

Working effectively to reduce bi+ discrimination

Approaches and recommendations for practical application

In the Netherlands, there are approximately one million people with bi+ feelings or experiences. They are often not seen and recognized. Bi+ people are subjected to many prejudices and stereotypes which can lead to discrimination, intimidation, and violence. They face negative attitudes and discrimination from both heterosexual people, as well as from gay men and lesbian women. In this guide you will read about what organizations, such as LHBTI+ interest groups, schools, and anti-discrimination services, can do about bi+ discrimination.





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Background of this guide

Movisie - in cooperation with Bi+ Nederland - conducted an exploratory study on what works to reduce discrimination of bi+ people. In this short guide, we translate the insights gained into recommendations and approaches for practice. Some of these approaches work well to tackle discrimination in general, so also against the discrimination of other stigmatized/marginalized groups in society. Others work specifically for countering discrimination against bi+ people as they respond to unique risk factors that encourage discrimination against this group.

Bi+ is a relatively new term. So, what are we talking about?

Bi+ is the umbrella term for all people with a sexual orientation toward more than one gender. In other words, bi+ people can develop feelings or attraction to more than one gender. Their perceptions of gender also vary. Some people call themselves bi, pan, queer or fluid. Many people do not label their bi+ orientation.

Approach 1: Organize a meeting

An effective method of reducing prejudice and stereotypes is to organize meetings. For example, have a bi+ person in the classroom educate or engage in dialogue with students.

Where to carry this out?

Contact-based interventions, such as organizing a meeting, can be conducted at organizations, in schools, sports clubs, and/or in community centers. Meeting a bi+ person can also take place through film, podcast, or theater. Interest groups, schools as well as municipal antidiscrimination services can facilitate and/or stimulate such encounters.

Why does it work?

One explanation for the effect of contact-based interventions is that you start to empathize with the other person. Empathizing with another person can reduce prejudice.

Another explanation why meetings work is that it helps to reduce fear. Fear of 'the other', often unconsciously, causes people to express themselves negatively, for example, about bi+ people. This fear can stem from the fact that bi+ people do not conform to heterosexual or gender norms that prevail in society, but also from the uncertainty about how to behave toward a bi+ person. Especially men are sometimes afraid that a bi+ man will be sexually interested in them, a fear that may be intertwined with prejudice against gay men.

This fear also sometimes exists among gay men, for example because bi+ people do not conform to the monosexual norm. Contact can contribute to the reduction of monosexual (heterosexual, gay and

Organizing meetings

Meetings with bi+ individuals can be organized in a variety of ways:

- Live in a classroom or in a physical space.
- Through a film, podcast, or theater piece, where the perspective of bi+ people is captured.
- Through dialogue. A dialogue needs good supervision, so that people listen carefully and reflect on what they say.

lesbian) people's fear of bi+ people, as it allows them to become more comfortable around them.

How does it work?

Tell a story that centers the perspective of a bi+ person. It is important that the audience can sympathize with the bi+ person. This person shares something about themselves but also about situations in which they have had to deal with negativity or discrimination. Make sure the story is not too intense or too painful. This makes it more difficult for the participants to put themselves in the position of, and empathize with, the bi+ person. It is important to tell the story in great detail whilst focusing on promoting a shared understanding and empathy.

Additionally, it is important to provide factual knowledge about what being bi+ entails, and what it does not. For instance, explicit attention can be paid to non-mogamous relationship constructions. One thing that explicitly does not work is refuting stereotypes. If you name a stereotype first, it becomes unintentionally reinforced and activated in the brain. That is counterproductive.

Recommendations for implementation

- **Reinforce a sense of confidence.** An important step is to have participants - prior to meeting bi+ people - write down a few good qualities about themselves. For example, "When did you do something good for another person this week? This increases their confidence. People who hold negative attitudes toward bi+ people are in fact often (unconsciously) afraid of them. Those who are more sure of themselves have less fear and are more positive about meeting bi+ people.
- **Make use of social norms.** A social norm demonstrates what people consider typical or desirable behavior in a certain group or situation. This affects how people behave. It involves (1) what is assumed that other people do ('descriptive norms') and (2) what is assumed that other people think, and approve or disapprove of. If people around you disapprove of discrimination against bi+ people, there is a good chance that you yourself will also disapprove of bi+ discrimination because of this 'social norm'. Social norms allow you to set a good example. Research has shown that if you see that someone with whom you identify is friends with a bi+ person, you



will see this as normal and think more positively about bi+ people. Therefore, before an encounter, you might for example, take someone with you who is heterosexual and who is friends with a bi+ person. Or, alternatively, you might show a video about that friendship dynamic. Also consider involving a young bi+ person and a young gay person in the meeting. This way you can help reduce prejudice and stereotypes within the LGBTI+ community. Social norms have more impact when they are communicated by someone with authority or status, and when the listeners and

people involved can identify with the person communicating the social norm. Consider, for example, age, gender, religion, et cetera. If the social norms about bi+ people in a group are very negative, you might choose to facilitate a meeting or contact through film, through theater or imaginary contact (see approach 3).

- **Encourage creative and flexible thinking beforehand.** Do a creative exercise to think less stereotypically. People who think 'out of the box' are less likely to fall into automatic associations and trains of thought that often contain

stereotypes. The best way to do this is to present people with opposing stereotypes (for example: 'a female fireman') in a text or to show them. Make sure that people do not know what the task is about (because then it will not be effective) and make sure that you do not unconsciously reproduce stereotypes when looking for opposite, or contradictory, stereotypes.

- **Try to prevent threatening feelings.** One way to do this is to keep a physical distance, and to avoid touching or close contact (as during the covid pandemic). Avoid talking explicitly about your sex life; you can share with whom you have (sexual) relationships but avoid sharing intricate details about how you have sex, et cetera. If you have several sexual relationships or partners, you can certainly share that as well; emphasize that there is mutual consent. And here too, avoid describing sexual acts and how you have sex.
- **Prevent people who have strong prejudices toward bi+ persons from imagining themselves having sexual interactions with bi+ people.** This makes them want to distance themselves, creating more resistance to fighting their prejudices. This applies mainly to heterosexual men.
- **Provide a relaxed and pleasant setting.** The atmosphere and place of a meeting have an effect on how someone looks back on it. People form associations based on what happens during an encounter and they also form associations based on how the atmosphere was (see: Priming in practice). So make sure there is good music, good food, comfortable chairs, et cetera. When people feel relaxed they will likely also experience less anxiety, so the positive effect of a meeting, and facilitating contact with bi+ persons, will be stronger.

Inclusion, discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes

Inclusion is: that everyone, within the rule of law, has and experiences the freedom to live their life according to their unique needs and abilities, within a social system: a) that everyone is, a priori, a part of, b) that everyone can help shape, and c) in which everyone feels recognized and accepted as an individual.

The legal definition of discrimination is: "Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social or cultural sphere or in other areas of social life."

We define LGBTI+ discrimination as follows: LGBTI+ discrimination refers to the unequal treatment, negative treatment and/or use of violence against LGBTI+ persons (partly) because of their LGBTI+ identity. LGBTI+ stands for lesbian, gay, bi+, transgender, and intersex persons. It also includes other configurations of people that are not heterosexual, and/or cisgender, and/or have a gender expression that does not fall within the usual definitions of woman or man.

Prejudice: Negative feelings toward a particular group of people. These can be very explicit but also (semi)unconscious and implicit.

Stereotypes: Unlike prejudice, stereotypes are cognitive. They are exaggerated views or amplified portrayals of groups of people. Stereotypes can be both positive and negative as well as implicit and explicit.

Approach 2: Start a campaign

Organize a campaign with information about bi+ people. A campaign with accurate information can counter misconceptions that people may have. Intentionally choose a specific target group, such as LGBTI+ or heterosexual persons. Use people who have status, people who are LGBTI+ and people who are heterosexual. Have them establish a clear social norm. For example, by stating that the LGBTI+ community should work to be more inclusive for bi+ people, or that society should become more inclusive toward bi+ persons. It also works well if people of status show that they are friends with someone who identifies as bi+ and/or has dated/is dating someone who is bi+. A campaign is concurrently a great opportunity to showcase the diversity that exists within the bi+ community. This can also help to reduce existing prejudices and stereotypes.

Where to carry this out?

You can run a campaign using (social) media, for example on Instagram. But it can also be done in public spaces, or at schools and/or other places where groups of people come together, such as associations or community centers. In this way you combine this approach with approach 1: Organizing meetings. Campaigns can be organized together with other parties. Think of the local or national government but also of interest groups, for example such as GSA's: Gender & Sexuality Alliances, which are mainly active in primary and secondary education.

Why does it work?

The positive impact of campaigns is based on the effect of social norms (see above at the recommendation: "Make use of social norms") and the effect of knowledge sharing.

How does it work?

A literature review conducted by Movisie shows that providing factual knowledge helps people to cultivate a more positive attitude toward bi+ people. It is important to present the knowledge in an accessible way and demonstrate that stereotypes are not facts, without first reproducing stereotypes. In addition to knowledge that mainly appeals to 'our thinking', it is also good to appeal to 'our feelings'. This can be done by sharing personal stories and experiences (see approach 1). With a campaign it is possible to establish positive social norms. For example, establishing the norm that inclusion and equality are positive, or the norm that you should intervene in discriminatory and exclusionary practices. Good example is the Dutch online campaign #DatMeenJeNiet (English: #YouDon'tMeanThat).

Recommendations for implementation

- **Work with GSAs in schools.** Within GSAs, friendships often exist between bi+ people and monosexual people. This is a useful and positive example for a possible campaign within schools. Research also shows that GSAs can contribute to less discrimination against bi+ people in schools.
- **Target LGBTI+ and heterosexual people separately.** Target not only heterosexual youth but also lesbian girls and women and gay boys and men. In doing so, recognize that the other members of the LGBTI+ community also experience forms of discrimination, so that they do not get the feeling that the discrimination that affects them is considered unimportant. As this would make it more difficult for them to let go of their own prejudices about bi+ persons.

- **Show films about friendship.** Show heterosexual people, as well as lesbian girls and women and gay boys and men, films, or movies in which friendships with bi+ people are visible and in which you get to know bi+ people in a positive way (see also, Organizing Meetings). This could be a film about a friendship between a lesbian girl and a bi+ girl and/or a film about a friendship between a straight boy and a bi+ boy.
- **Use well-known people.** Recognizability works if you want to encourage people to adopt positive social norms. People are more likely to adopt social norms from people who resemble them and whom they know, from their own environment, or from the media. A video in which a well-known gay man says that he finds discrimination of bi+ persons perpetuated by his own community very reprehensible, can therefore work well. The same goes for a well-known heterosexual woman who announces that she is going to do something against discrimination of bi+ people in society.
- **Showcase the diversity of the bi+ group.** By making visible that the group of bi+ persons is enormously diverse and heterogeneous, it becomes less easy to form stereotypes and prejudices about them. This helps reduce discrimination against bi+ persons.
- **Share specific knowledge.** Share different types of knowledge and information about bi+ persons. Consider statistical figures and numbers, a brief history about LGBTI+ and information about non-monosexuality. For example, use the Genderbread Person for this..



Approach 3: Organize exercises to reduce anxiety

There are several exercises that can be used to reduce apprehension and anxiety toward bi+ people and thus contribute to more positive contact with individuals from this group. For example, the exercises can be done with a group of students, sports players, colleagues, or other groups of people who meet regularly.

Where to carry this out?

The exercises can be performed in a variety of places: schools, public meeting places, businesses, sports clubs, or other places where encounters are possible. It is advisable, prior to organizing meetings with bi+ persons, to do exercises aimed at reducing fear and anxieties.

Why does it work?

When it comes to prejudices toward bi+ people, fear, and feelings of threat to one's own position, often play a major role. Exercises aimed at reducing these

feelings of fear can therefore help. For example, they can be done prior to a meeting with a bi+ person. The group of students, sports players, employees, or members of the LGBTI+ community, et cetera, will then be more relaxed about the meeting and it will have a greater effect. But also separate from these meetings, such exercises can lead to less prejudice about bi+ persons.

How does it work?

Exercise A: imaginary contact

Carry out an exercise with 'imaginary contact': this means that participants imagine that they have a pleasurable and relaxed meeting or encounter with someone who is bi+. Such an exercise reduces the fear of a real meeting with someone who is bi+ and ensures that people enter the encounter in a more relaxed manner. Especially for heterosexual boys this appears to be important.

Note:

- Guidance is essential. Create a clear story in which you bring someone into the imaginary meeting. Make sure there is no room for personal interpretation. Above all, prevent the person who is imagining the contact from thinking that the bi+ person is interested in them sexually. Then it becomes very difficult to reduce anxiety.
- The imaginary meeting should be realistic. For example, use recognizable places where you could actually meet others, such as in class or at a party.

Exercise B: mindfulness

Do a mindfulness exercise. Mindfulness can ensure that people lean less on automatisms so that stereotypes can be suppressed.

Note:

- People need to be motivated in order to control their biases.
- Works less well with authoritarian people who place less value on equality.
- Also works less well for anxious personalities.
- This approach is most effective with people with strong prejudices.

Example of a script (Toews, 2021)

You are invited to a good friend's house. You meet other friends of your good friend there. They are in the same school. You enter the house and join in the conversation. Everyone is nice, you unwind, and you enjoy yourself. You find out that you have many commonalities and interests with the new people you meet. You want to meet up with them more often. Later that night, it is suggested that you get to know each other a little better as a group. You sit next to Kris, and you find out that you have a lot in common. You laugh together and talk about hobbies and interests you share. Kris would like to date again, and you decide to go through Kris's Tinder profile. You get the phone to swipe and see that Kris is into men, women, and non-binary people alike. You start swiping together, and you chuckle at several interesting profiles. The evening progresses and it's getting late. You decide to go home and agree to meet up with Kris again. You say goodbye to your new friends and go home.

Recommendations for implementation

- **Ensure repetition.** Both exercises have a temporary effect, the precise duration of which is not known. Imaginary contact/meeting still has an effect at least after a week, but the question is whether this is still the case after months. Repetition of the exercises is therefore advisable, as is combining these exercises with other approaches.
- **In imaginary contact, provide details in the story.** The more detailed, the better it works.
- **Use imaginary contact especially with groups of people who do not know many bi+ people in real life.** Then the exercise will have more effect. Therefore, this exercise can be effective with children as well: they often know relatively few bi+ people, but they have often been imbued with stereotypical ideas about this group.
- **Do one of the above exercises before you implement a contact-based intervention.** This can make the meeting or encounter more relaxed.

Example of mindfulness

(Lueke & Gibson, 2016)

Play a 10-minute audio clip. This may be an excerpt that instructs participants to focus on and become aware of the sensations in one's own body (such as the beating of the heart or breathing), while accepting one's own thoughts and sensations without resistance. (YouTube has numerous examples of such body scans and other mindfulness exercises).

Differences in addressing discrimination against gay men and lesbian women

Approaches that are effective for countering discrimination of gay men and lesbian women often also work well for countering discrimination of bi+ persons. This applies, for example, to the use of organizing meetings and imaginary contact.

However, there are also some distinct differences. Educators and intervention developers who are already working to counter discrimination against gay men and lesbian women and now want to help reduce discrimination against bi+ individuals, would benefit from taking the following recommendations to heart.

1. Focus on reducing prejudice among heterosexual persons as well as reducing prejudice among lesbian girls and women and gay boys and men.
2. Consider that fear of 'the other' plays a bigger role in prejudice toward bi+ persons than in prejudice toward lesbian girls and women and gay boys and men. Therefore, use methodologies in your approach that reduce the fear of bi+ persons specifically, and that make people more relaxed when interacting with bi+ persons (see approach 3).
3. In the case of discrimination toward bi+ people, it can be that heterosexual people, but also lesbian women and gay men, feel that their identity ('their box') is under threat. Try to reduce this feeling of being threatened by making it clear that existing identities are not at stake if identities such as bi, queer, pan, bi+ et cetera exist alongside them. Note: do not try to teach people not to think in 'boxes'. People categorize things almost automatically and it is virtually impossible not to categorize.
4. Keep in mind that negative prejudices about non-monogamy may come into play when discriminating against bi+ individuals. Therefore, show that non-monogamy is not a threat to people who prefer monogamy. In general, it is good to make it clear that people have different ways of experiencing relationships and sexuality, and that differences between people are okay. It can also work to portray non-monogamy in a positive way. For example, by showing a video of people who are in a happy polyamorous relationship or an interview with someone who is in an open relationship.

Finally, never try to dispel stereotypes by naming them first, but instead show a positive depiction of relationship structures that are less common.



Colophon

This set of guidelines is based on the Dutch exploratory study 'Verminderen van discriminatie van bi+ mensen. Wat werkt?' ('Reducing discrimination toward bi+ people. What works?') and has been compiled after input from many experts in the field.

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kennis en aanpak van
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