

Is Being Bisexual the Same Thing as Being Pansexual?

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Medically reviewed by [Janet Brito, Ph.D., LCSW, CST](#) — Written by [Sian Ferguson](#) on September 17, 2019



Are they the same?

“Bisexual” and “pansexual” are two different ways to describe sexual orientation.

Although they don’t mean the exact same thing, some people relate to both terms and describe themselves as both bisexual and pansexual.

You can use whichever term(s) you’d like!

Read on to learn more about where these orientations overlap, how they differ, other types of attraction, and more.

What exactly does it mean to be bisexual?

Bisexual means you’re attracted to people of both genders, right? Not exactly.

Gender isn’t a binary, meaning that people don’t all fall into the categories of “men” or “women.”

“Nonbinary” is a word that describes people who don’t exclusively identify as either a man or a woman.

Nonbinary people could identify as bigender, agender, or genderfluid, to name only a few terms. So, “both genders” is a misnomer.

So, are bisexual people only attracted to men and women, and not nonbinary people? No, not necessarily.

Nonbinary people have been acknowledged by, and as a part of, the bisexual community for many decades.

In fact, the 1990 Bisexual Manifesto acknowledged that nonbinary people exist, and many bisexual groups started defining bisexual as being attracted to two *or more* genders.

Bisexuality means different things to different people.

To some people, it means attraction to two or more genders, or multiple genders.

To others, it means attraction to people of the same gender and people who are another gender.

Some bisexual people might only be attracted to men and women and not nonbinary people, but that's not every bisexual person's experience.

What exactly does it mean to be pansexual?

The prefix “pan-” means “all.” Similarly, pansexuality means that you're attracted to people of *all* genders.

This includes people who don't identify with any gender (agender).

Many pansexual people describe themselves as being attracted to people based on personality, not gender.

Note that pansexual doesn't mean you're attracted to all people.

For example, heterosexual men aren't attracted to all women, and vice versa.

It simply means that they find themselves attracted to people of all sorts of gender categories.

It sounds like you just said the same thing twice — what's the difference?

Bisexual means attracted to multiple genders, and pansexual means attracted to all genders. These are different because “multiple” isn't the same thing as “all.”

Let's say you ask your friends what their favorite colors are.

One friend might say, “Actually, I like more than one color!” Another friend might say, “I like all colors.”

Now, the first friend might like all colors, but they might not. They might not like khaki or beige. Perhaps they like pastels but not dark colors.

This is because “all colors” is, by definition, more than one. However, “more than one” isn't technically all.

Some people feel that pansexual falls into the category of bisexual because bisexual is a broad term that means more than one — but it isn't the same thing, because “all” isn't the same as “multiple.”

Why is the bi vs. pan distinction so contentious?

The controversy around this distinction often stems from a place of misunderstanding.

Some people assume that bisexual people are erasing nonbinary people. They assume the word bisexual implies that there are only two genders.

Other people assume that pansexual is a word invented solely because bisexual people are misunderstood and assumed to exclude nonbinary people.

| The truth is that both orientations are valid in their own right.

Many bisexual communities do acknowledge nonbinary people — in fact, many nonbinary people identify as bisexual. Additionally, many pansexual people know that the definition of bisexual can include nonbinary people.

Again, bisexuality and pansexuality don't mean exactly the same thing, and it's completely valid to identify as either (or both!).

Is it OK to be more attracted to one gender than another?

Yes! You can still be bisexual or pansexual if you find yourself more attracted to one gender than others.

In fact, surveys and studies show that many bisexual and pansexual people have a preference. This doesn't make your orientation any less valid.

Can you be attracted to different genders in different ways?

Yes. You might find yourself sexually attracted to one gender and romantically attracted to another gender. This is called “mixed orientation” or “cross orientation.”

For example, you could be bisexual but homoromantic — meaning you're sexually attracted to people of multiple genders, but you're only romantically attracted to people who are the same gender as you.

You'll notice that this article focuses on bisexuality and pansexuality — that is, sexual orientations.

However, there are different romantic orientations, including:

- **Aromantic.** You experience little to no romantic attraction to anyone, regardless of gender.
- **Bioromantic.** You're romantically attracted to people of two or more genders.
- **Panromantic.** You're romantically attracted to people of all genders.
- **Greyromantic.** You experience romantic attraction infrequently.
- **Demioromantic.** You experience romantic attraction infrequently, and when you do it's only after developing a strong emotional connection to someone.
- **Heteroromantic.** You're only romantically attracted to people of a different gender to you.
- **Homoromantic.** You're only romantically attracted to people who are the same gender as you.
- **Polyromantic.** You're romantically attracted to people of many — not all — genders.

Does dating someone of a particular gender mean you're 'straight'?

Let's say a bisexual woman is in a relationship with a man. This doesn't make her straight. Similarly, if she dates a woman, she doesn't become a lesbian.

Unfortunately, many people think that bisexual and pansexual people need to "pick a side" — gay or straight. And when bisexual and pansexual people date someone publicly, it's often assumed that they're picking a side.

| You aren't defined by your partner's gender.

The labels we choose to describe our orientation are *only* determined by ourselves and our experiences with attraction.

Where does the term 'queer' come in?

"Queer" is a sort of blanket term used to include all people who don't identify as straight.

While it was previously used as a slur, it has been reclaimed by the LGBTQIA+ community.

However, some people still feel uncomfortable with the word "queer" because it's been used as a form of oppression.

It's totally OK to use it instead of, or in addition to, another term.

Many people use "queer" because they aren't sure how to describe their orientation, or because their orientation feels fluid and changes over time.

Others describe themselves as queer because it connects them to a broader political movement.

How do you know which term fits?

There's no test to determine whether you're bisexual or pansexual (or another orientation entirely).

You can identify as whatever orientation fits you. Of course, figuring out what fits you might be tough.

To help you figure out your sexual orientation, you may ask yourself:

- Is there any gender that I don't ever feel attracted to?
- Is there any gender — or group of genders — that I'm not sure if I'm attracted to?
- What word feels best?
- What community do I feel comfortable with?
- Am I romantically attracted to the same people I'm sexually attracted to?

Remember, there isn't a right or wrong answer. It's about getting to know yourself better and figuring out what you like and prefer.

It's also important to remember that it's OK to identify with multiple terms — as well as change the way you describe your sexual orientation later on.

Can you identify with more than one of these terms?

Of course! Some people identify as both bisexual and pansexual. Some people use the terms interchangeably to describe themselves.

Can you identify with one term and switch to another later on?

Yes! Identifying with a particular sexual orientation isn't a lifelong binding contract.

You might find that your sexual orientation and your capacity for attraction changes over time, or you might learn of another word that better describes your sexual orientation.

No matter the reason, you're allowed to change the way you describe your orientation.

What if neither of these terms feel right anymore?

That's OK. Sexual orientation can change over time. That doesn't mean it isn't valid.

For example, it's totally fine to identify as bisexual at one point in time and then as heterosexual later on.

A lot of people assume bisexuality is a “stepping-stone” to homosexuality, but this isn't true.

Many people identify as bisexual their whole lives. If you do find that your sexuality shifts, don't feel ashamed because it "fits" into someone else's misconception of what bisexuality is.

You aren't perpetuating a myth by being who you are; another person's misinformed opinion isn't your burden to carry.

What if neither of these terms have ever felt right?

There are many ways to identify. Beyond bisexual and pansexual, there are other words to describe your orientation, including:

- **Asexual.** You experience little to no sexual attraction to anyone, regardless of gender.
- **Greysexual.** You experience sexual attraction infrequently.
- **Demisexual.** You experience sexual attraction infrequently, and when you do it's only after developing a strong emotional connection to someone.
- **Heterosexual.** You're only sexually attracted to people of a different gender to you.
- **Homosexual.** You're only sexually attracted to people who are the same gender as you.
- **Polysexual.** You're sexually attracted to people of many — not all — genders.

This isn't a comprehensive list of sexual orientations — more and more words are being coined to describe people's unique experiences of sexual orientation.

Remember, you don't have to use any word or label to describe your orientation that you don't want to use.

How you choose to identify is entirely up to you!

Where can I learn more?

There are a number of resources out there for learning more about bisexuality and pansexuality, including:

- The [Asexual Visibility and Education Network](#) wiki contains definitions of different words relating to sexuality and orientation.
- [Bisexual Resource Center](#) and [BiNet USA](#) are excellent sources of information and support for bisexual people.
- [GLAAD](#) has a number of useful resources and articles on their site.

Beyond that, you might find forums and Facebook groups for bisexual or pansexual people. You might also be able to find a local social or activism group for LGBTQA+ people.

Sian Ferguson is a freelance writer and editor based in Cape Town, South Africa. Her writing covers issues relating to social justice, cannabis, and health. You can reach out to her on Twitter.