

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Guidelines for researching and writing about bisexuality

Journal Item

How to cite:

Barker, Meg; Yockney, Jen; Richards, Christina; Jones, Rebecca; Bowes-Catton, Helen and Plowman, Tracey (2012). Guidelines for researching and writing about bisexuality. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 12(3) pp. 376–392.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2012 Taylor Francis Group, LLC

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:
<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/15299716.2012.702618>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

Guidelines for Researching and Writing about Bisexuality

Meg Barker¹, Jen Yockney², Christina Richards³, Rebecca Jones⁴, Helen Bowes-Catton⁵
and Tracey Plowman⁶ (of BiUK and Bi Community News)

Corresponding Author

Meg Barker, Psychology in Social Sciences, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA. Email: m.j.barker@open.ac.uk

Keywords

Research, guidelines, bisexuality, participants, accountability, ethics.

Running Head

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

1 The Open University, UK.

2 Bi Community News, UK.

3 West London Mental Health NHS Trust, UK.

4 The Open University, UK.

5 The Open University, UK.

6 Independent Scholar, UK.

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

Abstract

We are a group of researchers and writers who work on bisexuality, organise bisexual research conferences, and take part in discussions on many bisexual and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) academic forums. We have noticed, over the years, many problematic tendencies in research that focuses on, or includes, bisexuals. We therefore felt that it would be useful to come up with a list of “good practice” guidelines for people researching and writing in this area. These should be particularly useful to those new to the area when they send out their calls for participants, to avoid alienating those participants or finding themselves 'reinventing the wheel' with their studies. Hopefully the guidelines will also be helpful for experienced researchers to reflect on their research practices.

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

Introduction

In this paper it is our intention to put forward a brief list of good practice guidelines for researchers to follow when conducting, and reporting, studies of bisexuality or studies which include bisexual people (such as broader studies on lesbian, gay and bisexual experience, men who have sex with men, women who have sex with women, sexual fluidity, or queer experience).

Over the past decade we have worked as peer reviewers, conference organisers, and supervisors of research on bisexuality. This culminated in the first international bisexual research conference (BiReCon) which took place in 2010 (Barker, Richards, Jones, & Monro, 2011). In addition to this we have been involved in our own research studies on bisexuality (e.g. Barker, Bowes-Catton, Iantaffi, Cassidy, & Brewer, 2008; Bowes-Catton, Barker, & Richards, 2011; Jones, 2010; Jones, 2011). We also moderate online lists and discussion groups where researchers frequently post calls for participants for their research, or ask questions about how they should best go about studying aspects of bisexuality (e.g. academic bi, 2011; bi researchers, 2011; Radical BPQ group, 2011; UK bi activism, 2011). Several of us have also had activist and facilitating roles in the wider bisexual and LGBT communities (e.g. Roberts & Yockney, 2003; Barker & Yockney, 2004). In all of these roles we have noticed a number of problematic assumptions, errors, and unhelpful language which people frequently use when researching and writing on bisexuality. We have also reflexively interrogated our own research and writing processes and practices around these issues.

There already exists a very helpful list of suggested rules for cisgender⁷ people who are

⁷ Those who have remained in the gender that they were assigned at birth.

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

researching and writing about trans issues and experiences (Hale, 2009). Our intention likewise was to come up with a simple and accessible list that bisexuality researchers could attempt to follow in their studies and writings. Indeed, some of our suggestions are adapted directly from Hale's list, due to the similarities between the positions of trans and bisexual issues in LGBTQ studies. For example, both are recent additions to the acronym, and both occupy rather a problematic place in LGBTQ politics due to troubling some of the ways in which lesbians and gay men have fought for their rights on the basis of dichotomies of sexuality and gender (see Barker, Richards, & Bowes-Catton, 2009).

Whilst Hale's list is explicitly aimed at cisgender people, our list is aimed at those researchers and writers who themselves are bisexual-identified, as well as those who are not (and who are positioned outside of bisexual communities). Although it is likely that researchers and writers who are not bisexual may be more prone to making errors and problematic assumptions about bisexuality, it is also the case that being a member of the category that we are researching does not exempt us from making assumptions and mistakes ourselves (Barker, Richards, & Bowes-Catton, forthcoming 2012). For example, there is a common tendency to assume that all experiences will mirror our own, or to search for data that support the identities or communities that we are most familiar with. Vitaly, the intersections which exist between sexuality and other aspects of identity (gender, race, religion, culture, class, age, ability, etc.) mean that we need to tread very carefully when we share one or more characteristics with those we are researching or writing about (in this case bisexuality) – but, inevitably, not others that will greatly colour the ways in which bisexuality is understood or experienced.

Like Hale (2009), we wanted to limit our guidelines to a brief, simple checklist that

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

researchers could quickly work through when planning, carrying out and reporting their research. Perhaps the list could be made widely available online, adapted for different cultural contexts, and developed with further information being made available on each point for those who want to know more, in a way which would not be off-putting to those looking for a quick list of points to check through.

In the rest of this paper we will first highlight some of the key issues that arise when people ask about, plan, conduct, or publish research on bisexuality. We will then put forward our guidelines based upon our own awareness and understanding of these issues. Finally we will conclude with an invitation for others to engage with us further and to develop these ideas in their own work.

The intent of this paper is to make some suggestions about how best to further effective research into bisexuality, rather than to issue a set of didactic injunctions, and we hope that our readers will approach these guidelines in this spirit (see Richards, 2011). These guidelines, and the perspectives of the authors, will inevitably develop as ideas around sexuality evolve, and we welcome engagement and dialogue on these issues.

Key Issues

Here we outline the main issues that we wanted to address in the guidelines: questions and problems which come up regularly when bisexual communities and individuals are the topic of research. The aim in this section is not to name or shame specific authors or researchers. We are attempting to put together something positive in relation to future bisexuality research, rather than producing another critical study of research that has already been conducted (of which there have been several helpful overviews published in

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

this, and other, journals). Many of these points will already, we hope, be familiar to readers of this journal. However, they have not previously been brought together in a way that highlights all of the common pitfalls of writing and research relating to bisexuality.

Of course many of the issues covered here are matters of good practice for all writing and research on LGBTQ people, or on marginalised groups more generally. However, we have endeavoured to highlight the points that are key when it comes to bisexual people and communities specifically.

In the sections that follow, numbers in boldface link to specific items in the list of recommendations.

Bi invisibility

Perhaps the most important issue when it comes to bisexuality writing and research is the historical erasure, invisibility or silencing of bisexual identities and experiences (Hutchins, 2005; Ulrich, 2011) [**2**]. Arguably the most common form of this is the extensive research literature that searches for explanations of homosexuality per se, assuming that this is the only possible alternative to heterosexuality (see Barker & Langdrige, 2008). The thinking behind such research is that sexuality is dichotomous: that people are either attracted to people of the 'same', or the 'other' gender (Rust, 2000; Eisner, 2011). Much of the research investigating genetic, hormonal and brain differences specifically is based on a dichotomous framework that 'erases bisexuality as an epistemological category' (Petford, 2003, p. 7). Such research is commonly perpetuated in mainstream psychology and sexuality textbooks (Barker, 2007), despite the existence of bisexuality, and of many theoretical perspectives which view sexuality as diverse or on some form of continuum

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

(e.g. Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Klein, 1993; Diamond, 2009). Notwithstanding the problems of assuming that gender is dichotomous, or that 'homosexuality' requires explaining in a way that 'heterosexuality' does not (Rochlin, 2003) [3], such research erases bisexuality in assuming that there are only two forms of human sexuality.

Related to this, there is research and writing which, rather than ignoring the existence of bisexuality, explicitly or implicitly sets out to demonstrate that bisexuality does not exist or is very rare, and/or that sexuality is dichotomous [2]. Given the vast amount of literature which now exists on bisexual experience, behaviour, identity and community it should no longer to be acceptable to deny the existence of bisexuality in this manner. Researchers would do well to be mindful of Tavis' (1993) summary of research into gay/straight differences. She summarises that studies on brain differences are small and inconclusive, that the meanings of terms keep changing, that there is far more evidence of similarity than there is of difference, that physiological differences do not prove innateness, and 'there are many sexualities which do not divide up neatly into heterosexuality and homosexuality' (pp. 157-158).

Finally in terms of bisexual invisibility, it is very common for work across many topics to amalgamate bisexuals with other groups when there are bisexuals included in the research they are drawing on [1]. For example, in studies that make comparisons between heterosexual and lesbian/gay groups, bisexuals are sometimes combined in with lesbian participants (if they are women) or gay male participants (if they are men), and sometimes with heterosexual participants. Other times they are excluded from the data entirely (Tavis, 1993; Garber, 1995). It is also problematic to conduct research on LGB, or LGBT people as a group without recognising the differences among these different categories.

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

For example, it is common for LGB research to speak of common experiences of homophobia, rather than recognising the specific experience of biphobia -- which is often different from homophobia in that it includes specific stereotypes of bisexuals (for example, as greedy or promiscuous), scepticism about the reality and consistency of bi experience, and double discrimination from both heterosexual and lesbian/gay communities (Ochs, 1996).

In more theoretical writing on LGBT and queer matters, authors such as Fox (1996) and Angelides (2001) argue that bisexuality is not allowed to exist in the present tense (Petford, 2003): it is either seen as belonging to the past as part of a stage towards mono-sexual maturity (e.g. by psychoanalysis) or as part of a utopian future when there will be no need to label sexualities (e.g. by queer theory) [2].

The erasure of bisexuality as a category in research may well contribute to the societal prejudice and discrimination experienced by many bisexuals and the myth that bisexuality is always 'a phase' en route to a mature heterosexual or gay/lesbian identity (see Barker et al., 2008). Bisexual invisibility has been strongly linked to the levels of distress in this group (Jorm, Korten, Rodgers, Jacomb, & Christensen, 2002), and should therefore be carefully avoided by researchers [8].

Multiplicity/multiple discourses

A common problem in research specifically on bisexuals (as with many other sexualities) is the problem of universalising. In quantitative research this involves assuming that the findings of the current study apply to all bisexual people across the globe. In qualitative research it involves assuming that the accounts or discourses that have been elicited in

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

the specific study are those of bisexuals, or bisexual communities, more broadly (see Barker, Richards, & Bowes-Catton, forthcoming 2012) [5,6].

In qualitative research on bisexuality (and other related identities and practices) there has particularly been a tendency for writing to polarise into celebratory work which suggests either (1) that all bisexuality is radical and queer for challenging dichotomies of sexuality and gender [6], and (2) critical work that suggests that bisexuality is not quite so radical because bisexuals still often talk about attractions to men and to women (reinforcing the gender dichotomy) (Bowes-Catton, Barker, & Richards, 2011) [5]. Such research has recently been criticised for ignoring the context in which research takes place, which may well influence the elicited responses (for example, people may talk about 'men' and 'women' to a researcher who, they assume, is not familiar with more complex ways of conceptualising gender). It has also been questioned for its focus on language-based data which may not fully represent the lived experiences of bisexuals because it imposes certain limitations on what can be expressed, and for assuming that the talk of certain small groups of bisexual-identified people is representative of all bisexuals (see Barker, Richards, & Bowes-Catton, forthcoming 2012) [11].

Particularly important here is the issue of intersectionality. Research on bisexual people of different genders, races, cultures, classes, religions, ages, generations, abilities, geographic locations, and body forms (amongst many other differences) tends to find a diversity of understandings of attraction to more than one gender (which may or may not include the use of terms that can be translated as 'bisexual'). They also find diversities of experiences of all kinds including the societal messages people received, the relationships they form, their sexual practices, and much more (see the collection of bisexual research

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

in Fox, 2004) [6, 12].

Reflexivity

Related to all of the previous points is the issue of reflexivity in research on bisexuality. Reflexivity is often emphasised as a vital part of the qualitative research process (Etherington, 2004; Finlay & Gough, 2003), but we would argue that it is important for both quantitative and qualitative researchers, at least with a topic as personally relevant to researchers themselves, as politically charged, and with as much potential for impact on people's lives, as bisexuality (c.f. Richards, 2011) [10,11].

Reflexivity is the recognition of the assumptions, beliefs, opinions and values that researchers and writers themselves bring to their research and writing. It involves acknowledging the impact that these are likely to have on the research, and attempting to ameliorate this, to some extent, through as much openness as possible about such assumptions and through the willingness to be challenged and disputed [9]. Quantitative researchers often believe that reflexivity is not necessary because of all of the controls put in place to ensure the objectivity of research (e.g. anonymisation of questionnaires, double-blind procedures in lab experiments, etc.). However, researcher assumptions can still impact on the framing of the question, for example, or the interpretation of any results. This can be seen in the kind of work, previously mentioned, which assumes that sexuality is dichotomous (so asking about differences between gay and straight people makes sense), or in research that concludes that men who become aroused by watching two men being sexual together are gay, and men who become aroused by watching two women together are straight (but does not assume, in an equivalent manner, that straight women are generally aroused by watching two men together) [10].

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

Qualitative approaches do not, in themselves, prevent researchers from making biased assumptions. As we mentioned previously, qualitative researchers and writers on bisexuality have been particularly prone to polarised views impacting on their research and writing (either interpreting their data in entirely celebratory, or entirely critical, ways). Also, as previously mentioned, both researchers and writers who are bisexual themselves, and those who are not, are likely to make assumptions based on their values and beliefs and those of the culture around them (which they can never completely step outside of). Bisexual researchers might be particularly prone to celebratory interpretations of data, and to emphasising accounts which match their own, whilst non-bisexual researchers might be more prone to critical interpretations (particularly if they are, themselves, somewhat threatened by the possibility of bisexuality) and to emphasising accounts which problematise bisexuality in some way [15].

Thus it behoves all researchers and writers, whatever their philosophical stance, methodological approach, or personal identity, to engage reflexively prior to writing or researching on bisexuality: asking themselves what their opinions of bisexuality are, what they expect to find, how any participants are likely to view them, and how their assumptions and experiences might shape the questions that they ask and the conclusions that they draw [10, 14].

Accountability

A final key issue is that of accountability [8, 14]. Much past work on bisexuality has been focused on the questions that interest researchers or writers themselves (and often their funding bodies) and has thus been driven by a top-down, rather than bottom-up,

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

perspective. Dangers of such work include the risk that they may unwittingly reinvent the wheel, asking questions that have already been asked many times before, thus potentially burning out and alienating people from the communities who are continually asked to be involved in such research (Hagger-Johnson, McManus, Hutchison, & Barker, 2006). Also, writers and researchers with such a top-down approach often miss issues which are of key importance to bisexual people themselves, and frequently do not take the time to disseminate their work in ways which may be helpful and accessible to those whom it is about [4,7,9].

It is particularly important when working with sexual communities that have been erased and stigmatized previously, as the bisexual community has, to ensure that research is participatory and accountable (Hagger-Johnson, Barker, Richards, & Hegarty, forthcoming 2012) [8,13]. In an ideal world, this would take the form of including the relevant communities themselves at all levels of the research. This would include everything from formulating the question, to designing the research, through contacting participants, analysing the data and writing up the work for multiple audiences (academics, community members, and policy-makers and practitioners) [7,9].

As an example of this kind of accountability, BiUK itself aims to follow such guidelines. The group emerged from the immersion of writers and researchers in the UK bi community itself, and from their observations about key issues of importance. The group began by setting up an e-mail discussion group for bi research, bringing together people with shared research interests and producing a series of research studies. Crucially, the work was designed to engage directly with the bi community by conducting research at formal UK events (such as the annual BiCon and BiFest events) including large surveys and a

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

number of qualitative studies, as well as examinations of the bi activist literature (Bowes-Catton, 2007). Such research was embedded in practices which were already taking place within the UK bisexual community, both in terms of the topics under investigation and the familiarity of participants with the methods used to explore them (such as online surveys and creative workshops). Research was disseminated in a number of publications, particularly targeted at the international *Journal of Bisexuality* (e.g. Barker, et al., 2008). In order to be considered bidirectional, it was considered imperative that such research was also fed back to bi community members at their events as well as through the regular magazine *Bi Community News* and on bi websites and blogs. The project led to the inclusion of a page about bisexuality on the UK Stonewall website (which previously had not included any such information). The members of the group also drew on this research in developing training programs and policy for those working therapeutically with bi people (e.g. Shaw et al., forthcoming 2012). The work of the group is disseminated back to the community itself during the biennial BiReCon events (Barker, Richards, Jones, & Monroe, 2011) and also formed the backbone of *The Bisexuality Report: A document recommending policy and practice for UK government and LGBT and equality & diversity organisations based on national and international research* (Barker, Richards, Jones, Bowes-Catton, & Plowman, 2012).

The Guidelines and Why they Matter

Hopefully the above discussion has already provided many reasons why a set of good practice guidelines for writers and researchers working on bisexuality is important, and why it is problematic for all concerned when researchers and writers do not act in accord with such guidelines. To summarise, briefly, poorly planned or implemented research is problematic because it often filters into the wider culture (via mass media that are

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

obsessed with issues relating to sexuality). A headline questioning the existence of bisexual people, or reinforcing a stereotype, can be hugely damaging to bisexual people themselves (increasing the stigmatisation that surrounds them) and can dissuade people from claiming bisexual identities and accessing bisexual communities who might otherwise be helped by such ways of making sense of their experiences and finding support.

Not only is poor research and writing detrimental to bisexual people themselves and their communities, it is also problematic for other researchers and writers who want to work on bisexuality. The bad record of work in this area means that all researchers and writers may be regarded with suspicion by members of bisexual communities and not welcomed into real and virtual bisexual spaces to conduct their research. It also means that all research on bisexuality may be seen as problematic by others who deal with human sexualities, continuing the history of the marginalisation of such studies, and impacting negatively on funding and publication possibilities.

There is a danger, in poor research, that there will be damage to academic rigour and individual reputation -- and also to the wider bisexual community -- through misleading findings and reporting, and through impacts on policy making and public discourse. Clearly, better research and writing in this area is in everyone's interest, and will mean that we can build a sound evidence base about bisexuality and bi experience. This can, in turn, help with the funding of non-academic work of direct impact on bisexual communities (such as local projects and policy documents).

The following guidelines were developed through communication between the members of BiUK and the UK bi activist network. They emerged as a result of conversations on the

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

academic bi Yahoo email group, where there were frequent posts from new researchers looking for advice or for bisexual participants. The discussions of such posts prompted one of us (Jen Yockney) to produce a draft version of responses to 'frequently asked questions' on this list, so that such researchers could find advice in a single location, and members of the group would not have to keep repeating their suggestions. At this point, several other members of BiUK remembered Hale's (2009) rules for people writing on trans issues, and we realised that it would be useful to produce a similar list of guidelines for researchers and writers on bisexuality. Bringing together Yockney's draft and Hale's list resulted in the 15-point list that follows.

This list of good practice guidelines has been made freely available on the BiUK website and has been disseminated on all of the email lists and discussion boards known to the authors. Those new to bisexuality research and writing are often undergraduate students, or members of bisexual communities themselves, who may not have the resources to access academic journals, or perhaps have not yet acquired the ability to fully comprehend very academic and theoretical language. Thus it was our aim to produce an accessible and brief list of guidelines that were freely available to all.

We also encouraged the use and reproduction of the guidelines without concerns of copyright, and the thoughtful adaptation of them to fit the specific situations and cultural contexts of each researcher. Given the intersectionality referred to in the guidelines, it may well be that different items on the list are more or less pertinent in different situations, and that they need to be adapted to different settings.

Good Practice Guidelines for Researching/Writing on Bisexuality

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

1. *Separate bisexuals from the other groups:* If you are researching or writing about a wider group that includes bisexuals, do not subsume bisexuals under another category (e.g. including them with 'gay' or 'heterosexual' people), and do not assume that issues for LGB (or LGBT) people will be identical across all those groups.
2. *Avoid bisexual erasure:* Don't engage in bisexual erasure or reinforce bisexual invisibility by conducting research or writing with the implicit or explicit goal of questioning the existence of bisexuality, or forms of bisexuality.
3. *Be cautious of explanations:* Don't assume that questions of the causation or explanation of bisexuality are any more pertinent, interesting or useful than questions of the causation or explanation of heterosexuality, lesbian and gay sexuality, or any other form of sexuality.
4. *Avoid 'othering':* Avoid the common representation of bisexuals as an interesting and/or exotic 'other', outside the norm, to be fascinated with. Remember that everybody has a sexuality, that there is great diversity in sexuality, and that bisexual lives are experienced as just as normal and everyday as anybody else's. Don't write as if your entire audience is not bisexual – many of them will be.
5. *Avoid unfair criticism:* Avoid the common claim that bisexuals are a group

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

who imagine that they are doing something radical, but actually are not. Not all bisexual people aim to be radical or queer, and there are many different understandings of what bisexuality means. For example, some speak of being attracted to 'both' men and women, some speak of being attracted to people 'regardless of gender', and some deliberately challenge the idea that the people they are attracted to are *either* men *or* women.

6. *Assume multiplicity:* Be mindful of the multiplicity of experience amongst bisexuals and bisexual communities. Do not assume that what is true for one individual, group or community will be true for all. Do not write about bisexuality or 'the bisexual' as if there was only one way of being bisexual or one bisexual experience. Particularly be aware of intersections of gender, race, culture, religion, class, age, generation, ability, geographic location, body form, and other socio-cultural and historical aspects that will impact the ways in which attraction to more than one gender is experienced and understood. If you are not bisexual yourself, avoid the trap of assuming that all bisexuals will be like those you have spoken with. If you are bisexual yourself, avoid the trap of assuming that all other bisexuals will be like you – or using their experiences to bolster your own.
7. *Familiarise yourself:* Make sure that you familiarise yourself with bisexual communities and conversations before embarking on writing and research. If you are not part of these communities and conversations yourself, strongly consider involving co-researchers and/or steering group members of people who are, and spend significant time becoming familiar before

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

starting your work. There are a number of print and online spaces where you can advertise for participants, and a number of groups and events that you can attend to talk to people. Use these spaces appropriately and with respect. Remember that you are working with people, not with exhibits or reference books. State who you are, provide a procedure for people to contact your institution, and be clear what the research is for. If people are not comfortable with you being in a bisexual space as a researcher, respect the fact that they may need to be in that space more than you do.

8. *Be accountable:* Make sure that your work is of some use to those it is representing, ask them what questions are important to them before embarking on your work, and do not simply reproduce work which has been done before. It is good practice to give participants the chance to comment on research and to give feedback to the people and communities that you are representing. Invite bisexual people and bisexual communities themselves to engage with your work, and welcome their input and the time and energy that it involves.

9. *Be open:* Approach your work humbly and with an openness to learning. You are not the expert on the experiences of the people you are researching or writing about: they are. Try to avoid beginning with assumptions about what you will find, and be self-aware about the assumptions that you do – inevitably – have. Likewise, be open to having these assumptions challenged.

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

10. *Reflect on power imbalances:* Reflect on your own position in relation to those you are researching or writing about. What kinds of power do you have as the one framing the questions, being seen as the 'expert researcher', perhaps paying participants or having the support of an institution, and forming your interpretations and conclusions and deciding what information to include in your publications? Think about why you are interested in this area and what your stake in it is. How might this influence how you ask questions, approach people, conduct research, write and publish? What is the impact of this on the people you are representing? Consider alternatives, and ensure that you are open about these matters with the communities themselves, and in your writing.

11. *Be aware of context:* The context in which people speak has a marked effect on what is said and how it is said. For example, people may speak differently about bisexuality at a community event, with a partner, with a researcher whom they know from their own community, or with a non-bisexual researcher whom they have never met before. Do not take statements out of context or assume that they reflect everything that a person understands or says about bisexuality.

12. *Don't assume membership of other groups:* Not all bisexual people also belong to other categories. Common misconceptions are that bisexuals are all: polyamorous or non-monogamous, white, academic or comfortable and familiar with academic terms, out as bisexual, comfortable with the bisexual label, in the LGBT scene, subscribers to the same politics,

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

attending bi community spaces, or willing to be questioned by you.

13. *Respect language use:* Use the labels that the people you are writing about or researching use themselves. Make sure that you do not misrepresent their language, for example by hyphenating bi-sexual or bi-sexuality (the 'b' words have been around long enough not to count as neologisms, so there is no need for a hyphen to impart meaning), or adding 'sexual' when somebody just uses the word 'bi'. Recognise that people who attracted to more than one gender may use no label at all, or may use other labels (e.g. pansexual, omnisexual, queer, gay), and that they may use this in addition to bisexual *or* rather than bisexual (just as some lesbians would also refer to themselves as gay and others wouldn't).
14. *Put yourself in their shoes:* Consider how you would feel if you, or your own group/community, was being studied or written about in the ways in which you are planning to study or write about this particular group of bisexuals.
15. *Don't make assumptions about researchers:* Don't assume that others engaged in bisexuality research either are, or are not, bisexual themselves. Don't assume that bisexuals will not, themselves, have academic credentials and/or be engaged with writing/research. Don't assume that researchers who are bisexual themselves are either less valid, or more valid (and therefore beyond criticism), than anybody else.

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

With gratitude to Jacob Hale for the suggested rules for writing about trans from which some of these points were adapted.

This work by BiUK is copyrighted, but licenced under a Creative Commons BY Licence. No further permission needed to reuse or remix (with attribution), but it is nice to be notified if you do use it.

Conclusions

We hope that this list will be useful to both those new to writing about, and researching, bisexuality, and to those of us who have been engaged with such research and writing for years, to reflect upon the processes and practices involved in our work.

We also welcome continued dialogue and engagement with this list. It is very much intended as a starting point for further adaptation and development, rather than a fixed end point or didactic universal set of rules. However, we do hope that those engaging with it will recognise some of the potentially problematic practices highlighted that are prevalent in this area and seek to avoid them if at all possible.

We would strongly encourage researchers and writers to engage at an early stage of their work with the burgeoning set of online, and other, groups that exist. There are many in the BiUK group, for example, and on the academic bi email list, who are willing and happy to review questionnaires or interview schedules before they go 'live', or to read over colleagues' work before it is submitted for publication. It is important, of course, to be prepared to hear constructive criticism, and also to recognise the interdisciplinarity of this field and to be ready to engage with people from disciplines outside your own. There is a

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

strong argument that people working on bisexuality should no longer remain within a single discipline, but rather that they should ensure that they have read the wider literature from biological and physiological research, through mainstream psychological studies, to sociological accounts and cultural theory, and, of course, activist writings and personal accounts.

Finally, we would like once more to highlight the importance of disseminating research and writing beyond the academic world, back to the communities that have been written about, and also out into the wider world to inform popular understandings of bisexuality. Writing accessible blog articles summarising your findings, talking to LGBTQ-friendly journalists, creating podcasts, and writing brief pieces for bisexual community magazines (such as *Bi Community News*) are all good ways of ensuring that others benefit from your work as well as yourself. Below we have provided an incomplete list of further resources that may be useful in making initial contact with bisexual communities and to disseminating your work.

Further helpful links for those conducting bi research or writing about bisexuality

Email lists:

Academic-bi: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/academic_bi/

Bi researchers group: <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=BIRESEARCHGROUP>

Radical BPQ: <http://groups.google.com/group/radicalbpq?pli=1>

Social networking groups:

Facebook: Bi Activists

Facebook: Global Bisexual Network

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

Facebook: EuroBiNet

Livejournal: Bisexual community

Bisexual resources website:

Bisexual resource centre: <http://biresource.net>

Bisexual index: <http://www.bisexualindex.org.uk>

Bi Community News: <http://bicommunitynews.co.uk>

Bi Media: <http://bimedia.org>

Bi.org: <http://bi.org>

Binet USA: <http://www.binetusa.org>

Academic bodies:

American Institute of Bisexuality: <http://www.bisexual.org>

BiUK: www.biuk.org

Journal of Bisexuality:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t792306887~link=cover>

Community events:

ICB (International Conference on Bisexuality):

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Conference_on_Bisexuality

BiCon: <http://bicon.org.uk>

References

Academic bi (2011). *Academic bi yahoo group*. Available at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/academic_bi/. Accessed on 20/6/11.

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

Angelides, S. (2001). *A history of bisexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bi researchers group (2011). *Bi researchers jiscmail group*. Available at <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=BIRESEARCHGROUP>. Accessed on 20/6/11.

Barker, M. (2007). Heteronormativity and the exclusion of bisexuality in psychology. In V. Clarke & E. Peel (Eds.), *Out in Psychology: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer Perspectives*. pp.86-118. Chichester, UK: Wiley.

Barker, M., Bowes-Catton, H., Iantaffi, A., Cassidy, A. & Brewer, L. (2008). British bisexuality: A snapshot of bisexual identities in the UK, *Journal of Bisexuality*, 8 (1&2), 141-162.

Barker, M. & Langdrige, D. (2008). Bisexuality: Working with a silenced sexuality. *Feminism & Psychology*, 18 (3), 389-394.

Barker, M., Richards, C. & Bowes-Catton, H. (2009). "All the world is queer save thee and me...": Defining queer and bi at a Critical Sexology seminar. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 9 (3&4), 363-379.

Barker, M., Richards, C. & Bowes-Catton, H. (forthcoming 2012). Visualising experience: Using creative research methods with members of sexual communities. In C. Phellas (Ed.) *Researching Non-Heterosexual Sexualities*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Barker, M., Richards, C., Jones, R. & Monro, S. (2011). BiReCon: An International Academic Conference on Bisexuality. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 11 (2), 157-170.

Barker, M., Richards, C., Jones, R., Bowes-Catton, H., & Plowman, T. (2012). *The Bisexuality Report: Bisexual inclusion in LGBT equality and diversity*. Milton Keynes: The Open University, Centre for Citizenship, Identity and Governance.

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

- Barker, M. & Yockney, J. (2004). Including the B-word: Reflections on the place of bisexuality within lesbian and gay activism and psychology: Meg Barker in conversation with Jenni Yockney. *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review*, 5 (3), 118-122.
- Bowes-Catton, H. (2007). Resisting the binary: discourses of identity and diversity in bisexual politics 1988-1996. *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review*, 8(1), 58-70.
- Bowes-Catton, H., Barker, M., & Richards, C. (2011). 'I didn't know that I could feel this relaxed in my body': Using visual methods to research bisexual people's embodied experiences of identity and space. In P. Reavey (Ed.) *Visual Methods in psychology: using and interpreting images in qualitative research*. pp.255-270. London: Routledge.
- Diamond, L. (2009). *Sexual fluidity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Eisner, S. (2011). *The monosexual privilege checklist*. Accessed from <http://radicalbi.wordpress.com/2011/07/28/the-monosexual-privilege-checklist> on 5/1/12.
- Etherington, K. (2004). *Becoming a reflexive researcher: Using our selves in research*. London: Okica Lingsley.
- Finlay, L & Gough, B. (2003). *Reflexivity: A practical guide for researchers in health and social sciences*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Fox, R. (1996). Bisexuality in perspective: a review of theory and research. In B. A. Firestone (Ed.), *Bisexuality* (pp.3-34). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fox, R. (Ed.), (2004). *Current research on bisexuality*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press.
- Garber, M. (1995). *Vice versa: Bisexuality and the eroticism of everyday life*. London: Penguin..

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

- Hagger, Johnson, G., Hegarty, P., Barker, M. & Richards, C. (forthcoming 2012). Public Engagement, Knowledge Transfer and Impact Validity. *Journal of Social Issues*.
- Hagger-Johnson, G. E., McManus, J., Hutchison C. & Barker M. (2006). Building partnerships with the voluntary sector. *The Psychologist*, 19 (3), 156-158
- Hale, J. (2009). Suggested rules for non-transsexuals writing about transsexuals, transsexuality, transsexualism, or trans. Accessed from <http://sandystone.com/hale.rules.html> on 20/6/11.
- Hutchins, L. (2005). Sexual Prejudice: The erasure of bisexuals in academia and the media. *American Sexuality magazine* 3(4).
- Jones, R. L. (2010). Troubles with bisexuality in health and social care. In Jones, R. L. & Ward, R. (Eds.) *LGBT issues: Looking beyond categories*. Edinburgh, Dunedin Academic Press.
- Jones, R. L. (2011). Imagining bisexual futures: Positive, non-normative later life. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 11 (2), 245-270.
- Jorm, A., Korten, A., Rodgers, B., Jacomb, P., & Christensen, H. (2002). Sexual orientation and mental health: Results from a community survey of young and middle-aged adults. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 180, 423-427.
- Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W. B., & Martin, C. E. (1948). *Sexual behavior in the human male*. Philadelphia, PA: Saunders.
- Klein, F. (1993). *The bisexual option*. New York: Harrington Park Press.
- Ochs, R. (1996). Biphobia. In B. A. Firestein (Ed.) *Bisexuality: The psychology and politics of an invisible minority*. pp. 217-139. London: Sage.
- Petford, B. (2003). Power in the darkness: some thoughts on the marginalisation of

Bisexuality Research Guidelines

bisexuality in psychological literature. *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review*, 4(2), 5-13.

Radical BPQ (2011). Radical BPQ google group. Available at <http://groups.google.com/group/radicalbpq?pli=1>. Accessed on 20/6/11.

Richards, C. (2011). Are you sitting comfortably? *The Psychologist*, 24 (12), 904-906.

Roberts & Yockney (2003). Bisexual life in Manchester: A needs assessment. Manchester: Manchester LGBT Local Strategic Partnership Network.

Rochlin, M. (2003). The heterosexual questionnaire. In M. S. Kimmel & A. L. Ferber (Eds.) *Privilege: A reader*. pp.75-76. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Rust, P. (2000). Criticisms of the scholarly literature on sexuality for its neglect of bisexuality. In P. Rust (Ed.), *Bisexuality in the United States*. pp.5-10. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Shaw, L., Butler, C., Langdrige, D., Gibson, S., Barker, M., Lenihan, P., Nair, R. & Richards, C. (forthcoming, 2012). Guidelines for psychologists working therapeutically with sexual and gender minority clients. Leicester: British Psychological Society.

Tavris, C. (1993). The mismeasure of woman. *Feminism & Psychology*, 3(2), 149-168.

Ulrich, L. (2011). *Bisexual invisibility: Impacts and recommendations*. San Francisco: San Francisco Human Rights Commission LGBT advisory committee. Accessed from <http://www.sf-hrc.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=989> on 20/6/11.

UK bi activism (2011). UK bi activism yahoo group. Available at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/uk-bi-activism/post?act=reply&messageNum=2316>. Accessed on 20/6/11.