

GETTING

B in a gay/
straight
world



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WELCOME

Whoever thought the world was just in black and white? If you're bi, it sometimes seems the world only wants us to be gay or straight. But life isn't so clear-cut!

For some of us, our partner's gender doesn't matter, it's all about the person. For others, our partner's gender is a big part of the appeal. Either way, or even somewhere in between, we're still bi: and here's a few tips about getting bi in a gay/straight world.



Bisexuality isn't complicated, or hard to understand, but people's attitudes to bisexuality can be tangled.

In a world where the local supermarket has thirty varieties of coffee, too often it's like you still only have two choices about your sexuality.

We're here to shake that up a little...

LANGUAGE!

Throughout this booklet we talk about being bi or bisexual or bisexuality. A decent dictionary's definitions will tell you something like:



Bisexual: adj. Attracted sexually and/or emotionally to more than one gender.

There are some people who prefer not to label their sexuality but who might fit into that description, or who prefer to use other words such as queer, pansexual or omnisexual to mean essentially the same thing, but perhaps to emphasise that they are attracted to a spectrum of gender identities, viewing gender a bit like the Kinsey Scale (see page 6). They may also want to emphasise that other things are important in their attractions, such as aspects of appearance or personality..

That's great; we use the 'b' words here because they are the most common and accessible words in general usage.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE...

Bisexual, lesbian, and gay visibility has come a long way in recent years. There are open and happily lesbian and gay film stars, TV characters, celebrities - even government ministers.

There are a growing number of out bi people too, but not so many. It can still feel quite an isolated experience coming out as bi. For lesbians and gay men there are places like Manchester's Canal Street, but where to go to find other bi folk? How do we keep a sense of identity, being bi in a world that still wants us to be straight or gay?

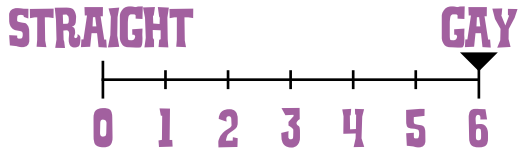
For many bi people there hasn't been much information out there. That's why Community Foundation for Greater Manchester have helped us to produce this guide, as we at BiPhoria are the longest-established social & support group run by and for bisexual people in the UK.

We hope it's useful, and we would warmly welcome your feedback.

You can get in touch with us on **bis@biphoria.org.uk** or by writing to **BiPhoria**, Box 101, c/o LGF, Number 5, Richmond Street, Manchester M1 3HF.

THE SCIENCE BIT

Alfred Kinsey (famous for the 'Kinsey Report' which shocked late 1940s America by revealing people had sex) liked to plot people on a scale according to who they'd had sex with from 0 to 6. 0 was entirely straight, 6 entirely gay.



Where on that line do you have to be to be bi? Some people say 3 - that if you're not totally equal in your attractions, you're somehow "really gay" or "really straight".



We say - anywhere in the space between the two ends - just like if you're swimming the Channel, it doesn't matter whether you're nearer to France or to England, you're still really wet!



Kinsey's way of looking at things was as sophisticated as it got for thirty years. Then in 1980 Fritz Klein, a sociologist, argued that there was a lot more to sexuality than just who you'd slept with. For instance, you might be very 'into' girls but rubbish at pulling them.

And more seriously what you do and what you might like to do can be affected by the different legal and social status of same sex relationships in many countries and cultures, as well as how you live your life - if your friends are more open-minded and you have a more liberal workplace you may feel you have more options open.

Klein also said that sexuality changed over time - so he looked at your sexuality in the past, where it was at present, and also asked what your ideal would be - and took into account that the pattern of someone's attraction, behaviour, and fantasies weren't necessarily the same.

Klein: a lot more complicated!

	Past	Present	Ideal
Sexual Attraction			
Sexual Behavior			
Sexual Fantasies			
Emotional Preference			
Social Preference			
Lifestyle			
Self Identification			



TELLING PEOPLE

“Telling people that you are bi can seem a big step, but for many it’s a way to become comfortable with your sexuality and to stop feeling like you’re “hiding”.

But should you come out? And if you decide you should, who should you come out to, and how should you do it?

The first person you need to come out to, and perhaps the only person you really have to come out to, is yourself. When you come out to yourself it can be quite enlightening - being honest about who you are and who you’re attracted. It can feel like taking a load off of your shoulders. Take your time, look at what you feel and what feels right for you. There is no rush!

If you’ve done that, and you feel you do want to come out to others, then you need to pick your moment. You don’t have to do it the very next day if you don’t want to. Some people find it’s easier to come out as bisexual after first attending a bisexual event and hearing how other people have done it.

Mood matters too: if you solemnly say “I have something very important to tell you, I think you had better sit down” then they’ll be assuming it’s something horrendous, and that can put people in the wrong frame of mind! We suggest not making your sexuality seem to be some sort of doom-laden revelation - instead it’s often best just to casually mention it when the other person is relaxed and in a good mood.

Some people won’t see why you want to tell them, or would prefer not to have a conversation that is directly about sexualities. Perhaps instead of taking a deep breath and “I’m bisexual!” you could come

out by mentioning you’d been to a bisexual event, really like the way a film handled the bisexuality of a character, or comment that a celebrity coming out as bi struck a nerve?

Incidentally, you don’t have to come out to everyone. Many bisexuals don’t tell all of their relatives, or their co-workers. Who you come out to is up to you, and really you don’t have to come out at all, except perhaps to yourself. If you’re thinking about coming out to someone you’re financially dependant on, like a boss or parent, and you think they might be homophobic or biphobic then please think carefully about how to do it, and whether you need to.

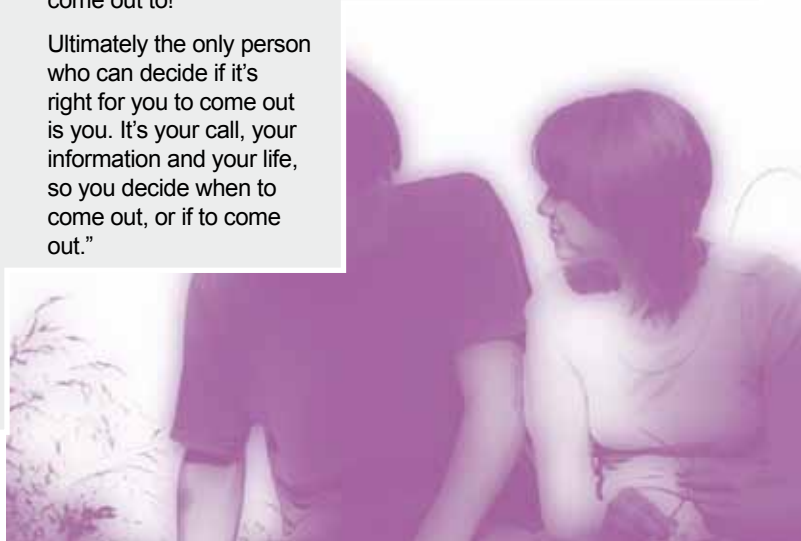
Of course, if you are casual and matter of fact about your sexuality and you don’t make it seem like a big deal, then it’s quite likely that you won’t need to come out to some people.

They’ll hear it through the grapevine. Being out and happy about your sexuality will reassure people, and many may never feel the need to bring it up with you. Maybe you’ll be the person that others come out to!

Ultimately the only person who can decide if it’s right for you to come out is you. It’s your call, your information and your life, so you decide when to come out, or if to come out.”

The Bisexual Index 

You can read a longer version of this article on the Bisexual Index website.



WHO TO TELL?

BiPhoria's top tips on who to come out to...



NO-ONE You don't have to tell anyone. If now's not the right time, it can wait.

YOURSELF Take your time, explore your feelings, don't feel you have to make any sudden life changes. You'll still be bisexual in the morning!

YOUR PARTNER They may already have noticed signs, but choose a time and way of telling them carefully - not while they're driving or over the Christmas dinner!

YOUR FAMILY As with partners - they might already have a clue.

The people you see every day.
WORKMATES AND FRIENDS if you don't make a big deal out of it, there's a good chance neither will they.

PARTNERS, FRIENDS & ALLIES

Not everyone who picks this booklet up will be bi. Maybe you're a partner, friend, or family member who wants to know more and wants to help or understand. So a few ideas:

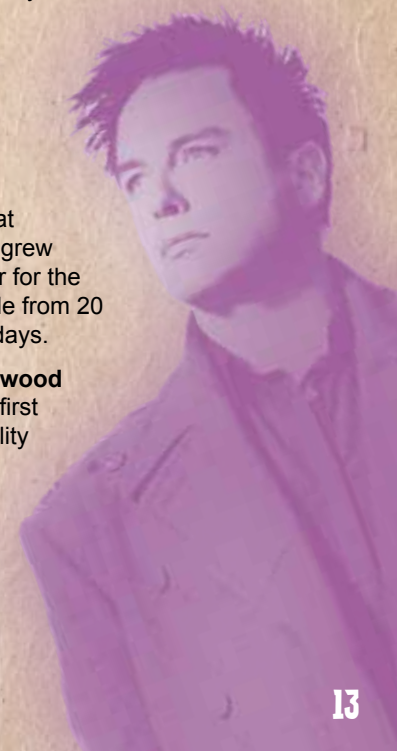
- Accept who we are.
- Put right anyone who tries to convince us – or you – that we're really gay or straight. We know best what's going on in our heads and who we're attracted to!
- Don't keep us in a box with other ideas about how bis have to be. We can be monogamous, choose to be single, or be open to more than one partner.
- Who we are now is just as 'real' whether having always been bi or having just come to being bi after being straight or gay in the past.
- Challenge homophobia. Because it hurts us, too, making some of our loves and relationships less valid than others.
- Challenge biphobia – from gay and straight people, and sometimes from ourselves. We've grown up with biphobia around us too, which we might have internalised and need to shake off.
- Help us find other bis if we're feeling isolated or alone.
- There are some starting points on the last couple of pages of the booklet.

BI HISTORY:

Know your big bi dates

- 612 BC:** **Sappho**, lesbian icon poet from Lesbos, takes her life over her love for a man called Phaon, reflecting how difficult it is to put modern sexuality labels on people from the past.
- 323 BC:** **Alexander the Great** conquers most of the known world. Again, up to you how to judge stories of him having relationships both with princesses and with male friends.
- 1914:** The word “bisexual” first appears in the **Journal of American Medical Association**: “By nature all human beings are psychically bisexual - capable of loving a person of either sex.” The term had previously been used only to refer to intersex and identification with both genders.
- 1948:** **Kinsey’s “Sexual Behavior in the Human Male”** published - it says that some people are gay or straight but there are many in between. Causes uproar! We recommend the 2004 film “Kinsey” about it.
- 1980:** **First UK bi group starts** - London (ran until 2002).
- 1984:** **The Politics of Bisexuality** is the first UK bisexual conference - they become an annual event and are still going strong, see www.bicon.org.uk
- 1991:** American bi mag “**Anything That Moves**” launches with the strapline “the magazine for card-carrying bisexuals”

- 1994:** **BiPhoria** launches as a mixed social & support group for bis in Manchester (still going in 2011)
- 1995:** **Bi Community News** magazine starts publishing in the UK in response to biphobia and bi-erasure in the gay and lesbian press.
- 1996:** Having changed its name to include bi and trans people **London LGBT Pride** hosts a bi tent with performers including Tom “Glad to be Gay” Robinson and Marisa Carnesky.
- 1999:** US bi activist organisation BiNet declares September 23 as Bi Visibility Day or “**International Celebrate Bisexuality Day**”
- 2000:** **BiCon** - the conference that The Politics Of Bisexuality grew into - comes to Manchester for the first time. Nearly 300 people from 20 countries attend over five days.
- 2006:** Doctor Who spin-off **Torchwood** breaks new ground as the first TV series to make bisexuality normal
- 2010:** **Bi Visibility Day** marked with at least ten events around the UK. Check september23.bi.org for more info.



BI FIDELITY

One of the big nonsense myths about being bi is that when it comes to lovers you 'need one of each'. Like heck! Some people do find having more than one partner suits them - but that's true for straight and gay folk too.

But someone in an existing, monogamous relationship who is coming to realise they

are bi may want to explore their feelings and need to talk about things. You can find ways of doing that while still being faithful in a monogamous relationship: it may help to find bi groups or forums where you can talk to other people about how to make that work for you.

"For me, the hardest things I have had to deal with have been the isolation, partly due to my fear of what other people will think, and the fluctuation of my attractions - I used to wish I could just settle on one way and stay there. Since I've accepted that as part of being bi it's no problem at all. Coming out is also hard - I find it hardest to come out to people I care about, although I've never had a truly bad reaction so perhaps my fear is unfounded.

The worst reaction was my mum using the cliché "It's just a phase", which I'm sure she still thinks ten years later! I LOVE being bi and wouldn't really want to be any other way just because it makes sense to me - seems to fit in with my way of thinking and other areas of my life."

POLYAMORY?

Not everyone chooses monogamous relationships and you may want to consider a polyamorous relationship. As the word suggests, it's many-loves - having more than one partner, where each of them knows about the others. If you're going to do that it takes time and consideration, and you and your partners will need to be open, honest, and to understand and respect one another's limits.

And three key rules: communicate, communicate, communicate! Talk about what you need, about how each of you are feeling about things, your fears, hopes and needs.

We're all human and exploring polyamory is likely to be a path with a few mistakes along the way. After all, we don't get taught the 'script' for it the way films and TV tell us about monogamy!

Just like there are bi social & support groups, there are poly groups too - you may want to do a little web surfing to find something suitable!

"Sometimes it seems like polyamory is more common on the bi scene, but I think that's because it's a place where people feel comfortable being out as polyamorous as well as bisexual. When you look closer it doesn't seem most bisexuals are poly or even would want to be."

GROUP ACTION

Want to meet other bis?

There are lots of groups out there for gay and lesbian people, or “LGBT” (lesbian, gay, bi and trans), and especially in big cities like Manchester you can find not just groups for coming out and talking about your sexuality but all sorts of pursuits from hill climbing to rugby playing, political activism to film-going.

Some – a growing number – of those groups welcome bi members; a few may not be so comfortable. Usually the best approach is to go along and find out for yourself.

There are also bi specific groups, events and projects. In Manchester there’s a long-running social and support project called BiPhoria, established in the mid 1990s as a bi space.

“The group started from two things - the first was the idea of creating a space where being bi was normal rather than strange, where you didn’t have to explain or defend yourself for being bi.

And many lesbian and gay groups are single-sex, which didn’t seem to make so much sense for a group where there was a common experience of being less focused on gender and perhaps more on other aspects of personality.”

“I was terrified the first time I went along – walked round the block about five times before I rang the doorbell, it was the first time I’d told someone I wasn’t straight. Afterwards I felt a bit daft – after all, everyone else there must have had first time nerves too.”

“Going to the group gave me more confidence to act on my feelings - having only ever been with other guys before, the third time I went I was able to show off that now I’d kissed a girl!”

BiPhoria gives people a space to talk about being bi, as well as having a social diary and organising events or trips to Prides and community events around the country like BiCon and BiFest.

www.biphoria.org.uk or text 07941 811 124

@biphoria on twitter

Write: box 101, LGF, 5 Richmond St, Manchester M1 3HF

BIPHOBIA

Some people will try and convince you you're not bi, or be prejudiced against you if they think or know you're bisexual.

Some of the daft things we've heard:

"IT'S JUST A PHASE"

even if it were, lots of things are phases – being a teenager is a phase, doesn't make it any less real!

"YOU MIGHT LEAVE ME FOR A MEMBER OF THE OPPOSITE SEX. I COULDN'T COMPETE"

If we became gay or straight, yes - but being bi means just the opposite to that.

"BIS ARE JUST CONFUSED"

Sounds more like, we're bisexual - and you're confused.

"IT'S A COP-OUT"

In a gay/straight world, being honest about being bi is hardly the easy option - but it can be the honest one.

"BIS ARE PROMISCUOUS AND WILL ALWAYS CHEAT ON YOU"

something entirely unknown amongst gay or straight people, of course!

"YOU MUST REALLY PREFER ONE OR THE OTHER"

Maybe. I might prefer apples to oranges, that's not the same as only liking apples.

BI LIFE

"I've been coming out for over 10 years, and I haven't finished yet... I first came out to my best friend, then I started coming out to other friends. People were generally quite accepting, and before long it was common knowledge within my social circles. My sister's social circles overlapped with mine, so she found out when most other people did. But I never came out to my parents- there was no need to because my sister did it for me when she was drunk once. The result? The last I heard, my dad thinks I'm a lesbian and my mum thinks I'm going through a 'phase' and I'm straight really. Coming out hasn't all been easy, and unless I tattoo BISEXUAL across my forehead, I doubt I'll ever be out completely."

"In bi spaces I've met people who talk about different attractions to men and women and people for whom gender isn't a factor like that. People who see a host of genders rather than just male and female. That gave me a chance to explore who I am in safety and that has been so good for me!"

BIS ONLINE

The internet's always changing but a few places to look for bis online:

- On www.Bisexual.com and www.bi.org - for web forums and links. If you'd rather use a space that is for just other men or other women try www.shybi.com for women and www.shybi-guys.com for men.
- On LiveJournal: bicon.livejournal.com has lots of UK bi folk and in particular people who are going to or have been to BiCons and BiFests tend to chat there.
- On **Second Life**: there's a large online meetup every Sunday:
- bimedia.org/blogs takes you to a host of bi writing by bloggers from across the UK
- For dating - a lot of websites demand that you be looking for only men or only women; we suggest you may do better on sites like okcupid.com that cater better for bis.
- Check out news and listings on community news website BiMedia.org
- Or tap in the name of your town or city and "bisexual" to a search engine and see what you find!

While there's not so much out there specifically for bis as for lesbians and gay men, what there is can make a big difference - especially when you're first working out whether you are bisexual.

Here are a few pointers:

MEET PEOPLE

BiPhoria is a group for bi people and those questioning their sexual orientation who think they might be bi, that meets regularly in Manchester city centre. Ages 18 up, and with people coming from all over Greater Manchester and beyond. They have discussion 'talky' meetings in a community centre, regular pub meets and outings to bi and queer events near and far.

Find out more on www.biphoria.org.uk
on twitter: [@biphoria](https://twitter.com/biphoria)
or write to: **BiPhoria**,
Box 101, LGF,
Number 5, Richmond St,
Manchester M1 3HF.

There are other groups like BiPhoria elsewhere in places like Sheffield, Birmingham and so on.

CATCH THE LATEST NEWS

Bi Community News magazine and its sister news website BiMedia are community news hubs with info about what's going on in the bi scene, events, opinion, reviews and more.
See www.BiCommunityNews.co.uk or www.BiMedia.org or write to **BCN**, BM Ribbit, London WC1N 3XX.
(Despite the postal address, they're actually based in Manchester!)

CAMPAIGN

Bisexual Index is a visibility campaigning group, based in London but working right across the UK. You can find out more on

www.bisexualindex.org.uk

FLY THE FLAG

Got Bi Visibility Day in your diary? Every 23rd September there are bi events around the UK to mark Bi Visibility Day and raise the bi profile - in 2010 there were things going on in Manchester, Cardiff, Birmingham, London, Brighton, Edinburgh, Winchester, Sheffield and more. Check out www.september23.bi.org

GET SUPPORT

Need to talk to someone now? Try The Lesbian & Gay Foundation: 0845 3 30 30 30 (10am-10pm daily) for support and advice when you need it.



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BJÖRK

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