



Division 44 Webinar Series: Affirming Care for Bisexual Individuals

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Workshop Objectives

1. Describe the role of bisexuality as an identity
2. Identify the detrimental effects of binegative attitudes in the lives of bisexual people
3. Implement skills to successfully engage bisexual clients in counseling and psychotherapy in a culturally responsive manner.



Context: Selected Needs of Bisexual People...

- Visibility
- Accurate representation
- Validation
- Affirmative treatment
- Liberation
- Equal rights and equal access



NEEDS



Context: Mental and Physical Health Disparities

PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Substance Use
- Suicidality

PHYSICAL

- Unprotected sex
- Sex work engagement
- Increased number of sexual partners
- Increased use of emergency contraception and abortion
- Increased risk of HIV and STIs

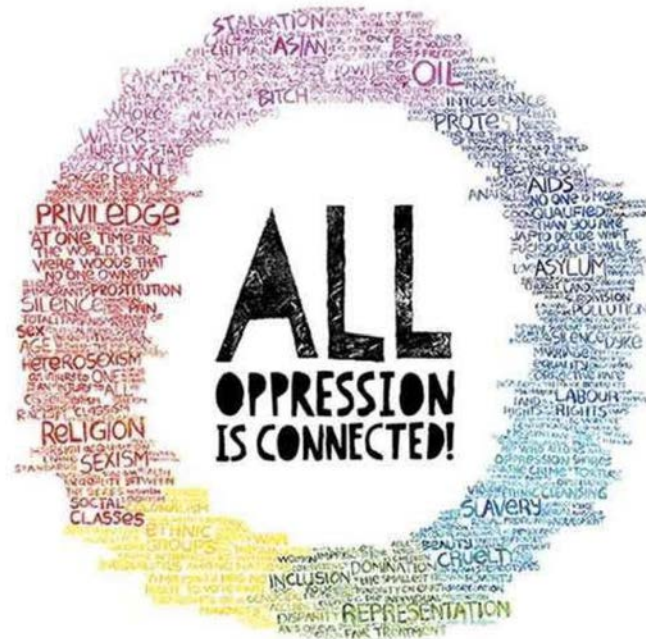


Our Framework: Intersectionality

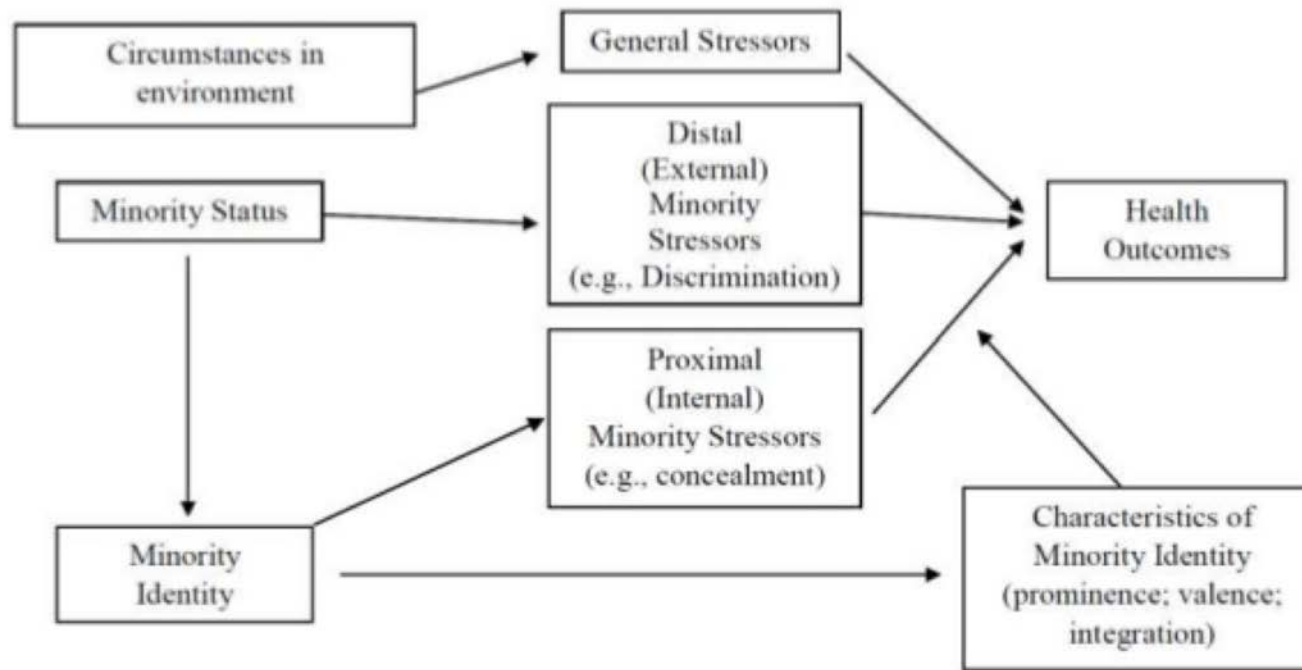


There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.

Audre Lorde



Our Framework: Meyer's Minority Stress Model



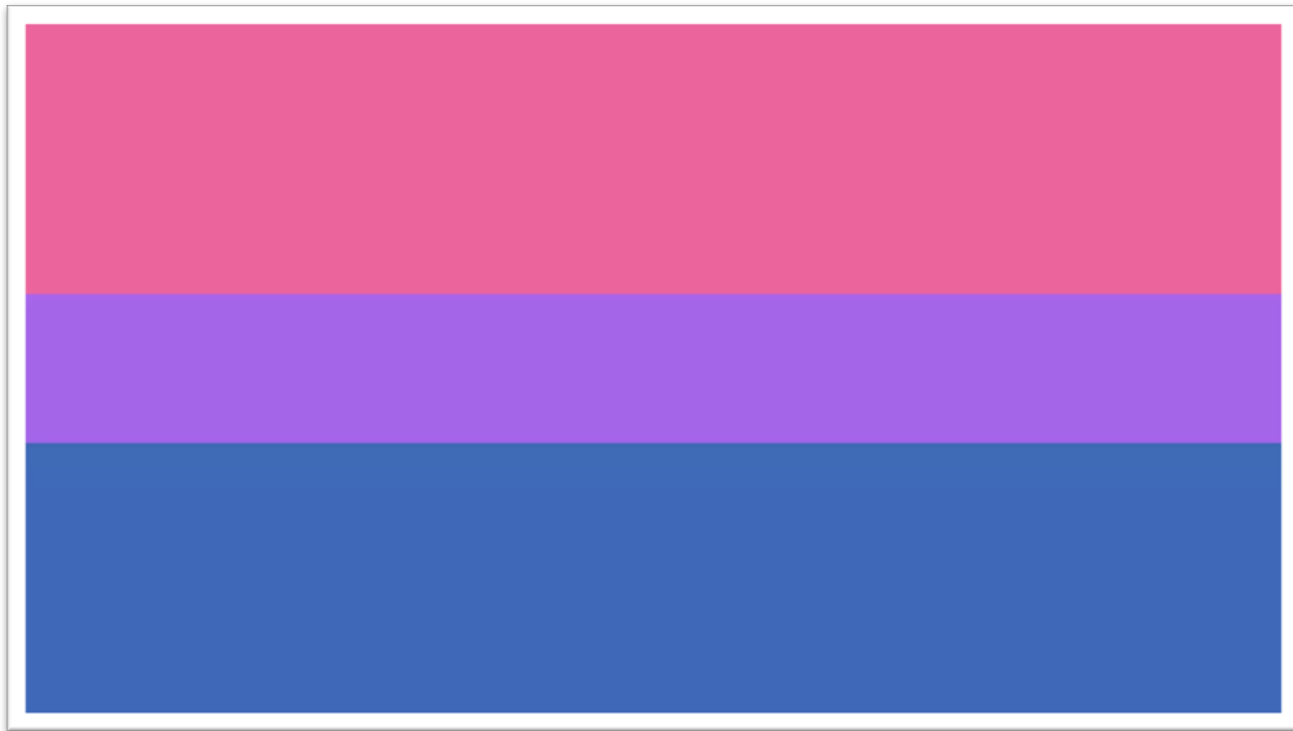
Our Framework: Situate Historically



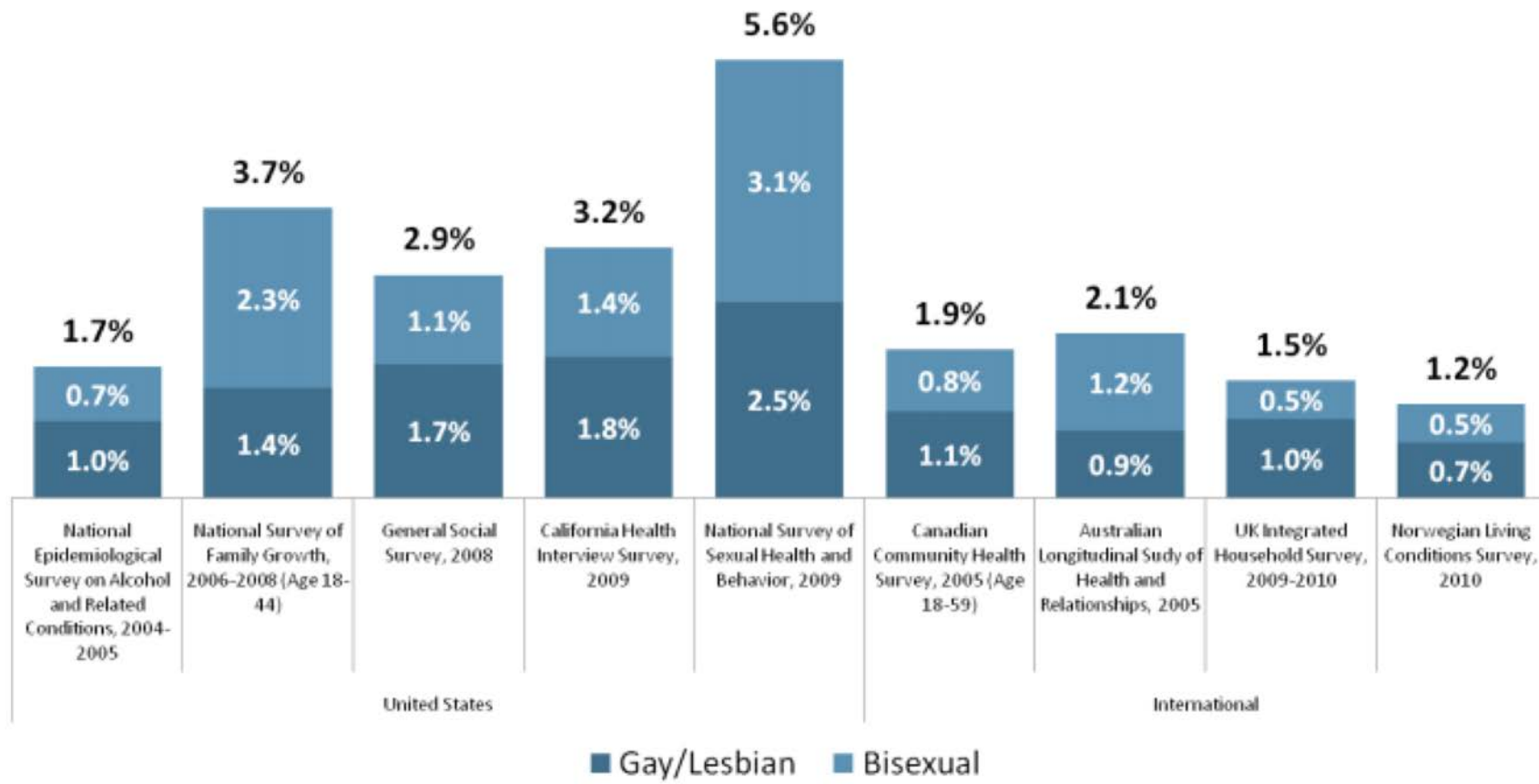
- Pathologization of identity
- Persecution/discrimination of identity
 - Hurtful discourses
- Exclusion from heterosexual communities and "gay" communities
- Monosexism



What percentage of the population is bisexual?



How many people are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender? (Williams Institute, 2011)



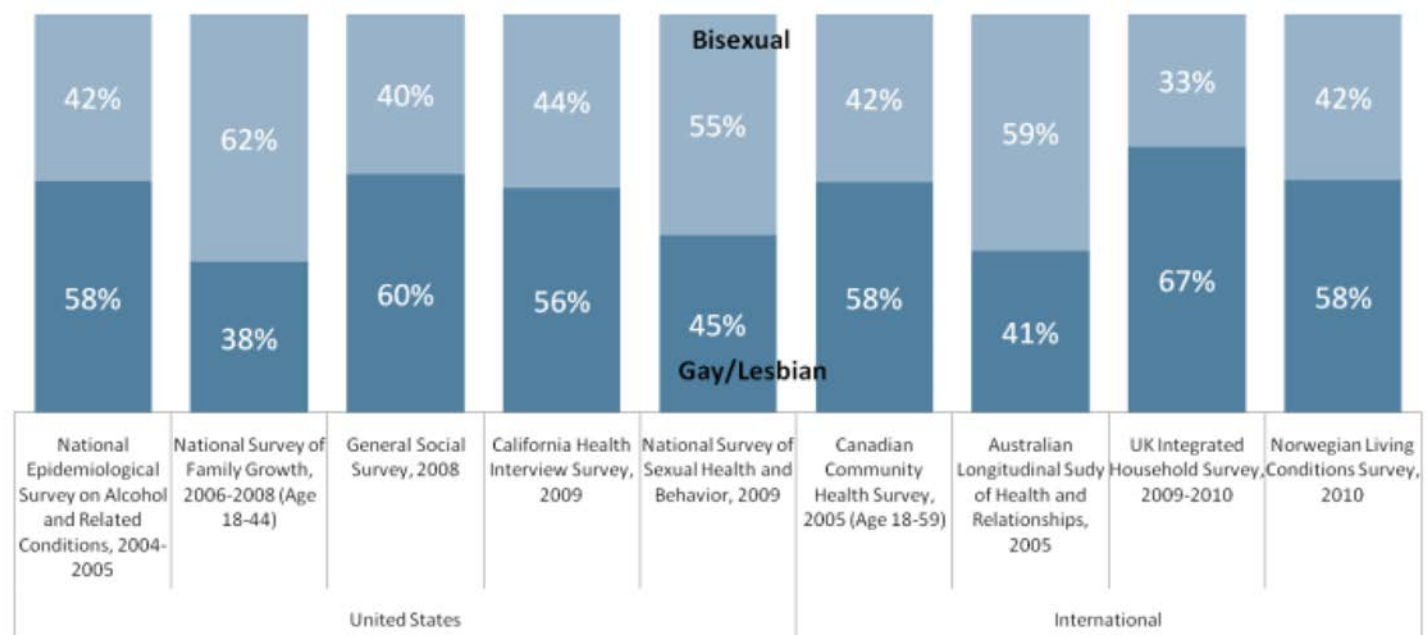
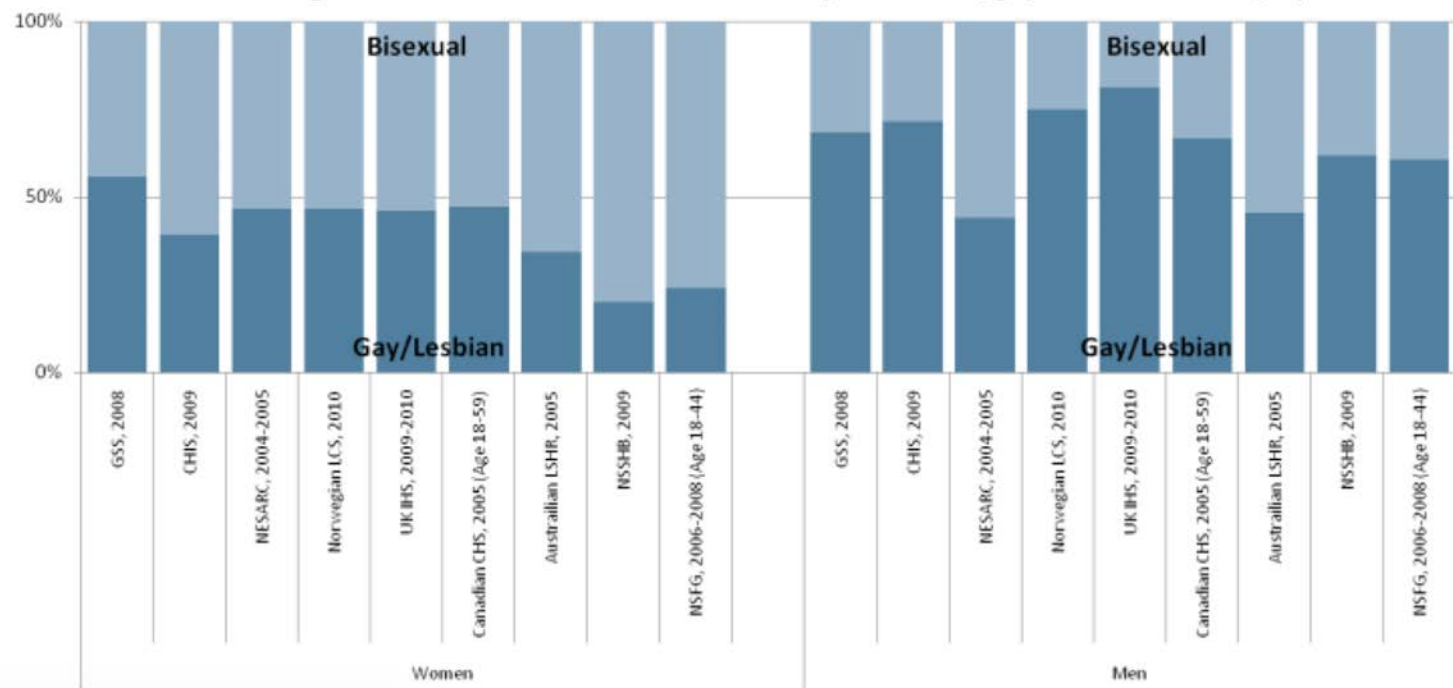


Figure 3. Percent of adults who identify as lesbian/gay versus bisexual, by sex.



Bisexuality Defined

- **American Institute of Bisexuality**: The capacity for romantic and/or sexual attraction to more than one gender.
- **Robyn Ochs**: The potential to be attracted—romantically and/or sexually--to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree.
- **Swan (2018)**: Bisexuality is a collective term for a sexual orientation that encompasses a continuum of relational possibilities including, sexual behaviors and/or feelings toward, emotional attachment to, and/or desires or fantasies for, both men and women. These attractions do not have to be acted on or equal in either their magnitude or in the ratio of men and women to who they have targeted.



Flexibility



THE BISEXUAL* UMBRELLA

BISEXUAL*

Anyone attracted (sexually, romantically or otherwise) to people of more than one gender, or to people of similar+different genders, and who identifies as bisexual*.

- This text represents one person's opinion and is not meant to speak for anybody else.
- The umbrella only includes people who identify under it and want to be included.



PANSEXUAL/OMNISEXUAL

Anyone attracted to people of all genders and sexes, or regardless of sex and gender, and who identifies as pan or omni.

POLYSEXUAL

Anyone attracted to people of many genders and sexes (but not all), and who identifies as poly.

QUEER

A non-specific identity for describing anyone diverging from heterosexuality, monogamy and vanilla sexuality. In a bi-spectrum context, it's used to convey attraction to people of more than one, or to many gender(s).

FLUID

Attraction which changes or might change over time (towards people of various genders).

HOMOFLEXIBLE/LESBIFLEXIBLE

People who are usually attracted to people of genders similar to their own, but might occasionally be attracted to people of genders different from their own.

HETEROFLEXIBLE

People who are usually attracted to people of genders different from their own, but might occasionally be attracted to people of genders similar to their own.

OTHER BI* IDENTITIES

Include: biromantic, panromantic, bisensual, pansensual, bi/dyke, dyke, bisexual-lesbian, ambisexual, anthrosexual, multisexual, gender-blind, pomosexual, and many more.

BI-CURIOUS

Describes people who are usually gay, lesbian or heterosexual, and who are curious about experimenting with people of genders different from their usual preference.

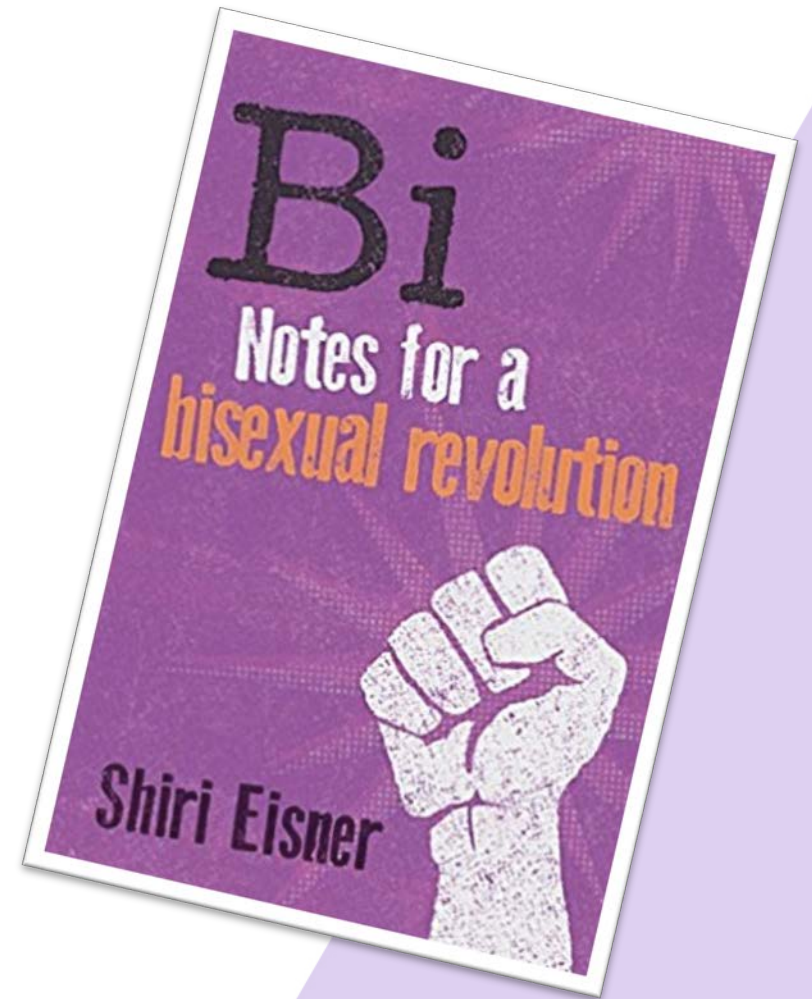
Made by Shiri Eisner <http://bidyke.tumblr.com>



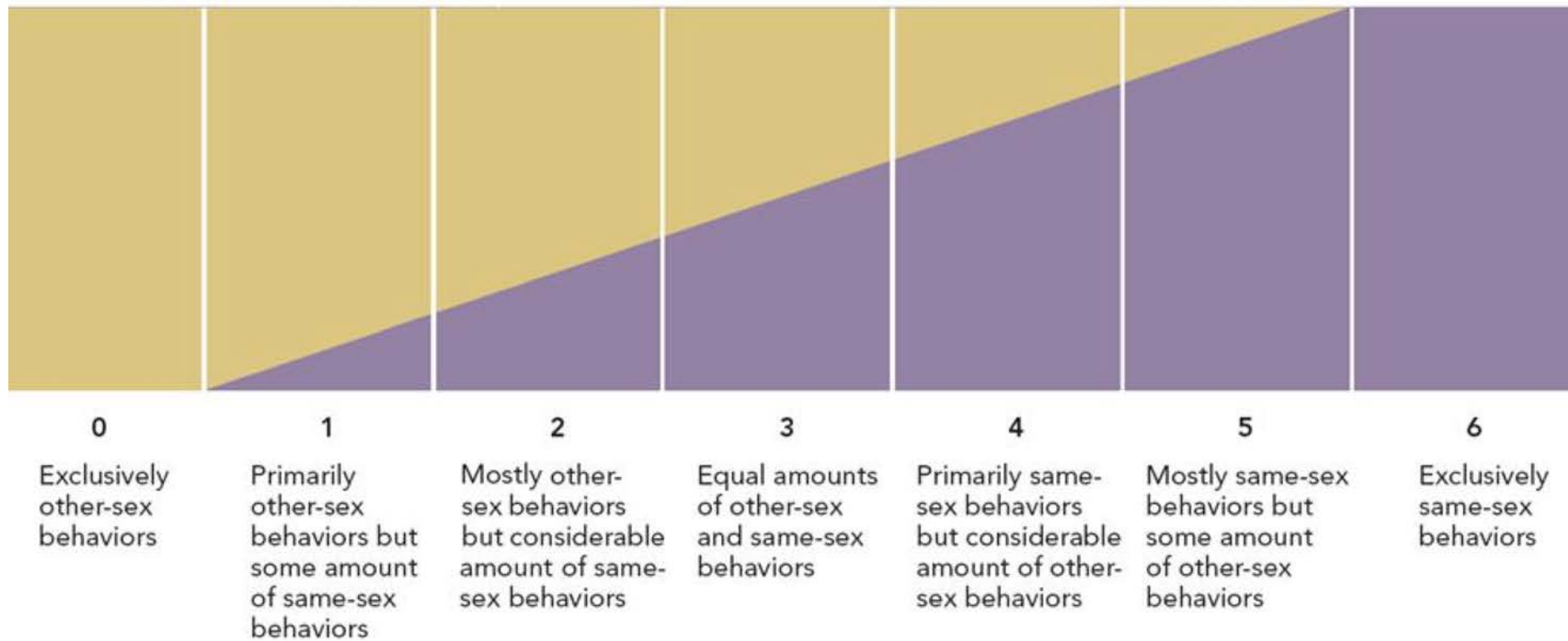
“Much like many other LGBT and queer identities, bisexuality, too, was first **invented and scrutinized by hegemonic powers** under the mass project of categorizing and then **pathologizing** various human experiences and behaviors, later to be reclaimed by the bisexual movement...What remained, then, for the bisexual movement, was to **reclaim bisexuality**...in a way that would benefit bisexual populations and give back to them.”

Shiri Eisner

Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution (2013)



Kinsey Homosexual-Heterosexual Scale



Klein Sexual Orientation Grid

The Klein Sexuality Grid

	Variable	Past	Present	Ideal
A	Sexual Attraction			
B	Sexual Behavior			
C	Sexual Fantasies			
D	Emotional Preference			
E	Social Preference			
F	Heterosexual/Homosexual Lifestyle			
G	Self Identification			

For Variables A to E:

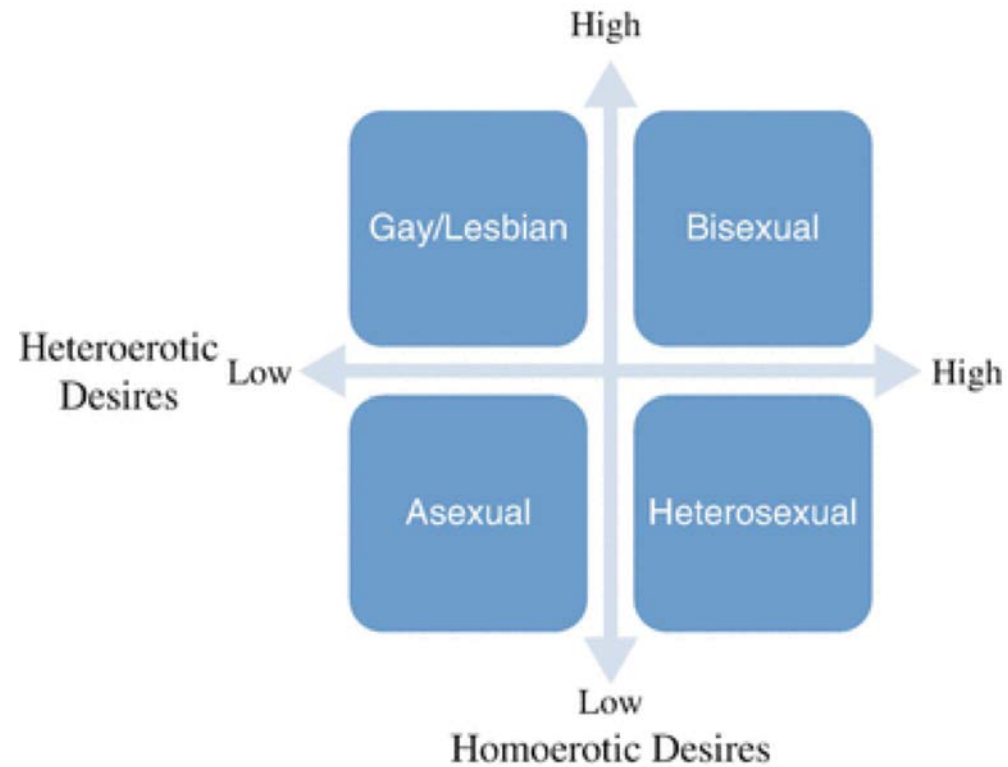
- 1 = Other sex only
- 2 = Other sex mostly
- 3 = Other sex somewhat more
- 4 = Both sexes
- 5 = Same sex somewhat more
- 6 = Same sex mostly
- 7 = Same sex only

For Variables F and G:

- 1 = Heterosexual only
- 2 = Heterosexual mostly
- 3 = Heterosexual somewhat more
- 4 = Hetero/Gay-Lesbian equally
- 5 = Gay/Lesbian somewhat more
- 6 = Gay/Lesbian mostly
- 7 = Gay/Lesbian only



Storm Erotic Response and Orientation Scale



Social Identity Perspective

- Social construction of difference—“normal” vs. not
- General format of identity development models:
 - No exposure
 - Initial exposure
 - Participating with identity, internal struggle
 - Integrating identity and committing to it



Binegative Attitudes

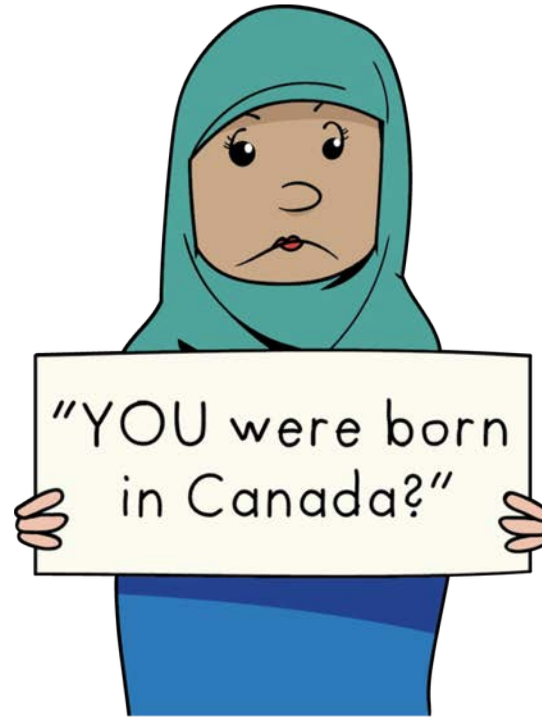
“Biphobia or anti-bisexual prejudice has been conceptualized to reflect two underlying dimensions: an **instability dimension**, or the degree to which bisexuality is perceived as an unstable and illegitimate sexual orientation, and an **intolerance dimension**, or the extent to which others are hostile toward bisexuality and bisexual persons.”

Brewster & Moradi (2010)



Microaggressions

“Microaggressions are the **brief and commonplace** daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental **indignities**, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious **slights and insults** to the target person or groups” (Sue, 2010)



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Myths Related to Bisexuality

Borrowed from Shiri Eisner (2013)

- Bisexuality does not exist
- Bisexuals are confused, indecisive, or going through a phase
- Bisexuals are slutty, promiscuous or inherently unfaithful
- Bisexuals are carriers or vectors of HIV and other STIs
- Bisexuals are actually gay or straight
- Bisexuals can choose to be gay or straight



Myths Related to Bisexuality

BISEXUALITY DOES NOT EXIST

- Feeds bisexual identity erasure
- Truth: Validated studies demonstrate that it is a true construct
- Serves a societal purpose to subvert and eliminate bisexuality out of existence



What **Not** To Say in Session

- “I wonder if you’d put less pressure on yourself if you recognized that you’re just exploring.”



Myths Related to Bisexuality

BISEXUALS ARE CONFUSED, INDECISIVE, OR GOING THROUGH A PHASE

- Implies sexuality is not truly fluid and that bisexual people are unable to achieve relationship consistency
- Truth: Research demonstrates people of all sexual identities experience phases and shifts but only bisexuality is criticized. Sexuality is a continual process of learning.
- Bisexuality creates space for a fluidity that is in opposition to societies narrow expectations



What **Not** To Say in Session

- “Usually people who say they are bisexual find that they’re actually preparing to come out as gay.”



Myths Related to Bisexuality

BISEXUALS ARE SLUTTY, PROMISCUOUS OR INHERENTLY UNFAITHFUL

- Perpetuates the idea that bisexual people cannot be sexually satiated with only one partner and are unable to commit to one partner
- Truth: Many bisexuals are in successful monogamous relationships, although there are also many who are in successful consensually non-monogamous relationships.
- Bisexuals are hypersexualized within the presumption that sex is problematic, meaning bisexual = bad.



What **Not** To Say in Session

- “I’m concerned that being bisexual will affect your ability to maintain fidelity in your marriage.”



Myths Related to Bisexuality

BISEXUALS ARE CARRIERS OR VECTORS OF HIV AND OTHER STI'S

- Premise is that bisexuals (especially men) have indiscriminate unprotected sex and then carry it to other partners, plays on fears of these diseases
- Truth: Identity of bisexual does not cause one to get infected, behavior of unsafe sex does.
- Bisexuality introduces “queerness” into heteronormative structures which is feared.



What **Not** To Say in Session

- “I saw on your paperwork that you are bisexual. When was the last time you got tested for HIV?”



Myths Related to Bisexuality

BISEXUALS ARE ACTUALLY GAY OR STRAIGHT

- Reinforces the idea that bisexuals are confused and must fit into dichotomous structure of gay/straight
- Truth: It's possible to have attraction to more than one gender!
- Reinforces phallocentrism: that bisexual men are gay and bisexual women are straight, because adoration of men unites all bisexual people.



What **Not** To Say in Session

- “I’m worried you foreclosed on your identity label; how closely did you think about what your sexuality really is?”



Myths Related to Bisexuality

BISEXUALS CAN CHOOSE TO BE GAY OR STRAIGHT

- Implies that bisexual people have a privilege to morph into gay or straight as they see fit
- Truth: Sexuality is not a choice. Do others chose to be straight?



What **Not** To Say in Session

- “Since you experience some “straight privilege,” does that make you feel insulated from discrimination?”



Microaggressions

“**Acknowledgement** of the existence of sexual orientation microaggressions and taking the risk to challenge micro-aggressions can set a therapeutic tone to foster enhanced conversations regarding power, privilege, and sexuality, likely improving the quality of the therapeutic relationship.” (Shelton & Colleagues, 2011)

“After our last session, I realized that I made an assumption that we have a shared experience because I identify as a lesbian and you identify as bisexual. I want to acknowledge that happened and talk about how that affected you and this work.”



Upcoming D44 Webinars

Monday, November 5th at 12:00PM Eastern Time

Anxiety in Sexual and Gender Minority Populations: Research and Clinical Considerations

Dr. Lauren P. Wadsworth, Postdoctoral Fellow at McLean Hospital/Harvard Medical School's OCD & College Mental Health Program

Friday, November 16th at 3:00PM Eastern Time

LGBTQ Intersectionality with Kink Sexualities: An Overview of Research, Clinical Practice, and Advocacy

Dr. Richard Sprott, California State University, East Bay

*A Recording of today's webinar will be sent to your email
Slides available on my website



Selected References

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QUESTIONS?

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