

Bisexuality

Bisexuality is when a person finds both men and women physically, sexually or emotionally attractive. Bisexuality is a general term only, because there are many differences between individuals. For example, people who are attracted to both men and women may not necessarily label themselves as bisexual – they may consider themselves to be primarily straight or gay, or they may choose not to adopt any label to describe their sexuality.

In other cases, a person may have sexual feelings towards both men and women, but only have sex with people from one gender, or they may abstain from sex altogether. The attraction isn't always evenly weighted, since a bisexual person may have stronger feelings towards one gender than the other. This can vary depending on the people they meet, since sexual chemistry between individuals is complex and unpredictable.

Common myths

In the past, the psychological community ignored bisexuality because it was assumed that bisexuality didn't exist. Other approaches included considering it to be deviant behaviour or a phase that soon passes. Bisexuality's low profile in society means that many misconceptions have been allowed to flourish.

Common myths include:

- **Bisexuals just can't decide** – Western concepts of sexuality rely on opposites (man or woman, straight or gay), and bisexuality doesn't fit neatly. This is one of the main reasons why bisexuality is often so difficult for other people to understand.
- **Bisexuals like to look androgynous** – the way a person looks, behaves and dresses are different things, and usually not related to sexual preference.
- **Bisexuals are promiscuous** – the range of relationship styles varies as it does in straight and gay communities. Some bisexuals are in committed relationships, some are serial monogamists, in open relationships or in relationships with more than one partner, and some prefer casual relationships or celibacy, with every variation in between.
- **Bisexuals have raging libidos** – it is sometimes assumed that a ravenous appetite for sex is what leads a person to bisexual behaviour. This isn't true. The libido of bisexuals is the same as the libido of anyone else in the community, which ranges from not wanting sex at all to wanting it often, with every variation in between.
- **Bisexuals spread AIDS** – the commonly cited scenarios include the married man who has gay affairs, and the woman who has affairs with men while in a lesbian relationship. It is unsafe sex, not bisexuality, which spreads AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Coming out issues

Some social commentators believe it is more difficult for a bisexual person to 'come out' than it is for a gay man or lesbian, because the bisexual isn't making the relatively clear-cut choice of rejecting heterosexuality.

A bisexual person has to combine their heterosexual and homosexual orientations into their sexual identity. Considering the lack of social awareness and support, this can be a bewildering and time-consuming process.

The person may have to argue against the stereotypical attitudes of family and friends, and may need to 'come out' over and over again. For example, since there are no obvious signs of bisexuality to display, it can be hard to convince sceptical family members and friends that one is truly bisexual. A person in a long-term relationship will be assumed to be gay or straight, depending on the sex of their current partner.

Discrimination and prejudice

Bisexual people can experience discrimination from both straight and gay communities. For example, some heterosexual people may assume a bisexual person is straight but just 'experimenting' with gay sex, while some homosexual people may assume the person is gay but still having heterosexual relationships because they are afraid of 'coming out' or accepting their gay sexual orientation.

A person who is bisexual can feel social pressure to choose which gender they prefer. Studies suggest that close to one third of sexually active people have engaged in bisexual behaviour at some time. However, social commentators believe the actual figure may be much higher. Some people may be hesitant to admit to gay or bisexual feelings or experiences because of fear of prejudice from family, friends and the wider community.

Finding support

If you think you may be bisexual, are feeling confused or are experiencing discrimination, it might be helpful to talk it over with people who are sympathetic. Be wary of people, professional counsellors included, who try to persuade you to choose between heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Where to get help

- Gay and Lesbian Switchboard: Victoria counsellors are available daily from 6pm until 10pm, and Wednesdays from 2pm until 10pm Tel. (03) 9663 2939 or 1800 184 527
- Kids Help Line Tel. 1800 551 800
- Lifeline Tel. 13 11 14
- Bi-Victoria website

Things to remember

- Bisexuals can experience discrimination from both straight and gay communities.
- Some people believe it may be more difficult for a bisexual person to 'come out' than it is for a gay man or lesbian, because the bisexual person isn't making the relatively clear-cut choice of rejecting heterosexuality.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Reach Out

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