

This brochure has been developed by the Australian Bisexual Network to assist women who are, or may feel they are, in a relationship with a man who is Bisexual or Gay. There are many women married to or in relationships with men who are either Bisexual or Gay. Some women have entered into relationships knowing their partner was Bisexual at the time or that he had been active with men in the past. Some of these women may have believed that their partner's sexual activity with other men ceased upon their relationship starting only to find out later down the track that it had continued or had restarted at some stage during their relationship. Other women have found out after years of marriage or after having been in a relationship for some time. This may have resulted from their partners voluntary disclosure or through their partner being "caught out". Tragically for a few women, disclosure has come as the result of either their partner or both of them being diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease, even HIV which has led to AIDS. There are still other women who may suspect or be totally unaware, their partner is attracted to or sexually active with men.

For some women their partner's bisexuality or activity with other men does not pose a problem for them or a threat to their relationship. We rarely hear about women in this situation. For others however, the revelation that their partner is Bisexual or Gay can be totally devastating to her and the relationship. When women find out or suspect their male partner is having sex with men they may experience many feelings. Feelings commonly experienced are shock, disgust, isolation, anger, confusion, blame, shame, hurt, betrayal, helplessness, fear, inadequate, loss, grief, and suicidal.



SEXUAL PREFERENCES VERSUS SEXUAL IDENTITIES

It may help if some understanding of what sexual preference and sexual identity are as they relate to bisexually active men. Bisexuality is being attracted physically, emotionally and/or sexually to both women and men. This can also take in fantasies, dreams and also attractions to transsexual people. A person's sexual preferences, their attractions, may vary over time and in their intensity. They may be stronger towards one gender or the other at different times in a person's life and even from week to week for some.

Some men (as boys) realise they have an attraction to other males at a very early age. For others this attraction may surface following puberty during their teens while others may find these attractions surface later in life often after years of only being attracted to women. This can be very scary and confusing. Personal, family, religious, and society attitudes towards homosexuality / bisexuality can make it very difficult for a man to accept himself, his attractions to other men, and whom he can confide in. He may try to deny his feeling and cover up his attractions and behaviours. Denial, fear, guilt, and shame place added stress on him resulting in other problems in his personal life, relationship, and health. For many of you this has been what you have seen in or experienced with your partner over a period of time often wondering what is really wrong.

Gay, Bisexual, and Straight are sexual identities or labels. A bisexual or homosexual man in a relationship with a woman may choose any one of these labels to describe himself. This may reflect how much he accepts himself or how he sees himself in relation to his lifestyle, community attachment, or need for acceptance by others. Just as Straight men have sex with men, Gay men have sex with women, however this does not necessarily mean they are Bisexual.

Homosexual or Gay men marry for a variety of reasons. They may not have been aware of their homosexuality at the time. They may have found one particular woman they could love and relate to. They may marry because of pressure from family, friends, religion, culture or society. They may desire fatherhood. They may not be able to accept their own homosexuality. They may think or have been told that marriage will "cure" them. Bisexual men may enter relationships and marry for

similar reasons but for the Bisexual, an attraction for and love of women is as natural for them as it is for heterosexual men. They may marry simply because they love their partner.

RELATIONSHIPS

There are many Bisexual men in monogamous and faithful relationships with women. Most seem to be able to recognise and accept their attractions for men without the need to become sexually involved. For other men there is a constant battle going on between their need to fulfil their sexual desires with men and their commitment to their spouse. Fear, shame, or guilt often lead them to live secret lives. Still there are other relationships where openness and honesty prevail. The woman is aware of her partner's bisexuality and either accepts or tolerates his lifestyle. Rules or limits may be set. Some women become sexually involved with their partner and his lover/s while others may also seek lovers outside of their primary relationship. Some women are themselves Bisexual and may seek female partners, or the Bisexual couple may seek other couples or singles on a permanent or casual basis. Triad and two couple relationships living under the same roof and raising children are not uncommon. There are also group and communal situations.

Because Bisexual men are attracted to women, some men may seek other women, couples or transsexuals. This can be harder for his wife or girlfriend to accept than his involvement with just men. Another woman can pose a direct threat to a relationship because she is viewed as competing to satisfying the same needs at present being satisfied by his spouse or girlfriend. Another man should be viewed as complementing the existing relationship between man and woman in that he satisfies various needs only a man can provide to a bisexual man. For some of you your relationship may have broken up and you are separated or divorced. You may have just found out now that he is Bisexual or Gay. Relationships break up for many reasons. If people have good communications and honesty in their relationship there is no reason why mixed sexuality relationships can't work. Often seeing a relationship counsellor is a good idea so you can both work through various issues. If your relationship has already broken down there may also be issues of access to children that must be worked through.

COUNSELLING

It may be necessary to see a relationship counsellor or to seek individual counselling. It is important that you find one that has an understanding of bisexuality, that is not biphobic or homophobic, and that also understands the very real issues and concerns of the heterosexual woman. In the past too many counsellors have broken relationships up because of their own personal views rather than addressing the wishes and needs of the couple.

The Australian Bisexual Network can provide details on understanding counsellors in most capital cities. Relationships Australia also has some very good and understanding counsellors. Many Sexual Health Clinics also have qualified counsellors while others may be obtained by contacting your local AIDS Council or Women Partners Group. Don't accept anything less than the best and don't be railroaded into things.

YOUR HEALTH.

If your partner has been having unprotected vaginal or anal sex with other women, men, or transsexuals, he may have placed himself and you at risk of infection with HIV or other Sexually Transmitted Diseases. It is important for you both to see your doctor or Sexual Health Clinic. If you suspect your partner of having sex with men then you will have to decide whether you will talk to him about this, HIV/AIDS and safe sex, seek testing for yourself or introduce safe sex into your relationship with him. If your partner also has a history of intravenous drug use he may have been exposed to HIV or Hepatitis B or C through the sharing of needles and syringes. Pregnancy may carry risks for both you and your baby if you or your partner are HIV +ve.

If you are also seeing other men, or have left the relationship and plan to start dating again, you should always insist on safer sex and that means always have him use condoms and a water based lube. If you or your partner have HIV or an STD you should discuss your rights, responsibilities and options with someone from your local AIDS Council, Positive Women's Group or Sexual Health Clinic. Some women may face discrimination or rejection from family, friends, community groups or services and from areas of the gay and lesbian community. Please report any discrimination or domestic violence to the Australian Bisexual Network.

MORE INFORMATION

Good Reading

The Other Side of the Closet - The coming-out crisis for straight spouses & families, Amity Pierce Buxton (John Wiley & Sons).

She's my wife, He's just sex (1997), Sue Joseph; Australian Centre for Independent Journalism (University of Technology, Sydney); Sydney.

On Women's Health & Legal Services

Look in White Pages under Women

On Counselling

Look in White Pages under Relationships Australia or contact the ABN for a list of counsellors.

On HIV/AIDS, STDs & Safe Sex

ACON

Pamphlet: Do you think your partner could be having sex with Men? Contact (02) 9206 2000, acon@acon.org.au

Contact your doctor, AIDS Council or Sexual Health Clinic

On the Internet

There are some good resources available including the Spouse Support Mailing List, an email list for spouses. Find out more info from the ABN home page.

Australian Bisexual Network

ABN is a national body for bisexual men, women and their partners. It has affiliates including the Sydney Bisexual Network and other Australian bisexual groups.

Web page: www.rainbow.net.au/~ausbinet/

Email: ausbinet@rainbow.net.au

Phone: (07) 3857-2500

Address: ABN, PO Box 490, Lutwyche, QLD 4030

Sydney Bisexual Network

SBN is a social and support group, based in Sydney. It has regular social activities and members undertake various activities to raise the awareness of bisexuality.

Web page: <http://sbn.bi.org>

Email: sbn-admin@yahoogroups.com

Info line: (02) 9565 4281

Address: SBN, PO Box 281, Broadway, NSW 2007



WHAT IF MY
HUSBAND OR
BOYFRIEND
IS
BISEXUAL??



Information for the Female
Partners of Bisexual Men