

Introduction

I am very grateful to you for your kind words of welcome. Thank-you for inviting me to speak with you tonight. I'd like to begin by telling you a brief story. In May of 1996 I was living in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I was 23 years old, a newlywed and I was finishing the last year of my bachelors degree. I was on my way to a party at a gay friend's house to celebrate changes to the Canadian Human Rights Act.

It was cloudy and only 46 degrees Fahrenheit, but I was sweating. While my gay and lesbian friends were excited, I was nervous. Why was I nervous? Because unlike them, it made a difference to me how the change was worded. Would it mention gays and lesbians specifically, I wondered, leaving it legal to discriminate against bisexuals, or would it say simply "sexual orientation?"

This wasn't just paranoia on my part. During the parliamentary debate people had raised concerns that "sexual orientation" was too vague a term, and some had objected specifically to its inclusion of bisexuals as opening the doors to polygamy. So while the party would be a celebration for my friends it could also be a defeat for me and other bisexuals. I cried with relief when I learned that the Act would use the words "sexual orientation." Being included in the Human Rights Code meant that stores could not legally refuse to serve me. I could not be legally fired from my job, evicted from my home, paid less than my straight co-workers, or harassed for being bisexual.

The lesson behind this story is that just saying "gay and lesbian" is not enough. Bisexuals do not automatically share in every advancement made under the banner of gay and lesbian. Unless we are specifically included, either by naming us directly, or through truly

inclusive language, we are excluded and our human rights are diminished.

Tonight I'm going to talk about bisexuality, and how we can be authentically included. Specifically, I want to say a few things about what bisexuality is, discuss some of the myths associated with it, and talk about where we fit in relation to gays and lesbians. Then I'll discuss a few of the issues bisexuals face in theology. Finally, I'll offer a few suggestions for things you can do to support bisexuals in your town, congregations, and families.

Overview of Bisexuality

Talking about bisexuality can be tricky. People use the term to refer to many different things. As a sexual orientation, bisexuality is the potential to feel attracted to people of any sex. It's similar to being homosexual or heterosexual in that it's a feeling that come spontaneously and unbidden into your mind.

Some research suggests that your orientation may have a biological basis, and other research sees it as being shaped by social forces. I'm what they call a modified social constructionist. I think there's a bit of biology and a lot of culture in most aspects of our lives. I view sexuality as similar to language. Our brains are built to learn language. Research shows that babies cry in the pitch of their parents' native tongue. They pick this up from the sounds they hear before they are born. Once our brain has learned our language it's hardwired there.

Similarly, our brains are designed to respond to others sexually. What sex entails, how we understand ourselves as sexual beings, how we find partners and form relationships is determined by our culture. Like language, our sexuality develops when we interact with others. It is both cultural and biological because our interactions build neuropathways in our brains that stay with us the rest of our lives.

I see my bisexuality as a potential that I was born with, which was then shaped by my environment. I've been attracted to men and women as far back as I can remember. When I was five years old I had a crush on Linda Carter as Wonder Woman and on a boy in my class named Peter who played floor hockey really well. When I saw Star Wars for the first time I liked both Han Solo and Princess Leia.

Like most people I grew up in an environment where same-sex attraction was not approved of. As a result it took me a while to identify my feelings for women as attraction. I thought my same-sex crushes were caused by having low self-esteem. Why else, I wondered, would I be so focused on these amazing women? Well my self-esteem improved and I realized I had misinterpreted my feelings. I realized that my sexual orientation wasn't heterosexual, but was actually bisexual.

You can also use the term bisexual to describe sexual behaviour. If your sexual history includes experiences with both men and women then it could be described as a bisexual history. The problem with using bisexual as a term to describe behaviour is that it doesn't tell us how people identify themselves, or how they will behave in the future.

Let me give you an example. In 1991 I was 17 and volunteering with a group called The Gay Lesbian And Bisexual Youth Project. We had been invited to speak with high school teachers about how to make schools safer for LGBT kids. One of the women in the audience was Gail, a tall woman in her forties with a beautiful head of long white hair. She worked as a principal at a junior high school.

She was also an acquaintance of my mother. I was not out to my mother yet. I was concerned about whether or not Gail would tell my mom where she had seen me. I was also

concerned about burdening her with a secret that was not hers, and that might make her friendship with my mother difficult. But I spoke about my experience anyway.

Afterwards Gail came up to me and I braced myself for a confrontation. Instead, her words left me dumbfounded. “I’ve never identified as bisexual,” she said, “but now that I think about it, many of my early sexual experiences were with women, and they were quite pleasurable.” Needless to say it was not the response I had expected. But it did underscore for me that our sexual history does not predict our sexual identity.

In addition to describing orientation and a behaviour, bisexual is an identity label like straight, gay or lesbian. Many people, perhaps as many as 50%, have a bisexual orientation or sexual history. Despite this, very few, perhaps only 3%, actually identify as bisexual. That’s a small percentage, but the US has a lot of people. 3% of the population of Puyallup is enough to fill Puyallup High School. Given the population of the US, 3% is enough to fill Safeco Field Ballpark over 6453 times.

Sexual identity labels are about social relationships. They identify our culture, values, and commitments. Bisexual the orientation is *what* I am, but bisexual the social identity is more about *who* I am.

I came out in 1990, during my first year of university, which means that I’ve been out as bisexual for 20 years now. Sexual identity labels change according to political fashion. I identify as bisexual, but I also identify as queer, and sometimes as a dyke. Some people with a bisexual orientation prefer labels like ambisexual omnisexual, pansexual, or sexually fluid. Some do not use identity terms at all.

Sexual identity labels attach us to particular cultures and communities. I belong to the bi community in Toronto, and also to the larger LGBTTIQ community there. I am a member of queer culture in general, connected with people in other countries, and as part of a movement for sexual liberation both inside and outside the global church.

As a sexual identity label Bisexual is pretty diverse. Let me give you some examples.

- I have a friend, Carmen, who identified as lesbian for 10 years and is now in a polyamorous relationship with a man. She is bisexual, and very queer aligned.
- Linda, a friend I've known from elementary school, identified as straight, got married and had three kids. After her divorce she came out as bisexual and now lives with her second husband. She is what we call a straight-identified bisexual. She's not political. She's not going to the parades. She sees her sexuality as a private matter.
- I know a teenager, Michael, who came out as bi in junior high. That's the only identity he's ever had and he's very comfortable with it. He started an LGBT group at his school.
- Brian, who has identified as straight for 40 years but who is now dating a man. He lives in the gay community with his boyfriend and works as a cop. He is bisexual and monogamous.
- Robert, who identified as gay through his twenties then met his current wife and fell in love. They have two grown children. He's an Anglican minister. He identifies as bi and runs a group for gay and bi fathers.

- Craig, who was labelled as female when he was born, identified as lesbian, came out as transsexual and now identifies as a bisexual transman. He lives in the gay village and is a trans activist.

Because sexuality is so diverse, it's helpful to be able to measure it in some way. One useful system of measurement is the Kinsey Scale.

This scale comes from Dr. Alfred Kinsey, a zoologist. Trained in the study of animals, he approached humans in a similar way, examining behaviour rather than culture or identity. His best-known book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* was published in 1948. In that study he found that 46% of the men he interviewed responded sexually to men and women. Most of those people identified as straight.

Kinsey's scale measures sexuality from heterosexual, represented by 0 (no offence to heterosexuals intended), to homosexual, represented by 6. Some people also add an x to represent asexuals—that is people with no sexual attractions whatsoever. In my 20 years in the queer community I have met one woman who self-identified as asexual. But given how focussed our society is on sex there are likely many more who simply aren't open about how they feel. Most people use the Kinsey scale to describe their attractions, but Kinsey used it to describe sexual behaviour. Kinsey didn't like labelling people according to their sexuality. He wrote:

“Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats. ...nature rarely deals with discrete categories... The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects.”

A more developed measure of sexuality is the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid. Dr. Fritz Klein was born in Vienna. His family moved to New York when he was a child to escape the Nazis. He became a psychiatrist, came out as bisexual, and established the first bi support group. The key insight behind the Klein Grid is that there is more to who we are as sexual people than simply who we have sex with.

The Klein grid measures seven aspects of sexuality

1. Attraction. Who turns you on?
2. Behaviour. Who do you have sex with.
3. Fantasies. Who do you imagine yourself with?
4. Emotional preference. Who do you feel close to? Who do you fall in love with?
5. Social preference. Who do you like to spend your time with?
6. Lifestyle preference. Do you prefer the heterosexual mainstream or the gay community?

Here we see the importance of the historical location of the Klein Grid's development.

This question wouldn't have made sense until there was a gay community.

7. Self-identification. What terms do you use to describe yourself? What sexual identity labels do you use?

The grid measures each of these elements in terms of your past, present and ideal future.

It makes the important point that someone who has the same sexual history as you do may still be very different in other ways.

Take my friend Linda, for example. She and I have similar attractions, behaviours, fantasies and emotional preferences. We both identify as bisexual. But our lifestyle preferences are at

opposite ends of the spectrum. She prefers to live in the heterosexual mainstream while I am very political about my sexuality and prefer to spend time in bisexual, gay or lesbian spaces.

If we consider fantasy, attraction, and emotional attachment as facets of bisexuality then we include many people who are behaviourally heterosexual or homosexual, but whose interior life, and social identity are bisexual.

The Klein Grid also enables us to see changes over time. My attractions have remained fairly constant, but my sexual behaviour score would look very straight. I am currently in a monogamous relationship with a male partner. We've been together for 15 years. I am not behaviourally bisexual, but I have a bisexual history because I have previously had relationships with men and with women.

Some people have asked me why I don't simply identify as straight. I'm in a relationship with a man. I have a fairly feminine gender. I can pass as straight. But I'm not straight. Pretending that I am does not feel authentic to me. Living my life with integrity means that my sexual identity reflects my experience of the world. And for me, that includes the daily experience of finding particular people hot regardless whether they're male, female, or outside of those categories altogether.

One of the problems with the Klein Grid is that it's not easy to share. The Kinsey scale enables you to identify yourself by a number and compare that number with others. I'm a 3. Former Republican Congressman Michael Huffington is a 4. Ellen Degeneres is a 6. My partner Dave is a 0. Compared with the Kinsey scale, the Klein Grid is mathematics.

Another issue is that it isn't able to accommodate attractions to people who don't fit male or female sex categories. Moreover, it assumes that the person being measured fits easily into these

categories. This is an effect of the time period in which it was designed, before trans activism was widespread.

One problem that arises out of bisexuality being an orientation, a behaviour and a sexual identity is that when people speak of “bisexuals,” they could mean any of these groups.

For example in testifying before the Committee on Justice and Human Rights, university nursing head Grace Getty acknowledged that bisexuals exist, but said, “they're not somebody who comes out and says, hi, by the way, I'm bisexual.” This is true if you're speaking about the orientation or the behaviour. But if you're speaking about the identity then it's inaccurate and insulting.

Identifying as bisexual is exactly about coming out and saying “By the way, I'm bisexual.”

Ms. Getty also said “When you look at the emotional attraction to somebody, it tends to be to one gender.” While it is true that most people who identify as bisexual don't have exact 50-50 attractions, Ms. Getty uses this information in such a way as to suggest that we're really either gay or straight, depending on which side of the Kinsey 3 you happen to fall on.

When the facts are twisted in this way they give rise to myths and stereotypes. There are a lot of myths about bisexuality. I'll discuss five that affect my own life, and that of bisexuals I know.

1. Bisexuality Just a Phase

The first of these is that bisexuality is just a phase. Or as Carrie Bradshaw said on *Sex and The City*, “it's just a layover on the way to gaytown.” Like many myths, this is both true and false. People at the high end of the Kinsey scale (your 5s and 6s) may initially describe themselves as bisexual. It indicates that they're questioning their sexuality. It may be a way of preparing you to later receive the news that they're gay or lesbian.

A recent study of bisexuals aged 14-21 found that 30-40% had changed their identity to gay or lesbian a year later. 60-70% of them continued to identify as bisexual.

Bisexuals encounter a lot of pressure to identify as either straight or gay. When I came out I went to support groups for queer youth. Although LGBT was in the title, in practice I soon learned that only gay or lesbian were considered acceptable identities. Bisexuality, they said, didn't really exist. I was told that no one would date me unless I picked a side. People frequently expressed their disgust for bisexuals, and these remarks went unchallenged.

I remember one night a woman talked about how bisexual women shouldn't be allowed in queer women's spaces. Then she paused and said, "I'm sorry, are there any bisexuals here?" I wasn't the only bisexual there, but I was the only person who raised her hand. Afterwards, some women apologized to me for her remarks, but none of them had challenged her statements in the group itself. Who is permitted to be offensive tells us a lot about the power dynamics in any group. That experience sent a clear message to me that being bisexual would be tolerated, but not welcomed.

Frequently, when I come out as bisexual, some well-meaning person suggests that I'm simply having a confused phase before settling into either the straight or lesbian category. This used to happen all the time when I was first coming out. I would reach out for support to the groups that claimed to offer it, only to be told that I wasn't real, legitimate or welcome unless I identified as a lesbian. It only occurred to me later that these people were trying to help me. They thought I was a lesbian. It's understandable—a bisexual may seem similar to a gay or lesbian person who is just coming out.

I wish I could say that I never gave in. But the truth is that while I never told anyone I was a lesbian, on a few occasions I did allow people to assume I was a lesbian because it felt

safer. Passing as a lesbian meant fewer questions from both straights and gays. Everyone is susceptible to peer pressure, and those who are just coming out are particularly vulnerable. For this reason many people who come out as bisexual do so later in life after having identified as gay or lesbian. Ron Fox's study of 835 bisexuals found that 38% of the women had previously identified as lesbian and 34% of the men had previously identified as gay. My own research with bisexual women in Toronto found that 23% of them had identified as lesbian.

The common thread here is that telling people who we really are inside is what feels the most risky. Hiding behind the mask of a similar but not entirely accurate identity feels safer in the early stages of coming out, whatever that identity might be.

2. Bisexuals Are Crazy

The second myth I encounter is that bisexuals are crazy or mentally unstable. Psychiatrist Edmund Bergler wrote that bisexuality is "out-and-out fraud." Of course his book was called *Homosexuality: disease or way of life*, so you may want to take his opinion with a grain of salt. Psychoanalyst Heinrich Ruitenbeek wrote that the "mask of bisexuality" is "dangerous" and prevents coming to terms with our homosexuality.

Reporter Jess Stearn described us as highly disturbed with identity problems, conflict & guilt.

Sociologists Donald Cory & John Le Roy described us as "overgrown adolescents." They wrote that we were confused, lacked a group identity were unable to "differentiate one form of sexuality from another."

This view that bisexuals are crazy is reinforced by the portrayal of bisexuals as icepick killers in *Basic Instinct* and more recent films such as *Jennifer's Body* where Megan Fox plays a

demonic bisexual serial killer. Wayne Bryant's book, *Bisexual Characters in Film* lists over 40 movies that portray us as psycho murderers. Gays, lesbians and transpeople have had the same treatment.

Like most stereotypes, there is some truth to the bisexuals are crazy myth. Some studies have found that bisexuals were more likely to suffer depression, anxiety, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts, or substance abuse. Bisexuals were also more likely to seek assistance from a mental health practitioner.

However, studies also show that our mental health is related to our social status. Simply put, we're depressed because people are so mean. In 2002 social psychologist Gregory Herek found that heterosexuals rated bisexuals more negatively than any other minority group, with the exception of intravenous drug users.

Depression and anxiety are a normal response to heterosexism, homophobia, and biphobia. Rather than just treating individual bisexuals for mental illness, we ought to be treating society for the inequities that make us crazy. But there is also good news. One study found that the more out bisexuals are the fewer mental health issues we had. Another found that bisexuals who had close ties with LGBT communities (that is, who had friends and a sense of belonging) had better mental health.

2b. Bisexuals Are Confused

A variation on the bisexuals are crazy myth is the view that sees bisexuals as struggling under a great conflict, unable to decide between gay and straight. I also encounter this model as a biracial woman. My father is Micmac, a native group that lives on the East Coast of Canada and the US, and my mother's ancestors come from Scotland. People assume I must be alienated

from my racial heritage and lost in a no-man's land. In fact, I belong to both racial groups, as well as having much in common with other people of multi-racial heritage. Similarly, when it comes to sexuality, I'm not conflicted or confused. I have much in common with both straight and gay or lesbian people.

Like gays and lesbians, I experience homophobia. I know what it's like when friends you've known since grade school won't talk to you after you've come out. One night I had a car full of men called me a dyke and then pull to a stop and wait for me on a street near my home. It was only the insistent honking of the car behind them that forced them to move on and saved me from violence. I've encountered systemic homophobia, like when my highschool principal didn't want to let me go to my prom with a girl. I know the looks people give you when you walk down the street holding a woman's hand.

I have a lot in common with heterosexuals as well. Unless I identify myself as queer, people assume I am heterosexual and treat me accordingly. No one threatens to attack me. I can be assured that others will not discriminate against me because of my relationship with my partner. No one accuses me of being political about my sexuality if I mention how we spent the weekend. Although the rights of Canadians in same-sex relationships have improved dramatically over the past decade there are still many differences. Key among them is that not only is the world set up for heterosexuals, but most people cannot envision it any other way.

In addition, I belong to a third community of bisexuals like myself. We know how it hurts when people discuss whether or not we exist. We've seen groups to which we had donated money, time and effort debate whether or not to add bisexual to their name. We've seen Newsweek, Cosmo, New Woman, and Ebony, accuse us of spreading AIDS. Sometimes

biphobia is systemic, like when the city of Toronto refused to issue a proclamation for Celebrate Bisexuality Day.

Although people may be confused about me as a bisexual, I am not confused about myself.

3. Bisexuals are Promiscuous

The third myth is that bisexuals are promiscuous. Many people think of bisexuality as behaviour rather than identity. This immediately evokes the idea of multiple sex partners. No one assumes that you'll have multiple sexual partners if you're attracted to both redheads and brunettes, or to people with brown eyes and people with blue eyes. But when it comes to people's sex, the stereotype is that bisexuals will want both a male and a female partner.

This is particularly annoying for monogamous bisexuals because it denies our experience, redefining us as people destined to be promiscuous, who just haven't gotten around to it yet. I once had an advertisement I had submitted to a newspaper personals column rejected because I had used the word "bisexual." Their head office told me that while the terms "gay" and "lesbian" were permitted, "bisexual" was not since it implied that I was looking for a threesome.

The truth is, some bisexuals do have multiple partners. Lesbian sociologist Paula Rust found that only 30% of the bisexuals she interviewed saw monogamy as their ideal relationship structure, compared with 46% of lesbians. It may be that some women who choose to identify as bisexual instead of as lesbian do so in part because they want polyamorous relationships.

In my own study half the women identified as monogamous and half as polyamorous. Yet identity is not the same as behaviour. For example, 78% of the poly women were not dating multiple partners at the time of the interview.

But research is also contradictory on the issue of bisexuals and monogamy. A ten-year study by lesbian psychologist Lisa Diamond found that bisexual-identified women were more likely than lesbians or straight women to form monogamous relationships. By the end of her study, 89% of the bisexuals were in monogamous relationships, compared with 70% of the lesbians and 67% of the heterosexuals. So according to her study we're the most monogamous of all.

Looking at sexuality primarily as behaviour isn't always useful. I agree with Catholic priest Robert Nugent, who writes, "Sexual orientation is not fundamentally or even primarily a tendency toward *acts*, but an attraction toward particular individual *persons*." No straight man or lesbian is attracted to all women. No straight woman or gay man is attracted to all men. Bisexuals likewise are attracted to particular individuals. Whether or not you choose to have sexual relationships with more than one person is an issue for all sexual orientations, not just bisexuals.

4. Bisexuals Are traitors

The fourth myth is that bisexuals are traitors. We are stereotyped as untrustworthy because people see us as refusing to take sides in a battle between straights and gays. Even those who believe that people are born into one category or the other sometimes blame bisexuals for not choosing the right category.

The traitor myth often portrays bisexuals as not political enough. Sometimes we are portrayed as having shown up late to the gay and lesbian movement. The truth is, while bisexual organizations only emerged in the 1970s and 80s, bisexual people were involved in activism long before that.

- Stephen Donaldson founded the first gay students' organization in the US and was the first person to fight a discharge from the U.S. military for homosexuality.
- Brenda Howard organized the first events to commemorate the Stonewall Rebellion, which led to the creation of Pride Week.
- Alan Rockway helped write the first successful gay rights ordinance put to public vote, in Dade County, Florida. He also initiated the boycott of Florida orange juice in response to Anita Bryant's "Save Our Children" campaign.

Bisexual organizations only became necessary when what had been a movement for sexual liberation shifted to being a movement for a class of distinct people—limited to gays and lesbians.

I've been out as bisexual for 20 years. I've been an activist for all of those years. I've lobbied all levels of government for LGBT human rights. I've organized conferences and events. I chaired the Dyke March in Toronto for three years. Yet I still encounter the attitude that the most closeted lesbian is more of an insider to the queer community than I am. The message is that if I was really "one of us," I would identify as a lesbian.

Bisexuals are seen as traitors to the cause. But what is the cause and who has determined it? My cause includes the freedom for all people to define their sexuality free from coercion or fear. That's the cause I put my energy towards.

Many people ask how they can be sure that their bisexual partner won't cheat on them. Normally cheating is seen as an individual problem, with bisexuals it's seen as the natural expression of our orientation. Studies suggest that heterosexual cheating rates range from 25-50%, but no one ever hesitates to date heterosexuals because of that.

Yet it's not unusual to hear statement like "If you can't even commit to dating men or women, how are you ever going to be able to commit to a partner?" Well, for starters the commitment a person makes to a partner emerges out of shared trust and joy and is about building a future.

While there are legitimate reasons one might choose to limit themselves to dating particular people, bisexuals challenge the claim that this choice must always be divided by biological sex. Why not a commitment to only dating mature people with kind dispositions and strong characters?

All of these myths emerge from the fact that the models for understanding bisexuality are based on the experience of people at either end of the Kinsey scale, instead of the experience of bisexuals themselves. If the categories don't fit people, maybe it is the categories that need to be adjusted, not the people. To quote one of my favourite writers, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. (Mark 2:27)

So now that I've talked about the myths of bisexuality, let's look at the practical side.

Relation to gays and lesbians

How do bisexuals see ourselves in relation to gays and lesbians? The answer to that question depends on whom you mean by bisexuals. As mentioned earlier, most of the people who have a bisexual history and bisexual attractions do not choose bisexual as their social identity label. Most of those people identify as straight. Some identify as gay or lesbian.

Self-identified bisexuals, like me, tend to see ourselves as a type of queer. We're part of the alphabet soup of LGBTTIQ. With a few exceptions, bisexuals do not have our own communities. Our events take place in gay and lesbian communities. My study of bi women in Toronto found

that 40% of them spend time in lesbian and gay space and 54% of those women feel accepted there.

One of the things that prevent us from participating more fully is gay and lesbian biphobia. The belief that bi women are inferior to lesbians is common in the lesbian community. This was more problematic in the 70s and 80s. Lesbian Sociologist Sharon Dale Stone, speaking about Toronto in the 70s, said “We knew that there were bisexuals among us, but we thought we knew who they were and we didn't hang out with them.” A lesbian conference held there in 1979 had one workshop on bisexuality. It's focus questions were “Is bisexuality a viable way to live? Is it really a cop-out? Is there space in the lesbian community for bisexual women? Are they welcome? Should they be?”

I still routinely encounter biphobia in lesbian magazines, websites, discussion boards and events. A woman in Outlook Magazine described bisexuality as a “danger to the lesbian community far greater than any threat by homophobes,” and another wrote “bisexual women dilute and pollute the very definition and essence of lesbianism.”

One of the strategies the women in my study used to avoid biphobia was to date other bisexuals. Of the women in same-sex relationships 42% are partnered with another bisexual woman. Of those in other-sex relationships, 16% were dating bisexual men.

But of course the lesbian community isn't only a source of biphobia. The lesbian community changes over time and much has changed due to bisexual visibility, the rise of trans activism, and changes in lesbian politics.

To give you an example, when I was chair of the Toronto Dyke March in 2000 six of our twelve woman committee quit because we wanted the arch to be explicitly welcoming to

bisexual and transsexual women. Six years later I attended a meeting where we voted on that same subject. There were over 40 women in the room and they all approved of the inclusion.

Furthermore, to completely separate bisexuals and lesbians is artificial. Bisexual and lesbian orientation are different points on a continuum, and individual women often moved along that continuum throughout their lifetime. Many bisexual women used to be lesbians. Many of us have lesbian friends, live in lesbian neighbourhoods, attend lesbian events, work in lesbian organizations. In my study 33% of the women with female partners were dating lesbians.

So while there is biphobia, there is also acceptance and change. While there is rejection, there is also love, and the experience of working together in a shared struggle for a better world. When it comes to myths about bisexuality, there is no special exception for theology. Theology is done by people and it contains all of the faults of any other work we do. It's filled with our hopes, our fears and all of our prejudices.

Four Problems in Theology

Bisexuals face four main issues in theology: erasure, being equated with nonmonogamy, scapegoating and devaluation.

1. Erasure

The first problem is erasure. The voice of self-identified bisexuals has been conspicuously absent from theology. I started studying religion in 1990. It wasn't until 10 years later that I found a single book that offered a bisexual perspective, *Blessed Bi Spirit*. It took another three years before I found any writing from a major denomination that addressed bisexuality on its own.

The founder of Other Sheep Ministries, Tom Hanks, writes that bisexual invisibility in mainstream theology has been an “enormous advantage” for bisexuals. I disagree. Our erasure means that our sexuality is rejected in terms that refuse to even acknowledge us directly. From the perspective of the religious right, whether we identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual is irrelevant, for we all share the same problem of homosexual attraction and behaviour.

- The founder of Courage, a Catholic group aimed to help gays stay celibate, John F. Harvey, writes that “apparently bisexual persons are either homosexual or heterosexual.”
- Joseph Nicolosi, director of the Thomas Aquinas Psychological Clinic, a reparative therapy group, writes, “a bisexual is a person who to some extent has not resolved his homosexuality.”
- On his website, Jesus is saviour.com, David J. Stewart writes, “bisexuals are still guilty in God's eyes of committing homosexuality and are thus, homosexuals.”

This behavioural view of sexuality is also at work in the United Methodist Church’s Book of Discipline, which refers to “the practice of homosexuality,” as being “incompatible with Christian teaching.” Instead of discussing gay, lesbian or bisexual identity or culture, it lumps everyone under a behavioural umbrella of “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” and says that we cannot be ordained as ministers and our same-sex relationships cannot be blessed.

So as you can see, being erased from theology does not make us safe.

2. Equated with Non-Monogamy

The second problem is that bisexuality is equated with non-monogamy. The Anglican House of Bishops wrote:

We recognize that there are those whose sexual orientation is ambiguous, and who can find themselves attracted to partners of either sex. Nevertheless it is clear that bisexual activity must always be wrong for this reason, if no other, that it inevitably involves being unfaithful.

They don't specify what "bisexual activity" is, but I assume they mean sex, rather than what I usually think of as bisexual activity, such as holding a discussion group, marching in a parade, or organizing a conference.

The Bishops start with an orientation definition of bisexuality, but quickly assume that acting on that orientation requires multiple partners.

Equating bisexuality with non-monogamy has slowed the inclusion of bisexuals in gay and lesbian religious groups. When Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns considered including bisexual in their name the discussion that followed focussed on the possible repercussions for mainstream acceptance. As one member put it, "Do we really want to include an orientation which by definition is non-monogamous? It seems to me we're having enough trouble getting the church to accept monogamous lesbian and gay relationships, without asking them to branch out in this way." Another wrote, "I have a lot of compassion for bisexuals. It sounds like a very difficult life. But I have always thought we were holding homosexual relationships to the same standard the church holds for heterosexual ones -- monogamy. I don't understand how we could hold bisexual relationships to this same standard."

This approach, of bonding with heterosexuals over the importance of monogamy normalizes gays and lesbians at the expense of bisexuals and anyone else who fails to conform to the standard set by straight authorities.

Multiple relationships have been addressed by Christian churches, but usually in relation to polygamy in Africa, or the Middle East. The shift toward tolerating polygamy can be seen in the Resolutions of the Lambeth Conference. In 1888 polygamist men were not permitted to be baptized unless they got rid of all their “extra” wives. By 1988 they were permitted to be baptized and confirmed if they continued to provide for their wives and children and promised not to marry again. This toleration has not been extended to other Anglicans. In 1991 the Anglican Bishops expressed an awareness of gay oppositions to monogamy, but argued that such a view “flies in the face of all that has been said earlier about the sacramentality of the body and the importance of proportion between physical intimacy and personal commitment.”

The bishops suggested that gays and lesbians might choose to have a network of warm, “intensely emotional” friendships, but they dismissed any other option as “a pretentious disguise for the evil of promiscuity.” I suspect that the difference between the polygamy of Africans and the polyamory of gays and lesbians is not an issue of cultural authenticity, but of voting power within the House of Bishops. I can’t say that I’m particularly surprised that having been forced to abandon their own sexual customs as unchristian that African churches would be hesitant to vote in favour of increased sexual licence for North Americans, particularly when their own custom has Biblical precedence.

3. Scapegoating

The third problem we encounter is scapegoating, where bisexuals are sacrificed in order to free gays and lesbians. John J. McNeill, John Boswell, and Maury Johnson all use an exegesis that frees gays and lesbians by shifting the biblical prohibitions onto bisexuals.

In *The Church and the Homosexual*, John J. McNeill defines homosexuality as an exclusive same-sex attraction (a Kinsey 6, if you will) and distinguishes the invert, or “true” homosexual

from the pervert (the Kinsey 2s through 5s), describing the latter as “a heterosexual who engages in homosexual practices,” possibly “as an easy means of sexual indulgence.” This statement seems to me to reflect McNeil’s experience as a gay man. Anyone woman who has tried to pick up other women would probably agree that the experience can’t be described as easy.

McNeill argues that the people Paul denounces in Romans are not true homosexuals, since Paul describes them as “abandoning their natural customs,” but are “debauched individuals” or possibly male prostitutes. McNeill holds that same-sex sexual acts would not be sinful for “genuine” homosexuals provided they took place within the context of a committed loving relationship. This theology counters Biblical prohibitions against same-sex relationships but leaves them applicable to bisexuals, who are labelled as perverts rather than inverts.

A second way bisexuals are scapegoated is when we are told that including us will jeopardize the acceptance of gays and lesbians. We should wait, they say, until gays and lesbians are accepted before pushing for our own inclusion. The truth is that bisexuality does raise concerns about the acceptance of gays and lesbians, especially if that acceptance is based on the idea that same-sex attraction is exclusive and unchanging.

Psychiatrist Frank Mondimore, author of *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, writes:

“if homosexuality were simply a behaviour—especially if it were a behaviour that could be changed with therapy—rather than an inherent and unchanging characteristic, minority status for homosexuals would not make very much sense.”

Religious conservatives have been quick to use bisexuality against gays and lesbians. The high reported rates of choice as a factor in sexual identity among women, the uncertainty of orientation reported by adolescents, and the existence of bisexuals have all been used to

challenge the authenticity of homosexuality. All of these elements, they argue, prove that gays can be made straight. Oddly, they never seem concerned that it might also suggest that straights can be made gay. Where is the funding for that research?

So I agree that conservatives do use the Kinsey 2s, 3s, and 4s against the 6s. But it is not my being a Kinsey 3 that is the problem. It is the use and twisting of that identity by the religious right. Being honest about bisexuality may be strategically inconvenient, and it may raise uncomfortable issues, such as nonmonogamy, but that does not mean I should lie about who I am. Telling you who I am is not the same as telling you who you should be. Moreover, what is ultimately being challenged is not the acceptance of gays, lesbians and bisexuals, but the basis for that acceptance. Do I want to be accepted because I can't help who I am? Or do I want to be accepted because who I am is a good expression of created sexual variation? It's the difference between being tolerated and being welcomed. Personally, I prefer the latter.

4. Denigrated

The fourth problem is that bisexual identity is denigrated or treated as less important than other identities. The religious Right has argued that extending rights to gays and lesbians will open the floodgates for all sorts of perverse behaviour. They have used bisexuality as a special example of how normalizing homosexuality will pervert otherwise "normal" people, especially impressionable children. The Traditional Values Coalition called bisexuality the "ultimate perversion." Robert Knight, director of the Culture and Family Institute, called it "perverse and dangerous behavior." And Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote that acceptance of bisexuality was a sign that "something sick lies at the very heart of our society." When the YWCA hired bisexual Patricia Ireland as chief executive, the Traditional Values Coalition wrote, "young Christian women are as likely to learn about good

character by spending a weekend with a motorcycle gang.” The YWCA fired Ireland six months into her contract due to the negative press directed at her bisexuality.

In my own country witnesses speaking against equalizing marriage equated bisexuality with cross-dressing, transexuality, polygamy, incest and pedophilia. This was intended to scare legislators away from extending equal rights to gays, lesbians. In effect, because being gay or lesbian had reached a certain level of acceptance, they used bisexuality as a scare tactic, portraying it as the floodgate through which all kinds of sexual practices would pour unchecked.

Lesbian theology has portrayed bisexuality as less political than lesbianism. Lesbian theologians Carter Heyward and Sally Gearhart report choosing to identify as lesbian to oppose patriarchy’s devaluation of women and their relationships. Heyward portrays lesbian identity as politically powerful, but describes bisexuality as “grounded... in...utopian fantasy.” The body of her work speaks only of “lesbians and straight women,” or of “gays and lesbians.” This leaves bisexuality as the only identity unable to be useful in oppressive environments. This ignores the motives behind bisexual women’s identity choices, which may be no less political and strategic than Heyward’s choice to identify as lesbian.

Moreover, Heyward and Gearhart equate lesbian identity with lesbian practice. They see lesbianism as powerful because they see relationships with women as powerful. When it comes to bisexuality, however, they ignore the fact that bisexual women can also be in relationships with women. 37 % of bisexual women in my study were in a relationship with a woman.

Another place where bisexuality is devalued is in what’s known as “compromise” theologies. Compromise theologians hold heterosexuality as the ideal but argue that an exception can be made for those unable to attain this goal. Theologians such as Gregory Baum, Charles E. Curran, and Lisa Sowle Cahill view same-sex attraction as a type of birth defect. They suggest that if the

person's homosexuality is "irreversible" they should be allowed to have a same-sex partner provided the relationship is monogamous and permanent.

The Anglican House of Bishops recommend abstinence for gays and lesbians but their document *Issues In Human Sexuality* states "we do not reject" those who through "free conscientious judgement" are "convinced that this way of abstinence is not for them." Such individuals are permitted to choose a "loving and faithful homophile partnership, in intention lifelong, where mutual self-giving includes the physical expression of that attachment."

The compromise position effectively permits same-sex relationships for gays and lesbians (the Kinsey 6s) but denies them for bisexuals. Under the compromise position we must choose between celibacy and heterosexual marriage. This can be seen in the Anglican House of Bishops statement on bisexuality:

The Church's guidance to bisexual Christians is that if they are capable of heterophile relationships and of satisfaction within them, they should follow the way of holiness in either celibacy or abstinence or heterosexual marriage. In the situation of the bisexual it can also be that counselling will help the person concerned to discover the truth of their personality and to achieve a degree of inner healing.

The last sentence suggests that we're not really bisexual after all, and that counselling will uncover a truer identity. The reference to "inner healing" portrays bisexuality as a broken desire and evokes images of reparative therapy.

This approach sees gays and lesbians as defective, separates theology from pastoral practice, and fails to adequately challenge the expectation that everyone should be straight.

How to Support Bisexuals

So, what can you do to support bisexuals in your community, your Church and your families?

1. Be a good friend.

Long-term friendships provide a witness to sequential bisexuality. My own research found that these friendships were very important because they enabled bisexuals to have the support of people who could see their life as a whole, rather than in sections. This kind of support, as mentioned earlier, has been shown to fight depression.

2. Respect the identity terms people use and expect that they might change over time.

Shifts in orientation do happen. Changes in behaviour happen even more often. Identity labels change as terms go out of fashion and new terms emerge. Because sexual identity labels are social labels they also change as our values, cultural preferences and friends change. Focus on the person as an individual on a journey, rather than as a symbol of a type of sexual being.

3. Don't be the category police.

Creation isn't a series of boxes. It's a continuum like the Kinsey scale. Human sexuality isn't just about what you do. As the Klein Grid shows, it's also about how you feel, whom you bond with, your imagination, your friends, and your community of choice. Try examining your own sexuality using the Klein Grid and noticing the ways it has changed over time. Even if you don't fully understand bisexuality, try to fully accept the bisexual individual. I agree with John Wesley when he said "An ounce of love is worth a pound of knowledge."

4. Remember that identity does not dictate behaviour.

Bisexual identity doesn't predict what kind of sexual life a person will have. You can support bisexual inclusion without having to support multiple relationships. Remember Paula Rust's study, 30% of the bisexuals did see monogamy as their ideal relationship structure. And Lisa Diamond's study found that only 11% of the bisexual women were in open relationships. You can also support multiple relations without supporting bisexuals, as some of the African Bishops do. Identity and behaviour are distinct, but related issues.

5. Challenge biphobia when it is expressed.

In 1964 a woman names Kitty Genovese (Jen-o-veez) was murdered in Queens. I wasn't born yet, but when I read about the case it made a strong impression on me. 38 neighbours watched as her assailant attacked her for half an hour, and no one even called the police.

Psychologists call this bystander apathy. The responsibility to act is spread out over the bystanders, so that no one person feels empowered enough to step in. Everyone just wishes someone else would help.

I see this dynamic at work often when it comes to queer issues. Homophobic jokes, people making a career out of denouncing gays and lesbians, biphobia in national magazines, movies and television. Whether it happens on the national stage or in our livingrooms, it is difficult to be the one to respond when someone is being attacked.

Some of us feel that we don't have the right to challenge homophobia if we aren't gay, lesbian or bisexual. Or that we can't speak up against transphobia if we're cisgendered (that is, if we're just a "regular" man or women).

I've spent a lot of my life being the only out bisexual in the room. When biphobic things are said I've often felt like it was my job to respond to them. But not all bisexuals have the energy, confidence or social support to do so. I'm lucky. I have a large circle of gay, lesbian and bisexual friends and fellow activists that I can turn to for support. I live in a city with a large bisexual presence. I have the education and the training to defend myself when people attack me for my sexuality.

But always defending ourselves gets very draining. It's especially difficult when we're young or just coming out. When my friends didn't challenge biphobia in the queer women's support group it hurt me very much. A few times I hid in the bathroom and cried about it. After a year of feeling unwelcome, I didn't go back. Because of that experience I've made it a rule for myself not to be that person who apologizes later but didn't speak up at the time.

In preparing for this presentation I found this commitment expressed very eloquently by John Wesley when he wrote,

Do all the good you can, in all the ways you can, to all the souls you can, in every place you can, at all the times you can, with all the zeal you can, as long as ever you can"

Thank-you for your time and your patience. I look forward to hearing your opinions on these issues with you later in the Q& A period and in the small group discussions.