Am I bisexual or bicurious? [1]

Dear Alice,

I think that I'm bisexual. I've never thought of myself feeling this way, but I do. My new friend has admitted to being bisexual although she knows that I've never been. Lately I've felt somewhat attracted to her. I've even had dreams about her, but I still find guys attractive. Would you consider me bisexual or bicurious?

Answer

Dear Reader,

We are often called to label ourselves as purely sexually inclined one way or the other, either to be attracted to guys or to girls only, end of story. But in actuality, most people fall somewhere on a spectrum of attraction, fantasy, desire, and action with people of all genders. The curiosity your friend has sparked in you could be just that ? same-gender wonderings ? or it could be the impetus for discovering that you are bisexual, and may be attracted to other women in the future.

Your dreams about your friend fall well within the range of normal sexuality. Fantasies can be a powerful vehicle to discovering new facets and depths of your sexuality ? some people feel ashamed of dreams or fantasies that do not fit into their waking lives or partners, but even taboo-feeling fantasies may teach us something about who we are attracted to and why.

The pioneering sex researcher Alfred Kinsey broke from popular thinking on sexuality in the 1950s, theorizing that bisexuality was in fact far more common than previously thought. Kinsey is perhaps most famous for his sexual-orientation scale, which represents exclusive heterosexuality with a zero and exclusive homosexuality with a six ? bisexuality is regarded as an approximate three, when a person is equally attracted to or has had sexual experiences (including fantasies) with both men and women.

Most humans experience erotic desires, act on those desires, and have relationships in a social context. Kinsey's research showed that bisexuals had more sexual experiences with one gender or another depending on their social environment. In other words, factors that we might not think of as sexual per se, like political and social ties, can in fact influence those who we choose to be with and whether we identify ourselves as straight, gay, bi, queer, etc.

In the 1980s Kinsey's scale was updated for use in clinical studies by researcher Eli Coleman. Coleman's research broke new ground in understanding human sexuality, showing that while...
some people identify as either gay or straight consistently throughout their lives, a sizeable proportion of people do not. Many rate themselves as bisexual on questions of desire (or near a three on Kinsey’s scale) but maintain exclusive gay or straight relationships. In addition, some people identify as a certain sexual identity as one point in their lives, and as another later on. In other words, sexual behavior and identity are not written in stone, and may shift as we encounter new people or life circumstances.

In your search for understanding your true nature, you may want to ask yourself what it is that attracts you to your friend. Given what we know from Kinsey about social context and sexuality, what factors of your friendship do you think is driving the attraction/dreams? Would you be comfortable talking to your friend about the spark you're feeling? For more information on sorting through different sexualities, check out Bi, gay, pansexual: What do I call myself? [2] in the Go Ask Alice! Archives. You may wish to make an appointment with a therapist where you can talk to someone about your sexuality wonderings in an open way. Also check out the International Encyclopedia of Sexuality [3], put together by The Kinsey Institute [4], with loads of information on bisexuality and new sexuality research.

Whether you're a solid three on the Kinsey scale or your scale reading is a little cloudy right now as you question and seek answers, you are certainly brave for digging deeper into yourself and learning more about your sexuality.

Alice!
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