BIMOR
BISEXUAL INDIVIDUALS IN MIXED ORIENTATION RELATIONSHIPS
SUPPORTING BISEXUAL HEALTH AND RELATIONSHIPS
What We Found
Bisexual Individuals in Mixed Orientation Relationships (BIMOR)

Bisexual individuals are likely to find themselves in a mixed orientation relationship; that is, a relationship in which the sexual orientations of the partners do not “match.” Despite being named a top health priority, we have little knowledge about the sexual and relationship health of bisexual individuals.

The Program in Human Sexuality at the University of Minnesota launched a project to explore relationship health, sexual functioning, mental health, and stressors related to bisexual identity among bisexual individuals in mixed orientation relationships. Fifty-three people completed health-related surveys and, of these, 45 attended focus groups to discuss their experiences. This report, designed for the community, reviews what we found in working with local bisexual individuals in mixed orientation relationships.

Who were these 53 bisexual individuals?
- Average age was 30 years old
- Some additionally identified as queer or pansexual, depending on context
- Relationships ranged from 2 months to 20+ years
- Majority were Caucasian
- Majority were women-identified
- Partner sexual orientations were mostly heterosexual, followed by lesbian, gay, queer, and pansexual

Major Findings: Focus Groups

Mixed Orientation Relationships
- Bisexual individuals had both positive and negative experiences in these relationships.
- Negative experiences typically involved myths and stereotypes about bisexuality, and often varied in relation to the non-bisexual partner’s sexual orientation.

Communication
- Strong communication skills were considered critical for mixed orientation relationships.
- Bisexual individuals often had to teach others about their sexual orientation and identity.

Non-Monogamy
- Bisexual individuals participating in (or interested in) consensual non-monogamy worried about reinforcing stereotypes about bisexuality.

Labels
- Bisexual individuals were consistently alert about when and where it was safe to openly identify their sexual orientation, and what label to use (e.g., bisexual versus queer).
- Partner gender played an important role in how relationships were labeled and treated by others.

Bisexual Identity
- Bisexual individuals often experienced negative emotions (e.g., shame) in exploring and accepting their sexual orientation, as well as in coming out to others.

Bi-erasure & Binegativity
- Bisexual individuals were strongly aware of cultural bi-erasure and issues related to visibility (e.g., lack of strong role models).

Community
- Bisexual individuals often felt alienated from larger LGBTQ community events and noted a lack of bisexual-specific resources.

Mental Health
- Experiences with depression, anxiety, trauma, and substance abuse were often related to stigma and prejudice against bisexuality.
Major Findings: Health Survey (N = 53)

Did bisexual individuals talk with their healthcare providers about sexual health?

- Yes, in the last year: 4%
- Yes, over a year ago: 64%
- No, never: 32%

What relationship agreements did bisexual individuals have?

- Monogamous: 6%
- Consensual non-monogamy (CNM): “fully open”: 32%
- CNM: “only with partner present”: 4%
- No agreement: 64%

Did bisexual individuals experience unwanted sexual activity in their lifetime?

- Yes: 70%
- No: 23%
- Unsure: 7%

How recently were bisexual individuals tested for sexually transmitted infections?

- 1-2 years ago: 26%
- Last year: 25%
- Last 3 months: 25%
- 2+ years ago: 11%
- Never been tested: 11%
- Can’t recall: 4%

How did bisexual individuals describe their mental health?

- Depression: 50%
- Anxiety: 40%
- Stress: 10%
For Community Organizers
- Larger LGBTQ-focused events and spaces continue to feel unsafe for many bisexual individuals. There is need and desire for more bisexual-specific resources and community spaces, especially those that are inclusive and welcoming to all non-monosexual or “bi+” individuals (i.e., bisexual, pansexual, queer).
- Discussion spaces and “role models” for healthy, consensually non-monogamous relationships are lacking in the community.

For Researchers
- Research forms and scales, particularly when studying relationships, must allow for information to be gathered about multiple romantic/sexual partners.
- Bisexual individuals in mixed orientation relationships experience unique minority stressors (related to stereotypes about bisexuality) as compared to gay or lesbian relationships.
- There is a critical need for greater diversity, particularly with regard to race and ethnicity, within research on bisexual communities.

For Healthcare Providers
- Be aware of assumptions regarding sexual orientation when it comes to couples & families.
- When working with couples/families, ask about relationship agreements and encourage this dialogue.
- Educate yourself about the unique stigma and prejudice faced by bisexual individuals, even within the LGBTQ community.

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