

Bisexual Social & Community Needs Assessment.

A Joint Project by OutFront Minnesota, Bisexual Organizing
Project (BOP) and The University of Minnesota.

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Preface

OutFront Minnesota*

Mission Statement:

"OutFront Minnesota's mission is to make our home a place where GLBT Minnesotans have the freedom, power, and confidence to make the best choices for their own lives."

Our organization serves the GLBT and allied communities of Minnesota with a wide variety of programs and services.

Bisexual Organizing Project*

Mission Statement:

"The Goal of the Bisexual Organizing Project is to foster community, offer support, facilitate social interaction and encourage activism for bisexuals and their allies".

* www.tcbop.org

* www.outfront.org

Designing the survey form

The importance of data collection tool cannot be under estimated. The quality of a study depends on the nature of questions listed in the survey. Even the direction of a study is led by the contents of the survey questionnaire. For these reasons this survey form was designed by investing endless hours of continuous efforts by about twenty individuals.

I would like to list the links of the chain that led to the formation and compilation of the final survey form used for this study. The needs of the bicomunity are quite different from the rest of the community members, because the bicomunity has appeared publicly since the 1970's and is facing strong discrimination by the gays, lesbians and the straight communities. The current and past trends of discrimination and the level of acceptance that this community is getting influence the social and community needs of this community.

I started out by reading the work done during a similar study back in October 1991 by Joe Duca. I read the survey questionnaire prepared then and read the study findings based on that survey. I used that study as my initial baseline, being well aware of the fact that the community needs have changed in many dimensions during the last ten years. However the previous study did not include the specific community needs of the bisexuals, so a provision was made in this

survey to ask about specific community services that might be important for the bicomunity.

My second step was to ask the members of the bicomunity as to what social and community needs they thought should be met. I contacted fifteen board members of the bicomunity and questioned them. Each member viewed bicomunity with a different angle, but the common thing among all fifteen was that their views coincided at the same point. The board members and I communicated via e-mail and telephone. It took endless e-mails and telephone calls to figure out the social and community needs of the existing bisexual community.

I read the book 'Bisexual Politics, Theories, Queries and Visions' by "Naomi Tucker" and got a background regarding how the bisexual movement started. It was much hard work before I was able to design a prototype survey questionnaire. I built my knowledge about the bicomunity by reading this book and by interacting with the board members.

The questionnaire contained questions pertaining to:

- Demographics. (e.g. age, income, education, zip code and location)
- Discrimination against Bicomunity.
- Sexual orientation.
- Legal status of relationship.

- Inquiry about self-esteem.
- Disclosure of identity in different social environments.
- Interaction between the bicomunity and the gay, lesbian and transgender, heterosexual and straight community.
- Question about barrier preventing in maintaining or disclosing the bi-identity.
- Selection of prime concern issues in the bicomunity.
- Inquiry about acceptance of bisexuals in their own community.
- A list of resources that might be needed for the bicomunity.
- Questions to evaluate if the bicomunity in the twin cities was aware of support resources already available at this time.
- Questions were included that asked what bicomunity fantasizes about their future, and how they think that they can achieve that level.
- Violence against the bicomunity was asked in specific.
- Employment issues and discrimination at work place was inquired.
- Questions regarding health issues were asked.
- Questions about the participant's partners, relationships and legal status were asked.

The questionnaire contained some leading open-ended questions. The aim was to guide the person filling the form to think and answer. Generally the questionnaire was designed so that it did not contain question that lead to selected answers. The questions asked had multiple possible answers designed

to evaluate if most of the bisexual' s think in the same way regarding an issue that involves their community.

This prototype questionnaire was e-mailed to the board members with a request to fill it. Some members of the bicomunity were included in filling this form. The members were asked to comment and suggest changes to this form. The form was criticized in a very comprehensive and an extensive way. The members provided with much valuable input. The formatting was changed, some new questions were added, and many old questions were dropped. The new survey form had emphasis on quantitative evaluation. Scale boxes were added and yes/no option questions were inserted.

The new look survey form was again e-mailed to board members and almost all of them accepted the changes and were very envious about the look of the form. I contacted my academic advisor and told him about the survey that I was planning to conduct. He was very helpful and suggested some changes to the survey form.

At the same time when I was designing and assembling this survey form, I was taking a course "Community Health Assessment". We had a few guest speakers who came in to deliver lectures on "How to conduct surveys". I immediately summoned their expertise and told them about the survey that I was planning to conduct. This was when most of the changes had been made to the survey form.

The guest lecturer e-mailed me after about two weeks of scrutiny and said that they found this survey form complete and detailed in all aspects.

The final form was e-mailed to Scott Fearing and William Burleson, who suggested more changes. After making these changes the form was mailed to 200 selected study participants.

Convening the focus groups

There were two focus groups held in April and May. There were two participants in the first focus group. Members of the bicomunity were invited over the telephone for the first focus group. As for the second focus group five participants participated. The invitation for the second focus group was through the cover letter attached to 200 surveys that were mailed about ten days prior to the second focus group.

The summary findings for the focus groups are as follows:

- Bi-organizations' need more publicity and projection.
- Social isolation was identified among certain bicomunity segments. Especially the senior and the male strata. There was a suggestion to establish a pool for bi-friend selection.
- A need for telephone date line was established.

- It was suggested that bi-woman are more readily accepted than bi-men, so the bi-men are more predisposed to social isolation compared to bi-women.
- It was considered that there is compartmentalization within the bicomunity that leaves some bicomunity members in isolation.
- There was a suggestion that bicomunity members should display the photographs of their spouse at their work place desk. There was a contradiction to this suggestion by one participant that bicomunity members want to keep their private live out of work places because they do not want their private lives to be a topic of discussion at their work places, especially when there is an existing strong discrimination against them.
- The participants felt a need for covering bisexual partners for medical and health benefits as well as post partner death benefits. The partners especially in the polyamorous relationships need to be covered for medical benefits.
- The paternity issue barrier for bisexuals who want to adopt children was raised.
- A need for teenage bisexual support services was stressed.
- The group thought that if a partner dies then the living partner should have a right to speak for the children of the deceased partner.
- A need for coffee shop and hang out places for bicomunity were thought to be required where the bicomunity can find people with whom they can

identify with. This was thought to be an essential step towards reducing social isolation.

- We declared that marital laws should be gender blind.
- It was felt that other communities should bring a change in attitude and increase their understanding about the bicomunity.
- It was felt that bridges be made into GLBT work place groups.
- An immediate need to increase societal understanding and knowledge of bicomunity was felt.
- It was considered that there are senior bicomunity members; they should have some place to hang out and services that match their age. The impression that only young people are active about sexuality is false and misleading.
- There was a suggestion for Barnes & Noble GLBT section.
- There should be distribution of informative literature about bisexuality among society to increase their understanding of bisexuality.
- Bi-libraries should have book on various topics and issues pertaining to bisexuals like vaginal fisting etc.
- It was learnt that aging bisexuals have a tendency to get lonely, especially when they start losing friends to disease and death. There should be supportive services for these senior age groups.
- There was a consensus that the bicomunity needs fund raising, more outreach, support groups, executive direct coordinator, support groups facilitated, webmaster and a library.

Description of the survey form

The current survey form is spread over six pages with a total of forty-two questions. The survey begins with the title of the project and the study being conducted. The mission of OutFront Minnesota follows this.

The first six questions address the age, identity, income and demographics of the subject. The next five questions ask the relationship status of the subject. These questions also inquire about legal status of the partnership and if the partner is registered. Also asks with whom the partner is registered with.

The next few questions ask about the comfort level of the subject in his or her setting. These questions also inquire as to what segments of the society the person feels comfortable with the bi-identity. There is a question asking about when the person assumed the bi-identity.

Question number nineteen has multiple choices but asks for only five prime concerns among the bicomunity for the subject. The following questions' focus on extracting data if the subject has ever been subjected to violence because of bi-identity.

The next set of questions asks the individuals perception of the bicomunity and the future of this community. These are open-ended essay type questions

designed and thought to explore the imagination and the ideas of the person filling the survey form.

I asked about services needed for the children of bisexuals, any experiences of discrimination. Then there are leading questions for data about discriminatory attitudes against the bi on the hands of gays, lesbians and transgender. There is a leading question about socializing with the gays and lesbians/transgender.

There is provision for voluntary submission of contact by the subject if a need to contact that person arises in future. Then there are a bunch of questions that test the knowledge of the person about the organizations and services that exist to support the bicomunity.

Sample selection

The Bisexual Organizing Project maintains a database for about 700 bisexuals.

This database was started about ten years ago at the Because Conference.

From this database 200 individuals were selected with the following criteria.

- Race wise the selected participants were white as well as people of color.
- Couples were preferred as subjects, although the database had overwhelmingly single individuals.
- 117 participants were from Minneapolis and St. Paul cities.
- 83 participants were from suburbs/rural areas.

- About ten subjects were hand picked.
- Some surveys were included from the bi-nite group, Moore Head and Mankato.

Survey findings

(Sample size: n = 42)

Age:

20-30 - 21.42%

30- 40 - 35.71%

40-50 - 26.2%

50-60 - 14.3%

60-70 - 2.4%

Identity:

Male – 38.1%

Female – 59.52%

Transgender – 2.4%

Annual Income:

10 K – 15%

20 K – 12.5%

30 K – 27.5%

40 K – 10%

50 K – 15%

60 K – 7.5%

70 K + - 12.5%

4.8% did not respond

Education:

High School – 4.4%

Bachelor's degree – 44.44%

Masters degree – 22.22%

Doctoral – 8.88%

Trade/Vocational School – 11.11%

Some graduate hours – 8.9%

Where do you live:

Rural – 4.76%

Urban – 69%

Suburb – 26.19%

Current sexual orientation:

Bisexual – 97.7%

Relationship status:

A: Partnerships:

Single – 19%

Dating – 11.9%

Coupled monogamous – 30.9%

Coupled polyamorous – 16.6%

Non-monogamous – 26.2%

C: Legal status:

Are you or your domestic partner registered:

Yes – 23.8% No answer:
28.57%

No – 47.62%

Registered where:

City of Minneapolis: 7.14%

Your place of employment: 4.76%

B: Living arrangements:

Live alone – 30.95%

Live with roommates – 71.4%

Live with partner – 47.62%

Live with multiple partners – 0%

Live with children – 14.28%

Your partner's place of employment:

4.76%

D: Legal partnership status:

Single – 42.85%

Married – 33.33%

Same sex domestic partnership –
0%

Legally separated – 4.76%

Divorced – 11.9%

No reply – 7.14%

Gender of your partner(s):

Male – 38.1%

Female – 50%

Transgender – 4.76%

No reply – 7.14%

What is your partner's orientation:

Bisexual – 26.2%

Gay – 7.14%

Lesbian – 16.7%

Heterosexual – 11.9%

Straight – 35.7%

Queer – 4.8%

Does your partner know your orientation:

Yes – 64.3%

No – 14.28%

No reply – 21.42%

How comfortable are you with the following:

Gender identity – 100% comfortable

Sexual orientation – 97.62 are above the average degree of comfort, and 2.4% are uncomfortable below average degree.

Relationship status – 78.6% are above average level of comfort with their relationship status and 16.67% are below average level of comfort, 4.76% did not reply.

At what age did you first identify as your current orientation:

Age in years:

10-20 – 33.3%

20-30 – 39.4%

30-40 – 24.24%

40-50 – 3%

50-60 – 0%

60-70 – 0%

No reply – 21.43%

How comfortable are you in acknowledging your identity publicly in each of the following settings:

	Uncomfortable	Average	Comfortable	No reply
With friends	11.9%	11.9%	76.2%	
At work or at school	50%	14.28%	35.7%	
At my place of worship	46.15%	7.7%	7.7%	38.1%
With my family of origin	40%	12.5%	47.5%	4.76%
With my current children	35%	20%	45%	52.38%
In my neighborhood	37.77%	21.43%	42.22%	
With my children	45%	15%	40%	52.38%