

Internal divisions of the LesBiGay community often obscure what we have in common. How did these divisions come about, and what can be done about them?

Oppression and Community

“Oppression” is the systematic, societally condoned mistreatment of people, simply because they are believed to belong to a particular group. This mistreatment includes both direct mistreatment of individuals and the propagation of misinformation about the group and its members. The direct mistreatment of individuals ranges from name calling and threats of violence through hanging or beating people to death. An example of misinformation is “Faggots are out to molest our children and convert them to their abominable lifestyle”.

Lesbians, Gay men, and Bisexual men and women are targets of the same oppression, excused on the basis that we value sexual and affectional relationships with members of the same gender. The experience of this oppression is part of the formation of a “sexual identity”, a label which represents, to that person, her or his relationship to the rest of the world in terms of sex, gender, and relationship roles.

In all cases of oppression, people develop a concept of themselves, an identity, as people who are in some way separate or different from the rest of society. Those who think of themselves (self identity) as members of a particular group which is targeted by the oppression come together to support one another and fight the oppression. For example, people who think of themselves as valuing relationships with members of the same

gender come together to support one another against that oppression. In this society, the oppression of people who value relationships with members of the same gender has led to the development of the Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay (LBG) community.

Internalised Oppression and Creation of Sub-communities

“Internalised oppression” means feeling bad about and mistreating ourselves and members of our own group in ways which reflect our oppression. It is a characteristic effect of oppressions on members of an oppressed group. As with all people who are targets of oppression, Lesbians, Bisexuals, and Gay men have at some level internalised this oppression. At some level, we have come to believe the misinformation about us and to feel badly about ourselves because of it. We mistreat ourselves and other members of our group, duplicating the mistreatment of the oppression.

Internalised oppression often takes the form of mistreatment and misinformation about one subgroup, by another subgroup of the community. The misinformation often takes the form “You are not a real / good enough member of this community to be recognised and honoured”. This “you are not good enough” and “we will ignore you” treatment (along with the operation of other oppressions) tends to divide the community. In the LBG community, messages like “you are not good enough” and “you should be in the kitchen instead of at the political strategy planning table” divided Lesbians from Gay men. Lesbians formed a separate identity and demanded their name, their issues, and they themselves be included in the agenda and life of the larger LBG community.

Internalised oppression has also divided LesBiGay members of the “Leather”, the “S/M”, and other overlapping groups from the rest of the LBG community. Each of these groups has developed a separate identity and has asked for that identity to be recognised and honoured.

In the same way, “you are not good enough” and “you don’t really exist” internalised oppression are directed toward members of the overlapping Bisexual community from Lesbians and Gay men. This has divided Bisexual women and men from the Lesbians and Gay men. Bisexuals who are involved in the LesBiGay community and liberation movement have developed an identity separate from “Lesbian” or “Gay”, and have developed a partially separate, partially overlapping Bisexual community like the Gay men’s community, the Lesbian community, the Leather community, etc.

Where Do We Go From Here?

What can be done about the division between bisexuals and the lesbian and gay men’s communities?

Some Ways to Be Inclusive

Include the word “Bisexual” in your literature and programs wherever you use both “Lesbian” and “Gay”. Just as many Lesbians do not feel included by the word “Gay” (since it is often used to mean “Gay men”), many Bisexual women do not feel included by the term “Lesbian” and many Bisexual men do not feel included by the term “Gay” because each has often been explicitly defined as not including bisexuals. If your organisation is dedicated to supporting all people who value sexual and affectional relationships with

members of the same gender, this change will make that support clear.

Acknowledge the role of Bisexual people in the Gay Liberation movement. Bisexual-identified people have been involved in the Gay community and in organising and running many historic Gay Liberation organisations. Among these are the Lesbian Gay and Bisexual Speakers Bureau in Boston, Boston's first Pride Day, and the first officially recognised student homophile organisation in the USA, at Cornell. We know of these particular instances, because we know the Bisexual people who helped organise them.

Encourage everyone to take pride in their sexual identity and themselves, whether Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Straight, or other.

Ask a bisexual speaker or speakers to do a workshop or speaking engagement for your group, so that you can meet and learn more about Bisexual people.

Provide opportunities to discuss sex and relationships not only between women and women and between men and men, but also between women and men, still as people who value relationships with members of the same gender.

Points To Remember

Like some Gay men, some Lesbians, and some Straight women and men, some Bisexuals are in monogamous relationships with a member of the same gender. Others are in a monogamous relationship with a member of the other gender.

Like some Lesbians, Gay men, and Straight women and men, some Bisexuals are not in monogamous relationships.

People who have relationships with both women and men may identify as heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual.

People who identify as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual may have relationships with both women and men, regardless of their sexual identity.

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 2007

Australian Bisexual Network

ABN is a national body for bisexual men, women and their partners. It is affiliated with 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 4030

Bisexuality.



Why Would Lesbian & Gay Organisations Include Bisexuals?