

BiNet USA describes itself as "America's umbrella organization and voice for bisexual, pansexual, fluid and all other of us *'somewhere in between'* people as well as their lesbian, gay, transgender, 'straight but not narrow' and questioning friends and allies."

The organization works toward the development of a cohesive network of independent bisexual and bi-friendly communities and promotes bisexual, pansexual, and bi-inclusive visibility. It also collects and distributes educational information regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, especially information about and of interest to bisexual and pansexual communities.

The oldest national bisexual organization in the United States, BiNet USA was spawned by a gathering of bisexual activists at the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights in 1987. In 1990, the North American Bisexual Network, as it was then known, sponsored a national conference in San Francisco. In 1991, the organization changed its name to BiNet USA.

The organization has an impressive online presence through its participation in most of the social networking venues and through its own website: www.binetusa.org. A number of online resources are highlighted on the site, which also provides lists of national and local bisexual and pansexual associations, as well as links to many glbtq media, legal, and activist groups and to such specifically bisexual educational and political resources as the Bisexual Resource Center, the American Institute of Bisexuality, and Bialogue, the website and blog of the New York Bisexual Network.

BiNet USA also maintains its own well-edited blog (binetusa.blogspot.com/), which features news, editorials, essays, and other opinion pieces of interest to the bisexual community.

The association frequently hosts or co-hosts conferences on bisexuality and the rights of sexual minorities, and frequently undertakes policy initiatives with groups such as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

"Celebrate Bisexuality Day" and Political Positions

The organization sponsors "Celebrate Bisexuality Day," which has been observed on September 23rd every year since 1999. Wendy Curry, former president of BiNet USA, was one of the originators of the celebration, which was conceived to counter the marginalization that bisexuals feel within both the straight and the gay and lesbian communities, particularly the tendency to label individuals as either heterosexual or homosexual as though those categories exhausted the range of sexual possibilities and orientations.

BiNet USA has taken political positions consonant with most glbtq activist groups, including the repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" military policy and the Defense of Marriage Act. In addition, it supports hate crimes legislation, a comprehensive anti-bullying policy in public schools, employment non-discrimination legislation, marriage equality, and immigration reform that recognizes same-sex couples.

The association has participated in the marches on Washington for equal rights for sexual minorities, including the 2009 National March for Equality.

Biphobia and Bisexual Erasure

Although BiNet USA is a significant component of the broader glbtq coalition seeking equal rights under the law, it is particularly dedicated to combating *biphobia* and *bisexual erasure* in both the glbtq communities

and the larger society.

Biphobia is a portmanteau word, modeled on homophobia, to denote prejudice and intolerance toward bisexuality and bisexuals. Biphobia is often manifested in negative stereotypes of bisexuals as confused, insecure, and unable to commit. People who express interest in both sexes are sometimes accused of being promiscuous or suffering from internalized homophobia.

In another manifestation of biphobia, bisexuals are sometimes accused of denying their basic homosexual orientation so that they can partake of heterosexual privilege, including marriage.

Bisexual erasure is defined as the tendency to ignore, remove, or falsify evidence of bisexuality in historical records, academic materials, the news media, and other primary sources. In its extreme form, bisexual erasure asserts that bisexuality and bisexuals do not really exist.

The denial of bisexuality stems from looking at the world through a binary lens that sees sexual orientation and behavior only in terms of homosexuality and heterosexuality, when in fact human sexual behavior is far more fluid than those categories can accommodate.

Often bisexuality and bisexuals are erased by the assumption that people who claim to be bisexual are really closeted homosexuals or in transition toward acceptance of their homosexuality.

Bisexual erasure also occurs when cultural and historical figures, such as writers and artists and politicians, who have had extensive sexual experience with both sexes are nevertheless referred to as gay or lesbian rather than bisexual.

For example, Oscar Wilde, who was married and produced children, is usually simplistically described as homosexual, while Virginia Woolf, who was also heterosexually married, is often represented merely as a lesbian rather than a bisexual.

Within glbtq activist circles, bisexual erasure is sometimes manifested when bisexuals are not accorded equal status in the movement for equal rights, perhaps on the assumption that bisexuals partake of the heterosexual privilege denied to gay, lesbian, and transgender people.

One of BiNet USA's first attempts to confront bisexual erasure within the glbtq equality movement was the successful campaign to include "Bi" in the name of the 1993 "National March on Washington for Gay, Lesbian, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation."

When the anthology, *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*, edited by Loraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu, was forced to compete for a Lambda Literary Award under the category "Lesbian Anthology," BiNet USA accused the Lambda Literary Foundation of practicing bisexual erasure because it failed to recognize the equal status of bisexuality in the glbtq literary community. For the 2006 competitions, the Lambda Literary Foundation added a bisexual category to recognize bisexual literary achievements.

J. Michael Bailey, the controversial American psychologist and academic, who has been accused of misconduct in his work on transsexuality, has also been attacked by bisexual groups and individuals for practicing bisexual erasure as a result of a 2005 study he co-authored that questioned the reality of male bisexuality.

Finally, bisexuals are erased when a person who identifies as bisexual becomes involved in a heterosexual relationship and others assume that he or she is no longer bisexual.

Conclusion

The work of BiNet USA has been instrumental in increasing the visibility of bisexuals within the glbtq community and within society as a whole. The organization has also helped educate bisexuals and others about the contributions of bisexuals to world history and culture and about the unique challenges faced by bisexuals in contemporary America.

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