

Ways To Be An Ally to Nonmonosexual / Bi People

The ideas in this pamphlet were generated during a discussion at a UC Davis Bi Visibility Project group meeting and were compiled Winter quarter, 2009.

Nonmonosexual / bisexual individuals self-identify in a variety of different ways – please keep in mind that though this pamphlet gives suggestions about how to be a good ally, one of the most important aspects of being an ally is respecting individual's decisions about self-identification. There are hundreds of ways to be a good ally – Please use these suggestions as a starting point, and seek additional resources!

Monosexism: a belief that monosexuality (either exclusive heterosexuality and/or being lesbian or gay) is superior to a bisexual or pansexual orientation.
<<http://www.wikipedia.com>>

In this pamphlet the terms “bisexual” and “nonmonosexual” will be used interchangeably to describe individuals who identify with nonmonosexual orientations (attracted to more than one gender), encompassing pan-, omni-, ambi-, bi-, and nonmonosexual identities. Respect personal choices about self-identification and use specific terms on an individual basis.

Try...

Acknowledging that a person who is bisexual is always bisexual regardless of their current or past partner(s) or sexual experience(s).

Using the terms, “monosexual” and “monosexism.”

Educating yourself through articles, books, websites or other resources if you have questions.

Questioning the negativity associated with bisexual stereotypes.

Example: The stereotype that “all bi people are oversexed.” This reinforces societal assumptions about the nature of “good” or “appropriate” sexual practice or identity. Acknowledge the different ways women, people of color, disabled people, queer people and all intersections thereof, are eroticized or criticized for being sexual.

Checking in with someone about what term(s) they prefer – different people prefer different terms for different reasons, respect each term.

Being inclusive of bi people of color (BiPOC). This means not assuming that all bi people are white and acknowledging that racism exists within the bi community. BiPOC are often further invisibilized by the assumption that they do not exist.

Recognizing that coming out can be different for people who are nonmonosexual than it is for lesbian/gay people. Because nonmonosexuality is invisibilized/ delegitimized, nonmonosexual people usually have to come out over and over. Often, after we come out, we also have to convince someone that we are nonmonosexual, and not “confused.”

Try...

Recognizing that sometimes it's appropriate to group people who are nonmonosexual with people who are lesbian and gay, and sometimes it's not.

Example: Healthcare & economic studies on LGB people that separated bisexual from lesbian/gay have found that there are significant disparities.

Remembering that no one person represents a community; no two people are the same.

Recognizing that privilege is complicated. Bisexuals don't have straight privilege because we are not straight. Some will never have a "heterosexual looking" relationship. However, many have "passing" privilege in different forms. This might be gender conforming privilege, which people of any sexuality can have. This might also mean being assumed to be straight when with a partner of a different gender. (Note: This often does not feel like privilege but rather an erasure of bi identity). Acknowledgement of one's own privilege (whichever forms it takes) is always important.

Taking a minute before asking questions and looking into the assumptions behind them

Don't assume...

... You can only be a bi ally if you know people who are bi - Going to events, talking in gender-neutral terms, or being inclusive of bi sexualities speaks volumes to people of any sexual orientation.

... All people who are nonmonosexual are sexual or have had "all" kinds of sex. Not all have had experiences with different genders; no one person will necessarily have had experiences of any specific kind.

... All people who are nonmonosexual are gender conforming. Gender and sexuality are separate and do not depend on each other.

...Someone's sexual orientation is based on the gender of their partner(s).

... All people who are bi are heteronormative or homonormative.

... How a person who is nonmonosexual defines "virginity."

... All people who are nonmonosexual do/do not prefer one gender over others. Neither of these is more or less nonmonosexual.

... That people who are bisexual are attracted to everyone. Everyone has different criteria by which they judge whether or not someone is compatible.

... What kinds of sex people are having or how they relate to different kinds of sex. These assumptions might be based on perceptions of gender roles, or assumptions of what someone's genitalia looks like and how it functions.

Try...

Recognizing the way that specific relationships function is entirely independent of sexual orientation. Be positive about all relationships –monogamous, polyamorous, or anything else.

Remembering that when a person who is bi says something biphobic it takes on a different meaning than when said by someone who does not identify as bi. Witnessing biphobia in any form does not give permission to be further biphobic. Biphobia is harmful to bi people in any form.

Remembering that no one individual is more or less nonmonosexual; no one is “truly” or “untruly” nonmonosexual; someone is nonmonosexual if they say they are.

Remembering that just because a person who is nonmonosexual reinforces a nonmonosexual stereotype does not mean the stereotype is true.

Accepting you might never fully understand someone else’s sexuality, and that it’s okay not to.

Be Careful Not To...

... Attempt to quantify “how bisexual” someone “*really*” is. This is related to the stereotype that people who are bi are lying or confused and sometimes satisfies a craving to categorize bi people as either “more gay” or “more straight”. People often try to do this by asking someone about their romantic or sexual behaviors. People deserve to have their privacy while having their identities respected.

... Use “Gay” as an umbrella term. Doing so invisibilizes nonmonosexuality.

Example: Saying things like, “gay rights”, “gay marriage”, or “gay sex”, implies that bi people are only included when “acting gay”, i.e. when they are engaged in same-sex relationships/sexual activity. Instead, use the terms “same-gender relationship”/“other-gender relationship” instead of “gay relationship”/“straight relationship”. Relationships don’t have sexual orientations.

... Seem infatuated, fascinated or exoticizing of nonmonosexuality.

... Invisibilize bisexuality.

Example: “All people are bisexual.” This dismisses people’s identities as if they are a negligible part of “human nature”.

... Ask invasive questions, or interrogate people about their sexuality. This may make the person feel like a scientific study and contribute to a sense of invalidation or isolation.

... Suggest that people who identify as bisexual inherently uphold a gender binary of woman/man. Different people think differently about their identities. Many people identify as bisexual as an act of reclaiming the word from its negative contexts. Many describe being bisexual to mean “attraction regardless of gender”, or “attraction to any gender”. Identifying with the word bisexual can also serve to connect with history and literature.

UC Davis On-Campus and Community Resources for Nonmonosexuals & Allies:

LGBT Resource Center, University House Annex

530.752.2452, <http://lgbtrc.ucdavis.edu>

Provides a range of education, information and advocacy services and works to create and maintain an open, safe and inclusive environment on campus for LGBTI people. Safe Zone Programs and training are also offered.

Delta Lambda Phi (Fraternity)

xi.chapter@dlp.org, <http://www.dlp.org/xi>

This national gay fraternity is a great way to meet friends, engage in social activities, and join a support network of gay and bisexual men.

Lambda Delta Lambda (Sorority)

info@ldlucdavis.org

This alternative sorority is for women who want to socialize with other women and who are concerned with lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues.

APIQ (Asian Pacific Islander Queers)

apiqcore@ucdavis.edu

APIQ strives to educate about various issues faced in the Asian Pacific Islander / Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender community, as well as provide support & resources.

La Familia

familiajunta@ucdavis.edu

La Familia is a community based peer support group dedicated to addressing issues at the intersection of sexuality, gender, and ethnicity while creating a safe space for its members to explore and embrace both their queer and ethnic identities.

Women's Resources & Research Center, First Floor, North Hall

530.752.3372

LGBT friendly, the WRRRC offers referrals, a library, posting space, and educational programs.

Counseling And Psychological Services, Second Floor, North Hall

530.752.0871, <http://caps.ucdavis.edu>

Offers general counseling and therapy groups for students dealing with personal and coming out issues.

The House, TB 16

530.752.2790

The House offers confidential peer drop-in/telephone counseling, support groups, and workshops provided by trained student volunteers, committed to supporting LGBTI and other communities.

Rainbow House

http://housing.ucdavis.edu/education/theme_programs.htm

Rainbow House is a community located on a single floor, geared towards students and allies of the LGBTI community who are interested in personal growth within a safe and supportive environment.

BiFriendly

<http://www.frap.org/bifriendly/>

This website provides connections to different BiFriendly meeting sites in the Bay Area.

BiNet USA

<http://www.binetusa.org/>

This organization encourages networking and exchange between nonmonosexual groups and individuals and their allies and provides them support and resources.

UCD Bi Visibility Project

biviscore@ucdavis.edu

Our purpose is to raise awareness around the nuances and politics of bisexual, nonmonosexual, trisexual, pansexual, omnisexual, or otherwise unlabeled, fluid or flexible sexualities and how they intersect with our many other identities. In doing so, we hope to diminish stereotypes and make the B in LGBT more visible.

Bisexuality Basics

UC Riverside LGBT Resource Center
245 Costo Hall • www.out.ucr.edu
(951) 827-2267 • out@ucr.edu

What Is Bisexuality?

Bisexuality is the potential to feel attracted (sexually, romantically, emotionally) to and to engage in sensual or sexual relationships with people of either sex. A bisexual person may not be equally attracted to both sexes, and the degree of attraction may vary over time.

Self-perception is the key to a bisexual identity. Many people engage in sexual activity with people of both sexes, yet do not identify as bisexual. Likewise, other people engage in sexual relations only with people of one sex, or do not engage in sexual activity at all, yet consider themselves bisexual. There is no behavioral “test” to determine whether or not one is bisexual.

Bisexual Identity

Some people believe that a person is born heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual (for instance due to prenatal hormonal influences), and that their identity is inherent and unchangeable. Others believe that sexual orientation is due to socialization (for example either imitating or rejecting parental models) or conscious choice (for example, choosing lesbianism as part of a political feminist identity). Others believe that these factors interact. Because biological, social, and cultural factors are different for each person, everyone’s sexuality is highly individual, whether they are bisexual, gay or lesbian, heterosexual, or asexual. The “value” placed on a sexual identity should not depend on its origin. Many people assume that bisexuality is just a phase people go through. In fact, any sexual orientation can be a phase.

Humans are diverse, and individual sexual feelings and behavior change over time. The creation and consolidation of a sexual identity is an ongoing process. Since we are generally socialized as heterosexuals, bisexuality is a stage that many people experience as part of the process of acknowledging their homosexuality. Many others come to identify as bisexuals after a considerable period of identification as gay men or lesbians.

A recent study by Ron Fox of more than 900 bisexual individuals found that 1/3 had previously identified as lesbian or gay. An orientation that may not be permanent is still valid for the period of time it is experienced. Bisexuality, like homosexuality and heterosexuality, may be either a transitional step in the process of sexual discovery, or a stable, long-term identity.

How Common Is Bisexuality?

It is not easy to say how common bisexuality is, since little research has been done on this subject; most studies on sexuality have focused on heterosexuals or homosexuals. Based on research done by Kinsey in the 1940s and 1950s, as many as 15-25% of women and 33-46% of men may be bisexual, based on their activities or attractions. Bisexuals are in many ways a hidden population. In our culture, it is generally assumed that a person is either heterosexual (the default assumption) or homosexual (based on appearance or behavioral clues.) Because bisexuality does not fit into these standard categories, it is often denied or ignored.

When it is recognized, bisexuality is often viewed as being “part heterosexual and part homosexual,” rather than being a unique identity. Bisexuality threatens the accepted way of looking at the world by calling into question the validity of rigid sexual categories, and encourages acknowledgment of the existence of a diverse range of sexuality. Since there is not a stereotypical bisexual appearance or way of acting, bisexuals are usually assumed to be either heterosexual or homosexual. In order to increase awareness, bisexuals have begun to create their own visible communities.

Bisexual Relationships

Bisexuals, like all people, have a wide variety of relationship styles. Contrary to common myth, a bisexual person does not need to be sexually involved with both a man and a woman simultaneously. In fact, some people who identify as bisexual never engage in sexual activity with one or the other (or either) gender. As is the case for heterosexuals and gay men and lesbians, attraction does not involve acting on every desire. Like heterosexuals and gay people, many bisexuals choose to be sexually active with one partner only, and have long-term, monogamous relationships. Other bisexuals may have open marriages that allow for relationships with same-sex partners, three-way relationships, or a number of partners of the same or other gender (singly or simultaneously). It is important to have the freedom to choose the type of sexual and affectional relationships that are right for the people involved, whatever their orientation.

Continued on reverse...

Biphobia

Bisexual women and men cannot be defined by their partner or potential partner, so are rendered invisible within the either/or heterosexist framework. This invisibility (biphobia) is one of the most challenging aspects of a bisexual identity. Living in a society that is based and thrives on opposition, on the reassurances and “balanced” polarities of dichotomy, affects how we see the world, and how we negotiate our own and other peoples lives to fit “reality.”

Most people are unaware of their homosexual or heterosexual assumptions until a bisexual speaks up/comes out and challenges the assumption. Very often bisexuals are then dismissed, and told they are “confused” and “simply have to make up their mind and choose.” For bisexually identified people to maintain their integrity in a homo-hating heterosexist society, they must have a strong sense of self, and the courage and conviction to live their lives in defiance of what passes for “normal.”

What Does Biphobia Look Like?

- Assuming that everyone you meet is either heterosexual or homosexual.
- Supporting and understanding a bisexual identity for young people because you identified “that way” before you came to your “real” lesbian/gay/heterosexual identity.
- Expecting a bisexual to identify as heterosexual when coupled with the “opposite” gender/sex.
- Believing bisexual men spread AIDS/HIV and other STDs to heterosexuals.
- Thinking bisexual people haven’t made up their minds.
- Assuming a bisexual person would want to fulfill your sexual fantasies or curiosities.
- Assuming bisexuals would be willing to “pass” as anything other than bisexual.
- Feeling that bisexual people are too outspoken and pushy about their visibility and rights.
- Automatically assuming romantic couplings of two women are lesbian, or two men are gay, or a man and a woman are heterosexual.
- Expecting bisexual people to get services, information and education from heterosexual service agencies for their “heterosexual side” and then go to gay and/or lesbian service agencies for their “homosexual side” (sic).
- Feeling bisexuals just want to have their cake and eat it too.
- Believing that bisexual women spread AIDS/HIV and other STDs to lesbians.
- Using the terms “phase” or “stage” or “confused” or “fence-sitter” or “bisexual” or “AC/DC” or “switchhitter” as slurs or in an accusatory way.
- Thinking bisexuals only have committed relationships with “opposite” sex/gender partners.
- Looking at a bisexual person and automatically thinking of their sexuality rather than seeing them as a whole, complete person.
- Believing bisexuals are confused about their sexuality.
- Assuming that bisexuals, if given the choice, would prefer to be within an “opposite” gender/sex coupling to reap the social benefits of a “heterosexual” pairing.
- Not confronting a biphobic remark or joke for fear of being identified as bisexual.
- Assuming bisexual means “available.”
- Thinking that bisexual people will have their rights when lesbian and gay people win theirs.
- Being gay or lesbian and asking your bisexual friend about their lover only when that lover is the same sex/gender.
- Feeling that you can’t trust a bisexual because they aren’t really gay or lesbian, or aren’t really heterosexual.
- Thinking that people identify as bisexual because it’s “trendy.”
- Expecting a bisexual to identify as gay or lesbian when coupled with the “same” sex/gender.
- Expecting bisexual activists and organizers to minimize bisexual issues (i.e. HIV/AIDS, violence, basic civil rights, fighting the Right, military, same sex marriage, child custody, adoption, etc.) and to prioritize the visibility of “lesbian and/or gay” issues.
- Avoid mentioning to friends that you are involved with a bisexual or working with a bisexual group because you are afraid they will think you are a bisexual.

Publications

- [Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out](#) by Loraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu, Eds.
- [Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries, & Visions](#) by Naomi Tucker, Ed.
- [Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World](#) by Robyn Ochs and Sarah Rowley, Eds.

Web Resources - <http://www.biresource.org>

bisexual

**COMMUNITY
NEEDS ASSESSMENT
MINNESOTA 2012**



Bisexual Organizing Project

OutFront Minnesota
PFund Foundation

Metropolitan State University Gender & Sexuality Student Support Services Office

Bisexual Community Needs Assessment 2012

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Bisexual Organizing Project (BOP) builds the Bi/Pan/Fluid/Queer/ Unlabeled and Allied communities of the Upper Midwest. We also host the well-known national conference on bisexuality, [BECAUSE](#). BOP is welcoming and inclusive of everyone, including but not limited to people of all genders, gender identities, sexual orientations, sexes, relationship orientations, races, ethnicities, national origins, abilities, religions, sizes, political affiliations, and others.

BOP is a 501(c)3 non-profit registered in Minnesota.

<http://www.bisexualorganizingproject.org>

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Partner organizations:



OutFront Minnesota's mission is to make our state a place where LGBT Minnesotans have the freedom, power, and confidence to make the best choices for their own lives. www.outfront.org



PFund Foundation is a vital resource and community builder for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and allied communities by providing grants and scholarships, developing leaders, and inspiring giving. www.pfundonline.org



Metropolitan State University Gender and Sexuality Student Services Office provides safe spaces for all members of the Metropolitan State University community to explore, organize, and promote learning around issues of gender and sexuality. www.metrostate.edu/msweb/pathway/DoS/glb

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1991, the Gay Lesbian Community Action Council (GLCAC, now OutFront Minnesota) completed a needs assessment of the bisexual community. What has changed in the last 21 years?

Amazingly, the conclusions of the 1991 needs assessment (Appendix C) will likely seem very familiar to readers of this needs assessment. The summary of findings on page 21 of the 1991 assessment could have been written today. Disappointment and, at times, even anger over bi phobia (especially from the lesbian and gay communities), feelings of isolation, feeling disconnected from one's community, challenges navigating a world ignorant about bisexuality—all continue to create barriers to living a proud, self-actualized life.

This is not to say nothing has changed. Within greater society, it would appear to the casual observer that acceptance has grown. Within traditionally gay and/or lesbian organizations, gains have been made both locally and nationally with inclusion of bisexuals in their names, many now using a variation of a more inclusive “lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT).” On the other hand, has the bisexual community grown as a cohesive group offering resources and services? Are bisexuals increasingly involved in now-LGBT organizations in more than name? Have bisexuals truly become more accepted in the larger community, or are we enjoying the benefits of a generalized acceptance of diversity?

While this needs assessment may emphasize how needs have changed for bisexuals and the bisexual community, it must be recognized that there are far more commonalities than differences with the 1991 report. The needs assessment identifies two main themes, familiar to those who participated in the 1991 needs assessment:

- **The need for greater meaningful inclusion in “LGBT” organizations.** While there is a strong desire for increased inclusion and acceptance in the greater LGBT community, there appears to be a real gap between that desire and reality. In fact, respondents reported that they felt the straight community—despite the great historical challenges of the past—to be *more* welcoming than the gay and lesbian

communities. In fact, this may be one substantial difference from the 1991 assessment: that assessment found a “strong connection to the lesbian and gay movements,” whereas it would be hard to characterize the 2012 findings this way.

- **The need to build a more robust bisexual community.** This may be another point in which the current needs assessment differs—at least to degree—with the 1991 assessment. While the 1991 needs assessment offered one bullet-point calling for support from a bisexual community, that feels much softer (at least from this 20-year distance) than the current clarion call for a robust, complete bisexual community. While this is subtle enough that one must acknowledge the possibility of investigator bias, it reflects the results as reported.

Given these two themes, specific needs identified include:

LGBT community

- More training for LGBT organizations and other organizations serving the bisexual community
- More targeted outreach to bisexuals by LGBT organizations and other organizations serving the bisexual community
- More targeted, bi-specific programming for bisexuals by LGBT organizations and other organizations serving the bisexual community

Bi community

- Continued growth of existing bi organizations
- Creation of more bi specific organizations, especially those with a social component
- Clarity as to the goals of any bi movement
- More research on bi specific health and wellness issues
- More philanthropy within the bisexual community directed toward the bisexual community
- More bi specific programming
- Build consensus toward understanding bisexual identity vis-a-vis other, newer burgeoning identities

The last finding, not discussed in 1991, is worth expanding upon. This needs assessment identified an uneasy relationship between the bisexual community and an outspoken number of people who reject the bisexual identity in favor of “fluid,” pansexual,” “omni-sexual,” and other new labels. In needs assessment groups, many people self-identifying as one of these new labels expressed how they see “bisexual” as not recognizing the spectrum of gender identity at best or trans-phobic at worst. On the other side, many bisexual-identified individuals in the groups pushed back against what they see as a threat to any opportunity for community solidarity in favor of an overly-literal interpretation of a simple Latin prefix, and expressed resentment to once again being defined by outsiders. This issue will likely continue to challenge, and perhaps even redefine, bi activism into the future.

Finally, on a more editorial note, despite the similarity between 1991 needs assessment and this 2012 needs assessment, it is important to not be discouraged by what one might think of as a lack of meaningful progress for the bisexual community. While



time has yet to address the needs of the bisexual community, this only means that this report should be viewed as a call to action. In ten or twenty years hence, we should not only want to, but expect to, indeed, demand to, see real, measurable progress on these simple, basic, actionable community needs.

BACKGROUND

Bisexuals have much in common with lesbians, gays, and transgender people. Homophobia, active discrimination in laws and policies, violence, health, and economic disparities affect all parts of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. However, few would argue that the needs of the bisexual community are the same as those of the lesbian or gay communities. While there are areas of common interest, one could argue that bisexuals—along with omnisexuals, pansexuals, and fluid identified persons—inhabit a landscape all their own, one with unique challenges.

1991 to 2012

In 1991, Bi activism was entering something of a golden age. *Bi Any Other Name* by Lani Ka'ahumanu and Loraine Hutchins was published, BiPOL (later renamed BiNet USA) and the first national bi conference were one-year-old, the first international conference was held, and the national magazine, *Anything that Moves* was on the newsstands.

In 1991, Minnesota benefited from a strong bi organization, the Bi Connection, and the community was one year from the first Bisexual Empowerment Conference: A Uniting Supportive Experience (BECAUSE). It also benefited from out bisexuals involved in, and strong allies working at, the Gay and Lesbian Community Action Council (GLCAC, now known as OutFront Minnesota).

It was in this climate of increasing bi activism that GLCAC completed a bisexual community needs assessment. The 1991 assessment, plus one completed in 2001, offered clarity as to the barriers bisexuals face as well as a vision for bi inclusion in Minnesota.

In 2012, given the age of these needs assessments, the question must be asked: what has changed?

In the past twenty-one years, the entire lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community has enjoyed dramatic change at a meteoric place. In 1991 there was little discussion of marriage equality. It was six years before Ellen came out, seven years before *Will and Grace*, and 12 years before *Queer Eye for the Straight*

Guy. It is hard to deny that there is greater acceptance now for gay and lesbian people in mainstream culture demonstrated by, among other factors, the number of “out” elected officials, legalization of same-sex marriage in nine states, and the now-official acceptance of non-heterosexuals into the armed forces.

Straight society often thinks “girl on girl action is hot.” But “[bi] guys are people who cheat on their wives.”
—*Bi Salon participant*

Many of these social changes are inclusive of, and liberating for, bisexual people. Indeed, in 2012, Arizona elected Kyrsten Sinema, an openly bisexual woman, to congress, and four other elected officials in the 2012 election are claimed by the bi community. However, one must ask: how often is this greater inclusiveness of bisexuals and bisexuality intentional and deliberate (voter: “Yes—Sinema’s bisexual and that’s okay by me”), and how often is it merely benefiting from the success of gay and lesbian rights in America (“I’ll vote for Sinema because I believe in gay rights”)?

While bisexuals have always been and continue to be involved in LGBT activism on all levels, public perception of bisexuals may or may not be keeping pace. For example, while one might imagine that of the Minnesotans who voted in 2012 to reject a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage, many if not most may have focused on the concept of “gay marriage” having not considered the positive effects of their vote on the bisexual community.

This would be no surprise, since not only was “Gay Marriage” the default understanding of the issue for the masses, it appeared that “gay and lesbian” was the favored stylebook choice for Minnesotans United, the organization fighting the amendment. This is but one example of the well-documented invisibility of bisexuals in American culture, at times passively forgotten and at other times deliberately left out. As one woman participant in a needs assessment group said, “ ‘B’ gets lost in ‘LGBT.’” Added another participant, “Sally Ride was adamant that she didn’t want to label,” but still got labeled as a lesbian. Whether this was a symptom of cultural invisibility or a strategic communications choice, the results are the same: continued invisibility.

Related to invisibility is stereotyping. If stereotyping isn't a direct consequence of invisibility, it is certainly closely linked. A climate of ignorance about bisexuality and the bisexual community has led to a great deal of misunderstanding, at best. At its worst, it has allowed for outright hostility. Stereotypes were a popular topic of conversation at needs assessment groups, reflecting the great deal of pain they cause. As much has been written about this topic, beginning with the first supportive books about bisexuality, this needs assessment does not spend a time discussing, enumerating, or debunking them. Instead it will ask: what needs to happen to solve the underlying issues that facilitate stereotyping?

DEVELOPMENT OF THIS NEEDS ASSESSMENT

In the winter of 2011, the Bisexual Organizing Project decided to commission a new bisexual community needs assessment. Planning began in the fall, and the needs assessment got underway in December of that year. A project proposal was created:

Project Proposal: We will develop and complete a “bi community needs assessment” that is inclusive, thorough, and actionable. This needs assessment will seek to understand the goals, problems, and opportunities for furthering social justice for bisexuals and all those who identify as neither straight nor lesbian/gay (referred to here as “bisexuals”).

Partners for this project were identified. OutFront Minnesota became a major partner in this effort, helping facilitate focus groups among other tasks. Metropolitan State University's Gender & Sexuality Student Support Services Office offered strong support for the Organizational Luncheon in meeting space, planning support, and finances. PFund Foundation organized and held a “Listening Circle,” data from which has been included in this needs assessment, and their generous grant to the Bisexual Organizing Project for 2013 allowed for printing and distribution of this report. Finally, several organizations that serve the bisexual community formed an Organizational Task Force (discussed below) to do an organizational assessment.

Objectives

In consultation with the leadership of the Bisexual Organizing Project and the Organizational Task Force, four objectives were identified:

- Assess the current situation for bisexuals vis-a-vis social justice
- Define the issues specific to bisexuals that need to be addressed
- Understand how organizations supportive of social justice for bisexuals can be successful
- Communicate community needs to a wider audience
- Scope
- The population of interest to this needs assessment is:
- Self-identified bisexuals
- Self-identified pansexual, omnisexual, and fluid individuals

Not addressed by this needs assessment are individuals not self-identifying with one of these groups. Sexual behavior is often quite fluid and at times not well represented by one's self-identity, for example a woman who has a relationship with another woman yet identifies as straight or a man who has a relationship with a woman yet identifies as gay. These individuals were not the target of this needs assessment.

Similarly, the scope of the organizational component of the needs assessment is specific to how organizations can serve the bisexual community more effectively, and discusses the recruitment of bisexual, pansexual, omnisexual, or fluid self-identified individuals. This needs assessment does not address recruitment of people who identify as straight or gay, regardless of behavior. This choice is a result of capacity and the desire to focus on the objectives of the assessment.

Organizational assessment

Organizational Task Force/focus group

Seven LGBT organizations participated in various events and a survey. The goal of working with LGBT organizations in the context of a bisexual community needs assessment was to understand better these organizations desire for inclusion and the barriers they face in achieving it. An "Organizational Task Force"

was created consisting of seven organizations serving the greater LGBT community. Organizations that participated were:

- Metropolitan State University’s Gender & Sexuality Student Support Services
- OutFront Minnesota
- PFund Foundation
- Pride Alive of the Minnesota AIDS Project
- Pride Institute
- The Men’s Center
- Twin Cities Pride

The Organizational Task Force worked via email and met in person at once. These meetings served as focus groups to gather qualitative data. Group discussion usually consisted of a number of questions planned in advance, as well as a number of questions asked in response to specific comments. Notes were taken of participant comments. The facilitator attempted to write down comments as completely as possible and without bias or use of selection criteria. However, when trends presented themselves, follow up questions were asked for further depth.

LGBT Leadership Luncheon

The “LGBT Leadership Luncheon: Embracing Community Across the Continuum,” sponsored by Metropolitan State University, OutFront Minnesota, and the Bisexual Organizing Project, was held and attended by 19 people.

The objectives were to:

- Gather anecdotal data regarding inclusion of bisexuals in LGBT organizations
- Identify strategies to increase bi/pan/fluid participation in LGBT organizations and programs.
- Foster an open and affirming environment for bi/pan/fluid individuals within LGBT organizations.
- The luncheon was a facilitated discussion. This discussion consisted of a number of questions planned in advance, as well as a

*“People are hungry to have the conversation”
—Task Force participant*

number of questions asked in response to specific comments. Notes were taken in the manner described previously.

Survey

An organizational survey consisting of open-ended questions was also distributed [Appendix B] via SurveyMonkey.com. Nine surveys were completed. The survey was described thusly:

Thank you for taking this survey as part of the Bisexual Community Needs Assessment. The needs assessment seeks to gauge the assets and deficits for bisexuals in their search for social justice. We hope to create a report that is thorough and actionable, offering insight and guidance for truly inclusive LGBT work for the state of Minnesota.

One important area of interest is gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender, LGBT organizations and other organizations offering services to those with sexual orientations different from the majority. Developing a picture of current community capacities is critical to understanding the needs of the bisexual community.

Given the small data set, the anecdotal nature of the data, and the open-ended design of the survey questions, for the sake of this needs assessment data from the survey has been folded into the focus group and luncheon notes.

Bisexual community assessment

Focus groups

Four focus groups—the “Bi Salon”—were held monthly starting in May 2012. The Salon was sponsored by the Bisexual Organizing Project (BOP) and OutFront Minnesota, and co-facilitated by an OutFront Minnesota staff person. The events were advertised with BOP yahoo group posts, on Facebook, and at Meetup.com, as well as through handouts at BECAUSE and at the hosting coffeehouse. Participants were not paid. Groups averaged slightly less than 23 people per meeting.

*“I came out
when I was
thirteen....I
thought I was
going to die.”
—Bi Salon
participant*

The group consisted of announcements, a “check in,” and a facilitated discussion. This discussion usually consisting of a number of questions planned in advance, as well as a number of questions asked in response to specific comments. Notes were taken, with the facilitator attempting to write down comments as completely as possible and without bias or use of selection criteria. However, when trends presented themselves, follow up questions were asked for further depth.

BECAUSE workshop

On Saturday, April 21, 2012, a workshop was held at the BECAUSE conference at Metropolitan State University, St. Paul. The title and description of the workshop was:

Moving Toward Social Justice for Bisexuals: What Do You Need?

A Bisexual Community Needs assessment is now underway, and we need you! Needs assessments were completed in 1991 and 2001, and they were extremely influential in arguing for organizing, services, and inclusion. But that’s history. What do we need as a community in 2012? That’s where you come in. Come prepared to discuss your experiences, what you need from your community, your allies, and the greater world. “I” statements will be valued, candor appreciated, and participation encouraged.

The workshop was attended by 29 people. Notes were taken using the method described above regarding the Bi Salon focus groups.

Listening Session

On June 8, 2011, PFund facilitated a Bisexual, Pansexual, Fluid Listening Session which was held at Augsburg College. PFund, the LGBT community foundation for the Upper Midwest, hosted this event to better understand the needs of these communities. Notes were gathered by PFund staff as to bisexual community resources that exist, needs, opportunities, and “closing forward.” There were 29 people in attendance, with a wide span of ages, racial and ethnic identities, gender identities, and organizations represented.

A survey targeting people who identify as bisexual was created and disseminated [see appendix B].

- Surveys were gathered at the 2012 Pride Festival at the BOP booth, where surveys were either handed out by a volunteer or randomly picked up by the surveyed. A total of 23 surveys were completed.
- 29 surveys were completed at the 2012 BECAUSE conference. Surveys were distributed and collected at the needs assessment workshop.
- Surveys were completed prior to each Bi Salon focus group. Participants were encouraged to not fill out surveys if they had previously completed one elsewhere. 23 surveys were collected.
- The survey was offered online and promoted through various BOP online resources. A total of 26 surveys were completed.

In all above venues, survey responders were strongly encouraged to not fill out the survey if they had filled it out previously at that or another venue.

Limitations

This needs assessment uses convenience samples for surveys and focus groups. Therefore, results should not be generalized to all bisexuals. The lack of proportional representation from people of color may be a good example of this problem. Perhaps the most useful way to imagine the population who participated in this needs assessment is as being disproportionately out and socially and politically active in the identifiable bisexual community. However, rather than discrediting the needs assessment, it is hoped that the information gathered reflects what may be this group's greater knowledge and experience in issues of concern to bisexuals. Perhaps survey and group feedback may be better understood as bordering on key informant interviews.

Similarly, regarding the organizational piece of this needs assessment, 15 non-randomly selected organizations received invitations to participate. Seven organizations participated. These organizations, while providing valuable anecdotal data, should not be seen as representative of all LGBT organizations, as participating organizations may be more likely to support efforts such as a bisexual community needs assessment and having the organizational capacity to support involvement in this effort.

Research

Literature

In the 1991 needs assessment, one identified need was for more representation “in gay and lesbian press and literature.” Indeed, the late Dr. Fritz Klein, author the seminal book *Bisexual Option*, said in 2005, “When I started research in the 1970’s, there was almost nothing written about bisexuality. I remember going into the main New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue, and finding only two cards in the catalog pertaining to the subject.”¹

Since the 1991 needs assessment and certainly since the ’70s, there has been a great deal published on the topic. A quick check at Amazon.com, when using the search term “bisexuality,” found 59 pages of results and well over 50 books published since 2000. Indeed, in 2012 there is the Journal of Bisexuality from Taylor & Francis Group, the official journal of the American Institute of Bisexuality. A total of 48 issues have been published since its beginnings in 2001, with Dr. Klein as its first editor.

This needs assessment does not attempt a rigorous review of the literature but instead will discuss two recent and relevant works.

In 2011 the San Francisco Human Rights Commission LGBT Advisory Committee published the report *Bisexual Invisibility: Impacts and Recommendation*,² in which the causes and effects of invisibility are explored, especially in regard to bisexual health. The report says that,

Bisexuals experience high rates of being ignored, discriminated against, demonized, or rendered invisible by both the heterosexual world and the lesbian and gay communities. Often, the entire sexual orientation is branded as invalid, immoral, or irrelevant. Despite years of activism and the largest population within the LGBT community, the needs of bisexuals still go unaddressed and their very existence is still called into question. This erasure has serious consequences on bisexuals’ health, economic well-being, and funding for bi organizations and programs. (pg 1)

¹ Bi America, *Myths, Truths, and Struggles of an invisible Community*, 2005 Hayworth Press, William E Bursleson

² Available at <http://www.sf-hrc.org/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=989>

The report goes on to discuss the challenges the bisexual community faces being “erased” from history by being mislabeled as some other orientation, having their contributions ignored by gay and lesbian activists, and often being ignored or even excluded from theoretically “LGBT” organizations.

While many people and organizations have certainly become more welcoming and inclusive of bisexuals over the years, others remain inconsistent, oblivious, or occasionally hostile. (pg 34)

The report goes on to make six recommendations (pg 34):

1. Educate the public, city departments, and elected officials about inclusive language (for example, “anti-LGBT bias” rather than “homophobia”) and ensure its use whenever possible and accurate.
2. Review the [sexually transmitted infection] brochures offered through San Francisco’s Department of Public Health and, if needed, encourage them to adopt models created by Fenway BiHealth in Boston (one that addresses those who identify as bisexual and one for those who don’t).
3. Work with the Department of Public Health to ensure that data collection addresses the experiences of bisexuals accurately and consistently.
4. Share this report and the results of the survey of local nonprofits on what bi-specific programming they have, if any; whether their programs that say they serve bisexuals are welcoming in practice; and how the content of their programming changes to address the needs of bisexuals.
5. Include specific, separate information on bisexuality in diversity trainings.
6. Ensure that bisexuals are included among the speakers when there are panels, forums, and other official discussions affecting the LGBT community.

While the report seeks only to represent the San Francisco bisexual community and has a health focus, its conclusions mirror the results of this needs assessment and those of many published works on the bisexual experience in the United States. While there

may be great variation in the resources available between bi communities across the country, there appears to be little variation in the overall problems bisexuals experience.

The second publication is *The Bisexuality Report: Bisexual Inclusion in LGBT Equality and Diversity*.³ While it may be stretching the point that there are similar issues facing the bisexual community regardless of geography, this report is worth considering here. *The Bisexuality Report* was written by Meg Barker, Christina Richards, Rebecca Jones, Helen Bowes-Catton & Tracey Plowman (of BiUK), with Jen Yockney (of Bi Community News) and Marcus Morgan (of The Bisexual Index) and published by the Center for Citizenship, Identity and Governance, The Open University, United Kingdom. Despite its great geographical distance from the focus of this needs assessment, much of this report mirrors the issues brought forth here, dealing directly with the bisexual community's relationship with the lesbian and gay communities. Of special interest here is its recommendation to separate out bisexual issues from those affecting gay men and lesbians, asserting that:

There are strong grounds for singling out bisexual people as a specific group in policy and practice for the following reasons:

- There is a wealth of evidence that bisexual people's experiences differ in important ways from those of heterosexual people and those of lesbian and gay people.
- Bi phobia is distinct from homophobia.
- Bisexual people often face discrimination and prejudice from within lesbian and gay communities. These processes of discrimination are erased by simply amalgamating bisexuality into LGBT.
- Research has found significantly higher levels of distress and mental health difficulties amongst bisexual groups than amongst equivalent heterosexual or lesbian/gay populations.

³ Barker, M., Richards, C., Jones, R., Bowes-Catton, H., Plowman, T., Yockney, J. & Morgan, M. (2012). *The bisexuality report: Bisexual inclusion in LGBT equality and diversity*. Milton Keynes: The Open University Centre for Citizenship, Identities and Governance. ISBN: 978-1-78007-414-6. Taken from <http://bisexualresearch.wordpress.com/reports-guidance/reports/thebisexualityreport/>

The authors give an in-depth look at the bisexual community and issues at hand, and goes on to make recommendations regarding bisexuals at the workplace, in sport, health, criminal justice and the media. While there is a call for a true LGBT community, *The Bisexuality Report* offers a valuable vision of what solutions would look like if we were taking the approach of a more self (or would it be group?) actualized bi community with solutions that are distinct from the greater LGBT vision. *The Bisexuality Report* and its call for a robust bisexual community was strongly reflected in the results of this needs assessment.

Past needs assessments

In 1991, Joe Duca, intern at GLCAC completed the *Needs Assessment of the Bisexual Community in the Twin Cities* (see appendix C) as part of an ongoing project “to more effectively service and support the bisexual community.” The goal of this needs assessment was to provide “an overview of what bisexuals need and want from GLCAC.” One might suggest that Duca exceeded this modest goal, instead giving Minnesota its first glimpse at the needs—as well as assets, struggles, and barriers—bisexuals face in society and within the greater LGBT community, data useful well beyond GLCAC’s planning needs.

Duca broke his findings down into four “wants and needs from gays and lesbians” and five “wants and needs from other bisexuals”:

Wants and needs from gays and lesbians

1. Acceptance of [everyone’s] right to self-identify as bisexual, gay, lesbian, heterosexual, or other, and their right to act out that identity however they choose as individuals.
2. Inclusion in words and language when talking about issues that involve bisexuals...
3. ...Gays and lesbians need to show a willingness to accept that bisexuality may redefine some popular notions about sexuality and sexual identity that exist among gays, lesbians, and heterosexuals.
4. Lesbians, gays, and bisexuals [need] to work together, as well as maintain their own spaces.

Wants and needs from other bisexuals

1. [Increased] visibility of the bi community
2. ...Building bisexual pride
3. ...Support.
4. More social activities, political action, and resource development
5. Coalition building [aimed at] growing the bisexual movement

Of special note are general to specific programmatic suggestions included in the “Wants and needs from other bisexuals” Please refer to page 17 of the 1991 needs assessment in Appendix C for these suggestions.

In 2001, Dr. Taimur Rashid Malik completed the Bisexual Social & Community Needs Assessment, a joint project of OutFront Minnesota, the Bisexual Organizing Project, and the University of Minnesota. Dr. Malik, a student at the University of Minnesota at the time, was hired to complete the needs assessment by OutFront Minnesota with the help of a representative of BOP. Dr. Malik relied on a survey tool and interviews with members of the bisexual community, as well as reviewing the 1991 needs assessment and select pieces of literature.

A number of fairly concrete suggestions for action were given, such as bi organizations needing more publicity, the need for “color-blind” marital laws, “bridges” to workplace LGBT groups, and the need for fundraising.

FINDINGS

“Self-actualization”—defined by Abraham Maslow as self-fulfillment or the desire “to become everything that one is capable of becoming”—can be said to be a goal for all people. This is certainly true for bisexuals. “[I want to be] free to express my bisexuality to the same extent and places as gay and lesbian people,” said one bi salon participant.

What gets in the way of this goal is complex. This needs assessment identified two overarching needs for bisexuals and the bi community:

- Solidarity and inclusion with the lesbian and gay communities.
- A strong, complete bisexual community.

The need for solidarity and inclusion with the lesbian and gay communities.

This desire has driven much of bi activism since the start and remains the goal for many bi activists. This is not an effort by outsiders trying to get in; as mentioned previously, bisexuals have been involved in “gay” liberation politics from the very beginning. What has often been lacking is recognition. Whereas in the seventies bisexuals may have been satisfied with, or at least accepting of, being part of a “gay” movement, by the 1980s and ‘90s, many bisexuals were no longer willing to be left out of the gay narrative. Plus, gays and lesbians became less willing to, or in need of, accepting bisexuals into “their” movement, that is, if they insisted on being vocal about their bisexuality.

Needs assessment group participants generally expressed their desire for inclusion in a true LGBT movement via their disappointment. In one woman’s opinion, “The bi community has built a certain amount of cynicism toward ‘LGBT’ organizations.” And according to one man, “I don’t think [acceptance of bisexuals in an LGBT community] has gotten any better.”

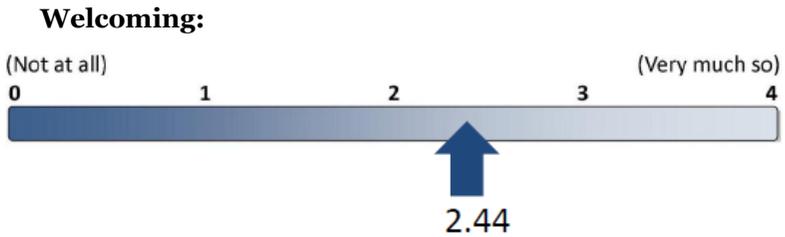
This was far-and-away the most popular topic of needs assessment groups. A woman says she is “thought of as being ‘lesbian lite.’” One woman who has a high-profile job at an LGBT organization said that, since “I get read as straight,” people wonder

“how did an ally get this job?” “I’ve always been mis-identified,” meaning she is constantly struggling against the “automatic assumptions.”

Bi phobia continues

“Bi phobia” is generally considered separate from homophobia. While bisexuals face the same discrimination from society as lesbians and gays, they also have unique issues as a community. Straight community discrimination directed specifically at bisexuals—assuming all bisexuals are “swingers,” objectification for bi women, etc.—was a popular topic of discussion in the groups. The survey found:

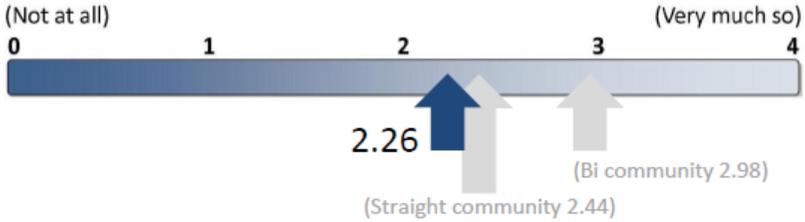
Overall, how would you characterize your experience in the heterosexual community?



However, when group participants discussed bi phobia, overwhelmingly the topic was discrimination afflicted upon bisexuals from lesbians and gays. Indeed, the survey found the gay and lesbian communities to be least welcoming communities of all:

Overall, how would you characterize your experience in the gay and lesbian communities?

Welcoming:



Note:

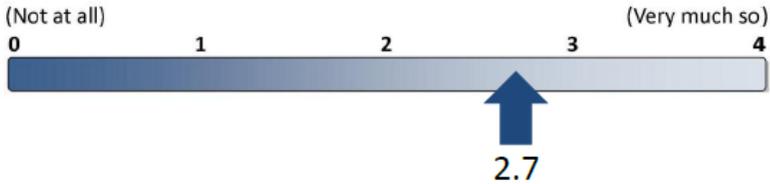
- Pride respondents more likely to find GL community welcoming

“Bi phobia” was a popular topic of discussion among group participants. Stereotyping and judging were common experiences for many.

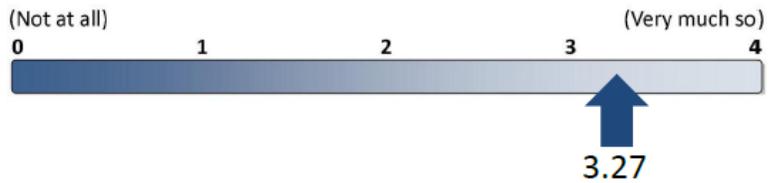
- Female: “We need to work harder on the LGBT community than the straight community. The gay and lesbian communities should get it, and it offends me when they don’t.”
- Female: When it comes to being visible in political activism, “We are an invisible minority.” I have a male partner, and “When I get a chance, I say I’m bisexual.”
- Female: “I have dated people who won’t date bi people.” “You can pass.”
- Female: if “you are bisexual, ‘I don’t want to date you.’ Everyone assumes I’m lesbian.”

Survey respondents want to be connected to an LGBT community, but their actual feelings of connection fall short.

How closely do you feel connected to the LGBT community?

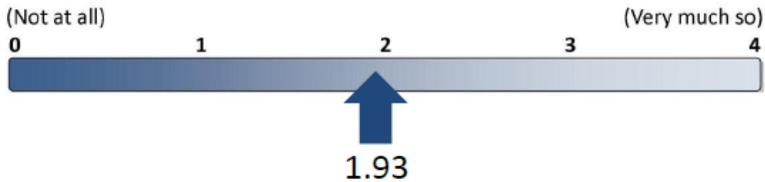


How closely do you WANT to feel connected to the LGBT community?



This gap between respondent's desire for connection to lesbian and gay communities and their actual feeling of connection reflects the stress so many bisexuals feel and the flashpoint for much of bi activism. As a result, bisexuals rank the lesbian and gay community as below the mean for their community life focus:

[LGBT community] serves as a focus of my community life



Notes:

- Women a bit more focused on the LGBT community: 2.01 female 1.59 male
- Women more likely to have no experience in the gay and lesbian community than men, 7% to 3%
- Bis from Pride surveys were more likely to express a focus on the LG community

Bisexual inclusion in LGBT organizations remains elusive

As previously described, at the outset of the data gathering phase of this needs assessment an Organizational Task Force was formed of leadership from various organizations that serve the bisexual community. The hope was to identify needs for organizations serving the bisexual community in order to increase and support bisexual participation. “I want all voices at the table. I want to make my organization more inclusive of everyone,” said one Organizational Task Force member.

However, their experience gives us insight into the gaps between bisexual hopes for inclusion and reality. As one person characterized the makeup of their organization, “A lot of G, a little L, nothing after that.” Said another, “I know one person who is out as a bi person.” A man who is part of an organization designed to deliver services to gay and bi men, said, “There’s a level of participation you are looking for.” “We want to deliver services;” however, of the volunteers he works with, he’d guess “one percent identify as an out bi person.” But, he says that when he talks to people one-on-one, people tend to be more up front and reveal themselves as bisexual.

“I’ve become comfortable saying I’m lesbian even though I’m bi.”
—Bi Salon participant

Few organizations reported much success in recruitment of bisexuals for their programming. Why aren’t there more bi people involved in LGBT organizations? One Organizational Task Force member says that, “I see two levels: things organizations do that is stigmatizing to bi people, and many bi people not being interested.”

On that first point, one man suggests that, “There’s not a huge acceptance for a bi community.” Another man put it bluntly, “If you have an event that is bi inclusive, you have an event that no one goes to,” suggesting that few bisexuals come, and if some do, gays and lesbians stay away. He adds, “[Gays and lesbians] haven’t worked through their own stuff.” On participant told the story of an evening event at a smaller city Pride festival. A drag performer on stage called out “Who’s gay? Lots of cheers. Who’s lesbian? Cheers. Who’s transgender? Cheers. Who’s bisexual? A few

cheers.” The performer then said, “ ‘Well, go in the corner and don’t come out until you make up your mind!’ and people laughed.”

Who would return after that reception? While hostility may or may not completely explain what appear to be low-levels of bi participation in such events and organizations, it is safe to assume that an unwelcome atmosphere is a major factor.

Two solutions were proposed by the Organizational Task Force. First, training. Several organizations would like to see more opportunities for training around recruiting and serving bisexuals. “We train all our facilitators not to label,” said one Organizational Task Force participant. Second, active outreach. One participant suggested that their organization needs to “make it explicitly clear that they are welcoming. We need to look outside of ourselves. To put actual work into it.” “Outreach is an issue,” said another. “How are we as an organization? Are we putting ourselves out there?”

The need for a strong, complete bisexual community

Building a robust bi community was the other main topic of groups. “It’s about community. We need a space,” declared a woman, referring to actual physical spaces to call one’s own. A man said, “I think we need gatherings like these [bi salons].” He adds, “I need to come out and vent and spend time with people who really know who I am.” A woman said she is looking for “a better sense of community,” and another says she’s been “hungry for community” for a long time.

One benefit of a community would be increased resources in which to draw strength from. However, there was a consensus in groups that resources in Minnesota are limited. “Not anywhere near the resources for bisexuals” needed, said one man. Another benefit is a greater ability to simply socialize with other bi folk. In the survey, various social activities were the most mentioned type of resources written in under “other.” Finding one’s flock is such a powerful drive for most people, and the isolation many group participants and survey respondents feel points to the need for a strong, more complete, bi community.

Would a strong bi community be a replacement for an LGBT community? Or would it augment the larger LGBT community with more bi-specific gatherings? “I would like actual bi resources,” said one man. “I don’t care if it’s from the LGBT community or the bi community.” A woman agreed, saying she wants both. However, few people addressed this issue directly, and the topic of the desired balance between community building verses successful acceptance into gay and lesbian spaces awaits further study, or perhaps simply time to sort itself out.

The Challenge of Community connection

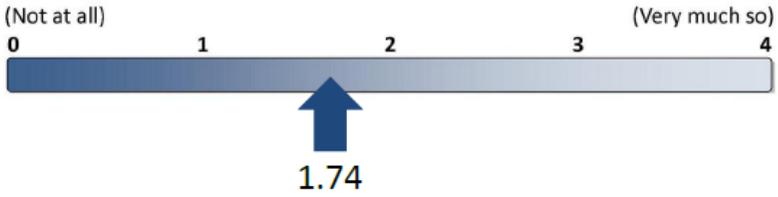
One oft mentioned and written about fact of bisexual life is a general lack of a community to call one’s own. Even the largest bi communities across the U.S are small and often disenfranchised—virtually clubs—compared to the juggernaut that is gay and lesbian culture with its newspapers, bars, entire districts, and public recognition. While feeling connected to a bisexual community may vary depending on whether there is such a “club” available, one’s resourcefulness, or their satisfaction with the bi community they find, it is nonetheless a common experience for bisexuals to feel isolated from others like them.

The Twin Cities and Minnesota are often mentioned in national circles as having one of the larger, more active communities. Indeed, BOP is one of only four bisexual non-profits in the country, and the 2012 PFund grant to BOP was the only grant nationally to such an organization that year. For most of the past twenty years, there has been some sort of community event happening on a regular basis, of which the BECAUSE conference is the most visible. (Indeed, participants in these events is exactly who populated the Bi Salons and BECAUSE group.)

*“Whatever people think bisexuality is, we aren’t living it.”
—Bi Salon participant*

Survey participants generally found the bi community welcoming and helpful, yet fewer made the bi community a community focus and fewer still felt a strong connection to the bi community.

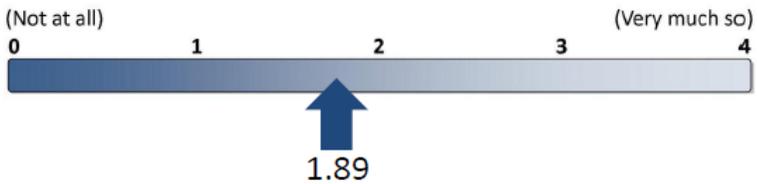
How closely do you feel connected to a bisexual community, as you define it?



Note:

- BECAUSE respondents felt most connected to the bi community, Pride, Salon, and Online respondents the least.

Serves as a focus of my community life



Note:

- Pride bis most likely to have bi community focus, online least.

Considering our assumption that participants in the survey are likely to have a much greater connection to the organized bi community than the average bisexual, this low number is startling. Indeed, respondents expressed a higher degree of community focus with the gay and lesbian communities than the bisexual community. This fact should be no surprise, given the nearly unlimited access to the lesbian and gay communities, at least in the Twin Cities. While 6 percent reported having no experience in the gay/lesbian communities, 16 percent had no experience in the bi community, with fully 1/3 of respondents from the Pride Festival expressing no experience with the bi community (considering they were standing in the Bisexual Organizing Project booth with a clipboard when answering this question, one hopes they would answer the question differently now).

One must ask: what keeps so many bisexuals from feeling connected to their community? A lack of capacity among bi groups and the resulting limitation to a few meetings held in metro area

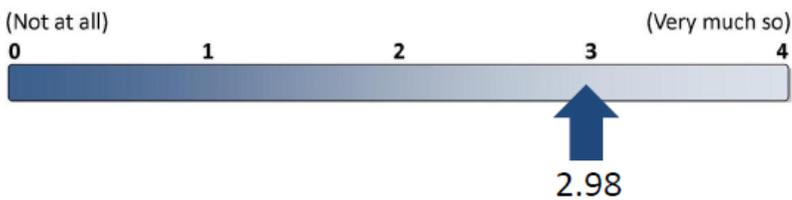
locations? The “club” they find is not the one they are looking for? Or a preference to be successful in the straight or gay and lesbian communities? It is hard to imagine the bi community getting to the scale and visibility of the lesbian and gay communities or the safety and ubiquities of the straight community. Have some bisexuals then give up on any desire for a community of their own?

One woman from the groups expressed her “need [for] a bi space.” After a lifetime of LGBT activism, she finds in LGBT spaces “I’m being ushered out because I’m bi.” “I’m more welcome in the heterosexual community than the lesbian community.”

Many spoke of finding a home in other, alternative non-specifically LGBT spaces. “Are there a lot of micro communities? You bet,” claims a male participant. Several communities were mentioned, such as the science fiction and Rocky Horror Picture Show communities. “The pagan and wiccan communities always welcoming,” said one woman. She finds her community “in the poly community,” said another. One participant said that at WisCon—an annual sci-fi convention—bisexuals outnumber straights, gays and lesbians.

However, survey respondents who did have experience with the bi community, found the community to be generally welcoming and the resources available helpful:

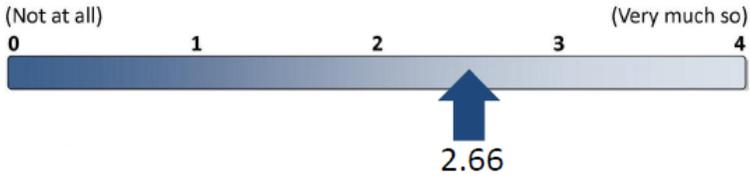
Finds the bisexual community welcoming



Note:

- BECAUSE respondents were most likely to find bi community welcoming, and online respondents the least. Women found the bi community to be a bit more welcoming (3.18) than men (2.55).

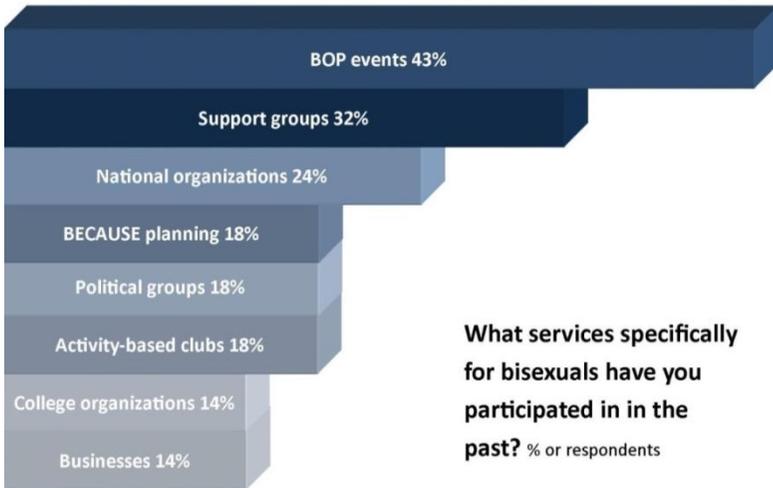
Finds the bisexual community resources helpful



Note:

- Online respondents find the bi community to be the least helpful.

Specific resources mentioned in groups were BOP, the BiCities cable access show, BECAUSE, the BiPanFluid and Biversity groups at the University of Minnesota, the Men’s Center, and Pillsbury House Men’s Brunch, as well as a number of openly bi therapists, a Metropolitan State University class on bisexuality, and the fact that Gadfly Theater makes a habit of writing bi characters into their productions.



Notes:

- Men were a bit more active, involved in an average of two categories, women 1.62
- Men were more involved with support, activities, national orgs, BECAUSE planning, BOP events
- 34% of respondents have attended the BECAUSE conference

It would appear that existing resources are well used. However, the survey also found that the average number of LGBT resources checked was 2.93, while the average number of bi activities checked was 1.79. Why are LGBT resources more used than specifically bi resources? Given what is already known and discussed previously—the challenges of finding a bisexual community—this likely reflects a shortage of bisexual-specific resources or low visibility of those that do exist. Considering the general unhappiness with the reception bisexuals get in gay and lesbian spaces, bisexuals must often find themselves participating in generally less-satisfying programming, once again contributing to and illustrating the stress so many bisexuals feel.

New identities: are they a challenge to community building?

A new topic for this needs assessment not identified in the 2001 and 1991 needs assessments is the relationship of bisexuality to new orientation labels such as “pansexual,” “omnisexual,” and “fluid.”

Labels selected in the survey (could use more than one)

N=101	total	Bisexual and...	Not identified as bisexual
Bisexual	92		
Queer	34	33	1
Fluid	16	14	2
Pansexual	17	10	7
Omni	4	4	0
Other	7	6	1
Total labels	170		
Total		41	9

The drive for self-definition is arguably at the core of the bisexual experience. Said a male group participant, “I have the power to describe who I am and how I define myself.” Said a woman about identify as bisexual, “I am a warrior.” She said it’s about “independence” to self-define.

While “queer” was certainly on the scene by the time of the 2001 needs assessment and was discussed therein, anecdotally there appears to be a rise in alternative labels to the customary sexual orientations of gay, lesbian, and bisexual. As one woman said, referring to queer, bi, fluid, etc., “I want a T-shirt with everything on it.”

Some group participants expressed their desire for new labels such as “fluid,” “omni,” and “pansexual” because they felt they recognized the complexities in their sexual attractions and feelings. Said one woman, we “need to open up the definition to include fluid sexuality.” One man said he is attracted to transgender people. “If that makes me omni, so be it.”

Some people in groups expressed their belief that “bisexual” was necessarily “trans-phobic,” in that the Latin root implies “two,” as in two genders, and thus their desire to find or create a label that they feel acknowledges a range of gender expression. One person argued: “Implies a two-ness that doesn’t apply.”

*“If a person says ‘pansexual,’ what does that mean?”
—Bi Salon participant*

Others took great exception to the idea that “bisexual” was trans-phobic. A popular definition for “bisexual” among group participants was “attracted to all genders.” Indeed, this is the preferred definition of “Bisexual” in most writing on the topic. Another participant pointed out that “bisexual” is no more binary than “gay” or “straight,” “homosexual or heterosexual.” Said another, “How do you say “gay,” “homosexual” or “straight” and not reinforce the binary?”

Many seemed willing to accept the lack of perfection of any label for something as complex as human sexual identity. One woman said, “We need to come together as a community to get our own needs met and remember that whatever label we use will be imperfect.” Another woman agreed. We need to “find a way to come together.” Language is so completely imperfect “it’s never going to feel right,” added a third.

What the proliferation of new labels means is speculative. Given the popularity in the survey of choosing “Bisexual and...”—as opposed to exclusively one of the new labels—one might wonder

how consequential this is or how confusing it really is to outsiders. For example, if a surveyor shows up at a fluid person's door, are they able and willing to use more customary terminology, and save the nuanced discussion of "bi" verses "fluid" for BECAUSE? One

" 'Bisexual' is so binary."

—

"[Pansexual is] hipster crap."

—two Bi Salon participants

group participant said that, in order to be understood, he adjusts his label to match the understanding and acceptance of the person hearing it. Perhaps competing labels serve as intra-community discussion points and actually have little effect on a unified front for bisexual—and fellow travelers—rights.

Nor should it be assumed that a proliferation of labels is necessarily divisive. Indeed, "queer" has long been popular as a model for bringing the LGBT community together under one heading—the opposite of divisive.

On the other hand, what is one communicating when one tells someone they are pansexual? Fluid? Omni-sexual? Do people understand? A leader of a large LGBT organization asked when the topic came up, "Pan? What does 'pan' mean?" If the leader of a LGBT organization doesn't know what pan means, what could it mean to the average person on the street? One woman pointed out that if you say you are bisexual, at least people will have some idea of what you mean. Said another, "When you tell people you are 'fluid' people don't know what you are talking about." Said another, "People don't understand."

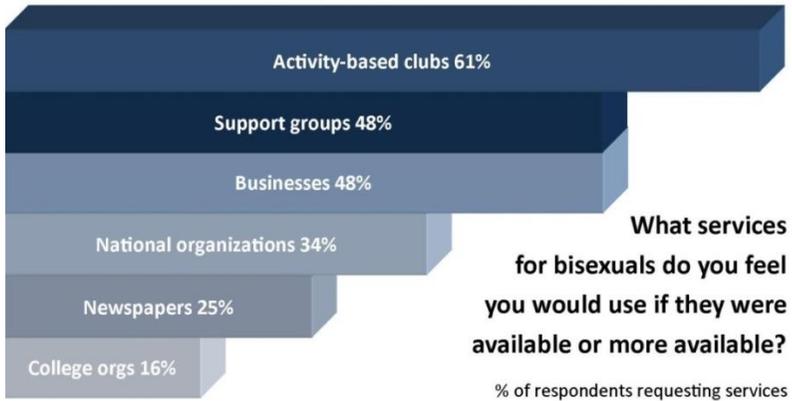
In needs assessment groups the proliferation was seen as a barrier to organizing. "It's a challenge for me when I'm doing any organizing with people who would fit under bisexual but choose not to," said one woman. Added a man regarding groups he's attended: "We would talk for 45 minutes about defining terms and the last five minutes talk about the topic." He concludes that "We have a marketing problem."

Does the proliferation of new labels reflect the beginning of sea change for how we see ourselves? Long-term prospects remain unclear. Said one woman, "I don't think it will stay around." Added another, "Creating additional terms just muddies the waters."

There are those who also argue for the abolishment of all labels. “Would we lose the categories?” said one woman. “There are no more labels? How realistic is that? Would something be lost?”

There remains much room for further research; plus, should there be another needs assessment in ten more years, the answer will likely have become clear.

SPECIFIC NEEDS



The following is a list of specific needs identified toward the goals of inclusion in a supportive LGBT community and the building of a robust, multifaceted bisexual community. No such list can be all-inclusive, but this list reflects the findings discussed previously. One might well be able to identify needs not addressed; their lack of inclusion here does not imply their lack of value or importance.

Greater meaningful inclusion in “LGBT” organizations

- More training for LGBT organizations and organizations serving the bisexual community
- More targeted outreach to bisexuals by LGBT organizations and organizations serving the bisexual community
- More targeted, bi-specific programming for bisexuals by LGBT organizations and organizations serving the bisexual community

Building a more robust bisexual community

- Continued growth of existing bi organizations
- Creation of more bi specific organizations, especially those with a social component
- Clarity as to the goals of bi activism
- Specific outreach to communities of color
- More research on bi-specific health and wellness issues
- Build consensus toward understanding bisexual identity vis-a-vis other, newer burgeoning identities
- More philanthropy within the bisexual community for the bisexual community
- More bi specific programming
- More local resources for bisexuals online

CONCLUSION

Despite great social progress in the U.S. for gays, lesbians, and transgender people in the twenty-one years since the first bi community needs assessment, for bisexuals many barriers remain. Indeed, it is remarkable that they are in large part the same barriers documented two decades ago. Will these barriers still exist in another ten, twenty years in the future? The needs of the bisexual community are far from unreasonable. They are the needs of all people—respect, acceptance, freedom. The good news is the bisexual community controls its own destiny; we are many, and we all have a hand on the tiller as we make decisions about how we spend our time, apply our resources, and envision our futures. Regardless of our own orientation or community, everyone should support building a strong community, not only for bisexual people but for all people. We should expect nothing less.

APPENDIX A: DATA TABLES

Total respondents 101
Average age 38

Gender **F** 69 *Could choose more than 1 gender*
 M 25
 T or other 11

Race

White	Black & Hispanic	Asian	Indian	Navajo, Mexican, white	No answer /other n=101
91%	1%	2%	1%	1%	11%

At what age did you first identify as your current orientation to yourself?

24 -Average respondent has been out to self for 14 years

Degree out 0 (not at all)-4 (very much so)

2.84 -31 respondents said 4
 -No relationship between marriage status and degree out

Relationship status

30 married	39 unmarried partner(s)	31 unpartnered	-23 more than one partner (1/3 of partnered and married)
------------	-------------------------	----------------	--

Overall, how would you characterize your experience in the heterosexual community? 0 (not at all)-4 (very much so)

Welcoming 2.71 Serves as a focus of my community life 2.21

BISEXUAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2012

Overall, how would you characterize your experience in the gay and lesbian communities? 0 (not at all)--4 (very much so)

	Welcoming	Resources and programs available helpful	Focus of my community life	No experience (welcoming; % with no Exp.)
F	2.2	2.2	1.8	4% -Pride bis more likely to find GL community welcoming
M	2.3	2.3	2.2	0%
T or other	2.4	2.1	2.2	0% -Bis from Pride more likely to express a focus on the LG community
total	2.3	2.2	1.9	4%

Overall, how would you characterize your experience in the bisexual community?
0 (not at all)--4 (very much so)

	Welcoming	Find resources and programs available to be helpful	Serves as a focus of my community life	No experience (welcoming)
F	3	2.6	1.8	13% -BECAUSE bis most likely to find bi community welcoming, online least
M	2.9	2.9	2.1	16% -Pride bis most likely to have bi community focus, online least
T or other	2.4	2.4	1.9	18% -Online found bi community to be least helpful
total	3	2.7	1.9	14%

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How closely do you feel connected to a bisexual community, as you define it? <i>0 (not at all)-</i> <i>4 (very much so)</i>	F	1.8	-BECAUSE people felt most connected to the bi community, Pride, Salon, and Online last
	M	1.6	
	T or other	1.6	
	total	1.7	

How closely do you feel connected to the LGBT community? <i>0 (not at all)-</i> <i>4 (very much so)</i>	F	2.2	-Pride people felt most connected to the GL community, followed by Bi Salon, and online/BECAUSE tied last
	M	1.7	
	T or other	2.5	
	total	2.1	

How closely do you WANT to feel connected to the LGBT community? <i>0 (not at all)-</i> <i>4 (very much so)</i>	F	3.3	-Bi Salon and pride bis most aspired to connecting with the LG community, followed by BECAUSE and online	
	M	3.2		
	T or other	3.6		-Biggest gap between connection and desire to connect was in the Bi Salon group, followed by BECAUSE
	total	3.3		

B I S E X U A L N E E D S A S S E S S M E N T 2 0 1 2

What LGBT community resources are important to you?

Choose all the apply

	support groups	political groups	philanthropic organizations	News-papers
F	48%	35%	33%	41%
M	60%	52%	28%	36%
T or other	36%	18%	18%	27%
total	52%	40%	31%	40%
	activity-based clubs (knitting groups, bike club, etc)	college orgs	businesses (bars, coffee shops, etc)	Average # of LGBT resources checked
F	57%	23%	57%	2.9
M	52%	32%	72%	3.3
T or other	64%	27%	64%	2.6
total	55%	27%	61%	2.9

BISEXUAL ORGANIZING PROJECT

What bisexual services have you participated in in the past?

	support groups	political groups	national orgs (BiNet, conf., etc.)	BECAUSE planning	BOP events
F	38%	17%	23%	17%	42%
M	16%	20%	20%	16%	44%
T or other	36%	18%	27%	18%	36%
total	32%	18%	24%	17%	43%

	activity-based clubs	college orgs	businesses (bars, coffee shops, etc)	Average # of LGBT resources checked
F	17%	14%	14%	1.8
M	16%	12%	8%	1.5
T or other	36%	9%	27%	2.1
total	18%	14%	14%	1.8

Have you ever attended the BECAUSE conference? Yes:

F 30% M 40% T or other 27%
total 34%

B I S E X U A L N E E D S A S S E S S M E N T 2 0 1 2

What services for bisexuals do you feel you would use if they were available or more available?

F	support groups 46%	political groups 49%	national orgs (BiNet,conf,,etc) 36%	Newspapers 25%
M	44%	36%	20%	24%
T or other	64%	64%	64%	36%
total	48%	47%	34%	25%
F	activity- based clubs 68%	college orgs 14%	businesses (bars, coffee shops, etc) 51%	Average # of non- newspaper services wanted 2.7
M	48%	12%	32%	1.9
T or other	55%	45%	82%	3.7
total	61%	16%	48%	2.5

APPENDIX B: ATTACHMENTS

Survey

Bi Needs Assessment Survey

About the needs assessment:

The Bisexual Organizing Project is sponsoring this needs assessment to discover what the needs of self-identified bisexuals are, with the goal of full inclusion in the community at large and within LGBT organizations.

The needs assessment will:

- Assess the current situation for bisexuals vis-a-vie social justice
- Define the issues that need to be addressed specific to bisexuals
- Delineate how organizations supporting social justice for bisexuals can be successful
- Communicate community needs to a wider audience

Instructions:

- As with anything this complex, many questions could be answered many ways. Generally, we'd recommend going with your immediate first impressions.
- Oftentimes questions will rely on your definition of various terms. For example, a person could ask, "what do you mean exactly by 'bisexual'?" Answer it as *you* define bisexual.
- There are no right or wrong answers, only *your* answers.

Thank you in advance for completing this survey!

Circle your answer:

What is your sexual orientation? (check all that apply):

bisexual	Gay/lesbian	fluid	Heterosexual	Homo- sexual
omnisexual	pansexual	queer	straight	Other____ —

If you do NOT identify as bisexual, fluid, omnisexual, or pansexual, STOP HERE.
Thank you for your interest!

What is your gender? (check all that apply)

female	gender queer	male	transgen der	Other____ —
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Age <18 19-24 25-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 >60

Race (please write in)

What state or province do you live in?

Minnesota	Illinois	Iowa	North Dakota	South Dakota	Wisconsin
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Other: _____

If you live in Minnesota, what county?

If you live in Hennepin or Ramsey County, do you live in:

Minneapolis/St Paul	a suburb
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At what age did you first identify as your current orientation to yourself?

<18	19-24	25-30	31-40	41-50	>51
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To what degree would you say you are currently "out" about your sexual orientation?

0 (Not at all)	1	2	3	4 (Very much so)
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Relationship status (check all that apply):

un-partnered	unmarried partner(s)	married
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Do you have more than one partner?

Ye s	No
---------	----

Gender of your partner 1, if applicable? (check all that apply):

female	gender queer	mal e	transgend er	Other____ —
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Gender of your partner 2, if applicable? (check all that apply):

female	gender queer	mal e	transgend er	Other____ —
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Gender of additional partners, if applicable? (write in)

Overall, how would you characterize your experience in the heterosexual community?

Welcoming 0 1 2 3 4

BISEXUAL ORGANIZING PROJECT

	(Not at all)					(Very much so)
Serves as a focus of my community life	0 (Not at all)	1	2	3	4	(Very much so)

Overall, how would you characterize your experience in the gay and lesbian communities?

Welcoming	No experience 0 (Not at all)	1	2	3	4	(Very much so)
------------------	------------------------------------	---	---	---	---	----------------

Find resources and programs available to be helpful	No experience 0 (Not at all)	1	2	3	4	(Very much so)
--	------------------------------------	---	---	---	---	----------------

Serves as a focus of my community life	No experience 0 (Not at all)	1	2	3	4	(Very much so)
---	------------------------------------	---	---	---	---	----------------

Overall, how would you characterize your experience in the bisexual community?

Welcoming	No experience 0 (Not at all)	1	2	3	4	(Very much so)
------------------	------------------------------------	---	---	---	---	----------------

Find resources and programs available to be helpful	No experience 0 (Not at all)	1	2	3	4	(Very much so)
--	------------------------------------	---	---	---	---	----------------

Serves as a focus of my community life	No experience 0 (Not at all)	1	2	3	4	(Very much so)
---	------------------------------------	---	---	---	---	----------------

How closely do you feel connected to a bisexual community, as you define it?	0 (Not at all)	1	2	3	4	(Very much so)
---	-------------------	---	---	---	---	----------------

How closely do you feel connected to the LGBT community?	0 (Not at all)	1	2	3	4	(Very much so)
---	-------------------	---	---	---	---	----------------

How closely do you WANT to feel connected to the LGBT community?	0 (Not at all)	1	2	3	4	(Very much so)
---	-------------------	---	---	---	---	----------------

What LGBT community resources are important to you? Choose all the apply	support groups	activity-based clubs (knitting groups, bike club, etc)	political groups	college organizations
	philanthropic organizations		businesses (bars, coffee shops, etc)	newspapers
	Other:			

BISEXUAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2012

What services specifically for bisexuals have you participated in in the past?	support groups	activity-based clubs (knitting groups, bike club, etc)	political groups	college organizations
	national organizations (BiNet, conferences, etc.)	businesses (bars, coffee shops, etc)	BOP events	BECAUSE planning
	Other:			

Have you ever attended the BECAUSE conference?	Yes	No
If so, how many?	1	>6

What services for bisexuals do you feel you would use if they were available or more available?	support groups	activity-based clubs (knitting groups, bike club, etc)	political groups	college organizations
	national organizations (conferences, etc.)	businesses (bars, coffee shops, etc)	newspapers	
	Other:			

When it comes to the needs of the bisexual community, what questions do you feel would be important to ask but were left out of this survey? What questions were poorly worded and need improvement?

Thank you for completing this survey!

Organizational survey

Bi Needs Assessment: Organizational Survey

Name of organization

Is “Bisexual” or “bi” in your organizational name or mission?

Yes No

Does your organization have out bisexual leadership in your organization? How many? What are their roles?

Regarding staff and/or Board training for working with bisexuals, Check all the apply:

- Received in-person training from outside facilitator
- Printed or online materials part of new staff training
- Participated in training at an outside event such as a conference

Other:

Does your organization do any specific programming for bisexuals or offer any resources for or in conjunction with the bisexual community?

Yes No

If yes, please describe:

Does your organization offer any programming or resources that specifically include pan/fluid/queer identities?

Yes No

If yes, please describe:

Does your organization do outreach specifically the bisexual community? If yes, please describe.

Yes No

If yes, please describe.

How do you see bisexuals fitting in within the main population you serve?

Comments?

Bi Salon publicity



Coffee and
bisexuals
too?
Where do I
sign up?

Bi Salon

Bi Salon talk
relax
meet
breath
be

BISEXUAL COMMUNITY DISCUSSION GROUP

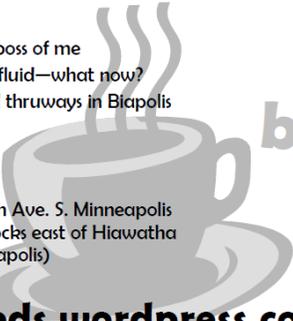
7:00p.m.—8:30p.m.

Second Thursday:
May 10: You're not the boss of me
June 14: Poly/pan/omni/fluid—what now?
July 12: Road blocks and thruways in Biapolis
Aug 9: Bi utopia

Free

Fireroast Café 3800 37th Ave. S, Minneapolis
(on 38th Street a few blocks east of Hiawatha
Avenue in South Minneapolis)

www.bineeds.wordpress.com/salon



Original project plan

Bi Community Needs Assessment Project Plan

Revised 12/20/2011

Background:

In 1991 and again in 2001, needs assessments sponsored by OutFront Minnesota were completed examining the bisexual community. These assessments were instrumental to the development of BECAUSE and help provide a vision of bi inclusion to this day. Building on these earlier efforts, a critical mass of individual and organizational interests believe it is time to revisit and reassess what is needed to achieve social justice for bisexuals and the bisexual community.

Project proposal:

We will develop and complete a “bi community needs assessment” that is inclusive, thorough, and actionable. This needs assessment will seek to understand the goals, problems, and opportunities for furthering social justice for bisexuals and all those who identify as neither straight nor lesbian/gay (referred to here as “bisexuals”).

The needs assessment will:

- Assess the current situation for bisexuals vis-a-vie social justice
- Define the issues specific to bisexuals that need to be addressed
- Understand how organizations supportive of social justice for bisexuals can be successful
- Communicate community needs to a wider audience

Needs assessment priorities:

1. Articulate the present environment for bisexuals

2. Define external challenges and opportunities for bi community organizations
3. Identify needs for organizations serving the bisexual community in order to increase and support bisexual participation

Project plan:

Step one *(completed by 12/31/2011):*

- BOP board—
 - Recruit project manager
- Project manager—
 - Recruit Advisory Task Force of supportive community partners such as PFund, OutFront Minnesota, Pride, the University of Minnesota LGBT Programs office, Metropolitan State Lavender Bridge, and more

Step two *(completed by 3/31/2012):*

- BOP board meeting one—
 - Develop project mission
 - Develop SMART project objectives
- Advisory Task Force Meeting—
 - Review direction, recruitment, assess organizational needs,
 - “What do organizations that serve the bi community need to know from a needs assessment?”
 - “How can we increase participation by bisexuals in LGBT organizations?”
- BOP board meeting two—
 - Review final project plan, survey tools, and other assessment materials
 - Survey/focus group/key informant recruitment plan
- Advisory Task Force Meeting (in person or via email)—
 - Review final project plan, survey tools, and other assessment materials
 - Survey/focus group/key informant recruitment plan

Step three *(completed by 9/30/2012):*

- Project manager—
 - Identify, review and incorporate existing Minnesota data—1991 assessment, 2001 assessment, 2011 PFund Listening Session notes
 - Lit search—review relevant national literature regarding the needs of bisexuals
 - Survey—quantitative assessment of current situation
 - Focus group—one or more focus groups to gather qualitative data
 - Key informant interviews

Step four (*completed by 12/31/2012*):

- Project manager—
 - Draft report
 - Final report
 - Report collateral (media release, fact sheet, etc.)
- Advisory Task Force/BOP Board meeting—
 - Review report drafts
 - Dissemination plan
- Report release event

**1991 Needs Assessment of the
Bisexual Community in the Twin Cities**

**NEEDS ASSESSMENT
OF THE
BISEXUAL COMMUNITY
IN THE
TWIN CITIES**

Produced for the Gay and Lesbian
Community Action Council
By Joe Duca
Staff Intern
Published October 1991

BISEXUAL ORGANIZING PROJECT

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HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

The Gay and Lesbian Community Action Council is a non-profit organization dedicated to eliminating heterosexism and homophobia in Minnesota. Founded in 1987, the Action Council supports pride, individual growth and community awareness for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender individuals, and their families and friends in Minnesota.

In 1991, in order to more effectively service and support the bisexual community, GLCAC established an on-going project on bisexuality. The project has had five preliminary focus areas: 1.) a needs assessment of the Bisexual Community in the Twin Cities, 2.) updating homophobia literature to include bisexuals, 3.) building a bisexual resource list, 4.) conducting a bisexual inservice for the staff and volunteers of GLCAC, Contact Yes Neon, and Equal Time; and 5.) adding bi books and articles to the GLCAC's library.

This needs assessment provides an overview of what bisexuals need and want from GLCAC. The document itself does not provide a plan of action, rather a body of information on which to build future programming.

Because this project was initiated by a gay and lesbian community service agency, the method of contacting respondents and the wording of questions reflects a sample of bisexuals affiliated to some extent with gay and lesbian communities. It does not attempt to provide a comprehensive profile statistical representation of all bisexuals in the Twin Cities.

METHODOLOGY

The needs assessment was generated through interviewing bisexual people in the Twin Cities. Interviews were generally conducted by this author and consisted of a set of questions asked of the respondents in face to face interviews, phone interviews, or written questionnaires. Ninety-five percent of the interviews were done face to face and generally lasted a half-hour to one and a half hours.

Most participants became involved by responding to a press release about the project placed in gay, lesbian, bi newspapers. Other respondents were located through local bisexual groups, talking to publicly out bisexually identified people, friendship networks, public service announcements on local radio shows, and contacting agencies, therapists, and coordinators of programs that deal with bisexual women and men.

The questions asked of respondents were:

1. Describe your sexual orientation.
2. What does this orientation mean to you?
3. How do you identify yourself to others?
4. What community(ties) or groups do you feel most comfortable with? What about these groups makes you feel comfortable?
5. In terms of sexual orientation, what has been your experience in gay and lesbian communities?
6. In terms of sexual orientation, what has been your experience when interacting in heterosexual environments?
7. In coming out or coming to terms with your sexual orientation, what resources helped you--books, people, organizations?
8. What do you wish could have been there for you when you were coming out?
9. Have you ever had any contact with the GLCAC, or used any of their services? If so, what was your impression?
10. What ways, if any, could the gay and lesbian communities be more responsive to your needs?
11. What could you use now to help you with issues about sexual orientation and sexuality?

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

24 respondents were interviewed individually, and 14 more were interviewed as a group. People who work with AIDS services, youth services, women's services, African American groups, and gay/lesbian organizations were among the respondents.

The gender distribution was 22 men and 16 women. Most of the respondents (89%) were white. Ages ranged from 18 to late 50's. Level of physical or mental ability was not mentioned by any respondents as an issue related to their identity.

Amount of time since respondents 'came out' (each person defined this differently) was from three weeks to 19 years. Half the respondents had come out during high school or college; a majority of the rest came out during a marriage or long term relationship with either sex.

Respondents were presently involved in a variety of relationships: partnerships, marriages, or long term relationships with a member of either gender; monogamous and polygamous relationships; one primary relationship or many primary relationships; divorced, separated, or single; with children or grandchildren, without children, or hoping to have children; dating only women, dating only men, dating both, not dating; etc. Of those who were dating, most were dating people who identified as either lesbian, gay, or straight as opposed to bisexual.

Specific demographics such as income, education, etc. were not asked as part of the interview, however this information was often related during the interviews. Respondents were employed in a variety of fields including: health, media, various human services (AIDS education, community housing, gay/lesbian/bi youth services), auto mechanics, agriculture, publishing, business, engineering, counselling, and civil service. Almost all had finished high school and many went on to get a bachelors degree, masters degree, or specialized certification.

RESPONSES

The responses to the interview questions have been organized around four themes:

1. How respondents defined their sexual orientation and what that meant to them.
2. What their experiences had been in heterosexual gay, and lesbian communities.
3. What resources people had to deal with their orientation when they first were 'coming out' and what could be done to help others who are coming out now.
4. What the bi community in the Twin Cities needs and wants now in terms of support services, networking, and community programming.

The themes will be explored in depth in the next four sections.

Theme #1-How respondents defined their sexual orientation and what that meant to them.

Because labels may carry with them connotations that do not always fit everyone's life experience, the questions in the interview make a distinction between how respondents describe their orientation and the label they may use to represent their orientation.

Of the respondents interviewed, 26 identified as Bi or Bisexual (some identified as gay or lesbian in certain situations), 2 as Very Bisexual, 3 as Queer, 1 as Lesbian, 1 as Gay, 1 as Ambiaffectional, 1 as Genderfree, 1 as Polysexual, and 2 preferred not to identify themselves to others but would choose Bisexual if they needed a label. While most respondents did apply a label to themselves, many also said that they disliked labels as being too restrictive or rigid. One person who agreed that she disliked labels, said also that labels "give a place to be, a base to work from, a community to belong to and work with."

While every respondent described their orientation differently, the most common descriptions were:

"Freedom to be emotionally and affectionately involved with someone without gender being an obstacle or the main determinant."

"I see gender as a part of what a person is- like their personality, body, or looks- and a part of what is attractive about them."

"Capacity or potential to be attracted to and involved with a person of either sex."

Respondents frequently used the word "freedom" in two ways. They most commonly talked about freedom from categorizations, rules, and limits. Many respondents said their orientation challenged them to redefine the rules they were taught about relationships, love, sex, and gender such as: "You have to be straight or gay", "You have to get married if you date someone of the opposite sex", "You can only love/date one person at a time", "This is how you must act to be a man/woman/lesbian/gay". Respondents also used the term freedom as being able to have attractions that could change from day to day or hour to hour. Fluidity was a word that many respondents used to describe their attractions.

Capacity and potential were often expressed as being very important, particularly by respondents who did not have primary relationships with both men and women. The majority of the respondents who identified as bisexual stressed it was not important to them to have had relationships with

both women and men, but rather to have the capacity or potential to do so, and thereby be able to look at all the options available. Respondents expressed confidence that their identity and their behavior (who they dated, had sex with, were attracted to) did not have to be directly correlated. There were respondents who identified as bisexual and were involved in a monogamous marriage or partnership, who dated only women, or who dated only men. Similarly, other respondents who identified as lesbian or gay were dating someone of the opposite sex. Respondents seemed to base their sexual identity on capacity and potential rather than particular behaviors or present or past relationships.

People who had first come out as lesbian or gay and later came out as bi, said they felt a distinct difference when they came out for the second time. As some respondents said:

"There was a peace of mind, an end to the conflict within myself. I became very at ease with people and how I interacted with them."

"It was giving myself permission to look at my options"

"It makes me more tolerant of others. We need to give people more permission to be bi."

These respondents often said they had a more difficult time coming out as bi than coming out as lesbian or gay due to the lack of visible bisexual community or support network. They reported being harassed, ignored, excluded, or called a 'traitor' by gays and lesbians. One respondent stressed that:

"Being bi does not mean we have to leave lesbian or gay communities, they should adjust to encompass all the members that are there. The gay rights movement has always been fought by whoever wanted to belong, not by who was judged to be an acceptable queer."

For others who had not previously identified as gay or lesbian first they said they found the entire process of coming out was related as being empowering and liberating. As one respondent said,

"Coming out is empowering. I am more openminded to ALL people, more aware of people of color, and want to learn about others. I'm inspired to create bridges between different kinds of people...I want to use my coming out as a way to empower others."

In coming out as bi, one respondent stressed the importance of recognizing and dealing with heterosexual privilege, and being visibly out as a bisexual especially if in a relationship with the opposite sex. It was suggested that dealing with heterosexual privilege would help build trust with gays and lesbians (many respondents had been told to "deal with your privilege" by gays and lesbians) as well as help to dismantle heterosexism.

Theme #2-What their experiences have been in heterosexual, lesbian, and gay communities.

In heterosexual society, people received mixed responses when they were open about their sexuality. Some were accepted or felt comfortable. Most had some problems, but said that problems they encountered with heterosexuals were usually not as painful as the problems they had with gays and lesbians. Respondents suggested some reasons for this:

- Respondents stated that they believed that heterosexuals generally did not have the language or concepts to deal with sexual issues and most respondents did not expect them to understand all the intricacies of oppression and privilege that gays and lesbians would.
- Respondents said they expected more acceptance from gays and lesbians than from heterosexuals, which made exclusion from lesbian and gay spaces much more painful.
- Some respondents felt that bisexuality is less of a threat to heterosexuals than to gays and lesbians. To heterosexuals it's "just another queer", to gays and lesbians there is a fear that bisexuality will destroy their movements.

Respondents said that they believed their problems with heterosexuals stemmed from general ignorance and the attempt to deny any issues around diverse sexuality in heterosexual society. Bisexual women and men said they saw a lack of differentiation between lesbian/gay and bisexual from heterosexuals when they discussed morality, legislation, or general reaction to same sex relationships or orientations. Respondents often experienced their identity being ignored completely by heterosexuals when they were in opposite sex relationships. In this situation many respondents related stories of being declared as 'cured' or 'through their gay phase' as well as being told that they couldn't be involved with someone of the opposite gender and still be attracted to the same gender. Several respondents said that when they were in opposite sex relationships, friends and family seemed to avoid talking about sexuality, attraction, and past relationships that might bring up same sex partners or experiences.

Respondents reported that responses from heterosexuals ranged from "Oh, how sad" or "You don't know what you really want" to seeing bisexuality as exotic or titillating. Heterosexual friends were often said to express a fear of being perceived to be gay, lesbian, or bi if they associated with 'out' people. In general, respondents said there was a

great deal of misinformation and inaccuracy in heterosexual society.

However respondents reported that not all of their experiences in heterosexual society were negative. Some respondents received support from families or groups that accepted their same sex feelings, though not all encouraged their bisexual identity. One woman's mother said she wished her daughter was a lesbian rather than bi since identifying as bi would cause so many problems in lesbian communities.

Male respondents noted that they experienced more acceptance from heterosexual women than from heterosexual men, but had many fears about when and how to come out to women they dated because of possible problems to deal with such as homophobic reactions and misperceptions about AIDS and sexual identity.

Female respondents said that men they dated considered their orientation either exciting or not an issue. Some heterosexual women they came out to expressed fear that the respondents were making a pass, while other heterosexual women said that they were liberated by someone coming out to them and felt freer to explore their own sexuality.

In general respondents said they did not expect much acceptance or validation from heterosexuals. Thus they had less of an emotional response to the treatment they received in heterosexual environments. Respondents did, however, express an expectation to be tolerated if not accepted by lesbians and gays who, as many of them said, "should know what it means to be oppressed, excluded, invisible, and looked down on because of their orientation".

Almost all of the women who were interviewed were or had been involved in primarily lesbian communities. A majority of the men had been involved in gay men's communities, but several had little or no contact with these communities either by choice or because they could not find resources with which to connect.

Respondents talked of certain individuals, groups and organizations as being very inclusive and encouraging of diversity. Among those mentioned were many lesbian and gay leaders in the Twin Cities, organizations like GLCAC and Equal Time, feminist men's conferences, science fiction groups, and political activist organizations.

Respondents said that some of the lesbians and gay men with whom they interact have either adjusted and are comfortable with their orientation or at least say "it's okay for you to be bi. It's just not who I am."

While some people had very positive experiences with lesbians and gays, it seemed that the negative experiences were the most vocalized and most remembered. Negative experiences seemed to carry more weight in how respondents viewed lesbians and gay men.

Male respondent involved in gay men's groups or communities, said they often felt a strong push to conform to a certain idea of what it means to be a man who loves men. This pressure was said to come mostly from the words and ideas expressed by gay friends, gay groups, gay literature, and gay culture. These respondents said they felt a strong push to identify as gay and not tell anyone they were bi or attracted to women. Often respondents were assumed to be gay just by being around gay men and were not provided the opportunity to say who they really were. Militant gay men and men who were still in the beginning of their coming out processes were reported to be dogmatic about their decision that "there is only gay and straight". Respondents said that these men stopped listening to others' experiences who might be different than their own.

For women who either openly identified as bisexual or who identified as lesbian but dated men the negative experiences consisted of condemnation, scorn, or exclusion for being a 'traitor'. One was asked "when are you going to leave your husband and admit who you really are". Some were asked to leave women's or lesbian groups or spaces and some were not allowed to speak at women's or lesbian conferences. Several female respondents said that they had heard the phrase "Don't date a bi woman, sooner or later she'll leave you for a man." Several respondents noted that bisexuality seems to be less of an issue with gay men than with lesbians.

"I don't know how it is in a men's community, but for women, we need to realize that it's internalized sexism that makes us think that a bi woman will leave a woman for a man. A bi woman can be with a woman or a man, she won't succumb to the pressure and act straight just because she has the option to be with a man. We also need to reexamine our political ideas that if a woman sleeps with a man she is 'sleeping with the oppressor'"

One respondent found that other women would use her as a confidant to whom they could complain about and slander other lesbians.

Respondents, particularly those that openly identified as bisexual, said that many gays and lesbians they had encountered seemed to be very rigid about their identities and projected hatred for anyone not like them. Respondents

reported hearing statements such as:

"You just don't know what you want."
 "You can't possibly be."
 "I don't believe you."
 "It's just a phase."
 "You're in denial."
 "Do you have to talk about it so much?"
 "Keep your perversions to yourself."
 "God, you really are desperate, aren't you?"
 "You're a traitor."
 "You're a coward."
 "I went through that too, but I finally figured it out."
 "You just want to have your cake and eat it too."
 "We're all waiting for you to come off the fence."

One respondent heard this response when coming out to a gay friend:

"You can live a normal life"

Respondents often related feeling ignored, invalidated, invisible, scowled at, unacknowledged and disbelieved. Several women were labelled 'Lesbeens' or 'Hasbians' by other lesbians.

Respondents had these thoughts about reactions from gays and lesbians:

"They don't want us to rock the boat. When they get complacent and comfortable they are willing to oppress anyone who threatens that. I think some gay men are threatened by bi's because they aren't used to having to deal with women-they haven't dealt with their own misogyny and fear of women-and some lesbians espouse this undifferentiated anger towards men-bi, gay, straight, or other-they need to start treating us as individuals."

"To the people that roll their eyes when I tell them I'm bi, I want to say 'thank you very much for assuming I can't run my own life'. Stop telling me who I am, only I know that."

"I get a mixed reaction-some people accept, acknowledge, respect us, and are inclusive. Others deny us, second guess us, resent us in their groups, and exclude us. We are most commonly invisible-not overtly excluded, just not acknowledged as being legitimate."

With such a wide range of positive and negative experiences in large groups or communities, many respondents said they preferred, and found they were most comfortable with, a smaller network of friends. When becoming involved in groups, most said they looked for groups that were based on diversity and multiculturalism, with the idea that in such groups people strove for openness and accepted each other's uniqueness. Some liked women's group, some liked men's groups, but many respondents expressed a strong desire for mixed gender groups, bars, events, etc.

Pagan groups, science fiction/fantasy groups, many political activist organizations, AIDS organizations, folk-singing communities, and some lesbian and gay groups that included bisexuals, topped the list of places that were openminded and accepting of the people interviewed. One person said that

"Gay, lesbian, bi groups are so enriching to be with because of the shared experience of being oppressed and outcasted, the shared ideas of feminism, the shared creative energy, and the youthfulness present--so many straight friends my age (late 20's) seem really tied down".

Theme #3-What resources people had to deal with their orientation when they first were 'coming out' and what could be done to help others who are coming out now.

In coming to terms with their own orientation, most respondents said they had to struggle inside themselves to find where they belonged and who they were. The best resources respondents reported using in coming to terms with their orientation were: friends; therapists; some books dealing with lesbian, gay, or bisexual issues; gay and lesbian bars; women's music; and coming out or exploring affections groups. (Such as the Exploring Sexual Preferences group offered by Chrysalis, which was noted as being very helpful by many female respondents.) Other resources cited were bi groups such as the Bisexual Connection, the University BI Community, and the now defunct BiWimmin Welcome; supportive families; phone lines such as Contact Yes/Neon and the GLCAC's Helpline; Girl/Boy Bar at the Varsity; Spirit of the Lakes Church; Adult Children of Alcoholics Groups at Lambda; and bisexual workshops at Take Back the Night.

A number of respondents said they had no resources. Many said that they had to validate their reality and identity themselves because there were no external supports. Some survived by listening to everything they could find in the popular press concerning gays and lesbians. Others searched for positive role models and environments. Many talked about their coming out as being very isolating or difficult, particularly when gay and lesbian friends told them to "Make up your mind."

Respondents had many suggestions about what could have helped them when they were coming out. The most prominent suggestion was to hear the word 'bisexual', or know that it was possible and okay to be attracted to women and men. The next most common response was to have an active, visible, supportive bi community or space where it would have been safe to be themselves. Other suggestions included: more books, more visible resources, more support groups for those who are coming out in a marriage, more social groups, more inclusion of bi in language, ways to meet and talk with other people going through the same things, or a book or video that people could confidentially get that would tell them about issues such as coming out, and exploring orientations.

Theme #4-What the bi community in the Twin Cities needs and wants in terms of support services, networking, and community programming at this time.

This section is both what respondents wanted from gay and lesbian communities as well as what they want from the bi community that is growing in the Twin Cities. The first part of these responses will therefore be specifically geared towards gays and lesbians, the second part will be both for the bi community and for bi/gay/lesbian/transgender communities in coalition.

WANTS AND NEEDS FROM GAYS AND LESBIANS

1. Acceptance of the respondents (and everyone's) right to self-identify as bisexual, gay, lesbian, heterosexual, or other, and their right to act out that identity however they choose to as individuals. Respondents expressed a strong need to be accepted as who they say they are rather than who other people try to label them as.

"Accept difference, allow choice and mobility, let people change and grow."

"Bisexuals exist, even if you don't know any, even if you went through 'that phase too'. You don't have the right to deny others' existence."

"Accept people for who they say they are, don't try to define or categorize them."

2. Inclusion in words and language when talking about issues that involve bisexuals was emphasized over and over by respondents. Many respondents said that if a group or organization did not include "bisexual" in the title, they felt that they may not be welcome.

"I would like to see a move to force all gay and lesbian organizations to make a conscious and public decision to either include or exclude bisexuals. I want them to either say "No, we don't want you here", in which case we can take our energy, support, and resources elsewhere, or to say, "yes, you are a part of us" and to include us in whatever language they use to describe their group (I.e.the word bisexual used whenever gay/lesbian is)"

Appendix A "Language inclusion" has more in depth ideas and strategies for inclusive language.

3. Respondents stressed that gays and lesbians need to show a willingness to accept that bisexuality may redefine some popular notions about sexuality and sexual identity that exist among gays, lesbians, and heterosexuals. Respondents wanted gay, lesbian, and heterosexual people to make an effort to research or ask about bisexuality and to admit that it was confusing or didn't make sense if that was the case.

"People need to see bisexuality as a legitimate identity to break this mythical dichotomy about GAY OR STRAIGHT, there must also be room for other people with other labels and orientations."

"Gays and lesbians seem to have gotten complacent and settled and aren't fighting enough of the stereotypes and molds. They need to stop buying into other's ideas, none of us will get anything handed to us. Start dealing with your own internalized shame and get past it. Bi's are accused of heterosexual privilege, but lesbians and gays need to recognize the privileged token spot they have received in many places and stop using their oppressors tools to oppress us..."

"Gays and lesbians need to educate themselves and deal with their own biphobia-it's not our problem, it's theirs. Just like homophobia and heterosexism is not their problem, it's the problem of their oppressor."

4. Almost all respondents expressed a need for lesbians, gays, and bisexuals to work together, as well as maintaining their own spaces. Respondents had these things to say:

"We need an opportunity to dialogue with gays and lesbians about what it means to be bi, what it means to be bi in a biphobic gay and lesbian community, and what it means for them having us around."

"We need a home and a history, that we need to create, but that others need to acknowledge so we don't have to keep rediscovering ourselves."

"Bisexuals need to be public in places of leadership, lesbians and gays can't speak for us, know us, or assess us."

"Lesbians need to figure out how bykes fit into our women's community"

"Gays and lesbians have so much fear that we are going to 'dilute the movement' by talking about

mobility, options, and choice. But that just plays into the myths and stereotypes about all of us-that we don't know what we want, we are confused, or that it's just a phase. Why do they waste so much time and energy trying to prove those things wrong when homophobic people won't listen anyway. Why be concerned about what the homophobes think, let's concentrate on progressing and start an offensive, not a defensive movement."

"We have from the start been involved in running gay and lesbian(gl) organizations; in supporting and campaigning for gl candidates and rights ordinances; in patronizing gl businesses; in marching for gl rights; in making gl music, art, literature, and in general helping to create and maintain the gl community that exists today. Yet we are invisible, either because we've allowed ourselves to be absorbed into the labels gay/lesbian, or because our orientation has been discounted by gl people. It is time that our presence and contribution be acknowledged, respected, valued."

"Many gays and lesbians tell the straight world that this is "just the way we are, we can't change our identity." Because bisexuals can choose to date same or opposite sex partners, homophobes use bisexuality to say, "see you can choose who you date, so you should choose to be straight." This is why we, as gays and lesbians, need to keep bi's in our movement, to keep them 'queer'."

More specific individual ideas were suggested by respondents about what gays and lesbians could do to be more accepting of bisexuals. These individual ideas can be found in appendix B "Promoting Bisexuality."

WANTS AND NEEDS FROM OTHER BISEXUALS

While researching what bisexuals need from lesbians and gays it is also important to understand what bisexuals need from each other as a community. Respondents expressed a strong desire for an active and supportive bi community in the Twin Cities. From information respondents gave, these five components would contribute to the growth of the bisexual community:

1. Respondents repeatedly stressed the importance of increasing the visibility of the bi community. They suggested that bisexuals need:

- to be visible and proud about being bisexual in gay and lesbian groups, events, and communities, as well as in heterosexual society.
- to come out as bisexuals to gay and lesbian friends.
- to be out as bisexuals, especially when dating someone of the opposite gender.
- to increase awareness of bisexuality as a legitimate identity for those who are coming out.
- to reach out to closeted bi's in both heterosexual society and in gay and lesbian communities.
- to create more bisexual spaces to talk about being bi, to exchange stories, and to explore issues related to bisexuality.
- to be represented more often in gay and lesbian press and literature.
- to create more articles for lesbian and gay press.

2. Respondents conveyed the importance of building bisexual pride by:

- reclaiming bisexual history.
- examining bisexuality in academic settings.
- telling personal stories.
- exploring bisexuality in depth in writing, groups, and dialogue.
- dispelling myths about bisexuality (For example, the myth that all bisexuals are promiscuous and nonmonogamous.)
- being true to their personal bisexual identity even if that means reinforcing negative stereotypes.

3. Respondents expressed a strong need for support. People sought many different types of support, including:

- safe places to meet other bisexuals.
- affirming spaces to talk about bisexual issues on a personal level.
- same sex spaces for men (bisexual and gay) and for women (bisexual and lesbian).
- coming out groups.
- supportive spaces for bisexuals who are married.
- supportive spaces for heterosexual spouses (and long term partners) of bisexuals.
- groups for bisexuals, gays, and lesbians raising children.
- more spaces oriented towards youth and towards older bisexuals.
- more spaces inclusive of bisexuals of all ages.
- spaces to explore spirituality and sexuality.

4. Respondents also felt the need for more social activities, political action, and resource development. Some methods they suggested:

- having bisexual conferences, seminars, celebrations, and parades.
- writing more books, more letters to the editor, more articles, and more newsletters about bisexuality.
- having a bi lending library or a bisexual section at Quatrefoil.
- having a clearinghouse for information with a newsletter, mailing list, and ongoing events.
- having more bisexually identified political activists.
- having a larger diversity of groups which go beyond coming out issues into the theoretical or intellectual facets of bisexuality.
- having more social events to get to know each other personally.
- having bisexual sporting activities and teams.

5. Coalition building was universally expressed by respondents as a necessity to the growth of the bi movement. The important ideas and concerns respondents had in building coalitions fell into two major categories-what needs to be done internally for the bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender communities in coalition, and what these coalition communities need to do externally to further their individual and collective causes.

Within bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender coalitions, many respondents expressed the need to organize coalitions around what the individual groups have in common, but to also allow space for the concerns and issues of individual people and groups. Respondents suggested organizing around issues such as hate crimes, homophobia, and civil rights.

Many respondents stressed the importance of bisexuals and their resources to be available and visible in gay and lesbian spaces and groups. Several respondents said that there need to be out bisexual representatives or liaisons on staffs and boards of organizations such as GLCAC, the Gay and Lesbian Pride Committee, Family Children's Services, Equal Time Newspaper, Gaze Newspaper, and MN AIDS Project. The need to have bi resources available and visible particularly in community centers such as the Men's Center and Chrysalis was also frequently expressed. Other respondents called for bisexuals to be included in gay and lesbian conferences and seminars, and to be included in civil rights legislation issues that concern gays and lesbians.

Some respondents stated that it was very important for bisexuals to recognize the privileges as well as the oppression that comes from being bi and to remember that some gays and lesbians support the bi movement.

Many respondents expressed concern that bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender communities were not meeting the needs of everyone involved in those communities. Respondents stressed the need for coalitions to include everyone and be especially concerned about issues such as gender, race, age, class, ability. Respondents also suggested that people and communities need to expand the language and conceptual frameworks (such as theories on sexual identity and gender) they use to reflect real-life experiences, rather than laboratory results or abstract concepts. (Examples of expanded language can be found in Appendix A "Inclusive Language".)

The majority of the respondents also wanted to have more gender mixed, multi-orientation social spaces to come together to, as one respondent said, "meet as people rather than orientations."

Respondents felt bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender coalitions need to make their resources and existence much more visible in heterosexual environments. Respondents suggested:

- That resources be made available in predominantly heterosexual environments such as doctor's offices, schools, churches, community centers, etc.
- That a multi-step news campaign be initiated: first work with the intermediate press (like City Pages and TCReader), then major papers, then tv. The focus of such a campaign would be to present positive images of the diversity of bisexual/gay/lesbian/transgender communities, rather than only talking about bashings, murders, and protests involving these communities.
- That it is important to keep in mind heterosexuals who ally with bisexuals, gays, lesbians, and transgender people (many of these heterosexuals may become involved through relationships with bisexuals).

OBSTACLES

Respondents noted several problems that impede building a strong bisexual community and forming coalitions with gay, lesbian, and transgender people:

-Bi people that are very closeted won't go to gay bars or read gay papers. This presents a problem in networking and community organizing since most of the bi organizing that is currently happening is within gay and lesbian communities

-Many bisexuals don't know anyone else that is bi and have no context to talk about it.

-Many heterosexuals, gays, and lesbians talk about bisexuality as a behavior or phase, not as a concrete identity.

-People may be afraid to come out as bi because of fear of constant rejection from gays and lesbians.

-There is some perceived reluctance from lesbians and gays who say that the 'coming of age' of the bi movement will destroy the gay and lesbian movements.

-Respondents reported hearing many gays and lesbians openly espouse hatred or condemnation of bisexuals and bisexuality, which may keep bisexuals in the gay and lesbian communities in what has been called the 'gay and lesbian closet'

-The binaristic tendencies (a person must be gay OR straight, male OR female, disabled OR able-bodied, young OR old, white OR of color) of American culture make it difficult for people to accept or accommodate people who do not fit into those mutually exclusive terms, such as bisexual, transsexual, temporarily abled/hidden disability, middle-aged, mixed race/ethnicity.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Most respondents said they felt a strong connection to lesbian and gay movements, communities, and politics. Many respondents had at some point identified as gay or lesbian or felt that as bisexuals they were very much a part of the 'queer' movement.
2. While respondents identified with gay and lesbian communities to some extent, they had suffered negative reactions from those communities because of their attractions to both sexes. Many had at some point been "closeted" about their sexuality to avoid being ostracized by lesbian and gay communities, groups, and individuals.
3. Because of their negative experiences and/or the threat of ostracization from gay and lesbian communities, many respondents expressed a great deal of anger and resentment towards lesbians and gays who were not accepting of bisexuality.
4. Bisexuals expressed a strong need to associate with gays and lesbians and indicated a desire to work in coalition with gays and lesbians around common issues.
5. Respondents expressed a need for support and community- both support from gays and lesbians as well as a bisexual community.

GLOSSARY:

Biphobia:1.The fear, hatred, or distrust of people who are attracted to and form romantic or sexual relationships with partners of any gender. 2.Ignoring the existence of bisexuals, by believing everyone is either gay or straight. 3.The fear that bisexuality as an identity will destroy the lesbian and gay movements. 4.The fear of being labelled a bisexual by others. 5.The fear that admitting attraction to the both sexes will destroy or invalidate one's personal sexual identity, whether gay, lesbian, or heterosexual.

Dyke:a bisexual woman who identifies primarily with lesbian culture, related to the term dyke.

*Heterosexual privilege:the benefit of basic civil rights and familial recognition heterosexuals accord themselves as the "norm"-e.g., marriage, job security, tax breaks, parental privilege, foster parenting, visitation, and inheritance rights. For women, such privilege often also means the material and physical security of being with a man who has more access to earning power (financial security) and who can protect her from other men. For men it can mean protection from homophobic "faggot" attacks by other men and benefitting from women's free labor in patriarchy-for example, in the forms of housework, cooking, child rearing, and emotional nurturing. This varies depending on race, class, culture, age, and physical abilities.

Homophobia:1.The irrational fear of sexual/affectional preferences other than heterosexuality; fear of anything associated with homosexuality or variations in sexual identity. 2.Ignoring the existence of identities other than heterosexuality. 3.Being afraid of being labelled as other than heterosexual.

*Monosexual:a term used for both heterosexuals and homosexuals-i.e., all people who love only one gender...

* Terms are taken from Bi Any Other Name, Bisexual People Speak Out, Loraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu, Alyson Publication Inc., Boston, 1991

APPENDIX A"LANGUAGE INCLUSION"

This appendix is added to give suggestions for using more inclusive language. These ideas are written by the author but arose from the interviews conducted for this report. The suggestions thus pertain to the respondents' experiences in gay and lesbian communities and are intended to be used in gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities where inclusive language is often a very important issue.

1.An important part of language inclusion is respecting that people will use whatever language they choose to talk about themselves. It is very important to respect everyone's right to self-identify. This includes respecting everyone's experiences, respecting diversity and even inconsistencies in a group of people. No one should be asked to speak for or react for an entire group of people, everyone needs to speak out of their own experience and recognize it as such.

It means not putting labels on people, but letting them label themselves. It means not trying to tell someone who they "really are". It means that it may be time to examine the urge to label others and find out why it is so important to categorize them.

Specifically regarding bisexuals, it means not telling bisexuals to get off the fence, make up their mind, decide which they like best, or leave same-sex communities if they are dating someone of the opposite gender.

2.Use inclusive labels such as 'lesbian, gay, and bisexual' or 'gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender' where appropriate. Often, if a name does not include 'bisexual', people assume they either do not belong, or they should be closeted about their orientation there.

3.Make distinctions in groups and events. Events should be clearly labeled to make a distinction if they are for lesbians or gays, for women-oriented women(lesbian, bisexual, and others) or male-oriented men(gay, bisexual, and other), and which are for women or men.

4.Do not assume that every male couple is a 'gay couple' and every female couple is a 'lesbian couple'. They are simply a 'couple'. If it is important to note that they are two men or two women, then terms such as 'same sex' or 'same gender' couples are much more inclusive. The same is true when referring to a man and woman involved in a relationship. They are not necessarily a 'heterosexual

couple' but rather an 'opposite gender', 'opposite sex', or 'mixed gender' couple.

5. Another example of making these distinctions is to not have coming out groups for gays and for lesbians, but rather women's and men's exploring affections groups that validate people's feelings and attractions wherever they may be.

6. If groups, organizations, and communities say they include bisexuals they need to be prepared to be open to whatever issues may arise around bisexuality that may affect the group or the focus.

7. Rather than talking about being a "perfect" 6 when referring to a place on the Kinsey sexual identity continuum, use the term "absolute" 6-it is a much more inclusive term. Recognize also that there is a great deal of literature beyond Kinsey that explains and explores sexuality much more in depth

8. It is important not to see and label bisexuals as a 'fringe group' of the lesbian and gay movement. Bisexuals have been very involved in gay and lesbian politics and movements since they began, and the bisexual movement, which is emerging from the gay and lesbian movements, is not a fringe group, but rather a movement of its own with very strong ties to gay and lesbian politics.

APPENDIX B

"PROMOTING BISEXUALITY"

These are specific tips respondents gave when asked how gays and lesbians could be more responsive to their needs.

- *Talk about bisexuality more, in a positive way. Don't be afraid to admit not understanding it as long as there is a willingness to learn.
- *Don't assume that relationships with women and men are the same for bisexuals. Ask what it is like to be attracted to both men and women and how it is different dating each.
- *Research bisexuality. There is a lot being written about it today, and there are groups and people that can be contacted to find out more.
- *Write a story or play with a bisexual character that is not a villain.
- *Go to a bisexual group, seminar, or conference.
- *"Don't be afraid to admit it if you have some attraction to people who are not of your gender, this will not 'ruin' your identity and no, you won't have to turn in your gay or lesbian membership card."
- *Sponsor a bi sensitivity forum or a discussion about bisexuality in your business, group, or organization.
- *Talk to friends about bisexuality and find out what they feel about it.
- *Let people know that you are sensitive and receptive to hearing who they are.
- *Listen to bisexual people tell who they are, don't assume its just like being gay or lesbian.
- *Don't assume it's not like being gay or lesbian.
- *Don't assume anything, ask.

Bisexuality Role Play

Creator: Abigail Francis, Director of LBGT Services at MIT

**Note: We use this as a workshop activity for Bi 101 on our LBGTQA Community Retreat in the Fall. It is pared w/ Bisexuality 101 info such as a definition, Kinsey scale and Klein Grid. It may need some tweaking for your individual populations and more or less info in terms of a description and directions for the players.

Overview:

"A" is meeting their friend "B" and "C" for dinner in the Student Center. B happens to be gay, and C happens to be straight. A is planning to tell his/her friends about a new relationship with "P". P happens to be a different gender from A's previous partner. After A brings up the news B and C role the dice and play out their reactions based on the number and corresponding directions. Then P enters the scene and also roles the dice for directions.

Follow-Up Questions:

- 1) How do you think that went?
- 2) If you could re-create the scene, what would you change?
- 3) What will you take away from this activity?

Plot for the Director

Step 1: "A" is meeting their friend "B" and "C" for dinner in the Student Center.

Step 2: A tells his/her friends news about a new relationship with "P". (The news being that P is a different gender from their previous partner.)

Step 3: B and C roll the dice to determine their individual reactions to the news. If they roll...

1 = (Negative) So now you're "gay"/"straight"?

2 = (Positive/still offensive) Congrats and welcome to the other side

3 = (Neg) So you got board but you'll eventually go back

4 = (Pos) I support whoever you choose to be with as long as they're good to you

5 = (Neg) Denial – So you're experimenting but this won't last

6 = (Neutral) I look forward to meeting them

Step 4: Players role play those responses

Step 5: A tries to respond with the idea that they have always been bisexual and that P's gender doesn't reflect who A is as a person. Adding that A invited P to join them all that night at dinner.

Step 6: P enters and asks what's up. The players fill P in on the conversation including the gender of A's ex.

Step 7: P roll the dice to determine their reaction to this news. If he/she rolls...

2, 4, or 6 = P was aware of this news and has a positive/supportive reaction

1 = P was not aware of the news but has no problem w/ it

3 = P was not aware of the news and asks for time to think about it

5 = P was not aware of the news and let's A know that the relationship is over.

Building Common Ground

Instructions

- Let's all stand in one large circle.
- What can we tell about each other by looking around this circle?
- In a moment, I will make a series of statements. If what I say is true for you, please walk to the center of the circle.
- Remember it is okay to pass if you do not feel comfortable stepping into the center of the circle. Pay attention to how you feel as you decide whether to step forward.
- This is a silent activity. Please hold your comments and thoughts until the end.

Questions

1. If you were born with a female body
2. If you were born with a male body
3. If you were born with an intersex body
4. If you are the first in your family to attend a college or university
5. If you have ever celebrated Ramadan
6. If you have ever celebrated the Lunar New Year
7. If you have ever celebrated Yom Kippur
8. If you have ever dated someone of the opposite sex
9. If you have ever dated someone of the same sex
10. If your heritage is Asian or Pacific Islander
11. If you are Chicano/a or Latino/a
12. If you are white or of European descent
13. If you are black or of African descent
14. If your heritage is Native American
15. If your heritage is Middle Eastern
16. If you have a multi-ethnic heritage
17. If you have ever worn a dress
18. If your faith is Christian
19. If you grew up in the Catholic faith
20. If your faith is Buddhist
21. If your faith is Hindu
22. If your faith is Pagan
23. If you are atheist or agnostic
24. If, when growing up, your family did not always have enough money to get by
25. If you have ever had to translate English for a family member
26. If you have ever marched in a Pride Parade
27. If, growing up, you ever had to take on a major role of responsibility in your family

28. If you or a member of your family has ever struggled with drug or alcohol abuse
29. If you or a member of your family has ever been incarcerated or been in the juvenile justice system
30. If you see positive representation of people of your ethnic or racial heritage on TV or in newspapers
31. If you have a parent who is working class, or did manual labor, clerical, or service work to make a living
32. If you have a parent who has a Master's or PhD
33. If you grew up in an urban environment
34. If you grew up in the suburbs
35. If you grew up in a rural or farming community
36. If you grew up in a single-parent household
37. If you have a visible or hidden disability
38. If you were born in a country other than the United States
39. If you have ever been the victim of sexual harassment
40. If you have ever stopped yourself from showing affection, hugging or touching another person of the same gender because people might think you are gay
41. If you have ever been sick or ill to the point where you were near death
42. If you have ever been the target of derogatory statements
43. If you have ever used derogatory statements toward someone else
44. If you have ever used the word "gay" to identify yourself to others
45. If you have ever used the word "transgender" to identify yourself to others
46. If you have ever used the word "bisexual" to identify yourself to others
47. If you have ever used the word "queer" to identify yourself to others
48. If you have ever used the word "lesbian" to identify yourself to others
49. If you have ever used the word "genderqueer" to identify yourself to others
50. If you have ever used the word "straight" to identify yourself to others
51. If you have ever used the word "asexual" to identify yourself to others
52. If you prefer not to label your sexual orientation
53. If you prefer not to label your gender identity
54. If you have ever seen snow before coming to Snow Camp

Group Discussion

- Thank you for taking part so respectfully in this activity.
- Can anyone share what it felt like to move to the middle of the circle?
- Can anyone share what it felt like to watch others step to the center of the circle?
- How did it feel to be defined by a single characteristic?
- Have you ever defined someone else based on a single characteristic about them?
- Were there any times you felt a sense of pride stepping to the center of the circle?

· We are all at the Retreat because we share at least one thing in common – we all identify in one way or another with the LGBT community at UCR. In what other ways are we similar? Different?

Bye, Bi Stigma!

Celebrating Bisexuality, Pansexuality, and Fluidity

Bi Visibility Day—September 23, 2012



Sponsored by the Metro State University Gender & Sexuality Student Services Office

Metro Spotlight on Trenda Boyum-Breen

This year marks the 13th anniversary of Bi Visibility Day (or Celebrate Bisexuality Day) and Trenda Boyum-Breen, Metro's Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, has a long list of things she is celebrating.

Trenda came of age in the '80's, where androgyny described the blurring of gender and sexuality occurring during this time. In a time where "any love is good love," Trenda could date both women and men and "be honest about it." Given this context, she also never had to label her sexuality. The end of Trenda's 12-year marriage to her husband prompted a time of empowerment and her attendance at a BECAUSE conference (Bisexual Empowerment Conference: A Uniting, Supportive Experience) in the Twin Cities was a point of realization where Trenda discovered "Hey, that's me...I'm bisexual." Trenda feels that it has been important for her to live "out" rather than closeted. When other parents in her community mistakenly reference Trenda and her partner as being "lesbian moms," Trenda ensures they are aware that she identifies as bisexual. She feels that this clarity and visibility are important, stating "When it is safe, say it out, because you're creating safe spaces for others."

"A marriage is a marriage, whether you're married to a man or to a woman."

At the very top of her priorities and central to her identity is her role as a mother.

"Being a mother is most important. All the other identities mesh together to make me the woman I am." As a well-respected leader, loving partner, out-and-proud bisexual woman, and sometimes a golfer, Trenda wears many hats in her daily life. She reiterates the importance of motherhood: "My daughters have pushed me to define myself; to put my money where my mouth is." Trenda glows with pride when she speaks of her wife, Shelly, and her two college-aged daughters, Savana and Sydney. It has always been important for her to live "out" and be open about her sexuality. As a same-sex household, family life is and has been a delicate balancing act, one in which Trenda and her partner are committed to promoting an open environment for dialogue. Finding the balance of being "out" has often been accompanied by the careful consideration of their daughters' experiences of being "out" as having two moms. As parents, the question that remained central to this balancing act was: "When is it our story and when is it their story?"

Trenda integrates appreciation and reflection in her daily life. Both Trenda and Shelly write daily journal entries of three things they are thankful for, as well as saying thanks as a family before dinner. "I live my life grateful; it's almost a per-

spective in life." In addition to celebrating daily gifts, Trenda also has concerns about today's society and the implications for her family. She is concerned about the safety of LGBTQ kids and particularly the implications of the current marriage amendment. "That people would go as far to exclude rights rather than expand them" is disconcerting. Seeing her first Vote Yes sign in a neighbor's front yard had a personal impact on her initially, leaving her concerned about the negative influence these messages have for her daughters and other kids with same-sex parents. "A marriage is a marriage, whether you're married to a man or to a woman. You have bills to pay and there are still hard conversations to be had about child raising." She emphasizes the unique role she can hold as a peacemaker given that she has experienced both types of relationships and can speak to the lack of core differences between the two. "I can see the beauty in men and women. I can interpret and act as a bridge for those who struggle with homosexuality. I am grateful that I can be out and share these experiences...to make peace."

Myths About Bisexuality

Myth #1 Bisexuality is just a phase. Nobody stays bisexual.

Sexual orientation is not defined by a person's actions but rather by their feelings. Many people believe that if a bisexual is in a straight relationship, they become straight and vice versa. Bisexuals are not straight half the time and gay half the time; they are bisexual *all* the time. Even if a bisexual ends up in a monogamous, straight relationship for the rest of their life, they may remain attracted to men and women.

Myth #2 Bisexuality is only a transitional label used by those who aren't fully out of the closet.

It's true that some people who are still exploring their sexual identity temporarily label themselves "bisexual" before they come out, but many people remain attracted to men and women for their entire lives. Because some use "bisexual" as a transitional label, real bisexuals feel as though no one believes that a person can be truly bisexual. In fact, research involving bisexual women (Diamond, 2008) shows that although partners may change, a bisexual woman's capacity for attraction to men and women remains stable throughout their lives.

Myth #3 Bisexuals are promiscuous.

Bisexuals are no more likely to cheat, have one-night stands, or have multiple partners at a time than gay men, lesbian women, or heterosexuals. Although the media, certain celebrities, and pornography would have us believe that bisexuals are prone to promiscuity, many bisexuals strive for committed, monogamous, stable relationships the same way gay, lesbian, and straight couples do.

Myth #4 Bisexuals need to be with both a man and a woman in order to be happy.

As stated above, bisexuals are no more likely to cheat on their partners than anyone else is. The capacity to form attractions to two genders does not equal a need for two partners at once.

Myth #5 People only say they're bisexual to double their chances for a date.

Not only is this not true, but coming out as bisexual may have the opposite effect. Due to stereotypes and myths about bisexuality, many people don't trust bisexuals to remain monogamous and won't date them. People who do end up dating bisexuals often have the fear that their partner will suddenly and without warning leave them for someone of another gender.

Myth #6: Bisexuals caused AIDS to be transmitted to the straight population.

In reality, unsafe sexual practices and needle-sharing spread AIDS, not bisexuals. There is no research supporting the idea that bisexuals are to blame for bringing AIDS to the straight community. The reality is that HIV does not discriminate based on sexual orientation.



References:

- The Bisexual Resource Center (biresource.net)
- The American Institute of Bisexuality (bisexual.org)
- Bisexual Index (bisexualindex.org.uk)
- Diamond, Lisa M. (2008) Female Bisexuality From Adolescence to Adulthood: Results From a 10-Year Longitudinal Study. *Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 44 (No. 1). Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/releases/bisexuality108.html>

Source: <http://www.bridgew.edu/glbta/pdfs/BiMythsFacts.pdf>

Resources in the Twin Cities

- **Metropolitan State University—Gender and Sexuality Student Services Office**
 Website: [Metro State GSSSO](http://www.metrostate.edu/gssso) Facebook Group: [Metro State Gender & Sexuality Student Services](https://www.facebook.com/MetroStateGenderSexuality) Twitter: [@MetroGSSSO](https://twitter.com/MetroGSSSO)
 Office: St. Paul Campus, 700 East 7th St., Founders Hall 240C Phone: (651) 793-1544
- **The BECAUSE Conference**
 Bisexual Empowerment Conference: A Uniting, Supportive Experiences an annual event for bisexuals, queers, non-monosexuals, the bi-curious or questioning, and all allies, regardless of sexual or gender identity.
 Website: <http://www.becauseconference.org/default.html> Email: BECAUSE@becauseconference.org
- **Bisexual Organizing Project**
 A non-profit social & service organization dedicated to serving the needs of the Minnesota bisexual community and providing resources and information to the community at large.
 Website: <http://www.bisexualorganizingproject.org>

Magpie Luck: Stories of a Time Traveler By Katie Sekelsky

<http://magpieluck.com/?p=481>



This flyer is available

“It’s Not a Phase; it’s My Life”

by Maria Roumiantseva

The title of this piece comes from the new slogan for the Bisexual Resource Center. Before I cannonball forward, let’s go back and reiterate: *there is a Bisexual Resource Center*. In fact there are bi-specific resources worldwide: an American Institute of Bisexuality, webzines like The Fence, blogs like Bi-Café, a Bi-gruppen Danmark in Denmark, Bi and Pansexuals Israel, etc. We’ve even got Celebrate Bisexuality Day on either September 23 or 24, we’re still on the fence about it. But the reason for this piece has little to do with the organizations and much to do with *why* they are there. They exist as testaments to the fact that it simply isn’t easy to come out as bisexual.

Bisexuality means one can develop feelings, sexual and/or romantic, for members of more than one sex. It is recognition of fluid attraction. But bisexuality is also defined in a variety of other ways. Like the famous “eye-roll” by an attractive someone at Feathers. Or the combination hand on shoulder, eye-roll, followed by the understanding head nod and “Yea, I was bi too when I first started. You’ll be saying lesbian soon enough.” It is always *more* understood by others than the bisexual person, “It’s just a phase.” It is temporary “Bi until graduation, BUG for short if you like.” It is confusion “A man one day, a woman the next. Make a decision!” It is about sex. It is promiscuity “So you’re attracted to everyone? Do you just have threesomes all the time?” It is toying with feelings because “you bisexuals always leave.” It is being monogamy-challenged “If you marry him, you’ll want a woman eventually.” It’s playing gay but not gay enough to suffer the consequences of homophobia “This is just so you can pass. You want the straight privilege. This way they can’t call you a lesbo, a homo, queer.” It is a fractured sexuality, broken down question at a time, “How bi? 20% man, 80% woman?” It’s a fad “Just because Lindsay Lohan is one doesn’t mean you are.” Imagine that this is only the tip of the “coming out as bi” iceberg. These are questions every bisexual will eventually encounter, though they will be tailored to the specific individual, in both the heterosexual and queer community. This is what it means to come out as bi in a world of Adam and Eve or Adam and Steve/ Eve and Ana.

I strongly believe in the philosophy that it is better to question sexual identities than not. We have to question who we identify as because we are categorizing ourselves, not creating the categories. Therefore, I have used every question I’ve encountered about my bisexuality to grow by looking closely at the myths that prevail. Yet the problem with the popular-myth questions is *not* that they are being asked but the attempt, underlying each

one, to invalidate bisexuality. These questions, especially when asked by members of the LG community, seem not to be asked from a point of open-mindedness or acceptance. They seek to undermine my ability to define myself. Instead of broadening the sexuality spectrum, these questions seek to seal it, and mimic heterosexism when they do so. They are asked in a way that forces me not to explain but to defend my bisexuality. And if I can't come up with a good defense, I am boxed in the most prevalent myth of all "She's so *confused*, she doesn't even know what she is."

When considering "other" sexualities we can no longer have the mainstream discussion stop at Lesbian and Gay. Yes bisexuals are part of the alphabet soup of LGBT but Lesbian and Gay identified individuals do not contend with the same issues that bisexuals do. For example, they do not have to fear coming out because they may be ostracized by those who have "really" come out. In many ways the groups listed at the beginning of this piece have sprung up specifically because bi-specific resources, services and support have been denied. The LGBT community must realize that it is dangerous to deny bisexuality, just as it was once physically and mentally dangerous to define homosexuality as a mental disorder. Bisexuals will only feel "validated," will only feel welcome, when we can walk into an LGBT safe-space and confidently, without fear of prejudice, declare that we need dental dams and condoms.

The fact is that my bisexuality is *not* confusing to me and it can be less confusing to those who seek to question it when they begin to approach it from a point of understanding and acceptance. I recognize that for many people, because there are in fact so many different types of people, the aforementioned myths apply. They apply to me on some levels as well. The questioning of and the discussion about bisexuality is not to be stopped. But before questions continue, we must first declare that bisexuality *does* exist. There are bisexuals in your class right now. They are on staff at this university. They march at the pride parades. They choose to remain in closets. They are men who like men and women. They are women who like women and men. They are there, struggling for acceptance simply because of who they choose to love. They belong in the LGBT community and they must be made to feel as such. We can no longer spell LGBT with a silent B.

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THE BISEXUAL* UMBRELLA

* This text represents one person's opinion and is not meant to speak for anybody else.
* The umbrella only includes people who identify under it and want to be included.

BISEXUAL*

Anyone attracted (sexually, romantically or otherwise) to people of more than one gender, or to people of similar+different genders, and who identifies as bisexual*.



PANSEXUAL/OMNISEXUAL

Anyone attracted to people of all genders and sexes, or regardless of sex and gender, and who identifies as pan or omni.

POLYSEXUAL

Anyone attracted to people of many genders and sexes (but not all), and who identifies as poly.

QUEER

A non-specific identity for describing anyone diverging from heterosexuality, monogamy and vanilla sexuality. In a bi-spectrum context, it's used to convey attraction to people of more than one, or to many gender(s).

FLUID

Attraction which changes or might change over time (towards people of various genders).

HOMOFLEXIBLE/LESBIFLEXIBLE

People who are usually attracted to people of genders similar to their own, but might occasionally be attracted to people of genders different from their own.

HETEROFLEXIBLE

People who are usually attracted to people of genders different from their own, but might occasionally be attracted to people of genders similar to their own.

OTHER BI* IDENTITIES

Include: biromantic, panromantic, bisexual, pansensual, bi-dyke, byke, bisexual-lesbian, ambisexual, anthrosexual, multisexual, gender-blind, pomosexual, and many more.

BI-CURIOUS

Describes people who are usually gay, lesbian or heterosexual, and who are curious about experimenting with people of genders different from their usual preference.

Made by Shiri Eisner <http://bidyke.tumblr.com>

Biphobia: Fear or hatred of people who are bisexual, pansexual, omnisexual, or nonmonosexual. Biphobia is closely linked to transphobia & homophobia.

“Bisexuality doesn’t really exist, people are just gay or straight”

This statement denies the fluidity of sexuality and dismisses people’s experiences and definitions of self. People deserve the right to define their identities any way they wish. Honor people’s identities.

“I think everyone is really Bisexual”

People often say this as a way to acknowledge the fluidity of sexuality, however it dismisses people who identify as Bisexual and their experiences.

WORDS THAT ARE BIPHOBIC and why

“You’re too femme/butch to be Bisexual”

A person’s gender presentation does not indicate their sexual orientation. Bisexual people have a range of gender presentations, just like everyone else.

Not all Bisexual people define their identity the same way. There are many ways of defining Bisexual identity. Don’t make assumptions that you know how individuals define themselves.

“Who do you see yourself ending up with?”

This is another way of implying that someone has to “end up” gay or straight and ignores bisexuality as a valid identity. It also assumes that everyone desires to be in one long term monogamous relationship.

USING “GAY” AS AN UMBRELLA TERM FOR THE LGBT COMMUNITY LEAVES OUT MANY PEOPLE WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY.

“Bisexual people just want straight privilege.”

Bisexual people experience discrimination from both the gay and lesbian community and from the straight community. They never fully experience straight privilege, because they are not straight. Often their identities are invisible and denied.

Identity  Behavior

Behavior  Identity

A person’s identity does not determine what behaviors they engage in and vice versa.

“Bisexual people are just greedy and want to have sex with everyone.”

This stereotypes bisexual people and assumes they are all promiscuous. It creates negative attitudes towards sex and works against creating a sex positive climate. It also comes from the notion that bisexuality is not a legitimate identity but is only about behavior.