



Proudly supporting bisexuals across Victoria

www.bi-alliance.org

info@bi-alliance.org

<http://au.groups.yahoo.com/group/MelbBiChat/>

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/vicbiact/>

Bisexuality – Information for Professionals

This leaflet is intended to provide a brief overview for professionals on bisexuality, based on current research. A list of some materials for further reading is included at the end.

What is bisexuality?

Bisexuality can be generally defined as experiencing an attraction to more than one sex/gender¹. The lived experience of this identity can vary, for example:

- More strongly attracted to one sex/gender than another, but acknowledging that attraction isn't exclusively predicated to only one sex/gender
- Attraction is more about the person rather than their sex/gender
- Attraction to particular sexes/genders can change over time

One or more of these instances might be applicable to people you could meet. It is advisable to check with the client about their experience of being bisexual. It is also worth noting that although someone might experience attraction to more than one sex/gender, they could refer to themselves as heterosexual/gay/lesbian instead of bisexual.

Some issues to consider

- *What is my sexual orientation?*

For some people, they may already be clear on whether they are bisexual and what this means for them, while others feel confused or uncertain. For example, research has shown that young bisexual people are more likely to experience confusion about their sexual orientation than their lesbian and gay peers (The Bisexuality Report, 2012).

- *Do I come out, and if so to whom?*

Questions such as whether to 'come out'; and if so, to whom; can be difficult. A report (Private Lives, 2012) found that people who are bisexual are far less likely to come out than people who are lesbian or gay. However for those who do, coming out can be an affirming process in terms of sexual identity. Finding supportive communities and friends can be an important aspect of feeling positive about oneself. Coming out can be a continual process, as assumptions of sexual orientation are made on the basis of the sex/gender of the partner. This contributes to the 'invisibility' of bisexuality.

¹ The phrase 'more than one' acknowledges that there are more than two sexes and genders, such as the cases of intersex and transgender. Sex refers to physical characteristics while gender refers to the psychological experience. In the case of physical characteristics, intersex acknowledges that there are more than two sexes. In the case psychological experience, trans* (e.g. transgender, transman, transwoman) acknowledges that there are likewise more than two genders. For this reason some people actually prefer the term pansexual as 'bi' technically designates 'two'.



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- *'Double discrimination'*

Double discrimination refers to the fact that people who identify as bisexual can be discriminated against² by others who are heterosexual or homosexual, with those who are out reporting feeling that they are not welcome at neither heterosexual or homosexual spaces. There are plenty of myths and assumptions, such as bisexuals are greedy; are unable to make up their minds; will end up identifying as gay or lesbian; or can't feel satisfied unless they have multiple partners that represent their multiple attractions and thus will not be faithful or leave one partner for another sex/gender.

With the above considerations in mind, the decision to come out can be a difficult one, and it is an issue that frequently comes up within the support groups we hold.

Please consider referring clients to our peer-managed online groups and monthly in person meet-ups, details are listed below.

- *Physical and mental illness*

According to current research, people who identify as bisexual are at greater risk of adverse physical and mental health outcomes, including suicide, than the gay or lesbian population which is in turn worse than the heterosexual population.

- *Use inclusive language*

Inclusive language and thinking is important. Common terminology in the mainstream media and a number of LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer) organisations tends to acknowledge only the existence of 'gay and lesbian' or just 'gay', which leaves bisexuals feeling that they are invisible or forgotten. When discussing any situation relevant to sexual orientation, using the language preferred by the person or people you're talking with; if you're uncertain of preferred words or terms it is advisable to ask.

About Bisexual Alliance Victoria

Bisexual Alliance Victoria (BAV, or 'Bi-Alliance') is an incorporated organisation staffed by volunteers, which advocates on bisexual issues as well as providing peer support via an online yahoo groups (please see details below) and face to face monthly discussion groups (Bi Chat, currently held in Melbourne and the Mornington Peninsula).

Please feel free to explore our website (www.bi-alliance.org), where you will find resources for professionals, individuals, events (including the Bi Chats), and means of staying in touch with us.

² The term 'biphobia' is increasingly being recognised to describe discrimination on the basis of being bisexual.



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Further reading

Barker M, Richards C, Jones R, Bowes-Catton H, Plowman T, et al., (2012). *The Bisexuality Report: Bisexual inclusion in LGBT equality and diversity*. Open University, United Kingdom.
<http://www8.open.ac.uk/ccig/files/ccig/The%20BisexualityReport%20Feb.2012.pdf>

This report summarises current research on bisexual identities, issues faced, and positive experiences in a way that does not require a background in research. A flyer that summarises this report is also available here: <http://bisexualresearch.wordpress.com/2012/06/06/bisexuality-report-flyer/>

Bisexual Alliance Victoria (n. d.). *Information for Professionals*. The author, Australia. http://www.bi-alliance.org/?page_id=1107 Accessed 28 August 2014

On this page you will find a number of resources, including an electronic version of this information sheet, and the link and annotated slides from a webinar presentation on working with people who experience attraction to more than one gender.

British Psychological Society (2012). *Guidelines and literature review for psychologists working therapeutically with sexual and gender minority clients*. The author, United Kingdom.
http://www.bps.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/rep_92.pdf

This document provides a background on the current research on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender populations which is aimed to provide the context for practice guidelines. These guidelines provide recommendations on how to work with clients who identify as GLBTIQ, which can be generalised to various professions. The Australian Psychological Society (APS) also has practice guidelines but is only available to members of the APS.

Leonard W, Pitts M, Mitchell A, Lyons A, Smith A, Patel S, Couch M & Barrett A (2012). *Private Lives 2: The second national survey of the health and wellbeing of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) Australians*. Melbourne: The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University. <http://www.glhv.org.au/files/PrivateLives2Report.pdf>

This is the most extensive survey of the lived experience of LGBT Australians to date. As it is a research report, this is written for an audience with policy and health professionals backgrounds.

LGBT Advisory Committee: San Francisco Human Rights Commission (2011). *Bisexual Invisibility: Impacts and recommendations*. The author, San Francisco USA.
<http://sf-hrc.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=989>

This report summarises current issues facing bisexuals identified by current research (including some original research conducted by the authors) and makes recommendations for action areas.