

Biphobia in the UK asylum system

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At MRN, we want to unpack bisexuality, biphobia and the experience of queer people in the asylum system. We draw on the experiences of our team and wider Network to consider how stereotypes and biphobia are impacting people currently in the UK asylum system.

Bi/M-spec¹ visibility

Bisexuality is both a label and an umbrella that is distinct from lesbian and gay people. It is the term used to describe people who experience a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards more than one gender. We may describe ourselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms including bisexual, pansexual, abrosexual/fluid and queer².

As bi people, we often experience a unique form of discrimination and erasure from straight people and other members of the LGBTQ+ community. However, this is often not recognised. Biphobia can manifest itself in the widespread stereotypes that bi people are “greedy” or “confused”. This can lead to exclusion from the community, community that can be incredibly vital to newly arrived queer people in the UK.

Bi people, especially those in relationships with people of different genders, can be assumed to be heterosexual. Furthermore, there is an assumption that bi people possess a degree of privilege because they “can pretend to be straight”. For some bi people, this can result in imposter syndrome or feel like their experiences as queer people are not as valid as others.

For bisexual asylum seekers seeking safety on the grounds of sexuality, this misconception can have damaging consequences for their asylum claims. One member of our Network told us that Home Office staff demonstrated a clear lack of

understanding of bisexuality by consistently labelling them as “gay” despite them stating they were bisexual. The burden often falls on bi/m-spec asylum seekers to have to explain the nuances of their sexuality to an institution that is profoundly anti-queer.

It has been widely documented that the Home Office has an ingrained ‘disbelief culture’ towards LGBTQ+ asylum seekers³. Many feel the burden of proof and are often subjected to traumatising interviews in order to demonstrate they queer. Through our Network at MRN, we have heard shocking stories of the lengths people are going to in order to meet the Home Office’s high threshold of proof including one person who provided a sex tape as part of his evidence. Queer people are already made vulnerable by our society, yet the Home Office subjects queer asylum seekers to further horrifying treatment and acts to reinforce their trauma.

The Home Office does not foster a safe or inclusive environment for asylum seekers, especially for those who are bi or m-spec. It must be abolished.

Misrecognition + erasure: a personal account

“During my asylum claim process, I experienced the consequences of the misrecognition and erasure that often bisexual individuals face. As someone who identifies as bisexual, it was important for me to express my true self and provide accurate information about my sexual orientation. However, I soon discovered that the system’s lack of knowledge and understanding about bisexuality could have serious implications for my case.

During my initial interview at the Home Office, I confidently stated that I identify as bisexual. I explained that my attraction extends to multiple genders, emphasising the significance of this aspect of my identity in seeking asylum. To my surprise, I noticed that my case file had been marked as “gay,” completely disregarding and erasing my bisexual identity.

This misclassification was not an administrative oversight; it reflected the misunderstanding of bisexuality and the unique experiences that bisexual asylum seekers face. It felt as though my identity was being boxed into ‘gay’.”

References:

¹Multiple-attraction spectrum.

²<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/bi-hub>

³<https://www.refugeewomen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Women-for-Refugee-Women-See-Us-Believe-Us-Stand-With-Us.pdf>

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