

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

“B” is for Bisexuality, but What and Who Are They

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If someone asks you to explain bisexuality, simply say, "Bisexuals are people who have the potential to be physically intimate with both sexes." This probably takes in the majority of the population, but bisexuals aren't doing a very good job of putting a face on the issue, and telling us how their issues are different from those of gay men and lesbians. We need a Bisexual Liberation Movement, or at least an educational DVD.

I would assume that among the challenges faced by bisexuals are the refusal of many people to believe the orientation exists, the pressure bisexual people feel to choose a gay or straight identity, the lack of strong, public role models of bisexuality, the fear many people have of the undependability of a bisexual's commitment, and the feeling that bisexuality is a behavior rather than an orientation and identity. Bisexuality was added to LGBT for political reasons and not because there was, or is, understanding on anyone's part of what the political and workplace issues of bisexuals are. Gay people's advocacy for bisexuals is probably generated by their desire to protect the homosexual attractions of the person from discrimination.

Anecdotes, data, and the business case are what I need most help in. My personal belief as a sexual person, and as a sexuality educator, is that most people would identify as bisexual if they saw it as meaning that there is the potential to be attracted to both sexes to varying degrees. If you go to Wikipedia and ask for a list of famous bisexuals, you'll see hundreds of names, including Katharine Hepburn, Herman Melville, Sammy Davis, Jr., and Anne Frank. Some of the people listed as bisexual are probably gay or lesbian, but afraid to say so. There are far more bisexuals in the world who label themselves gay or lesbian, but who really aren't.

Who doesn't have the potential to be physically intimate with both sexes under the right circumstances? Women are more honest about it than men. We men gravitate to one or the other end of the identity scale, finding community by saying "yuck" to the thought of being sexual with a woman or with another male. Gay guys and straight guys create their identity by saying what they're not. But women are more courageous and honest, except for those women who were once married and now identify as lesbian. That may be their label, but there had to have been some potential for experiencing physical intimacy with a man or they never could have shared a marriage bed with their husbands. I'm not saying the sex was great, but the cuddling must have been, and cuddling is intimacy.

The same is true of gay men who were once married. They may insist today that they are gay, but that's not an accurate description of their sexual potential. They spent time being intimate with at least one woman they chose to marry. One day, such men won't find it necessary to be so gay. Today, they can be like converts to Catholicism. You've never seen people who are so orthodox.

The term "bisexual" was coined in the 19th century, as were the terms "homosexual" and "heterosexual". Some people today prefer the term "pansexual", which doesn't mean they find intimacy in the kitchen. It means they see themselves on the continuum between exclusive attraction to men or to women.

Heidi Green is a bisexual woman who is mentoring people involved in [Out and Equal](#) on the issues facing bisexual men and women in society and in the workplace. As an advocate for bisexual people, I need her help, and that of others, in understanding how the workplace can be made to feel more welcoming to bisexual employees. What are their unique, everyday concerns? It's clearly not about which bathroom to use, nor, if they are married to a person of the other sex, is it about having no heterosexual privilege.

We need bisexual people to come out of their gay and straight closets to help us all understand the challenges faced by bisexual people, and perhaps in the process, enable us to claim our own pansexual capacity.