



# the sexeducator

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A magazine for educators who conduct sex education  
activities with high-school students

## The bi trend: Open mindedness or trivialization?

Toward a better understanding  
of bisexuality and bisexual behaviours  
at adolescence

By Jessica Caruso

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Québec 

# testimonies

I've kissed a girl and I've kissed a boy, and I felt the same way. I had the same feelings. Right now, I'm in love with a boy and with a girl. Is this normal?

Marilyne, 13 years old, AlterHéros

I'm 14 years old and a little while ago, I played a game with some girlfriends of mine. During the game, I kissed two girls. It was nice and I feel more and more like I want to do it again. For laughs, we pat each other's' butts and touch each other's' breasts (we're just kidding around. We're close and we're not shy). I have a boyfriend. I'd like to know if I'm bisexual.

Anonymous girl, 14 years old, AlterHéros

I don't understand anything anymore. I've been madly in love with girls several times and I'm attracted to girls. But I'm questioning myself. For instance, I've had gay fantasies and sometimes I have the impression that I'm physically, but never emotionally, attracted to guys. I don't get what this means.

Andrew, 15 years old, AlterHéros

Hi. I've been with my boyfriend for almost a month now and I'm really in love with him. I'm totally heterosexual, but my boyfriend is bisexual. I'm wondering if it's possible to have a stable and lasting relationship with two people of different sexual orientations.

Charlotte, 16 years old, Tel-jeunes

Hi. I'd like to know if a person can be sure that he's bisexual at my age (13). Is this too young?

Rebb, 13 years old, Tel-jeunes

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# introduction

The questions on the previous page are taken from Québec websites that deal with bisexuality. They give us an idea of the worries teens have about sexual orientation and, more specifically, bisexuality. Historically, humans have been attracted to people of both sexes, but you may be wondering if this phenomenon may be some kind of trend. Indeed, young people increasingly see bisexual behaviours in the media, among their friends or in pornographic material. Therefore, we could ask ourselves the following question: Is this so-called 'bi' trend a celebration of diversity and sexual freedom or simply a method used by the media to attract young heterosexual consumers who have always fantasized about sex between women (Diamond, 2005)?

Whether we like it or not, bisexual behaviour (for instance, two girls kissing or threesome sex) is an option that is more common than ever among teens today. The frequent messages promoting bisexual behaviours can cause adolescents to feel confused about their own sexual orientation and the behaviours they should or should not adopt. As we shall see, young people face pressure to adhere to this trend, and close to 60% of youth have felt such pressure. Some teens who engage in bisexual behaviours later regret having done so, while others take advantage of these experiences to get to know themselves better and to situate themselves within the broad spectrum of sexual orientation. Therefore, to deal with the pressure, it is important that young people be able to differentiate bisexual orientation from bisexual behaviours.

Discussing bisexuality with adolescents can seem very challenging at first. Yet, this issue can be central to identity construction and, as a result, it is a topic that should be raised. Some educators and young people may feel uneasy discussing this issue; we will address it in a balanced manner.

In this edition of *The SexEducator*, we will demystify bisexuality and distinguish between sexual orientation and fashion. We will explore these realities and assess the scope and characteristics of bisexuality as a new trend among adolescents. We will also propose tools that can help young people determine where they stand in regard to this growing phenomenon.

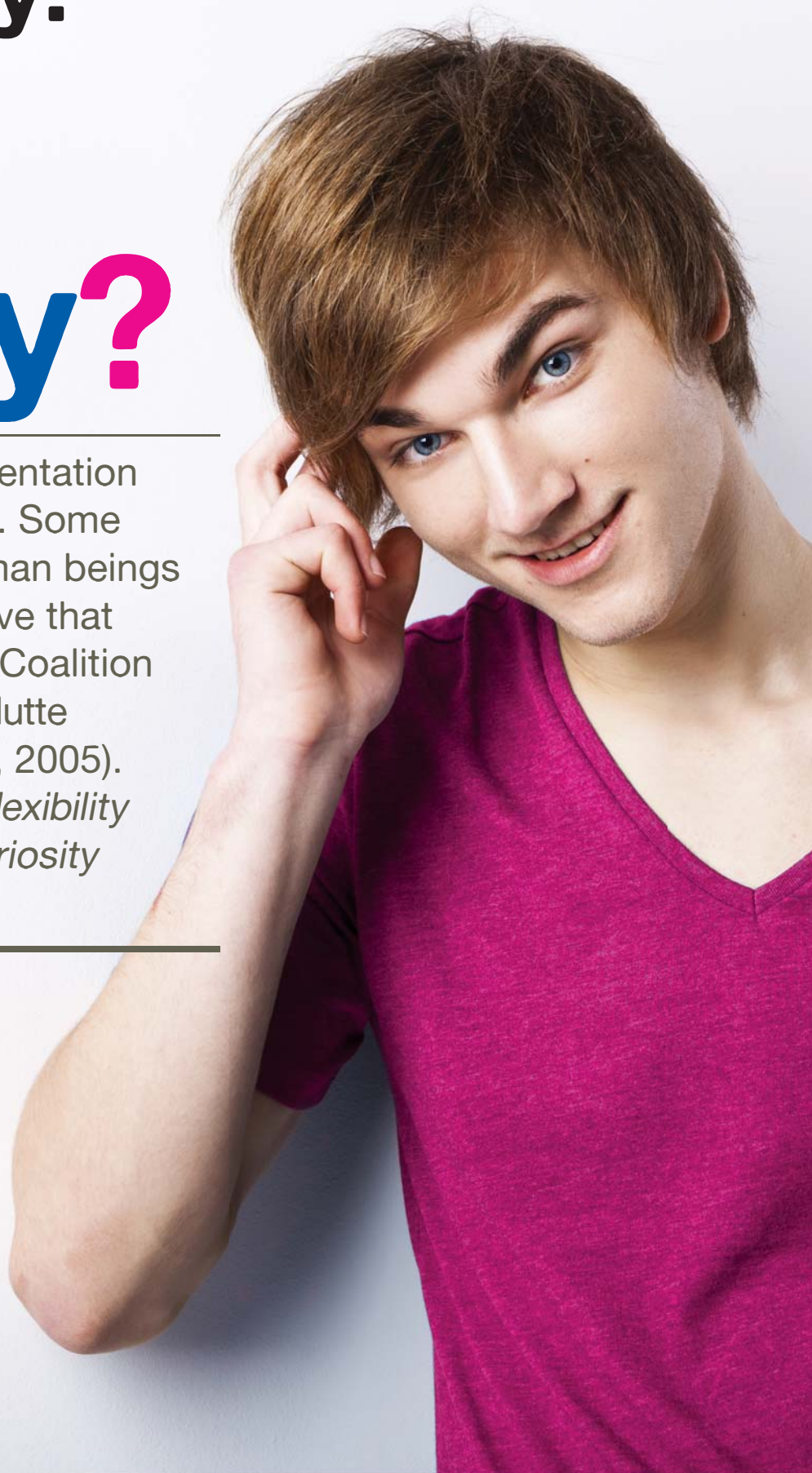


# Bisexuality: myth or reality?

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Bisexuality is a sexual orientation which is rarely discussed. Some authors claim that all human beings are bisexual; others believe that bisexuality doesn't exist (Coalition jeunesse montréalaise de lutte à l'homophobie [CJMLH], 2005). Still others refer to *heteroflexibility* (Diamond, 2005) or *bi-curiosity* (Burleson, 2005).

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## What is bisexuality, exactly?

Bisexuality is being attracted to people of both sexes (Mimoun, 2007, p. 107). Therefore, bisexual individuals can fall in love with, be attracted to or have sexual relations with people of either sex (CJMLH, 2005, p. 49). However, the way bisexuality is perceived and experienced varies from person to person. Indeed, generally, there are three ways to think about sexual orientation (Mendès-Leité, 1996):

1. A dichotomous perspective of sexuality that involves choosing between heterosexuality and homosexuality
2. A continuum that includes various forms of sexuality
3. A multidimensional view of sexuality where behaviours, fantasies, affects and lifestyles form a variable whole

These differing visions of sexual orientation affect the perception each individual has of bisexuality. Regardless of the vision adopted, bisexuality exists and can generate questions among young people. Despite the apparent consensus regarding the fact that, theoretically, bisexuality evokes attraction to both sexes, the form and meaning of bisexuality, related issues and even the existence of bisexuality itself can be perceived very differently by individual authors and in various eras.

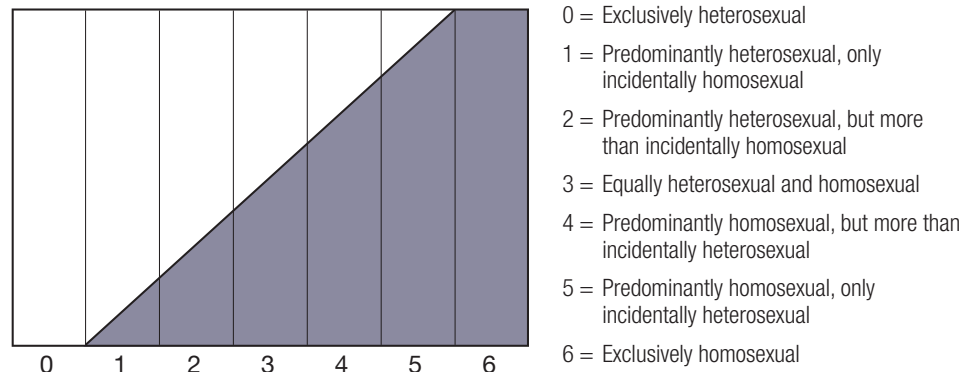
## Since when has bisexuality been a topic of conversation?

Although bisexuality is a contemporary term, bisexual behaviours have been observed among animals and humans for centuries—in mythology, in art and in fantasies (Burleson, 2005; CJMLH, 2005; Angelides, 2001). The origin of the term *bisexuality* is uncertain. Its etymology is broad (from the prefix *bi*, two, and the Latin *sexus*, sex), and the term has been used in the field of botany to designate plants and flowers with organs of both sexes, and to designate hermaphrodites. From the 1890s to the 1910s, a few authors raised the issue (Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Fliess). However, it is the work of Alfred Kinsey in 1948 and Fritz Klein in 1993 that has enabled us to understand the scope of this phenomenon (Angelides, 2001; Mendès-Leité, 1996).

## Bisexuality: A continuum

Alfred Kinsey used his studies of human sexuality to observe that sexual orientation is not dichotomous—heterosexual or homosexual. He then developed a sexual orientation rating scale ranging from 0 to 6 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 | Kinsey Scale (1948)



Source: Alfred C. Kinsey et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, 1948, in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, 1953, p. 470.

On the Kinsey Scale, a bisexual person could fall within the 1 to 5 range, which can be argued since some people believe that only individuals in category 3 are truly bisexual. Regardless of the viewpoint, the biggest limitation of the scale resides in the fact that it is based only on behaviours and does not take into account feelings, fantasies and the way a person perceives himself or herself. Thus, Fritz Klein (1993) developed a more complex grid to supplement Kinsey's, which Klein found lacking. Klein's grid adds seven factors and three distinct aspects of life (see Table 1) to Kinsey's seven-point scale.

Klein's more complete grid considers diverse factors that come into play in the multidimensional experience of sexual orientation. Each factor is measured on a 7-point scale similar to Kinsey's (from 0= exclusively heterosexual to 6 = exclusively homosexual) at three different points: past, present and ideal, which refers to the choice one would make if sexual orientation were a question of choice. A score is entered for each factor and time point. To determine the final score, all values are added and then divided by 21, the result of which is an average that situates sexual orientation on a scale of 1 to 7.

Think of Andrew, whose story is presented at the beginning of this article: he says that he is physically but not emotionally attracted to men. Such an attraction is not easy to understand, especially during adolescence, a period when young people are constructing their identities. Attractions can be many and complex, and raise a number of questions for youth. Attractions can also vary, fluctuate and change depending on a person's age, experiences and interpretation.

Table 1 | Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (1993)

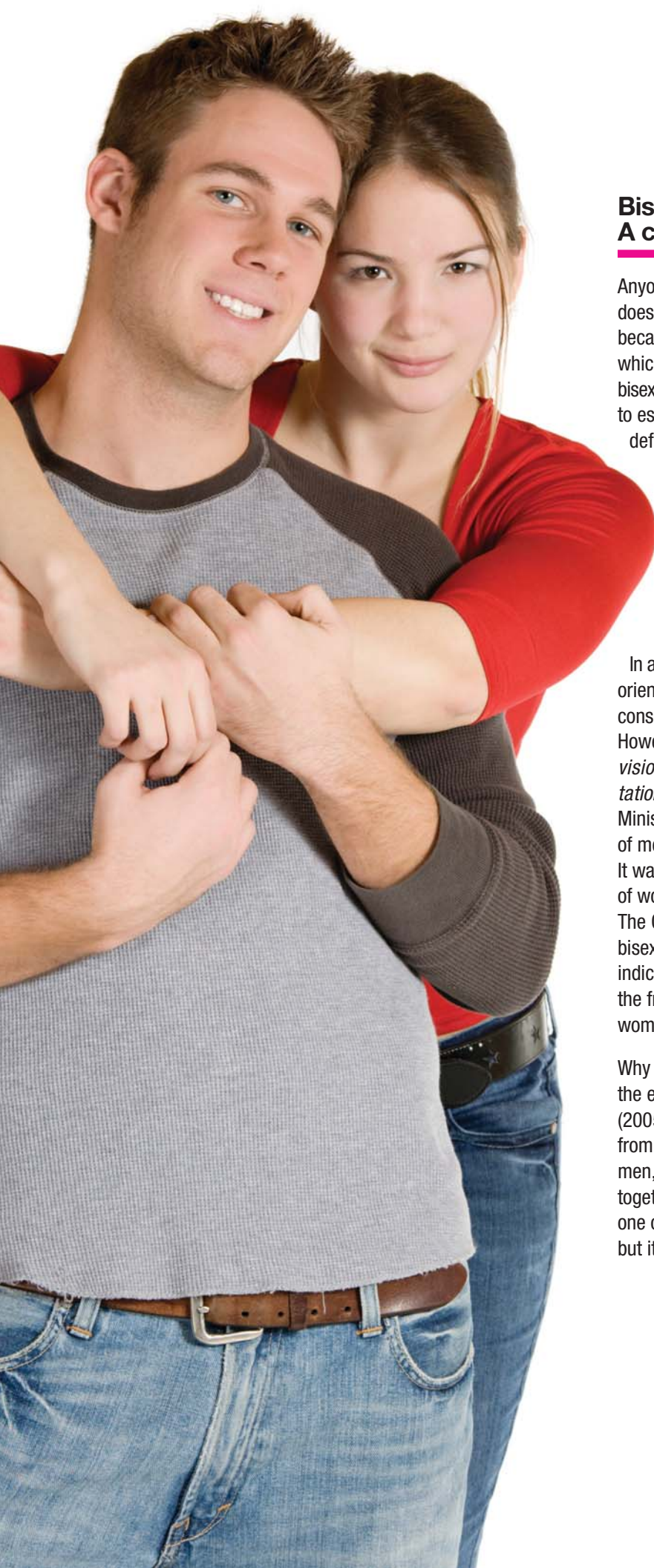
|                                   | PAST | PRESENT | IDEAL |
|-----------------------------------|------|---------|-------|
| Sexual attraction                 |      |         |       |
| Sexual behaviour                  |      |         |       |
| Sexual fantasies                  |      |         |       |
| Emotional preference              |      |         |       |
| Social preference                 |      |         |       |
| Heterosexual/Homosexual Lifestyle |      |         |       |
| Self-identification               |      |         |       |

Source: Fritz Klein, *The Bisexual Option*, 1993, p. 19.

“[...] 1.3% of Quebecers considered they were bisexual [...]”







## Bisexuality: A common sexual orientation?

Anyone who engages or has engaged in bisexual behaviours does not necessarily identify as bisexual (Burleson, 2005). Whether because of cultural reasons, the absence of a community with which to identify, or a refusal to shake up a well-established couple, bisexuality is rarely declared (Burleson, 2005). It is even more difficult to establish a portrait of the prevalence of bisexual orientation since definitions attributed to it vary from one study to another. Indeed, it would be difficult to reach a consensus regarding who is bisexual and who isn't. For instance, to identify as bisexual, is it absolutely necessary to have had sexual partners of both sexes? If you have had such experiences, are you necessarily bisexual? The lack of a definition upon which everyone agrees makes it difficult to compare studies and establish averages (Mendès-Leité, 1996).

In a province-wide study, where individuals were asked about sexual orientation based on their sexual behaviours, 1.3% of Quebecers considered they were bisexual (Clermont and Lacouture, 2000). However, according to a document entitled *Pour une nouvelle vision de l'homosexualité : Intervenir dans le respect des orientations sexuelles* (Institut national de santé publique du Québec and Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, 2007), 13% to 20% of men and 9% to 12% of women engage in bisexual behaviours. It was also determined that 21% to 30% of men and 13% to 20% of women are not exclusively heterosexual during their lifetimes. The CJMLH (2005) estimates that 12% to 25% of Quebecers are bisexual. As for how this phenomenon is evolving, some authors indicate that, over the past 20 years, there has been an increase in the frequency of bisexual fantasies and behaviours in young Québec women (Médico and Fortin, 2008).

Why then, if the percentages are so high, are we so unaware of the existence of bisexuality in everyday life? According to Burleson (2005), the answer is simple: we infer a person's sexual orientation from his or her behaviour. When we see a couple formed of two men, we assume they are homosexual; if a man and a woman are together, we think they are heterosexual. However, it is possible that one or several of these people are bisexual. Bisexuality does exist, but it isn't as apparent as heterosexuality or homosexuality.

# Bisexuality isn't synonymous with sexuality...

As noted earlier, bisexuality appears to be poorly defined and misunderstood, and the theory of it badly explained. However, regardless of who the author is, all agree that bisexuality is a sexual orientation that is distinct from the others. Despite a rather straightforward definition, it is nonetheless difficult to understand on several levels (CJMLH, 2005). So what is it like on a day-to-day basis?

## An orientation that varies

Accepting bisexuality as a sexual orientation is a multi-step process. Based on a few vague impressions, individuals go through successive phases before becoming fully aware of their sexual orientation. Weinberg, Williams and Pryor (1994) have identified four:

### **1. Initial confusion**

Since the person may have always conformed to heterosexual norms, there is a stage of confusion during which the person questions his or her sexual orientation.

### **2. Finding and applying the label**

At this stage, the person rejects not only one but both sexual orientations—heterosexuality and homosexuality—before accepting the bisexual orientation.

### **3. Settling into the identity**

If the person notices that his or her reality makes sense when understood from the viewpoint of bisexuality, he or she can settle into this new orientation and eventually come out to others as bisexual.

### **4. Continued uncertainty**

Even when an individual accepts the label, he or she might continue to feel uncertain, depending on previous sexual and emotional experiences with other people of both sexes; thus, a person can be bisexual without ever having intimate relationships with someone of the same sex. As we saw in an earlier example, how a person's orientation is perceived often depends on the partner's sex; the lack of social understanding regarding this perception often results in bisexual individuals questioning themselves.



Some people go through these stages very quickly; for others, it is a very long process. According to Mendès-Leité (1996), bisexuality should be viewed as something complex, multidimensional, variable and changing. Basically, it involves different aspects: sexual, affective and purely imaginary, that is, feeding fantasies and desires (CJMLH, 2005). Different individuals can experience bisexuality in different forms and on different levels. At an age when developing identity is critical and when teens constantly compare themselves to others and question themselves, developing a bisexual orientation manifests itself differently and raises a variety of issues.



## Bisexuality and unfaithfulness: A persistent prejudice

One of the most enduring prejudices against bisexuality is that they are people who need to have male and female sex partners to be satisfied and, therefore, are not likely to be monogamous (Rodriguez-Rust, 2000; Mendès-Leité, 1996; Weinberg, Williams and Pryor, 1994). Whether true or not, this statement varies according to the form bisexuality takes in a person's life. Several hypotheses have been put forward regarding types of bisexuality, a few of which are discussed here.

There are three types of bisexuality (CJMLH, 2005): successive, simultaneous and transitory. **Successive bisexuality** is the most common form, where an individual falls in love with someone, regardless of this person's sex. In this case, the person is central—not his or her sex. **Simultaneous bisexuality** supposes that an individual has male partners at the same time as female partners. For this person, being in a relationship with someone of the same sex is so different from being with someone of the opposite sex that it is ideal, even essential, to have contacts with people of both sexes to feel fulfilled. **Transitory bisexuality** refers to being in transition between heterosexuality and homosexuality. This form is more common among young people who are questioning their sexual orientation. For some, it can seem easier or reassuring to say they are bisexual rather than gay or lesbian since bisexuality is less frequently associated with homophobic prejudices. Moreover, some young people believe that stating they are bisexual gives them time to explore before making a decision about their sexual orientation and that it will be easier for them to change their minds later on, if need be (CJMLH, 2005). Weinberg, Williams and Pryor (1994) developed a typology of bisexual individuals. To do so, they used the 7-point Kinsey scale and added three dimensions: 1) sexual feelings; 2) sexual behaviours; and 3) romantic feelings.

Table 2 | Bisexual types

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Pure type</b>                 | Score of 3 (equally homosexual and heterosexual) on each dimension  |
| <b>Mid-Type</b>                  | Score of 3 (equally homosexual and heterosexual) on at least one dimension  |
| <b>Heterosexual-leaning type</b> | Score that wavers between 0 (exclusively heterosexual) and 2 (mainly heterosexual, but with a number of homosexual experiences) on each dimension |
| <b>Homosexual-leaning type</b>   | Score of 4 (mainly homosexual but with a number of heterosexual experiences) to 6 (exclusively homosexual) on each dimension                      |
| <b>Varied type</b>               | Score varies between dimensions   |

Source: Martin S. Weinberg, Colin J. Williams and Douglas W. Pryor, *Dual Attraction: Understanding Bisexuality*, 1994, p. 46 to 48.

Therefore, different bisexualities tie in with various aspects of sexuality. Some people seek to have intimate relationships with people of both sexes at the same time; others choose monogamy within a long-term relationship with one partner only. Some are only interested in casual sexual contacts with people of one sex or the other; others still look only for an emotional link with a person of either sex. Some will turn to partner-swapping to fulfil their bisexual needs while others will be very judgemental of people who engage in this practice (Burlison, 2005). There are just as many ways of expressing one's bisexuality as there are of expressing one's heterosexuality or homosexuality.



## **Biphobia and myths**

Like homosexuals, people who are bisexual can be victims of discrimination, strictly based on their sexual orientation. Such discrimination is often due to a lack of information or a poor understanding of this lifestyle. The following table presents the most common myths related to bisexual individuals and the facts concerning each one.

**Table 3 |** Myths about people of bisexual orientation

| MYTH  | FACT  |
|---|---|
| Bisexual girls are “easy” or like to partner-swap (Burleson, 2005). Bisexual boys are very sexually active (Rodriguez-Rust, 2000).    | Just as heterosexuals or homosexuals, some people who are bisexual can have more sex partners than other bisexuals or engage in partner-swapping; however, this does not apply across the board. Therefore, this sexual orientation does not necessarily involve having sex with several partners (Burleson, 2005). |
| Bisexuals are twice as likely to have sex partners (Burleson, 2005).  | Many people refuse to go out with someone who is bisexual because of all the prejudices they hear. It can sometimes be difficult for someone who is bisexual to find a partner who accepts his or her orientation. Therefore, bisexual people do not systematically have access to more partners (Burleson, 2005).  |
| Bisexuals are incapable of having a committed relationship (Burleson, 2005).  | People who are bisexual are no different from heterosexuals or homosexuals in terms of commitment (Burleson, 2005).   |
| Bisexuals need to be in relationships with men and women, and are unable to be monogamous (Mendès-Leité, 1996; Rodriguez-Rust, 2000). | In fact, few bisexuals have relationships concurrently with people of both sexes, or feel the need to do so (Rodriguez-Rust, 2000; Diamond, 2008).  |
| Bisexuality is a phase that precedes homosexuality (Burleson, 2005; Mendès-Leité, 1996).  | This can be true for some individuals, especially young people, but most bisexual people will remain so for their entire lives (Burleson, 2005).  |
| Bisexuals are gay people who don’t assert their homosexuality (Mendès-Leité, 1996).   | To believe this myth is to subscribe to dichotomous thinking whereby you can only be heterosexual or homosexual. Yet, people’s experiences prove the contrary (Mendès-Leité, 1996).   |
| Bisexuals can’t be happy, and have low self-esteem or are mentally ill (Burleson, 2005).  | The problems that people of bisexual orientation encounter are often associated with the biphobia expressed in society; it is not their orientation that determines happiness or mental condition (Burleson, 2005).   |
| People say they are bisexual so they can be in fashion (Burleson, 2005).  | While this may be true for some people in countries where bisexuality is trendy, it isn’t true everywhere; yet bisexuality exists in all countries (Burleson, 2005).  |
| Bisexuality is a choice (Burleson, 2005).   | A bisexual experience may be a choice if it is done to please oneself, to experiment or to feel fashionable. When bisexuality involves an emotional attraction, it isn’t controllable and isn’t a choice. No one chooses his or her sexual orientation (Burleson, 2005).  |



Such beliefs can lead to biphobia, that is, “an aversion or negative attitude toward bisexuality or toward bisexual individuals and what is associated with them” [Translation] (Groupe de travail mixte contre l’homophobie, 2007, p. 95). Biphobia, like homophobia, can sometimes have serious consequences, as we can see in Table 4. These consequences are even more pronounced for adolescents since they are already struggling with concerns specific to their age group such as fear of being judged, wanting to be popular and the search for self. Common myths about bisexual individuals are only generalities that result from a poor understanding of bisexuality. Deconstructing these myths can lead to fewer biphobic behaviours, improve understanding and increase acceptance of bisexual orientation.

Table 4 | Consequences of biphobia

|   |   |
|---|---|
| • | <b>Distress and isolation</b><br>(Conseil permanent de la jeunesse [CPJ], 2007; CJMLH, 2005); |
| • | <b>Shame and guilt</b><br>(CPJ, 2007);  |
| • | <b>Lower self-esteem</b><br>(CPJ, 2007; CJMLH, 2005);   |
| • | <b>Insults, threats and intimidation</b><br>(CPJ, 2007);                                      |
| • | <b>Risky sexual behaviours</b><br>(CJMLH, 2005);  |
| • | <b>Abusive drug and alcohol use</b><br>(CJMLH, 2005);   |
| • | <b>Depression</b><br>(CJMLH, 2005);   |
| • | <b>School dropout and suicide</b><br>(CPJ, 2007; CJMLH, 2005).                                |

# Being bi to look cool: Bisexual behaviours among teens

Over the past few years in the media, bisexual behaviours involving girls have become increasingly popular. Video clips, films, radio and TV ads, and adolescents’ behaviours all indicate that it is fashionable to adopt bisexual behaviours. But is that what being bisexual really is?

## Bisexuality and bisexual behaviours

Clarification is needed here. From the beginning, we have presented bisexuality as a sexual orientation, just like heterosexuality and homosexuality, rather than as a lifestyle. How, then, do we define people who have had one or several homosexual contacts because they wanted the experience or to please someone, or because they were under the influence of alcohol, even though they do not identify as bisexual?

It is preferable to refer to bisexual behaviours as 1) actions or gestures of a homosexual nature made by a heterosexual person who does not feel sexually or emotionally attracted to people of the same sex or 2) gestures of a heterosexual nature made by a homosexual person. Therefore, bisexual behaviours are not necessarily signs of bisexual orientation, just as bisexual orientation does not necessarily involve bisexual behaviours.

## Bisexual behaviours in the media

Today, bisexual behaviours are presented more often in the media. Whether it is in songs, TV shows, or behaviours of certain stars, the media is overflowing with examples of women who have sexual contacts with other women. This new trend began in 2003, during a performance meant to shock during the MTV Video Music Awards ceremony, when pop star Madonna kissed Britney Spears and then Christina Aguilera on the mouth. Since then, the music industry has often produced hits based on promiscuity and bisexual behaviours between women. For instance,

- *I Kissed a Girl*, by Katy Perry (Capitol Records, 2008), tells the story of a girl in a heterosexual couple who is drinking during a party; she kisses another girl out of curiosity and ends up enjoying the experience;
- *If U Seek Amy*, by Britney Spears (Jive Records, 2009), a song that tells the story of a girl who is in a bar and looking for a young woman she is obsessed with so she can buy her a drink. When listening carefully to the lyrics, we detect that the singer is saying that all boys and girls in the club want to have sex with her (the phrase “*If U Seek Amy*” spells out “*F.U.C.K. me*”);
- *Not Myself Tonight*, by Christina Aguilera (RCA Records, 2010), relates the story of a girl who doesn’t feel like herself after drinking alcohol, and kisses all the men and women on the dance floor.

In these songs, girls are partying and drinking. Two of the three songs clearly specify that having homosexual experiences is not usual for these girls. These are perfect examples of bisexual behaviours; the characters are not necessarily bisexual but all have one-off experiences out of curiosity or because the mood is right.

Some video clips feature a man surrounded by women who touch and kiss each other. Seemingly, the bi trend puts pressure on boys as well as on girls. This trend creates expectations regarding boys’ sexual preferences and capacities to have a lot of girls around them. Indeed, video clips create the illusion that boys enjoy seeing two girls kissing and that it is cool to watch such a scene.

The media also like to report on the sex lives of celebrities. Over the years, a number of female actors or singers have discussed being bisexual: Drew Barrymore, Angelina Jolie, Lisa Marie Presley and Alanis Morissette, to name a few (Diamond, 2005). This phenomenon, called “bi chic”, consists of wanting to seduce men and women by attracting attention and to pass off as glamorous (Barleycorn, 2010). Even though these stars have openly talked about their attractions to or prior relationships with women, all of them claim



that they doubt they will pursue such experiences in the future (Diamond, 2005). The media often fails to illustrate the realities of bisexual individuals; rather, focus is placed on heterosexuals who, either by choice or out of bravado, want to experiment with same-sex sexuality (Diamond, 2005). This phenomenon has been called *heteroflexibility* (Diamond, 2005) or *bicuriousity* (Burleson, 2005); it is equivalent to having a homosexual experience for a reason other than being attracted to people of the same sex. This fantasy, which used to appear mostly in pornographic material for heterosexual men, is now seen regularly in films, popular TV shows, video clips, ads and reality TV shows. In a cultural context that prizes self-exploration and open-mindedness, female characters experiment with same-sex sexuality only to, in most cases, establish they really are heterosexual (Diamond, 2005).

Thus, the media present bisexual behaviours as something accessible, common and cool. Such representations can give the impression that it is normal to have bisexual behaviours, or that having such behaviours makes you more popular; this is done without regard to a person’s psychosexual development or to the confusion this can cause. What about teens, in all this? Do they subscribe to this trend?

## Teens and the bi trend

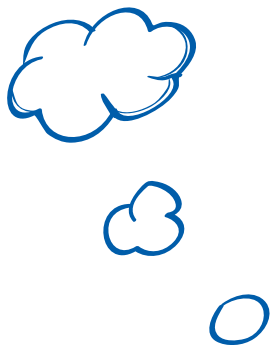
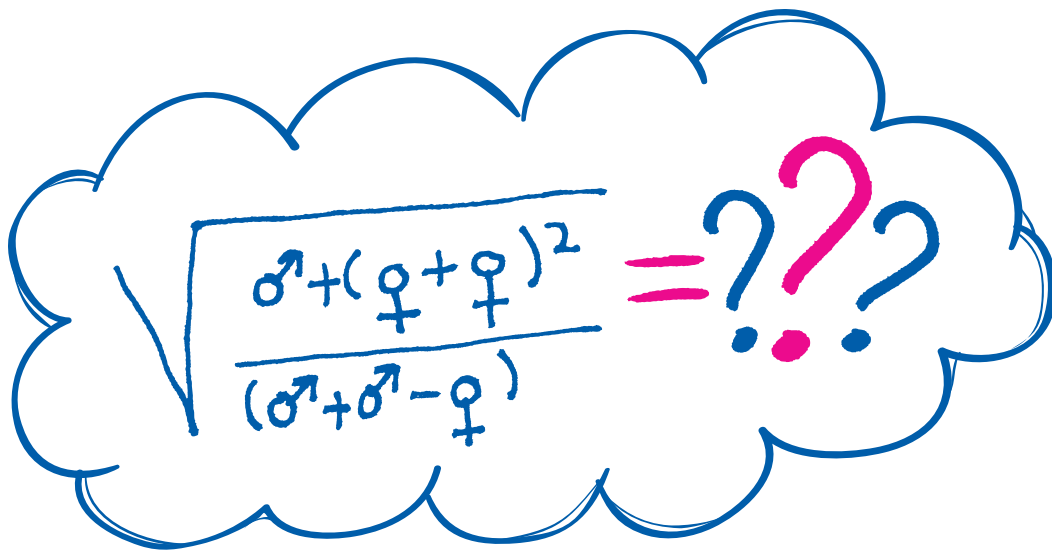
Recent studies on adolescents' behaviours show that a majority of teens are tempted by bisexual behaviours but that fewer than a quarter of them actually act on it. In a study of young Quebecers in Secondary 4 and 5, Lavoie et al. (2008) found that about 60% of teens feel like kissing someone of the same sex to excite other people around them. While 28% of young people have been encouraged to do so, 20% of girls and 3% of boys have done it at least once. Among these adolescents, 26% (25% of girls and 1% of boys) felt uncomfortable the following day. In all, 67% of youth think it is normal for adolescents to play these types of sexual games. Another Québec study, this time of Secondary 3 students, revealed that 13.8% of girls and 3.4% of boys have kissed another person of the same sex at least once, either to excite others or to attract attention (Pelletier-Dumas, 2010). Bisexual behaviours are present among young people, but only a minority of adolescents engage in them. Moreover, data show that girls are much more likely to adhere to this trend than boys: bisexual behaviours among boys are not represented as something desirable in the media.

Although trivialized in the media, bisexual behaviours can be the source of intense emotions and confusion. The consequences of adhering to the bi trend to impress peers have not been specifically studied. However, it is easy to imagine that engaging in bisexual behaviours just to please others could cause a person to feel regret or shame, as would having heterosexual relations without feeling ready to do so. Questions regarding sexual orientation could also arise if he or she feels pleasure when having such relations. For instance, a situation where two girls kiss during a party can cause them to feel very uncomfortable the next time they see each other at school. Some girls will be called “easy” by their peers or will be perceived as being very sexually available. Other young people, who have acted under the influence of drugs or alcohol, can later feel that such practices are not compatible with their values and personal limits. We should remember that adolescents are already going through a period during which they are constantly redefining and questioning themselves. They want to adhere to stereotypes and conform to social pressures while also discovering themselves and affirming their individuality, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

Fitting into a group, making friends and engaging in intimate relationships—these are all developmental requirements at adolescence. But it's also a time to forge an identity and become someone, for oneself and for others. Asserting one's independence is a major sign of reaching adult maturity. These two, seemingly contradictory realities are two aspects of growth. Indeed, the course of development indicates that socialization and individuation are intimately linked, since it is when people are in meaningful relationships with others that they assert their individuality [Translation] (Claes, 2003, p. 21).

Therefore, it is up to adolescents to decide what they want to experience and to use their critical thinking skills when dealing with external pressures to ensure that they remain true to their own values, desires and personal choices. Exploring same-sex sexual contacts will help some young people struggling with sexual orientation discover their attractions and preferences regarding intimate and sexual relations. This is why it is beneficial to heighten adolescents' awareness of the importance of making informed choices, once they can differentiate social pressures from their own preferences. Moreover, teens who are experiencing uncertainty often believe they are the only ones feeling this way since sexual orientation is rarely a topic of conversation in families. Discussing bisexuality and bisexual behaviours will help teens identify where they stand and make informed choices; they will also feel less pressured to adhere to or reject the bi trend, and be less likely to quickly interpret bisexual conduct as a sign of bisexual orientation.

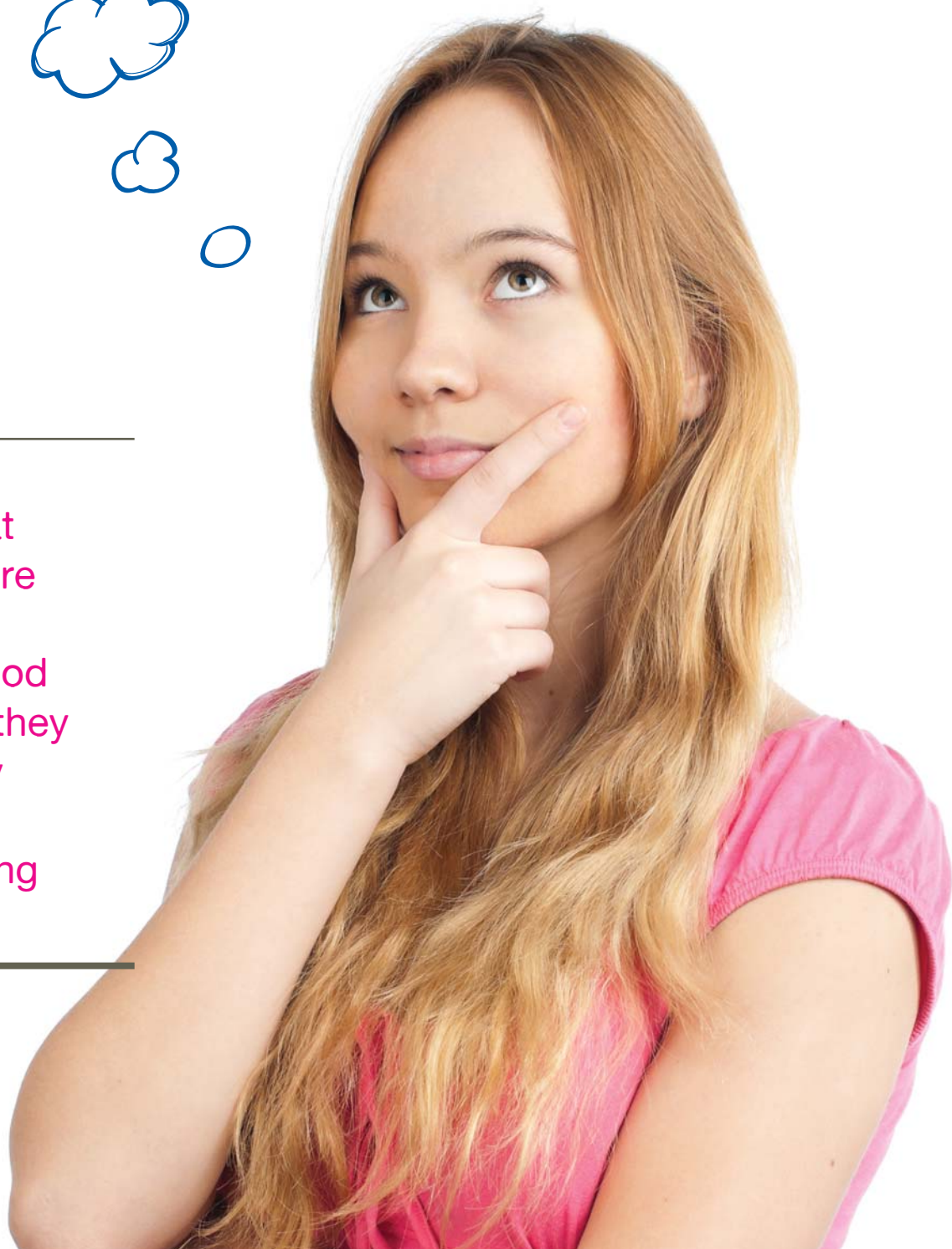




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“We should remember that adolescents are already going through a period during which they are constantly redefining and questioning themselves.”

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# LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The following learning activities concern bisexuality as a sexual orientation and the bi lifestyle. The goal of these activities is to teach young people to distinguish between bisexual behaviours and bisexual orientation, and between their actual desires and the social pressures that adolescence brings. The activities can be organized in either school or community settings. The target audience consists of adolescents aged 15 to 17 (Secondary 4 and 5).

To facilitate sex education sessions, we suggest 10 ground rules (see Table 5) which young people must follow. Students or the person who leads the sessions may add to these rules.

**Table 5 |** Ten ground rules for sex education sessions

|    |   |
|----|---|
| 1  | Be aware of, sensitive to, and respectful of others' reactions and emotions.                                  |
| 2  | Don't make coarse or judgmental comments, and don't insult others or make fun of their comments or questions. |
| 3  | Feel free to respond, or not, to a question.  |
| 4  | Try to use precise terms.   |
| 5  | Don't personalize questions or situations.  |
| 6  | Don't repeat elsewhere what other people say during the session.  |
| 7  | Keep in mind that all questions are welcome and helpful.  |
| 8  | If you need to, discuss the issue with your parents.  |
| 9  | Use the pronoun "I" when talking about your own opinions and feelings.  |
| 10 | Let the teacher or session leader know if you're dissatisfied with the session.                               |

Source : Adapted from Francine Duquet, *Sex Education in the Context of Education Reform*, 2003, p. 39-40.

## Possible associations with

the Quebec Education Program and with complementary educational services programs

### Goals of the Quebec Education Program

- Construction of identity
- Construction of a world view
- Empowerment

### Broad areas of learning

#### Health and Well-Being

Ensure that students develop a sense of responsibility for adopting good living habits with respect to health, safety, and sexuality

##### Focus of development

##### **Self-awareness and awareness of his or her basic needs**

Self-affirmation; respect for his or her physical and psychological well-being; need for recognition and fulfillment, need to express his or her emotions.

##### **Awareness of the impact of his or her choices on health and well-being**

Awareness of how behaviour and attitudes influence one's psychological and physical well-being.

### Media Literacy

Enable students to exercise critical, ethical, and aesthetic judgment with respect to the media and to produce media documents that respect individual and collective rights.

##### Focus of development

##### **Awareness of the place and influence of different media in his/her daily life and in society**

Reflection on the functions of media; search for media consumption habits; awareness of how media messages influence one's world view and everyday environment

### Cross-curricular competencies

- Use information
- Exercise critical judgment
- Use information and communications technologies
- Cooperate with others

## Complementary educational services framework

### Promotion and prevention services program

Give students an environment favorable to the development of healthy lifestyle habits and skills that will positively influence their health and well-being.

### Program offering assistance services

Help students with any difficulties they encounter.

Other associations could develop with other disciplines, other elements of the Quebec Education Program or with complementary educational services programs, depending on the expertise and interest of the individuals called upon to facilitate these activities.



# ACTIVITY

## 1

### Duration

45 minutes

### Educational goals

To understand bisexuality as a sexual orientation.

- To know the main characteristics of bisexuality.
- To be aware of the prejudices people have regarding bisexual orientation.

### Content

- Bisexuality: Myth or reality? (page 4)
- Bisexuality isn't necessarily synonymous with sexuality... (page 8)

# Bi... what? Myths and realities of bisexuality

Ideally this activity should follow a presentation explaining the idea of sexual orientation.

## Preparing the activity

Prepare a red and a green card (10 cm X 10 cm, for example) for each participant.

## Doing the activity

- 1** Present the theme of the session and, if needed, the ten ground rules for participating in a sex education session (see Table 5).
- 2** Ask the adolescents to define bisexuality. They may give definitions, keywords or synonyms, but they may not name anyone. Write all that is said on a board. If disrespectful expressions are proposed, use this opportunity to encourage the group to reflect on the repercussions of using such expressions (see step 4).
- 3** Distribute a green and a red card to each student. Read each of the statements in the section entitled *Myths and realities*, and ask the adolescents to raise the green card if they believe it is true or the red card if they believe it is false. Then tell them whether the statement is true or false and give a short explanation.
- 4** Ask the students if any of the words written on the board should be erased because they fuel myths or prejudices. This exercise allows students to go back and discuss any coarse expressions that might have been proposed (see step 2). Such expressions are good indicators of ignorance about bisexuality and homosexual orientation, and provoke disdain. Things that deviate from the norm are often disturbing to people and are the object of ridicule. Next, ask the students if any words could be added that might help explain and improve understanding of the phenomenon of bisexuality.

---

**5** Taking into account what is written on the board, summarize the session by reviewing, with the students' help, the terms that can lead to a definition of bisexuality. This definition should include the following elements:

- Attraction to persons of both sexes
- The affective (love) or sexual (desires, fantasies) character of the relationship
- The fact that bisexuality isn't a choice

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**6** (Optional)  
Give a brief account of bisexuality according to the Kinsey and Klein scales (see the subsection "Bisexuality: A continuum").

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**7** End the activity by asking students what they have learned in the session and by telling them about other upcoming sessions, if any are planned.

---

## Myths and realities

|    |   |
|----|---|
| 1  | <b>Only girls can be bisexual.</b><br><b>False.</b> Boys can also be bisexual in orientation.   |
| 2  | <b>You can choose to be bisexual.</b><br><b>False.</b> Just as one doesn't choose to be homosexual or heterosexual, one doesn't choose to be attracted to people of both sexes.   |
| 3  | <b>Bisexuality is a phase you have to go through before becoming gay or lesbian.</b><br><b>False.</b> Though some people may call themselves bisexuals when they are questioning their sexual orientation, most bisexuals don't change sexual orientation during the course of their lives. |
| 4  | <b>If you have kissed someone of the same sex, you're automatically bisexual.</b><br><b>False.</b> Being bisexual isn't a question of what you do, but of what you feel.  |
| 5  | <b>People call themselves bisexual just to be in fashion.</b><br><b>True and false.</b> This is a growing trend among young girls, but not all those who call themselves bisexuals do so just to be trendy.   |
| 6  | <b>About 12% of the population is bisexual in orientation.</b><br><b>True.</b> Studies show that between 1.3% and 25% of the population are bisexual in orientation.  |
| 7  | <b>Bisexuals are people who have lots of partners.</b><br><b>False.</b> Bisexuals can fall in love just like homosexuals and heterosexuals, and only have sex with the person they love and desire. It's not just a question of sexual attraction.  |
| 8  | <b>You can call yourself bisexual even if you've never had sexual relations with a person of your own sex.</b><br><b>True.</b> Sexual orientation isn't just a question of what you do; it also involves your feelings, sexual desires, and fantasies.                                      |
| 9  | <b>A bisexual is someone who would like to be involved in threesomes.</b><br><b>False.</b> Bisexuals don't necessarily feel the need to have relations with men and women at the same time. To be bisexual simply means that you can fall in love with someone of either sex.               |
| 10 | <b>Bisexuals can be victims of discrimination because of their orientation.</b><br><b>True.</b> Bisexuals can be discriminated against just because of their sexual orientation. Discrimination often arises from lack of information or misunderstandings about the bisexual way of life.  |

# ACTIVITY 2

## Duration

45 minutes

## Educational goals

Become aware of the influence of the media on perceptions of the bisexual orientation.

- Distinguish bisexual orientation from bisexual behaviour.
- Become aware of the pressure on adolescents exerted by the media (and ultimately, by their peers) to follow the bi trend.

## Content

- Bisexuality isn't necessarily synonymous with sexuality... (page 8)
- Being bi to look cool: Bisexual behaviours among teens (page 12)

# Between image and reality: Bisexual behaviours in the media

## Doing the activity

- 1** Outline the theme to be addressed and, if needed, the ten ground rules for a sex education session.
- 2** Review the main points of Activity 1, on the discussion about the definition of bisexuality. Write this definition on the board.
- 3** Explain the differences between bisexual orientation and bisexual behaviours (see the subsection entitled "Bisexuality and bisexual behaviours"). Make connections between various aspects of the definition of bisexuality; for example, those who adopt bisexual behaviours often don't feel affection for others of the same sex.
- 4** Point out to the adolescents that bisexual behaviours between women are often represented in media such as films, video clips, ads, popular shows, and reality TV shows. As needed, use the example of Madonna kissing Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera during the 2003 MTV Video Music Awards ceremony (which greatly enhanced the careers of all three women).
- 5** Get the adolescents to form four-person teams and to compile examples of bisexual behaviours they have seen or heard in media such as video clips, songs, reality TV shows, magazines, ads and films (with the exception of pornographic films, in which scenes depicting such behaviour are very common). Make sure that the teams pick a variety of examples. The teens should discuss how bisexual behaviour is represented in each example they have chosen, using the questions in the box on the following page.
- 6** Next, ask a representative from each team to present to the others the examples of bisexual behaviours his or her team has chosen, and their analysis of these examples.



- 
- 7** Make a brief statement about representations of bisexual conduct in the media (see the subsection entitled “Bisexual behaviours in the media”).
- 
- 8** Summarize the session by reviewing the points raised during the discussion. Stress the fact that, in general, bisexual actions are presented in the media as being doable, common, and cool. These representations can give the impression that bisexual behaviour is normal or is a way to become more popular, but without any concern for the psychosexual development of the characters portrayed or the audience, or for the confusion that might be created in the minds of some audience members.
- 
- 9** Wrap things up by asking the teens what they have learned in the session and by presenting the third session, if one is planned.
- 



### Suggested questions (for point 5)

- 
1. What constitutes behaviour that can be associated with bisexuality?
  2. In your opinion, what is the point of making such an association?
  3. What does bisexual behaviour add to a media product? Is this behaviour relevant to the product's message?
  4. How do men and women differ in this representation of bisexuality?
  5. What is the message for women?
  6. What is the message for men?
  7. Could adolescents targeted by these media products be influenced by the behaviour in question? If yes, how? If no, why not?
  8. Do you think this representation is realistic?
-

# ACTIVITY

## 3

### Duration

45 minutes

### Educational goals

Make adolescents aware of the implications of engaging in bisexual behaviours.

- Make known what's at stake in situations involving bisexual behaviours.
- Promote self-respect in all situations in which there is social pressure to adopt bisexual behaviours.

### Contenu

- Being bi to look cool: Bisexual behaviours among teens (page 12)

# Bisexuality and Popularity

## Doing the activity

- 1 Present the theme of the session and, if needed, the ten ground rules for participating in a sex education session (see Table 5).

- 2 Read the following scenario.

### SCENARIO

Laura is going to party with friends next Saturday evening. At the last party she went to, some girls (including two of her “hot” friends) kissed each other to impress the boys. Since then, her friends have told her she should try it next time. Laura doesn’t want to, but she also doesn’t want her friends to think she isn’t cool. The pressure makes her feel awkward and uncomfortable. One of her friends, a girl, told her that they should kiss just for fun.... What should Laura do?

- 3 Using the questions in the box on the following page, lead a discussion on the scenario. Bring up the question of the stakes involved in bisexual behaviours. These include fear of judgment, doubt and uncertainty, the desire to be popular, regret, questions about one’s sexual orientation, and feeling uneasy in the relationship with the other person involved. Discuss the issues associated with social pressure—being cool and part of the gang versus respecting your values and desires—and compare these to the exploration of new sexual behaviours. Emphasize the importance of self-respect in making decisions.

- 4 Summarize what the students have said about the issues involved in, and possible consequences of, following the bi trend.

- 5 Add the following ideas. Even if Laura or one of her female friends were lesbian or bisexual, this would not justify her engaging in sexual acts in public. Preserving intimacy is important. This is true for heterosexual adolescents as well. One can agree that it’s okay for friends to do silly things together for fun, but to give into pressure and engage in such practices in public, just to get a lot of attention or to be provocative, is quite another thing and may have consequences.

- 6 Wrap up by asking the adolescents what they have learned from the session. Stress the importance of self-respect and of respect for intimacy in all situations that involve sexual behaviours.

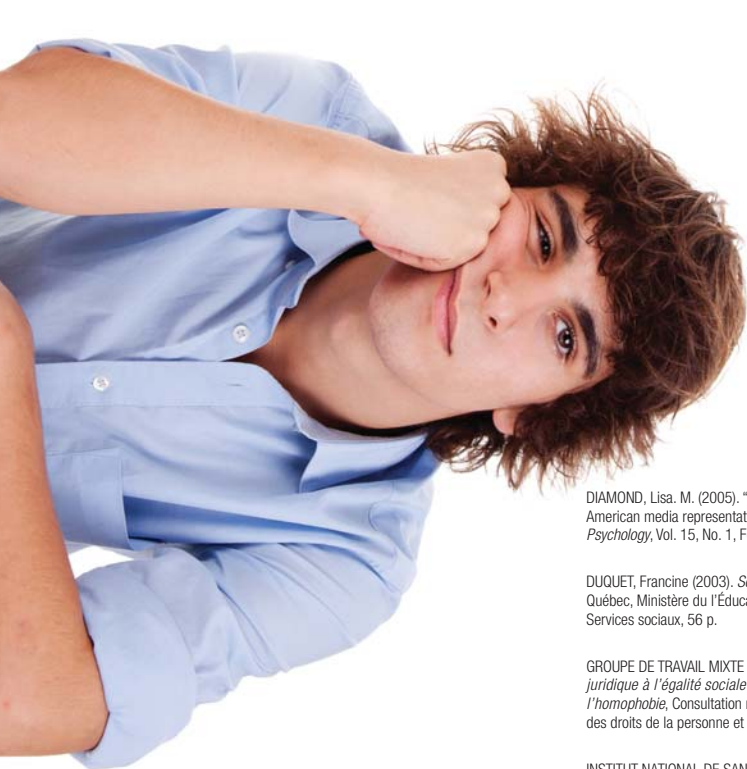


### Suggested questions (for point 3)

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1. What do you think of the situation?
  2. What do you think of the reactions of Laura's friends?
  3. In your opinion, what could motivate someone to participate in this kind of "game"?
  4. Are there contexts that would encourage adolescents to participate or not to participate? If yes, what are they?
  5. What are the possible positive and negative consequences for Laura of participating, or of not participating?
  6. How might her participation be seen by others? Is such behaviour frequent? If yes, how do you explain it?
  7. How important is it for adolescents your age to be seen as being hot or cool? How can you resist the pressure from friends or other adolescents who tell you something would be fun or funny?
  8. Do you feel that being bi is trendy? If so, what are the possible consequences of this trend?
  9. In light of what has been said in previous sessions, would this situation be linked to bisexuality? Why?
-





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