



We Aren't Who You Think We Are: Working with Bisexual Clients

Raven James, Ph.D.
Governors State University
Addictions Studies & Behavioral Health
rjames@govst.edu

Outline

- Definitions
- Statistics
- Theories describing bisexuality
- Common forms of biphobia
- Cultural sensitivity
- Resources
- References



Definitions

- **Bisexuality**

The capacity for emotional, romantic and/or physical attraction to more than one sex or gender. That capacity for attraction may or may not manifest itself in terms of sexual interaction

- **Sexual Identity**

A culturally organized concept of the self. Labels can include lesbian or gay, bisexual or heterosexual
(Diamond, 2008).



Definitions

- **Sexual Fluidity**

Situation-dependent flexibility in sexual responsiveness, regardless of sexual orientation (Diamond, 2008).

- **Sexual Orientation**

A consistent pattern of sexual desire for individuals of the same sex, other sex, or both sexes, regardless of whether this pattern is manifested in sexual behavior (Diamond, 2008).

Indicators of sexual orientation can include sexual and romantic desire, attraction, arousal and fantasy (Savin-Williams & Vrangalova, 2013).



Definitions

- **Sexual Minority**

Individuals who have experience with same-sex sexuality, at the level of sexual orientation, desire, behavior or identity (Diamond, 2008)

- **Biphobia**

The fear and hatred of bisexuals

- **Bi-invisibility**

The lack of acknowledgement and ignoring of the clear evidence that bisexuals exist



THE BISEXUAL* UMBRELLA

BISEXUAL*

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

PANSEXUAL/ OMNISEXUAL

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

OTHER BI* IDENTITIES

Include biromantic, panromantic, bisensual, pansensual bifyke, bifye, bisexual-lesbian, ambisexual, anthrosexual, multisexual, gender-blind, pomosexual and many more.



POLYSEXUAL

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

QUEER

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

Bi-CURIOS

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

HOMOFLEXIBLE/ LESBIFLEXIBLE

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

HETEROFLEXIBLE

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

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

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

Prevalence

In 2010, a study published in the Journal of Sexual Medicine (Herbenick, et al), based on a nationally representative probability sample of women and men in the U.S., found that among adults (5,042 respondents):

- 3.1% self-identified as bisexual, compared to 2.5% as gay/lesbian (males, 2.6%; females 3.6%).
- While the sample size was smaller for adolescents (818 respondents), the split was even more striking: 4.9% self-identified as bisexual compared to just 1.0% gay/lesbian (males, 1.5%, females, 8.4%).



Prevalence

Data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth, based on in-person interviews with 7,643 women and 4,928 men, found that 2.8% of women and 1.8% of men identify as bisexual.

By comparison, 1.3% of women describe themselves as lesbian and 2.3% of men as gay. It is also interesting to note that while behavior is distinct from identity—not everyone who is attracted to more than one gender identifies as bisexual

The study also found that about 13% of women and 6% of men reported attractions to both women and men (Mosher, Chandra & Jones, 2005).



Prevalence

A 2007 survey of 768 self-identified lesbians, gays, and bisexuals drawn from a nationally representative sample of respondents found similar proportions: approximately half of LGB people self-identified as bisexual, including about one-third of the men and two-thirds of the women (Egan, Edelman & Sherrill, 2007).



Effects of Biphobia



Effects of Biphobia

- Bisexual (and gay) people reported more lifetime and daily experiences with discrimination than heterosexuals
- Approximately 42 percent attributed this to their sexual orientation, in whole, or part
- Perceived discrimination was positively associated with both harmful effects on quality of life and indicators of psychiatric morbidity

(Journal of Public Health, 2001)

Effects of Biphobia

- Bisexual and lesbian girls are more likely to be sexually harassed and threatened with violence than heterosexual girls
- One study revealed that 63 percent of lesbian and bisexual girls reported being “touched, brushed up against and cornered in a sexual way” compared to 52 percent of heterosexual girls
- In this same study, 23 percent of the bisexual and lesbian girls reported that their peers “attempted to hurt them in a sexual way (attempted rape or rape) compared to just 6 percent of the heterosexual girls in the sample

(Bochner & Brown, 2001)

Effects of Biphobia

- Biphobia intersects with racism and sexism, particularly in the case of the “down low”, which has been the focus of racialized media attention, casting African-American men as deceitful, cheating partners and African-American women as victims
- Individuals who cheat on their partners exist among ALL racial and ethnic groups
- Negative and sensationalist response to the down low is the result of biphobia, as well as racist and sexist attitudes towards African-American men and women

(Johnson, 2005; Ka'ahumanu, 1995)

Theories

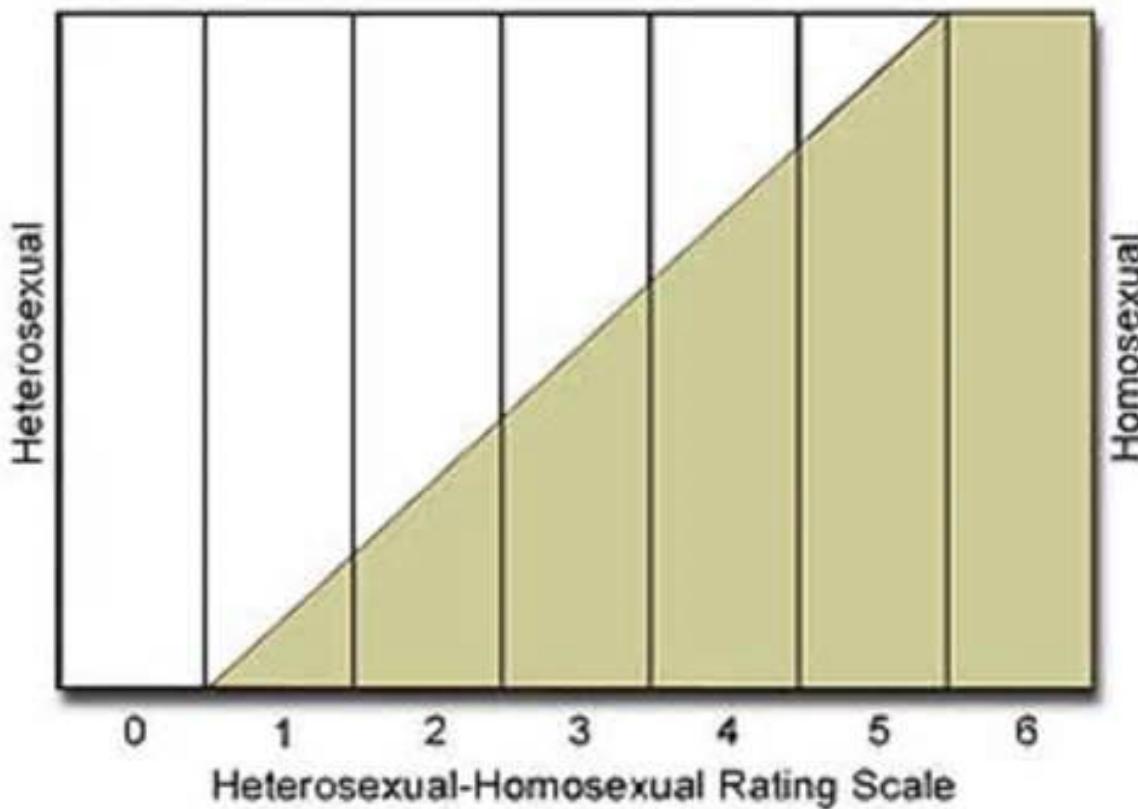


Theories

- Dr. Alfred Kinsey – one of the first sexologists to comprehensively describe human sexual behavior in relation to sexual activity with partners of more than one gender
- His research team interviewed over 10,000 predominantly white Americans in the late 40s/early 50s
- Study normalized sexual activity with more than one gender, which had been previously posited as an extreme occurrence



KINSEY SCALE



Theories, cnt.

- Dr. Fritz Klein created and developed the ‘Klein grid’, a system of charting sexuality by examining the relationships among several variables, including attraction, fantasy, heterosexual and homosexual community involvement and social and emotional preferences, over the lifetime of the individual filling out the grid.
- The grid has been critiqued as overly simplistic, but played an important part in drawing attention to the complexities of human sexuality

(Klein, 1990)



Klein Grid

VARIABLE	PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE	IDEAL
A. Sexual Attraction				
B. Sexual Behavior				
C. Sexual Fantasies				
D. Emotional Preference				
E. Social Preference				
F. Self-Identification				
G. Hetero/Gay lifestyle				

For variables A to E: 1 = Other sex only; 2 = Other sex mostly; 3 = Other sex somewhat more; 4 = Both sexes; 5 = Same sex somewhat more; 6 = Same sex mostly; 7 = Same sex only

For variables F and G: 1 = Heterosexual only; 2 = Heterosexual mostly; 3 = Heterosexual somewhat more; 4 = Hetero/Gay-Lesbian equally; 5 = Gay/Lesbian somewhat more; 6 = Gay/Lesbian mostly; 7 = Gay/Lesbian only

Klein (1993) also identified four main different types of bisexual people:

- **Transitional bisexuals** – who are moving from a heterosexual identity to a lesbian or gay one, or, less commonly, from a lesbian or gay identity to a heterosexual one;
- **Historical bisexuals** – who are now either homosexual or heterosexual but whose pasts include bisexual relationships;
- **Sequential bisexuals** – who have had partners of different sexes at different times in their life course;
- **Concurrent bisexuals** – who are sexually active with both men and women in the same time period.



Theorists, cnt.

- Dr. Paula Rust published a new theory about sexual orientation; she locates her theory within the field of social construction, arguing that bisexuality, like any other sexuality, is “a description of one’s social location.”
- Bisexuals have no monopoly on sexual fluidity, which can also be a part of the lives of those who are not bisexual-identified

(Rust, 1993)



Toward a new model: Sexual fluidity

- The construct of sexual fluidity fits more accurately with bisexual identity, often characterized by the sequential and concurrent bisexual patterns of sexual behavior and attraction.
- Bisexuals can be attracted to, partner with and love both same and opposite sex people over the lifespan. Thus, bisexual identity defies traditional sexual identity models as there is no fixed end point of identity – this is context and relationship dependent (Diamond, 2008).



Why the Confusion?



Why the Confusion?

- Much of the confusion, myths and misinformation about bisexual identified people are due to the variable nature of sexual fluidity.
- Society and culture teaches people that sex and gender identity are binary, as such, ambiguity cannot exist in this model. Anything outside the binary is suspect, stigmatized, misunderstood, and discounted.



Common Forms of Biphobia

Bisexual denial

- Questioning the existence of bisexuality or of certain groups (e.g. bisexual men, bisexual people of color).
- Believing that bisexual people should ‘make their mind up’ or ‘stop sitting on the fence’.
- Seeing bisexual people as ‘confused’ about their sexuality (The Bisexuality Report, 2012).



Common Forms of Biphobia

Bisexual invisibility

- Assuming that people will either be heterosexual or lesbian/gay.
- Referring to ‘homophobia’ rather than ‘homophobia and biphobia’ when speaking of negative attitudes, behaviors and structures in relation to LGB people.
- Referring to ‘same gender’ relationships as ‘lesbian relationships’ or ‘gay relationships’ and ‘other gender relationships’ as ‘heterosexual relationships’, as this misses the fact that such relationships may include one or more bisexual people. This applies to words like ‘couples’ and ‘parents’ as well as ‘relationships’.
- Assuming people’s sexuality on the basis of their current partnership (straight if they are with someone of an ‘other gender’ and lesbian/gay if with someone of the ‘same gender’) (The Bisexuality Report, 2012).



Common Forms of Biphobia

Bisexual invisibility

- Assuming that attraction to more than one gender, or identifying as bisexual, is a phase on the way to a heterosexual or lesbian/gay identity.
- Questioning a person's bisexuality unless they have had sex with more than one gender (heterosexuality is rarely similarly questioned before somebody has had sex with someone of an 'other gender').
- Pressuring bisexual people to become lesbian/gay and/or only recognizing their 'same gender' partners (The Bisexuality Report, 2012).



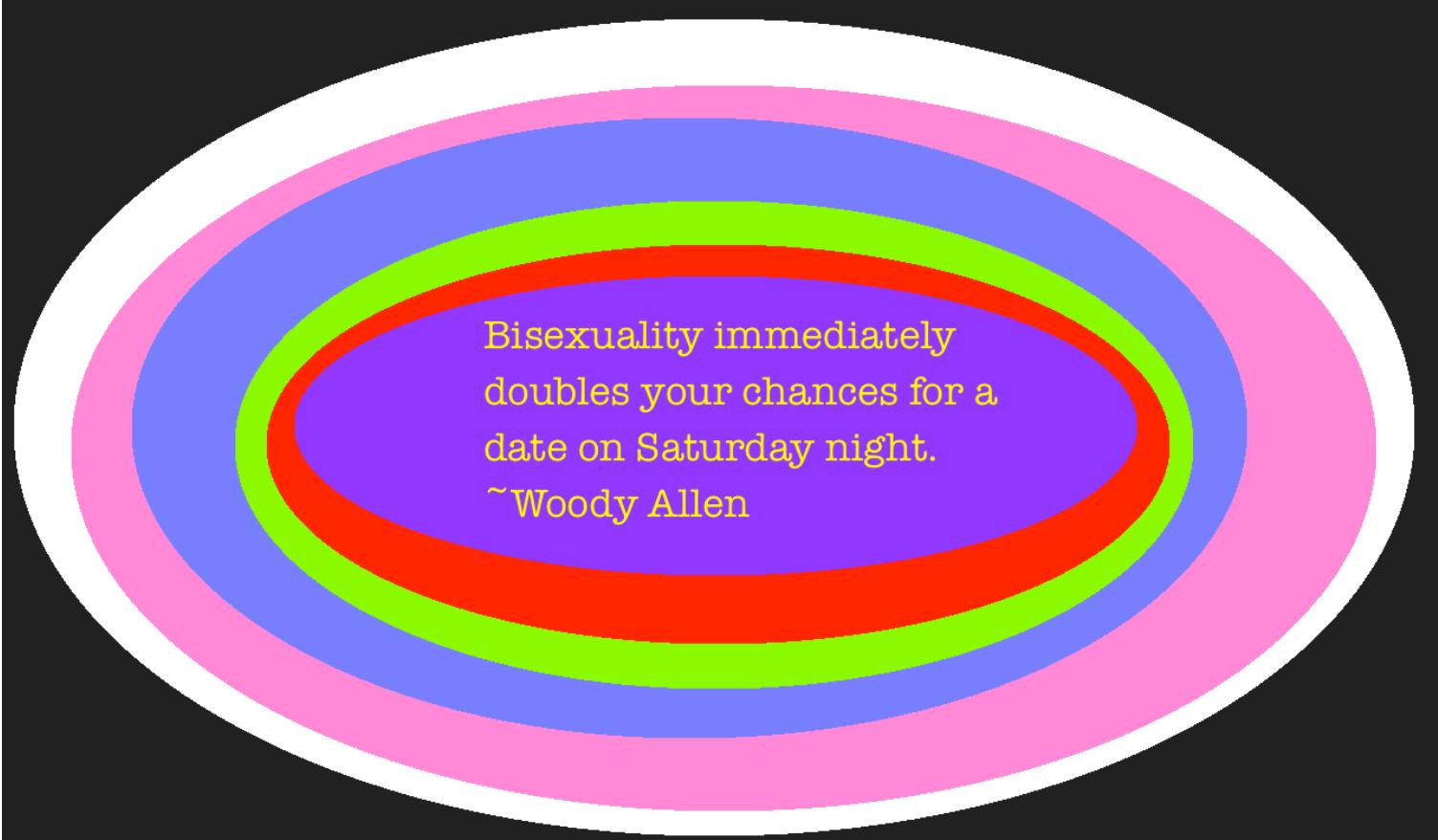
Common Forms of Biphobia

Bisexual exclusion

- Providing no bisexual-specific services but expecting bisexual people to use a combination of heterosexual and lesbian/gay services.
- Claiming to speak for LGB, or LGBT people, and then failing to include ‘B’ in the name or mission statement of a group, neglecting bisexual-specific issues, and/or dropping the ‘B’ within materials (The Bisexuality Report, 2012).



Inappropriate humor



Bisexuality immediately
doubles your chances for a
date on Saturday night.
~Woody Allen



Common Forms of Biphobia

Bisexual marginalization

- Allowing biphobic comments to go unchallenged when homophobic comments would be challenged.
- Assuming that bisexuality is an acceptable topic for humor in a way that lesbian/gay sexualities are not.
- Prioritizing lesbian and/or gay issues over bisexual issues.
- Failing to engage with bisexual individuals or groups in relation to policy and practice.
- Asking lots of questions about a person's bisexuality in ways which would be deemed offensive in relation to heterosexual, lesbian or gay sexuality (The Bisexuality Report, 2012).



Common Forms of Biphobia

Negative stereotypes

- Viewing bisexual people as greedy, or wanting to ‘have their cake and eat it’.
- Seeing bisexual people as spreaders of diseases.
- Assuming that bisexual people are promiscuous or incapable of monogamy.
- Assuming that bisexual people are a threat to relationships/families.
- Believing bisexual people to be manipulative, evil or tragic.
- Thinking that bisexual people will always leave their ‘same’ or ‘other’ gender partners.
- Assuming that bisexual people can pass as heterosexual and are therefore privileged or taking the ‘easy option’.
- Denigrating the attractiveness of bisexual people.
- Viewing bisexual people only in terms of their sexual practices, for example as objects to fulfil sexual fantasies (such as threesomes).
- Assuming that bisexual people will be sexually interested in ‘anything that moves’ (The Bisexuality Report, 2012).

Health Disparities

- Bisexual people experience greater health disparities than the broader population, including a greater likelihood of suffering from depression and other mood or anxiety disorders.
- Bisexuals report higher rates of hypertension, poor or fair physical health, smoking, and risky drinking than heterosexuals or lesbians/gays.
- Many, if not most, bisexual people don't come out to their healthcare providers. This means they are getting incomplete information (for example, about safer sex practices).



Health Disparities

- Most HIV and STI prevention programs don't adequately address the health needs of bisexuals, much less those who have sex with both men and women but do not identify as bisexual.
- Bisexual women in relationships with monosexual partners have an increased rate of domestic violence compared to women in other demographic categories.



Top Ten Bisexual Health Issues

1. Drug use
2. Alcohol use
3. Sexual health
4. Tobacco use
5. Cancer
6. Nutrition, fitness and weight
7. Heart Health
8. Depression and anxiety
9. Social support, general emotional well-being & quality of life
10. Self-harm and suicide attempts



Unique Relationship Issues



Unique Relationship Issues

- Openly non-monogamous styles of relating are more common amongst self-identified bisexual people than amongst lesbians or heterosexual people (they are similarly common amongst gay men).
- There are also multiple marginalizations for openly non-monogamous bisexual people who are even more likely to be stigmatized for supposed promiscuity or to be seen as sexual predators.
- Bisexual people who are in monogamous relationships are more likely to be ‘invisible’ (due to sexual identity being assumed on the basis of their current partner).



Implications for Providers

- It is imperative for health care providers to create a safe, affirming atmosphere for bisexuals, MSMW, and WSMW in order to facilitate dialogue on well-being and improve the delivery of health care to minority populations. Many members of the bisexual community have negative experiences with health care providers, with problems ranging from disclosure of sexual orientation to distribution of improper or incomplete sexual health information.



Implications for Providers

- Disclosure is important for bisexual clients for many reasons, including:

...the desire to be seen as a whole person, with bisexuality being part of who they are, to increase comfort levels and understanding, so proper diagnoses can be made and relevant information given, so providers can be sensitive and understanding to the issues being faced, for appropriate resources referrals, and generally because it is important for mental health and emotional wellness (Dobinson et al, p.54).

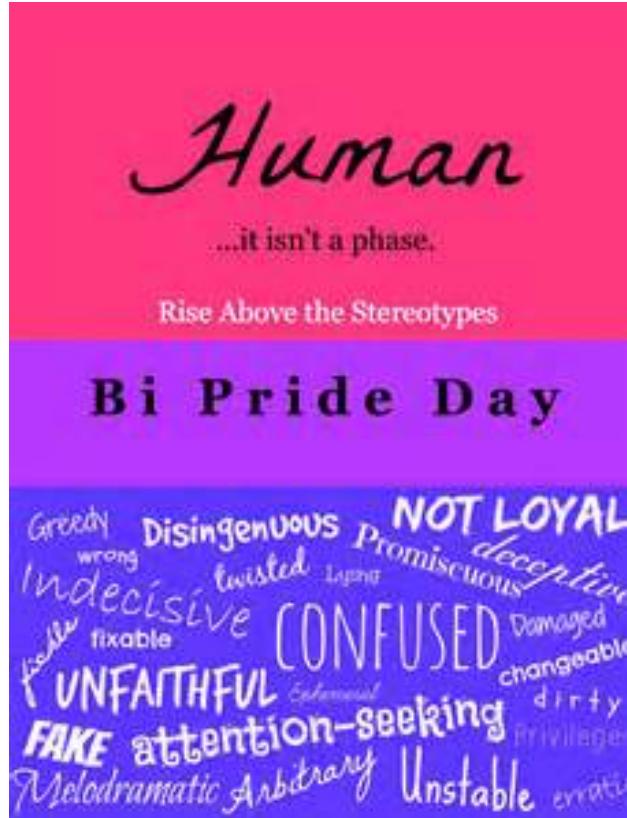


Implications for Providers

- Clients who experience homophobia, biphobia, or ignorance when dealing with providers may not receive appropriate information about sexual health, with some counselors ‘equating bisexuality with having multiple partners, not receiving appropriate information about safer sex with male and female partners, voyeurism, inappropriate jokes or comments, bisexuality being seen as the problem, and being told that you’re either gay or straight’ (Miller, 2007).



Stigma Management



Stigma Management

- Experiencing multiple stigmas only exacerbates the feelings of internalized hatred or shame. Stigma management is a strategy that should be discussed with clients in order to assist them with day to day transgressions over identity disclosure across the lifespan.
- Stigma management has to do with the continuous process of “coming out” to different people, in different situations and contexts.
- Counselors should be able to discuss the ramifications of coming out to people who may not be supportive or open to not only their bisexual identities, but their substance use history.



Acceptance

Love Doesn't Come With A Gender



<http://darkhun.deviantart.com/>



General Recommendations

- Inform yourself about bisexuality and avoid stereotypes about bisexual people.
- Liaise with bisexual communities on issues of equality and diversity in the same way that you liaise with lesbian, gay and trans communities. There are many bisexual groups and organizations who are willing to engage in this manner.
- Ensure that bisexual people are included amongst the speakers on panels and forums relating to LGBT communities.
- Include bisexual representation in all relevant working groups and initiatives.
- Include bisexuality within all policy and explicitly within the diversity implications section of every document and policy.
- Don't assume one unified bisexual experience. Many different types of relationships and sexual practices are found among bisexual people.



General Recommendations

- Separate biphobia out from homophobia, recognizing that there are specific issues facing bisexual people such as lack of acknowledgement of their existence, stereotypes of greediness or promiscuity, and pressure to be either gay or straight.
- Recognize the role that biphobia and bisexual invisibility play in creating negative outcomes for bisexual people.
- Recognize that bisexual people are also subject to homophobia, heterosexism and heteronormativity.
- Be clear, when talking about bisexual people, whether you are defining bisexuality by attraction, behavior and/or identity.
- Support and commission research addressing the specific needs and experiences of bisexual people.
- Support events and spaces for bisexual people financially, through access to venues and resources, and with publicity.
- Address bisexual-specific experiences of domestic violence given evidence that bisexual people in ‘same-gender’ relationships are more at risk than other groups (The Bisexuality Report, 2012).

Online Resources

US and International

- BiNet USA: <http://www.binetusa.org/>
- Bi resource: www.biresource.net
- The Bisexual Resource Center: www.biresource.org
- Bisexual.com: www.bisexual.com
- Shybi.com: www.shybi.com (women), www.shybi-guys.com (men)
- Online forum: <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/BiHealth>
- Wiki database: www.binetusa.org
- American Institute of Bisexuality: www.bisexual.org
- Journal of Bisexuality: www.tandfonline.com/toc/wjbi20/current
- Academic-bi: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/academic_bi



Key Books on Bisexuality

- Diamond, L. (2009). Sexual fluidity. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Firestein, B. A. (Ed). (1996). Bisexuality: The psychology and politics of an invisible minority. London: Sage.
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