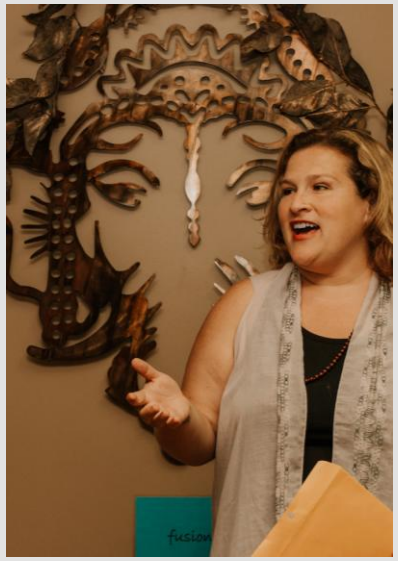
Working with Bisexual Clients: Foundations and Basic Competencies

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- Licensed Supervising Professional Clinical Counselor, Registered Expressive Arts Therapist (IEATA), 500-hour trained yoga teacher
- EMDRIA Certified Therapist/Approved Consultant and Training Provider
- 24 years of experience working in social services and counseling; includes three years in civilian humanitarian (Bosnia-Hercegovina)
- Author of *EMDR Made Simple, Trauma and the 12 Steps, Trauma Made Simple*, *Process Not Perfection: Expressive Arts Solutions in Trauma Recovery,* and *Transforming Trauma with Jiu-Jitsu*; co-author of *EMDR Therapy & Mindfulness for Trauma-Focused Care* and *Healing Addiction with EMDR Therapy*
- Creator of the Dancing Mindfulness practice and author of *Dancing Mindfulness: A Creative Path to Healing and Transformation*
- Author of *Dissociation Made Simple: A Stigma-Free Guide to Embracing Your Dissociative Mind and Navigating Life* (2023) and *You Lied to Me About God: A Memoir* (2024)
- Interfaith Seminarian, The Chaplaincy Institute

Purpose Statement

The discrimination and trauma faced by the LGBTQ+ community in the modern world is well-documented, with a significant impact on mental health outcomes noted. Within the LGBTQ+ community, people who identify as bisexual or as part of the bisexual umbrella can encounter even greater misunderstanding and bias, compared to their gay or lesbian counterparts. Bisexual individuals often describe the pain of being regarded as “too straight” by gays and lesbians, and “too queer” by the heterosexual mainstream. The trauma of being stuck between both worlds is profound.

Purpose Statement

This course seeks to highlight the unique trauma and stress of the bisexual experience and to equip clinicians to better understand and to work with their clients who identify as bisexual.

Objectives

1. Define bisexuality and the bisexual umbrella using several well-accepted definitions in the LGBTQ+ literature.
2. Discuss the concept of oppressive cognitions as a trauma issue and explain how such cognitions can complicate recovery for bisexual clients.
3. Articulate a basic trauma-focused treatment strategy for working with bisexual clients.
4. Evaluate one's own personal biases surrounding bisexuality and working with bisexual clients.

What is your working definition of *bisexual*?

(There is no right or wrong answer here, this is simply a question for your reflection.)

Common Responses May Include

1. Being attracted to both men and women
2. Being in relationships with both men and women
3. Being willing to have sex with anyone
4. People who haven’t figured it out yet
5. “Hearts not parts” or other expanded views beyond the binary

What Does It Really Mean? (Klein, 1993)

- A bi person has the capacity for romantic and/or sexual attraction to more than one gender.
- For most people, that simply means that you can be attracted to both men and women.
- If you honestly feel you meet that criteria, then you are bisexual.
- As a bi person, you do *not* have to feel the same kind or intensity of attraction to all genders.
- As a bi person, there is nothing for you to prove, nothing to consummate, and no requirement to “maintain” your bisexuality.

What Does It Really Mean? (Klein, 1993)

> *"Understanding and acknowledging your own sexuality is a personal process and is about living with integrity and being true to yourself."*
>
> –from The Bisexual Option (Klein, 1993)

What Does It Really Mean? (Robin Ochs, Advocate)

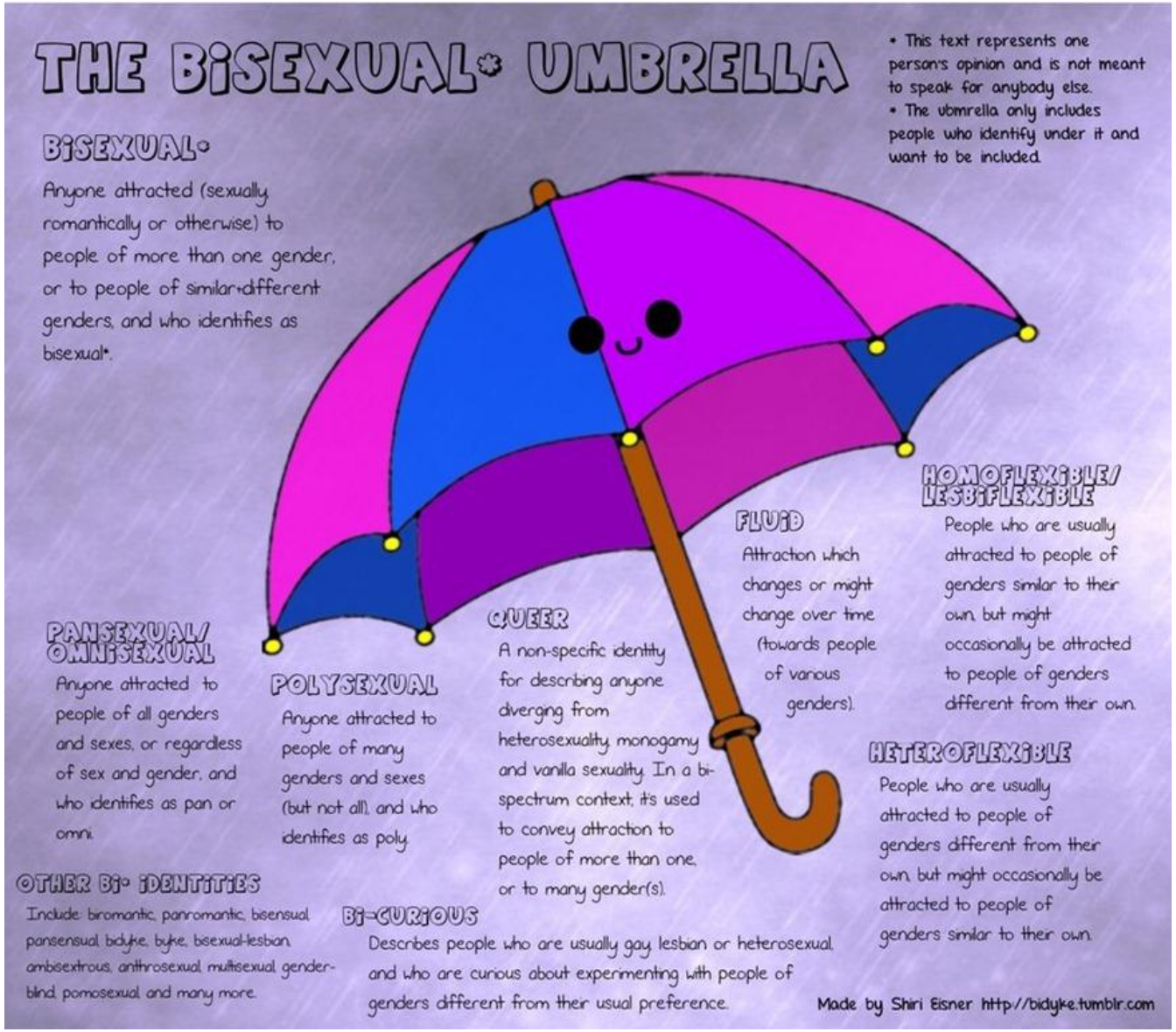
“I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge that I have in myself the potential to be attracted—romantically and/or sexually—to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree.”

https://www.robynochs.com/

The Bisexual Umbrella: Other Popular Identifiers

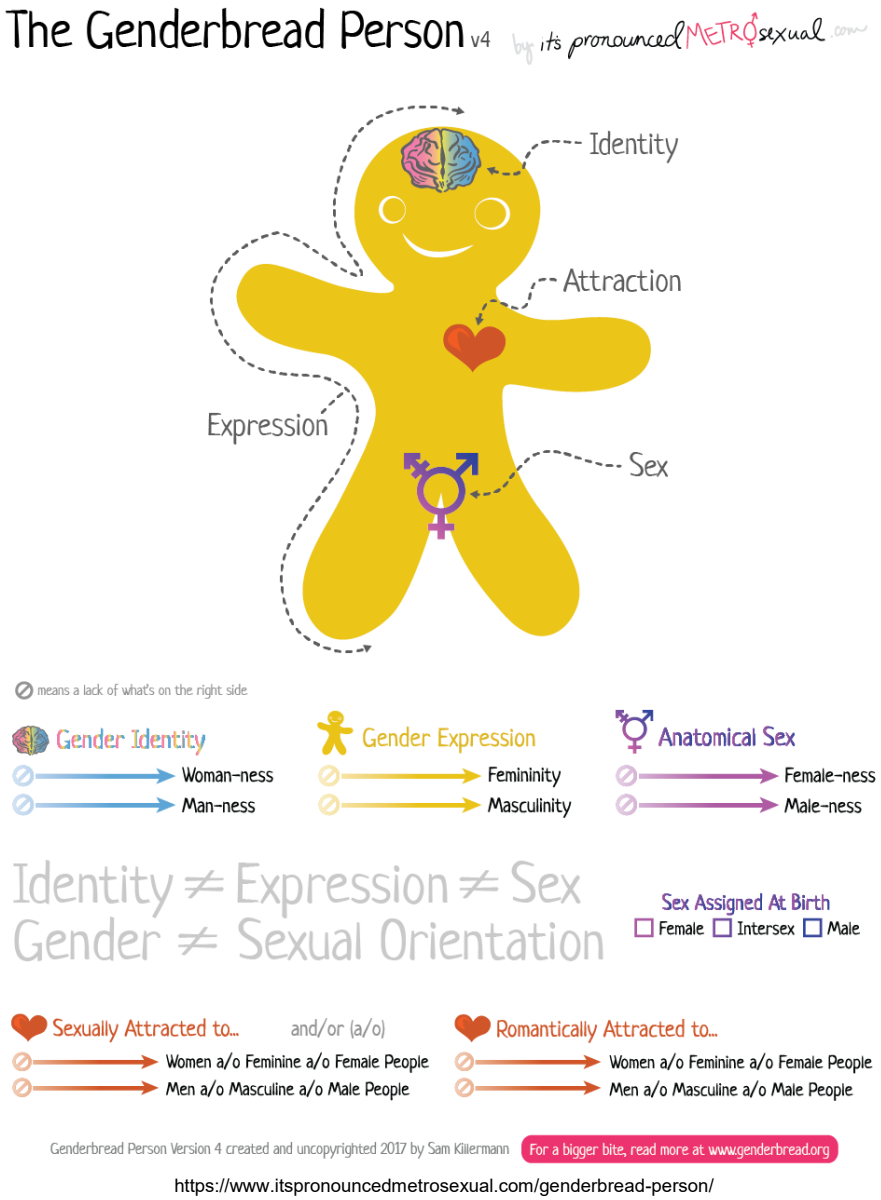
- Queer
- Sexually fluid
- Pansexual, omnisexual, polysexual, ambisexual
- Non-monosexual
- Non-binary (as it relates to sexuality, not gender)

The Bisexual Umbrella



https://www.deviantart.com/drynwhyl/art/The-bisexual-umbrella-269963982

The Genderbread Person



https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/genderbread-person/

How Common is Bisexuality?

- According to the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law (Gates, 2011), approximately 9 million Americans identify as LGBT.
- 1.7% of the total U.S. adult population identifies as either gay or lesbian.
- 1.8% of the total U.S. adult population identifies as bisexual.
- Updated data from 2023 shows that 5.5% of the US population (about 13.9 million) identify as LGBT, although specific data not given for bisexuals (Flores & Conron, 2023).

How Common is Bisexuality?

- According to a Gallup Poll (Jones, 2024), 4.4% of U.S. adults identify as bisexual with 7.6% identifying in general as part of the LGBTQ+ community.
- Gallup found that 57.3% of the LGBTQ+ community identifies under the bisexual umbrella.
- One-fifth of the members of Gen Z identify as bisexual/sexually fluid.
- Check out the full article here: https://news.gallup.com/poll/611864/lgbtq-identification.aspx

How Common is Bisexuality?

- Globally, about 4% of adults identify as bisexual according to a 2023 survey by Ipsos.

- Read the full report here:
  https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/Ipsos%20LGBT%2B%20Pride%202023%20Global%20Survey%20Report-ja.pdf

- While precise numbers can be difficult to ascertain, a 2019 survey of 191,000 participants globally suggest relatively stable rates of heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality across cultures, challenging myths about social norms (Rahman, et al., 2019).

Most Recent Meta-Analyses About Bisexual Health

- Haarmann, L., Folkerts, A.-K., Lieker, E., Eichert, K., Neidlinger, M., Monsef, I., Skoetz, N., Träuble, B., & Kalbe, E. (2023). Comprehensive systematic review and meta-analysis on physical health conditions in lesbian- and bisexual-identified women compared with heterosexual-identified women. Women's Health, 19.

- Wittgens, C., et al. (2022). Mental health in people with minority sexual orientations: A meta-analysis of population-based studies. Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica, 145(4), 357-372.

- Haarmann, L., et al. (2024). Higher risk of many physical health conditions in sexual minority men: Comprehensive systematic review and meta-analysis in gay- and bisexual-identified compared with heterosexual-identified men. LGBT Health, 11(2), 81-102.

- Cross, H., et al. (2024). Bisexual people experience worse health outcomes in England: Evidence from a cross-sectional survey in primary care. Journal of Sex Research, 61(9), 1342-1350.

Common Social Cultural Judgments

- There’s no such thing as bisexuality.
- You’re just confused and haven’t figured things out yet.
- Bisexual people use their sexuality in deviant or manipulative ways.
- Because of “passing privilege,” bisexuals aren’t really part of the LGBT+ community.

Reflection Questions

Are there other judgments or myths you can think of?

What role has media and the movies played in these judgments?

Oppressive Cognitions (Levis & Siniego, 2016)

- Originated as auto-punitive beliefs, a type of negative cognitions within EMDR therapy
- Applicable to the individual or the specific minority group
- Typically, sociopolitically influenced and culturally reinforced in an ongoing and insidious manner by the dominant majority and the media.

Oppressive Cognitions (Levis & Siniego, 2016)

- Treatment of this type of cognition requires a broadening of therapeutic focus.

- Successful resolution depends on an acknowledgment of the impacts that historic and ongoing social oppression have upon the presenting problem.

Implications for Case Conceptualization

- Validation, validation, validation!!! This is absolutely critical to forging a therapeutic alliance in early recovery/treatment.
- In trauma-focused addiction care, the oppressive cognitions of minority groups, in this case bisexuals, may need to be evaluated through client history and addressed as treatment issues before memories related to other traumas can be processed.
- Look for the links between presenting issues for treatment and possible oppressive cognitions.

“There’s No Such Thing as Bisexuality”

I do not exist.

???

“You’re Just Confused and Haven’t Figured Things Out Yet”

I am defective.

???

“Bisexual People Use Their Sexuality in Deviant or Manipulative Ways”

I am shameful.

I am deviant.

???

“Because of “Passing Privilege,” Bisexuals Aren’t Really a Part of the LGBT+ Community”

I don’t belong.

I can’t fit in anywhere.

???

"Some days I feel like I have a foot in both worlds, yet never really belonging to either." – *Governor Kate Brown*



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Biphobia (others fear of bisexual and misunderstanding about bisexuals) pushes many bisexuals further into the closet. This self-imposed isolation is generally to avoid ridicule and rejection, affecting well-being and sense of identity (Endicott, 2015).

- A 2015 study done in Scotland found that 48% of 518 individuals surveyed described receiving biphobic comments from health care professionals within the National Health Service.

- Unwanted sexual advanced by healthcare professionals were reported by 38% of the respondents. What's further compelling is that 66% of the respondents felt pressure to identify as straight and 42% of the participants found that it is was easier just to identify as gay when presenting for healthcare services

(Rankin et al., 2015).

- A 2016 study from Drexel University that researched the responses of 2,500 LGBT identified individuals between the ages of 14–24 painted a bleak picture for bisexuals. Per the results summary, bisexual and questioning females endorsed significantly higher scores on the depression, anxiety, and traumatic distress subscales than did heterosexual females.

- Lesbians, bisexual females, and questioning females all exhibited significantly higher lifetime suicide scores than heterosexual females. Interestingly, bisexual females exhibited the highest current suicide scores.

- Gay and bisexual males endorsed significantly higher scores on the depression and traumatic distress subscales than did heterosexual males.

- The research conclusion is that LGBT mental health needs must not be clumped together, calling for individualized attention to be paid to bisexual clients (Shearer et al., 2016).

Other Consistent Themes in the Literature

- Poorer health outcomes
  (Schick & Dodge, 2012)
- Mental health outcomes
  (Bauer & Brennan, 2013)
- Poverty levels/income inequality
  (Braveman, Egerter, & Williams, 2011; Ross, et al., 2017)

Can a case be made that bisexuals struggle with their mental health even more than their gay and lesbian counterparts?



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Qualities of a Bisexually Aware Professional

(American Institute of Bisexuality)

- You believe that bisexuality is a valid lifestyle and are welcoming towards bisexual people.
- You know of several ways in which bisexuals' concerns differ from gays' and lesbians' concerns, and several ways in which bisexuals' concerns differ from heterosexual peoples' concerns.
- You are an active participant in bisexual community events or forums.
- You have read three or more professional books or journal articles on bisexuality.

Qualities of a Bisexually Aware Professional

(American Institute of Bisexuality)

- You have attended a professional workshop on the concerns of bisexual people.
- You have worked professionally with several bisexual clientele in the past.
- You have organized bisexually oriented support or social groups or workshops.

Self-Assessment Question

Which of the following sexual identities can be classified under the bisexual umbrella?

A. Pansexual
B. Omnisexual
C. Sexually fluid
D. All of the above

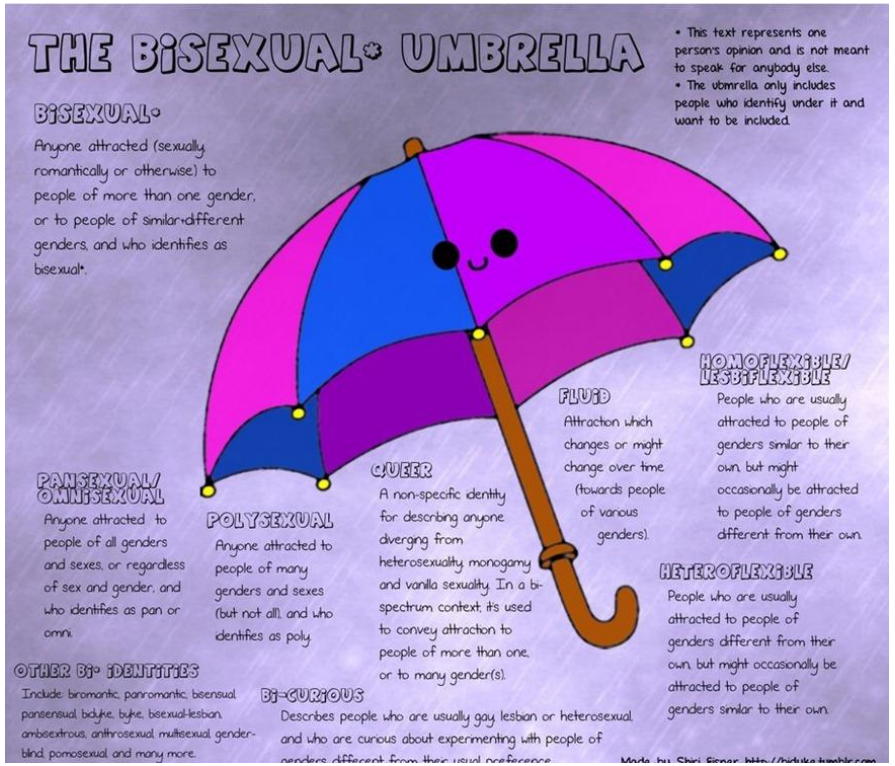
Self-Assessment Answer

Which of the following sexual identities can be classified under the bisexual umbrella?

A. Pansexual
B. Omnisexual
C. Sexually fluid
D. **All of the above**

Self-Assessment Answer

Which of the following sexual identities can be classified under the bisexual umbrella?



https://www.deviantart.com/drynwhyl/art/The-bisexual-umbrella-269963982

Scholarly Personal Narratives

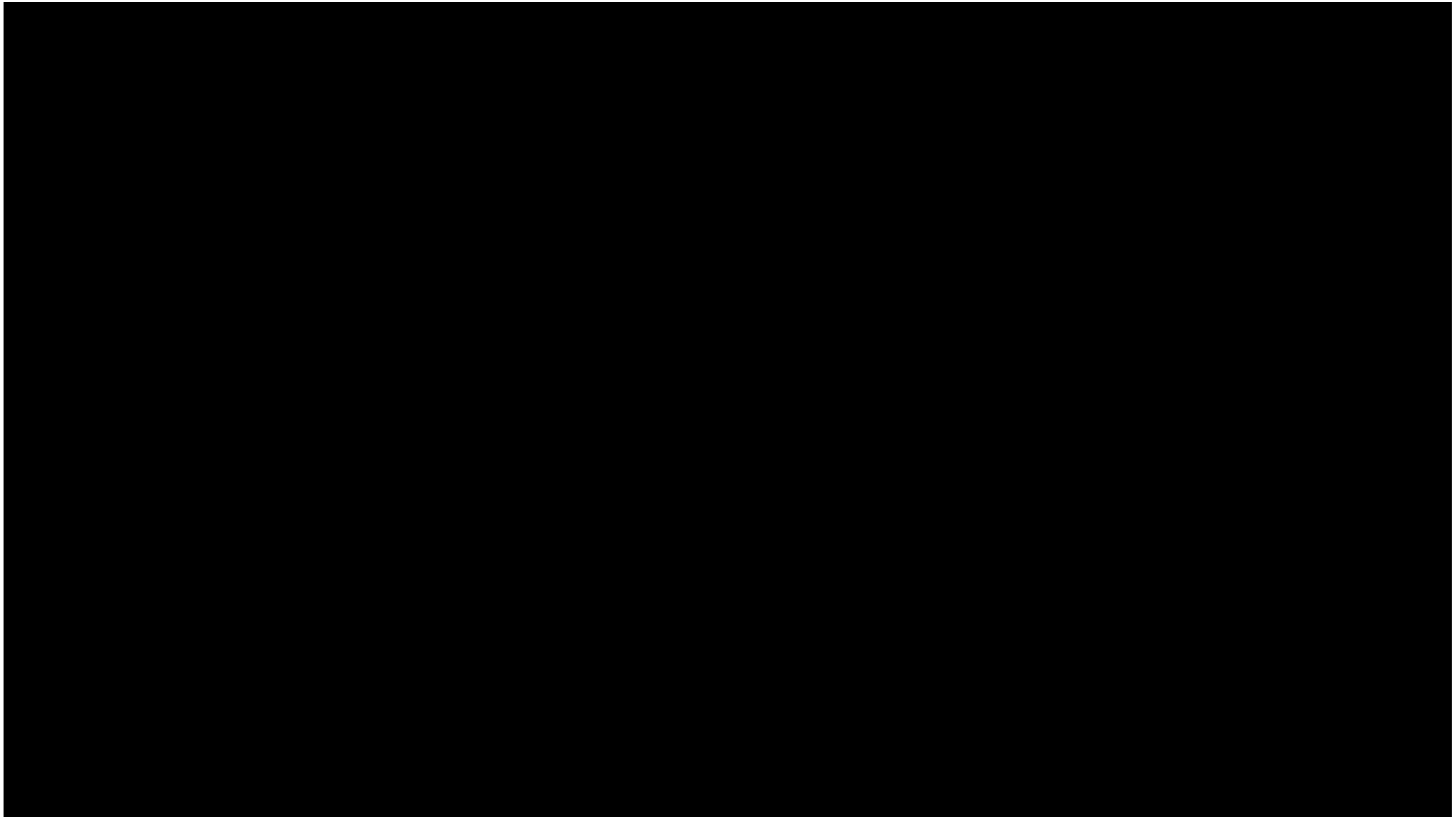
Sam Bergstein (in Chabra, 2025)





© *Queering EMDR Therapy* (Chabra, 2025). Used with permission.

Dance with Your World (Marich, 2024)



© *Dance with Your World* (Marich, 2024). Used with permission.

Resources

- **Bisexual.org**
  (A Program of the American Institute of Bisexuality)

- **BiMagazine**
  (A Program of the American Institute of Bisexuality)

- **Bisexual Resource Center**

- **BiWomen Quarterly**
  (Founded by Robin Ochs)

TEDx Talks

- **Bisexuality and Beyond.**
  By Tania Israel (TEDx UCLA), 2015.

- **Bi the Way, We Exist.**
  By Viet Vu (TEDx Terry), 2015.

- **Healing the Wounds that Keep Us Stuck.**
  By Jamie Marich (TEDx Youngstown), 2015.

Activist Websites (Short List)

- **Neil Endicott**
  https://happybisexual.com/
- **Robin Ochs**
  https://robynochs.com/
- **Shiri Eisner**
  https://radicalbi.wordpress.com/about/

Recent Meta-Analyses

Cross, H., Bremmer, S., Meads, C., Pollard, A., & Llewellyn, C. (2024). Bisexual people experience worse health outcomes in England: Evidence from a cross-sectional survey in primary care. Journal of Sex Research, 61(9), 1342-1350. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2023.2220680

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Thank You!

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You have completed the course:
Working with Bisexual Clients:
Foundations and Basic Competencies

Thank you!