



Both Directions

Finding the bi scene in the UK

What Next?

So you've carefully read this guide, come out to the people you feel comfortable with, and written in to BCN telling us how to make the next edition even better, now what do you do?

Contact Your Local Group

Whether it's a real-world group with regular meetings, or an email network for your area, meeting other bi folk can be really good for improving your sense of self as a bi person.

Go To BiCon

It's the biggest event of the bi year and it's the best place to meet a really wide cross-section of the bi community. You'll make plenty of new friends and be in a brilliant space for exploring what it is to be bisexual around lots of people who understand where you're coming from.

Bi Community News

Last but by no means least, subscribe to BCN. It's the best way of keeping in touch with what other bi people around the UK are up to. So without further ado, here's a subscription form.

Welcome

Gay and lesbian visibility has come a long way in the last ten years or so. There are open and happily lesbian or gay film stars, TV characters, celebrities, Members of Parliament, even government ministers.

However, if you're coming out as bisexual it can still seem quite an isolated experience: while there are plenty of gay and straight venues and places like London and Manchester have famously strong lesbian & gay communities, it can feel like you belong in neither one place nor the other. Some people will still try and tell us we're confused or we need to decide which we prefer, when the whole point is - we might prefer one or the other, but we like both.

Because of that, we've put this booklet together to share our experiences of coming out as bisexual - and staying out.

Over the next few pages we'll look at...

What it means to be bi - and dismissing the idea that unless you have a boyfriend and a girlfriend whom you kiss alternately, you aren't "bi enough"

Where the bisexuals are - what is the bi community and how you can become a part of it, including local bi groups all around the country.

Coming out - from gay or straight

Smashing the myths and stereotypes of bisexuality

We'll even pause along the way for a few personal stories of bi people, and to name-drop a few famous bisexuals, and some books, plays and films with prominent bi characters or bisexual themes.

We hope you'll find the guide useful or helpful, but we don't kid ourselves it's perfect, so feel free to get in touch with us with feedback or ideas for what you'd like to see included in future editions. Email us on comingout@bicomcommunitynews.co.uk

Jen, Peter, Helen, Meg, Allison & the folk from the uk-bi-activism network

Get It Regularly!

Want to know what's going on in the UK bisexual community?

Look no further.

BCN is the only national newsletter specifically for bisexuals. Jam-packed to the brim with news, views, reviews and listings for the bi movement nationwide, it keeps you bang up to date.

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Some Definitions

What it means to be bi

Bisexual (*adj*) means...

Being 'Sexually attracted to both men and women'
(*Oxford English Dictionary*)

'The capacity...to love and sexually desire both same-
and other-gendered individuals' (Firestein, *Bisexuality*)

'Gender is not that relevant. It's like eye colour: I notice
it sometimes, and sometimes it can be a bit of a feature
but that's all' (*BiCon attendee*)

As you can see from these definitions, what bisexuality actually *is* is not a simple matter. It's certainly not something that bi people themselves, or academics who write about bisexuality, agree on. Over the next few pages you can read what being bi means to some people who've chosen to adopt that label. In the pages of BCN you can read in more detail about these debates. Meanwhile here are some of the key things to think about.

Gender and Bisexuality

If heterosexual means being attracted to the opposite sex and homosexual means being attracted to the same sex, then bisexual means being attracted to both right? Well that's certainly one common definition, but it has been questioned both inside and outside bisexual groups.

Some people have pointed out that the terms homosexual and heterosexual were only invented back in the mid 1900s. Before then it didn't make sense to define people in terms of their sexual behaviour or which gender they were attracted too. In some cultures it still doesn't. There are many different possible ways we could define our sexuality, for example we could divide people in terms of whether they enjoy being penetrated during sex or penetrating or both, whether they prefer sex with people who are in a less powerful position than them or more, or whether they are attracted to one person at a time or more than one.

Some people have also questioned whether there are really just two genders. Several cultures consider there to be three or more. In our society babies are defined as boys or girls as soon as they are born and those who are ambiguous in some way are given surgery so that they appear masculine or feminine. However, a lot of people don't 'feel' that they are simply a man or a woman. Some people change from one to the other during their lives, others identify with some aspects of one and some of the other, or neither. Maybe being attracted to 'both' doesn't make sense because there are a rainbow of genders including transgender, tomboy, drag queen, butch woman, metrosexual man, androgynous, etc.

“ “ Being bi has never really been an issue for me or those close to me, but other peoples assumptions really annoy me. People tend to think I'm gay unless they know I'm with an opposite-sex partner, and then they assume I'm straight, which makes me feel invisible. But then, when I say I'm bi, they assume I'm into threesomes and have open relationships. When they realize that's not the case, they sometimes seem to think my sexuality's irrelevant since I'm not 'doing anything about it, and that I should stop 'going on about it.

Our Stories

The UK bi community has been really important to me in the last couple of years. Before I went to bi events, I thought they would be full of 'people just like me'. What I found out was that the bi community is really diverse. I actually haven't met that many other people in exactly the same situation as myself. But everyone has always been very open and welcoming. It's a small community and you soon get to know people once you get involved. And its great to have a place where, for once, you don't have to explain yourself.

Helen (29), Bedfordshire.

“ “ I realised I was bi quite early on while I was still at school. I never had a period of thinking I was gay or straight (other than assuming I was straight like everyone else does before their hormones kick in!) I finally found the courage to come out to my friends about 3 years later, and after an initial "you're just doing it for attention" period, it came to nothing really and was quite an anticlimax. At university I joined the LGB and made lots of new friends and never lied about myself for a minute - it was the best thing I ever did.

Our Stories

For me, the hardest things I have had to deal with have been the isolation, partly due to my fear of what other people will think, and the fluctuation of my attractions - I used to wish I could just settle on one way and stay there. Since I've accepted that as part of being bi it's no problem at all. Coming out is also hard - I find it hardest to come out to people I care about, although I've never had a truly bad reaction so perhaps my fear is unfounded. The worst reaction was my mum using the cliché "It's just a phase", which I'm sure she still thinks ten years later! I LOVE being bi and wouldn't really want to be any other way just because it makes sense to me - seems to fit in with my way of thinking and other areas of my life.

*Rainbow Queen
Greater Manchester*

Up Your Street - local bi groups

These are some of the larger and longer-established groups at the moment - we recommend BCN's webpage www.bicommunitynews.co.uk for the very latest listings.

Bedfordshire Bi Group - email bedfordbigroup@yahoo.co.uk for more details.

Birmingham Bi Women - social/campaign group for bi & bi friendly women in the Birmingham area. See the website, www.birminghambiwomen.org.uk for more information.

Brighton Both Ways - thriving weekly group. New website address - www.brightonbothways.com or get in touch on email shuangxinglian@hotmail.com, phone 07952 838921

Cambridge **Cambience** - local bi email list, to sign up, visit: <http://cambience.greenend.org.uk/>

Colchester Bi Group - meets 1st Thurs monthly, 7-10pm at The Outhouse, 19 East Hill, Colchester. For info contact: Colchester Gay Switchboard, 01206 869191, Mon-Fri, 7-10pm

East Mids Bi Network East Midlands email network - send a blank email to embn-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Edinburgh Bi Group - group meets third Wednesday of each month, 8pm - 10pm at the LGB Centre, 58a Broughton Street. See the website of Bi Scotland, <http://www.biscotland.org/>

Bi Glasgow - meetings first Wednesday of every month at the Glasgow LGBT Centre, 11 Dixon Street, socials mid-month. Email glasgow@bi.org, website <http://biglasgow.bi.org/>

Dublin Bi Irish - email: bi.irish@bi.org; or you can join the mailing list by mailing to bi-irish-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

London **Bi Underground** - monthly bis and friends pub night. Board games, beer, chat, second Tuesday of each month from 6pm til closing time. See www.bisexualunderground.com

Manchester **BiPhoria!** - 1st Tues monthly, text 07941 811 124. Email: info@biphoria.org.uk; web page: <http://www.biphoria.org.uk/>

BiNorwich - see <http://norwich.bi.org/>

Nottingham Bi-Women's group, meet-ups planned via emailing list. See www.nottingham.bi.org

Sheffield Bi Group - meets 7.30pm last Friday of the month, see www.bi-weekly.org.uk

Shropshire **BiAS** - social events in and around Shrewsbury. To join email list, send a blank email to bias_uk-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

This might explain why some people prefer to define bisexual as being attracted to people regardless of gender rather than being attracted to both genders.

Attraction and Bisexuality

Being bisexual doesn't necessarily mean that you are simultaneously attracted to men and women. Many people talk about the kind of person they're attracted to varying across their lifetime or even over the course of a day! It also doesn't necessarily mean that you're equally attracted to men and women. Some bisexuals might be much more strongly attracted to one or the other and still be more comfortable with the label 'bisexual' than 'gay' or 'straight'. Finally, it doesn't necessarily mean that you have to have had sex with both men and women. When I first said I was bisexual I got some very negative reactions from people who said I couldn't be bi unless I'd had sex with a woman, and the term 'bi-curious' is often used rather negatively towards people who haven't had what Brett Anderson called 'a homosexual experience'. We should remember that we don't say someone isn't heterosexual until they've had sex with someone of the opposite sex! You can be bi if you're only sexually active with one gender (which many people in monogamous relationships are) or indeed if you aren't sexually active at all.

Bisexual continuum?

Back in the 1940s, Alfred Kinsey came up with his famous scale of sexual orientation, finding that many people did not fall simply at either end of the spectrum. This scale explains why you might hear bi people calling themselves a 'Kinsey 2.6 and counting...'

Kinsey's scale of sexual attraction						
0	1	2	3	4	5	6
exclusively heterosexual	predominantly heterosexual	predominantly heterosexual	equally heterosexual	predominantly homosexual	predominantly homosexual	exclusively homosexual
	only	but more than	and	but more than	only	
	incidentally homosexual	incidentally homosexual	homosexual	incidentally heterosexual	incidentally heterosexual	

Fritz Klein's later model incorporated the idea that people could move up and down this scale rather than being stuck in one place on it forever. However, other people don't like the idea of a scale at all because it still defines people by which gender they're attracted to (the same or the opposite).

Nature or nurture?

Some see bisexuality as something they were born as and/or something based in their biological make-up. Some see it as something they learnt to be as they grew up. Some feel that it would be impossible for them not to be bisexual even if they didn't want to be. Others see it as a deliberate choice they have made: a label they have adopted or a political decision

they have made to be sexual with both men and women or to not choose partners on the basis of their gender.

Behaviour and identity

Finally, some people see being bisexual as something they *are* whereas others regard it as something they *do*. A person can have sex with men and women, or be attracted to both, and still prefer not to call themselves bisexual, perhaps because of biphobia (see page X) or because they are more comfortable with another word (gay, straight, queer, dyke...) And, as we've seen, a person can call themselves bisexual without acting bisexually (whatever that means!)

Some wear bi badges which say 'assume nothing' and some argue for a complete escape from labels and boxes. Some like the word 'queer' which can be used to express a desire to challenge the idea that people are either male or female, gay or straight. Many of us feel like we're making up the rules as we go along.

For some people being bisexual is the most important aspect of their identity, for others it isn't as important as other things about them or their sexual preferences. Many people are attracted to men and women without feeling the need to join a bi community. On the other hand, many people feel part of a bi community without defining as bi. 15% of people who came to BiCon 2004 weren't bi themselves.

Whatever your reason for using the word 'bisexual', or feeling affiliated in some way without claiming the term, is fine with us. If you don't find your experiences reflected in this booklet then please write and let us know so we can include them next time!

Meg Barker

Our Stories

I've been coming out for over 10 years, and I haven't finished yet...

I first came out to my best friend, then I started coming out to other friends. People were generally quite accepting, and before long it was common knowledge within my social circles. My sister's social circles overlapped with mine, so she found out when most other people did. But I never came out to my parents- there was no need to because my sister did it for me when she was drunk once. The result? The last I heard, my dad thinks I'm a lesbian and my mum thinks I'm going through a 'phase' and I'm straight really.

Coming out hasn't all been easy, and unless I tattoo BISEXUAL across my forehead, I doubt I'll ever be out completely.

Cat, West Yorkshire

Sunday, Bloody Sunday (*John Schlesinger, 1971*) A love triangle with one woman and two men.

Teorema (*Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1965*) The mother-of-all-mad-bi-movies. Terence Stamp is the gorgeous stranger who seduces male and female members of a household, enlightening them all.

Thundercrack (*Curt McDowell, 1975*) Bizarre film that's half art-house and half porn movie.

When Night Is Falling (*P. Rozema, 1995*) Upbeat Canadian romance about a woman choosing between one lover of either sex.

Books about Bisexuality

Bisexuals Horizons, ed. *Off Pink Collective* Covering the UK bi community with: theory; representation; personal stories; HIV, AIDS and safer sex; and politics. For info on Off Pink (<http://bi.org/~OffPink/>), write to them at 24 Shandon Road, London SW4 9HR

Bisexual Lives, ed. *Off Pink Collective* First-person accounts from bisexuals on their lives. Frank and revealing. For more info on Off Pink see above.

The Bisexual Option, *Fritz Klein* The book that introduced the 'Klein Grid' for sexual orientation. A serious study of the prevalence of bisexuality.

The Buddha of Suburbia, *Hanif Kureshi* 70s-style sexual experimentation and bisexual longings. See also TV

The Colour Purple, *Alice Walker* A black woman growing up in the 30s leaves her brute husband for a bi woman.

Interview with a Vampire *Anne Rice* Tamed down for the film is the copious bisexuality of several of the main characters. Anne Rice also wrote a set of poly-perverse SM porn books under the pseudonym A.N. Roquelaure.

The Left Hand of Darkness, *Ursula Le Guin* A science fiction novel set on a planet of bisexual, hermaphroditic beings.

Macho Sluts, *Pat Califia* Lesbian SM guru weighs in with some sexy stories. 'The Surprise Party' particularly leans towards bisexuality.

Orlando, *Virginia Woolf* A 'sex-change' allows Woolf to disguise bisexuality in sheep's clothing.

Sexing the Cherry, *Jeanette Winterson* Fiction with a bi central character (also wrote 'Written on the Body').

Vice Versa, *Marjorie Garber* Weighty, confusing and confused tome on bisexual theory and practice. Very useful for reference material though!

Films & Plays about Bisexuality

Basic Instinct (*Paul Verhoeven, 1991*) Was boycotted by lesbian and gay groups for Sharon Stone's performance as a bi murderess - which is the only time the lesbian and gay community ever got pissed off about how bisexuals are depicted. Some see Stone's character as a bi sex goddess, others just hate it.

Cabaret (*Bob Fosse, 1972*) Lisa Minelli struts her stuff in Berlin. Charts the fall of liberty under fascism.

Carrington (*Christopher Hampton, 1995*) Tells the true story of 'Bloomsbury' group (see bi heroes also) bi painter Dora Carrington (although her female lovers are sadly absent) and her lifelong passion for Lytton Strachey. Jonathan Pryce and Emma Thompson are the star-crossed lovers, who can't do without each other but can't get it together because he's busy eyeing up her latest piece of rough.

Chasing Amy (*dir Kevin Smith, 1997*) Love triangle set in the world of comic writing.

Crush (*Alison Maclean, 1993*) If you want another unstable bi, go for this. An emotionally lacerating film from New Zealand with another unhinged bi who spreads chaos around her with her uncontained desires. Compelling viewing, for those not easily distressed.

Desert Hearts (*Donna Deitch, 1984*) If you want a good bi movie why not reclaim a lesbian classic? An all-tears-and-kisses love story about a woman who leaves her husband and takes up with a younger woman. How come that makes her a lesbian rather than bi?

Desperate Remedies (*Stewart Main and Peter Wells, 1992*) A modern, high-camp classic set in 19th century Australia, about a woman torn between a man and a woman, with much sighing, billowing frocks and heaving bosoms (of both genders).

French Twist (1995) Or 'Gauzon Maudit' in France, wherein a woman falls in love with a butch dyke, but still loves her husband.

Gilda (*Charles Vidor, 1946*) One from the vaults. Rita Hayworth, still the most alluring, independent, and bitter of 40s femmes fatales. Rita is the tart-without-a-heart who breaks up a happy gay couple, and then publicly humiliates her husband with a striptease in which all she removes is her gloves, but which still manages to be the most erotic act of exposure in cinema history.

The Hunger (*Tony Scott, 1981*) A bi must-see with vampire Catherine DeNeuve seducing Susan Sarandon into mischief. Am-I-Aren't-I-bi David Bowie appears as another vampire, for that extra frisson. Genuinely erotic, if slightly hung up on billowing curtains.

The Rocky Horror Show Everyone shags everyone in this hilarious film/stage-play. It fits in with the anarchic sense of fun, and boundary breaking attitude, that many bis possess.

Satyricon (*Federico Fellini, 1969*) Two friends share their lovers - both male and female - in Fellini's 'master-piece'.

Savage Nights (*Cyril Collard, 1992*) A semi-autobiographical piece about coming to terms with HIV. It's as up-front and unsentimental about that as it is about the tensions and pleasures of open relationships.

A Few Famous Bisexuals

Angelina Jolie - Who says she only plays women who she'd like to date.

David Bowie - During the 70's he was the most famous bi in the world, and an inspiration for many to be out and proud. Shame he later decided it was a phase.

Neneh Cherry - A mother and rap singer who has talked openly and positively about her bisexuality in interview.

Hanif Kureshi - Writer of, among others, 'The Buddha of Suburbia' - a very wonderful bi novel and TV series.

Lou Reed - Now married to Sylvia, Lou had to endure 'shock therapy' as a youth, when his parents tried to 'remove' his homosexual urges. Lou has brought us with his solo work and with the Velvet Underground, songs celebrating alternative sexualities such as 'Walk on the Wild Side' and 'Venus In Furs.'

Tom Robinson - Though he long identified as gay, Tom's life history is bi and he has played at a variety of bi events from the bisexual tent at London Pride to several BiCons. His outlook is very positive towards all sexualities. Check out both his bi information website, <http://www.bothways.com/> and his personal site <http://www.tomrobinson.com/>

Vita Sackville-West - A member of the 'Bloomsbury' group of writers and a lover of Virginia Woolf's. A woman who lived a bi life to the hilt and then let the world know about it through her diary.

Pam St Clements - Acclaimed as a 'dyke' the EastEnders star actually came out as bi in the early 1990s.

Skin (from Skunk Anansie) - Singer for the acclaimed metal band and now solo performer. She's forthright, aggressive and sexy as fuck.

Alice Walker - Though it may have been largely edited out of her films, most of her books, including 'The Colour Purple' and 'Meridian', have positive bi characters in.

Virginia Woolf - For her role at the centre of the Bloomsbury group, and for her books including 'Orlando' (see *film section*).

Where The Bisexuals Are

The UK Bisexual Community - An Overview

What is this “bi community”? How do you go about finding other bisexuals? Better yet, finding other bisexuals with whom you have more in common than just a sexual orientation?

Well, for a start it depends on where you live. In the big cities - London, Edinburgh, Manchester, Birmingham - there tend to be one or more bi community groups meeting regularly, whether as a support group for people coming out, or something more informal and social such as meeting regularly in a corner of a pub. If you live elsewhere the bisexuals may be a bit harder to find - you may be best either finding a local lesbian, gay & bisexual group or going online.

Right Up Your Street

If there's a local bi group - go to it!! But get in touch first to make sure the details you have are up to date, as there's nothing more dispiriting than going along the first time and finding out when you get there that this month they were meeting early and set off to the cinema ten minutes before you arrived.

Most bi groups follow a pattern of meeting in a community centre to chat about bisexuality and welcome new members, before heading off to a pub. It helps to go to the pub with them - you can get to mingle more easily and people tend to relax more there than during a group meeting.

National groups

If there's not a local group near you, or if you have a particular interest, there are also a variety of national groups. These often work through email lists but not necessarily so; for example there is a media group working on getting better representation of bi people on TV & in newspapers, and an academics group for people who are involved in sexuality research and theory.

You Have Bi-Mail

There are also regional and national email networks. The regional ones covering areas where there is no local bi group will often arrange social meet-ups at pubs or cafes, and can be a way of finding other people to go to gay pride events or bi festivals.

National email networks tend to have a theme for discussion - apart from uk-bi which is a general bi email list for the whole country. So there is a list for bi students in the UK, one for people interested in documenting bi history, and so forth.

6. “Bisexuals spread HIV”

HIV and other STIs do not discriminate against groups of people. They are transmitted through unsafe sexual practices and all people who engage in unsafe sex are at risk of acquiring HIV and other STIs. Simply identifying as bisexual, or being in a relationship with a bisexual person, will not increase your risk!

7. “They're closeted married men, or ‘swingers’.”

Yes, ‘closeted’ bisexuals do exist, as do many closeted lesbians and gay men. Indeed, the fact that so many lesbian, gay AND bisexual people are forced to live their lives ‘in the closet’ demonstrates the oppressive nature of a society where heterosexuality is privileged and other sexualities are marginalised. Some ‘swingers’ may behave bisexually and some may identify as bisexual but there isn't necessarily a link between ‘swinging’ and bisexuality.

8. “Bisexuality is a cop out”

This stereotype is based on the assumption that bisexuals are really lesbians or gay men who pass as heterosexuals to avoid discrimination and, consequently, weaken the lesbian and gay political movement. Whilst this may be true of some bisexuals, it is also true of some lesbians and gay men, who pass as heterosexual. Adopting a bisexual identity is definitely not a cop out, indeed, bisexuals who come out face the possibility of discrimination and hostility from all quarters.

9. “Bisexuality is a fashion statement”

Like so-called ‘lesbian-chic’; bisexuality goes through periods when it receives a lot of media attention and features heavily in popular culture. Celebrities, particularly female celebrities, tell the stories of their sexual exploits. However, to say that bisexuality is little more than a fashion statement or trend is to deny the lived everyday experiences of most bisexual people.

10. “Bisexuals are nicer than other people”

Although more positive than the other stereotypes, this is still a stereotype and is therefore a generalisation. Bisexuals are real people and are capable of displaying a range of human traits, both good and bad. In fact, bisexuals are just like anyone else really!

These are just a few of the stereotypes you will hear about bisexuality. There are many more. However, remember that there is no such thing as a ‘proper’ bisexual. Your bisexuality is unique to you. Embrace it and Enjoy it!

Allison

(These stereotypes are derived from Udis-Kessler (1996) ‘Challenging the Stereotypes’ in: *Bisexual Horizons* London, Lawrence & Wishart Ltd)

“It’s Just A Phase” - and other nonsense

When you come out to people as bisexual there are a whole range of responses you may encounter. We can’t possibly imagine every single one, but here are some of the common negative ones and some answers to give.

1. “Bisexuality doesn’t Exist”

It would be ridiculous to say that bisexuality doesn’t exist – after all, plenty of surveys suggest that a significant number of people behave bisexually at some point in their lives. Whilst this stereotype doesn’t deny bisexual behaviour, it is based on a simplistic understanding of sexuality, where people are viewed as being basically straight or gay. According to this ‘either/or’ view of sexuality a bisexual identity is impossible

2. “Bisexuals are emotionally immature and don’t know what they want. It’s just a phase”

Are bisexuals confused or just going through a phase? Certainly some bisexuals find their emotional lives complex but that’s also true for non-bisexuals. Ironically, this stereotype is often expressed by gay men and lesbians who have themselves had their sexuality dismissed ‘as a phase’. Some people do go through a period of attraction to more than one sex before identifying as straight or gay, some people go from being attracted to one sex to being bisexual and others recognise and embrace their bisexuality from a young age.

3. “Bi’s are promiscuous, they want sex not commitment”

The idea of bisexuality as promiscuous is clearly judgmental. Not only is it underpinned by a negative attitude towards sex, with the implicit assumption that sex without commitment is necessarily wrong, it also misrepresents bisexuality. Bisexuality is much more than sex. It involves emotions, desires, and relations. It may not even include sex!

4. “Bisexuals can’t be monogamous”

Bisexuality isn’t significantly different from other sexualities. Whether straight, gay or bisexual, people engage in a range of relationships and lifestyles. Some bisexuals have committed monogamous, some have committed non-monogamous relationships and some bisexuals are celibate.

5. “A bisexual man will always leave you for a woman, and vice versa. You can’t trust them.

Relationships come to an end for many reasons. It is always difficult when a relationship ends because one partner has met someone new but the pain isn’t necessarily determined by the gender of the new partner. As with all of the stereotypes, there are certainly occasions when bisexual men have left their male partner for a woman, and vice versa. Similarly, there are many happy bisexuals in committed same sex relationships. Underpinning this stereotype is the assumption that bisexual people are unable to commit to a relationship with a member of the same sex, which is simply not true.

BCN

We can’t not mention the newsletter / magazine of the bi movement, Bi Community News (usually known as *BCN*). Established in 1995 and published regularly ever since it’s the best way of keeping up to date about topics of debate and bi events nationwide. See listings for subscription details!

The Internet

A guide like this cannot possibly ignore the internet these days - not least as most people coming to bi groups or going to their first BiCon say the web is where they found out about the bi community. Because the web changes every day with new sites coming and going it’s hard to give a definitive guide to the best places to look, but the following sites are good places to start that have been around a long while and stood the test of time:

www.bi.org - links to lots of interesting bi sites, mostly in the UK & Europe

www.bisexual.org - similar to www.bi.org for the USA

www.main.bisexual.com - good online discussion forums if you have a burning question

www.bicommunitynews.co.uk - BCN’s website, plenty of articles about bi life to browse and up-to-date links to bi community groups and email networks.

Events

The biggest event in the British bi calendar each year is called BiCon. It’s a long weekend away with a bunch of other bi and bi-friendly people, held in a different city each summer. There is a daytime programme of speakers, discussions and workshops, and in the evenings there are discos, live music and other entertainment. It can be a really good way to meet a diverse group of bi people and make new friends.

However BiCon is just one weekend and there are other one-day events in the year too. Most years Manchester hosts some kind of one-day bi event, which tends to be quite informative for people coming out, and London will normally host some kind of one-day event as well - theirs tend to have more of a party dimension.

There will also be specific events during the year around the country, such as conferences for people involved in bi activist work - running phone helplines or support groups. For the really adventurous there are also European and International bi events such as EuroBiCon to consider.

There are a number of ways you can keep informed about such goings on: naturally we’d recommend subscribing to Bi Community News magazine, but even if you just keep a sharp eye on their web page you should be able to pick up on up-and-coming events.

Of course, the bi groups around the country are by and large run by people much like yourself, so if there isn’t a group in your area - you could always start one. Contact one of the existing groups for help and advice so you don’t repeat mistakes others have made already though!

Coming out

‘Coming out’ to others - telling them that you are bisexual - can be an important way of finding your place in the world and becoming comfortable with your sexuality. Some people see the use of labels as limiting, whilst for others they are a valuable form of self-identification.

Coming out ‘of the closet’ defines the moment when you become honest with others and yourself about your sexuality – coming out to yourself, confronting your own personal fictions and removing the need to distort the truth about your personal life can be a liberating moment!

Your own situation influences whether it is necessary or desirable to come out to others – not having to bend the truth or hide a same sex relationship are good reasons to reveal your sexuality. However, your sexuality is a private matter and regardless of legal protection and equality it may be politically or otherwise unwise to come out everywhere.

Assuming you've decided to come out to someone, congratulations! There is no better time to come out than the present.

Similarly to many other life events, coming out is a process improved by a little prior planning. Most importantly, you should plan for the worst but hope for the best. Approaching coming out to those you are dependent upon for work, money and accommodation with a little more care than to others can be advisable.

The setting when coming out is important – people assume a tragedy if sat down and told to expect something significant; choosing a moment and setting when the person is relaxed and casually slipping into conversation your attendance at a bisexual event is less liable to provoke a shock.

Likewise, although annual occasions such as Christmas gather people together, there are stresses at that time that make it a less than ideal moment to reveal anything serious, never mind your bisexuality!

Try to place yourself in the viewpoint of the recipient – once the initial shock has worn off, they will want to know the implications for your relationship with them. For friends the implications may be fairly minor whilst families are likely to have questions about relationships, marriage/partnerships and children.

Having ready answers to questions, and pointers to bi-friendly literature, websites and phone lines can be a great help to some people, and guiding them in this manner helps reduce the possibility you will be assessed as exclusively gay. Stress that you've considered this and are certain of your bisexuality, that you want to share this part of your life

with them, but that fundamentally you're the same person they've always known.

Given your own personal judgment and the increased tolerance of society, reactions are likely to be good. A few jokes are to be expected (and you can laugh at them!) or in some cases the revelation the person is also gay or bisexual – it's not unknown!

More severe reactions, particularly amongst family may need a degree of sensitivity and patience. Give people time: you've had a lifetime to understand yourself, but it's still news to them. People often reject out of hand whatever they're unfamiliar with and may need a little friendly correction on their perspectives on relationships and other bisexual stereotypes.

Confidence can be built up by coming out first to those you know will respond the best, or have little to lose if it goes wrong. For instance, starting with known bisexuals, people you chat to on the Internet and friends you are sure will be sympathetic before moving onto other friends and family – coming out is easier each time. Do bear in mind that the grapevine may spread your news prior to coming out in some cases!

Coming out needn't be a big deal - many people are openly gay or bisexual nowadays. With increased public awareness it's unlikely those around you will find you frightening or alien - you'll just be like a celebrity or friend they already know. Often they will already have inklings and will now be overjoyed to share more of your life, loves and general gossiping!

Come out, don't come out or reveal yourself to a few. Identify as bisexual, something different or reject labels altogether. Choose what's right for you and your life, and by doing so find your place in the world.

Our Stories

My Anti-Coming Out Story

“The first time I came out was to my Mum. I said I thought I might ‘swing both ways’. Well, I was 14, and fond of euphemisms. She took it quite well, on the surface, but in fact she was deeply prejudiced ...

“I didn’t do anything about my sexuality for a very long time. I tried the local gay scene in my twenties, but never felt welcome. Partly this was because I self-identified as Bisexual from the outset, and said so. Eventually I tired of being out to some people and not out to others. So I went back in again. I’ve now rejected the entire coming-out process. Straight people don’t have to deal with the hassle, why should we? I’m just going to live my life as I like and confuse the hell out of everyone.”

John (36), Glasgow