

What Does It Mean to Be Bi or Bisexual?

 [healthline.com/health/what-is-bisexual](https://www.healthline.com/health/what-is-bisexual)

Medically reviewed by [Timothy J. Legg, Ph.D., CRNP](#) — Written by Maisha Johnson on January 29, 2018



1. Being bisexual means different things to different people

Many people use “bisexual” as the umbrella term for any form of attraction to two or more genders.

But ask a few people about what being bisexual means to them, and you might get a few different answers.

This can make things confusing if you think you might be bisexual, know someone who is bisexual, or you’re just wondering what it means to be bisexual.

So let’s talk about some of the different factors that determine what bisexuality really is.

2. Some people see the term as reinforcing the gender binary

Does the term “bisexual” refer only to attraction to men and women? Some people see it that way.

To them, bisexuality excludes [nonbinary genders](#), or even erases transgender people altogether.

For some, other terms like pansexual, queer, and fluid feel more inclusive.

3. While others apply a broader meaning

Historically, the term bisexual has referred not to “men and women” but to “same and different” — as in, attraction to people of your own gender and to people with gender(s) different than your own.

One popular definition was created by [bisexual activist](#) Robyn Ochs:

“I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge that I have in myself the potential to be attracted — romantically and/or sexually — to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree.”

— Robyn Ochs

This definition makes sense when you think about the definitions of homosexual — attraction to the same — and heterosexual — attraction to what’s different. Bisexuality can include both same *and* different.

4. One thing everyone agrees on: being bisexual isn’t a 50/50 split

While defining homosexuality and heterosexuality might help you understand the definition of bisexuality, don’t make the mistake of thinking that bisexual people are “half gay” or “half straight.”

Bisexuality is a unique identity of its own, not simply an offshoot of being gay or straight.

5. Some people are attracted to cisgender men and cisgender women

You might meet a bisexual person who says they’re only attracted to cisgender men and cisgender women, though that’s certainly not the case for all bisexual people.

This definition can be based on some misconceptions about gender, as you can’t always tell by looking at someone whether they’re a man, a woman, or cisgender.

6. And others are attracted to people across the gender spectrum

Plenty of bisexual people are attracted to trans and nonbinary people, and plenty of bisexual people *are* transgender or nonbinary.

So for many bi people, there’s no question that “bisexual” is an inclusive term spanning across the gender spectrum.

7. Some people are more attracted to one gender than another

You might think you’re only “allowed” to identify as bisexual if you experience an equal attraction to multiple genders.

Don’t worry — nobody can take away your bisexual card if this isn’t the case for you.

Research shows that lots of bisexual people are attracted more to one gender than another. Their bisexuality is perfectly valid.

8. Dating someone of a different gender doesn't make you "straight"

Getting into a relationship is another thing that might make you wonder if you're "bi enough."

For instance, if you're a woman in a monogamous relationship with a man, does that mean you're not bisexual anymore?

While you may come across people who think you've "picked a side" by getting into a relationship, that's not actually how bisexuality works.

There's even a whole movement – [#StillBisexual](#) – created just to affirm that bisexual people are bisexual regardless of relationship status.

9. Some people have different relationships with different genders

Maybe you're more attracted to one gender than another. But what does it mean if you experience different *types* of attraction to different genders?

For example, you could be romantically attracted to people of multiple genders, but sexually attracted only to men. Or maybe you don't have sexual feelings for anyone, but you do experience romantic attraction.

This is sometimes referred to as cross (or mixed) orientation: romantic attraction to one gender group(s) (or no gender group) and sexually attraction to another (or none).

It's possible to be bisexual or biromantic, along with another orientation like asexual or aromantic.

10. Who you're attracted to — in whatever capacity — is valid

Don't see yourself reflected in common descriptions of bisexuality? That's OK.

If nothing else, this shows that there are many different ways to be bisexual, and many different expressions of sexuality as a whole.

Your unique experience is valid.

11. Being bisexual isn't a "pitstop" or a "phase"

One of the most persistent myths about bisexuality is the idea that it just doesn't exist.

Do people say that they're bisexual just to go through a "phase" or hide that they're really gay?

There are many, many people who live their entire lives identifying as bisexual.

And while there have also been people who identified first as bisexual and later as gay, their experience in no way invalidates the existence of bisexuality as a whole.

12. If you find that your individual definition of being bisexual is changing, that's OK

Does it turn out that bisexuality isn't what you thought it was? Did you used to define it one way, and now you think of it as something else?

Welcome to the club! That's actually how a lot of us have come to reach our understandings of bisexuality.

| You're not obligated to stick with a definition that doesn't feel right to you anymore.

As long as you're not hurting anyone (including yourself), let yourself explore what bisexuality really means to you.

13. And if you find that you no longer identify as bisexual, that's OK, too

Once you're bisexual, are you always bisexual? You certainly don't have to be — and if you used to identify as bisexual and you don't anymore, you're not the only one.

Some people's sexuality is fluid, meaning it changes from time to time.

It's also possible that you've learned more about yourself and sexuality over time, and realized you were never bisexual in the first place.

This isn't anything to be ashamed of — the journey to figure out who you are is an important one, and it's wonderful that you're growing to know yourself more.

14. It's often used interchangeably with other terms, but they don't always mean the same thing

Some people see no difference between bisexuality and other terms like “pansexual” or “queer.”

Some even identify as more than one of these terms at once.

The term they use could simply depend on who they're talking to or what about their sexuality they want to convey.

But these terms aren't always interchangeable.

For example, someone might have specific reasons for identifying as queer and not bisexual, so it's important to respect how each individual chooses to identify.

15. Sexual experiences are independent of sexual orientation

Polyamorous people come in all forms of sexual orientation, including gay, straight, bisexual, and more — and so do monogamous people!

Bisexuality has nothing to do with determining how monogamous or how faithful a person is. That's all up to the individual.

16. There isn't really a "test" to assess your own sexuality

It might seem like everyone else has this sexuality thing all figured out — have they taken some sexual orientation test that you don't know about?

I've got some bad news and some good news for you.

The bad news is that, though it might seem like it would make things easier, there is no test to tell you what your sexual orientation is.

But the good news is that you've already got the keys to determining your sexuality.

Just consider your attractions, your experiences, and how they may or may not be influenced by gender.

You're the only one who can say what all of it really means to you.

17. Ultimately, you should use the identifier(s) that you're most comfortable with

So, does this information mean that you're "technically" bisexual — even though the term doesn't call to you? Does it seem like you're not actually bisexual, even though you've always identified that way?

| You — and only you — can determine your own sexual identity.

You may prefer to call yourself bisexual, fluid, cross oriented, gay with some bisexual tendencies, multiple identities, or no identity label at all.

If you're looking to answer what bisexual means to understand who you really are, then it's time to look inward for your answers.

You're on your own unique journey toward understanding yourself.

Maisha Z. Johnson is a writer and advocate for survivors of violence, people of color, and LGBTQ+ communities. She lives with chronic illness and believes in honoring each person's unique path to healing. Find Maisha on [her website](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#).