

Gender chasing

Labeling of sexuality too limiting



For the depraved among you who haven't yet seen my all-time favorite movie, "Chasing Amy" is the story of two comic book writers who are best friends.

One of the pair, Holden (Ben Affleck), falls in love with a beautiful and funny writer named Alyssa (Joey Lauren Adams). One problem, though — Alyssa's a lesbian.

Or at least that's what she thinks.

Alyssa eventually realizes that she's in love with Holden as well. There's a lot of things I like about this movie. Besides my crush on Ben Affleck, there's a hilarious appearance by Jay and Silent Bob. And I can relate to the whole comic book theme, having been a collector as a kid.

But the heart of the movie is the relationship between Holden and Alyssa and the effects it has on Holden's relationship with his best friend.

I didn't like this movie the first time I saw it. In fact, I was somewhat offended. As a "straight but not narrow" ally of the gay community, I didn't like how the film seemed to show that all lesbian Alyssa needed to fall for Holden was a good screw.

Back then, my support for the gay community, like many straight people, came from a belief that straight or gay, people are born that way, and there's nothing they can do about it. And this belief has allowed for tremendous progress in the face of the Religious Right's prattle about "choice" and "sin."

But now I don't think this belief is entirely accurate. There's not just two categories of sexuality (gay or straight) that everyone falls into. Sexuality is a continuum, with homosexuality on one end and heterosexuality on the other end, and in reality, most people don't fall completely on one end or the other.

I came to see the true complexity of sexuality when I realized that the feelings I had for my best friend were not of mere friendship — I had the same hopes and confusions about him that I had for girls I'd been in love with. I began to realize that many of my friendships with guys in the past had this same element of attraction, but I never let myself realize it consciously.

Yet realizing that I could love a man didn't destroy my desire or ability to love women.

The more I become involved with the gay community, the more I come to think that many of the people who consider themselves "gay" or "lesbian" have had, and could have, happy romantic relationships with someone of the opposite sex as well. But we're all pressured to pick one or the other and stick with it.

To this day I'm sometimes guilty of identifying myself as homosexual. People understand "gay," even if they don't like it. Saying I'm bisexual seems to make people think I'm either actually gay but afraid to admit it, I'm confused or I'm just some kind of

greedy sex fiend.

Indeed, when I came out to my parents as bisexual, they told me that if I were gay they would support me "because then I couldn't help it," but being bisexual is a "choice" and that I should just "choose" women.

But more and more young people are identifying themselves as "bi," "queer," or "pansexual" to avoid narrow labels. Several celebrities like Angelina Jolie, Megan Mullally (Karen on "Will & Grace") and Margaret Cho have come out as bi in the past few months.

I saw "Chasing Amy" again recently. There's a scene where Alyssa tells Holden that she's been ostracized by all of her lesbian friends for dating him. He asks her why she dated girls in the first place, and Alyssa replies, "because I didn't want to miss out on my chance to find that one special person just because they were of the same gender."

That scene ties the whole film together. Alyssa wasn't a "lesbian" made "straight" by a good screw. She was someone looking for love and not afraid of where she might find it. I think that most of us, if we would let ourselves, could fall in love with someone of either gender as well.

Like Alyssa in "Chasing Amy," I, too, hope that one day I'll meet that one special person who will change my life forever — and if I ever do, I won't turn him or her away because he or she happens to have (or not have) a penis.

Culture shock

San Francisco trip leads to self discovery



Yesterday mornin' at 4:20 a.m., I was sitting in the San Francisco airport. I hadn't slept for two days, but I was going strong.

My psychologist (mother) will ask of my trip, "Was it worth it?"

As I encompass what it means, I will nod my head and say, "Oh yeah."

Sometimes, for me, I think expressing the simple pleasures in life isn't possible without sounding contrived and dishonest, but I'll try.

Only one sentence can describe my weekend — I learned a lot and had fun doing it.

I didn't know how my trip was to fare because getting my plane ticket was an adventure in itself.

Not really an adventure per se, but I had to pay \$8 more than my best friend and companion on the trip, Deena.

The only reasoning we could come up with as to why mine was a little more is that so many

gays fly into San Francisco that United Airlines feels it can add an additional "queer charge" on the side.

I thought it a bit odd when the United lady asked what my sexual orientation was.

Oh well.

To add to this "distraction," at 5:14 a.m. on my way home, my six-shooter butane lighter was confiscated by the baggage check lady. It's scary to think that it has passed through the X-ray many times before, but my luck simply ran out.

The lady said, "It's a weapon, and I'm going to have to turn it in to the police. I don't want to make it a bigger issue than it is, since it's a lighter."

OK, fine. So, is it a weapon or a lighter, lady? I would guess the latter since she probably would have let me keep a weapon.

With all this farty nonsense aside, what I learned this weekend was that I don't know how to act and respond to people of "my own kind."

This may be inconceivable to the people of the world, but I felt sort of, well, uncomfortable in my homosexual Mecca.

Allow me to explain.

I didn't feel uncomfortable in a necessarily bad way, but I found myself doing a double take when I saw two males kissing.

Or, I had to stare when a bunch of girls would walk by, and I didn't have to question whether they had boyfriends, but girlfriends.

It was just sort of shocking, and I was surprised at myself for responding in such a manner. After all, I thought I was comfortable with who I am.

Isn't this what everyone (not just queers) aches for?

We all want to be in a society where people won't look at us with an icy, condemning stare because of who we're holding hands with or who we believe in.

Maybe I'm a lost cause. Maybe I've lived in Nebraska too long and have become immune to the whispers and stares behind my back and have even grown to love them.

The whispers and stares make me stronger than the people who feel the need to poke fun at the different.

For someone like me, who is considering a move to the Bay area, I will have to ask myself if I want to be in a place where there is no animosity betwixt strangers and acquaintances alike.

A place as peaceful as pumpkin pie topped with an eerily low crime rate.

A place where all the shops are geared toward the astute clothing styles of gay men and where rainbow paraphernalia is bursting out of store fronts.

A place where I will see gay couples strolling daily with thoughts only of what to do when the next earthquake hits.

What will my reactions be? Why am I so shocked at something new?

My answer is that, although queerness is indeed part of the culture of San Francisco, it's only one culture on a palette of so many others.

The gay district runs rampant with fruity overtones — for about 10 blocks.

The rest of the city (aka the majority) has a plethora of astounding museums, gardens and unique Victorian-style houses.

There are several areas in 'Frisco that define a certain attitude and way of life.

There is Chinatown (to your left) with its aroma of dead fish and bustling market-goers and North Beach (to your right) with the tourists, live music and Italians.

The Presidio is located in another section of town where no one lives (because the government-owned land won't be rented for reasons that remain unclear).

I've never in my 22 years seen hills as steep as I saw (that only gays in VW bugs could overcome), and I've never seen such peaceful folks throughout the city.

San Francisco isn't unlike many other cities in that there is a representation of different communities, but it is damn unique in the way that these communities are at one with one another.

I'm not exactly used to this calm interaction between such opposition, because where I live there isn't much opposition.

I suppose I could learn to fit into a place where accepting everyone isn't so bad after all. I do accept heterosexuality with two thumbs up.

I should accept it because not everyone in San Francisco is gay.

Don't get confused by that because everyone is happy.



Shawn Ballarín 'DN

Jeremy Patrick is a first-year law student and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Karen Brown is a senior English and film studies major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.