

Bears & Health

Private Acts, Social Consequences

Bisexuality--Round II



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In a previous column, "Bears, Bisexuality and Masculinity" (April/May 2001), I wrote about the problems, mostly having to do with the closet, gay men tend to encounter with bisexual, especially married, men. Bottom line of my take: with exceptions, bisexual men, especially those who are married, tend to be more closeted and to play their circumstances to their own advantage, at greater cost to their wives as well as their gay lovers. In some cases, I proposed, outing may be justifiable retaliation, just as it can be for gay closet cases, sometimes even for individuals who are not public figures. Subsequently, I got a letter from my friend, Pete Chvany, a bear, bisexual activist and reader of this column, expressing concern that this criticism would encourage people to be unethical (outing), add to the fears and isolation of bisexual/married men, and do little to promote the understanding and compassion that are the real solution. What follows are some highlights from that letter.

The flip side of the much-discussed "privilege" of being a closeted, manipulative bisexual male who oppresses his women and men partners is the extreme lack of support, affirmation and common decency for bisexual men and women who are out of the closet, honest and active in our communities. This makes the admirable goal of honesty and of "coming out" for bisexual men and women more difficult to achieve, the way coming out as gay and lesbian was so much more difficult before Stonewall.

Why would we expect the closet to be any less devastating for bisexual men? The conviction of gay men that bi men have it easy is truly mystifying.

The safer-sex literature on display in most places in the gay community has almost nothing on bisexuality. Lacking such information, just what does anyone expect of bisexual men?

That we go to the "straight" world? My experiences around bisexuality with doctors in straight environments have been deeply damaging; most "out" bisexuals say the same.

I think back on your point-by-point explanations of medical conditions bears should be aware of, and I think to myself "here is a bear who can help bisexual bears be much safer." Instead, what I read is a meditation on how a young cub messed over by a "bisexual" partner can protect *himself*. That's important work, too, but it's work I've seen gay men doing with each other for decades now. What would really be new and helpful is to do more outreach to bisexuals. In 2001, doesn't everyone already know that bi men are bad news? Even USA Today can write about African-American men "on the down low" who "callously" infect their women partners with HIV. Here in Boston, a white supremacist group has been putting out leaflets saying: "DON'T CATCH AIDS! Don't have sex with Intravenous Drug Users, Bisexuals, Blacks." Even the KKK types know to steer clear of bisexuals. I'm not sure why that story needs to be told again in American Bear.

I too struggle with the with the question of how to reach bisexual men who may not want to be reached. But one lesson I've learned from earlier work by mentors like you is that harping on what's wrong only shames people all the more.

I worry that your discussion of manipulative bi men gives little comfort or support to bi men who are NOT living dishonestly, and little guidance to bi men who are, but who want to do better.

To insist that someone else's com-

ing out must be primarily for *our* benefit seems to me like an unhealthy blurring of egos.

So there you have it, enlightened criticism of gay unhappiness with bisexual/married men from a bisexual activist. Certainly safer sex advisories need to be geared for bisexual men as well as other groups. As for the points about closetedness and outing, I'll close as I did that previous column, with another real-life story of a contemporary American bear. A father had confided to his son, a cub, that he was bisexual. He then obtained a divorce and moved to Europe to live with another man. During and following the divorce, the cub's mother, who knew nothing of her husband's bisexuality (when still an adolescent, the cub was sworn to secrecy by his father) blamed herself for the collapse of their marriage. Today, ten years later, the cub, now in his thirties but, himself still closeted in a locale and profession where many others are out - still feels he has no right to break his father's confidence and out his father to his mother, who apparently still doesn't know that her husband was bisexual. In this case, of course, it may be that Dad was always preferentially gay. In any case, is this right? Is it nobody else's business but theirs? You be the judge. Or not.

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