



SPECTRUM

Waterloo Region's
Rainbow Community Space

BI/PAN PHOBIA: Common attitudes and expressions

Bi(sexual) and Pan(sexual) people are often accused of having privilege for being able to have “straight” relationships, but bi/panphobia is extremely common – especially from other monosexual queer people. This means that many Bi/Pan people prefer to “pass” as monosexual, and are not able to be their true selves even in LGBTQ2+ spaces.

Because it’s so common, biphobia and panphobia can be hard to recognize if you’re not used to looking for it. So what does it look like?

Bi-and-panphobic attitudes

Saying that Bi/Pan People Don’t Know Their Own Experiences

One of the most common forms of Bi/Panphobia is talking about Bi/Pan(sexual) people as not knowing or understanding their own experiences. Common expressions of this attitude include:

- Bi/Pan people are confused about their sexuality
- Bi/Pan people are deluded or crazy
- Bi/Pan people are indecisive or can’t make up their minds about who they are attracted to
- Bi/Pan people are in denial about being gay or straight
- Bi/Pan people are “sitting on the fence” because they don’t want to commit to “one side”
- Bi/Pan(sexuality) is just a phase:
 - “You’ll grow out of it”
 - “You’re just experimenting”
 - “You’re too scared to come out as gay”
 - “You’ll pick a side eventually”

Bi/Pan(sexual) people aren’t confused, deluded, or indecisive. And while it’s true that the words someone may choose to describe their orientation with may change over time, being attracted to multiple genders is as real and valid an orientation as being attracted to only one gender.

When we say that Bi and Pan people can’t be trusted to accurately report their own feelings and experiences, we reinforce the shame and stigma that keeps many Bi and Pan people in the closet.



Bi/Pan People Can't Be Trusted

Because Bi/Pan people experience attraction to multiple genders, it is commonly believed that Bi/Pan people are too hypersexual and/or promiscuous to commit to monogamous relationships. Because Bi/Pan people have “more options”, many people believe that Bi/Pan people are inherently dishonest.

Additionally, the common belief that Bi/Pan people are in denial about having a monosexual orientation (either gay or straight) contributes to this attitude. (I.E. “If they’re in denial about being gay/straight, what else are they lying about?”)

Being Bi/Pan Is a Character Flaw

Sometimes Bi/Panphobia gets generalized into a belief that Bi/Pansexuality is an innate character flaw. Common expressions of this attitude include:

- Bi/Pan people are just greedy
- Bi/Pan people are attention-seeking
- Bi/Pan people are deceitful, dangerous or perverse
- Slut-shaming Bi/Pan people for having “twice as many options”

Bi/Pan People Spread Disease

Perhaps less common an attitude now than it was during the emergence of HIV/AIDs, but Bi/Pan people are sometimes regarded as “dirty” or “spreading disease” between the gay and straight communities. However, orientations don’t spread disease. Individual choices and actions do.

Bi/Pan People Aren't “Really” Queer

It’s very common for people to argue for a very specific definition of Bi/Pansexuality that “disqualifies” the Bi/Pan person they are talking to from being queer. Common expressions of this attitude include:

Gays and lesbians are the “true” queers: If Bi/Pan people are going through a phase or are confused about their sexuality, it stands to reason that gay and lesbian people are the only “true” queer orientations. But this belief is nothing more than queer gatekeeping.

Moving the goalposts / making up rules about “real” Bisexuality: Because of the “bi” prefix, people often invent “rules” about Bisexuality that they then use to “disqualify” someone as being “really” Bisexual. These “rules” can include:

- Bisexuality is being equally attracted to men and women
- Bisexuals have to date both men and women equally



- Bisexuals always alternate between the genders
- Bisexuals are actually trans/nonbinary-phobic

What all of these ideas have in common is that set prescriptive limits around how people are “allowed” to experience attraction in order for it to qualify as Bisexuality. But the truth is that different people experience attraction differently! Experiencing romantic and sexual attraction toward one gender but only sexual attraction to another gender is still a valid experience of Bisexuality.

Additionally, Bisexuality isn’t inherently transphobic. Many trans and/or non-binary people self-identify as Bisexual. They might define their Bisexuality as attraction to multiple genders, attraction regardless of gender, or attraction to more than one but definitely not all genders – all of which are valid experiences of Bisexuality that don’t exclude trans and non-binary people.

Defining Bi/Pan People Based on Their Relationships

Bi/Pan people are told that they are gay when they have same-gender partners and straight when they have different-gender partners. Because Bi/Pan people in “straight-appearing” relationships aren’t seen as “really” queer, “straight-appearing” couples where one or both partners are Bi/Pan are often explicitly told that they are not welcome at Pride or in other LGBTQ2+ spaces and events.

However, a person’s orientation is defined by how they experience attraction, not by who they date or who they have sex with. Bi/Pan people in “straight-passing” relationships are still Bi/Pan.

Bi/Pan People have “Privilege”

Many monosexual queer people feel that Bi/Pan people have “privilege” for having the “option” of “passing as straight”. Common expressions of this attitude include:

- Bi/Pansexuality is the “easy option”
- Bi/Pan people with “opposite gender” partners aren’t queer because they don’t experience queer marginalization
- Bi/Pan people with “opposite gender” partners don’t belong in queer spaces because they don’t understand the struggles of “real” queer people
- Even when in a same-gender relationship, Bi/Pan people always have the “option” of returning to an “easier” straight relationship

However, this overlooks the fact that Bi/Pansexuality is an orientation, not a choice. In reality, Bi/Pan people are at significantly higher risk for mental illness, addiction, and sexual violence.



It is well documented that the stress of being closeted has serious long-term health consequences. “Passing” is not a privilege for Bi/Pan people – it is emotional violence.

Bi/Pan People Are Bad Romantic Partners

Discrimination against Bi/Pan people as potential romantic partners is extremely common – both by straight people and monosexual queer people. Common expressions of this attitude include:

- A straight person not wanting to date Bi/Pan people because “they could turn gay”
- A monosexual queer person not wanting to date Bi/Pan people because they had to fight for their identity and don’t want to “waste time” on someone who isn’t equally “committed” to that identity
- Believing that Bi/Pan people could never be trusted to remain faithful to just one partner

These attitudes are extremely widespread. In one survey of Bisexual people, one third of respondents reported being rejected by a potential partner because of their sexual orientation, and 93% reported having heard biphobic or panphobic comments.

Misogyny + Bi/PanPhobia

Bi/Panphobic rhetoric almost always assumes that the only “true” orientation for Bi/Pan people is towards men. Bi/Pan men are stereotyped as being too afraid or in denial to come out as gay, and Bi/Pan women are seen as performing queerness in service of the male gaze in order to get more attention from men. The underlying assumption is that anyone who has other “options” wouldn’t “choose” to be attracted to women.

Aphobia / TransPhobia + Bi/Panphobia

Defining Bi/Pansexuality around who someone has had sex with: Often, Bi/Pan people will have their orientation dismissed if they are not able to provide a list of multiple sexual partners of different genders. However, defining someone’s orientation around who they have or have not had sex with is aphobic in that it erases the experiences of asexual people.

Experiencing only romantic or other non-sexual forms of attraction doesn’t make a person’s orientation any less real or valid.

“Gold star gays”: Some gay and lesbian people refer to themselves as “gold star gays”, meaning that they have never had sex with “the opposite gender”. “Gold star” gay men brag about never having touched a vagina, and



“gold star” lesbian women brag about never having touched a penis. “Gold star” monosexual people are often reluctant to date Bi/Pan people because it would somehow “taint” their “gold star” record by association.

This attitude is deeply transphobic, because it holds that trans people aren’t “really” the gender they say they are. Gender is not defined by biology, and having sex with trans people should never be seen as “delegitimizing” to someone’s orientation.

Panphobia

Because Pansexuality is a “newer” orientation, there are some experiences of multisexual marginalization particular to Pan people. These experiences can include:

- Not recognizing that Pansexuality exists (“there’s no such thing as Pansexual”)
- Redefining someone’s orientation (“you’re actually Bi”)
- Dismissing Pansexuality as inherently ridiculous (“you’re attracted to frying pans?” or “does that mean you like animals too?”)
- Claiming that people only identify as Pan because it’s trendy
- Claiming that Pansexuality is a “made up” orientation people use to feel special

While it’s true that there are people who feel equally comfortable identifying as either Bi or Pansexual, it’s important to recognize that they are both still valid and distinct orientations. Pansexuality is commonly defined as attraction to all genders or attraction regardless of gender. And while there are people who identify as Bisexual (particularly older Millennials and Gen X people) who also experience attraction regardless of gender, many Bisexual people either experience attraction to some but not all genders or attraction to multiple genders because of their gender.

Pansexual is not inherently more ridiculous or less valid as an orientation than Bisexuality, and we should always respect how someone chooses to self-identify as being the label that is correct and valid for them.

Sources:

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