



Think Tank for Inclusion & Equity

WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

“Bi+” is an umbrella term for people of all genders whose sexual orientation falls outside concepts of straight and gay. This includes bisexual (or “bi”)*, pansexual (or “pan”)*, sexually fluid*, queer*, and other sexual orientations with the capacity to be sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to more than one gender (not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree). Someone’s bi+ identity is valid—and should be respected—no matter their relationship status, sexual/romantic experience, or the gender of their partner(s).

HERE'S WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

Despite making up the largest portion of the LGBTQIA+ community, bi+ people are significantly underrepresented onscreen and are frequently reduced to harmful tropes, leading to a widespread misunderstanding of bi+ people and the false idea that they’re confused, going through a phase, or experimenting. These forms of biphobia* and bi erasure contribute to higher rates of mental health struggles, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence. In addition to experiencing discrimination from straight people, bi+ people are often excluded or erased from queer spaces and conversations about LGBTQIA+ issues, which reduces their access to resources and support.



BI+ PEOPLE

OVERREPRESENTED STORIES & HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

- **Devious:** Bi+ characters as inherently untrustworthy, cheaters, obsessive, greedy, or villainous, who often use sex as a tool of manipulation. These harmful depictions paint an entire community as evil.
- **Oversexualized:** Characters who are overly promiscuous and willing to have sex with anyone. These kinds of portrayals can fuel hate, putting bi+ people in danger of real-life sexual violence.
- **Unnamed & Erased:** Bi+ characters who have a vague, unexamined identity (e.g., “I don’t really do labels”) or stories where their identity is only hinted at. This contributes to bi+ erasure because, unless their sexual orientation is named onscreen, the character will read as straight or gay based on their partner/love interest.
- **Biphobia:** Storylines and dialogue that make fun of, denigrate, and/or invalidate bi+ identity (e.g., jokes that a character is “mostly straight” or that “everyone’s a little bit queer”; paranoid partners assuming bi+ people will cheat). Even when played for “comedy,” these biphobic messages are harmful for all viewers to internalize.
- **Straight To Gay:** Stories where characters have one same-gender romantic/sexual experience and are immediately depicted as *exclusively* gay. This wrongly portrays orientation as either straight or gay, with no room for bi+ identity.
- **Plot Device:** Revealing a bi+ character’s attraction to more than one gender as a plot twist or temporary story, especially when their identity is never referenced again. Bi+ people shouldn’t be used as props whose only role is to further other characters’ stories.
- **Bis In Tris:** Characters in love triangles (with a man and a woman) and/or approached for threesomes. These depictions can lead audiences to believe a bi+ character is choosing to be straight or gay (based on their partner) and wrongly equate being bi+ with desiring/having sex with multiple people at the same time. (Like anyone, bi+ people *can* be in polyamorous relationships, but being bi+ doesn’t equate to a desire for multiple partners.)

THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF

- **Out & Thriving:** Confident and comfortable bi+ characters with explicit identities (e.g., bisexual, pansexual, queer) whose sexuality is believed and supported by other characters. Show them in community with other bi+ people.
- **Bi+ Men:** More men and masculine characters of all kinds (e.g., BIPOC, HIV+, disabled, trans) with explicit bi+ identities. Not only are bi+ men greatly underrepresented onscreen, there is also a long-held *false* societal belief that they don’t exist.
- **Healthy Relationships:** Bi+ characters in romantic and sexual relationships with partners who support, celebrate, and defend their identity. In particular, show bi+ characters in monogamous partnerships. Of course, bi+ people can seek all kinds of relationships (e.g., casual, polyamorous), but explicitly bi+ characters in monogamous relationships help portray that sexual orientation is a part of who you are and not dictated by the gender of the person you’re with.
- **All Ages:** Characters of all ages and in all stages of their bi+ journey, especially in friendship and/or mentorship with one another. Show them navigating the joys of being bi+ together, as well as the challenges (e.g., repeatedly coming out in a biphobic society; navigating microaggressions and erasure; facing poor mental health).
- **The “B” Belongs:** Bi+ characters participating, being accepted, and taking on leadership roles in LGBTQIA+ spaces. Show that their identity, history, and culture deserve respect within the community.
- **Gay Allies:** Gay and lesbian characters, standing in support of bi+ people, who confront and work to dismantle the biphobia within the LGBTQIA+ community (e.g., being inclusive and accepting of bi+ people, no matter the gender of their partner; pushing back on biphobic behavior; in healthy relationships with bi+ people).

*Denotes a term in the glossary

QUICK FACTS

- ➔ Bi+ people make up 57% of LGBTQIA+ adults but only 29% of queer characters on TV in the 2021-22 season (with 124 bi+ women, 50 bi+ men, and nine bi+ non-binary characters).
- ➔ 15% of Gen Z adults and 6% of millennials in the U.S. self-identify as bi+, making it the most common orientation in the LGBTQIA+ community.
- ➔ 61% of bi+ women and 37% of bi+ men experience rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, the highest of any sexual orientation for each gender.
- ➔ In 2019, 66% of bi+ youth reported feeling sad or hopeless, compared to 27% of their heterosexual peers and 49% of their gay/lesbian peers.

ONLINE REFERENCES & RESOURCES:

- The Advocate: [“13 Things Never to Say to Bisexual People”](#)
- Bi.org: [“Questions”](#)
- Bisexual Resource Center: [“Bi+ Info: What it Means to be a B\(ee\)”](#)
[“Understanding Issues Facing Bisexual Americans”](#)
- Gallup: [“LGBT Identification in U.S. Ticks Up to 7.1%”](#)
- GLAAD: [“6 college students explain what being pansexual means to them”](#)
[“Accelerating Bi+ Acceptance”](#)
[“For Celebrate Bisexuality Day, let’s break some bisexual myths”](#)
[“Some questions to ask yourself as you become a better bi+ ally”](#)
[“Where We Are on TV, 2021-2022”](#)
- Huffington Post: [“9 Things Pansexual People Want You To Know”](#)
- Human Rights Campaign: [“Coming Out: Living Authentically as Bisexual+”](#)
- Movement Advancement Project: [“Bisexual People Face Invisibility, Isolation, And Shocking Rates Of Discrimination And Violence”](#)
- Princeton University: [“Bi/Pan/Fluid 101”](#)
- Teen Vogue: [“What is Pansexual? A Guide to Pansexuality”](#)
- Them: [“9 LGBTQ+ People Explain How They Love, Hate, and Understand the Word ‘Queer’”](#)
- The Trevor Project: [“How to Support Bisexual Youth”](#)
[“Understanding Bisexuality”](#)
- Women’s Health: [“Okay, So What Does It Actually Mean To Be Sexually Fluid?”](#)

GLOSSARY

Biphobia:

Prejudice or hatred directed at bi+ people, including jokes or comments based on stereotypes that seek to undermine the legitimacy of bi+ identity. Biphobia occurs both within and outside of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Bisexual (Bi):

A person of any gender who has the capacity to form enduring sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attractions to people of *two or more genders* (e.g., women attracted to women, men, and non-binary people; non-binary people attracted to non-binary people and men) with gender influencing the type of attraction they experience. These attractions can manifest in differing ways and to differing degrees over a person’s lifetime (meaning bi people aren’t necessarily attracted to different genders equally).

Pansexual (Pan):

A person of any gender who has the capacity to form enduring sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attractions to people of *any* gender or *regardless of* gender.

Pansexual vs. Bisexual:

Some people are comfortable identifying as both bi and pan and may use them interchangeably, while others only identify with one. (Neither term excludes attraction to trans people—both terms are trans-inclusive.)

Queer:

A word with many meanings. In the context of bi+ identity, queer is used by some people as a way to explain that they aren’t straight but don’t feel like their sexual orientation falls into categories like gay, lesbian, bi, or pan.

Sexual Fluidity:

When one’s sexual orientation isn’t fixed, meaning who they are sexually attracted to can change over time (sometimes influenced by their relationship, situation, or environment). Sexual fluidity is not the same as bi+ identity and doesn’t negate sexual orientations. Instead, it captures the idea of a spectrum or *fluidity* among the orientations.

Please visit our [Expanded Glossary](#) for in-depth definitions of the above terms and definitions of additional terms: **bi erasure**, **bi visibility**, **intimate partner violence**, **minority stress**, **mlm**, **omnisexual**, **polyamorous**, **transphobia**, and **wlw**.

In-kind support and materials for this factsheet were provided by the following partner organizations. Please contact them for additional information, story guidance, and in-room consultations.



INDIVIDUAL CONSULTANT: [Alex Love, SHRM-CP](#)



A list of the most up-to-date contact information for all of our partner organizations can be found on our website: [WriteInclusion.org/factsheets](#)

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY:

