

Q&A ON BISEXUALS: Examining Stereotypes and Misconceptions

Q: What is bisexuality?

A: Bisexuality is the capacity for physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to more than one gender/sex. A bisexual identity affirms a reality beyond dualistic categories of sexual orientation and challenges the foundation of binary thinking in this regard.

Q: Do bisexuals have to have partners of different genders/sexes to be satisfied?

A: Bisexuality is the *potential*—not the requirement—for involvement with more than one gender/sex. This involvement may mean sexually, emotionally, in reality, or in fantasy. Some bisexuals may have concurrent partners; others may relate to different genders/sexes at various time periods. Most bisexuals do not have to be involved with more than one gender/sex at a time in order to feel fulfilled.

Q: Aren't bisexuals "oversexed"?

A: Attraction does not necessitate acting on every desire. Just as there is a range of behaviors within heterosexual society and the lesbian and gay communities, there is also a range within the bisexual community. Some have one partner; some choose to be single; some have multiple partners; some bisexuals are celibate. The bisexual population has the same variety of sexual activity as other groups.

Q: Can bisexuals be counted on for long-term committed relationships?

A: A bisexual, like a lesbian, gay or heterosexual identity is independent of relationship choices: monogamous; polyamorous; non-monogamous; or whatever the parties agree upon. Bisexuals are as capable as anyone else of making a long-term monogamous commitment if that bisexual is also a monogamous person.

Q: Isn't calling oneself bisexual just a phase a person goes through because he or she is afraid to "come out" as lesbian or gay?

A: Some people do go through a transitional period of bisexuality on their way to adopting a lesbian, gay, or heterosexual identity. For many others, bisexuality remains a long-term orientation. In fact, researchers have found that homosexuality and heterosexuality are often transitional phases in the coming-out process for bisexual people.

Q: Aren't bisexuals just "confused"?

A: It is natural for bisexuals, gays, and lesbians to go through a period of confusion in the coming-out process. Historically, society has stigmatized same gender/sex attractions and denied the possibility of a bisexual orientation. In this situation, confusion is an understandable reaction until one is able to come out and find a supportive environment. Most bisexuals are absolutely clear about their sexual orientation.

Q: Do people choose to be bisexual?

A: For bisexuals the choice is to live openly and honestly or to be silenced by the invisibility of the closet. No one really knows the origins of sexual orientation, including bisexuality. However, whether it is biologically determined or not, sexual orientation should not determine one's access to full participation in society.

Q: Do bisexuals want “special rights”?

A: Bisexuals want to live their lives without the threat of discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodation, and the military. To ensure their basic civil rights, bisexuals are seeking equal protection under the law.

Q: Do bisexuals spread AIDS?

A: Bisexuals have been scapegoated as “carriers” of HIV/AIDS to heterosexuals and lesbians. The fact is, risky behaviors spread HIV, not one’s sexual identity. HIV is transmitted when the body fluids of an infected person (e.g. blood, semen, vaginal fluids, or breast milk) enter someone else’s body. Practicing safer sex and not sharing injection drug paraphernalia is important for everyone—bisexual, heterosexual, lesbian, gay, or transgender—who is interested in stopping the spread of AIDS.

Q: Should the lesbian and gay communities be inclusive of bisexuals?

A: Bisexuals have always been a part of, as well as apart from, the lesbian and gay communities. Bisexuals are part of the generic definition of gay in the same way that lesbians are. Because heterosexuals lump them all together, bisexuals encounter the same kinds of harassment and discrimination as gays, lesbians, and transgender people. Bisexuals lose their jobs, their homes, and their children, and are discharged from the military when they are honest about their sexual orientation. It is important that bisexuals be included to accurately describe the larger gay community.

Q: When the going gets tough, won’t bisexuals hide in the heterosexual community? Don’t bisexuals dump their same gender/sex partners for different gender/sex partners to pass as straight?

A: People leave relationships for all kinds of reasons, and not just because of the gender/sex of their partner. Anyone regardless of sexual identity who is unable to make a commitment to a relationship may use a person of any gender/sex to leave. To “pass” for straight and deny one’s bisexuality is just as painful and damaging for bisexuals as it is for gays and lesbians to stay in or re-enter the closet. Bisexuals are not heterosexual.

Q: Do some bisexuals identify as heterosexual? What about lesbian or gay?

A: All human sexuality studies have found that there is a notable disparity between what people do (sexual behavior) and what people call themselves (sexual identity). Many people are unaware that identifying as bisexual is even an option. (Significantly, no studies have measured the incidence of bisexual feelings and fantasies that have not been acted upon.) Many people who have sex with more than one gender/sex do not identify as bisexual for a number of reasons, including fear of discrimination and social stigmatization from both heterosexual society and the lesbian and gay communities.