

Bi+ Inclusive Language Guide

Language revolving around lgbtqia+ and bi+ can be unintentionally exclusive, old-fashioned or affirm stereotypes. This Bi+ Inclusive Language Guide is intended for organizations, professionals, volunteers and other interested parties who are engaged in lgbtqia+ empowerment, diversity, and inclusion. Bi+ inclusive language is also relevant for journalists and influencers who write and speak about sex, gender and sexual diversity.

Topics covered include:

- Terms relating to bi+ and bisexuality
- Language that does not assume the monosexual norm
- Bi+ inclusive language about lgbtqia+ individuals and communities
- Appropriate use of sexual identity labels
- Language with an inclusive view on diversity, inclusion, and equality

Want to know more about bi+?

- Read the 10 tips for bi+ inclusion for professionals and volunteers
- Read the [Guide inclusion of bi+ people at work](#)
- Visit the [website of Bi+ Nederland](#) or get in touch [via e-mail](#)



What is bi+?

About 1 million people in the Netherlands have a bi+ orientation. Bi+ is an umbrella term for all people who are not monosexual, i.e. whose sexual attraction is focused on more than one gender.

There is much diversity in how bi+ people can experience sexual attraction and romantic attraction, with whom they have sex and form relationships, and how they choose to shape a relationship. For many people who fall under the umbrella, bi+ is not a label or an identification. A person may fall under the bi+ umbrella because that person is attracted to people of more than one gender, and refer to themselves as bi, pan, queer and/or fluid. Similarly, they may opt to not use a label at all. Some people with a bi+ orientation do not dare, want or cannot be open about their orientation, thus label themselves as straight, gay or lesbian, both to others and themselves. Or, they may have been in a relationship with the same partner for years and end up identifying themselves more as gay/lesbian or straight.

So, bi+ is a broader and more inclusive term than bisexuality. The bi+ umbrella encompasses all non-monosexual orientations and identities. A person's feelings, behavior and sexual identity need not be related. Moreover, many bi+ people's experiences across these three dimensions may change over time.

Descriptions of several labels

Bi or bisexual: people who are attracted to more than one gender, or are specifically attracted to men and women.

Pan or pansexual: people who are attracted to people, regardless of gender or sex.

Sexually fluid: people whose sexual orientation may vary over time and for whom these changes are a given.

Queer: people who do not conform to fixed (binary) frameworks and boxes for gender and sexual identity, or explicitly reject them.

Note: How people apply these labels to themselves may differ from this general description.

Bi+ and bisexuality

There are multiple spellings in circulation for bi+ and bisexuality. The left side of this table lists some incorrect language and spellings related to bi+ and bisexuality, the right column contains the correct language and wording.

Do use	Don't use
bi-sexuality	bisexuality. No hyphen is used, same as with homosexuality.
biplus	bi+. The exception is the use of "plus" in website names.
bisexuality+	It is either bi+ or bisexuality, not a combination of the two words.
using bi+ and bisexuality interchangeably	These phrases are not synonyms. Bi+ includes anyone with a sexual orientation

	directed towards more than one gender. Bi+ is thus a broader and more inclusive term than bisexuality.
Bisexuals	bi+ people or bisexual people. A person's sexual orientation is a trait and not a generic name. Not everyone experiences it as an identity. The general rule is to use it as an adjective, not a noun. Nevertheless, it is important to follow individual people in how they want to be addressed. If someone refers to themselves as a bisexual, follow their example. But in discussing groups, it is better to avoid those nouns.
Bi+, Bi	bi+ and bi, like bisexual, are written with a lowercase letter, except for the organization name Bi+ Nederland, or at the beginning of a sentence.
Bi+ Nederland	Bi+ Nederland, with a lowercase i. Bi+ is not an abbreviation, so write the i with a lowercase letter.
Bi+ (when referring to the organization)	Bi+ Nederland, or in case of little text space Bi+ NL.

Monosexual norm

Bi+ people experience many problems with the monosexual norm, which is the expectation that everyone is attracted to only one gender. This norm is oppressive and misrepresents bi+ people as it often places people in binary boxes, both in terms of sexual identity and gender. In our society, the monosexual norm strongly prevails, as people are often assumed to be straight or otherwise lesbian or gay.

Sexual orientations that fall outside the monosexual norm, such as bi+, are then not seen as genuine, serious, and stable. As a result of the monosexual norm, bi+ people often suffer from (figurative) invisibility, prejudice and stereotyping, intrusive behavior from others, and internalizing negative beliefs about bi+. Within lgbtqia+ communities (lesbian, gay, bi+, transgender, intersex, asexual and all other sexual and gender minorities)¹ this still occurs on a regular basis.

Just like the existence of heteronormative language, there can also be mononormative language. Mononormative questions and formulations similarly exclude bi+ people and orientations.

¹ The “+” in lgbtqia+ does not refer to bi+ but to all other sexual and gender minorities.

A question such as “What or who is your partner?” makes several assumptions, after which the person asked has to assess what the person asking the question means exactly and how open-minded they may be.

Possible assumptions made can be:

- that someone has a partner (the norm of having a relationship);
- that someone has one partner (the norm of being monogamous);
- who counts as a partner, and do you both follow the same definition? Do casual relationships count? Or friends with benefits, etc.?

This inadvertently presents people - and not just bi+ people - with the dilemma of giving either an honest or an expected answer.

Recommended

- When discussing heteronormativity, or the norm of heterosexuality, consider whether mononormativity is also relevant.
- Whenever possible, which is almost always, ask about relationship partners in a gender-free way

Do use	Don't use
'whether you are gay or straight'	Regardless of your sexual orientation, regardless of who you are attracted to/fall for/love
Straight and gay; heterosexuality and homosexuality	straight, gay and bi+; heterosexuality, homosexuality and bi+; sexual diversity.
When parenting or giving sex education (at school), saying that you can be attracted to boys or girls.	This is incomplete for several reasons. People can fall for both men and women, or more than just men and women. Some people are rarely attracted to others and are aromantic and/or asexual.
Boyfriend/girlfriend or husband/wife	Partner/relationship, partner(s)/relationship(s)
Are you attracted to women or men?	This is binary and monosexual. Who are you attracted to?
What kind of partner do you have?	Be mindful of the contexts in which this question is appropriate and/or relevant. For example, it can be relevant in certain research studies and counseling situations. However, keep in mind that this question may be difficult to answer for bi+ people, among others (see the text above this table).

Lgbtqia+ people and communities

Equating homosexuality with lgbtqia+ or with all sexual and gender “minority” groups effectively fails to recognize bi+ as a distinct and valid sexual orientation. As a result, bi+ is not taken seriously and instead made and kept invisible. This is called bi+ erasure. Bi+ people have unique experiences and feelings which cannot be equated with the experiences and feelings of gay and lesbian people.

In lgbtqia+ communities, bi+ people can have difficulty finding connections because erasure of non-monosexual orientations occurs regularly there as well. This can happen due to bi+ related prejudice or believing that bi+ people are not lgbtqia+ “enough”.

Advice

- Recognize bi+ as a distinct and valid sexual orientation in lgbtqia+ communities.
- Do not use lgbtqia+ and homosexuality interchangeably. Mention the specific group(s) that the content refers to.
- Continue to clearly mention gender, sex, and sexual diversities and write out the letters of the groups that abbreviations stand for.

Do use	Don't use
Gay emancipation	lgbtqia+ emancipation
Gay pride	Pride
Pink	Rainbow. Pink can be associated with only gay men. Rainbow appeals to more people who fall under the lgbtqia+ umbrella.
the lgbtqia+ community	lgbtqia+ communities. To give recognition to the different groups within the lgbtqia+ umbrella, use communities (as it is not a single community).
lgb (lesbian, gay, bi)	This is not inclusive of anyone under the bi+ umbrella who does not identify with the label bi. A better umbrella term for anyone who is not straight is lgb+.
lgbt (lesbian, gay and transgender)	A letter is often forgotten in the explanation. The current commonly used abbreviations are lgbt+ or lgbtqia+, which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and all other sexual and gender minorities. Currently, the “b” in the abbreviation is increasingly described as bi+ instead of bisexual to be more inclusive.
Using lgbt, lgbtqia+ or sexual diversity while in practice it only refers to homosexuality.	For example, “LGBT+ emancipation ... acceptance of homosexuality” When referring to homosexuality, it is better to clearly address it that way. Only speak about lgbt+, lgbtqia+ and sexual diversity if it

	is relevant to all groups within said abbreviation.
IDAHO (International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia)	'May 17,' the day against lgbtqia+ phobia (formerly known as IDAHOBIT)

Labels

The use of sexual identity labels such as straight, lesbian and gay in situations involving sex, partners, relationships, marriage and parents is rarely bi+ inclusive. An assumption is made about sexual identities based on the genders of people and their partners when these identities are usually unknown. When two women have a child, you cannot assume it's lesbian parenthood, as one or both parents may be bi+. By calling this lesbian parenthood, you link a sexual identity to a situation when in fact only information about their gender(s) is known. As a result, bi+ people are disrespected, excluded, and remain invisible.

Advice

- Only link a sexual identity to something or someone when discussing sexual identities, otherwise don't.
- Describe the gender(s) of those involved in the situation only when relevant, and without connecting a sexual identity to it.
- Keep in mind that a person's feelings, behavior and sexual identity/self-identity need not be related. Moreover, many bi+ people's experiences across these three dimensions may change over time.

Do use	Don't use
Gay marriage	Marriage (marriage was opened in the Netherlands in 2001). Only talk about partners' genders when it's relevant, but do not link sexual identity to this.
Straight and gay; heterosexuality and homosexuality	Rainbow scene. Not everyone under the lgbtqia+ umbrella feels addressed by the term gay.
Lesbian/gay sex	Sex, sex between women/men
Lesbian parenthood	Two parents, two mothers, non-heterosexual mothers/parents, rainbow parents
Mother and father	Parents

Inclusive vision

The words *acceptance* and *tolerance* denote a skewed power dynamic that is naturally kept and upheld. With “acceptance,” it is automatically expected that it is cisgender straight people who do the accepting and tolerating of lgbtqia+ people. Through this, cisgender heterosexual/straight (cishet) people remain the norm. When using the terms acceptance and tolerance, inequality remains intact. There are cases where acceptance is the highest achievable goal, but we ultimately strive for full inclusion and equality.

Another important aspect of an inclusive vision focuses on “normal” versus “different”. It may seem positive to continue stretching the definition of who is considered “normal”, but who decides what is normal and therefore the norm? There will always be people who do not want to or cannot conform to what is considered “normal”. Instead it is better to focus on valuing differences, take diversity as the norm and strive for inclusion and emancipation of all. Accordingly, a bi+ orientation no longer needs to be normalized or “considered normal”.

Do use	Don't use
acceptance/tolerance	inclusion/emancipation
gay acceptance	lgbtqia+ inclusion. Usually when using gay in this context, lgbtqia+ is meant. Inclusion goes beyond acceptance.
normalizing, as in “bi is normal”	Taking diversity as the central norm, so that everyone regardless of sexual orientation is seen and treated as equal.

