

Bisexuality: Making One's Way Beyond the Binary

I once came across a Tik Tok video by the user @kat1981, where Kat compares bisexual attraction to that of straight and lesbian women. In the video, the straight woman says, "I'm attracted to men; girls are pretty though." The lesbian woman says, "I'm attracted to women; guys are chill though." Lastly, the bisexual woman passionately describes her attraction to other women, and when asked if she also likes men, she pretends to vomit and admits so reluctantly. Although the video is meant for comedic purposes, I had never seen a piece of media before that accurately illustrated the way I feel towards my identity as a bisexual woman. Why does the bisexual community feel ashamed of expressing their attraction to the opposite sex? Our heteronormative society invalidates bisexuality. However, the gay and lesbian communities do so as well. Isn't LGBTQIA+ culture affiliated with the notion of aff





communities. One example of biphobic discourse taking place within the queer community comes from a post on Twitter via the user @2kkdavid, who identifies as a gay male. On October 31, 2020, this user expressed his perceived frustration towards bisexuals who feared losing their rights if Donald Trump was re-elected as president. Furthermore, he explicitly states that despite their worries, bisexuals are “still half straight and [they] still have [somewhat] rights [because they] have that ‘default setting.’” Fortunately, social media users on various platforms came forward to defend the bisexual community against the invidious statement. This tweet highlights how close-minded assumptions affect bisexuals, as user @space.berryy on Tik Tok expressed that this tweet fuels her internalized biphobia because she often questions the validity of her sexual identity while interacting in queer spaces. The initial tweet presents a member of the gay community acting on their bisexual prejudice through binary opposition. The author refers to bisexuals as “half-straight,” thus implying that bisexual attraction is based on an equal attraction to members of the same and opposite sexes. Because binary thinking reduces the scope of bisexual attraction down to a set of two genders or sexualities, people grapple with the possibility of bisexuality existing on a spectrum.

A general misunderstanding of bisexuality is due in part to the continuous bi-erasure taking place in both research and the media. Using an alias for anonymity, I obtained one lesbian woman's perspective on bisexual representation by interviewing my coworker Megan McCartney (she/her). Megan observes a lack of “bi representation in the media... it's typically more gay/lesbian representation.” Although the entire queer community represents a minority, the media especially overlooks bisexuals. People are more likely to find movies, television shows, and books featuring openly gay or lesbian characters than they are to find media with openly bisexual characters. Bi-erasure is also prominent in the research world. Scholars struggle



dating because I wouldn't want them to criticize me if I happened to be in a relationship with a woman. I'm also afraid of being praised or tokenized by tolerant family members for my

they are rarely found marching within the ranks of a Pride Parade,” (2). This is an example of bi-erasure; bisexuals are underrepresented in queer spaces despite people acknowledging them as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. True allyship involves affirming and celebrating the bisexual experience. These inequalities affect bisexuals' physical and emotional wellbeing. The 2019 report, “Perceived discrimination, health and wellbeing among middle-aged and older lesbian, gay and bisexual people: A prospective study,” suggests the connection between bisexual discrimination and their physical health. The document concludes that people who have faced bisexual discrimination likely experience more “long-standing illness, depressive symptoms, [poor] quality of life, [low] life satisfaction and loneliness,” (Jackson, Hackett, Grabovac, Smith, Steptoe). Bi-erasure is discrimination, and it has dangerous long-term effects on the community. Biphobia is complex as it ranges from distasteful comments among peers to misinformation spread within research-based fields. Complacency is a driving factor behind misunderstanding bisexuality. One might assume as long as they are not explicitly biphobic, they can identify as allies to the bisexual community. However, practicing solidarity means actively advocating for the fair treatment of any marginalized group.

Internalized biphobia is rampant within the bisexual community. Internalized biphobia is the process of discriminating against oneself for their bisexuality. I reached out to my friend





can become easily overwhelmed by choice when they have too many options to decide from. In fact, it would go against the very principles of spectrum thinking to argue that one can only use spectrum thinking or binary thinking to categorize all information. Moreover, spectrum thinking gives bisexuals the opportunity to let their feelings guide the way they identify themselves. As Jessa Lingel states in the 2009 article, "Adjusting The Borders: Bisexual Passing And Queer Theory," spectrum thinking is lacking in the queer community. The author closes their research with the statement that "feminist and queer theory... have frequently failed to recognize the subjectivity and psychological complexity of bisexual bodies," (16). Bisexuals should not have to wonder how much of their identity is part straight or queer; they should be able to accept themselves as fully bisexual and recognize how that means something different to every member of the community.

Before writing this inquiry-based research essay, I harbored deep insecurity towards my sexuality and didn't understand why bi-erasure was so common among the straight and queer communities. I felt alienated in my attraction towards men, women, and non-binary individuals. While researching and reflecting on the experiences shared by queer people, I learned that it isn't plausible to believe that biphobia stems from a genuine scorn for bisexuality, especially when navigating biphobia in the LGBTQIA+ community. Biphobia is a consequence of the definitive role binary opposition plays in our society. A bisexual in a relationship with a member of the opposite sex is just as valid as gays and lesbians in the queer community. However, there are certain struggles and fears that gay and lesbian people may experience that a bisexual person cannot identify with. There is privilege in being able to pass as straight in our heteronormative society. Despite this truth, bisexuals are not "half-straight and half-gay," they are fully bisexual and entirely responsible for navigating their attraction, even if other people aren't comfortable

with the idea that bisexuality exists on a spectrum. Binary opposition strongly influences the way people view sexuality; sexual identity is typically boiled down to someone being either straight or gay. I believe this causes tension between the bisexual, gay, and lesbian communities because they are forced to assimilate, thus overlooking the unique challenges each group endures. Fortunately, it is possible to shift towards the more inclusive ideology of spectrum thinking. Spectrum thinking allows people to express their sexuality freely without invalidating the experiences of someone with a different sexual identity. It is essential for people of all backgrounds to understand the concepts of binary and spectrum thinking and how they affect one's view of sexuality. Although it is difficult to abandon the status quo, any thought process can be altered when we recognize which harmful beliefs are a direct result of our thinking patterns and take the initiative to reframe our views.



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