

# Challenging Our Assumptions of Sexuality

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Guest Columnist

She asked me to give her a back massage with her shirt on while a resident of mine was in the room. I asked her why she would not take her shirt off (she had two layers of clothes on!). She scribbled a message on a note pad that read, "Your resident might feel uncomfortable." I scribbled back, "Why?" She said, "She will get all weirded out."

I could not understand the significance of a back massage until my friend and I had a discussion later. She feared that a back massage might get construed as something sexual.

In my culture women bond with women; men bond with men. It is not uncommon to see men holding hands or for women to be physically close to each other—a back massage would not be considered a sexual act.

A mother in her late 20s told me that although she does not have 'problems' with homosexuals, she would feel uncomfortable having a lesbian baby-sit her children. She said: "Children imitate others. I would not want them picking up 'homo vibes.'"

I asked if she ever feared that her daughter might start chasing after boys because she would pick up 'hetero vibes.'

"No," she said. "I see your logic. But this is stuff that has been engrained in our minds. It is easier to go through life where I can go to sleep with everything placed back into their pre-labeled cubbyholes."

She did not see how her views were hurting anyone. Our relationships with people and our actions are most often reflective of our mind frame, which includes the beliefs and the

viewpoints that we hold. By not hiring a baby sitter based on the mere fact that she is or might be a lesbian not only discriminates against all homosexuals, but also promotes injustices that plague our culture.

As an international student, my views have been challenged constantly. Sometimes I find myself isolated in my beliefs and viewpoints because they seem foreign or unfavorable to other people—this is true in Jordan as much as it is true at UR. Non-heterosexuals have at one point or another questioned who they are and may have questioned their homosexuality often. How often do heterosexuals question heterosexuality? Most do not because they don't have to.

I used to think that people are born gay, that there was some gay gene, or something along those lines. I was one of those people who supported gay rights without necessarily supporting homosexuality. Anything not heterosexual was a mutation, a fluke of nature.

In the past year, I have undergone a paradigmatic shift of thought, a new way of seeing, a new way of knowing. Coming from a multicultural background, it was not difficult to realize that sexual orientation is not necessarily dualistic—just like most things I have come to know. I do not see only one right way.

Homosexuality, just like everything else, cannot fit in a neatly designated cubbyhole. Some people may be disposed genetically to homosexuality or heterosexuality. But for many, it is not that simple. Homosexuality, and specifically, bisexuality falls on a continuum. Most of what we have come to know and believe is a social

construction. The concept of "human nature" in itself is what we have come to define it—through a historical and cultural context.

Many of us may not necessarily have been born heterosexual. It may have been more convenient for people to have been heterosexual at one time because of procreative factors, or because of division of labor and other economic and political reasons. Much of what we consider to be innate or moral may in fact be masked by a history of mere social construction based on economics and politics, and little to do with innate or universal values.

"Sexual Diversity, In Focus: Bisexuality." That was the title on my RA bulletin board. I was advised by someone close to me to put up another bulletin board.

The person told me I was promoting bisexuality. What the person did not realize was that heterosexuality is promoted everyday and in early socialization. Magazines and television are an example of that. From early on, we get the message that girls are supposed to have boyfriends, and boys are supposed to have girlfriends.

We live in a heterosexist culture that assumes that heterosexuality is the best way to be, the "norm." Why can't someone fall in love with a person and not a sex or gender role? It does not make sense to eliminate 50 percent of the population.

A common assumption is that bisexuality is a stage, an experimental phase that some people undergo before deciding whether they are heterosexual or homosexual. For some people that may be the case.

For others, it might be easier to

choose one way or the other because it fits more neatly into their cubbyholes.

For many people who label themselves bisexuals, that is who they are. They might identify more as heterosexual at some point, and identify more as lesbian or gay at another point, but they are bisexual because they are open to either sex or all genders.

Another common assumption made by heterosexuals and homosexuals about bisexuality is that one ceases to be bisexual as soon as he or she chooses a partner. I was recently asked, "Is it possible to be married and yet be bisexual?"

Easily! A bisexual female can be in a monogamous relationship with a man and still be bisexual. Sexual activity does not necessarily determine one's identity. A person could very well be a virgin and be bisexual. Most people who consider themselves heterosexual would say they felt or knew they were heterosexual even before they ever had sex.

The opposite is also true. A person who has had sexual activity with the same sex might still consider him or herself to be heterosexual.

When we question our concept of pre-defined and rigid identity, we might realize, and even celebrate the fluidity and diversity of peoples.

Homophobia and heterosexism are directly intertwined with sexism, racism and other human issues. An example of the social, political and economic biases and injustices that permeate many global societies can be seen right here in the University of Richmond community.