

Ways To Be An Ally to Nonmonosexual / Bi People

The ideas in this pamphlet were generated during a discussion at a UC Davis Bi Visibility Project group meeting and were compiled Winter quarter, 2009.

Nonmonosexual / bisexual individuals self-identify in a variety of different ways – please keep in mind that though this pamphlet gives suggestions about how to be a good ally, one of the most important aspects of being an ally is respecting individual’s decisions about self-identification. There are hundreds of ways to be a good ally – Please use these suggestions as a starting point, and seek additional resources!

Monosexism: a belief that monosexuality (either exclusive heterosexuality and/or being lesbian or gay) is superior to a bisexual or pansexual orientation.
<<http://www.wikipedia.com>>

In this pamphlet the terms “bisexual” and “nonmonosexual” will be used interchangeably to describe individuals who identify with nonmonosexual orientations (attracted to more than one gender), encompassing pan-, omni-, ambi-, bi-, and nonmonosexual identities. Respect personal choices about self-identification and use specific terms on an individual basis.

Try...

Acknowledging that a person who is bisexual is always bisexual regardless of their current or past partner(s) or sexual experience(s).

Using the terms, “monosexual” and “monosexism.”

Educating yourself through articles, books, websites or other resources if you have questions.

Questioning the negativity associated with bisexual stereotypes.

Example: The stereotype that “all bi people are oversexed.” This reinforces societal assumptions about the nature of “good” or “appropriate” sexual practice or identity. Acknowledge the different ways women, people of color, disabled people, queer people and all intersections thereof, are eroticized or criticized for being sexual.

Checking in with someone about what term(s) they prefer – different people prefer different terms for different reasons, respect each term.

Being inclusive of bi people of color (BiPOC). This means not assuming that all bi people are white and acknowledging that racism exists within the bi community. BiPOC are often further invisibilized by the assumption that they do not exist.

Recognizing that coming out can be different for people who are nonmonosexual than it is for lesbian/gay people. Because nonmonosexuality is invisibilized/ delegitimized, nonmonosexual people usually have to come out over and over. Often, after we come out, we also have to convince someone that we are nonmonosexual, and not “confused.”

Try...

Recognizing that sometimes it's appropriate to group people who are nonmonosexual with people who are lesbian and gay, and sometimes it's not.

Example: Healthcare & economic studies on LGB people that separated bisexual from lesbian/gay have found that there are significant disparities.

Remembering that no one person represents a community; no two people are the same.

Recognizing that privilege is complicated. Bisexuals don't have straight privilege because we are not straight. Some will never have a "heterosexual looking" relationship. However, many have "passing" privilege in different forms. This might be gender conforming privilege, which people of any sexuality can have. This might also mean being assumed to be straight when with a partner of a different gender. (Note: This often does not feel like privilege but rather an erasure of bi identity). Acknowledgement of one's own privilege (whichever forms it takes) is always important.

Taking a minute before asking questions and looking into the assumptions behind them

Don't assume...

... You can only be a bi ally if you know people who are bi - Going to events, talking in gender-neutral terms, or being inclusive of bi sexualities speaks volumes to people of any sexual orientation.

... All people who are nonmonosexual are sexual or have had "all" kinds of sex. Not all have had experiences with different genders; no one person will necessarily have had experiences of any specific kind.

... All people who are nonmonosexual are gender conforming. Gender and sexuality are separate and do not depend on each other.

...Someone's sexual orientation is based on the gender of their partner(s).

... All people who are bi are heteronormative or homonormative.

... How a person who is nonmonosexual defines "virginity."

... All people who are nonmonosexual do/do not prefer one gender over others. Neither of these is more or less nonmonosexual.

... That people who are bisexual are attracted to everyone. Everyone has different criteria by which they judge whether or not someone is compatible.

... What kinds of sex people are having or how they relate to different kinds of sex. These assumptions might be based on perceptions of gender roles, or assumptions of what someone's genitalia looks like and how it functions.

Try...

Recognizing the way that specific relationships function is entirely independent of sexual orientation. Be positive about all relationships –monogamous, polyamorous, or anything else.

Remembering that when a person who is bi says something biphobic it takes on a different meaning than when said by someone who does not identify as bi. Witnessing biphobia in any form does not give permission to be further biphobic. Biphobia is harmful to bi people in any form.

Remembering that no one individual is more or less nonmonosexual; no one is “truly” or “untruly” nonmonosexual; someone is nonmonosexual if they say they are.

Remembering that just because a person who is nonmonosexual reinforces a nonmonosexual stereotype does not mean the stereotype is true.

Accepting you might never fully understand someone else’s sexuality, and that it’s okay not to.

Be Careful Not To...

... Attempt to quantify “how bisexual” someone “*really*” is. This is related to the stereotype that people who are bi are lying or confused and sometimes satisfies a craving to categorize bi people as either “more gay” or “more straight”. People often try to do this by asking someone about their romantic or sexual behaviors. People deserve to have their privacy while having their identities respected.

... Use “Gay” as an umbrella term. Doing so invisibilizes nonmonosexuality. Example: Saying things like, “gay rights”, “gay marriage”, or “gay sex”, implies that bi people are only included when “acting gay”, i.e. when they are engaged in same-sex relationships/sexual activity. Instead, use the terms “same-gender relationship”/“other-gender relationship” instead of “gay relationship”/“straight relationship”. Relationships don’t have sexual orientations.

... Seem infatuated, fascinated or exoticizing of nonmonosexuality.

... Invisibilize bisexuality.

Example: “All people are bisexual.” This dismisses people’s identities as if they are a negligible part of “human nature”.

... Ask invasive questions, or interrogate people about their sexuality. This may make the person feel like a scientific study and contribute to a sense of invalidation or isolation.

... Suggest that people who identify as bisexual inherently uphold a gender binary of woman/man. Different people think differently about their identities. Many people identify as bisexual as an act of reclaiming the word from its negative contexts. Many describe being bisexual to mean “attraction regardless of gender”, or “attraction to any gender”. Identifying with the word bisexual can also serve to connect with history and literature.