

## New study finds that bisexuality is a ‘distinct orientation’ in women

WASHINGTON, Jan. 29 — *USA Today* recently reported on a new study finding that “being bisexual is a distinct orientation in women, not a temporary phase.” Amy André, Julie Ebin and Marshall Miller, co-authors of *Bisexual Health*, published by the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute**, comment on this latest study by Lisa Diamond, an associate professor of psychology and gender studies at the University of Utah. That study is soon to be published in the *Journal of Developmental Psychology*, a publication of the American Psychological Association.

Download a copy of *Bisexual Health* [here](#).  
Read the *USA Today* story [here](#).

Analyses from *Bisexual Health* authors Amy André, Julie Ebin and Marshall Miller

From Amy André:

“Lisa Diamond’s recent findings come as no surprise to the nearly 5 million women in the U.S. who identify as bisexual. Where Professor Diamond has broken ground, and quite successfully, is in letting the rest of the country in on the news.

“Bisexuality, defined as experiencing attraction to other adults, regardless of gender, has often been described by mono-sexual people (i.e., heterosexuals, gays and lesbians) as mysterious and difficult to understand. This is because mono-sexual people take gender into account when assessing attraction; therefore, it can be challenging to imagine that there is a whole world of people out there who don’t do the same.

“Half of all those who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, identify as bisexual, according to research from the National Survey on Family Growth, as well as other sources. That means that bisexuals make up the largest group within the LGB population. As one of them, I was intrigued to read a recent issue of *USA Today*.

“*USA Today* pointed out, in an article about Professor Diamond’s work, that ‘[w]omen’s bisexuality [is] an identity, not [a] phase.’ The truth is, it can be both, in the same way that identifying as heterosexual can be a phase prior to a period of identifying as gay or lesbian or bisexual. That’s because identity is entwined language. Identity is about the language we use to describe ourselves to others, to let others know about internal processes and demographic characteristics. Many people who currently use terms like ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ or ‘bisexual’ to identify themselves used to use terms like ‘heterosexual’ or ‘straight.’ For some women, bisexual identity is a phase, prior to using a different term. However, for other women — in fact, for most women who experience attraction to other adults, regardless of gender — ‘bisexual’ is the term used most consistently over time to label their identity.

“But, as we’re rushing to state that bisexual identity is usually not a phase, it’s important to recognize that there is also nothing wrong with phases. If there is one thing I learned from getting a master’s degree in sexuality studies, it’s that, for many people, sexuality evolves over the course of a lifetime. For example, research from Lisa Diamond shows that many women who used to use the word ‘lesbian’ to identify themselves later in life come to identify as bisexual. For

these women, identifying as a lesbian was a phase — but one that was as valid and true for them then as bisexual is now.

“Phases are useful elements of the growth process. The problem with phases is when evidence of a phase is used to perpetuate biphobia. The great thing about Professor Diamond’s research is that we can point out the fallacy of the biphobic argument that bisexual identity is always and only temporary — and that that’s a bad thing.

“For all women who identify as bisexual (whether consistently, as most do, or temporarily, as some do) biphobia impacts their lives in many ways. While co-authoring *Bisexual Health*, I read study after study proving that bi women bear the brunt of biphobia every single day. In fact, bisexuals experience more stigma than people of other orientations, gay and straight.

“Research shows that there are numerous harmful stereotypes about bisexuality, proving that biphobia is unfortunately alive and well. What I appreciate about Professor Diamond is that her work has the potential to draw attention to the realities of bi women’s lives, and therefore undo some of the harm that biphobia has caused.”

*With a master’s degree in sexuality studies from San Francisco State University, Amy André writes and lectures extensively on sexuality topics, with a focus on bisexuality. Visit her online at [www.amyandre.com](http://www.amyandre.com).*

From Marshall Miller:

“In *Bisexual Health*, we call for more research into bisexuality and the experiences of bisexual people. This journal article offers just that — a thoughtful, accurate look into the lives of bisexual women. Thank you to the *Journal of Developmental Psychology* for confirming what the bisexual community has known for a long time: that bisexuality is a real, valid sexual orientation.

“According to the National Survey of Family Growth, 2.8 percent of women ages 18 to 44 identify as bisexual. (In comparison, 1.3 percent identify as lesbian.) It’s about time someone took a serious look at their lives and debunked the many myths that surround bisexuality.

“I’ve counseled hundreds of men and women who are in the process of coming out as bisexual. Despite the existence of millions of other Americans who identify as bi, they come out into a world where scant information exists about bisexuality, and where the experience of being attracted to both men and women is often invalidated. I’m glad to see research that confirms so many people’s experience: bisexuality just as real as being lesbian, gay, or heterosexual.

“Some people mistakenly believe that bisexuality is merely a transition stage from straight to gay. Lisa Diamond’s 10-year longitudinal study proves that’s not true. At the 10-year point in her study, Diamond reports that *more* women identified as bisexual or didn’t choose a label at all, not less.

“An important research study like this one is wonderful for bisexual visibility. But that’s also just the beginning: bisexual people need resources, support, and information. We encourage anyone with an interest in bisexuality, HIV/STI prevention, or GLBT health to download a copy of *Bisexual Health*. Many people are now aware that bisexuality exists. What they many not know is that there’s a national bisexual community. [Learn more here.](#)”

*Marshall Miller is the founder of the BiHealth Program at Fenway Community Health.*

From Julie Ebin:

“Lisa Diamond’s study provides thoughtful, sound research on bisexuality that takes into account the nuances of bisexual, unlabeled and lesbian identities. This study provides scientific confirmation for what many bisexuals already know: that we exist and we are not merely going through a phase.

“As we discuss in *Bisexual Health*, there is a need for thoughtful research like this study that examines the similarities and differences between bisexuality and other identities. I applaud Diamond for taking this approach and encourage other researchers to similarly compare identities rather than lumping bisexuals in with heterosexuals or lesbians/gays. Researchers who are interested in a detailed discussion of this issue can download [Bisexual Health](#).

“Health care providers can learn from this study: It’s important to ask about all patients’ sexual behavior and sexual identity, accepting their self-identification as valid and serving them according to their actual physical and mental health needs. Too many individuals experience biphobia from health care providers, and we need to do better at getting people the care they need.”

*Julie Ebin manages the BiHealth Program at The Fenway Institute at Fenway Community Health in Boston. BiHealth resources at can be accessed at [www.fenwayhealth.org/bihealth](http://www.fenwayhealth.org/bihealth).*

**Bisexuality a focus of interest at The National Conference on LGBT Equality: Creating Change, Feb. 6–10, in Detroit, Mich.**

Julie Ebin will be part of the team presenting at the pre-conference institute titled *Charm School for Activists: Effectively Advocating for Your LGBTI Issue*. Workshops of interest include *Crossing Lines: Identity and the Sexuality Spectrum*, and *Bi Theory: A Discussion of Human Sexuality and Models of Sexual Identity Development*. There will also be three caucuses focused on the bisexual community.

Learn more about The National Conference on LGBT Equality: Creating Change [here](#).