

## **I's the Bi: Bisexuals Get Blatant for Pride**

**By Margaret Robinson**

**XTRA!**

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Bisexuals are notoriously difficult to pick out at Pride. Bisexuals with same-sex partners often blend into the sea of gay men and lesbians, while those with other-sex partners or who don't trigger people's gaydar are assumed to be straight tourists.

In the past, part of the difficulty was the lack of identifiable bi symbols. Three years ago, members of the Toronto Bisexual Network (TBN) were creating homemade shirts with iron-on transfers, embroidery and magic markers.

Since then, bisexuals have been discovered by capitalism. A wide array of bi pride pins, stickers and jewelry are now available on-line and in local stores for just a swipe of your credit card.

Want to be identifiably bi this Pride? How about a T-shirt that reads, "I'm not a lesbian but my girlfriend is." Or maybe you need a button that says, "Kiss me twice, I'm bisexual." And for those of you wanting to bust the old "anything that moves" myth of bisexual promiscuity, there's the "I'm bisexual and I'm not attracted to you" keychain.

Like all good queer subcultures, bisexuals now have a flag of our own, invented by US activist Michael Page back in 1998, the same man who brought us Celebrate Bisexuality Day (Sep 23). The flag features horizontal bands of pink and turquoise with a stripe of purple in between – the purple represents the overlapping attraction for multiple genders – and can now be found fluttering at Pride celebrations from San Francisco to Reykjavic.

TBN has been struggling with its invisibility at Pride ever since the group started marching back in 1990. But this year they're looking to get noticed. They'll have a truck and sound system for the first time this year and members marching will be tossing bi pride bracelets into the crowd – bracelets they spent some 12 hours putting together.

"It was a lot of work," says TBN member Laura Jarvis. "But it was fun and it was well worth it."

But visibility doesn't come cheap. The group has been fundraising all year to get together the cash for their parade wheels and for the U-Haul that the TBN women will be taking into the Dyke March.

Bisexuals still have a long way to go in terms of overcoming prejudice. A study last year at the University of California found that straights dislike bisexuals more than either gay men or lesbians. In fact, compared to any other identifiable minority, sexual and or otherwise, the only group that rank lower than bisexual were intravenous drug users.

Lyla Miklos, a 28-year-old bisexual woman and queer activist, notes that the most painful rejection comes from within the queer community itself. "I've had people who have known me for years assume

that I am a lesbian and then say some nasty remark about bisexuals. Some of them were on the same Pride committee with me.”

Miklos has been on the organizing committee of Hamilton Pride for the past five years. She says that many homos hold a double standard, accepting other gay men and lesbians just on the basis of their sexuality, but expecting bisexuals to prove themselves through community service.

“It’s like I have to constantly fight for credibility within my own queer culture, no matter how much GLBT [gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans] activism I am a part of. That always bites.”

TBN member Stephen Harvey says he still encounters biphobia at Pride Week events. “Sometimes it’s explicit, as in a cordial but direct challenge at the Toronto Bisexual Network’s information table.”

Visitors to the organization’s table in the community fair have told Harvey that he’s got to choose between being gay and being straight, and even that TBN doesn’t belong at pride week.

“It happens less than it used to,” says Harvey. “But I don’t think it will ever totally go away.”

Over the years, Pride Toronto has worked hard to be more inclusive. “I think we feel strongly that Pride is something that can bring the whole community together,” says Pride Toronto co-chair Kyle Knoeck.

In 1995, Pride Toronto was incorporated as the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual and Transgender Pride Committee. They have since elected bisexual coordinators and incorporated bisexual awareness into their volunteer training.

But Knoeck is realistic about changing attitudes. “That doesn’t mean we’ve conquered the challenge of inclusivity,” he says. “It’s just a starting point.”

He adds that making everyone feel included in Pride Week is an enormous challenge. “But it’s an easy start to include ‘bisexual, transsexual and transgender’ in our language,” he says. “We’ve gotten so much heartfelt feedback from people who are bi or trans and are grateful that those words are included. It’s a very small thing, but I think it can make a difference, especially if it triggers the larger community to start asking questions and educating themselves.”