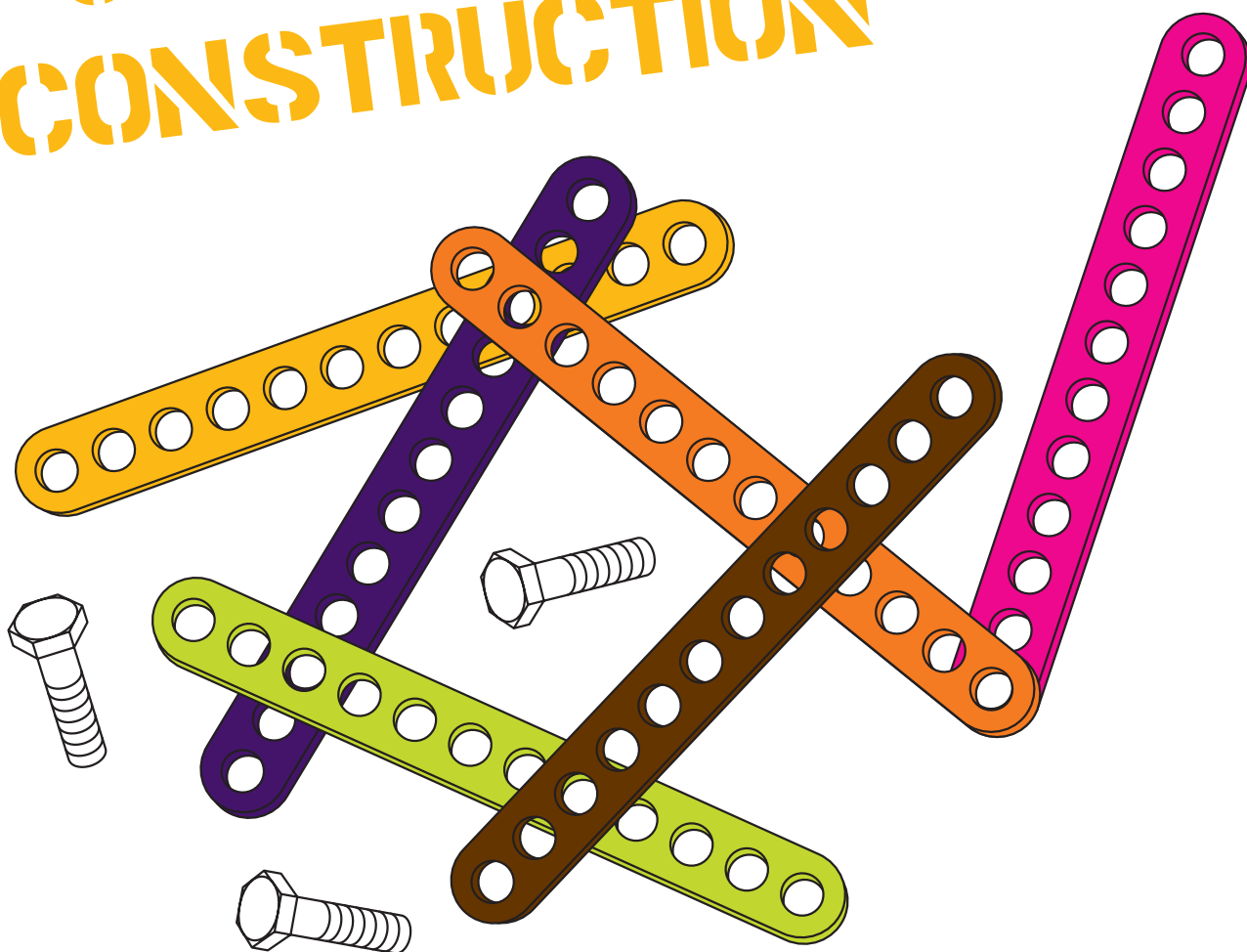


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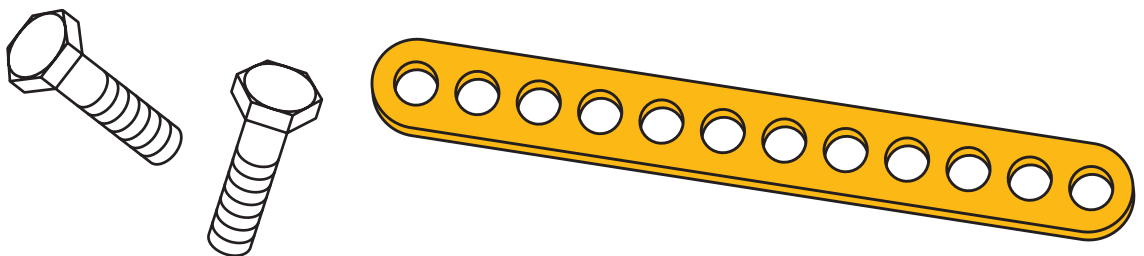


**BUILDING
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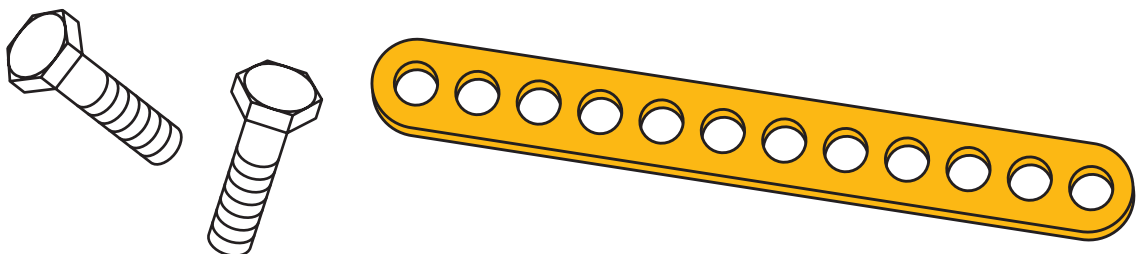
BISEXUAL STUDENTS

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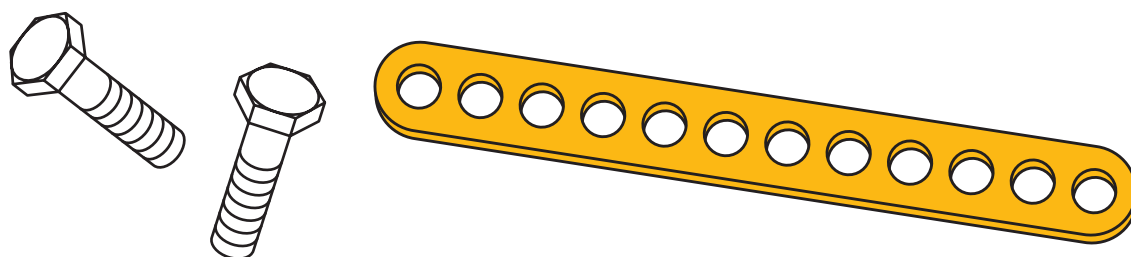


A GUIDE TO BECOMING BI-INCLUSIVE FOR STUDENT ACTIVISTS AND OFFICERS



UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Written by Lucy Brookes (NUS LGBT Officer 2008/9); Matt Starley (NUS LGBT Committee 2007/8);
Sophia James (NUS LGBT Committee 2008/9).



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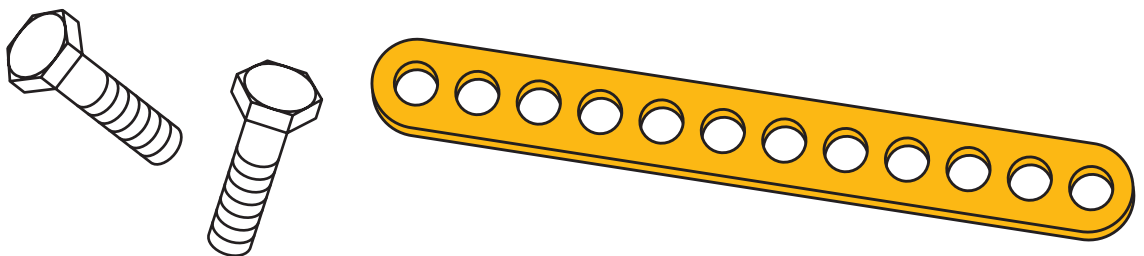
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UNDER CONSTRUCTION



Part 1: What is bisexuality?

Bisexuality is commonly defined as “being sexually attracted to both men and women” (Oxford English Dictionary). However this definition is often challenged by those who feel that attraction does not simply have to be defined by sexual attraction – it can equally comprise facets of romantic, aesthetic and sexual attraction. By this definition a bisexual woman could have a sexual and aesthetic attraction to men, but a sexual and romantic attraction to women; or any combination of these (and perhaps other) forms of attraction.

The common definition is also challenged by some for its use of binary gender terms. Some people do not experience attraction that is limited to the traditional categories of male and female – so “being attracted to ‘both’ men and women” might not be an accurate definition for some bisexuals who do not wish to define their attraction to others in these terms. Instead of saying bisexual people are attracted to both genders, we could say that bisexual people are simply attracted to more than one gender.

Such individuals, not all, may choose to define as ‘pansexual’ or ‘omnisexual’ (the term pansexual is derived from the Greek pan –all, and the term bisexual is thought to be derived from the Latin bis – twice/two.)

Ultimately, defining your sexuality is a matter which is entirely up to you, and not everyone who defines themselves as bisexual will have the same views on what it means to be bisexual, or have the same levels or form of attraction, or define their bisexuality in the same way as other bisexual people. It may be useful to think of sexuality as a sort of sliding scale, and indeed many people have supported the idea of a ‘continuum’ of sexuality, most notably the American sex researcher Alfred Kinsey, who published ‘Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male’ in 1948, and ‘Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female’ five years later. Through his extensive research Kinsey found that people could generally be placed on a 7-point scale (from 0 – exclusively heterosexual to 6 – exclusively homosexual.) We could say then, that anything between 2 and 5 on the scale would be bisexuality, to differing degrees. This supports the idea of differing levels of attraction. Many bisexual people don’t consider themselves bound to a particular point on the scale, and will be at different points at different times. However, the Kinsey scale is not the only means for visualising bisexuality. Many like to consider sexuality as a grid or spectrum, that changes and varies throughout time. It is also important to note that the Kinsey scale focussed upon sexual behaviour, and that this is not necessarily directly linked to sexual attraction. For example, one may have not engaged in sexual activity with a member of another or the same gender, despite being attracted to them.

There are no accurate figures relating to the exact numbers of LGBT people. A recent American survey estimated that among those aged 18–44, 1.8 percent of men considered themselves bisexual and 2.3 percent homosexual. The same study (carried out by the American National Centre for Health Statistics) found that 2.8 percent of women considered themselves bisexual and 1.3 percent homosexual. The UK government currently uses a figure of around 6% of the population identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual, and many LGB and LGBT groups (including Stonewall) agree with this estimate. However there is no definitive figure, and various surveys have produced a wide variety of figures.

Part 2: Dispelling the myths

As with gay or lesbian identities, identifying as bisexual can carry stigma, and people within and outside the LGBT community may make assumptions about you based solely on your sexuality. Some common myths about bisexuality are discussed below.

MYTH: Bisexuals have to like men and women equally.

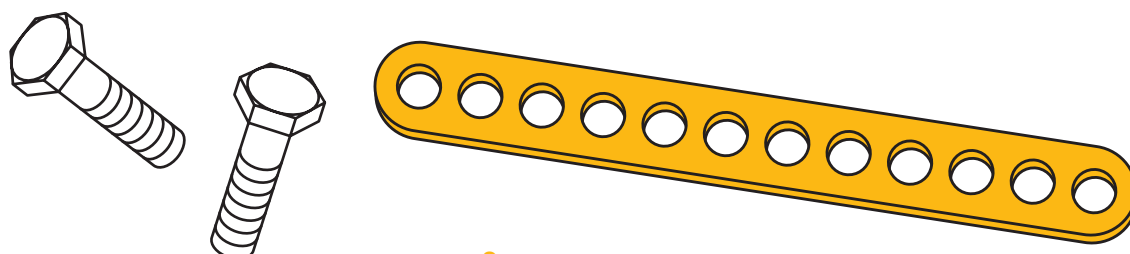
As has already been discussed, sexuality is often seen as a spectrum. A bisexual's attraction can range from only incidental homosexual attraction to almost entirely homosexual attraction, or attraction to those without a particular or fixed gender, but this doesn't make them any more or any less bisexual.

MYTH: Bisexuals are promiscuous.

Simply being attracted to both more than one gender does not mean that bisexuals automatically sleep with more people than homosexual or heterosexual people. While some bisexual people may be more promiscuous than others, the same definitely holds true for everyone else too! Sexual attraction is not an indicator of sexual behaviour or promiscuity.

MYTH: Bisexuals are just denying that they're gay, or are confused.

Bisexuality can often be misunderstood by those who think that people can only be gay or straight. For some people bisexuality may indeed be a period of transition, but this does not mean to say that the same is true for all bisexuals. Many bisexuals remain comfortable in their orientation and are neither 'in denial' nor 'hiding' their sexuality, but have happily come to terms with their attraction and identity. Besides which, a person's identity is their own, and shouldn't be questioned by others.

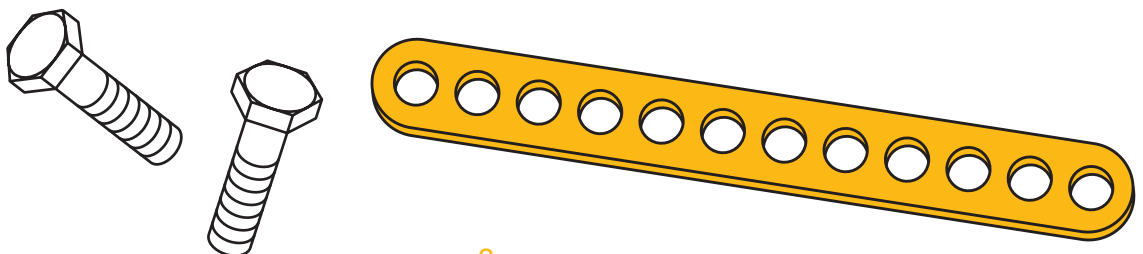


MYTH: Bisexuals can't hold down relationships, and will leave their partners for someone of a different gender.

A person's ability to have a relationship, whether monogamous or otherwise, is not determined by their sexual orientation, and bisexuals are no better or worse than homosexual or heterosexual people at having any kind of relationship. It should be up to every individual, of whatever sexuality, to choose the type of relationship which is right for them. It is also false to assume that a bisexual person will always leave their partner for someone of a different gender – sometimes a bisexual woman might leave their female partner for a male one, or equally another female one, just as much as they may leave a male partner for another male or a female.

MYTH: Sexuality is determined by who you've slept with.

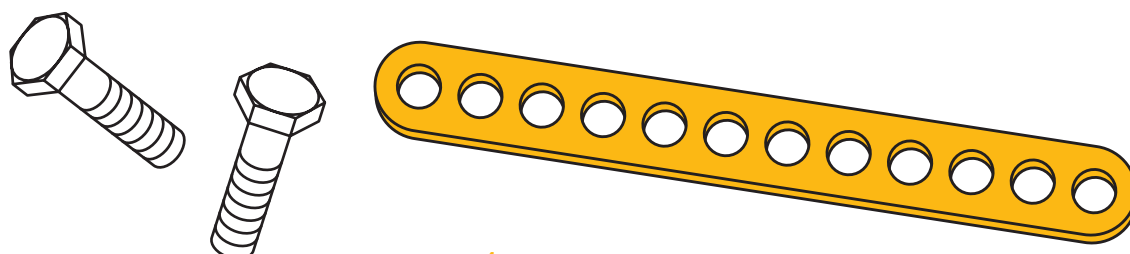
So what about a virgin who identifies as straight? Or a lesbian who had sex with a man once as a teenager? Are they any more or less gay or straight because of who they've slept with? Sexuality is determined by your own attraction and your identity, not a formula of how many men or women you've slept with. Bisexual people may have slept with both men and women, either men or women, or may not have chosen to sleep with anyone at all. A bisexual person should never be made to feel less legitimate if they are not sleeping with, or having relationships with, both men and women and should never feel forced to 'prove' their sexual orientation.



3: How are bisexual issues different to lesbian and gay issues?

Bisexuals have been accepted into the LGBT liberation movement because of prejudice facing those who define as bisexual. Just as individuals who identify as gay or lesbian face discrimination, oppression and even violence, bisexual people are discriminated against on the basis of their sexuality. However, whilst the discrimination faced by a bisexual man with a male partner, or a bisexual female with a female partner may be comparable to that of a gay man or a lesbian, there is another side to the discrimination faced by bisexual people, which may come from the LGBT community itself. As a result of this discrimination against bisexuality which exists in the larger community, most groups recognise bisexuality as part of the campaign. While the discriminatory attitude towards bisexuals for sleeping with members of the same sex may be a primary reason for inclusion within the LGBT campaign, bisexuals may also have their own issues to campaign on, including dispelling the myths surrounding bisexuality and tackling prejudice from within the LGBT community.

Some people believe that bisexuals shouldn't be included within the LGBT movement because they 'weaken' the campaign by enjoying the heterosexual privileges of society or the ability to 'hide' their sexuality. This statement in itself is discrimination! In fact the inclusion of bisexuals, campaigning for sexual freedom for all, could be said to strengthen the LGBT movement. Bisexual-identified people have also long been involved in the gay community, and in organising and running many historic gay liberation organisations. Accepting a bisexual identity is not an easy option and in doing so, you should not feel required to defend yourself. Coming out as bisexual can leave you as open to discrimination as a lesbian or gay man.

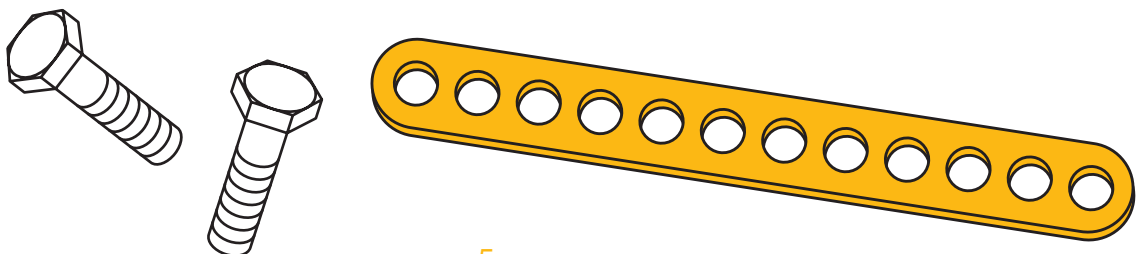


Part 4: What is biphobia?

Biphobia is the term used to label discrimination against a person because of their bisexuality. As much as the gay and lesbian community demands acceptance and respect from the heterosexual community, the bisexual community demands tolerance and respect from both. The oppression of bisexual people is at once similar to and distinct from the oppression faced by lesbian and gay people. In this way it can be complex, confusing and difficult for a bisexual person to define and challenge biphobia. Aside from the myths, prejudice and hatred that the lesbian and gay community faces from the heterosexual, bisexual people can often be marginalized by lesbian, gay and trans communities.

As much as the LGT community should understand the oppression of homophobia and transphobia, and not wish to see it perpetuated, it seems that experiencing oppression is no guarantee against propagating oppression. With portrayal of bisexual people in the mainstream media and 'gay' media at best inoffensive, 'bi-chic' culture and 'gay' clubs operating "majority gay and lesbian" door policies, coming out as a bisexual can be a daunting prospect, something made more difficult by the limited number of positive 'out' bisexual role models in the media.

However, the portrayal of bisexual people is slowly improving. With organisations such as Bisexual Action challenging 'bi-invisibility' within and outside of the LGBT community, and attitudes towards bisexuality changing in the light of increasing representation and sensitive campaigning, being bisexual is becoming much more acceptable in both communities.



5. Involving bisexual students

If a culture of biphobia already exists within your LGBT group, it can be hard to challenge or even detect and define. It can range from 'jokes', to physical abuse, just as with any kind of bullying. When the bullying comes from within an LGBT group, it can be especially difficult for the person suffering to tell anyone, so it can be even more difficult to challenge.

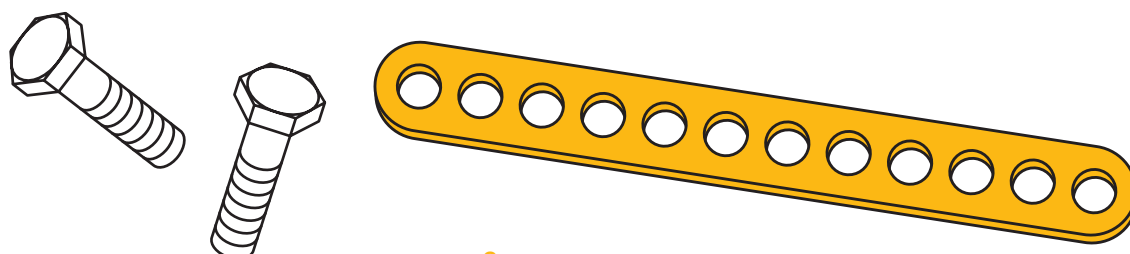
If you want to challenge biphobia in your LGBT society, or involve more bisexual students, then this section is designed to give ideas on how to do this, and win the arguments for bisexual inclusion. By simply involving more bisexual students, a culture of biphobia can be challenged, and help people to understand why we should have a 'b' in the LGBT.

Representation

We need to include bisexual people in our societies in order to be representative of the movement which we are part of. If we include more people, with experiences of discrimination on similar grounds, we can be more representative about the reality of the discrimination and how to fight against it. Being representative, from having specified representation on your LGBT society committee, to having more varied and accessible events, are essential both for the welfare and involvement of bisexual students, but they also enable us to find out about issues which we must be campaigning on. Having bisexual representation whenever possible is a great way of ensuring that bi students get the representation they need at the highest level in your society's decision making.

Involving bisexual students in decision-making can be achieved by:

- Ensuring that there is a dedicated representative position on your committee, filled by self-defining bisexual students. To create this, a motion can be put to a general meeting of members of the group. An example of this kind of motion can be found at the end of this guide.
- Create co-chairs of your LGBT group, with a dedicated space for a bisexual member. Again this could be voted upon by the general meeting.
- Set up an autonomous bisexual student's group, or hold a 'bisexual students' caucus'. This could be a group, a one-off meeting or a series of regular meetings. They will ensure that bisexual students feel fully involved by the group and its campaigns, make bisexual students feel more confident in being involved, and give them the ability to discuss issues that affect them. These meetings or groups do not need to be divisive, but can be part of the LGBT group as a whole. A member or representative from the caucus can present details of discussions from the caucus to the LGBT group committee.



Welfare

Many of our union LGBT groups are set up to provide support to students, in both providing peer support to those who are coming out or facing discrimination, and holding socials, giving opportunities for LGBT students to meet like-minded friends. Both emotional and social support can be of benefit to bisexual students, and including them, and challenging bi-phobia can benefit other bisexual students who are seeking welfare support.

Safe space

Most unions and institutions operate a safe space policy to some extent, but it is often not enough to provide LGBT students with space totally free from discrimination. By default an LGBT group is often a safer space than many other places for bisexual students, and by including them, you could create a safe haven for many who are being bullied or discriminated against because they are bisexual. If you have a safe space policy which can be applied to all events, socials, and meetings, then all LGBT students will feel able to participate. Make sure your LGBT group has a safe-space policy of its own which includes biphobia as an unacceptable form of discrimination.

Campaigning

A central part of what LGBT groups do is campaigning, fighting for equality and liberation for all who self define as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans. Bisexual students can help to strengthen these campaigns by bringing an alternative perspective.

If the society is running a campaign, make sure that issues relevant to bisexual students are included. Ask bisexual students (perhaps through the bisexual caucus mentioned above) how campaigning can benefit them, or what campaigns they might like to see happen.

If your union is running a campaign on a wide scale such as anti-bullying or sexual health, make sure that your society asks the union that all L,G, B and T perspectives are included in order to make it an accessible and representative campaign.

Social events and publicity

LGBT groups can sometimes hold events that unintentionally focus only on the needs of its gay and lesbian members. This leads to lower numbers of bisexual people who feel comfortable getting involved, or choosing to become involved with the LGBT group, and therefore also reduces the opportunity for bisexual members to be elected to the committee. Representation and participation of bisexual students is therefore reduced in groups which do not run inclusive events. However this does not mean that the group must focus only on the issues which affect one group of the members. In order to have the most diverse and representative membership possible requires a similarly diverse range of events.

The 'gay scene' has a culture which is very orientated towards gay men, which often excludes bisexual people. Since many LGBT groups use trips to gay clubs or bars as social events, this can discourage involvement from bisexual students, particularly if the establishment already has a reputation for being exclusively gay. Remember that some bisexual members may be in relationships with opposite-sex

members, and they and their partners can often be made to feel excluded on the 'scene'. Other events such as film screenings can exclude bisexual members if they overly focus on issues only affecting gay members. There are plenty of good films containing a variety of LGBT characters, and reflecting this variety in your event can engage all your members.

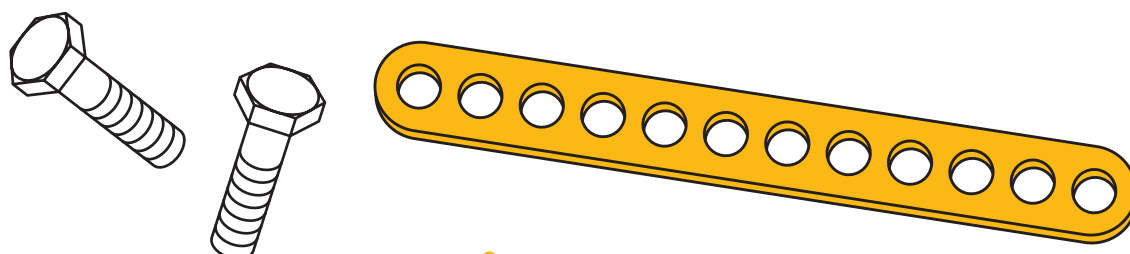
Below are some suggestions for events you can run that include bisexual members.

- Hold a video night, or show a film which reflects bisexual people in a positive light.
- Find out about local clubs and bars that are known to be tolerant of their clientele. 'Gay-friendly' venues often have a mixture of customers and can be less intimidating and more accepting places than 'gay-clubs'. The bisexual representative on your executive could run 'bisexual-only' socials to such venues as a chance for bisexual members to get to know each other and get more involved. However it is important to remember that some members may not be comfortable visiting bars or clubs, and there are plenty of other opportunities for bisexual socials. If in doubt ask the members.
- Get together with other local LGBT groups to organise a social event in your union. This could also include a discussion on various LGBT issues

If you have posters on display or maybe an LGBT notice board, perhaps include a specific bisexual inclusion poster, or if your group subscribes to magazines such as Gay Times or Diva, then consider subscribing to a bi publication such as Bi Community News (see the links page)

Challenging biphobia

One of the best and most successful things we can do is to challenge biphobia whenever and wherever it occurs, whether in formal meetings, informal events, socials, and in your wider student union community. If bisexual students know and can see evidence of biphobia not being tolerated, they are much more likely to come out as bisexual and get involved in the society. Although it is unlikely that there will be no biphobia in your institution, union or LGBT group, challenging it will benefit bisexual students immensely.



Part 6: Winning the arguments for bisexual representation

We have a large committee already. Why should we add a position for bisexual students?

Bisexual students are often overlooked within the LGBT community. Our sexuality is seen as 'a phase' and our relationships are not taken seriously, regardless of the gender of our partner. We experience abuse, not just from wider society, but also within the LGBT community. Encouraging bisexual students to become more involved in your society, and providing guaranteed representation for bisexual students is a positive step towards engaging more students to involve themselves in our campaign. Adding a bisexual representative may mean a slightly larger executive, but in the long run is a small price to pay for a truly inclusive campaign.

There are lots of bisexual people in our LGBT anyway.

Having lots of bisexual people involved in the campaign is always a positive thing, however, if there is no dedicated representation for bisexual people on the committee, it may be that they are being unintentionally excluded from being fully included in the group. Group memberships fluctuate over time and just because there are currently many bisexual people, does not mean this will always be the case. Bisexual students may feel that they are excluded from certain events, and may not feel fully represented by the group's campaigns or policies. There may also be bisexual students who haven't joined the group because they feel they wouldn't be welcome. One way to ascertain if any of these are issues is to hold a caucus of bisexual students, where bisexual students can discuss any relevant issues.

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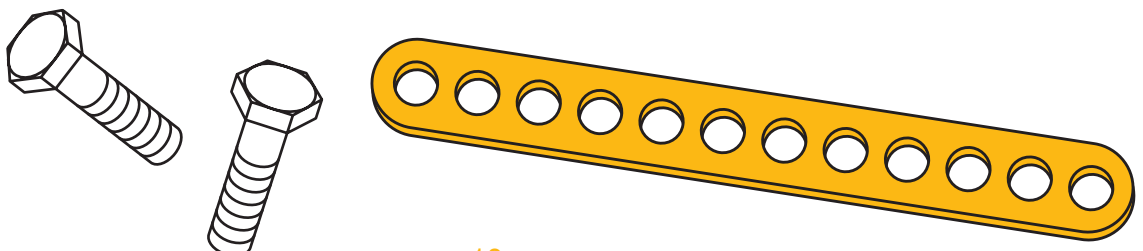
There are bisexual students in other positions on our committee. Doesn't that show we don't need dedicated bisexual representation?

What you need to bear in mind is that this representation is not guaranteed. In order to guarantee bisexual representation at all times, not just when bisexual students are elected to your committee, there should be a member of the committee responsible for it.

There aren't any bisexual people in our LGBT at all. We don't need bisexual representation because we don't have any bisexual students to represent!

Many groups might think they have no bisexual members. This is highly unlikely! Bisexual students may be too nervous to join the group because they think they will face prejudice, others might not see the point in joining, and you may have bisexual members in your group already who haven't come out, or are simply perceived as being lesbian or gay, perhaps as a result of their sexual partner at the time. There can sometimes be the assumption within the LGBT community, that everyone is gay or lesbian and so being out about bisexuality can mean coming out a second time. This can be a daunting task.

Having a representative shows new members that the group is welcome to all members of the LGBT community, which can encourage increased involvement. Having bisexual representation on your committee can ensure a comfortable and inclusive environment for all.



Part 7: Setting up an inclusive LGBT society

If your students' union does not already have an LGBT society, then starting up a brand new group can provide an ideal opportunity to create an inclusive space for LGBT students. The procedure for setting up a society varies from one union to the next, but in general you may find that you have to collect a number of signatures from students interested in joining such a group, and draft a constitution for the group. Writing a constitution is the ideal time to enshrine inclusivity at the heart of your group. You can do this by having an 'aims and objectives' section in your constitution, and including encouraging diversity as one of the group's aims. An example of this is given below.

Aims and Objectives.

- 1.1 The aims and objectives of this group shall be:
 - 1.1.1 To actively acknowledge and embrace diversity amongst its membership and do all in its power to combat any discrimination faced relating to this diversity.
 - 1.1.2 To actively encourage diversity amongst its membership, and to provide representation on the committee for specified groups within its membership.

You can also specify required representative positions on the executive within the constitution. When setting up an LGBT group you may want to include such representation for Women, Bisexual, Trans, Disabled and Black students. It is important to include representation for bisexual people as LGBT societies may inadvertently exclude participation from bisexual students. Ensuring that your constitution specifies such positions on the executive can easily be done, and an example is given below.

Bisexual Representative

- 2.1 The committee will contain at all times one bisexual representative.
- 2.2 This position will only be filled by a person who self-defines as bisexual.
- 2.3 Only members who self-define as bisexual will be eligible to vote for those standing for this position.
- 2.4 The Bisexual Representative shall be responsible for representing the interests of those members of the group who self-define as bisexual.
- 2.5 The Bisexual Representative shall be responsible for maintaining the bisexual members' mailing list/discussion forum.
- 2.6 The Bisexual Representative shall be responsible for raising awareness of issues affecting those individuals who self-define as bisexual.
- 2.7 The Bisexual Representative shall be responsible for organising events aimed solely at those members of the group who self-define as bisexual.

It is important to make sure that only bisexual students stand and vote for this position to ensure that bisexual students have an autonomous voice on your committee. If a particular group is disadvantaged, it may need particular representation to overcome this. Ensuring representation for bisexual students on your committee is not about giving bisexuals more power than other members, but about redressing the inequalities that bisexual people often face within the LGBT community.

APPENDIX 1: Useful Links

These links may provide useful information on issues covered in this pack.

Help and support lines:

West Midlands – LGBT switchboard	08452 578255
Brighton and Hove LGBT switchboard	01273 204050
Bristol LGBT switchboard	01179 221328
Gloucestershire LGBT switchboard	01452 306800
Leeds LGB switchboard	01132 453588
London and National switchboard	02078 377324
North Staffordshire LGB switchboard	01782 266998
Surry LGBT switchboard	01483 727667

Websites:

Coming Out Stories

A directory of coming out stories, arranged by gender, sexuality and age.

<http://k.domaindlx.com/comingoutstories/read.asp?fc=>

Pink Parents

An organisation offering advice and support for the parents of LGBT people.

www.pinkparents.org.uk

Coming Out

A brochure from FFLAG which covers in detail the issues you may face if you decide to come out to your parents.

http://www.outproud.org/brochure_coming_out.html

The American Institute of Bisexuality

Contains useful links and information.

<http://www.bisexual.org/en/index.php>

Bi.org

A central hub for bisexuals to find information from the plethora of sites that have sprung up across the Internet in the past 10 years. There is also large set of pages detailing resources (groups, organisations, magazines, Internet newsgroups), and discussion fora for chatting to other bisexuals.

<http://bi.org/>

Bi community news

The UK bisexual community's journal, also has many useful articles, links and the guide "Both directions."
<http://www.bicommunitynews.co.uk/>

Soc.Bi Newsgroup: the internet's open forum on bisexuality'

A website containing useful information and discussion on all areas affecting the UK bisexual community.
<http://serf.org/jon/soc.bi/>

UK National Bisexual Convention

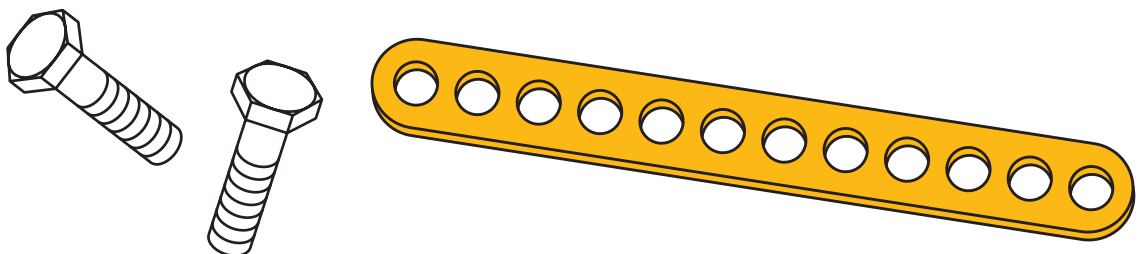
A website for the UK National Bisexual Convention held annually.
<http://www.bicon.org.uk/>

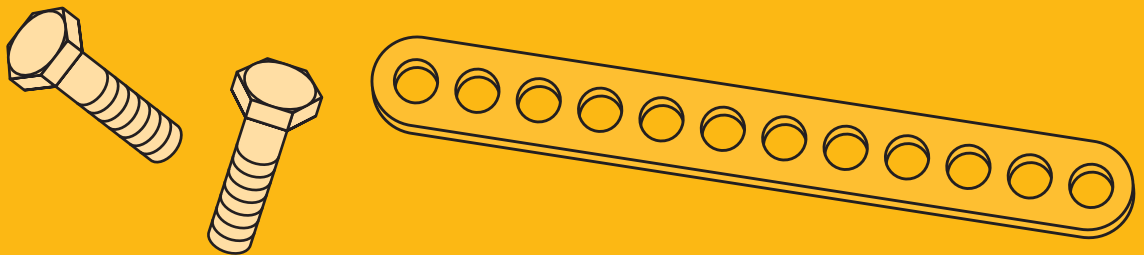
The Bisexual Resource centre

Contains links and lots of information on inclusivity, political action etc.
<http://www.biresource.org/>

NUS LGBT

The NUS LGBT liberation campaign homepage, with useful information, guides, campaigns material and blogs.
<http://www.officeronline.co.uk/lgbt/>





National Union of Students

2nd floor, Centro 3
19 Mandela Street
London NW1 0DU

t. 0871 221 8221

f. 0871 221 8222

w. www.officeronline.co.uk/lgbt

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