

## Glossary

Note: Short Definitions are on top of page. Longer Explanations are below.

### Bi or Bisexual

**Person who has the capacity to be attracted to people of more than one gender romantically/and or sexually.**

### Biphobia

**Fear, hatred or prejudice towards bisexual people, often based on inaccurate stereotypes.**

### Bisexual Erasure

**Bisexual erasure is the attempt to erase, hide, eliminate or make invisible bisexual people, groups or organizations and bisexual contributions to the LGBT movement, culture or history or general society. Bisexual erasure is an outcome of biphobia.**

### Bi or Bisexual Identity

**An identity of “bi” or “bisexual” is based on a person’s capacity for emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to people of more than one gender, and possibly, identification with the bi community.** (Not everyone who is attracted to people of more than one gender chooses to identify as bisexual. Many people with multi-gender attractions identify as gay or straight.)

### Gaywashed

**A type of bisexual erasure. Example: When a reporter identifies a bi-identified person as gay in an article.** Also applies to people of bisexual experience who prefer different labels such as fluid, omnisexual, pansexual, ambisexual, queer or refuse labels altogether.

### LGBT

**Common abbreviation for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender.”**

### LGBT Community

**Used to more accurately describe the makeup of what is often referred to as the “gay community.” This community includes gay men, lesbians, bisexual people and transgender people.**

## Explanations

### Biphobia

**Fear, hatred or prejudice towards bisexual people, often based on inaccurate stereotypes.** Also dismissing, ignoring, or erasing bisexual people. For example: saying that bisexual people don't exist; that it is not a legitimate sexual orientation; that bis are merely slutty, oversexed or greedy; that bis are really gay but don't want to admit it; that bis are liars or dilettantes; omitting the word bi or bisexual in the name of an organization or event that serves the whole LGBT

community; or believing that bis don't deserve equal status or inclusion because they are a minority in the LGBT community.

As bi activists have been increasingly successful (often in partnership with transgender activists) in lobbying to get “lesbian and gay” or “gay and lesbian” organizations and events to change their names to “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender” and to increasingly use the phrase “LGBT” instead of “gay” or “gay and lesbian” when describing our community: biphobia has been decreasing. The incorrect perception that people who self-identify as bi or bisexual are not really part of the LGBT community, have never contributed to the community or were not involved at the beginning of the movement are decreasing. So far, this has been more successful politically than socially as the same prejudices, stereotypes and assumptions about bisexual people and dating still exist.

## **Bisexual Erasure**

**Bisexual erasure is the attempt to erase, hide, eliminate or make invisible bisexual people, groups or organizations and bisexual contributions to the LGBT movement, culture or history or general society. Bisexual erasure is an outcome of biphobia.**

Historically, since the beginning of the LGBT rights movement (commonly referred to as the “gay rights movement” or “lesbian and gay rights movement”—an example of bisexual erasure) the word bisexual has been left off of the names of organizations and events that serve the entire LGBT community. Not one major national organization (that is not specifically bisexual) has the word “bi” or “bisexual” in the title. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, The Gay and Lesbian Journalists Association, and the Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project are all examples of this phenomenon. The names of these organizations were decided when the practice of bisexual erasure in LGBT organization-naming was common. If those organizations were being named today, the names would most likely have been formulated to be more inclusive—however, none of these organizations has volunteered to change their established names in order to address this inequity. They all have made efforts to be more LGBT-inclusive in their mission statements as well as their literature and websites than in the past—but this effort has been inconsistent and spotty. Every year there are multiple instances where these organizations (as well as those without a problematic name such as Human Rights Campaign, Lambda Legal and Freedom to Marry demonstrate their lack of commitment to an inclusive policy and put out press releases, fund-raising literature, website resources and give speeches that either completely or mostly erase bisexual (and transgender) people.

The mainstream media, taking its cues from “gay and lesbian” organizations and their spokespeople, continues this bisexual erasure in their news reporting on the LGBT community and on LGBT-related issues. The rare instances that bisexuality is mentioned in the mainstream media are usually when covering AIDS transmission to heterosexual women from men on the “down low” or stories on cheating spouses. This coverage is rarely balanced with any positive coverage of bisexual people or issues. Bisexual people who are famous for their contributions to society in the arts or other professions are often erroneously described as “gay” in both the gay and mainstream media. Gay media outlets are inconsistent in their usage of inclusive language and 50% or more of their articles use terms such as “gay and lesbian” when terms like “LGBT,” “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender” or “same-sex” would be more accurate.

## **Bi or Bisexual Identity**

**An identity of “bi” or “bisexual” is based on a person’s capacity for emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to people of more than one gender, and possibly, identification with the bi community.** (Not everyone who is attracted to people of more than one gender

chooses to identify as bisexual. Many people with multi-gender attractions identify as gay or straight.)

Although the words bi and bisexual imply that there are two genders of people to be attracted to (female and male), as understanding of the spectrum of transgender possibilities has increased, understanding of the implications on a bi identity have increased also: updating the definition of bisexual. Some people of bisexual experience choose alternative words to express that understanding such as pansexual, ambisexual, fluid, omnisexual or queer. Some feel themselves to be "beyond labels." The famous quote by bisexual rock star Michael Stipe (REM) "Labels are for soup cans" expresses that sensibility.

Many come to a bi identity after identifying as either straight or gay first. Heterosexism leads many to assume the "default" label of heterosexual until proven otherwise. Some transition first to a gay or lesbian identity, especially if the word or concept of bisexuality is either unknown to that person or has been denigrated so that it doesn't seem like an appealing option--even when the person's feelings most closely match that identity. Often, well meaning friends or "experts" assume the person who expresses bisexual feelings must actually be gay (because they themselves went through a transitional identity as bisexual before settling into a gay identity, or they were advised by a gay person who believes this.) A bi person need not have had equal sexual or romantic experience with men and women, in fact, they need not have had any sexual experience to claim a bi identity: feelings of romantic or sexual attraction are sufficient. As a society, we presume heterosexuality from birth. If we can presume that, we cannot say someone is too young or too inexperienced to claim otherwise.

The feelings of a child or teenager who has early crushes on both girls and boys should not be discounted, in fact, they should be given extra weight. As a society, we presume heterosexuality from birth and reinforce it socially from infancy and toddlerhood up. For example telling a baby girl "You are beautiful and all the boys will love you!" or telling a boy toddler "You're a handsome guy and all the girls will be after you!" or asking a first grader how many boyfriends she has are all common ways we talk to children. Children who display early bisexual tendencies, therefore, are expressing their inner nature as they have not yet had any bisexual influences.

As an identity label, some prefer the term *bi* to *bisexual* because they feel it more closely matches the transition from *homosexual* to *gay* or *lesbian* and indicates a broader focus on love relationships, community and culture rather than solely on sexuality. Some prefer *bisexual* because they don't want to de-sex the label or feel it's more traditional and recognizable. As Carol Queen, noted bisexual erotica author, says: "Sex is our middle name!" Many use the two terms interchangeably. Some people who describe themselves the same way as those who use the label bi prefer other labels such as pansexual, queer, omnisexual, ambisexual or fluid.