

# Am I Bisexual?



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## Determining Bisexuality

Most people in the world recognize heterosexuality. It is a part of our everyday experience from the day we are born. Even our gender is often categorized to make sure we know who the “mom” will be and who the “dad” will be. We see heterosexuality in media everywhere we turn. We can lay out an entire family tree based on the heterosexual couples in our family. In this world, heterosexuality is seen as the default or the standard. It is what is expected to be practiced, even in households that are supportive of LGBTQ+ rights. Every industry and law maker will prioritize heterosexuality and the issues surrounding it because majority of people are seen as “heterosexual”.

This is called **Heteronormativity**. Heteronormativity is the idea that heterosexuality is preferred, the default sexual orientation, or the only “normal” sexual orientation. Many people in the LGBTQ+ community at one time identified as “straight” or “heterosexual”.

However, some of us begin to feel attraction to the same gender. Every LGBTQ+ member of the community can remember a time when they felt an attraction outside of the “norm”. Some of us knew at a very early stage in our lives that our attraction was different from our peers. Others didn’t discover their sexuality until later in life after following the heteronormative pathway that had been set before them. We began to question ourselves as human beings. Is this normal? Is This right? Am I *gay*?

Homophobia becomes a symptom of heteronormativity. Homophobia is a fear, prejudice, and hatred of homosexuality (i.e., same sex or gender attraction). Many LGBTQ+ people have experienced this both externally and internally at some point in their lives. It is the reason many of us

have struggled to accept ourselves, gain the love or support of family members, and be respected by law makers.

So, what about *bisexuality*? Within the framework of heteronormativity, bisexuality is even harder for most people to fathom or understand. **Bisexuality** is a sexual orientation where a person has the potential to be sexually or romantically attracted to two or more genders. Under a system of heteronormativity, many bisexuals might be more inclined to believe they are more than likely straight. Others have often seen bisexuality as a “stepping stone” to see where their sexuality actually fits in the binary between straight and gay. This is what makes the bisexual identity very complicated. Not everyone *identifying* as bisexual is actually bisexual, but sometimes this label feels comfortable or safe for some while dangerous for others.

How can we determine bisexuality, then? After all, bisexuality can seem like homosexuality and/or heterosexuality to many people considering our experiences may overlap at times. Furthermore, when we are in relationships with the opposite gender, do we not call it a “straight relationship”? Or when we are in relationships with the same gender, do we not call it a “gay” or “lesbian” relationship? Is the bisexual label really necessary? Is it even a real sexual orientation?

The answer is very simple: Yes, the bisexual label is necessary for many people and bisexuality is real. The proof of bisexuality is in the people that are bisexual, just like other sexual orientations. The only issue is that people, sometimes ourselves included, *choose* to overlook or ignore it. We choose to dismiss it and erase it. However, the more one suppresses their bisexuality, the more it will affect the self-esteem and mental health of bisexuals.

## What is Biphobia and How Does it Affect Me?

Biphobia is fear, prejudice, and/or hatred for bisexuality or bisexual people. Along with homophobia (which focuses on the fear, prejudice, and/or hatred of homosexuality), biphobia is unique in that it focuses on people who are attracted to more than one gender. In the heteronormative framework a bisexual person can be seen as a threat to heterosexuality just on the basis that they are attracted to more than one gender.

In media, bisexuals are often portrayed as “greedy”, promiscuous, immoral, and/or untrustworthy. This often paints a negative picture about bisexual people. To add, many people identify as bisexual, even if they are not, which often shapes other’s perception of bi+ people. As a result, bisexual people are often overlooked for job opportunities, as romantic/sexual partners, and/or even when it comes to politics. Unfortunately, this form of discrimination can even happen within the LGBTQ+ community.

**Mononormativity** is a piece of the heteronormative framework, where it stigmatizes both bisexuality and/or polyamory as immoral or somehow inferior to monosexuality and/or monogamy. Even when most bisexuals are monogamous, they are still associated with polyamory (which is not a bad thing between consenting adults), and therefore they are seen as “disloyal”.

This can cause many bisexuals to develop **internalized biphobia**. This happens when you begin to hate bisexuality even as a bisexual person. Many people dealing with internalized biphobia tend to avoid using bisexuality as a label due to the stigma surrounding it. They may also target other bisexuals, afraid that these people will make them question

their sexuality further as they attempt to assimilate into the monosexual norm. Of course, this repression only leads to mental health issues.

Statistics show that Bisexual people have a higher likelihood of developing mental health issues and suffering from higher rates of depression when compared to other sexualities.

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/bisexuality-mental-health#statistics>

Bisexual women especially have lifetime rates of mood/anxiety disorders that were higher (58.7% for mood disorders, 57.8% for anxiety disorders) when compared to their straight (30.5% for mood disorders, 31.3% anxiety disorders) or lesbian counterparts (44.4% mood disorders, 40.8% anxiety disorders). According to research, there is also a higher risk of self-harm among bisexuals when compared to their gay and lesbian counterparts, as well.

Unfortunately, like with many things surrounding bisexuality, there is very little research when it comes to bisexuality when compared to some other LGBTQ+ groups. This is why it is important to acknowledge the existence of bisexuality. If we don't acknowledge our own existence, we cannot get the help that we and others need. But why is it still so hard to understand bisexuality and what is holding us back from embracing it? There are several ways that bisexuals are repressed or oppressed, making it more difficult to embrace bisexuality even as bisexuals.

### Bisexual Erasure

**Bisexual Erasure** is the tendency to ignore, remove, falsify, or re-explain evidence of bisexuality in history, academia, media, and other primary sources. Even when there is obvious evidence of bisexuality, many monosexuals tend to dismiss it or remove our accomplishments from visibility in society. The goal of this form of suppression is if you don't see

it, you can't even consider bisexuality. In the framework of heteronormativity, we are straight until proven otherwise, by which case you will be seen as gay or lesbian in accordance with heteronormative and mono-normative standards. There is a tendency to see-saw between straight to gay people when speaking about sexuality. When we see a couple that looks "queer" we assume everyone in that relationship is gay. When we see a relationship that looks "straight" we assume everyone in that relationship is heterosexual. There is even a tendency to assume that every gender expression of femininity from a man is a sign of homosexuality or masculinity expressed from a woman is a sign of lesbianism. We equally assume that people are straight if they appear more "gender conforming".

Yet, why is it that we never ask if one of two partners is bisexual? Many have argued that it is because we can't see bisexuality the way we can straight and gay orientations. But, honestly, can we actually see any sexual orientation? It's no secret that many people who were gay/lesbian were closeted for many years and many of them "passed" in society as straight people. Furthermore, many straight people have often played around with their gender expression for the sake of entertainment or liberation even while being attracted mostly to the opposite gender. While some aspects of the way we express gender can be indications that we are LGBTQ+, it is not the main way to determine sexuality.

Bisexual Erasure can also happen within the LGBTQ+ community. Despite the fact that majority of people in the LGBTQ+ community are bisexual, we are often treated as insignificant. Many pride events often forget to include bisexuality or they often depict bisexuality through a "gay" or "lesbian" lens without actually consulting bisexuals. Some in the LGBTQ+ community may be dismissive of bisexual issues or prioritize gay/lesbian rights over bisexual rights. We may even be contributors to

our own erasure in media, history, and the news, ignoring bisexuality in characters or historical figures. This is not only damaging but disrespectful to bisexuals who have worked just as hard to dismantle heteronormativity. The truth is that not everyone who is “queer” or LGBTQ+ is simply gay or lesbian. They could very well be bisexual.

We must dismantle the idea of a “default” sexuality. Recognizing that there is no standard sexuality and that there is no physical way to recognize any sexuality helps us eliminate internal or external prejudices of various sexualities. Furthermore, it can help us better determine the best representation for ourselves in media, research, and in news sources. Breaking the monolithic barrier of heteronormativity can help you sort through your sexuality in a way that is more comfortable.

### Monosexism

Christian V. Dolan, a scholar on monosexism, describes monosexism this way: “A form of oppression that promotes exclusive heterosexual, lesbian, or gay male behaviors as the only legitimate concepts of sexual orientation (Rust, 2000a).” While many people often refer to biphobia as a means of describing prejudice towards bisexual people, monosexism takes this a step further. Monosexism is a more active approach to suppressing bisexuality and oppressing bisexual people. It comes in the form of violence and harmful laws made to oppress or suppress bisexuals or bisexuality. Even within the LGBTQ+ community it can come in the form of exclusion of bisexuals from pride events, activities, or communities especially if they are dating someone of a different gender. In a monosexist society bisexuality is often depicted as immoral and therefore in need of eradication. This can lead to monosexism becoming an internal struggle as well as external where we feel bisexuality is something we must “fight”. Internalized biphobia often causes you to

hate who or what you are. Monosexism encourages you to suppress who you are. Keep in mind that bisexuality is no more moral or immoral than any other sexuality. Just like anybody else, you cannot help the way you feel no more than a straight, gay, or lesbian person can. Bisexuality is natural. It is human. It is valid. It is real.

### The Effects of Compulsory Heterosexuality on Bisexual Women

Compulsory Heterosexuality is the theory that heterosexuality is assumed and enforced upon women by a patriarchal and heteronormative society. Some women have the misconception that only lesbians experience compulsory Heterosexuality (Comphet). But if that is the case that means that other types of women aren't subjected to patriarchy and no other groups of women with other sexual identities can be victims of heteronormativity. The theory was popularized by Adrienne Rich who is respected among lesbians and other queer women alike. Despite being a lesbian herself, however, she didn't intend for this theory to just be for out and proud lesbians. It was a term intended for all women; so that all women could be given a chance to explore their sexuality freely without the restraints of compulsory heterosexuality.

Robyn Ochs, a renowned bisexual activist, is an example of someone who explains how Adrienne Rich's theory helped her understand the effects of compulsory heterosexuality and guided her in coming to terms with her bisexuality. She stated "It was empowering to realize that men as romantic partners were optional, not required." Once we break the chains of compulsory heterosexuality, we no longer have to worry about feeling forced to choose a side as far as gender. In fact, I'd argue that compulsory heterosexuality holds us back from not just exploring our relationships with women but also other genders as well.



Yet, often times as bi women it may be even more confusing to recognize when we are experiencing comphet vs attraction; it's probably more confusing for us than lesbians and asexuals because we actually do experience sexual or romantic attraction to men. However, what is important to note is the following:

- A.) Bisexual women are not attracted to all men. They do have standards.
- B.) Bisexual women are not obligated to date a man just because they are physically/romantically attracted to a man nor should they be obligated to date a man that is physically attracted to them.

Comphet will tell you otherwise. Comphet will tell you that you should just date any man giving you attention just because he is being "nice". Comphet will tell you to date a man just because you think he is sexually attractive, disregarding other things like compatibility or romantic attraction. The same can be said if you are only romantically attracted to him; comphet will encourage you to engage sexually with a man you do not find sexually attractive. Comphet will tell you that only men should be preferred or chosen as partners. Comphet will tell you that in order to validate your attraction to men you have to actually date them. The idea here is that as ciswomen, transwomen, and non-binary people we must accept what is given to us by cis men rather than have our own agency. This is especially so when you are bisexual. Our sexuality is both praised by men, but fetishized and weaponized against us. Statistics show that bisexual women have a higher chance of experiencing domestic violence from partners.

[https://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS\\_Report2010-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS_Report2010-a.pdf).

We can like women, but only if a man is present. We can like women, but only if men are entertained by it. We can only like women when it benefits men. If we don't cater to men's fantasies, then we are considered lesser than. This is all a part of the comphet framework and as bisexual women it is just as important for us to recognize it as it is for lesbians and asexual women.

A lot of discourse surrounding women's sexuality tends to lean in favor of straight women or lesbians. It's becoming more acceptable for women of other marginalized groups to have their own research and spaces where they can discuss their sexuality and experiences, yet often times bisexuality is ignored in such topics regarding women's sexuality. From fandoms, to media, even in history, bisexual women are often depicted as either lesbians or straight, erased or ignored from discussion about sexuality. This makes it hard to differentiate our experiences from the monosexual framework and makes it harder for us to combat comphet as bisexual women or women-aligned people. Speaking of monosexuality, monosexuality is also encouraged through the comphet framework. Compheet prevents you from exploring freely and even forces one to be devoted or monogamous only to men. Polyamory is only good if it is to benefit men in the compheet framework, which means both of the partners must be attractive to the male partner. Compheet forces everything we do to be for the maintenance of a heterosexual relationship rather than for our benefit or pleasure.

Unfortunately, just like lesbians and asexual people, we may not recognize the signs that we are experiencing compheet right away. While there is some overlap between the way lesbians and asexuals experience compheet, there are unique differences in the way a bisexual woman or women-aligned person may experience compheet. Bisexual women's experiences often involve catering to only one side of their attraction, and repressing the other in many cases. There is a lack of agency or at

least a feeling that you are not in control of the outcomes of the relationship. Furthermore, it comes in the form of limiting self-expression for the sake of maintaining heteronormative values.

Here are a few signs you may be experiencing compnet as a bisexual woman or woman-aligned person.

- “I am attracted to men and/or enjoy sex with them, but I somehow feel uneasy about staying in a long-term relationship with them. “

While lesbians experiencing compnet might find themselves trying to date men with apprehension, the difference is that they are not in any way romantically or sexually attracted to men. Whereas with bisexual women and women-aligned people they do have an attraction to men but many things could make them feel apprehension or discomfort in even the best relationships. For example, internalized biphobia can lead to an internal sense of guilt for also being attracted to women or a fear of dissatisfaction in long term relationships because you are bisexual. This can come from an unreconciled relationship with one's bisexuality and external biphobia around you. Compnet usually encourages us to accept men as partners (or to even accept men's desire of us), but it often causes us to push aside our own attractions especially to other genders. If we don't dismantle the stronghold of compnet, a lack of healthy exploration of one's sexuality could cause serious problems to the self-esteem and confidence. It can cause a dissatisfaction in our relationships too, no matter how great our partner is.

- “I have an excessive need to date men or have sex with men, even if I'm not attracted to all of them.”

This can come from two things; either a need to repress an attraction to other genders or to hide the fact that you are attracted to other genders from the outside world. Think back to when you had your first crush on someone you perceived as a girl. You probably felt a whirl of feelings that you've probably never felt before. However, living in a monosexist and heteronormative society makes you think these feelings are unnatural. So, you decide maybe you need a boyfriend. You finally go out with a boy, whom you aren't interested in romantically, but wanted to affirm your heterosexuality to feel more "normal". Sure, there were other boys in the past that you were *genuinely* attracted to. However, this boy was not your type. Yet you convince yourself he likes you and is kind enough for you to date. You feel compelled to date him, especially to repress your newfound attraction to someone of a different gender. When you find yourself dating a man just to repress your interest in women that is when you know that comphet is involved. When your attraction to a person is natural that is when you know comphet has nothing to do with it. Keep in mind that comphet cannot force you to be attracted to someone nor can it change your sexuality. Compheet can't affect things that are natural. What it can do is make you force yourself to do things you don't want to do to fit the norm and encourage you to repress your urges to uphold a sense of "normalcy" in a heteronormative society.

- "I constantly dismiss some of my feelings for girls or other genders as admiration."

Both lesbians and bisexual women alike experience this under the compheet framework. However, when you are bisexual sometimes it's even harder to know because you are attracted to men and your feelings for the men around us can sometimes feel different than for other

genders. You might even compare your feelings for men and women and decide that because we don't feel the same way about women that we do men that we can't possibly be sexually or romantically attracted to women. But this is a part of the comphet framework. The reality is that it makes us default to believe that how we feel about men is how all romantic relationships SHOULD feel and how we feel about women or other genders will always be seen as unnatural if it is not like it is with men. This is what leads us to repressing our urges to date people of other genders and/or dismissing our attraction as admiration.

Now don't get me wrong, girls do admire other girls and women outside of romance/sexual desire. Sometimes, this is also hard to believe because society tells us that femininity is not something we should admire outside of sexuality and that women are only “sex objects”. Yet, admiration of a woman’s accomplishments, apparel, and/or talents is just as important. Comphet blurs the lines between admiration and sexuality because of what our roles are expected to be in society.

But when your attraction starts to make you think about a woman in a more intimate way (such as kissing, holding hands, sexual fantasies, etc). That isn't just admiration. But internalized comphet can make you dismissive of even those type of feelings. In fact, I'd even go on to say that because society dismisses bisexual attraction to women, you may be even more so be subjected to comphet. Which brings me to another sign of internalized comphet.

- “I Constantly pivot between monosexual labels to appease societal norms.”

This is a unique form of comphet that bisexual women will experience. Part of the comphet framework is encouraging monosexuality. You see,

monosexuality is seen as safer and more worthy of respect. It makes men especially feel like they can control outcomes in a relationship which is why monosexuality is encouraged by society. Sure, one could argue that men do like bisexual women because men have a natural interest in seeing two women together as a sexual fantasy. However, are bisexual women respected by these types of men? Many times, the moment a woman or woman-aligned person comes out as bi+ some men in the relationship immediately sexualize that person, reducing them from being seen as a significant other, wife or girlfriend, to being shared for sexual pleasure of the man. Bisexual women get treated with less respect than their straight counterparts in relationships. Again, higher rates of domestic abuse happen among bi+ women.

Furthermore, men have an expectation that bisexual women should cater their sexuality to his needs. This is because in patriarchy men are seen as a prize or the better option for bisexual women. Some men don't believe they can ever be inferior to a woman and that bisexual women will choose a man in the end. They ultimately do not respect bi+ women's attraction to women on the basis that they are bisexual, allowing them to take advantage of bisexual women's attractions.

You may decide you only want to date straight men because society enforces that this is what women should do. Not only does it push you to avoid dating women but it also prevents you from seeing even bisexual men as a viable option, even though you yourself are bisexual. This is a part of the comphet framework as well. This leads to internalized biphobia where you gain an unfounded fear of men who are bisexual, as if straight men are "superior". Society wants to preserve heterosexuality so that women can be accessible to straight cismen when they need them, which is why discouraging your interest in bi+ men only encourages comphet's control over women's sexuality.

To combat comphet, some bisexual women might also decide that it's better to identify as lesbian when dating a woman. This might seem like a great fight against comphet systems, but to say this is to say that bisexual women do not contribute to dismantling patriarchal norms or heteronormativity. Bierasure helps encourage comphet, because the goal is for everyone to perform heterosexuality. The system relies on us to disown our bisexuality because it is seen as too unstable for comphet to take place and makes stabilizing a straight relationship difficult. In order for comphet to work, the people benefitting have to know that their partners will be loyal to them and give them what they desire. But Bi+ people have options outside of gender binaries; this is a threat to comphet. Many men who rely on patriarchy don't want to have to "compete" against women for women; this makes them feel uneasy because patriarchy relies on the idea that women are inferior to men in every way. Believe it or not, bisexuality helps in dismantling comphet just as much as homosexuality as a result especially if we embrace ourselves for who we are.

Of course, some bisexual women may label themselves lesbian to avoid unwanted advances or harassment. First off, I don't condone judging a woman for doing what she has to do in the moment especially if she is experiencing harassment. But this actually makes your identification be based on how men feel about you, not how you feel about yourself and others. Besides, labeling yourself a lesbian will not stop some men from harassing you nor trying to be intimate with you. The problem is not the label; it's the patriarchal idea that men deserve you and your body no matter what. Furthermore, if this is your reason for labeling yourself lesbian over bisexual it's as if you are saying that only lesbians are deserving of not being harassed and only their attractions should be respected. No woman should be treated this way regardless of their

sexual orientation, but under the comphet framework bisexuality is not important or deserving of respect so you might be inclined to believe the same if you internalize this framework.

- “I find myself playing up gender roles in relationships with men, but feeling discomfort.”

This is not to say that all women that have a discomfort with these gender roles are bisexual. Some of them are transgender. Some of them are lesbian. Some of them are straight. However, part of the confusion is recognizing where the discomfort is coming from. In many cases the discomfort could be because your reasons for dating or being attracted to a gender is not necessarily based on the heteronormative, patriarchal values of men and men’s place in the world. Unfortunately, especially if you are dating straight men, it is no secret that when you get married many of them expect you to be the supportive one, the cook, the cleaner, the caregiver, giver of sexual satisfaction (especially in submissive positions), and the one giving birth while they work to provide monetarily. While many straight women are fine with this (and many are actually interested in men for this reason) as a bisexual woman you may find these roles stifling, limiting, and troublesome. As soon as you date a man you fall into the routine of being housewife and mother, sometimes without thought, only to feel a sense of dissatisfaction. This is again apart of the comphet framework. Being in the traditional role set for women is important in upholding heteronormativity. If you were to assume the role of a man, then that would slight his ego and how he perceives his sexuality, pushing us to think about him before ourselves.

This may also play a role in how you dress. You may find yourself dressing more "lady-like" for men, even when you wouldn't dress this way normally or for the women you are attracted to. This is a part of the



comphet framework as well. Comphet keeps men's heterosexuality intact so they don't have to question their role in society or their own sexuality by dating a more “masculine” woman.

While compulsory heterosexuality can seem like an endless battle, the reality is that once you become aware of the stronghold of comphet you can release the urge to suppress your feelings easier and begin the process of acceptance.

However, we must be careful of using comphet theory to discredit or erase real bisexual feelings. This can only lead to discrimination and invalidation of bisexual people who actually are attracted to men. Not every attraction to men is compulsory heterosexuality. It's okay to be attracted to men. Not all men are seeking to oppress women. Some men that you date may be bisexual themselves, seeking to also dismantle the hold of heteronormativity and can make great allies. This is why recognizing the difference between something being “forced” vs something happening naturally is important to discuss.

## Characteristics and Behaviors of Bisexuality

Although sexuality is not always visible, there can be behavioral cues or characteristics that one could look for if attempting to determine if they are indeed bisexual. As discussed before, bisexuality is the potential to be attracted to two or more genders romantically and/or sexually. Most of the cues will be in the way you see all genders and how that relates to your physical sensations.

For example, we as human beings have the ability to be aesthetically attracted to someone without desiring anything romantic or sexual. However, as a bisexual person it can be difficult sometimes to know who

you are aesthetically attracted to versus sexual attraction, and/or whether or not gender plays a role in the attraction to people at all.

Here are some questions that could be helpful in navigating aesthetic attraction vs sexuality:

- A. Am I attracted to this person because I want to be like them (dress like them, sing like them, speak like them, etc) or am I attracted to them because I can see myself enjoying intimacy with them (holding hands, kissing, having sex, etc)?
- B. Is a relationship with this person more valuable when I see it as a friendship or could I see this relationship being more intimate?
- C. Does my body react every time I am around them (genital reaction along with excitement)? Or do I simply feel happy to see them and excited for whatever they are going to do next (excitement but no genital reaction)?
- D. If this person were to spend time with someone else, would I be jealous because I want my admirer's validation/approval and/or to feel included or would I be jealous because I want their physical affection and attraction to me?
- E. Do I like their attention because I like the general feeling of admiration or do I like their attention because I find them to be very attractive to look at?

Feelings such as jealousy, excitement, and even love can sometimes blur our understanding of sexual attraction. However, keep in mind that it is not how you feel that is important but *why* you feel this way. Aesthetic attraction or admiration involves desiring what someone has in order to improve yourself while sexual/romantic attraction involves desiring the *person* to be yours.

Also, keep in mind that as a bisexual person you are not going to be attracted to *everybody*, contrary to what many people believe about

bisexuals. Bisexual people have standards like people of other sexual orientations. There will be some we see as only friends and others we are willing to be more intimate with. However, even if a bisexual person is sexually attracted to a person, it does not mean they have to date that person. We cannot control who we are sexually attracted to, but we can control who we date. You never have to date anyone if you don't want to and it doesn't make you less bisexual if you choose not to date at all. After all, sexuality is not determined by who you choose to date but rather who you are attracted to.

There are some early signs that can help you sort out whether you are bisexual as well. The following list are some common characteristics or behavior patterns of bisexuals before coming out. Please note that these characteristics alone cannot determine which identity you choose to describe yourself. Only YOU can do that. However, this list can possibly help guide you in mapping out your identity. Perhaps you can relate to some of these feelings and see if all or some of them have a connection.

- You have an easy time listing your "girl" crushes and "boy" crushes.
- You know you're attracted to men/men-aligned people, but have intense admiration for your teachers, celebrities, or friends who are women or women-aligned people. Or you know you're attracted to women/women-aligned people but have an intense admiration for your teachers, celebrities, or friends who are "men" or men-aligned people". This "admiration" usually goes beyond wanting to dress like them or do the things they do. You want to be attractive to them, alone with them, or gain their exclusive attention. You may even be jealous of their significant other or life-long partner.

- You have sexual fantasies about having sex with boys or boy-aligned people and girls or girl-aligned people. You may even have a hard time recognizing the gender of the person in your fantasy.
- You are attracted to men, but you have a strong preference for feminine boys or androgynous men. Or you are attracted to women, but have a strong preference for masculine girls or androgynous women. You may even like the idea of referring to them in gender neutral or opposite pronouns such as "mommy" or "daddy" in romantic or sexual roleplay. You might like the idea of your androgynous partner being your wife and/or husband, despite their gender. (This is less about moral ethics on trans identity and more about interest coupled with a lack of bisexual comfortability).
- You are attracted to mostly men/women but when thinking about it, you would still date your significant other if they were to come out as transgender even if you discover that their gender is the same or opposite your own.
- Your romantic partners/sexual partners tend to come out as transgender (whether binary or nonbinary). This usually happens more often to the point it starts to feel like more than a coincidence.
- You might prefer trans people as partners especially if they are pre-op (before any sex operations). This is not necessarily about moral ethics on trans identity but rather about you being interested in other genders but uncomfortable with your own bisexuality.
- You are attracted to someone but are apprehensive about dating or having a relationship with that person, afraid you are or would be missing out on something. This is not to say that other factors couldn't stop you from dating an individual, but if you are afraid of

dating someone because you're afraid of missing out on something romantically/or sexually you could be ignoring signs of bisexuality.

- You tend to constantly pivot from sexuality to sexuality or you are constantly going through phases of being attracted to "boys" for a certain period of time but then being attracted to "girls" for a certain period of time. The intervals between your attractions could last between a few days to a few years. (Many would call this a bi-cycle).
- You tend to be uncomfortable with being in traditional gender roles in "straight" relationships. (This could vary depending on gender identity).
- You prefer to dress androgynously (not too feminine, not too masculine)
- You enjoy sexual or romantic attention from people of various genders. You might even seek such attention from men or men-aligned people as well as women or women-aligned people. (Flirting, hugging, etc).
- You enjoy the idea of having sex with people of various genders, even if you are not interested in dating various genders romantically. Or you may be interested in dating various genders romantically, even if not interested sexually.
- You have a constant curiosity about what it is like to have sex with "the other gender". (Some might call this bi-curious). You may even fantasize about it a little too often.
- You are open to having threesomes with your partner involving someone of another gender.
- You are usually attracted to men or men-aligned people, but you get turned on by two women kissing or being intimate in some way. Or you are usually attracted to women or women-aligned

people, but you get turned on by two men kissing or being intimate in some way.

- You have had crushes on your "boy" and "girl" friends throughout your life
- You are not turned off by the idea of someone mistaking you of dating your friends even if they are the same or opposite gender.
- You tend to be really affectionate with people of various genders. For example, you may enjoy being affectionate with someone of a different gender but you find yourself holding hands, cuddling, and even kissing with someone of the same gender. The same could apply if normally you enjoy being affectionate with the same gender, but find yourself doing some of the same things with someone of another gender.
- When you are intoxicated, you are even more flirty with people of various other genders (This is for those who drink or get high in some capacity)
- You feel lonely or dissatisfied even in an otherwise great long-term relationship (whether with a boy or a girl). This can be caused by not addressing your bisexual feelings inside.
- You identify as straight/gay/lesbian, but have had more "crushes" on "the other gender" compared to the crushes you have had on the opposite/same gender. (It is ok to have a preference, but if you are more attracted to people outside of what is typical of your identity, it is sometimes a sign of bisexuality).
- You may identify as gay/lesbian and dismiss all attractions to men/women as "comphet" or "heteronormativity". Some girls do experience comphet only to realize they are not attracted to men. But remember, comphet does not make you sexually attracted to men. It encourages you to force yourself to do other than what is natural to you. If you find yourself naturally attracted to men

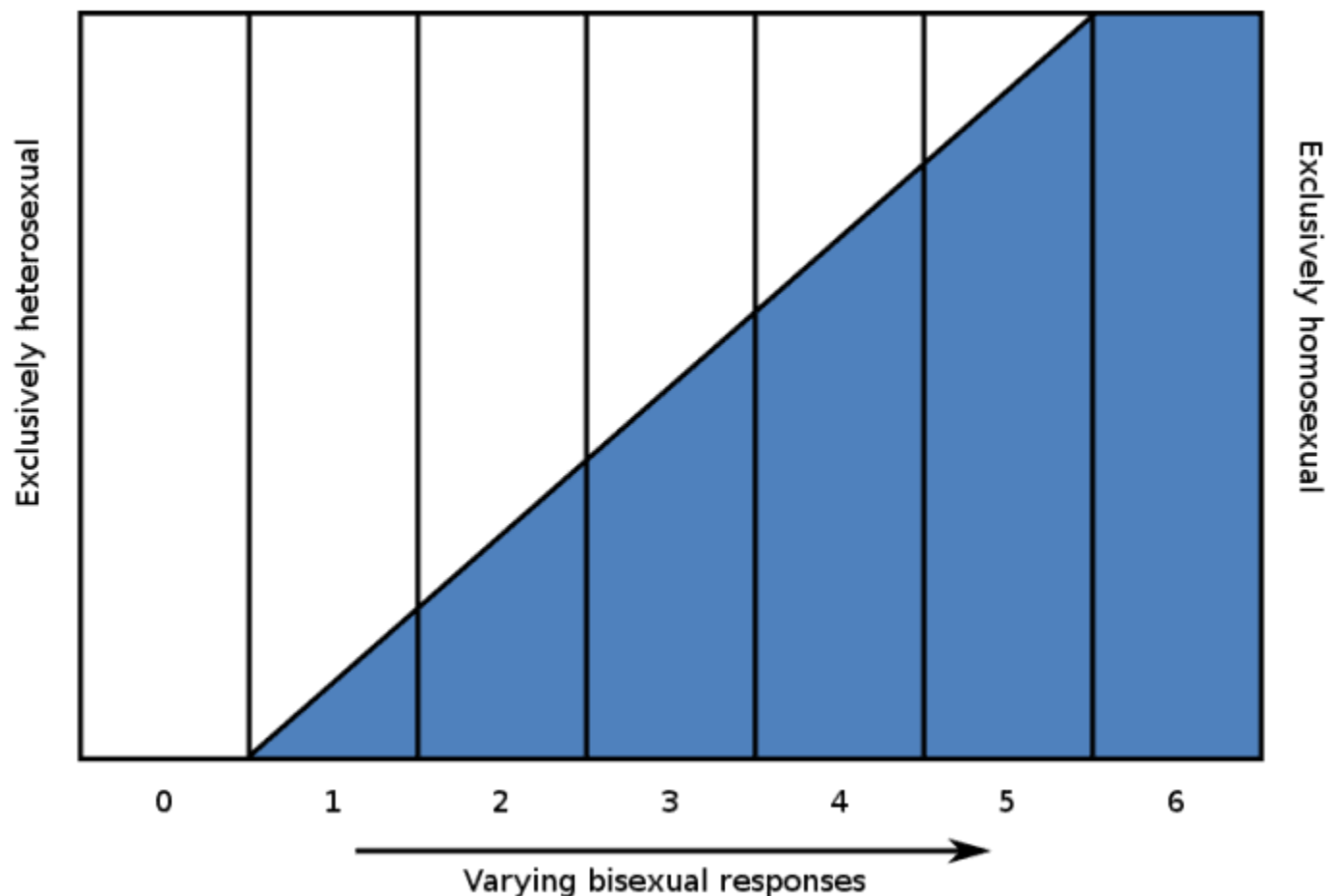
without forcing yourself or without pressure from outsiders, then this could be a sign that your sexuality is more fluid rather than compartmentalized. The same for gay men experiencing heteronormativity. Also, keep in mind that bisexual women also experience compartmentalization and bisexual men experience heteronormativity.

- You identified as lesbian/straight, but you enjoy sex most when you are penetrated and you may have possibly imagined the person penetrating you in a more masculine light. Or you identified as straight/gay, but you enjoy sex most when you are being sucked, possibly imagining the person doing it to be in a more feminine light.
- You prefer dating bisexuals (possibly because your sexuality is a little more fluid and you want to be with someone who will not judge you for it).
- You have celebrity crushes of the opposite and/or same gender that, in thought, you would actually have sex with if given the opportunity.

Bisexuality exists on a spectrum. Bisexual activist Robyn Ochs describes bisexuality this way: “I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge that I have in myself the potential to be attracted-romantically and/or sexually-to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree.” This is the most accepted description of bisexuality among people in the bisexual community. You don’t have to like men, women, or nonbinary people in the same way. It is actually okay to have a preference in genders. It is also okay to have different standards, with higher standards for one gender over another. Our experiences with the genders will always vary due to the fact that we live in a gendered society.

So, if you are more attracted to women than men or men more than women, this is okay. If you like nonbinary people more, this is also okay. It doesn't make you less bisexual in any way.

Dr. Alfred Kinsey, whose research focused on sexuality, created a scale known as the "Kinsey Scale" to help understand sexual fluidity. This scale, which sets exclusively heterosexual to 0 and exclusively homosexual to 6, shows that sexuality can exist at varying degrees and doesn't always have to be 50/50 to be bisexual.



Many bisexuals have discovered their sexuality through the scale as it has helped them recognize their attraction without feeling boxed into the binary.



## What If I Don't Want to Date a Certain Gender?

Some people decide that even though they are attracted to two genders or more, they simply do not want to date someone of a certain gender for the rest of their lives. Some people may even wonder if it is important to use the bisexual label to describe themselves if they are only willing to date one gender.

To start, our sexuality is valid whether we choose to date only one, two or more genders, as well as if we choose to date *none* of the genders. For example, most aromantics (people who do not experience romantic attraction) may not have any interest in dating anyone but some of them may still experience sexual attraction. That doesn't make their bisexuality invalid. To add, there are many bisexuals who were married before coming out and more than likely will never date another gender besides the one they are with. It doesn't make them any less bisexual. Sexuality is not often determined by who we are dating or even married to but rather our potential to be attracted to certain genders.

Of course, I think it is valid to label yourself in accordance with what feels comfortable to you. If you feel defining yourself as straight, lesbian, or gay is the most accurate way to describe your sexual and romantic relationships with certain genders, then do what you must do. Who am I or anyone to dictate how you label yourself?

However, there are some bisexuals who choose to date only one gender because of heteronormativity, internalized biphobia, or even because of transphobia. The important thing is to ask yourself why you only want to date one gender or gender binary. Nonbinary people, for example, can fall anywhere on the spectrum of gender. Even if you did decide to label yourself straight/lesbian/gay nonbinary people could still be valid

options for you. But if transphobia leads you to “other” these types of people because you are afraid of having to question your sexuality or afraid of potentially being bisexual (which isn’t necessarily true), this could be dangerous reasons for labeling yourself monosexually. Another important question to ask would be why you are not comfortable identifying as bisexual. Is it because you don’t feel it describes you and your attractions to people of various genders? This type of reason is natural. Or is it because you do not like the idea of being bisexual? Or is it that you don’t want to make other people think poorly of you? These reasons are more societal.

There are some people that avoid dating certain genders due to trauma or abuse. It is understandable that when dealing with trauma it feels better to avoid the gender of those that abused you or took advantage of you in some way. What you must know is that even if you choose to avoid dating a certain gender due to trauma associated with that gender, you could still be bisexual. Sexual trauma often has a way of shaping our perception of sexuality. How you choose to handle this trauma is for you to decide, not anyone else. Some may decide that they do not want to label themselves bisexual as a result even if they have potential to be attracted to other genders; Others may decide that embracing and reclaiming their sexuality through bisexuality is healing for them.

Keep in mind that the label you choose should have no bearing on whether or not you get treated with respect from men or women. The label you have does not deter people from harassing you or harming you. There is no right or wrong way to deal with trauma. There are options and bisexuality can be a label that is just as empowering and healing as with any other label.

## What If I Am Only Romantically Attracted?

There are some people that may not experience sexual attraction to any gender but may experience romantic attraction to two or more genders. Many asexuals may experience these types of feelings. Some of these people may experience sexual attraction to one gender while experiencing romantic attraction to two or more genders. This is often described as **biromantic** attraction. The difference between romantic love and sex can sometimes be hard to break down because we affiliate love and sex as the same thing. However, while some need sex to maintain romantic attraction, others do not.

Romantic attraction is an attraction that makes others want romantic contact with another person or persons. This involves holding hands, cuddling, kissing, spending more time with them than friends, etc.

Crystal Raypole, a mental health writer and editor for GoodTherapy, reviewed some signs that you may be romantically attracted to someone.

- Your thoughts return to them regularly

You want to see them every day, worry about their worries, and you talk about them to every person you know.

- You feel safe with them

You loosen all tensions when around them and share most all your vulnerable sides with them).

- Life feels more exciting

Time seems to fly by when you're together, and seem like forever when you're apart. You may even end up having a renewed interest in life and feel a rush.

- You want to spend a lot of time together

You crave their attention and/or affection. You even want to spend time with them no matter their mood.

- You feel a little jealous of the people in their life

You particularly feel jealous of people your romantic love interest fixates on or someone they spend time with that is attractive, afraid they'll be a threat to your romantic love or relationship.

If you feel this way or have ever felt this way when you were around people who were men, women, and nonbinary, then it is possible that you are indeed biromantic.

What if you *only* experience sexual attraction to a certain gender while you *only* experience romantic attraction to another gender? There are other fluid identities one can use such as homoromantic heterosexual or heteroromantic homosexual. There are also demisexual people who may only experience attraction to people they have a deep emotional bond with. Many demisexual people can also be biromantic if they have the potential to be attracted to two or more genders. The Bi+ umbrella is vast and filled with people who have potential to love and be attracted in all sorts of ways to all sorts of genders. Furthermore, it is possible for bisexuality to overlap with other sexual and romantic identities.

## What If I'm Only Attracted to Fictional Characters/Celebrities?

The *Am I A Lesbian?* masterdoc by Angeli Luz makes a point to mention that your attraction to fictional characters or celebrities wouldn't necessarily mean you can't be a lesbian. The same can be said of straight

women who are only attracted to women who are celebrities/fictional characters: they can still be straight. As discussed before, there are many different types of attractions. We can admire people that we may not be sexually attracted to for whatever reason (we like the way they dress, the way they speak, the way they sing or dance, etc). We can often confuse wanting to be like someone with actually wanting to be intimate or romantic with them. Some lesbians see their attractions to someone of the opposite gender as a “comphet” crush, especially if they feel the attraction to men was only on the basis of wanting to fit in and feel normal in a heteronormative society that encourages girls to like and cater to boys. Even bisexuals can experience this sort of “attraction” at some point in their lives. It is also possible to be attracted to celebrities/fictional characters if you want to be their friend because they seem kind, interesting, or fun.

However, when your attractions to fictional characters or celebrities involve feeling a sexual sensation (including consistent fantasies of having sex with them) or even a romantic sensation (wanting to kiss, cuddle, hold hands, etc), perhaps it wouldn't hurt to also consider if you are bisexual or biromantic. Your choice not to date a certain gender and only explore your sexual fantasies through celebrities/fictional characters wouldn't make you any less bisexual. Many aromantic people are not interested in dating anyone but they may explore their sexuality through fictional characters/celebrities. There are also people that may be bisexual but are homoromantic or heteroromantic, preferring to mostly date people who are closest to the same/opposite gender they are. They might be attracted to celebrities/fictional characters that they may not want to engage sexually with, but may see romantic interest in them.

Whether you want to date these celebrities/fictional characters doesn't have to determine how you see your sexuality. After all, most all people

are attracted to celebrities/fictional people because these people create a fantasy that we often feel we cannot access. Your sexuality can only be determined by you. If you feel lesbian/gay/straight describes your experience with fictional characters or celebrities of a different aligned gender, this is okay as well. Just know that bisexuality is also an option if you feel your attraction to these fictional characters/celebrities of two or more genders is intense enough to sexually or romantically arouse you.

Here are some key significant differences observed when examining aesthetic attraction vs sexual attraction in celebrities and/or fictional celebrities.

#### Aesthetic Attraction or Admiration

- You are sexually attracted to celebrities/fictional characters of a certain gender but when thinking of them sexually often imagine these celebrities or fictional characters as the gender you are most attracted to.
- You may experience mild sexual attraction to celebrities or fictional characters of a certain gender but are only attracted to them when fully clothed.
- You are attracted to celebrities or fictional characters of the same/opposite gender but do not experience sexual sensations (genital reactions coupled with excitement and sexual fantasies).
- You might believe you are sexually attracted to celebrities or fictional characters of a certain gender but when thinking of meeting them you start to feel differently.
- You may attempt to dress like or imitate the celebrities/fictional characters you are attracted to.

#### Sexual Attraction

- You are sexually attracted to celebrities/fictional characters even when thinking about their gender.
- You are attracted to celebrities/fictional characters of a certain gender and you feel physical bodily sensations (genital arousal coupled with excitement and sexual fantasies) either when you see them or the mention of them.
- You enjoy observing your favorite celebrities/fictional characters either half-naked or fully naked.
- You are attracted to celebrities/fictional characters and the thought of meeting these celebrities/fictional characters turns you on sexually or romantically.
- You have no strong interest in dressing or behaving like these celebrities/fictional characters and are more concerned as to what the celebrities'/fictional character's "type" is and whether or not you are compatible with them.

These observations may not necessarily be true of every monosexual or bisexual that is attracted to celebrities or fictional characters. The purpose in listing these observations is to help you understand that there are various ways to experience attraction to people that are unattainable and that some of those attractions can be helpful in you discover your sexuality.

## What Does It Mean to Be Pansexual?



There are some people with fluid sexualities who prefer to describe themselves as **pansexual**. Pansexuality means the ability to be sexually attracted to someone *regardless* of gender. Pansexuality also falls under the bi+ umbrella, but the key difference between bisexuality and pansexuality is gender can play a role in some bisexual people's attraction. Bisexuals vary in the sense that some may be attracted to all genders while others may not. While with pansexuals they typically like all genders and/or some of them do not factor in gender at all when thinking about attraction.

In accordance with their definitions, all pansexuals can be classified as bisexual, but not all bisexuals are pansexuals. The common comparison used to help understand these two sexualities is to think of them like you would a rectangle and a square. A square is considered a rectangle because it has interior angles 90 degrees each, opposite sides that are parallel, and opposite sides that are equal. However, while squares can be rectangles, rectangles cannot be squares because most squares have four equal sides while rectangles do not. Think of pansexuals as squares and bisexuals as rectangles in a sense that some bisexuals are not attracted to all genders while pansexuals usually are attracted to all genders or are attracted regardless of the gender.

Many people who are agender might decide to label themselves as pansexual if they do not believe gender exists for them. Of course, many agender people might actually be bisexual, lesbian, gay, or even straight



in a sense that their gender may exist more fluidly on the spectrum and therefore their sexualities will as well.

There are other differences between pansexuals and bisexuals as well and this has to do with their common experiences or discoveries of their attraction. The following is a list of common experiences pansexuals have when discovering their attractions versus bisexuals. Keep in mind that some experiences may overlap or vary. This list is simply to help examine how some of the experiences that pansexuals and bisexuals had may have affected the way they chose to label themselves.

### Pansexuals

- Some pansexuals discovered they were pansexual when their partner discovered they were transgender and transitioned from one binary gender to the opposite binary gender (FtM or MtF). (They may not have dated two or more genders before, but realized that they were still romantically/sexually attracted enough to their partner that the gender didn't matter.
- Some pansexuals started off attracted to only one gender, but they encountered someone who became the "one exception": they discovered that they were sexually/romantically attracted to a person that wasn't the typical gender they are usually attracted to.
- Some pansexuals never thought about the gender of the people they were sexually/romantically attracted to.
- Some pansexuals have never encountered any crushes or attractions on some genders, but when thinking about it they were still open to dating and/or having sex with all genders.

### Bisexuals

- Some bisexuals discovered themselves when they had crushes on people they perceived as “girls” and/or “boys” throughout their lives.
- Some bisexuals went through “bi-cycles” that caused them to have crushes on people perceived as girls and/or boys at different times or varying rates. This may or may not have caused confusion regarding identity.
- Many bisexuals considered the gender of the person they were sexually/romantically attracted to when thinking of dating or marrying someone. (They may have had a preference for a certain gender or had different standards depending on the gender of the person).
- All bisexuals have been attracted to at least two genders, but some have had a limited or no attraction to other genders.

Neither one of the sexualities are more morally right than the other and can be used interchangeably. Even if some bisexuals are not attracted to all genders, it doesn't make bisexuals any more transphobic or discriminatory than other sexualities. Just like straight people are only attracted to people closest to the opposite gender and gay/lesbian people are only attracted to people closest to the same gender, some bisexuals may only be attracted to two genders. This is okay. Sexuality is not something we can control and therefore our attraction to gender is simply a natural part of our sexual/romantic process. And again, some bisexuals are indeed attracted to all genders just like with the pansexual identities.

There are also people who mistakenly believe that pansexuality is immoral as well or unnecessary. There are claims that pansexuals are transphobic because they adopt their identity only to include

transgender people. There are also claims that say pansexuals are biphobic as if they want to erase bisexuality.

Let's start by clearing up misconceptions. It is true that some pansexuals adopted the term in order to include various gender identities in their attractions. Of course, at one time in history many sexual identities had to evolve their definitions based on new understanding of gender and sexuality. Many non-binary people, especially who were agender, embraced pansexuality because it felt like a term that fit their perception of both gender and sexuality: a term where they could describe liking someone or being liked regardless of gender. Therefore, pansexuality is not any more transphobic than any other sexual identity. It is embraced by cisgender and transgender people alike. As far as bisexuality, pansexuality is not there to erase bisexuality; It exists simultaneously under the great bi+ spectrum of identities that are open to dating or being intimate with people of two or more genders. To make such claims would be to say that every term that describes a similar experience erases other people's experiences. Bisexual experiences sometimes mirror that of gay and lesbian people, yet we accept all three terms as unique labels. Why shouldn't we do the same for pansexuality?

Many people even believe that pansexuality is a "new" term and therefore a "trend" to make others feel more unique or superior to bisexuals. Just like Bisexual, pansexual may have had a different definition upon its inception but it was far from a new word. The word pansexual has existed since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, attested in 1914 as *pansexualism* by theorists and philosophers of the time. Many pansexuals existed in the 1970s and especially the 1990s when it became an official term to describe sexual orientation. While the term is more widely accepted today, the experiences that pansexuals have existed long before there were terms to describe it.

There are other types of sexualities that also fit under the bi+ umbrella such as **omnisexual** (attraction to all genders and gender is a factor in that attraction) and **polysexual** (an attraction to a variety of different genders but their attraction is more exclusive than bisexuality i.e., some may date any gender but men/women while most bisexual people do date men and women along with other genders). Whichever label describes you, just know that there are plenty of options.

We should be happy that some are able to find a label that describes their experiences and embrace our differences. After all, we are all fighting in the same fight to deconstruct the oppression of heteronormativity. The more we accept others, the more we can accept ourselves.

## Opposite Gender Attraction Outside Of Heteronormativity

Some people who are questioning if they are bisexual may have already come out as gay or lesbian and discovered their same gender attraction. The “coming out” experience is already a very difficult ordeal in a heteronormative society because of the potential for violence and isolation that could occur when someone reveals who they are. So, when a person decides to come out as bisexual after identifying as gay or lesbian, there may be the perception that you would be more “privileged” and can safely date the opposite gender without dealing with the consequences of homophobia.

However, one thing to keep in mind is that much of society’s perception of bisexuals can often times come with more isolation and unfortunately that isolation can come from both heteronormativity and what Pride.com calls **homonormativity**. Homonormativity is a lot less

oppressive than heteronormativity, but it can be damaging in a lot of ways. This usually occurs when LGBTQ+ communities adapt mindsets and hierarchies based on heteronormative society and thinking. It causes LGBTQ+ members to look down on you as an “inferior” queer person who is not worthy of the support of the LGBTQ+ community because you are perceived as “privileged”.

You may have to reevaluate some of those biphobic ideas regarding bisexuals and privilege. Of course, if you choose to date the opposite gender without coming out to your partners the choice is yours, and in this case, you may begin to see that you will have certain privileges. However, even with something that may seem like a privilege can come with disadvantages.

### Oppression Vs Privilege

Many people who are gay or lesbian often have the misperception that bisexuals are “privileged” because they can “pass” in society with their partners without any one ever knowing they are bisexual. To a certain extent this is true. Many bisexuals can stealthily navigate society as if they are in a straight relationship. However, there are stipulations.

Just like gay or lesbian people, bisexuals who choose to remain “in the closet” while in a relationship can meet some serious consequences if found out by partners, family, and friends. According to statistics, bisexuals, especially women, have a higher rate of domestic violence from partners (see [The Effects of Comphet on Bisexual women](#)). Being discovered as bisexual would only exacerbate this. Often times bisexual men are not trusted and are automatically seen as “gay” even if in a relationship with a woman. They are targeted simply because they have interest in men as well as women.

Unfortunately, this does lead to many bisexuals hiding their bisexuality, but not without consequences. Statistics have also shown that this has led to bisexuals having higher anxiety and mood disorders when compared to their straight, lesbian, and gay peers (See [What is Biphobia and How Does it Affect Me?](#)). This is in part due to them hiding who they are from others.

The perception that bisexuals are somehow more “privileged” is actually what leads to discrimination from both straight and lesbian/gay communities. Bisexual people are less likely to receive adequate care for physical health, sexual health, or mental health. They are also less likely to be supported when there is evidence of biphobia, bierasure, or monosexism. To add, the idea that bisexuals “pass” in society ignores the fact that many bisexuals are gender non-conforming or even transgender which can sometimes make life more difficult.

On the other hand, it is okay to have privileges. However, it is important that if you are coming out as bisexual that you understand that there are privileges to being monosexual as well (straight/gay/lesbian). You should not feel ashamed of those privileges, but you should also be mindful of how your privilege can affect others.

### Differentiating Heterosexuality from Bisexuality

There is a misconception that dating a person of the opposite gender makes you straight. As a bisexual person if you are in a multi-sexual relationship with a straight person, you may begin to notice the differences between you. To start, some women and men in straight relationships have a heteronormative understanding of what men’s roles and women’s roles are. They may fall into a subconscious routine of traditionalism that you may not be used to as a queer person.

Your straight partners may also have friends and family that are not open to LGBTQ+ people. The choice is yours whether you want to disclose your own sexuality to people other than your partner. However, if you are going to be a good ally to others in the LGBTQ+ community you shouldn't allow homophobic or biphobic remarks or actions to persist or affect others. Communicate with your partner about your concerns. Work together to see what is the best course of action should you see any of these things happen. You may be surprised at how well your partner handles it.

Many straight people have never had to question the way they see sexuality so try to be understanding as best as you can if you really care for your partner. However, this does not mean you should allow disrespect or forced submission. If a person is not compatible with you, so be it. Bad relationships happen all the time for people of every sexuality. Don't let it set a prejudice against all people who are heterosexual as some of them can be really great allies and would be willing to make accommodations or work hard to break heteronormative thinking.

### "Coming Out" Again

As mentioned before, the coming out process can be a difficult one. Aside from trying to figure out the levels of your own sexuality, you often times have to figure out how to approach family, friends, colleagues, and even life-long partners with the news. While it was less common in society for gay people to come out as straight or bisexual, more people are beginning to come out as bisexual or even pansexual among today's youth. In fact, statistics show that bisexuals make up the largest majority of the LGBTQ+ community and there are more

bisexuals now than ever before.

<https://www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/BiMediaResourceGuide.pdf>

This could be because our understanding of gender has evolved and so has our understanding of bisexuality.

There are some privileges to coming out as bisexual after coming out as gay or lesbian. Some families may be more accepting of a bisexual that chooses to date the opposite gender. Furthermore, some people around you may not see a very strong difference between you coming out as bisexual or gay and simply see it as just another transition for you.

However, some of you may be afraid of the difficulty of finding suitable partners or coming out to a life-long partner. Biphobia runs rampant in society and some straight people may decide they do not trust that you are *actually* bisexual due to heteronormative thinking and understanding of bisexuals. Coming out as bisexual after being gay can sometimes be difficult as well. While most people in the LGBTQ+ community are more accepting of bisexuals than heterosexuals, you may be afraid to lose some friends and newfound families within the LGBTQ+ community. You may even be afraid to lose your life-long partner.

However, try to remember that this is actually for the better if these things do occur. You want to surround yourself with people who will appreciate, support, and respect you. Coming out as bisexual will help you to see who your true allies are. Besides, you can always choose to date and or be friends with other bisexual or pansexual people. There are plenty of different types of people to meet in the LGBTQ+ community!

It's important that you are also not ashamed to be bisexual. Many times, bisexual people do not feel 'queer enough'. Imposter syndrome



(a syndrome in which you doubt your queerness and feel you don't deserve to be in the LGBTQ+ community) is commonly felt in the bisexual community due to the overwhelming amount of bi erasure. As a result, you may also have this internalized sense of guilt as you transition. Understand that you are not alone. There are millions of bisexuals just like you all over the world. Bisexuals have contributed to many of the triumphs in the LGBTQ+ community and in dismantling heteronormativity.

## Same Gender Attraction Outside of Homosexuality

Coming out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual/pansexual can be the most challenging thing to do in a heteronormative society. Often times, being same gender attracted can be met with homophobic reactions from family, friends, and even romantic partners. When you are bisexual that discrimination can also be met within the LGBTQ+ community. It is important that whenever you are thinking about coming out as bisexual that you prepare ahead of time for these things. Do your research. There are resources out there for people who are coming out and communities that can help you. Seek them out as soon as you have come to the conclusion that you are bisexual.

However, coming out as bisexual can also be a relief. It can be rejuvenating for your mental health because you are finally able to show yourself for who you are. More importantly, the label can help you find communities of people who feel the same way you do and will support you. Accepting your bisexuality can help you live a more fulfilling romantic or sexual life.

What you must keep in mind is that although you are a part of the LGBTQ+ community, every sexuality in the community is unique. Your sexuality is one where you happen to be attracted to two or more genders. Of course, as you navigate the LGBTQ+ community there are times where you will fit in and yet times when you will stand out. It may be hard at first to avoid falling into homonormative behaviors because often those behaviors and ideas are based on our oppression and assimilation in a heteronormative society. People in the LGBTQ+ community are affected by the heteronormativity around them and so may act or react to it by developing hierarchies and standards hard for people with fluid sexualities to live up to. This only helps in the oppression of all sexualities, however, even if there is an attempt at sustaining the monosexual attractions. Be mindful of some of your privileges, but also understand that you are just as deserving of visibility, support, and respect as other LGBTQ+ people.

### Determining Which “Label” Fits

Part of the coming out process for many people is finding the “right” label for themselves. For some, having a label is important in discovering themselves, building communities, and feeling empowered. For others it makes them feel safe and stable to have a way to describe themselves. It also makes it easier for people to find romantic and sexual partners.

Unfortunately, gatekeeping is common in communities that have felt oppressed in an attempt to protect their rights and liberties. This creates a homonormative framework that restricts sexual fluidity within the community and makes sexual/romantic exploration more difficult. Furthermore, as we evolve our understanding of gender, our sexuality also evolves because our sexuality is often based on our perception of

gender. With all of these things in mind, what is a person to do if they are sexually fluid but afraid to choose the wrong label?

The honest answer is that labels in the LGBTQ+ community are not necessarily intended to be used to restrict what you do but rather words used to describe a feeling you have when in romantic or sexual relationships with certain genders. The reality is that sexuality is fluid and only you can determine just how fluid your own sexuality really is, not anyone else. No one honestly has the same sexual experience, even if some of our experiences may be similar. The LGBTQ+ community is a community of individuals with their own story to tell.

Of course, many people who are attracted to more than one gender choose not to label themselves at all! As mentioned before, labels are meant to be used as descriptors. Many people do not feel the need to describe how they feel and would rather love who they love without an identity marker. There are no wrong or right decisions regarding labels. It is your life and you should be able to live it how you want as well as describe it in the way you desire.

### Navigating Multi-Sexual Relationships

As mentioned before, coming out to friends, family, and life-long romantic partners can be challenging. If you are a bisexual person who is considering coming out after identifying as straight you might be attempting to prepare for all of the reactions and possibly losing the support of loved ones: mentally, spiritually, and financially. Unfortunately, you might also be afraid that you will not be desired by some people in the LGBTQ+ community. It is easy to think of the worse when we live in a society that does not accept bi+ love. However,

understand that you are not alone and you can always gain a new family, friends, and partners within the bi+ community like yourself.fq

Of course, there may also be a lot of unworking you have to do as well regarding how you see LGBTQ+ people and bisexuality. You might have to dust away some internalized homophobia that says being with the same gender is morally wrong. You may also have to dust away internalized biphobia that says you can't be open to dating or having sex with more than one gender, as well as mindsets that hold you back from dating other bisexuals or pansexuals. You might also have to reevaluate what your gender role in a relationship is outside of the heteronormative framework. Overcoming these hang-ups might seem difficult sometimes, but it can make embracing yourself easier.

If you once identified as straight it may seem easier to just date someone of the opposite gender because that is what you are used to. However, your sexuality is not something you can control nor your attractions. As a bisexual there may be times when you are not attracted to people closest to the opposite gender and instead attracted to people closest to the same gender. Rather than repress your desires, it is healthy to accept that they are there and explore. If you are in a long-term relationship, you can always relieve your fantasies through other mediums (there is plenty of entertainment to help satisfy). Talking to your partners about what will satisfy you during bicycles (moments where your attractions shift between genders) can help them relieve as well. You can also open up the relationship to include other partners in sex and romance.

Many bisexuals may be open to **polyamory**. Polyamory is when people decide to have romantic/sexual relationships with two or more people. However, not all bisexuals are polyamorous. Most bisexuals are very much capable of living a monogamous lifestyle and are capable of being

content with just one person. If you are afraid of embracing bisexuality because of these perceptions just think about it this way: you cannot control your attractions and your attractions do not control your final decision. *You* choose who you want to date and spend the rest of your life with. Furthermore, being attracted to other genders doesn't mean you want to date everyone. As a comparison, if lesbians are attracted to women does that mean they want to date all women and therefore will not be content with just dating one? What about gay men? Or straight people? The same should be applied to you.

However, there is nothing inherently wrong with being polyamorous. Our society stigmatizes polyamorous relationships because of the perception that we cannot have stable relationships unless someone belongs to us and only us. This is not a perception based on love but control. Polyamory can be just as healthy and stable as monogamy between consenting adults. Part of unworking heteronormativity is also unworking monogamous ideologies that say "one person to one person" is the only way to live a fulfilling love life.

All relationships, regardless of the gender of the person you choose to have a relationship with, can be rewarding if you leave your mind open for new possibilities. Just know that whatever gender(s) you choose to date wouldn't change the fact that you are bisexual. Your sexuality is still valid.

### Differentiating Homosexuality from Bisexuality

It can be empowering and comforting to be a part of the LGBTQ+ community. The best part about being LGBTQ+ is that most of the people in our community are some of the most open-minded and sexually/romantically liberated people you will meet. However, no

community is perfect and sometimes other identities do get preferential focus. As mentioned before, while we are one community, we are also a community of individuals with other varying intersectional rewards and disadvantages.

One of the hardest parts about being bisexual in the LGBTQ+ community is the lack of visibility. Bisexual erasure, a result of heteronormativity, can often seep into the LGBTQ+ community and create a homonormative hierarchy where lesbian and gay people are the primary focus of movements surrounding sexual/romantic liberation. As allies, we want to be able to support all members of the group and that should include bisexuals as well.

It is also important to embrace our differences within the community. Many people in the LGBTQ+ community only celebrate when two people of the same gender are in love with each other. Often times there seems to be no room to celebrate people who love various genders, even people who may be attracted to the opposite gender. This is because there is a misconception that everyone that dates the opposite gender is “straight” by default without understanding the complexities and nuances surrounding bisexuality.

Furthermore, often times scientific research, historical research, and media tends to paint all LGBTQ+ members under a broad umbrella without giving much thought about how our various experiences affect us differently. There is even a tendency to use monosexual terms such as “gay” or “lesbian” as broad umbrella terms to describe everything involving LGBTQ+ people. While this can be seen as an act of unity, it can also be isolating and repressive.

In order to combat bisexual erasure, it is important that you embrace bisexuality as its own sexuality reflecting a person who has their own needs and desires. It might help to start with using more sexual-neutral

language to describe things. For example, if there is a bisexual girl dating or married to a lesbian girl instead of simply calling it a “lesbian relationship” try calling it a multi-sexual one. Or instead of calling the entire community the “gay” community try calling it the pride or LGBTQ+ community. Using these terms can remind yourself and others that many types of sexualities and identities make up the community, not just monosexual identities.

## Navigating Gender and Sexuality

In society our sexuality is often based on our experiences and perceptions of gender. For example, a gay man is described as a person who is attracted to men or male-aligned people. However, when we think of what it means to be a man or male what is it that comes to mind?

For some the idea of a man or woman is strictly based on the classifications of sex (i.e., female/male reproductive organs). For others they may determine the idea of man or woman based on gender, which is based on the social and cultural constructs that form our perceptions. Then, there are those who recognize that some people may not align binarily towards one gender or the other. When considering which sexual label fits you it all comes down to how you perceive the sexes or genders.

### The Cisgender Perspective

For many, they may label their sexual/romantic attractions based on how they see body parts or the body parts they are most attracted to. For others, it may be based on shared experiences in society that they may have with certain genders. To add, there are some that simply base their attraction on the bonds they have with any individual person regardless of gender.

Keep in mind that the current labels we have in the LGBTQ+ community are merely descriptors of how we personally relate to gender romantically/sexually in the modern world. Language evolves. We can't control our sexuality; however, some parts of our *perceptions* regarding sexuality are shaped by culture and society. As society progresses, we will evolve to understand gender and sexuality even more than we do now. This will shape how we see gender and therefore how we interpret our sexuality.

Many transgender people understand this at an early stage in their life. A **transgender** person is someone whose gender identity doesn't always align that of what they have been assigned or designated at birth. A **cisgender** person is someone whose gender identity does match their designated gender. The self-perception of the average trans person is sometimes hard to understand by cisgender people because of **cisnormativity**. Cisnormativity reflects the idea that cisgender is the "norm" or the only way to be. All sex classifications are based on this function. Many cisgender people are not only afraid to question gender outside of sex, but also afraid to question the complexities of sex in general. This leads to **transphobia**, where people fear, hate, and/or discriminate against transgender people.

But what is it that makes people so afraid? Some reasons leading to transphobia is a fear of questioning one's own sexuality. Some people who are transphobic also happen to be homophobic or biphobic as well. Many bisexuals with internalized biphobia might be afraid of trans people because trans people only exacerbate that feeling they don't want to face. This is not to say that liking a trans person would make you bisexual. Straight people, lesbians, and gay people are all capable of being attracted to trans people. However, if a person's sexual orientation has been formed based on societal perceptions of gender or sex this could cause a person to have to reevaluate how they perceive or



define their sexuality. Furthermore, repressing one's sexuality could cause one to lack self-acceptance of anyone that makes us question anything.

The answer to how to navigate one's own sexuality is to understand that many perceptions of our reality is based on a social construct. Labels are good descriptors for helping us navigate our feelings, but we should not feel confined to strict definitions. Rather we should recognize and embrace the fluidity and uniqueness of sexuality and define how we feel for ourselves within those placeholders.

### The Transgender Perspective

Transgender people have an even greater fight when navigating their sexuality. While some are trying to discover where they fit on the gender spectrum it can make figuring out one's sexuality through it all even more challenging. Here are some common concerns many transgender people might have while discovering their sexuality.

- “How do I know if I'm attracted to them or just want to *be* them?”

It can be difficult to know whether or not you are attracted to someone you simply admire or someone you desire intimacy with. This concern is even more challenging if you are experiencing **gender dysphoria**: the feeling of distress in one's own body because you want to be seen as the gender you are. You might long to look like other people of the same gender and may admire the body or behaviors of other genders, which only confuses your attractions. The best thing to do is pay attention to your body's reaction. If you get any sort of reactions such as sexual fantasies, genital reaction, or urges to kiss or hold hands with this person, this could be a sign of sexual attraction. As mentioned earlier (see [Characteristics and Behaviors of Bisexuality](#)), understand that there are

several different types of attractions. We can be aesthetically attracted to someone of the same gender and our admiration would usually cause us to think of ways to do what they do and or follow in their footsteps. Whereas with sexual attraction we normally do not want to look like a person we are sexually interested in nor do as they do but rather, we want to appear like the kind of person they would want to be intimate with.

- “What if dating a certain gender gives me dysphoria/euphoria?”

When dealing with gender dysphoria it is sometimes hard to reconcile one’s feelings of attraction when you are not satisfied with yourself. Some genders you may not be attracted to but they give you **gender euphoria**: the joy or satisfaction you get when your gender and the features you associate with your gender correspond or begin to align. You may decide that you would rather date that gender because of it. On the other hand, some genders you may be attracted to but being around them sometimes makes you feel a sense of gender dysphoria.

It is okay to date the gender that makes you feel appreciated and welcomed. Our desires do matter, but it also matters how others make us feel as well. Both are a part of the romantic/sexual process. However, recognize that desire is different from the feeling of being desired. Dating only to get a rush of desire and validation can make for an imbalance where the other partner does not gain and you feel ultimately dissatisfied. Some people need both to have a fulfilling life. It might be a good idea to sort out the things that make you feel desired separately from the things you are attracted to in a partner. Perhaps make a list or a Venn diagram to organize your thoughts and feelings. This way you can navigate your sexuality better regarding which things you want versus the things that make you feel wanted.

There are other options regarding labels as well. As mentioned before, some people might feel romantic attraction to some genders while feeling sexual attraction to others. If you feel one gender satisfies you romantically while the other sexually there are various romantic identities and sexualities that you can use interchangeably such as biromantic heterosexual or homoromantic bisexual. You can also choose to date and/or label yourself after you are happy with your transition or position in life. Of course, even if you are attracted to all genders you don't have to date every gender you are attracted to and if you're considering bisexuality, it wouldn't make you any less bisexual. It is okay to have a preference.

However, be mindful that heteronormativity, compulsory heterosexuality, and mono-normativity can also influence your perception of yourself in relationships. For example, if you are a transman, you may think that when dating a man you may not be seen as a "real" man in a heteronormative society. So, you may decide to date women for this reason even if you also have an attraction to men. This is a part of the heteronormative system that not only shames men for dating men but also shames transmen for the way they appear or are assigned, diminishing the masculinity of some LGBTQ+ people. Transwomen might also be told that in order to be seen as "real" women they must date men. This may only exacerbate feelings of dysphoria. Unworking heteronormative/comphet biases can also help alleviate some of the feelings of discomfort. Trans men and transwomen are still men and women no matter who they date, just like cis people. Recognize that your perceptions on life matter just as much everyone else.

- “What If My Sexuality Shifts After Transitioning (HRT, surgery, etc)?”

You might be in the process of discovering your gender and suddenly, simultaneously, you are starting to feel attraction to more than one gender after transitioning. While research on sexual shift during transition is still new, one theory could be that comfortability in one’s gender helps transgender people feel more comfortable with their sexual attractions as well. This might cause many transgender people to change to different labels or descriptors. One of the best things about the bisexual label is that it often allows for more sexual fluidity. Even if you shift to have a preference it may not mean you are no longer bisexual. In fact, bicycles often occur where phases of attraction can exist for months to even years. Of course, you can also choose not to label yourself until you figure it all out. Focus on one transition at a time and keep in constant communication with partners so that they can make informed decisions moving forward with you.

## Conclusion

Whether you see bisexuality as a “stepping stone” to discovering your true self or as more of a settled sexual identity, it can be a helpful tool when trying to find love and acceptance. However, internalized biphobia and heteronormativity can often times blind us to the beauty of sexual fluidity. Awareness is the first step to discovering your sexuality. It is important to be aware that being bisexual does not mean you have to desire dating two or more people at the same time, at the same rate, or in the same way. It is important that you are aware of different types of bi+ labels such as pansexual or biromantic

that could also capture some of the feelings or desires you have. Furthermore, recognizing your own agency in determining your sexuality will help you take control of your desires so you do not fall victim to compulsory heterosexuality and/or bisexual erasure. The more you understand sexuality outside of the monosexist framework the easier it will be to accept the individuality, complexities, and nuances of your attraction and the attractions of others. That is why it is important for us not to ignore or dismiss bisexuality but to embrace it as a valid label for comfort, community, and support. My hope is that by reading this guide to bisexuality that you feel liberated and empowered throughout your journey. My hope is when you read this you will see it as a map that will help you open your mind to new possibilities. Finally, my hope is that this reading will help people of more fluid sexualities feel more respected, loved, and desired no matter how they choose to identify.

*This document was done in collaboration with  
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