

Bi+ Allies, A Guide

Plain text version

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Introduction

Welcome to this guide for bi+ allies.

The aim of this guide is to help you learn more about people who identify under the bi+ umbrella including different labels people may use and some of the issues bi+ people may face.

There is also information about being an ally, what you can do to help support bi+ people and a list of helpful resources.

We've produced this guide based on five years of running support spaces and outreach work for bi+ people in West Yorkshire and a review of related literature.

Emily Metcalfe
Leeds Bi Group

What Does Bi+ Mean?

Bi+ is the B in LGBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bi+ and Transgender.

The most commonly used definition for bisexuality used by bi+ and LGBT+ organisations in the UK is “attraction to more than one gender” where attraction can be sexual, romantic and/or emotional.

The Bi+ Umbrella

The bi+ umbrella is diverse and there are a number of different labels and definitions that people use such as:

- **Bi or Bisexual** - Attraction to more than 1 gender.
- **Biromantic** - Romantic attraction to more than 1 gender.
- **Pan or Pansexual** - attracted to people of all genders or regardless of gender.
- **Panromantic** - romantic attraction to people of all genders or regardless of gender.
- **Queer** - not straight and/or cisgender
- **Poly-, Multi- or Omni-sexual/romantic** - Attraction to multiple/all genders.
- **Unlabeled** - Some people prefer not to choose a specific label and are just attracted to who they are attracted to.

Generally these labels come under the bi+ umbrella (though queer is also used by some lesbian, gay and transgender people too). Labels and their definitions are very personal; if you are not sure which label or definition someone uses, please ask if it is appropriate to do so.

Bi+ identity does not necessarily equal sexual behaviour. Someone can identify as one of the bi+ labels even if they have only slept with people of

one gender, or if they have not been intimate with anyone. Some people who are behaviourally bisexual may still identify as straight or lesbian/gay.

Other Labels

Some other labels that you might also come across are:

- **Aromantic** - Someone who does not feel romantic attraction.
- **Asexual** - Someone who does not feel sexual attraction.
- **Transgender** - Identifying as a different gender to that assigned at birth.
- **Cisgender** - Identifying as the same gender as that assigned at birth.
- **Non-Binary** - Someone whose gender is neither exclusively male or female.
- **Intersex** - Someone who is born with male and female characteristics.
- **Ally** - Someone who supports those of a different orientation, gender or trans status including tackling discrimination.

Bi+ Issues

Biphobia

Biphobia is the prejudice, discrimination against or attack upon someone because they are bi+. Biphobia can be blatant or subtle; intentional or unintentional. Examples of this include:

- **Negative comments or stereotypes**
- **Hostility** such as being harassed for being at an LGBT Pride or similar event
- **Invalidating** someone's orientation
- **Hypersexualisation** including assumptions about sexual activity and interests
- **Bi+ erasure** – not including bi+ topics or people when talking about LGBT
- Workplace **discrimination**
- **Can include abuse from family and partners**
- **Hate crime**

Some harmful/biphobic comments and stereotypes include:

- But you're gay really
- They used to be bi, but now they're with me
- So you've decided you're straight?
- It's just a phase
- Greedy
- Disease spreader
- Promiscuous
- Unfaithful

Hate Crime

Bi+ people can also be victims of hate crimes: violence or abuse due to their sexual/romantic orientation. In 2017 the Crown Prosecution Service recognised that biphobic hate crime is specific and that victims' needs may be different to that of victims of homophobic or transphobic hate crime. They also made note that biphobic hate crime can come from within the LGBT+ community as well as from outside.

Research shows a similar percentage of bi+ men and women experience violence due to orientation as gay men and lesbians. However, for bi+ people that violence is more likely to be of a sexual nature.

Sexual Violence & Abuse

Bi+ people are more likely to be subjected to sexual violence and/or abuse. Bisexual girls are twice as likely as heterosexual girls to have reported sexual abuse. This increased to being 10 times more likely for bisexual boys than heterosexual boys.

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence is physical/sexual violence and/or emotional/psychological abuse by a person's partner. There is an increased prevalence of intimate partner violence among bi+ people.

Related statistics:

- 61.1% of bi women and 37.3% of bi men have reported intimate partner violence

Examples of this include:

- **Physical abuse**
- **Sexual abuse**
- **Threat** of being outed (eg. at work or to friends and family)
- **Degrading language** about their sexual orientation
- **Hypersexualisation**

Mental Health

Bi+ people have an increased likelihood of mental health issues compared to their lesbian, gay and straight counterparts. This can include increased prevalence of:

- Self-harm
- Symptoms of anxiety
- Symptoms of depression
- Suicidal thoughts and/or actions
- Eating disorders
- Alcohol and/or substance misuse

This increased likelihood is thought to be linked to being a sexual minority, discrimination and the high numbers of bi+ people who are not out to friends, to family or at work.

Being Out

Bi+ people are less likely to be out to friends, family and work colleagues about their orientation than their gay/lesbian counterparts.

Related statistics:

- 44% of bi men are out to their friends compared to 84% of gay men
- 53% of bi women are out to their friends compared to 86% of lesbians
- 28% of bi men are out to their mothers compared to 77% of gay men
- 39% of bi women are out to their mothers compared to 74% of lesbians

Bi+ Inclusion

A lack of bi+ inclusion, also known as bi+ erasure, is another issue experienced by bi+ people.

Examples of this are:

- Not using bi inclusive language in LGBT documents, publications or policies
- Not dating someone because they are bisexual
- Using exclusionary language
 - Saying gay when you mean LGBT
 - Talking about homophobia without including biphobia
- Exclusion of bisexuals in LGBT spaces

Related statistics:

- 50% bi men and 43% bi women have never attended a local LGBT specific event or venue compared to 27% gay men and 33% lesbians

Intersectionality

As previously stated, there is diversity within the bi+ umbrella. Bi+ people may also have other factors that influence their experiences and interactions. This is called intersectionality.

Examples of other factors include (but are not limited to):

- Race/ethnic origin
- Gender
- Trans status
- Gender expression
- Age
- Disability
- Class
- Faith/religion

This means some bi+ people may experience discrimination due to several factors. They may also experience discrimination in bi+ or LGBT+ spaces.

Related statistics:

- 3 out of 5 black LGBT people have experienced racism in their local LGBT community
- 34% of bi women, 65% bi men, 23% lesbians and 26% gay men are not out to anyone in their faith communities

What Can You Do?

Being an Ally

A bi+ ally is someone who does not identify as bi+ but who wants to learn more, support bi+ people and create more inclusive environments. Bi+ allies can be straight people as well as gay men and lesbians.

Someone can also be an ally within the bi+ umbrella, such as a bi person supporting someone who is pansexual and ensuring that the bi+ space is pan inclusive.

Allies are very important as it should not always fall on those in a minority group to educate others and stand up against discrimination. Being an ally is more than just pinning on a badge; it is a commitment to take a stand.

What can you do to help?

- Educate yourself (for more information, see our Useful Resources)
- Tackle biphobia as well as homophobia, transphobia and other forms of discrimination
- Recognise the potential impact of biphobia
- Understand the diversity within the bi+ community
- Ensure bi+ inclusion including advocating for bi+ specific language and representation at LGBT+ events and in LGBT+ organisations, publications and the LGBT+ community
- Be careful not to out people without their express permission
- Respect labels and people's right to define their own sexual/romantic orientation
- If someone comes out to you, take them seriously

Useful Resources

- Bi Community News
www.bicommunitynews.co.uk
- The Bi's of Colour Survey Report
<http://bit.ly/Bisofcolour>
- The Bisexual Index
www.bisexualindex.org.uk
- The Bisexuality Report
<http://bimedia.org/bireport>
- Complicated Report
<http://bit.ly/EN-Complicated>
- Getting Bi in a gay/straight world
www.biphoria.org.uk/publications.html
- Purple Prose by Katy Harrad
- Stonewall guides
 - Straight allies
- Bisexual people in the workplace

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Quotes

“Every marginalised community benefits from informed allies helping challenge prejudice and discrimination”

Mx Jen Yockney MBE
Bi Community News

“Our LGBT+ Inclusive City approach has diversity at its heart and the bi+ community in Leeds are a really important part of that rainbow”

Geoff Turnbull
LGBT+ Engagement Officer & bi+ ally
Leeds City Council