

SaferSex4Seniors

Information you need to enjoy safer sexual pleasure!

Aging Bisexuals – What’s Your BiQ?

Misinformation and myths abound for bisexuals; here are some common questions asked about bisexuals and bisexuality.

Q. What is bisexuality?

When it comes to defining bisexuality, senior (and not so senior) bisexuals may embrace varying definitions (if they use the label at all), for example: Someone who is capable of feeling romantic, spiritual, and/or sexual attraction for two (or more) genders; a person who loves despite gender; one who loves individuals first and genders second; one who is open to sexual or emotional exploration with more than one gender.

Q. I hear a lot about lesbian and gay people, but I rarely hear about bisexuals. Why is that?

Bisexuals (young and old) have been underrepresented in research, media and the arts. For the most part, we are merged into the discussions of gay and lesbian aging. Issues confronting older lesbian and gay men do overlap with the experiences of older people who are bisexual, but only partially. Our aging services and community providers have bisexuals accessing services even if they don’t realize it. The pervasive invisibility of bisexuality has given us few or no role models, let alone an identity for who we are.

Q. I’ve heard that bisexuals are really gay or lesbian. Is that true?

Bisexuals are rarely seen. When a bisexual falls in love, they sometimes begin to identify (publicly or privately) as lesbian, gay, or heterosexual, and thus are invisible as a bisexual person. For example, a woman with a male partner is presumed to be straight; if with a female partner, assumed to be lesbian; a woman or man alone, probably heterosexual. If they are in a “gay venue”, they are probably presumed to be gay, rather than bisexual. The world is not black and white. It is this myth that all things fall into either gay or lesbian that keeps many people from understanding bisexuals and bisexuality.

Q. I grew up decades ago and never heard of the word “bisexual”.

The term bisexual was not fully embraced until the gay rights movement was well underway and bisexuals were coming out as part of the Pride movement. Many seniors have never heard the word bisexual. Everyone now over 50 became an adult when the American Psychiatric Association (APA) still listed homosexuality as a mental illness. The APA never officially classified or declassified bisexuality.

Q. Can bisexual seniors “pass” as heterosexuals so they don’t face the same discrimination as gay or lesbian seniors might face?

Gay and non-gay folks often reject bisexual seniors as fence sitters or for using heterosexual privilege and passing as straight when convenient. To deny your bisexuality is just as painful and damaging for a bisexual as it is for gay or lesbian seniors to live in (or go back into) the closet.

Author bio: Terri Clark, MPH, CHES is an accomplished program planner, trainer and facilitator who has been providing education and training for nearly 25 years. She is currently Prevention Coordinator at ActionAIDS in Philadelphia. She is a certified trainer with the National Resource Center on LGBT Aging. She is a member of the Sexuality and Aging Consortium at Widener University and is an adjunct instructor at Arcadia University. Throughout her career in public health, she has been an advocate for gender equality and sexual health across the life cycle. Her expertise is in sexuality, including LGBT issues. Terri can be reached at tclark@actionaids.org or 917-204-7883. Copyright ©2012 Terri Clark.