



# **Growing a Bi+ Community**

## ***A Handbook for Facilitators***



## Acknowledgments

### Thanks to...

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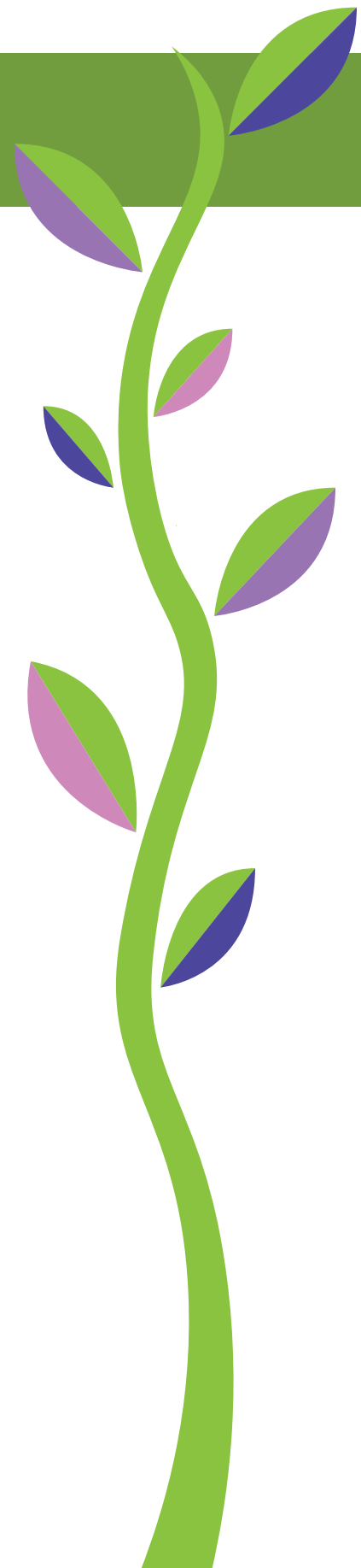
This handbook was made possible by the Equality Fund grant from the Boston Foundation. Learn more at [www.tbf.org](http://www.tbf.org).





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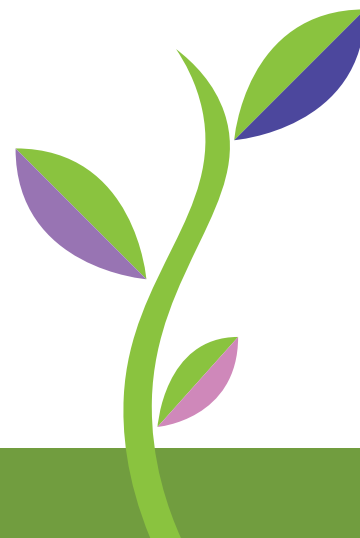
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# Introduction

## About this Guide

Because the Bisexual Resource Center is a national organization, people beyond Boston will frequently ask, “When will you host a support group here?” Though we’d love to have offices and staff nationally and internationally, we can currently only extend our reach to the Greater Boston Area. So what do we say?

“You can start your own group.”

It’s much easier said than done. Starting a support or social group, especially in an area with very little visible LGBTQ community in the first place, can be draining. However, the rewards that come with bringing together a new community of folks who know and share similar bi+ lives can be significant for both the facilitator(s) and the attendees.

You might ask, “But how do I do that? Where do I start?”

You can start here. Though the BRC has maintained a brochure on the subject for many years, more information needed to be compiled. Therefore, the purpose of this guide is to provide direction to those wishing to start or expand bi+ support and social groups, so these communities

can come together and thrive in places where bi+ folks might currently feel isolated and invisible.

People looking for community will have different needs and backgrounds, and it is our hope that this guide will shed some light on where folks might be coming from. This handbook will provide information on the bi+ community and its disparities, as well as discuss the logistics of starting a group. Of course, no handbook can anticipate all potential situations, but it is our hope that with enough information, facilitators will feel empowered to handle situations in the way best for their communities.

Throughout this handbook, case studies from the BRC’s own support groups will be shared to give you real-life examples of how groups can form and function.

## About the BRC

### Mission Statement

The Bisexual Resource Center works to connect the bi+ community and help its members thrive through resources, support, and celebration. Through this work, we envision

an empowered, visible, and inclusive global community for bi+ people.

## Inclusivity

The BRC uses bisexual and bi+ as umbrella terms for people who recognize and honor their capacity for sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to more than one gender (pansexual, fluid, omnisexual, queer, and all other free-identifiers, including those who don't wish to use a label). We celebrate and affirm the diversity of identity and expression regardless of labels.



Woody Glenn (left), Past-President, Bisexual Resource Center; Lani Ka'ahumanu, Author, Poet, and Archivist; and Cliff Arnesen, Past-President, New England Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Veterans, Inc. Photo courtesy of Cliff Arnesen, 1989

## History

Originally started in 1985 as the East Coast Bisexual Network, the organization incorporated in 1989 as a 501(c)3 nonprofit and changed its name to the Bisexual Resource Center in the mid-nineties. Since its inception, the Bisexual Resource Center has been creating resources, providing support, and helping to create a stronger sense of community for bi+ people across the U.S. and beyond. As one of its first

actions, the BRC published the Bisexual Resource Guide from 1990 through 2002 and helped to connect organizations and individuals around the world from Argentina to Zambia. As the oldest nationally-focused bisexual organization in the U.S., the BRC continues to raise awareness and build bridges within the LGBTQ and ally communities, and fosters bi-supportive social and political space wherever it can.

Currently, the BRC hosts Boston-area social and support groups, presents at national LGBTQ and bi+ conferences, produces Bisexual Health Awareness Month each March, and helps to organize meetings with other bi+ activists and organizations at the White House each September. In addition to brochures and our website, the BRC has published two anthologies featuring bi+ voices: *Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World* and *Recognize: The Voices of Bisexual Men*.



Ellyn Ruthstrom (left), Past-President, Bisexual Resource center; and Woody Glenn, Past-President and Co-Founder, Bisexual Resource Center were the first out bi+ marshalls of the Boston Pride parade. Photo courtesy of the BRC, 2015



# Overview of Bisexuality

There are different interpretations of the term “bisexual,” both within and outside the bisexual community. For this reason, the BRC has adopted the term bi+ to act as an umbrella term for those who recognize and honor their capacity for sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to more than one gender (pansexual, fluid, omnisexual, queer, and all other free-identifiers, including those who don’t wish to use a label). This can encompass those who identify as queer, pansexual, biromantic, polysexual, or fluid (see Appendix at the end of this manual for a glossary of terms and identities). While bi+ people have much in common with members of the lesbian and gay community, they also have their own unique needs and experiences. Outlined below are some of the disparities the bi+ community faces that create these unique needs.

## Bisexual Community Disparities

### Biphobia

Biphobia is the aversion or hatred of people who identify as bi+. It is related to, but distinct from, homophobia, and it is found within the lesbian and gay community as well as the straight

community at large. It can manifest as someone claiming all bisexuals are incapable of being monogamous, the belief that bi+ people are “greedy,” or that bisexuals do not really know their sexual orientation and are just confused or indecisive. Biphobia can result in bisexuals being blamed for the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and it can also appear as the assumption that someone stops being bi+ when they are in a monogamous relationship and should therefore identify as straight or homosexual, depending on the perceived gender of their partner. Overall, biphobia has a negative effect on the physical and mental health of bi+ people, and you may encounter these effects in your group.

### Bisexual Erasure

Bisexual erasure is a form of biphobia, and occurs when bisexuality and bi+ individuals are ignored or their existence is denied. Bisexual erasure can take several different forms. For example, participants who are in relationships may experience other people labeling them according to the gender of their partner without considering they might be bi+. For example, a

woman who is dating a man may be seen as straight and therefore have her bi+ identity erased. Individuals or, even more problematically, the media saying “lesbians and gays” when they mean the entire LGBTQ community can also be experienced as erasure of a bi+ identity. Instances like these can cause stress and frustration for participants. As a facilitator, it may be helpful to ask the group how they have dealt with instances of bi+ erasure in their lives.

### Physical Health Disparities

Due largely to the effects of biphobia and bisexual erasure, bi+ individuals experience health disparities that are different from and occur at higher rates than in heterosexual people and gay/lesbian people. Bi+ populations are more likely to smoke, abuse substances, and have more barriers to obtaining needed medical resources, including health insurance. (See Figure 1.)

### Mental Health Disparities

Bisexual people also report poorer mental health than either heterosexuals or gay/lesbian people. They report higher rates of anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders, and have experienced serious psychological distress in the past 30 days. Bi+ individuals also report higher rates of self-harm, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts. (See Figure 1.)

### Intimate Partner Violence

Bi+ individuals also report higher rates of intimate partner violence, including rape, than lesbian, gay and heterosexual people. In one study, 61% of bisexual women reported having experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, compared to 43% lesbians and 35% straight women.<sup>1</sup>

#### READ MORE ON THE WEB

“Mental Health in the Bisexual Community: Biphobia, Bi Erasure, & Getting Help”

[www.biresource.org/resources/brochures-and-handouts](http://www.biresource.org/resources/brochures-and-handouts)

“The Invisible Majority: The Disparities Facing Bisexual People and How to Remedy Them”

<http://www.lgbtmap.org/policy-and-issue-analysis/invisible-majority>

### Using this Information

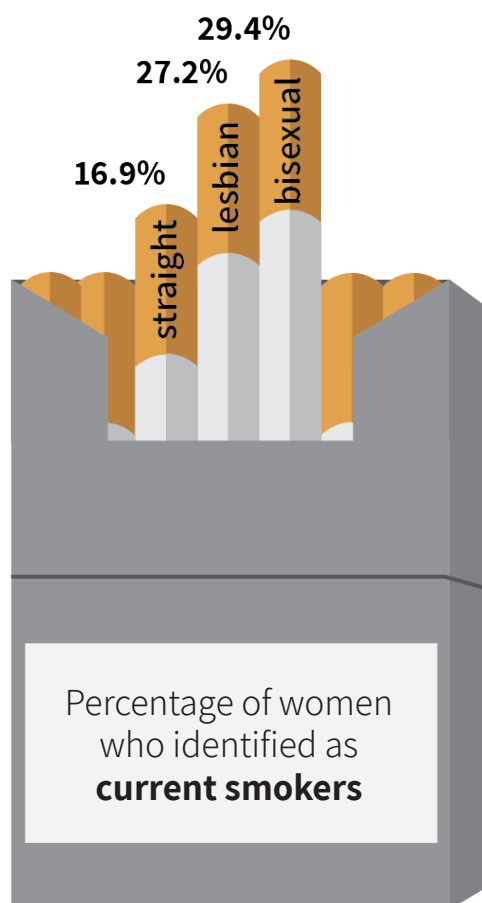
Facilitators should keep these many disparities in mind when leading groups. Participants may bring up these various topics as issues that they are struggling with, so it may be helpful for you as the facilitator to normalize these experiences by noting that due to biphobia and bi erasure, bi+ people experience these adverse outcomes at higher rates than their monosexual counterparts.

Fortunately, the more community support bi+ individuals have, the more empowered they can feel to live more visible lives. A more visible bi+ community means that it’s easier to request support and funding from institutions and nonprofits to minimize these disparities. Starting a support and/or social group is an important first step in providing this needed sense of community!

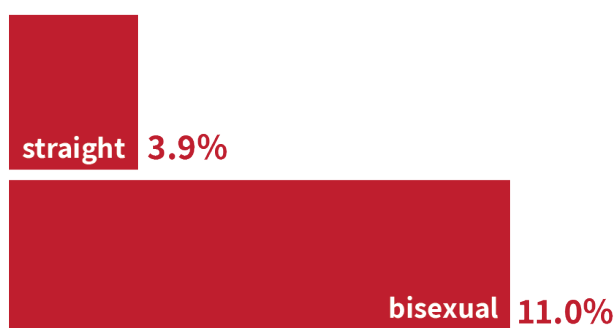
1 M.L. Walters, J. Chen, and M. J. Breiding, “The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation,” National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013.



**Figure 1: Disparities in the Bi+ Community<sup>2</sup>**



Percentage of adults aged 18-64 who had **5 or more drinks a day** within the past year



Percentage of adults aged 18-64 who experienced **serious psychological distress** in the last 30 days



Percentage of adults aged 18-64 who **failed to obtain needed medical care** in the past year due to cost

<sup>2</sup> Brian W. Ward et al., "Sexual Orientation and Health Among U.S. Adults: National Health Interview Survey, 2013," National Health Statistics Report, July 15, 2014, <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr077.pdf>.

## Low Coming Out Rates

Bi+ individuals also report lower levels of social support, being less likely to be comfortable with their sexuality, or be “out” to friends and family compared to lesbians and gay men.

## Intersectionality and Privilege

Intersectionality is the concept that each aspect of an individual’s identity interacts with other aspects of their identity. Someone may be a cisgender, Latina, bi+, Catholic woman from an upper-middle-class background, who is hearing impaired. Or they may be a transgender, Asian, bi+ individual from a working-class background who has social anxiety. All of these pieces of someone’s identity may impact how they understand themselves as a bi+ person, who they feel comfortable coming out to, and what additional societal stereotypes, discrimination, or oppression they face. As a facilitator, it is important to keep this in mind and reflect on your own intersections and how they have influenced your understanding of your bi+ identity.

In any discussion of intersectionality, it is also important to consider elements of your own privilege. In categories of identity in society, one group holds a place of privilege over other groups. The privileged group is seen as the default for that category. For example, in the category of gender, cisgender men are seen as the norm and behaviors associated with them are often considered “standard” (though it is also true that some trans men share this privilege). The system of cisgender male privilege operates broadly in many facets of life, including relationships, work, education, science and the arts. Cisgender men benefit from this privilege just by virtue of existing. The same is true for white people in the category of race, straight

people in the category of sexual orientation, Christian people (in the U.S.) in the category of religion, and wealthy people in the category of class.

People who are not from the privileged group will frequently experience negatively different treatment, language, or behaviors from someone from a more privileged group. This can be in the form of racism, classism, ableism, sexism, monosexism, cissexism, age-related discrimination, or a combination of two or more of these. Often the experiences of these various types of oppression are more subtle than, for instance, someone not being hired for a job because of their gender or race. These more subtle, daily occurrences of oppression are called microaggressions. The question “If you had to choose, would you pick men or women?” is one example of a microaggression for bi+ folks. These microaggressions may be recounted by participants during your support group meetings.

As the facilitator, particularly if you are from a more privileged group, it is important to model language that validates someone’s experience of oppression, rather than questioning it. While it is good to be open to learning from the experiences shared by participants who have identities that differ from your own, it is also important to take responsibility for your own education around these issues of oppression and privilege and continue to seek out information on topics when you identify an area with which you are less familiar. It is also necessary to remember that everyone is continuously learning about issues related to privilege and oppression, and it is likely that at some point you will do or say something that another person experiences as a microaggression. When this happens, it’s not

helpful to say that you didn't mean the comment in the way that was interpreted by the person

### READ MORE ON THE WEB

Privilege 101: A Quick and Dirty Guide  
[www.everydayfeminism.com](http://www.everydayfeminism.com)

who was hurt by the remark. This can sometimes be experienced as invalidating their concern. Instead, it can be helpful to thank them for letting you know how they feel, apologize for what you said, and tell them you will think about how to avoid doing something similar in the future.

## Gender

Bi+ individuals, both cisgender and transgender, face different challenges regarding the intersection of gender identity and their sexual orientation. Bi+ men are often assumed to be just passing through a phase until they say that they are gay or straight. They are also sometimes blamed for the spread of STIs among women. Bi+ women may be viewed as promiscuous, or only seen as objects of sexual pleasure for cisgender men. They also face the potential belief that they are only acting as bi+ to please men who think it's "hot." For individuals who are transgender, their gender identity exploration or transition may or may not coincide with coming out as bi+, and this can be confusing for some people. Folks who are transgender or genderfluid/non-binary may also face confusion from family, friends, and colleagues about the difference between their gender identity and sexual orientation.

## Race/Ethnicity

Bi+ people of color may be struggling with biphobia within their families and communities, in addition to encountering the day-to-day racism that is still present in society as a whole. In addition to microaggressions, such as a person of color being asked where they're really from, larger events sparked by racism could affect topics discussed in your group. For example, people of color may come in with increased stress caused by the harassment and killing of unarmed black people by the police, hate crimes carried out on people of Muslim faith, and mass shootings like the one targeting LGBTQ folks of Latin descent at the Pulse nightclub in 2016. Keep the news and current events in mind each meeting. On a more personal scale, bi+ people of color may have concerns about coming out as bi+ due to fear of losing their connection to their community or culture, as well as fear of how their coming out may affect their family's place and relationships within their community or culture.

## Ability

Bi+ people and people with disabilities both face invisibility and discrimination in society, so individuals with these intersecting identities may experience an added layer of disparity. The sexuality of people with disabilities can sometimes be overlooked or dismissed by families, friends, and health care providers, and therefore the bi+ identity of a person with disabilities might be more often ignored or denied. Bi+ individuals with disabilities encounter biphobia and bi+ erasure in addition to ableism, or discrimination against people who have disabilities. They may also encounter challenges

accessing the resources of the LGBTQ community and the bi+ community, so it's imperative that accessibility be one of the top concerns when thinking about logistics for a bi+ social or support group (see "Planning the Logistics").

## Class

Class can also have an impact on the experiences and disparities felt by bi+ individuals. For example, bi+ people who are of lower income may feel more reluctant about coming out at work due to the economic impact it could have on their lives if their hours were unfairly reduced or if they were fired due to their sexual orientation. Additionally, bi+ folks of lower income might not have as much access to LGBTQ resources, so it's important to keep that in mind when selecting a place for your group to meet (see "Planning the Logistics"). It's also possible that due to the disparities faced by the bi+ community as mentioned earlier in this guide, you will have a variety of different education levels completed among participants. Be mindful of this and try to avoid the use of jargon or overly academic language. There may also be educational differences related to concepts and terms around sexual orientation and gender identity, so the primary goal should be education and awareness, not correction or calling out.

## Age

Age is also something to keep in mind with regard to its intersection with bisexuality. For example, someone who is coming out later in life as bi+ may already be married and have children. This could impact their willingness to come out and lead to concerns or worries about potentially disrupting their family life. Elders may face stigmas associated with sex in aging communities on top of stigmas about being bi+.

Younger people may face discrimination from others who don't take their identity seriously, or think that they are just going through a phase or period of exploration. Both youth and elders may struggle with finding an age-appropriate bi+ community. You may have a group containing members of different generations who have varying terminologies and exposure to concepts around gender identity and sexual orientation; it is important, therefore, to keep this in mind when faced with members who might not always be on common ground. Again, focus on education and awareness instead of correction or calling out.

Read more details about  
intersectionality in  
"Common Discussion Topics"



# Bi+ Group Coordination

## Group Formats

There are different formats and purposes of bi+ support groups, and which one you start will depend on what folks in your community want or need, and what you have the capacity to organize and/or facilitate. Stay flexible, as sometimes the type of group shifts, depending on your capacity and your members' desires. Three common types of groups are listed below.

### Peer Support Groups

Peer-facilitated support groups meet with the primary purpose of allowing participants to have a safe, mutually beneficial space to discuss questions or issues related to their sexuality and form relationships with other people who identify or think they may identify as bi+ . The topics discussed at these types of groups generally come from whatever the particular individuals at a given meeting would like to discuss. The facilitator prepares the space, sets the ground rules, and guides the discussion, while the participants generate the topics themselves. The BRC's Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS) is an all-ages peer-facilitated group that meets once a month to discuss any topics related to bisexuality.

See more about BLiSS in "Case Studies."

### Discussion Groups

Discussion groups are typically more structured than peer support groups, and the facilitator may take a more active role in leading the discussions. Topics can include a book with bi+ themes, a current event related to bisexuals in the news, or a more general topic such as dealing with biphobia in the workplace or coming out to family and friends. While tangents or other unrelated topics will almost certainly occur in the group from time to time, the expectation among participants is that most of the conversation will be focused around the predetermined topic of discussion. See more about the Bi+ Book Group in "Case Studies."

### Social/Community-Building Groups

Social or community-building groups are generally focused on attendees getting to know other bi+ individuals in a less structured setting. They can take the form of potlucks, casual meetings in a coffee shop, or attending LGBTQ events together. These are less formal meetings, and the facilitator's role is often more logistics-

focused in regards to coordinating and serving as the point person for the event, as well as ensuring that the social space remains safe for attendees. The discussion may also be much less concentrated on bisexual-related topics. If you are feeling unprepared to facilitate a serious discussion group, this type of group may be the best to organize when just starting out. For examples, see Young BLiSS and Bi Guyz Social Night in “Case Studies.”

### BE FLEXIBLE

Even though you might intend to start a group of a specific type, it might be that the majority of the participants are looking for something else. Don't be afraid to let the group evolve, like Boston's Young BLiSS group did in its first few months. Though it started as a peer-led support group, it became clear that what most members wanted was a chance to meet other bi+ people in a social setting. It has been a social group ever since.

## Affinity Groups

Though many groups are open to all members of the bi+ community, you may wish to focus your group to attendees of a certain gender, race/ethnicity, or age, for example. These various groups can meet the needs of different intersections within the bi+ community, and give folks a safe space to discuss specific issues. When starting a bi+ support group, consider who the most likely attendees will be and whether or not you want to specify an affinity group meeting. If you wish to start a group for a population that you are not a part of, it's important to find

a co-facilitator or organizer that is a part of that population. For examples, see Bi Women Partnered with Men in “Case Studies.”

## Planning the Logistics

Much of the job of support or social group facilitator is planning the logistics of the meetings. Described below are some considerations and recommendations for such tasks.

### Find a Co-facilitator

Though not a required step, it might be easier to have a co-facilitator to work with, not only to split up tasks that need to be done for your group, but also to provide back-up if you are unable to host the group. Taking turns facilitating will also help stave off burn-out if the group is particularly draining. If you don't have a co-facilitator when you start the group, see if there's an enthusiastic attendee who might want to eventually take on the role. See “Appendix” for more information.

### Identifying a Space

Selecting an appropriate space to hold your support group is very important. Start by searching for a space that is welcoming to LGBTQ people in general. Consider public libraries, LGBTQ centers, and community organization offices. Churches are also frequently willing to allow outside organizations to use their facilities for meetings, but it's useful to remember that for some people, religious groups may have negative connotations, particularly around topics related to sexuality and gender identity.

The first consideration to narrow down your options is the type of group you want to lead. A support group that may involve sensitive topics



usually works best in a private space, like a rented room at one of the suggested locations listed above; a social or community-building group could meet in a public place like a coffee shop.

Then, think about accessibility. The space should be accessible to allow people of different abilities to access it. This means that the space should be wheelchair-accessible, with ramps and elevators as needed. If meeting in a public place like a coffee shop, make sure there are cheaper options on the menu so that no one feels pressured to spend a lot of money to attend. In terms of transportation, make sure there are options nearby for free (or cheap) parking in well-lit areas. In bigger cities, try to choose a place accessible to public transportation, again in well-lit areas so that folks feel safer leaving at night.

Cost is another consideration for hosting a support group. Some spaces require a small fee for each meeting, while others may allow you to use the space for free. Donations to offset the costs of space can be collected at the end of the meeting from participants and, in order to keep the meetings accessible, should be optional. If only one or two people attend the support group, you may want to skip asking for a donation so that no one feels unduly pressured to contribute. For some groups, particularly those that are more social in nature, meeting at a coffee shop can be a good option, as these spaces usually do not cost to reserve or use.

Once you have found a space, consider registering it as something generic like “The Men’s Group” or an innocuous acronym like “BLiSS” to protect the privacy of participants who are not out.

## Frequency of Meetings

The frequency and length of meetings will

vary depending on your community’s needs and your own capacity. For example, some Boston bisexual community groups meet once per month for two hours, while others have decided to meet every other month. Meeting every other month while you are building interest and community participation may increase the likelihood that you will have a decent turnout at each meeting, but you also run the risk of losing momentum. Another approach to deciding frequency is to schedule the first meeting, assess the turnout, and then ask the attendees at the end of the group if they would like to meet the following month or in two months. Be wary of meeting more frequently than once per month when starting your group. This can sometimes increase the likelihood of facilitator burnout, and if interest tapers, you could be left with frequent meetings of few participants.

### PUT INTO PRACTICE

See examples of when and where Boston-area groups meet in “Case Studies.”

## Choosing a Time

Select a time that generally works for participants, the facility providing the space, and your schedule. The Boston bi+ community has found that weekday evenings from 7:00-9:00pm is a time when most people are available to attend, in addition to weekend mornings and afternoons. Consider checking in with the group from time to time about alternate times that might work better for a majority of them.

## Promoting the Group

Getting the word out about your support group is an important aspect of ensuring strong attendance, but it can often be the most challenging aspect of starting a group given the time and effort required for promotion. Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter are great places to start, especially if you can spread the word through community organizations who will share your post or Tweet. Boston-based bi+ groups have found that Meetup.com is a great way to get the word out, though it does cost money to host a group there. Also, consider posting flyers at local bookstores, cafes, and laundromats, as well as ads in any local LGBTQ magazines or websites. If there are local event calendars in your community, request to have your group listed on one of those as well.

## Setting Up the Space

Arrange the chairs or space so that all of the group members can easily see and communicate with each other. Be mindful, too, of making the space navigable for any participants who have mobility impairments. Know where the restrooms are. If you are able, place signs throughout the building directing people to the room (consider using discreet wording on the signs, again, for participants who may not be out).

## Supplies

Having a group “bag” filled with some of the following supplies can come in handy:

- Tissues for difficult or painful conversations that may arise.
- Flyers, brochures, or other materials about organizations or events in the area that might be of interest to participants.
- Brochures from LGBTQ organizations as well as domestic violence or substance use disorder treatment resources. Often community organizations and facilities will provide these materials to you for free.
- Brochures or handouts about bi+-related issues. The BRC has several to download for free at [biresource.org/resources/brochures-and-handouts/](http://biresource.org/resources/brochures-and-handouts/).
- Notecards to have members share their contact information if they would like to be put on a mailing list. (This method adds to privacy as opposed to using a sign-in sheet.)



# Facilitating Your Group

Facilitation is a learned skill that takes practice and time to perfect. Below are some suggestions of strategies, approaches, and tactics for successful facilitation of your bi+ support group. More specifics can be found in the Appendix.

## Role of Facilitator

Facilitators of all types of groups need to handle meeting logistics, create a welcoming environment for participants, and provide referrals or resources as appropriate. For groups that are more discussion or support-based, the facilitator also needs to create a safe environment for participants to share their thoughts and keep the discussion flowing. However, you are not the group's therapist, and it may be important at times to make this distinction clear to participants.

While it is ideal that, as a facilitator, you have a support system outside the group and do not turn to the group for support yourself, it's understandable that you might be starting a group because no other forms of support exist in your area. It's important, then, to make sure all

members of your group get needed airtime before you turn to them for support for yourself.

## Ground Rules

One of the most important roles of facilitators is to set the ground rules for the group each time it meets in order to maintain the comfort and safety of participants. Though ground rules will change depending on what type of group you have, some are universal and crucial, such as discussing confidentiality, which is explained in more detail below. For support groups, other crucial ground rules also include educating rather than calling out when something hurtful is said, and using "I" statements to avoid conflict-based language. See the Appendix for ground rules that have been used by Boston facilitator Bobbi Taylor.

## Confidentiality and Privacy

Confidentiality is very important to emphasize at the beginning of every meeting. Participants should be reminded to not disclose the names of anyone at the meeting, and that while they may mention general topics that are discussed outside the group with others, they

should not reveal specific details. Participants should also be allowed to use aliases, not their real names, if desired.

Remind group members that not everyone present may be out as bi+ to everyone in their lives. If they see someone from the group outside of the group, they should be discreet in acknowledging them and letting others know how and where they met.

## Introductions

Once the ground rules have been established, you should begin by inviting participants to introduce themselves by giving their name or alias and preferred pronouns (e.g. he/she/they/ze). You could also ask whether they have attended the group before, what issues or reasons brought them there today, and any particular topics they would like to discuss during the meeting. In order to keep the group feeling comfortable for all members, you may want to make any information beyond name or alias and preferred pronouns optional.

During introductions for a support or discussion-based group, you should be listening closely and making mental or physical notes of the various topics that participants would like to discuss. After everyone has had an opportunity to check in, you can refer back to the introductions by saying something like, “I heard several people mention concerns about dating. Why don’t we talk about that for a bit? Who has something they would like to share on this topic?” When the discussion on this topic begins to peter out, the facilitator can introduce another topic raised by participants during the introductions. It would be good to prepare a few universal topics, like coming out, to bring up in case no one wants to start.

## Sharing Airtime

All group members should be given an opportunity to speak in a discussion or support-based group. Ask everyone to refrain from interrupting others and to allow time for all participants to contribute. It’s a good idea to encourage participants at the beginning of the session to observe the “Step Up/Step Back” ground rule, which means that if one is more likely to dominate a discussion, they should make an effort to let others who might not be as likely to speak have that space. However, do not pressure participants to speak if it appears they don’t want to. Some may just want to listen, especially if it’s their first time attending.

**“[The] best [sessions] have been when people genuinely share their own stories and offer support to others.”**

**-Ellyn Ruthstrom, Facilitator**

## Active and Empathic Listening

A primary part of your role as facilitator involves active listening. Active listening involves the use of summarizing statements, paraphrasing, asking clarifying questions, acknowledging the emotion behind what someone is describing, using attentive body language, not interrupting, and using encouraging verbal signals such as “Uh huh” and “I see.” A general rule for a facilitator is to speak no more than 20% of the time so that participants can speak, share, and discuss issues as much as possible.

## Self-disclosure

Facilitators should remember that their role is to create and maintain a safe space for the participants to share their concerns and experiences. When thinking about sharing personal information, the facilitator should be mindful of others' concerns first, and disclosures should be in the best interest of the group members. For example, appropriate disclosures might be to share a coming out story and invite the rest of the group to share theirs. However, when considering a disclosure about a sensitive topic, facilitators should think about whether they really need to disclose. Over-sharing from the facilitator can make group members feel less welcome participating.

## Wrapping Up a Meeting

Facilitators should be mindful of the time and strive to end the support group at the designated time. Giving a 15-minute warning towards the end of the meeting and asking for any final thoughts or reactions to anything discussed during the meeting may be helpful. If you have any handouts with resources available, this would be the time to remind participants about them. If you plan to collect donations, this would also be an ideal time. Try to make this collection optional if possible, and if there are only a couple of participants, consider skipping the donation so that there is less pressure to contribute. Contact information can be collected at this time as well. To ensure greater confidentiality, consider collecting contact information on index cards rather than on a sign-in sheet.

## Communicating After the Meeting

It's useful to set up an email list or social networking group to communicate with members about upcoming meetings or share events or articles that may be of interest to everyone in the group. However, make sure to keep confidentiality in mind. If you're going to send individual emails to the group, be careful to send them as a BCC in order to protect everyone's privacy. It might be easier to set up an email listserv through a service like Google Groups.

For a social or community-building group, starting a private group on a social network like Facebook that members can opt into can be useful for sharing events and articles, and keeping members connected between meetings. Keep in mind that starting this kind of community can bring forth a new set of obstacles and tasks, like the need for comment moderation. For an example of this kind of online community, see Young BLISS in Case Studies.

## Facilitation Challenges

### Members Who Are Looking for Dates

If you are facilitating a support group, as opposed to a social group, you may need to emphasize that it is not appropriate to attend the meeting looking for someone to date. While it's possible that members of a group may get to know each other outside of meetings, the meeting itself is not the time to try and strike up relationships. You should make these intentions clear as soon as possible, maybe even during the ground rules. If someone is violating this rule, you may have to issue a reminder or pull the person

aside privately at the break or end of the meeting in order to maintain the safety of the group.

## Silence

Silence will happen from time to time during group meetings. As the facilitator, try not to rush to fill the silence. Instead, first try to recognize whether people are collecting their thoughts, taking a moment to process something that another member just shared, or if they just need a more explicit invitation from the facilitator to speak. Silence could also mean that the group is uncomfortable with something that was shared, so the facilitator might need to check in with the group and then re-direct the discussion. It could also mean that the group is ready for the facilitator to introduce a new topic. However, the facilitator should be mindful that different people and cultures are used to longer or shorter pauses in conversation, so it is important that the facilitator have some ability to tolerate brief periods of silence during a meeting.

## Overly Talkative People

Often in a group there are one or two individuals who dominate the conversation, whether intentionally or unintentionally. They may speak longer than other people, interrupt others, and/or comment on everything. This may cause other group members to feel that their contributions are not valued, or that there is not enough space or time allocated for them to share their concerns or opinions. As the facilitator, it is important to strike a balance between honoring talkative people's contributions and the overall needs of the group. Some tactics for addressing overly talkative people include:

- Summarize what they said, thanking them for sharing, and then asking other

group members whether they have had a similar or different experience

- Ask a question and then deliberately make eye contact with another group member, or ask a specific member for their thoughts on a subject. (However, don't put pressure on anyone to speak who has been quiet.)
- Privately, tell the talkative person that you appreciate their willingness to contribute, but that you want to make sure everyone in the group has a chance to speak.

## Quiet People

While most groups have one or two people who are very talkative, there are also usually one or more people in the group who are very quiet. Some people may be shy generally and wish to observe the group until they become more comfortable. They may not be ready to speak because they are just beginning to question or realize their sexuality, or they may want to talk but need an explicit invitation. As the facilitator, it is important to pay attention to participant's body language. For example, sometimes a participant will not volunteer to speak, but it will appear that they had a reaction to something that another participant said. It may be appropriate as the facilitator to invite that person to comment, or to say something such as, "It looks like you had a thought, Maria, would you like to say something?" This should be done in a low-pressure manner. Similar to the talkative person, it can be helpful to check in at the break with a quiet person and let them know you would love to hear their perspective if they would like to share it. Some participants may say that they just want to listen and that is absolutely fine.



## Crying

Topics involving relationships, sexuality, and social or familial acceptance (or the lack thereof) can be emotional and challenging. The support group may be the only place where someone feels comfortable talking about these aspects of their identity and experiences. While sharing personal information, it is possible that a group member may become upset and cry. It is helpful, therefore, to have tissues on hand to offer in times like these. In terms of group dynamics, it is good to remember that tears can be cathartic and provide relief to someone. While they may make some of the group members uncomfortable, it is also possible that someone expressing so much vulnerability will draw the group closer together. The facilitator should calmly acknowledge that the person crying is having a strong reaction and that it is a valid response. This could be accomplished by saying, “Thank you for sharing that with us and trusting the group with this. It is clearly a topic that brings up a lot of difficult feelings for you.” The facilitator can then offer to come back to the person who is crying in a minute, while also asking the group if they have had any similar experiences or reactions. It may also be helpful to check in with this person at the break or at the end of the support group to see how they are doing.

More self-care might be needed after a particularly difficult session.  
See self-care tips in “Appendix.”



## Common Discussion Topics

Each group of participants is unique and will bring their own diverse perspectives and set of concerns to the topic of bisexuality. However, over the years, Greater Boston Area support group facilitators have noted some themes or topics that often emerge. These topics are listed and described below.

### Religion

For some participants, their religion and faith community will be a source of great support and strength to them. For others, they may have received negative messages about sexual and gender identities from their religion or faith community, or experienced such discrimination directly. The conflict between their religion's views on gender identity and/or sexuality and their own identity may be or source of distress for participants, or may be the reason they no longer ascribe to a particular faith. Participants may also have a mix of positive and negative feelings or experiences regarding their religion or faith community. Therefore, the support group may be a helpful space for them to talk about any tension they are experiencing between maintaining

their place within their faith community while expressing their gender identity and/or sexual identity.

#### KEEP IN MIND

It's possible that you will have members in the group that come from different backgrounds, and that these differences may clash. It's important as a facilitator to be sensitive to these differences, as well as try to keep your own biases about differences out of the discussion.

### Culture

Culture may also have a profound impact on group participants' lives. Some participants may identify strongly with a culture that they feel is not accepting of their bi+ identity or gender identity. They may even have concerns about losing connection to their cultural community if they come out as bi+. Others may be concerned about the reactions of their family members or

peers due to cultural values and the subsequent loss of financial or emotional support from their social and familial networks. They may also be concerned about how their coming out as bi+ will affect their family members' relationships to others within their culture or community and how their family will be perceived or treated. Other participants may not place as high of a value on their connection to culture or may feel that the culture they come from is accepting of bi+ people.

**"As a facilitator, it may be helpful to think about your own gender identity and gender expression as well as the ways that you may gender language and instinctively gender others, with the goal of trying to create a more expansive idea about gender."**

**-Bobbi Taylor, Facilitator**

## Gender

Participants may want to discuss their gender identity and how it relates to their sexual orientation. Topics may include gender presentation, transition, or how an individual experiences the intersection of their gender identity and being bi+. Historically, the gender identity of someone who was transgender and identified as anything other than straight was sometimes called into question by medical professionals. This precedent may present an additional barrier for someone when they consider coming out as bi+.

To create safe spaces for transgender, genderqueer, and other folks who want to discuss gender identity, it's helpful to ask participants to share their preferred pronouns at the beginning of the meeting, and be mindful of using these pronouns throughout.

## Sexuality/Labels

Labels and sexual identities are common topics that arise during support group discussions. Some people feel that the term "bisexual" reinforces the idea of the gender binary in a way that makes them uncomfortable, despite the use of bi+ and bisexual as umbrella terms and the bi+ community's longstanding rejection of the gender binary. As alternatives, some people are more comfortable calling themselves "queer," "pansexual," "polysexual," "fluid," or "omnisexual" as a way of emphasizing their potential to experience attraction to non-binary individuals. It's useful to remember that a sexual identity label does not necessarily have the same meaning to all people. An excellent example of this is the term "queer." For many people, its ambiguity and usefulness as an umbrella term are part of its appeal. For others, it has very negative connotations as they have heard it used as an insult or had it directed at them as a slur. As a facilitator, it can be helpful to create space for participants to explore labels that feel right for them. It can also be useful to bring up the fact that someone can identify with a personal label, like queer, and also gather and organize under a political label, like bisexual or bi+. For more information about labels, see [biresource.org/bisexuality-101/labels/](https://biresource.org/bisexuality-101/labels/).

## Coming Out

Coming out is a popular topic to discuss, and for bi+ folks, is often a lifelong process. Every time a bi+ person meets someone new, there is the possibility that they may want or need to come out to them about their sexual orientation. Because it is often assumed that most people are monosexual, or only attracted to one gender, it is common for individuals to assume the sexual orientation of someone based on the gender of their current or most recent partner. This necessitates bi+ people be explicit about their sexual orientation more frequently than monosexual people if they want to be identified accurately.

During support group meetings, participants may be in many different stages of coming out. Attending the group may be their first step towards coming out as bi+, or they may already be out to family and friends for years but are now considering coming out to their co-workers or larger community, and therefore want to discuss the most strategic way to do that. If someone is already partnered, but their partner does not know about their orientation, they may want to talk about how to come out to their partner. Coming out as a topic may bring up potential fears or experiences of biphobia, which may provide a space for group participants to provide each other with any support or advice needed.

It might be that members want to discuss coming out as other identities as well, such as transgender or polyamorous, and this can be an opportunity for members to discuss the intersections of coming out as bi+ and something else at the same time (or at different times).

**“We have, on several occasions, gotten people who have never before come out as bi even to themselves. This is the first time they’re talking about their bisexuality (or potential bisexuality), and often the first time they’ve met other non-monosexual individuals.”**

**-Gabrielle Blonder, Facilitator**

## Mixed-orientation Relationships

Mixed-orientation relationships involve someone who is bi+ and someone who is monosexual. If it is an established relationship and the bi+ person is just coming out, they may be seeking advice from the group on how to come out to their partner. If it is a monogamous relationship, they may be wondering how to explore their bisexuality while maintaining monogamy. This could mean reading books with bisexual themes or watching movies with bisexual characters and can include attending the bi+ support group or other LGBTQ events. The bi+ person in the relationship may also be talking to their partner about opening up the relationship in order to allow them to explore relationships with people of different genders.

## Ethical Non-monogamy

While many participants will be in monogamous relationships or only interested in pursuing monogamous relationships, some participants may be involved in ethically non-monogamous relationships or they may be

considering a non-monogamous relationship style. These styles include open relationships, monogamish (or mostly monogamous) relationships, or polyamorous relationships. (See the Glossary for more information on these styles.)

Non-monogamous relationships and how they are practiced will vary. Some relationships involve a primary partner and secondary (or even tertiary) partner(s), and these are usually called “hierarchical poly relationships.” However, some people have several partners they do not consider to be “primary” or “secondary,” so the hierarchical model should not be assumed as the standard for everyone.

It can sometimes be hard for people in poly or non-monogamous relationships to deal with their identities as both bi+ and non-monogamous. Sometimes, families and friends are less able to accept the non-monogamous identity than the bi+ identity. Keep this intersection in mind during discussions, especially if this style of relationship is new to you. When using generic examples, try to include language such as “your partner or partners” to keep people in these relationships engaged and included.

### READ MORE ON THE WEB

More Than Two: Franklin Veaux’s Polyamory Site  
[www.morethantwo.com](http://www.morethantwo.com)

Asexual Visibility & Education Network (AVEN)  
[www.asexual.org](http://www.asexual.org)

## Self-care

Dealing with the day-to-day struggles of biphobia and bi erasure or being closeted may cause a lot of stress for group participants. Oppression experienced by support group members’ many intersecting identities (like racism, classism, ageism, ableism) may also be sources of stress. It could be helpful as a facilitator and the group as a whole to ask participants in the room what they do for self-care or how they manage stress. Possibilities may include exercise, listening to music, journaling, talking with friends, participating in a hobby, prayer, or meditation.

Another important aspect of self-care is receiving appropriate and timely mental health and medical care. LGBTQ people sometimes delay seeking medical or mental health care because they are concerned about encountering discrimination from providers. Asking the group to share recommendations of providers that they have found to be particularly bi+ affirming is one way of addressing this issue in the group.

## Asexuality

There may be participants in your support group who identify or are thinking of identifying as asexual. People who are asexual experience little or no sexual attraction to anyone. They may still experience romantic attraction, and if they experience attraction to people of more than one gender, they may also consider themselves biromantic, and their relationship orientation can be monogamous or non-monogamous.

Some common myths about folks who identify as asexual are that they just “haven’t met the right person,” are incapable of love and romance, and/or are somehow “broken.” Calling out these wrong assumptions as myths

and affirming asexuality can help your group be a safe space for folks who are or are thinking of identifying as asexual.

## Relationships

When someone comes out as bi+, it often has an impact on their relationships with the significant people in their lives, including friends, family, co-workers, and partners. If they are welcomed and affirmed upon coming out, the experience can enrich a relationship. However, participants may express concern about how revealing their bi+ identity will negatively impact their relationships. They may be concerned that loved ones will reject them or stop speaking to them. They may fear the loss of support from their lesbian or gay friends because they are no longer seen as “queer enough” if they are dating someone of a different gender. If someone is in a relationship and their partner will not acknowledge their bi+ identity or asks them not to talk about it, that can be very hurtful and isolating. Gaining validation from fellow group participants that they are not alone in navigating these challenging topics, as well as receiving advice on how to cope, can be helpful.

## Holidays

Holidays, no matter the time of year, may be a stressful period for group participants. There can be issues of bringing one's partner(s) home for the holidays. Someone may be thinking about coming out to their family over the holiday, or they may feel that they need to hide aspects of their sexual orientation, relationship orientation, or gender identity when they see their family of origin. Some people may not have anyone to

spend the holidays with and this can be a source of stress or anxiety.

Holidays can be a topic that other group members can often empathize with, from their own experiences or experiences of people they know. It may even be good to devote a meeting around November/December to this topic, to allow for discussions that may help participants get through the holidays.

## Raising Children While Bi+

Many bi+ people are parents. Some bi+ people identified as bi+ before becoming a parent, while others begin to identify as bi+ after having children. For some bi+ parents, discussing their sexual orientation with their children may naturally happen while attending a Pride event or as part of talking about their relationship history in an everyday context. In the case of some polyamorous parents, it may come up in relation to the genders of their current partners.

For other people, determining how and when to disclose their bi+ identity to their children may feel difficult, particularly if they are coming out when their children are older. Parents may have concerns about disturbing their children's image of their family, or that this knowledge may be challenging for children to process given developmental stresses they may be facing. If someone is going through a divorce, they may also have fears about their sexual orientation being used against them in relation to custody. For some parents, they may particularly find their bi+ identity erased when they are socializing with other parents. They may encounter bi+ or gay antagonism from school officials and want to discuss ways of navigating this. Parents may also have concerns that their identity will cause their children to be targeted by bullies, or that



their sexual orientation will adversely affect their children in other ways. It may be helpful for the facilitator to note that no reputable research to date has found any adverse effect on children from having non-heterosexual parents.

Because community is especially helpful for parents, it would be beneficial to do a little research to see if there are any LGBTQ parenting groups in your area that you can recommend.

## Connecting to LGBTQ Community

Some participants may express a desire to connect with a specifically bi+ community. The bi+ support group is an ideal place to do that, but as a facilitator, it may also be helpful to tell participants about other LGBTQ organizations or events in the area in case they are interested in joining them. Group members may also know of events or relevant organizations, or may decide among themselves to organize a potluck or attend a movie with bi+ themes. Some people will have spent a great deal of time in LGBTQ spaces, while for others, attending the support group will be the first time they have attended any LGBTQ event, so it would also be helpful to have information about local LGBTQ events and organizations to share with group members.

## Online Dating

Online dating is a topic that participants frequently want to discuss, whether they are currently in a relationship(s) or are single but seeking a partner(s). Sometimes participants note that they receive unwanted attention via their online dating profile based on their bi+ identity. This can be frustrating or hurtful for someone who has been explicit about seeking a romantic

relationship, but continues to receive offers of threesomes because they identify as bi+. Some people address this by creating one profile for trying to meet people of the same gender and one for trying to meet people of a different gender, but this usually isn't a completely satisfying solution.

If people are frustrated with online dating, it might be helpful to talk about the different options that exist and discuss what sites or apps might have worked for others. For example, OKCupid for dating and FetLife for finding kink/BDSM communities have been successful for many in the bi+ community.

### KEEP IN MIND

One common myth is that all bi+ people are “slutty” or have more sex than other people. While this is not true for all bi+ people, some bi+ people do have a more active sex life, multiple sex partners, and/or practice kink, unconventional sex acts such as bondage or spanking. Reserving judgment about others' (legal) sex practices will help lessen the stigma that these members of the bi+ community already face.

## Sensitive Discussion Topics

### Trauma

Participants will sometimes disclose traumatic events during the course of the support group. These traumatic events may or may not be related to someone's identity as bi+. It is useful as a facilitator to understand a little about trauma, which can include childhood abuse,

trauma from war, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and/or hate crimes. When people experience trauma, they react with a fight, flight, or freeze response that is an instinctive survival mechanism. Following a traumatic event, a person may be triggered by an event, sound, sight, smell, or situation that resembles the trauma, and this can then cause someone to have a negative reaction. A trauma history may leave a person with a sense of hypervigilance in which they regularly scan their environment and the people in it for signs of threat.

As a facilitator, conveying a sense of calm and safety and generally managing your own emotional responses is helpful. It is also good to not express a sense of horror or disgust when someone discloses a trauma. Be very careful about asking the trauma survivor questions about the trauma. If you want to ask a question, ask permission to ask it first and let the group participant know that they do not have to respond if the question makes them uncomfortable. After someone shares a trauma with the group, the facilitator may want to acknowledge that it was probably a difficult topic to talk about and to thank the survivor for trusting the group with this information.

At the same time, the facilitator needs to be mindful of the safety of the group as a whole. If someone is talking about their trauma history in a manner that is making the rest of the group uncomfortable, or going into such detail that could be upsetting or triggering to other participants, the facilitator may need to acknowledge the importance of what the survivor is saying and offer to talk with them individually at the break or after the session. When speaking with the person privately, it might be appropriate to offer referrals to any local mental health or

related trauma resources. See “Resources” at the end of the manual for examples.

## Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a challenging topic that may be disclosed by participants in the support group. It encompasses not just physical violence, but emotional abuse, financial abuse, and generally any pattern of controlling and demeaning behavior. It may be helpful for facilitators to familiarize themselves with the cycle of violence, and how to identify IPV. Often, in these situations, there are periods of no violent behavior, during which tension builds. This can be followed by an episode of abuse, after which the perpetrator apologizes, the victim forgives them, and the cycle repeats. The level of violence may escalate each time, though doesn't need to.

While it can be tempting to tell a victim of domestic violence to leave the relationship, it is rarely that simple. Providing education about the cycle of violence and referrals to domestic violence shelters and hotlines, while continuing to remain a safe place for the person to come for support, are some good ways to help someone who is experiencing intimate partner violence.

### **The National Domestic Violence Hotline**

**1-800-799-7233**

### **The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

**1-800-273-TALK**

## Suicidality

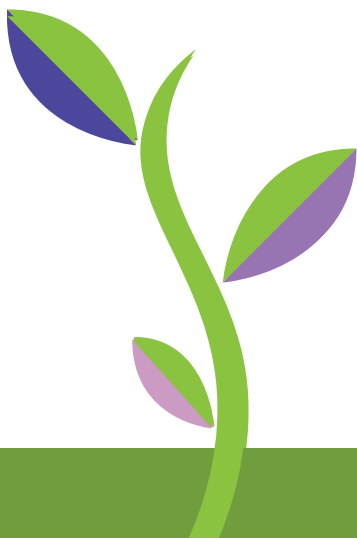
Hopefully, no facilitator will need to provide assistance to a suicidal participant. However, in the event that someone in the group expresses thoughts of suicidal ideation it is important to take it seriously. Some tips include:

- Do not make light of the situation or “brush it off” as insignificant.
- Do not be afraid to talk about suicide directly. You will not cause someone to commit suicide by asking them questions about their level of suicidality.
- Ask if they have a plan (how, where, when). If they do, this suggests a higher risk, and immediate action needs to be taken.
- Develop a plan for safety with the person. Who will they call if they begin feeling suicidal? A friend, family member, therapist or 911? Does anyone close to them know they have been having these thoughts?
- Direct them to an organization like the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: <http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>
- If you cannot develop a plan for safety, call 911.

situations we haven’t covered. In all situations, remember that one of the best things a facilitator can do is to give others a voice: ensure all attendees have an opportunity to speak in as safe a space as possible. Let them know they are appreciated and heard, and remember that even folks that act difficult are probably coming from difficult places in their lives. Act with compassion and the desire to educate and be educated. Your bi+ community is out there somewhere, and we hope that you now feel more empowered to go out and find it.

## Takeaway

Though we’ve provided you with many scenarios, you will probably come across people who have concerns and need support about



## Case Studies

### Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS)



**Type of Group:** Peer-led support group

**Target Demographic(s):** All bi+ or questioning people from age 18+

**Meeting Frequency/Location:** Once a month in a private rented meeting room

**Common Subjects Discussed:** Coming out, relationships, dating, coping with biphobia, non-monogamous relationship styles

**Facilitation Challenges Faced:** Attendees who dominate the conversation, attendees who need more emotional help than the group can give them

**Advice to Facilitators of a Group Like This:** “There is no such thing as perfection and this goes for facilitation as well.” -Julia Canfield, Facilitator (pictured top left)

“Influence the dynamic of the group in a positive way by keeping people sharing the talking time, and not letting tangents get too far off track.” - Ellyn Ruthstrom, Facilitator (pictured bottom left)



## Young BLiSS



**Type of Group:** Social/community-building

**Target Demographic(s):** Bi+ or questioning people ages 18-40

**Meeting Frequency/Location:** Once a month at a coffee shop

**Common Subjects Discussed:** Dating, coming out to friends and family, discovering and exploring sexuality, non-monogamous relationship styles, topics not related to being bi+

**Facilitation Challenges Faced:** The unpredictability of attendance, the occasional inappropriate attendee, attendees looking for dates

**Advice to Facilitators of a Group Like This:** “I’ve found it helps to have an opening speech to go over expectations for the group (don’t accidentally out anyone you run into from the group in public, because you don’t know how out they are in the real world), and address privacy concerns (though this is a public space, nobody knows the nature of our group except for the participants).” -Gabrielle Blonder, Facilitator (pictured above)

**Type of Group:** Discussion group

## Bi+ Book Club



**Target Demographic(s):** All bi+ or questioning people

**Meeting Frequency/Location:** Every eight weeks at a private home

**Common Subjects Discussed:** The chosen book is discussed from a queer perspective

**Facilitation Challenges Faced:** Finding bi books, encouraging new people to attend (most RSVPs by new people are no-shows)

**Memorable Moments:** “Anthologies can be a lot of fun.

Everyone picks out pieces that they love or hate to discuss.” -Branden Kornell, Facilitator (pictured above)

**Advice to Facilitators of a Group Like This:** “I try to kick off the discussion but not overwhelm it. I make an effort to switch up the genre regularly (fiction, non-fiction, memoir, graphic novel, etc.), to choose works by people of color, and to choose works that explore different areas of queerness (bi, lesbian, trans, gender-fluid, etc.).” -Branden Kornell, Facilitator

## Bi+ Women Partnered with Men



**Type of Group:** Peer-led support, affinity group

**Target Demographic(s):** Bi+ trans and cis women and non-binary people who are currently or recently have been in long-term partnerships with heterosexual or bi+ self-identified men and non-binary people

**Meeting Frequency/Location:** Every eight weeks at a cafe

**Common Subjects Discussed:** Bi+ invisibility: [being] mistaken for a “straight/heterosexual” couple, performing your queerness to “prove” you are bisexual, partner

blaming marital/relationship problems on attendees’ bi+ identities

**Facilitation Challenges Faced:** Discomfort from white cis women to share their gender pronouns, and attendees wanting the facilitator to share detailed information about their personal life, balancing the issues and conversations between diverse groups of attendees.

**Advice to Facilitators of a Group Like This:** “Have a friend/co-facilitator for the group (even if she doesn’t have more experience facilitating). It’s helpful to have someone to trade duties with and discuss the group’s approach.” -Deborah Block-Schwenk, Co-facilitator (pictured above)

“Celebrate group members’ achievements. Tough topics are often discussed [so] it’s [also] good to bring in humor when possible.” -Gwendolyn Fougy Henry, Co-facilitator

## BiWOC

**Type of Group:** Online Support Group

**Target Demographic(s):** Bi+ women of color

**Meeting Frequency/Location:** Online support group is available 24/7 is on Facebook

**Common Subjects Discussed:** Bi+ issues with an emphasis on the intersections of race and culture.

**Facilitation Challenges Faced:** Online support groups demand more time and stricter boundaries for safety

**Advice to Facilitators of a Group Like This:** “Keep reasserting your personal boundaries regardless if you are facilitating an online or offline support group. It’s important to take breaks from these volunteer services to restore your energy.” -Gwendolyn Fougy Henry, Facilitator



## Bi+ Guyz Social Night



**Type of Group:** Social/community-building, affinity group

**Target Demographic(s):** Anyone who identifies as a bi+ “guy”, which includes cis and trans men

**Meeting Frequency/Location:** Once a month at a bar

**Common Subjects Discussed:** Being out/closeted as bi men; marriage and other relationships; monogamy and non-monogamy; biphobia from monosexual communities; pizza, beer, pool, bowling; fatherhood

**Facilitation Challenges Faced:** Getting the word out and having a regular group of guyz attend--it is very, very hit or miss each month. Bi men tend not to be comfortable being out enough to go to such a group.

**Advice to Facilitators of a Group Like This:** “Keep it light, keep it loose. Try to reach more younger bi men without alienating older folks. Make it clear that this is not a support group, per se, as there are other excellent options for that in Boston.” -George Grattan, Facilitator

See more examples of groups and events at  
[www.biresource.org/calendar](http://www.biresource.org/calendar).



## Resources

Participants may indicate that they have needs in addition to support related to their bi+ identity. It can be helpful to have a list of referrals to provide as needed to participants. The websites listed below are for national sources of information, but facilitators should consider compiling a similar list of local resources to refer group participants to as needed.

### National Bi+ Organizations

#### **Bisexual Resource Center**

<http://www.biresource.org/>

#### **BiNet USA**

<http://www.binetusa.org/>

#### **Bisexual Organizing Project**

<http://www.bisexualorganizingproject.org/>

#### **American Institute of Bisexuality**

<http://americaninstituteofbisexuality.org>

### Intersectional Organizations

#### **Resources for People of Color**

##### **BIWOC (Bi Women of Color)**

<http://www.biwoc.org/>

#### **National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance**

<http://www.nqapia.org/wpp/home/>

#### **Queer Women of Color Media Wire**

<http://www.qwoc.org/>

#### **Unid@s National Latina/o LGBT Human Rights Organization**

<http://www.unidoslgbt.org/>

#### **The Visibility Project (portrait and video project for Queer Asian American Women, Trans, and Gender Non-Conforming communities)**

<http://www.visibilityproject.org/>

### Asexuality Resources

#### **The Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN)**

<http://www.asexuality.org>

#### **Demisexuality Resource Center**

<http://www.demisexuality.org>

#### **Asexuality Archive**

<http://www.asexualityarchive.com/>

#### **List of further Asexual resource sites**

[http://wiki.asexuality.org/Asexual\\_sites](http://wiki.asexuality.org/Asexual_sites)

## Trans\* Resources

### **National Center for Trans Equality**

<http://www.transequality.org/>

### **Transgender Law Center**

<https://transgenderlawcenter.org/>

### **Trans People of Color Coalition**

<http://transpoc.org/>

### **Gender Spectrum (support for families, trans\* youth, and educators)**

<https://www.genderspectrum.org/>

### **SPART\*A (Support for Trans\* military service members)**

<http://www.spartapride.org/>

### **List of further Trans\* resources**

<http://www.glaad.org/transgender/resources>

## Intersex Resources

### **Intersex Society of North America**

<http://www.isna.org/>

### **InterAct - Advocates for Intersex Youth**

<http://interactadvocates.org/>

## Genderqueer Resources

### **Nonbinary.org**

<http://www.nonbinary.org>

### **Genderqueer and Nonbinary Identities**

<http://genderqueerid.com/>

### **Neutrois**

<http://www.neutrois.com/>

## Disability Resources

### **National Organization on Disability**

<http://www.nod.org/>

### **American Disability Association**

<http://www.adanet.org/>

### **List of further disability resources**

<http://www.makoa.org/org.htm>

## Non-monogamy Resources

### **More Than Two**

<http://www.morethantwo.com>

### **Opening Up**

<http://openingup.net/>

### **Poly-Friendly Professionals Directory**

<http://polyfriendly.org/index.php>

## LGBTQ Parenting Resources

### **Family Equality Council**

<http://www.familyequality.org/>

### **Proud Parenting**

<http://www.proudparenting.com/>

### **True Colors Suggested Reading Materials**

<http://www.ourtruecolors.org/Resources/Reading/parenting.html>

## Housing/Utilities

### **The United Way**

[www.unitedway.org](http://www.unitedway.org)

### **National Alliance to End Homelessness**

<http://www.endhomelessness.org/>

### **The US Department of Housing and Urban Development**

<http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD>

“First-timers often express gratitude at the end of the meeting for finding the space and being able to share their experiences with others, especially since they usually have never expressed these experiences or feelings with anyone else prior.”

-Julia Canfield, Facilitator

## Food

### **Feeding America**

<http://www.feedingamerica.org/>

### **USDA Food and Nutrition Services**

<https://www.nutrition.gov/food-assistance-programs>

## Legal

### **Lambda Legal**

<http://www.lambdalegal.org/>

### **National Center for Lesbian Rights**

<http://www.nclrights.org/>

### **National Center for Transgender Equality**

<http://www.transequality.org/>

### **Immigration Equality**

<http://www.immigrationequality.org/>

## Healthcare

### **Healthcare.gov**

<https://www.healthcare.gov/>

### **Out2Enroll**

<http://out2enroll.org/>

## Assault & Violence

### **The National Domestic Violence Hotline**

<http://www.thehotline.org>

1-800-799-7233 or TTY 1-800-787-3224

### **Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network**

<https://rainn.org/>

### **National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs**

<http://www.avp.org/about-avp/coalitions-a-collaborations/82-national-coalition-of-anti-violence-programs>

### **The Network/La Red**

617-742-4911 or TTY: 617-227-4911

<http://tnlr.org/en/>

## Addiction

### **Alcoholics Anonymous**

<http://www.aa.org/>

### **Narcotics Anonymous**

<https://www.na.org/>

### **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**

<http://www.samhsa.gov/find-help>

## Suicidality

### **The Samaritans**

<http://samaritanshope.org/>

### **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

<http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

1-800-273-TALK

### **The Trevor Project**

<http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

### **Trans Lifeline**

<http://www.translifeline.org/>

### **GLBT National Help Center**

<http://www.glbthotline.org/>



# Appendix

## Co-facilitation

If there is another qualified person available, it can sometimes be helpful to have a co-facilitator, as mentioned in the previous section. The co-facilitator may notice things occurring in the group that the facilitator does not. A co-facilitator may also bring a different perspective to the group, and they can substitute for the facilitator in the event they are not able to attend. In addition, a co-facilitator can assist with group promotion and logistics.

Maintaining a strong working relationship between the facilitator and co-facilitator is important. It may be helpful to take a few minutes after each meeting to debrief together and discuss any challenging issues that came up within the group. Both individuals can also provide support to one another after a particularly intense or difficult group meeting. This relationship may also allow for a natural transfer of leadership of the group if the facilitator is ready to or needs to move on from this role.

## Ground Rules

Listed below are suggested areas to cover when setting the ground rules, and facilitators should feel comfortable adding any additional ones that seem relevant. Also listed are some potential specific ground rules used by one of the Boston bi facilitators, Bobbi Taylor. Feel free to use those that work for your group, or adapt them to your own wording and the needs of group participants.

- Seek peace and collaboration, not conflict.
- Think outside the box and beyond the binary.
- Seek first to listen and understand. Don't hear what isn't being said. Ask questions.
- Confidentiality (Who you see and what you hear here, stays here.)
- WAIT: Why Am I Talking? (Step Up/Step Back: If you don't normally talk much, this is an opportunity to step up. If you normally talk a lot, this is an opportunity to step back.)
- Use "I" statements. (Speak from your own experiences. Don't speak for others.)

- Don't yuk my yum. (Value diversity. A flavor you hate can be someone else's favorite.)
- Ouch and educate. (If someone says something that offends you, you have a right to speak up and feel safe in doing so. This is best done with an intention to educate.)
- Give amnesty in advance. (Practice respect and think well of each other. Assume the best, not the worst, of others.)
- Take responsibility for your own learning, education, and birthing of your awareness.
- Dialogue (seek to listen and understand), not Debate (seek to convince).
- Whose shoes are missing? (Consider who isn't in the room, who isn't being heard from, and what perspectives may be missing from the conversation.)
- Maintain your own health. Eat healthy, get enough sleep, maintain an exercise routine, and seek medical and mental health help as needed.
- Spend time with supportive friends and family. As the facilitator, you are there to help participants support each other and to support them. Make sure you have friends and family who are able to support you as well.
- Recognize burnout. If facilitating is beginning to feel like too much of a burden, allow yourself to step away from it either permanently or for a period of time. This can have the added benefit of giving a member of your organization the opportunity to gain or enhance their facilitation skills. Allowing a long-term member of the group to facilitate might bring fresh energy to the role and to the group.

## Self-care for Facilitators

Below are some suggestions for effective self-care as a facilitator.

- Know your limits. How often can you facilitate? How (e.g. phone, email, Facebook group) are you willing to be contacted by participants and how often?
- Have a backup plan in case no one shows up. Bring a book or have a friend who will meet you for coffee nearby.
- Have a routine to ground yourself after the group meets. Do you need a few minutes alone? Would you like to take a walk? Or listen to some favorite music? Journaling may also be helpful if it was a particularly challenging or intense group session.

## Increasing Facilitation Skills

Improving upon facilitation skills is an ongoing process. No two people will facilitate in the same manner, so it can be helpful to observe a variety of facilitation styles and examine which aspects will best mesh with your own personal facilitation style, personality, and preferred techniques. There are also facilitation tutorial videos available to watch online which will allow you to reflect on and expand your facilitation skills. Being receptive to non-defensively receiving feedback from support group participants is another important aspect of increasing facilitation skills.





## Glossary

Note: This is not a comprehensive list of terms; however, every effort was made to cover a range of vocabulary used within the bi+ community.

**LGBTQ, LGBTQ, LGBPTQIA, TBLG:** These acronyms refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Pansexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and Ally. Sometimes this will also be written as LGBTQ+ to indicate various communities and identities.

**AFAB:** Assigned female at birth. Sometimes written as CAFAB for coercively assigned female at birth.

**AMAB:** Assigned male at birth. Sometimes written as CAMAB for coercively assigned male at birth.

**Agender:** Feeling that one has no gender identity.

**Androgyne:** A gender identity that has elements of both masculine and feminine.

**Aromantic:** Not feeling romantic attraction or desire for anyone.

**Asexual:** A person who feels little or no sexual attraction to anyone.

**Ally:** Usually a non-LGBTQ person who supports and stands up for the rights of LGBTQ people. However, LGBTQ people can be allies as well,

such as a cisgender lesbian who is an ally to a transgender person.

**BDSM:** A variety of sexual and erotic acts that involve elements of some or all of the following: bondage, discipline, domination, submission and sadomasochism.

**Bi+:** An umbrella term encompassing people who are attracted to people of more than one gender. This can include people who identify as bisexual, pansexual, queer, or fluid.

**Bi+ antagonism:** Aversion or hatred toward bisexuality and bisexual people as a social group or as individuals. Can be used in place of “biphobia.”

**Bigender:** Having more than one gender identities. It could be simultaneously or at separate times

**Biphobia:** Aversion toward bisexuality and bisexual people as a social group or as individuals. People of any sexual orientation can experience such feelings of aversion. Biphobia is a source of discrimination against bisexuals, and may be based on negative bisexual stereotypes or irrational fear. This term can be seen as ableist

and imprecise by some who don't want to stigmatize people who have clinical phobias like claustrophobia (the fear of being in unclosed spaces).

**Biromantic:** A person who feels romantic attraction to people of more than one gender, but who may not feel sexual attraction to people of more than one gender.

**Bisexual:** A person who is attracted to people of more than one gender. Also called bi or bi+. Is used as a political label to include personal labels such as pansexual, omnisexual, sexually fluid, and queer.

**Bottom:** A person who assumes a submissive role in a sexual relationship. It can also refer to the receptive partner during anal sex.

**Bottom surgery:** Colloquial term referring to gender affirmation surgeries of the genitals for transgender people.

**Butch:** An overtly masculine gender identity/presentation.

**Ceterosexual:** Sexual orientation of people with a non-binary gender identity who are primarily attracted to other non-binary people.

**Cisgender:** Gender identity where an individual's experience of their own gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth. The opposite of transgender.

**Coming out:** The process of acknowledging one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity to other people. This can be an ongoing process.

**Compersion:** A term generally found within the polyamorous community to describe a feeling that is the opposite of jealousy. It is a feeling of happiness about one's partner having a relationship or intimate connection with another person.

**Crossdresser:** A person who likes to wear clothes typically associated with a different gender but who may not internally identify with that gender.

**Demisexual:** Someone who only experiences sexual attraction to another person after they have formed an emotional bond.

**Femme:** An overtly feminine gender presentation.

**Fluid:** A sexual orientation in which the level of attraction to people of the same or a different gender varies over time. A term under the bi and bi+ umbrella.

**FTM:** Abbreviation for a transgender person who was assigned female at birth but identifies as male. Female to male.

**Gay:** A person who is attracted primarily to members of the same gender. Although it can be used for any gender (e.g. gay man, gay woman, gay person), "lesbian" is often the preferred term for women who are attracted to women.

**Gender expression:** The way that someone signals which gender they identify as. This can be done by style, movement, behavior.

**Gender identity:** The sense of "being" male, female, genderqueer, agender, etc. For some people, their gender identity aligns with the gender they were assigned at birth. For transgender and gender non-conforming people, gender identity may be different than what they were assigned at birth.

**Gender neutral pronouns:** Pronouns preferred by some non-binary or gender non-conforming people. These include: ze/zim/zir, they/them/their, ve/ver/vis, sie/sie/hir

**Gender normative:** Conforming to traditional expectations of behavior, clothing or presentation for one's gender

**Gender reassignment surgery (GRS):** The

surgical procedure by which a transgender person's physical appearance is altered to allow them sexual characteristics of the gender they identify with. Also known as gender confirmation surgery or gender affirmation surgery.

**Genderfuck:** Someone who presents their gender in a way that is deliberately designed to subvert typical ideas about gender

**Genderqueer:** Individuals or groups who “queer” or problematize the standard notions of sex, gender and desire in a given society. Genderqueer people possess identities which fall outside of the widely accepted sexual binary (i.e. “men” and “women”). Also known as gender-variant.

**Greysexual:** This is related to asexual and is a sexual orientation of someone who seldom, or only under very specific conditions, feels sexual attraction to other people.

**Heteronormativity:** The belief that being heterosexual is not only the norm, but considered the preferred way of being by society at large, and conforming to traditional gender roles of man and woman is expected.

**Heterosexism:** A set of attitudes, beliefs and behaviors which privilege people who identify and present as heterosexual and discriminates against those who do not.

**Heterosexual:** A person who is primarily attracted to members a different sex. Also called straight.

**Homophobia:** Negative attitudes and feelings toward homosexuality or people who are identified or perceived as being lesbian or gay. This term can be seen as ableist and imprecise by some who don't want to stigmatize people who have clinical phobias like claustrophobia (the fear of being in unclosed spaces).

**Homosexual:** A clinical term for people who are attracted to members of the same sex.

**Intergender:** A gender identity in between man and woman which may incorporate aspects of both. Some people believe this gender identity should be reserved for people who are intersex.

**Intersex:** A person whose sexual anatomy or chromosomes do not fit with the traditional markers of female and male. For example: people born with both “female” and “male” anatomy (e.g. penis, testicles, vagina, uterus); people born with XXY chromosomes.

**In the closet:** Describes a person who keeps their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or relationship orientation a secret from some or all people.

**Kink:** An unconventional sexual practice, such as bondage and spanking.

**Lesbian:** A woman who is primarily attracted to other women

**Mononormativity:** The belief that being monogamous is not only the norm, but considered the preferred way of being by society at large.

**Monogamous:** Having only one sexual partner at a time.

**Monosexual:** Having a sexual orientation of being attracted to only one gender. For example, being a lesbian or being heterosexual.

**MTF:** Abbreviation for a transgender person who was assigned male at birth but identifies as female. Male to female.

**Non-monogamous:** Having sexual relationships with more than one person at a time with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved. This may include also having multiple romantic relationships at the same time, or it may involve

none or only one relationship that is romantic.

**Omnisexual:** Sexual orientation describing people attracted to people of more than one gender identity, not just those who fit into the gender binary. Under the bi and bi+ umbrella.

**Pansexual:** Sexual orientation describing people attracted to people of more than one gender identity, not just those who fit into the gender binary. Under the bi and bi+ umbrella.

**Polyamorous:** Having more than one intimate, romantic relationship at the same time, with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved.

**Polysexual:** Sexual orientation describing people who are attracted to more than one gender. It differs from pansexuality which implies attraction to people of all genders. Polysexual people may be attracted to women and agender people, for example. Can be under the bi and bi+ umbrella.

**Primary:** In some polyamorous relationships, this is a person's main partner. This may be the person that someone spends the most time with, has the strongest emotional connection to, or defined in some other mutually agreeable way.

**Queer:** 1) An umbrella term sometimes used by LGBTQ people to refer to the entire LGBTQ community. 2) An alternative that some people use to eschew the idea of the labels and categories such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc. 3) Sexual orientation of people attracted to people of many genders. Note: Queer is an in-group term, and a word that can be considered offensive to some people within the LGBTQ community, like older generations for whom it was a slur. Can be under the bi and bi+ umbrella, depending on how the person is using it.

**Questioning:** The process of exploring and discovering one's own sexual orientation, gender

identity, or gender expression.

**Relationship orientation:** The preference for a particular style or structure of intimate relationships. Examples of different relationship orientations include: monogamous, open relationships, and polyamorous relationships.

**Same gender loving:** Term sometimes used by members of the African American/Black community to express an alternative sexual orientation without relying on terms of European descent.

**Sapiosexual:** Sexual orientation in which the intellect of one's partners is the most attractive feature.

**Secondary:** In some polyamorous relationships, this is a partner who is not someone's main, or primary, partner.

**Switch:** Someone who sometimes likes to assume a dominant role (top) and sometimes a submissive role (bottom) in a sexual relationship.

**Top:** Someone who assumes a dominant role in sexual relationships. It can also refer to the penetrative partner in anal sex.

**Top surgery:** Colloquial term for breast surgery that some transgender people have. It can include mastectomy, chest reconstruction, or breast augmentation.

**Trans man:** A transgender person who was assigned female at birth but identifies as a man.

**Trans woman:** A transgender person who was assigned male at birth but identifies as a woman.

**Transgender:** This term has many definitions. It is frequently used as an umbrella term to refer to all people who do not identify with their assigned gender at birth or the binary gender system. This can include transsexuals, cross-dressers, genderqueer people, drag kings, drag

queens, two-spirit people, and others, though some members of the trans community do not recognize all these categories in the transgender umbrella. Often abbreviated to trans or trans\*.

**Transphobia:** The aversion or hatred of transgender people and gender nonconforming behavior. Transphobia can exist among lesbian, gay, and bisexual people as well as among heterosexual people. This term can be seen as ableist and imprecise by some who don't want to stigmatize people who have clinical phobias like claustrophobia (the fear of being in unclosed spaces).

**Two-spirited:** Persons in some Native communities who have attributes of two genders. They have distinct gender and social roles within their communities, and are often involved with mystical rituals (shamans). Their dress is usually a mixture of male and female items.

**Vanilla:** Conventional sex that is considered within the bounds of what is considered "normal" for the culture and usually does not include any BDSM or kink.



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