

Bisexual Attitudes: Understanding Behavioral Intentions

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Behavioral Intentions toward Bisexual People

Behavioral intentions represent the immediate precursors to action and are pivotal constructs within social psychology, particularly when examining issues of prejudice and discrimination toward minority groups. In the context of sexual orientation, studying **behavioral intentions toward bisexual people** offers critical insights into the mechanisms underlying acceptance, marginalization, and biphobia. Intentions are typically defined as the subjective probability that an individual will engage in a specific behavior, differentiating them from general attitudes, which are often diffuse and less predictive of immediate actions. The study of these intentions is essential because they provide a measurable link between an individual's internal beliefs and their external conduct in social, professional, and intimate settings.

The psychological framework governing these intentions recognizes that the experience of bisexuality necessitates unique consideration, separate from research focused solely on gay or lesbian identities. Bisexual individuals often face a dual layer of potential prejudice: negative intentions from the heterosexual majority and, occasionally, invalidating intentions from within the monosexual LGBTQ+ community. Therefore, understanding intentions toward this group requires addressing concepts like **biphobia** and **monosexism**, which specifically target the validity, stability, or authenticity of non-monosexual identities. These intentions manifest as concrete decisions, such as whether to hire a bisexual job candidate, validate a bisexual relationship, or offer social support in a crisis.

The predictive power of behavioral intentions makes them a vital focus for intervention. If researchers can accurately measure and understand the factors driving negative intentions--such as the intention to exclude, invalidate, or avoid--they can develop targeted educational and policy interventions designed to modify these precursors before they translate into harmful discriminatory behaviors. Conversely, strong positive intentions, such as the intention to be an active ally or advocate for bisexual inclusion, are equally important to measure, as they highlight pathways toward greater social integration and mental well-being for this often-invisibilized population. Analyzing these intentions allows for a granular view of prejudice that moves beyond broad statements of dislike to specific, actionable decisions.

Defining Behavioral Intentions in Social Psychology

In the realm of psychological theory, particularly within models like the **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)**, behavioral intention serves as the single best predictor of subsequent behavior, assuming the individual has sufficient control over the action. This concept is formalized as an individual's readiness to perform a given behavior, operationalized by measuring the strength of the motivation to execute that action. When applied to social interactions, this means that a high intention to discriminate, for example, is far more likely to result in actual discriminatory behavior

than merely holding a general negative attitude without a strong intention to act on it. This focus on intentionality requires researchers to ask specific, context-bound questions about potential future actions, rather than relying on abstract measures of prejudice.

The measurement of behavioral intentions is complex because it relies on self-report, which can be susceptible to social desirability bias, especially regarding sensitive topics like sexual prejudice. Individuals may be reluctant to admit an intention to exclude or harm, even if that intention exists subconsciously or implicitly. Consequently, researchers must meticulously design survey instruments to minimize bias, often by embedding intention questions within broader social context surveys or by utilizing scenarios that require participants to make hypothetical, yet specific, choices regarding interaction, employment, or relationship validation with a bisexual target. The goal is to capture the cognitive commitment to a future action, whether that action is harmful, neutral, or supportive.

Furthermore, intentions are not static; they are dynamic psychological variables influenced by immediate situational factors and cognitive processing. A person's intention to be accepting in an anonymous online forum might differ drastically from their intention in a face-to-face interaction with family members who hold opposing views. Therefore, high-level research often distinguishes between specific behavioral intentions (e.g., "I intend to vote for a policy protecting bisexual rights") and generalized intentions (e.g., "I intend to be supportive of sexual minorities"). The predictive utility of the former is consistently found to be much higher, reinforcing the need for highly detailed and context-specific investigation into the actions people plan to take regarding bisexual individuals.

Unique Challenges Faced by Bisexual Individuals (Biphobia and Monosexism)

The formation of behavioral intentions toward bisexual people is heavily filtered through the unique lenses of **biphobia** and **monosexism**, which often result in intentions distinct from those directed toward exclusively gay or lesbian individuals. Biphobia is defined as the prejudice, fear, or hatred directed at bisexuality, often manifesting as disbelief in the identity itself. This disbelief translates directly into specific negative intentions, such as the intention to invalidate a bisexual person's relationship, minimize their identity as a phase, or pressure them to ultimately "choose a side" (i.e., identify as gay, lesbian, or heterosexual). These intentions are fundamentally rooted in the denial of the possibility of attraction to more than one gender.

Monosexism, a deeper structural ideology, posits that attraction must, by nature, be exclusive to one gender. This ideology permeates many social institutions and is a powerful driver of negative behavioral intentions. For instance, a monosexist intention might involve assuming a bisexual person is inherently promiscuous, untrustworthy in a relationship, or incapable of true commitment.

These assumptions lead to intentions of avoidance or exclusion in dating pools and social circles. The internalization of monosexist norms can even lead monosexual gay or lesbian individuals to form exclusionary intentions, such as refusing to date or socialize with bisexual individuals, based on the erroneous belief that they are inherently less committed to the LGBTQ+ community or are likely to revert to heterosexual relationships.

The behavioral consequences stemming from these intentions include high rates of social isolation, lower rates of disclosure regarding sexual orientation, and significantly elevated mental health disparities among bisexual individuals compared to their monosexual peers. When measured, intentions often reveal that people are less willing to offer resources, validation, or political support to bisexual people compared to other sexual minority groups, precisely because of the pervasive skepticism surrounding the legitimacy of their orientation. Addressing negative intentions, therefore, requires dismantling the monosexist framework that underpins the denial of identity validity, rather than simply promoting general tolerance.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Intentions

The **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)**, developed by Icek Ajzen, provides the most robust psychological model for analyzing the formation of behavioral intentions toward bisexual people. TPB posits that intentions are determined by three core constructs: **Attitudes toward the behavior**, **Subjective Norms**, and **Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)**. Applied to prejudice, this means an individual's intention to engage in supportive or discriminatory behavior is a function of their personal evaluation of that action, their perception of social pressure regarding the action, and their belief in their ability to perform the action.

In the context of biphobia, a person's intention to avoid interacting with a bisexual colleague, for example, is influenced first by their Attitude--the personal belief that interacting with bisexual people is awkward, confusing, or somehow negative. Second, Subjective Norms come into play: if their immediate social group (family, close friends) frequently makes biphobic jokes or expresses invalidating views, the individual perceives that their group expects or condones avoidance, strengthening the negative intention. Finally, Perceived Behavioral Control is critical: if the individual feels they can easily avoid the colleague without social repercussions (e.g., in a large workplace), their intention to avoid interaction is more likely to solidify into actual behavior.

Research utilizing the TPB framework consistently demonstrates its utility in predicting behaviors related to prejudice reduction and allyship. For instance, studies targeting positive behavioral intentions--such as the intention to intervene when witnessing biphobic microaggressions--show that increasing an individual's perceived control (e.g., teaching specific intervention scripts) and shifting subjective norms (e.g., highlighting that most people disapprove of biphobia) are highly effective mechanisms for strengthening the intent to act positively. Therefore, TPB not only

explains the formation of intentions but also provides a structured roadmap for developing effective anti-prejudice interventions focused on modifying these three key determinants.

Manifestations of Negative Behavioral Intentions

Negative behavioral intentions toward bisexual individuals manifest across a wide spectrum of actions, ranging from overt hostility to subtle, yet damaging, acts of exclusion and invalidation. One of the most common manifestations is **social avoidance**, where individuals intentionally limit contact, refuse invitations, or maintain emotional distance from bisexual peers, often justified by vague feelings of discomfort or confusion regarding the identity. In professional settings, this can translate into the intention to bypass a qualified bisexual candidate for promotion or exclude them from informal networking opportunities, significantly impacting career trajectories.

Another significant manifestation is the intention to invalidate relationships. Because biphobia often involves the denial of identity, many people form the intention to treat a bisexual person's relationship as inherently temporary or less serious, regardless of the partner's gender. If a bisexual person is dating someone of the opposite sex, the negative intention often involves erasing their bisexuality and treating them as straight. If they are dating someone of the same sex, the intention often involves categorizing them as gay or lesbian, thereby denying the breadth of their attraction. These intentions lead to harmful behaviors such as refusal to acknowledge partners publicly or pressuring the individual to clarify their "true" orientation.

Specific negative behavioral intentions often include the following actions:

Intentional Erasure: Planning to ignore or refuse to acknowledge a person's bisexual identity in conversation or documentation.

Microaggressive Intentions: Formulating the intent to ask invasive or inappropriate questions about a person's sexual history or relationship patterns based on the assumption of promiscuity.

Exclusionary Intentions: Deciding to exclude a bisexual person from LGBTQ+ community events or spaces based on the belief that they do not truly belong or are not "queer enough."

Refusal of Support: Forming the intention to withhold emotional or material support during a crisis, rooted in the belief that the bisexual individual's issues are self-inflicted or due to their "confused" identity.

These intentional acts of discrimination, whether subtle or overt, accumulate to create a hostile social environment, demonstrating how specific negative intentions translate directly into systemic marginalization and contribute significantly to the chronic stress and mental health challenges experienced by bisexual populations.

Factors Influencing Intentions (Attitudes, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Control)

The three determinants outlined in the TPB--Attitudes, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control--operate synergistically to shape whether an individual forms a positive or negative behavioral intention toward bisexual people. Attitudes, the affective component, are often the primary driver. Negative attitudes toward bisexuality frequently stem from a lack of knowledge, adherence to rigid gender binaries, or deeply held moral beliefs that mandate monosexuality. When an individual holds a strong negative attitude--for instance, believing bisexuality is inherently unstable or a product of indecision--they are highly likely to form corresponding negative intentions, such as the intention to advise a bisexual friend to seek definitive clarity.

Subjective norms represent the perceived social pressure to engage or not engage in a behavior. This factor is profoundly influential in shaping intentions regarding bisexual acceptance. If an individual lives or works within a community where biphobia is openly tolerated or even encouraged (e.g., jokes are common, invalidation is the norm), the subjective norm dictates that negative intentions are acceptable and expected. Conversely, if an organization or family unit establishes clear, positive norms of inclusion and actively models allyship, individuals are much more likely to form intentions consistent with those norms, even if their private attitudes are ambivalent. This highlights the power of visible leadership and cultural messaging in controlling intentional behavior.

Finally, Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) relates to an individual's self-efficacy and the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the intended action. If an individual believes they can easily express a negative intention (e.g., making an exclusionary comment online) without fear of social or professional retribution, their PBC is high, and the negative intention is more likely to translate into action. Conversely, if an individual is in a setting with strict anti-discrimination policies and high accountability, their PBC for discriminatory behavior is low, even if their negative attitude remains. For positive intentions, high PBC means feeling equipped with the language and confidence to intervene against biphobia, making the intention to be an ally much stronger.

Measurement and Methodological Approaches

Accurate measurement of behavioral intentions toward bisexual people requires sophisticated methodological approaches that account for both explicit and implicit biases. Explicit measurement typically involves the use of Likert-type scales, where participants rate the likelihood that they would perform a specific, definable behavior. For instance, scales might measure the intention to socialize with a bisexual person, the intention to support a bisexual political candidate, or the intention to defend a bisexual person against verbal attacks. These scales must be carefully tailored to address biphobic tropes, ensuring they capture intentions related to erasure, promiscuity

stereotypes, and relationship invalidation.

However, because of the high social desirability associated with appearing non-prejudiced, explicit measures often underestimate negative intentions. Consequently, researchers increasingly rely on implicit measures, such as the **Implicit Association Test (IAT)**, to capture automatic, unconscious associations that may drive intentions. An IAT might measure the speed with which a participant associates "bisexual" with positive versus negative attributes, or "bisexual relationship" with "stable" versus "confused." While the relationship between implicit attitudes and explicit intentions is complex, implicit measures provide a valuable complement, helping to predict spontaneous, non-deliberate behaviors that stem from underlying prejudice.

Furthermore, methodological rigor demands the use of scenario-based assessments. Rather than asking abstractly about intentions, researchers present detailed vignettes describing a bisexual individual in a specific situation (e.g., a job interview, a dating scenario, or a health consultation) and ask the participant to report what action they would take. This approach grounds the intention in a realistic context, increasing the ecological validity of the findings. The careful selection of scenarios allows researchers to isolate specific facets of biphobia, such as intentions related to HIV/AIDS risk perceptions, or intentions related to assuming gender non-conformity, providing highly detailed data necessary for targeted intervention design.

Mitigating Negative Intentions and Promoting Allyship

Interventions designed to mitigate negative behavioral intentions toward bisexual individuals must utilize the principles derived from the Theory of Planned Behavior, targeting attitudes, norms, and control simultaneously. The modification of negative **attitudes** requires comprehensive, fact-based education that specifically addresses and refutes biphobic myths, such as the notion that bisexuality is a transitional phase or that bisexual individuals are more prone to infidelity. Educational programs must validate the stability and authenticity of non-monosexual identities, providing positive counter-stereotypes.

Shifting **subjective norms** is perhaps the most powerful lever for change. Negative intentions thrive in environments where biphobia is tacitly accepted. Interventions must therefore focus on making allyship and acceptance the highly visible, dominant social norm. This includes promoting public figures and organizational leaders who openly support bisexual inclusion, implementing clear anti-discrimination policies that hold individuals accountable for biphobic actions, and encouraging visible displays of allyship (e.g., supportive organizational messaging). When individuals perceive that their peers and leaders expect acceptance, their intention to act negatively diminishes dramatically.

Finally, increasing **Perceived Behavioral Control** involves empowering potential allies with the skills necessary to translate positive intentions into effective action. Many people may possess the

intention to challenge biphobia but lack the confidence or knowledge of how to intervene safely and effectively. Training programs focused on bystander intervention, effective communication strategies for challenging microaggressions, and resource navigation increase the sense of control, thereby strengthening the likelihood that the intention to be an ally will result in actual supportive behavior. The overarching goal is to foster a social environment where negative intentionality is both socially unacceptable and practically difficult to execute.

Future Directions in Research

Future research on behavioral intentions toward bisexual people must adopt an increasingly nuanced and intersectional approach to capture the full complexity of prejudice. Currently, much of the research treats the bisexual identity monolithically. However, intentions are known to vary significantly based on the intersecting identities of the target individual--for example, intentions directed toward a bisexual woman of color may differ substantially from those directed toward a bisexual white man, due to compounding biases related to race, gender, and class. Longitudinal studies are needed to track how intentions evolve over time and how they are moderated by life events, such as public disclosure, relationship changes, or exposure to pro-equality media.

Furthermore, a critical gap exists in the study of the transition from intention to behavior. While TPB suggests a strong link, the magnitude of this correlation varies. Future methodologies should incorporate observational measures or ecological momentary assessment (EMA) to document actual discriminatory or supportive behaviors, allowing researchers to refine predictive models and identify the specific situational or psychological factors that cause a strong intention to fail to translate into action (the "intention-behavior gap"). Understanding this gap is crucial for designing maximally effective interventions.

Finally, expanding the geographical and cultural scope of this research is paramount. The majority of studies on behavioral intentions originate in Western, industrialized nations. Intentions toward bisexuality are likely mediated by culture-specific norms regarding gender roles, religiosity, and family structure. Comparative international studies are required to determine which psychological mechanisms governing intentions are universal and which are culturally relative, thereby enabling the development of culturally competent and globally relevant strategies for promoting acceptance and reducing biphobia worldwide.