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# Bisexual people have long felt excluded at Pride festivities. That's finally changing.

*Zachary Zane*

8–10 minutes

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Despite my girlfriend's reluctance, she agreed to attend 2014 Boston Pride with me. She was the first person I had dated seriously since coming out as bisexual, and it was important that I had her by my side at my first Pride March. She, too, was (and still is) queer, but said she never felt welcome at Pride events as a bisexual woman. I promised her it would be different this time; she'd have me.

I couldn't have been more wrong.

At a pregame before the march, gay men were hounding both of us, but predominantly her, asking about our relationship.

Convinced that I was going to come out as gay by the end of the day and leave her, they showered her with pity. These same men shamelessly flirted with me in front of her, as if she didn't exist.

Two hours in, she started crying, telling me that she was heading home.

I offered to leave with her, but she said that since I had just come out, it was important that I stayed. "Besides," she said, "You'd have

a lot more fun without me.”

The truth is, I did. Since then, I’ve continued to date men and women — but I haven’t gone to Pride festivities with a girlfriend again.

For a long time, stories like ours were common at Pride-adjacent events. Everyone might be welcome at a big march. But queer couples who “look straight” have often been subjected to judgmental or harassing comments at pre- and post-march events. It’s a glaring hypocrisy. Pride festivities are supposed to welcome all queer individuals, but sometimes it’s only the most privileged within the LGBTQ community (white, gay, cisgender men and to a lesser extent white, gay, cisgender women) who have felt free to openly embrace their identities. In just the place they’re supposed to feel safe and welcome, bisexual people are and have been viewed as outsiders in their own community.

However, that discomfort is quickly melting away. Things have changed dramatically in the past five years since my then-girlfriend and I attended that pre-party in Boston. For starters, our culture is starting to recognize gender and sexuality as existing on a spectrum rather than as purely binary (male or female, gay or straight). There has been an influx of media visibility as celebrities such as [Janelle Monáe](#) and [Sara Ramirez](#) who’ve proudly identified as bisexual or pansexual. And transgender individuals are using those labels, as well. One-third of the 27,715 respondents in the [2015 U.S. Transgender Survey](#) identified as bisexual or pansexual.

Even with the increase of bisexual visibility, Pride festivities that are supposed to be inclusive of all members of the LGBTQ

community can still put queer folks in different-gender relationships (i.e., a man with a woman) in a peculiar predicament. On one hand, these individuals want to be able to celebrate their identity with their partners. On the other, they might not feel they belong because of [the privilege of “passing” as straight](#) or because outsiders assume they’re not queer. That can be uncomfortable for everyone involved.

There’s a long history of excluding bisexual folks from the LGBTQ community, despite how [Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera](#) — two transgender women of color who pioneered the LGBTQ rights movement — were both bisexual.

There’s no way to pin down a single cause. “Part of it is that gays and lesbians often have a lot of pain around their own coming-out process,” explains Ian Lawrence-Tourinho, director of the [American Institute of Bisexuality](#), “So there’s a bit of resentment toward bi people because they can still have a foot — so to speak — in the straight world.”

Negative perceptions of bisexual folks can affect how they are treated at Pride festivities. Despite being an LGBTQ activist and editor of [Bisexual.org](#), Talia Squires says she usually skips events other than the march, for fear of looking like a “tourist” by attending with her bisexual husband, Rio. Since they started going to Pride together nearly a decade ago, they’ve had dozens of experiences where bystanders have seen them kissing and said things like: *I don’t mind that you’re straight, but you maybe don’t want to do that here, right now.*

“It’s hard because you don’t want to be the stereotypical, straight girl in the gay bar,” Squires says. “And I fully understand why

people sort of get 'icked out' by that. But at the same time, there isn't a good way to scream. 'No! I'm one of you.' ”

After spending hours working the [amBi](#) bisexual booth at West Hollywood Pride, where she broadcasts her bisexuality from a megaphone, Squires has run out of energy to justify and explain her bisexuality at the Pride after-parties. “We can either allow ourselves to be erased and misunderstood by others or spend our whole lives telling random strangers, ‘Actually, I’m bi.’ ”

That’s why, once Squires heads home, Rio, who’s also polyamorous, enjoys going out to the evening Pride events with his boyfriend. No one has ever told him not to kiss his boyfriend there.

Still Squires doesn’t let this get her down. In fact, it’s why she is an activist — in the hopes that one day, a person seeing a man and woman holding hands won’t automatically assume that they’re straight.

Squires isn’t alone when it comes to feeling the need to constantly reassert and justify her bisexuality. George Grattan and Mary Bernard, both 49, have been married for 22 years. Six months before their wedding, Grattan told Bernard he was bisexual. He came out publicly to his family, friends and colleagues five years ago. Bernard identifies as straight and is a fervent ally. Still, at Pride events, “We get treated like fascinating, bizarre animals in a zoo,” Grattan says.

“Every time we go to Pride, we’re asked to explain, teach, justify our marriage, and defend ourselves,” Bernard continues. “People treat us as if they have a right to our most private thoughts and feelings and stories.”

Like Squires, the hardest part for Bernard comes after the march.

She remembers attending Providence Pride with Grattan a few years back. There, two men followed them around all night asking “incredibly intrusive questions, trying to understand how I could possibly be okay with my husband being bi and out, [and] how I could be willing to spend time at an LGBTQ club.”

She now expects these kinds of questions. Strangers will ask her if she’s worried Grattan will leave her for another man, or if she ever wonders whether her husband is actually gay. Even if they’re asking in a “nice” way, Bernard says it feels horrible because no matter how she responds, it’s clear these men aren’t listening.

“It’s as if these strangers are looking at them and saying: I don’t really believe you’re as okay with this as you say you are — and I feel sorry for you because I think your marriage won’t last.”

By the time Pride ends, Bernard says she’s reminded of something that pains her: “I am deeply invested in, committed to, participating in, and advocating for a community that I can never really belong in.”

Even though Grattan and Bernard’s past Pride experiences have been less than ideal, things are getting better for bisexual folks at Pride. In the five years I’ve been attending Pride events since coming out, I’ve seen a huge difference. The bisexual community is far more visible than we’ve ever been. I remember seeing dozens of folks at last year’s NYC Pride donning bisexual flags as capes or wearing some other form of pink, lavender and blue combination, whereas I don’t remember seeing a single “visibly” bi person at Boston Pride in 2014.

“We’ve reached a cultural tipping point,” says Robyn Ochs. Ochs is an educator, speaker and editor of [Bi Women Quarterly](#); she also

coined a popular [definition of bisexual](#) in the 1990s.

For 32 years, Ochs says she felt as if she was banging her head against the wall — advocating for bi people without seeing any “widespread change and perspective in the mainstream” — but in the past two to three years, “everything has changed.”

She thinks it has to do with youth, who are [openly embracing their bisexuality](#). About a [third of millennials](#) in the United States don't identify as exclusively gay or straight, meaning they fall somewhere on the bisexual spectrum. It's unclear why younger folks feel more comfortable labeling themselves as bisexual, although it may be because of an increase in [bi representation in mainstream media](#) over the past few years.

For the first time since attending Pride five years ago, I would feel confident bringing a woman with me as my partner without worrying about her being harassed. I just need to get a girlfriend first.

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