

## Untitled, (in the Bisexual Community Section)

By Amy Andre

When I discovered that the North American Conference on Bisexuality was going to be in my state of California, I jumped at the chance to attend. The conference nourished me in many ways, but one incident there threatened to mar my experience. In a workshop on social research on bisexuality, someone mentioned a study in which white and black men who have sex with both men and women were asked their sexual orientations. Black men were more likely to identify as bi. White men were more likely to identify as gay. These results seem pretty straightforward to me; they indicate that, for some reason, white men resist a bi label in the face of bi behavior, while black men do not.

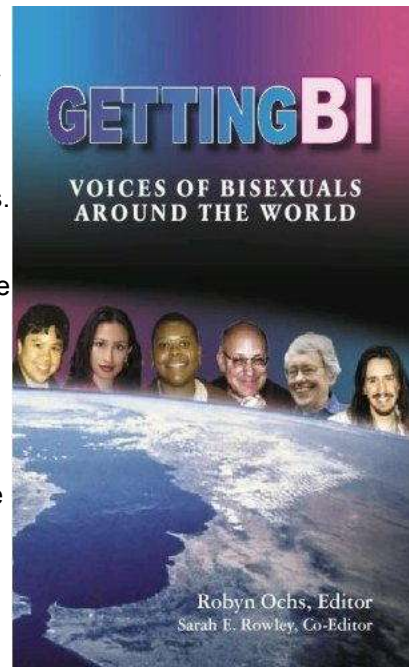
Imagine my surprise when a workshop attendee expressed surprise about the behavior of the *black* men! "Do you think that's because black men don't like to call themselves gay?" he said. "[The gay label] is pretty stigmatized in their community.

I was stressed. There were black people in the room, myself included. "Their" community is really our community. Some black people are bisexual. This use of the word "their" made me feel separated, silenced, as though I was only there to observe, not to fully participate.

Research shows that no group, apart from IV drug users, is more stigmatized than bisexuals. Therefore the attendee's implication – that blacks choose a bi label because it's so much harder to be gay – doesn't make much sense. Moreover, the implication is racist, because it marginalizes the experience of black men making choices in identity. It presumes that no black man would choose "bi" were it not for the strength of homophobia in the black community. These are stereotypes and assumptions; it's not easy to be bi, regardless of one's racial community.

The comments implied that black men who have sex with men and women *would* call themselves gay – ie., would do what the white men do – were it not for some community-based hindrance. It's as though the choices white men make are the norm against which we should be comparing men of other races. But doesn't what the white men are doing – calling themselves gay and having sex with both men and women – seem illogical? Granted, people call themselves bi for a variety of reasons, both because of and in spite of their own sexual behaviors. But, from a purely "A" plus "B" equals "C" perspective, I would have to agree with the logic of what the black men are doing: having sex with men and women and referencing their identities accordingly.

I went to the Bi Conference excited to immerse myself in community. I saw workshops on defining bisexuality, bi health issues, bi relationships, love, sex, science, art, and so much more. I put it all together and thought, "These are my people, my fellow bisexuals, my lovers and friends, my advocates and allies, whom I fight for and with every day that I out myself and speak my truth." Wouldn't you know it, just like out there in the monosexual-centric world that I butt heads with every time I give myself permission to love and breathe, here too we have those among us who



would internalize biphobia, give voice to racist notions, and marginalize *me*?

I'm glad the conference happened, and will happen again, that the bi community exists, and will continue to do so. But I came away sadder and wiser, realizing that we are made up of the same people who challenge my race politics and my bi politics across the board. Nevertheless, I'm still glad I came to the conference because the experience strengthened my resolve to keep fighting racism and biphobia, wherever I find them.

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