

What's with Brokeback Mountain?

“Ugh, faggots. I'm not watching that.”

I've been hearing this phrase again and again. Civil unions may be legal in NZ, but attitudes have yet to come a long way. It's ok to publicly fantasise about women having sex with each other, but the mere thought of two men kissing elicits public disgust. Both of which – the fantasy and the disgust - are socially acceptable.

If you're straight, put yourself in a gay kid's shoes: puberty time, everyone's crushing on a member of the opposite sex, but you're too scared to tell anyone that you like someone who is the same sex as you. It's not just the fear of being different, it's also the fear of its accompanying consequences when everyone finds out you're different. I've experienced how mere suspicion can ostracise a friend for life.

Sometimes, you don't even have to be gay. If you're a boy, being less sport-inclined is sufficient to elicit daily taunts to fight from other boys. This happened to a classmate who preferred to study than kick a ball during PE. A friend developed a fear of my falling in love with her the moment she suspected I was gay. (I never felt anything other than platonic friendship, but it's hard to reason with someone who's scared of you)

Being gay is not as obvious as you think. We identify gays who adhere to stereotype, but not the ones who look 'straight'. I enjoy *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, I listen to male friends talk about the ultimate lesbian fantasy (which unfortunately mostly involves Paris Hilton) - none of which fits my knowledge of what gay and bisexual people are. More than half of my close friends are attracted to members of the same sex. I know butch ex-gangsters and stunners with movie star looks; I've admired art created by gay friends and laughed at the fighting exploits of friends with rugby physiques, and whom most would never suspect of feeling attracted to other men. Gay isn't a one-size-fits-all label.

We pick and choose gay aspects which are acceptable and non-threatening - *Queer Eye*, supermodel lesbians. Why do people feel threatened by *Brokeback*? And why do people watch it? We make gay men and butch women the butt of jokes in Adam Sandler movies, without much consideration to how this hurts the dignity of a kid who grew up queer. Let's not forget that homosexual adolescents risk higher rates of depression and suicide. The US military practices a policy of "don't ask, don't tell" for homosexual soldiers - gays may serve in the army as long as they keep it secret. So it's acceptable to ask them to risk their lives, and yet deny who they are? Our sexuality is a core part of our very beings. Everyone deserves the freedom to express this without fear of ostracism, contempt and rejection - abuses that appear as mental, emotional, and physical harms.

The ending of *Brokeback Mountain* is ambiguous - did Jake Gyllenhaal's character die of a gay hate crime? He didn't die because he was gay. The real tragedy lay with hate: it took away two people's capacity to love without fear.

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