 6 representing varying degrees of bisexuality. It isn't surprising, therefore, that some have suggested that the majority of all people may be described as "bisexual," dividing our ranks into approximately 10% gays/ lesbians/transgendered people, 10% completely straight people, and 80% bisexuals. While there may never be a way to know for sure, this 80% estimate for bisexuality may provide us with some important questions.

Firstly, if our bisexual numbers ring in at anywhere near 80%, why would any sane activist try to alienate such a powerhouse of a demographic? Perhaps rather than view bisexuals as "stepchildren," we would more prudently fully embrace all the dynamics surrounding bisexuality.

Secondly, this realization makes me wonder how 90% of our population (the sum total of the LGBT community) could be so long and so well oppressed by the remaining 10%! This second question provides the meat for the remainder of this essay.

So I asked myself why this might be – how can so many be subdued by so few -- and the answer takes us right back to the topic of "choice." To follow me on this point, you're going to have to crawl with me into the conscience of the ultra-conservatives, because they don't see "choice" the same way we do. We see "choice" as the ability to choose a sexual orientation – and of course we know this is nonsense. But the conservatives, claiming they don't believe in "sexual orientations," use the word "lifestyle" instead. This simple exchanging of words already hints that choice is an option, because "lifestyle" sounds easier to change than "orientation," which sounds more permanent. It then becomes a simple matter to use the word "choice" as the ability to choose which "lifestyle" to lead, straight or gay (read "good" or "evil").

About 20 years ago, I began to become politically astute – a process that involved paying closer attention to the news, and discovered the following trend: Every few months, another "straight" conservative, antigay bigot would get busted for some type of homosexual activity. These cases are always remarkable for their hypocrisy, because it seems the louder they scream against gay rights, the worse kind of homosexual turmoil that follows. As is the most recent case with Senator Craig, they are leaders, either political or religious; they are family men (or women); and they are extremely anti-gay (up until the day they're busted, that is). So what's the deal? What's really going on here? Are they gay or are they straight?

Perhaps they're part of the larger (80%) demographic. And while this may seem repugnant to some (if I was bisexual, I wouldn't want to claim them, either), if you'll humor me for a few moments... I think I can make a good case for this possibility.

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In a perfect world, it would likely be healthiest for all of us to accept that many (perhaps most) people DO have some degree of flexibility -- a dual sexual orientation that encompasses both gay and straight sensibilities. While few people (and certainly not me) would suggest anyone can choose who they will ultimately love, some bisexuals may nonetheless have the luxury to “pick” which sexual orientation to practice, whether to live as a practicing homosexual or a practicing heterosexual – or both at once.

Think about it... if you had a choice... if you were bisexual, and could chose between full equality (opposite-sex partner) or being a member of the persecuted class (same-sex partner), which would you choose?

Of course, none of this is intended to detract from the many, many bisexual people who are among our ranks, nor is it an indictment of any person who chooses for her/himself the kinder, gentler path... yet it does provide a possible reason why we don't have more bisexuals among our ranks, joining in the good fight for equality. Maybe it is because it was easier for many to simply to make the choice to act “straight,” and voila... the issue no longer affects them... they become immune to the slings and arrows and religious and social and even physical violence directed toward the LGBT community.

Once I recognized this dynamic, an even more amazing truth hit me so squarely between the eyes, that it almost knocked me out of my chair! I was sitting here, wondering about those people who – in spite of all this overwhelming evidence – continue to insist that being gay is a choice. These people are terrified that recognizing gay humanity will cause in our country a gay “epidemic”... where all sorts of formerly “straight” people will begin “choosing” to act “gay.” The fear that making gay “ok” will therefore destroy the very fabric of the American family... that we'll all start running around naked and making love in the streets... that cats and dogs will start sleeping together... “It'll be anarchy, I tell you!”

Who would think such a thing? Who would honestly believe that it's a simple matter of choice in spite of all the evidence? Well, I believe the most likely candidates may be found among the ranks of the near-forgotten “B” in “GLBT,” among our bisexual brothers and sisters. Who else could “know” beyond a shadow of doubt that our “apparent orientation” is a choice but those among us for whom it actually IS a choice?

It is ironic to me that, in spite of our inclusion of bisexuals in our ongoing struggle toward freedom, that a few bisexual people, in addition to choosing the “straight” path, have also chosen to be among our most prolific adversaries – spewing hate from pulpit and judicial bench, from pen and from stage... perhaps even bringing themselves to believe that we are all, like them, blessed with the ability to make our “apparent orientation” a simple matter of choice. So some of the people we are trying to help liberate are also the same people who are “hell-bent” on subduing our liberty.

The dynamic is all around us, as we see preachers and “straight” Republican congressmen getting busted for illicit gay sex acts in airport restrooms, we can't help but

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start to ask why those who shout most loudly against our liberties seem to be trying foremost to keep their own “demons” at bay....

Perhaps I was one of the few people who hadn't already presumed that the strongest ant-gay voices might be borne out of their own personal struggles with what they consider to be "aberrant" same-sex attractions. But even though we may never be sure, in our own activism, who is and who isn't bisexual (or gay), I may begin to make that presumption....

It will inform my activism if I view opposing voices as being born out of tortured souls... and coming from people who may have more choices than they're readily to willingly admit. It will inform my activism in that I may recognize the futility of debating "choice" at all (though "choice" will certainly remain among their most vocalized issues with us). It will also inform my activism in my understanding of the fact that they may have the choices they claim we all have.

I believe that, in any debate, the motivation of one's "opponent" is the single most valuable bit of information in forming a response. This may not be so remarkable to others, but for me it is fundamental. Understanding this dynamic changes much in my understanding of our struggle for equality -- and it is simply this: That the voices speaking against my rights are in reality speaking in order to maintain and preserve the personal walls and masks that protect the speakers' own families! The "Family Values" we hear so much about may very well involve the specific preservation of the personal families of people like James Dobson (Focus on the Family)... so that he doesn't suffer the fate of people like Senator Craig.

Of course, their families are "under attack." But they are not under attack by us... they are under attack by their own impulses and attractions and... ultimately... by their own systems of ultra-conservative enforcements.

I say, “Enough!” I happen to be a gay man, but I don't presume to believe or preach the ridiculous notion that all men are therefore gay. So if you happen to be a conservative, repressed bisexual, we're simply asking that you don't make the ludicrous assumption that all humans are similarly oriented. I'll make a deal with you, Senator Craig and James Dobson... I'll accept your bisexuality – I'll accept the notion that you really can choose – if you accept the fact that I can't. How's that for a deal?

Maybe if more of us can start to accept the notion that humans are created with a variety of qualities, we can all start to get along better.

-- Troy Carlyle