



# MIXED ORIENTATION MARRIAGE PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

*Readings for couples in a mixed-orientation marriage seeking a positive outcome.*

Mixed-Orientation Marriage: Pathways to Success Compiled PDF edition from the web book

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# Introduction



*Mixed-Orientation Marriage: Pathways to Success* is a series of writings for husbands and wives in mixed-orientation marriages who both wish to stay together and are seeking strategies to make their relationships stronger, more satisfying, and happier. Very little has been written about mixed-orientation relationships from a “we can do this!” pathway-to-success point of view, so it is my hope to make a much needed contribution to the literature.

In a mixed-orientation relationship, the partners in the relationship have different sexualities. Most commonly, one partner is bisexual, gay, or lesbian and the other is heterosexual. Sometimes, one partner is lesbian or gay, and the other is bisexual. In other couples, one is asexual or the two simply have different sexual interests. Couples with differences in sexual orientation or sexual interests can often improve their relationships if they can find a pathway for mutual happiness despite those differences.

## **We fall in love with who we fall in love with.**

Straight spouses with newly discovered variations in sexual interests by their husbands or wives often wonder how they ended up married to a bisexual, gay, or lesbian partner. One common reason is the bisexual, gay or lesbian spouse finds the love of their life and their gender happens to match the gender society said they should be. They then put any doubts they might have had about their sexual orientation aside. The chemistry of love can be a very powerful force.

## **Challenges of Writing about Mixed-Orientation Marriage**

Writing that accounts for the wide variety of sexualities and relationship styles that arise in a mixed-orientation marriage presents many challenges . While my focus will be on mixed-orientation marriages with a bisexual husband, many of the challenges and pathways to success that I write about are also relevant to those who identify as gay and lesbian. I address this topic further in the “Is My Partner Bisexual Enough” chapter . While the word gay is often used as an inclusive term to

include a variety of sexual orientations including bisexuals and lesbians I feel that the inclusive gay label contributes to bisexual erasure so in my writing I will often use the term bisexual instead of gay as an umbrella term to include anyone who is attracted to their husband or wife and another gender no matter how that may present itself.

## **Bisexuality is Complicated**

Bisexuality is a diverse and complex sexual orientation with many different ways one can be bisexual. Bisexuality is not just a self described identity or sexual orientation, there is also bisexual behavior and attractions. In other words some people identify as gay, lesbian or straight but are bisexual in their emotional,romantic or sexual attractions and behaviors. Others may identify as pansexual, heteroflexible or a number of other variations that fall under the bisexual or Bi+ umbrella of identities that describe attraction or sexual behavior with more than one gender. When I use bisexual in my writings I am referring to anyone with bisexual attractions to more than one gender no matter how they may choose to label or identify their sexual orientation. Sometimes a gay husband is bisexual enough to be happily married to a woman.

## **Working together as a pathway to success**

I believe mixed-orientation marriages can thrive when both partners commit to open communication, finding common ground, and redefining what a fulfilling relationship means to each of you. My own process of learning how to celebrate my bisexuality openly , honestly and with integrity while remaining happily married has been an incredible journey, and I have learned a lot along the way. We want others to experience the happiness my wife and I have found in our mixed-orientation marriage.

It takes two partners motivated to work together as partners and friends to find success. I believe the success stories will become more common as more people see examples of the dynamics that make successful mixed-orientation marriages work. We need to look at each mixed-orientation relationship to see whether it is meant to continue. For a substantial minority, the answer is yes, and what a tragedy if we don't give it a chance. Our marriages are too important to not see whether a pathway to success can be found.

## **This is a process and a journey.**

The evolution of a healthy, dynamic, mixed-orientation marriage requires going through a process. This process takes time and a lot of work, but many have found their own pathway to success and will say the work is worth it. Mixed-Orientation Marriage dynamics can be extremely complicated. Sometimes the challenges can be too great and for the happiness of everyone involved the best course is to separate or divorce and go their separate ways. That said giving your marriage every opportunity to succeed will often lead to greater peace than always wondering, "What if?" There is no single pathway to success,

## **One resource of many.**

This is a story of my personal understanding of mixed-orientation relationship dynamics from a positive “pathways to success” perspective. I am not a credentialed mental health counselor and none of my writings should be considered professional advice. What I have to share is a lifetime of study and lived experience with bisexuality, gender variations, and the challenges and triumphs of mixed-orientation marriage. My own happy marriage and stories of thousands of others inspire the insights I share here.

This book is a sharing of what I have learned in almost 50 years of studying human relations and sexuality . I can not possibly cover this complex topic in a be all things to all people fashion so these articles should be used as simply a story of how one guy, and one couple found a way to make bisexuality and mixed-orientation marriage fabulous. Take what you can use and discard what you can't.

When I make specific suggestions it should be understood that they are what personally worked for me or are a reflection of my understanding of how this works, your situation may well be different, Each of us needs to find our own pathway . My casual pull up a chair writing style should be looked at as listening to a friend sharing their experience in the hopes you might find a “Hey, I could see that as working for me” moment.

I recommend you surround yourself with as many life skills tools as possible and that includes your own personal professional counselor experienced in mixed-orientation relationships, support groups and finding as many other perspectives on the topic of mixed-orientation relationships and human sexuality as you can find.

My story is one of many. Let it spark your journey of discovery and finding the path that works for you.

# Mixed-Orientation Marriage Success

## Success is Possible!

Many couples are surprised to learn that mixed-orientation marriages can be successful.. This lack of knowledge about mixed-orientation marriage success is a result of the large number of bisexuals still living a secret life. Without role models for a successful mixed orientation marriage it's understandable to think we are the only ones.

I wrote Mixed-orientation Marriage Pathways to Success to bring the idea of a happy mixed-orientation marriage out into the open. Our goal is to find a pathway to success so that marriages don't end needlessly over differences in sexual orientation. There is a reason why we married each other in the first place, and variations in sexual orientation do not necessarily change that reason.

I don't know any couples who say the only reason they got married was great sex. So one needs to ask oneself: Why, now, have sex and sexual orientation become the overriding measures of a successful relationship? While sexual intimacy is an important part of many relationships there are many different ways to fit our differing sexuality into our marriages and relationships.

We can change attitudes about mixed-orientation marriages. It starts with learning from others who have found success and saying, "Hey, I want one of those too!" and then setting about to make it happen.

## Avoiding the statistics trap.

One should not get caught up in the negative statistics showing a high rate of failure. I remember the day back in 2007 like it was yesterday when I turned to my wife after reading yet another article on the high rate of failure and said " "Oh my! It says here that only 17 percent of marriages survive" . My wife without even a pause said "And what makes you think we won't be one of the 17% that make it?" . That was over 15 years ago, we are still happily married and we have never been happier . There is nothing stopping anyone else. Simply look for one of the many ways to make it happen.

Many mixed-orientation marriages have lasted 10, 20, 30, 40,50 even 60 years; it is worth moving mountains and parting seas to make them work. No matter what the percentage is, the numbers are huge, hundreds of thousands to perhaps over a million of couples in marriages that are working even with their differences in sexuality.

When a bisexual spouse can lead a self-actualized, fulfilled life with integrity, it can bring that person unbelievable personal happiness. That personal happiness then permeates the relationship, and the mixed-orientation marriage can emerge with both partners happier than before. Building a mixed-orientation relationship based on honesty and integrity does indeed require hard work, and in the rawness of a newly discovered mixed-orientation marriage, it may seem like we will never get there, but in time and with the proper steps, sometimes these marriages can be happier than ever.

## Acceptance

A huge part of the development of our sexual orientations is being able to live our lives honestly and authentically as the persons we really are, not the persons others wish we were. Acceptance of one's gay, lesbian, or bisexual self is a core component of a successful mixed-orientation marriage. Note that accepting sexual orientation is not just about sexual activity. Being bisexual, gay or lesbian is who we are and not just about what we do. What we do sexually with our bisexuality is a separate issue and mutually agreeable ways of satisfying our sexual needs is a challenge that also needs to be resolved, but core acceptance is an essential part of success .

Growing up denying the part of oneself that is sexually attracted to one's same gender is exhausting, and it eventually wore me out. No wonder so many gay, lesbian, and bisexual people battle depression, alcohol abuse, and even suicide. We eventually get tired of being sick and tired. I have learned this was all so unnecessary. All that is required is that we throw out the shame and guilt and accept ourselves. Then we need to support those who love us to do the same thing. Acceptance of our sexuality by those we love can be one of the hardest struggles we face in our mixed-orientation marriages, yet it is at the very core of our pathway to success.

I was very lucky that eventually my wife realized for herself that having a bisexual husband really didn't change things except for the better. That change for the better didn't happen until she could fully accept who I am. This acceptance included the trust to let me have bisexual and gay friends so I could celebrate my bisexual side. We all have different needs; one of my needs is simply to have friends who understand what it means to live in the world being sexually attracted to men along with a wife who embraces that part of my journey. These friends add to my life and take nothing away from my relationship with my wife.

In the early days of a couple's adjustment to a newly out-of-the-closet bisexual, gay or lesbian spouse, huge questions are understandable and to be expected about how the new relationship dynamic is going to work. But eventually, the acceptance must follow, leading to mutually agreeable ways to live our lives with happiness and joy.

I struggle with what to tell others in newly discovered mixed-orientation marriages about what they can expect in their own relationships. In some newly evolving mixed-orientation marriages I see that the straight spouse's initial response is "It is fine you are bisexual but forget about living life that way." What does living life "that way" mean anyway? Determining how we are going to live our lives is one of the challenges to be met, and that takes time.

Each person needs to decide how long is long enough to give to working out these challenges, as well as how much change is needed. But ultimately, personal happiness and fulfillment require a point of mutual happiness to be found. If after all our efforts the differences cannot be reconciled perhaps it is time to acknowledge those differences and try something different for our lives, such as ending the relationship and moving on but I believe it is worth trying everything else first. Life is not a dress rehearsal; it took me 53 years to realize it, but I did, in time, and I am thrilled that my wife is joining me for the rest of the journey.

Our pathway to success comes down to whether both the husband and the wife desire more than anything else to make the marriage work. If they do, then they can, but if one spouse wants it to work “my way or the highway,” then it becomes more difficult. We need to approach our mixed-orientation marriages from a success and acceptance perspective. A can-do attitude will beat a woe-is-me attitude every day. Looking back, it is clear to me that acceptance of all of me was essential to our success. The journey to acceptance can be incredibly difficult for both the bisexual spouse and their straight partner. Finding a way to honor each other's feelings throughout this process paves the way to success.

## **Seeking the win-win solution.**

The secret to a successful mixed-orientation relationship is to find a solution that has both partners in a better place than before the differing sexual orientation was known. We want the classic win-win solution. The concept of a partner's feeling of joy when their partner is happy is essential, but it often will require a change in basic thinking. In our society, we may be raised to expect our partner to meet 100% of our needs. This is simply not realistic. When one partner likes to sew and the other to climb mountains, or when one likes to fish and the other to play tennis, we don't say this marriage will never work. Yet when differences in sexuality come up, many relationships enter the all-or-nothing negative binary thinking.

Often in mixed-orientation marriages, the partners provide each other with love and friendship, share hobbies and family, and feel they are soul mates and there is no one they would rather be with. The only issue is their sexual orientations do not match. It strikes me as very odd that anyone would want to throw away all that good just because one of the partners is gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Instead, ideally, they should work toward understanding and accepting each other's needs and preferences and search for ways to make the marriage work..

Such understanding and acceptance are needed because both partners in a relationship should be allowed to lead self-fulfilled and self-actualized lives. Expecting people to deny their sexuality is asking them to abandon a part of themselves and not live their lives to the fullest. Demanding this of one's partner does not speak of love. More positively, couples who recognize that their husband or wife is the person they are most supposed to be with can be inspired to work to accommodate their differing sexual orientations and sexual needs.

## **“We can do this as partners and friends”**

Each couple needs to work out for themselves their own pathway but at a minimum, the gay, lesbian, or bisexual partner should be accepted as the person they are. In addition we need to understand that each gay, lesbian, or bisexual person has unique needs and the couple should find, over time, mutually agreeable ways to satisfy the various needs of their bisexuality such as feeling supported in their identity or finding outlets for connection within the LGBTQ+ community.

This process of course needs to include the feelings and needs of the straight spouse. Ideally mixed-orientation marriage success features positive personal growth experiences for both the bi spouse and the straight spouse. This requires that the bi spouse be mindful of the straight spouse's needs and emotions in this journey.

As partners and friends, the couple should work out solutions from a position of love. To be clear I am not asking either the straight spouse or the LGBTQ+ spouse to give up who they are or their own personal happiness, instead I ask that they work together to see if together both can create a happier more rewarding relationship. My wife and I discovered the concept of compersion early on in our journey . Compersion describes our joy at seeing our partner's joy. In a successful mixed-orientation marriage, happiness is finding joy together in new, unexpected ways. In mixed-orientation marriage success, BOTH partners find joy . In the chapters that follow I hope to offer understanding and ideas for finding your own pathways to success.

# Empathy and Balancing Needs

## Empathy works best in a marriage when it is shared.

Empathy is an important element of mixed-orientation marriage success. Empathy for others' feelings is what friends provide, and our wives and husbands should be our best friends and partners in this journey, so of course, we need to go out of our way to be kind.

When we first come out of the closet, there is often this sense of a need to make up for all those years we repressed who we are and that we were a long-suffering victim. This attitude can result in self-centered, adolescent behavior. We feel we have suffered injustice for so long, and we believe it is our turn to make it right; it is time for us.

The problem with this thinking is we are not coming out into a vacuum. Our spouses also are impacted by our coming out. In some cases, we are way ahead of them because our coming out was preceded by an extensive contemplative stage. Our spouses end up paying the price for the millions of people who put us in this place to begin with. We need to remember it is not our spouses who forced us into the closet, yet they have to deal with the consequences, and they need our empathy as much as we need theirs.

It is imperative that, at every step of the journey, we ask ourselves how our spouse is feeling about this. Both partners need to be aware that, during a period of change, our needs may very well be at cross-purposes, especially if our respective lines in the sand are currently far apart. We might think, "Haven't we given up on our needs long enough? How do we resolve this conflict between our respective needs?" We should recognize that the creation of a successful, mixed-orientation marriage is going to require compromise, communication, and a willingness to take the tiniest of baby steps as the new relationship dynamic evolves. It takes time to learn the components of a successful mixed-orientation marriage. In the beginning, we need to look at each other's needs and determine whose is greater today. We then need to be willing to help or allow our partner to meet that need.

The straight spouse must find a point of strength that makes it possible to feel and show empathy for the other spouse's need to find a way to live a happier, more fulfilling life. Empathy enables the straight spouse to understand that suppressing the other's identity is a form of slow death, so change does need to come. So the best possible way for positive change to happen is for each spouse to develop empathy for the other's feelings and to learn how to communicate what is needed for a solution together.

## Ride the Seesaw Balancing needs in our relationships.

In addition to empathy, we also need to learn to balance the often-conflicting needs that occur in a mixed-orientation relationship. Having a bisexual husband or wife in a marriage adds demands to the relationship, and it is easy for things to get unbalanced. My wife has given me gift because she

accepts my bisexuality and is happy that I am living my life as the person I really am . It is a two-way street: In exchange for this gift, a gift I never thought I would see in a million years, I do everything in my power to make each and every day the best it can be for her. With something this amazing happening to me in my life, it is my pleasure and joy to return the favor to my wife.

A discussion about the seesaw might be in order at this point. In this analogy, we have the bisexual husband's stuff on one side, and enough of the wife's stuff gets piled on the other side to make it balance. I would guess it takes quite a lot on the wife's side, such as the husband's taking on more cooking and home care, and providing more personal care for his wife. Perhaps an extra ladies nights out with friends gets added to the list. Once a couple's lives are brought into balance, things can really change for the better for everyone. Then, if the bisexual husband needs a gay night out with the boys, instead of resentment, he might just get a wife who is genuinely happy for him because of all the joy he brings to the marriage day in and day out.

It is very hard to be resentful when your bisexual husband or wife is the most amazing person you know, regardless of sexuality. So that is my goal, to make myself an amazing and awesome husband so that a little thing like my being bisexual isn't even a blip on the radar. Bisexual spouses make great husbands, and wives, our mission is to prove it.

I never would have been happy doing anything related to my bisexuality if my wife hadn't been happy for me. One of my favorite expressions is that it is not the events that cause upsets, it is our reactions to them. I did my best to honor the commitment to our marriage but subsequently, she saw how much I struggled; she saw the brooding. Through baby steps, she said, "You know what, I don't see what's wrong with your going out to dinner with some of your bi and gay friends." She genuinely was happy that I was happy, and so I went. Each step of our journey has included an "I am happy you are happy" kind of moment; we each want the other to spend their days better because they are with us. And that is how our mixed-orientation marriage has evolved.

We cannot control our partners' feelings, but we can work together to help those feelings develop positively. I struggled with what I can do to make my wife truly feel that having a bisexual husband is a good thing. As it turns out, she started seeing it for herself. I try and be an amazing husband in every other way. Why? Because I get to live my life as the person I was born as and still spend my days with my wife, best friend, and soul mate.

Readers may have seen some of the negative spouses refer to all these efforts to make our spouses day a better day "love bombing" like its some sort of manipulation. That is pure nonsense, when you love someone of course you will try and make them happy.

This whole mixed-orientation marriage thing can be like a tape recorder; press play, and "Woe is me, my life is over." Keep playing the same tape, and it is going to be the same sad song. In our case, we learned to play a new and better tape, much better and happier all around.

Perhaps there is a way to look at the events of your own mixed-orientation marriage differently; perhaps there is a way to make a list of all the good things in your marriage, add on a few more good things you would like to see, and then, just maybe, the attitude could be, "My husband is so amazing,

I couldn't possibly hold him back for such a little thing as his being bi/gay." This is the seesaw effect; we need to pile so much good stuff on one end of the seesaw that it balances the nonheterosexual stuff on the other end. As my wife says it is a two-way street; if I can make her happy, then of course, she will make me happy even if it is in unconventional ways.

A successful mixed-orientation marriage is one where both the husband and wife feel they are happy and self-actualized. Success and happiness may not seem possible in the beginning, but many of us find the way, especially when we go out of our way to show empathy for each other.

## Why does a bisexual marry a straight spouse?



In a perfect world, a mixed-orientation relationship develops with mutual understanding and acceptance as a result of open and honest discussions about bisexual attraction beginning soon after the first date. Due to ongoing societal influences, sometimes this difficult discussion never happens, relationships evolve, and before we know it, the first date has turned into a mixed-orientation marriage without the couple's ever properly addressing the existence of bisexual attraction. Even if bisexual attraction is discussed early in the relationship, the importance of bisexual needs is often underestimated.

When bisexual attraction is discovered or revealed years or decades into the marriage, the couple must then deal with a variety of relationship issues. Sometimes, straight spouses ask why their gay, bisexual, or lesbian spouse did this to them. The straight spouses are often angry, believing that they are victims of some sort of deliberate premeditated fraud. But a mixed-orientation marriage's discovery late in a relationship happens because of misguided societal influences; it isn't something done to someone. I do not wish to downplay the tremendous impact of discovering one is married to a gay, lesbian, or bisexual spouse. But it wasn't done to the straight spouse out of malice; it simply happened as a result of society's close-minded model of acceptable human relationships. I know of no man who said, "Bwaahhhahaa! I am gay, and I am so evil I will marry this woman, raise a family with her, and then one day thirty years from now I'll drop the 'I am gay' bomb on her and make her life hell." It just does not happen that way, yet often that is the reaction we receive.

While many gay, bisexual and lesbian spouses have at least some awareness of bisexual attraction at an early age, even as they may not recognize the importance of it, some don't even become aware of their bisexual attraction until much later in life and in some cases the marriage happens with the bi, gay or lesbian spouse honestly not even being aware of their bisexual attraction. . Calzo, Antonucci, Mays, & Cochran in their 2011 study found that married and formally married gay, bisexual and lesbian spouses were 3 times more likely to be part of the group identified as late profiles.. Specifically Calzo et al's study found this late profile group "reported attraction at an average age of 32.74, had their first same-sex sexual experiences at age 37.65, self-identified at age 40.14 (after, on average, their first same-sex sexual experience), and came out at age 43.18." (Calzo, Antonucci, Mays, & Cochran, 2011) . This is an average so some members of the late profile group awareness can happen even later. Imagine what it must be like to be happily married to the love of your life and discover that either same sex attraction is more important than you thought or to newly

discover you are gay, bisexual or lesbian, Now what? . This is why so many mixed-orientation relationships cause the bi, gay, and lesbian spouse so much internal turmoil. We need to accept that sexuality can be fluid over the course of a lifetime and people can change. We need to accept that life is a journey and who we are and our understanding of ourselves evolves with time. There is no premeditated deception here, we are simply dealing with the evolution of variations in human nature.

This is a classic case of, “If only we had known then what we know now.” In the early 1970’s when I came of age, there were no role models for being a bisexual man. I was taught by my church, society, and friends that there was no place for faggots, sissy boys, or whatever other nasty term they could come up with in this world. Living life as the bisexual I was born as was not an option given to me. I was told my bisexuality was a choice, and there was only one choice: to fall in love with a nice woman and be a nice, heterosexual boy, period, end of story.

We are told every day, we must not be gay, lesbian, or bisexual, we may not be ourselves, and others will make our lives hell if we even try. We will be fired from our jobs, ejected from our churches, and thrown out of our homes. In some countries, we may even be put to death. I grew up in this world of hate. I was brainwashed and indoctrinated that there was only one path. It is so sad for so many that this societal bias not only takes away from the bi/gay/lesbian spouse but also damages so many bystanders. Even today, while acceptance of bisexual attraction has made huge strides, those of us in mixed-orientation relationships lack sufficient models of how to meet our need for relationships with multiple genders. With all this social messageing it is easy to see how we ended up in mixed-orientation marriages. It is why out of the blue, someone of the opposite gender comes along and, by some miracle, our heart starts to flutter, there is a stirring in our loins, and we have found our soul mate, we think, “Thank God, there is hope. I can be straight just like everyone is telling me I must be.”

Noted researcher Lisa Diamond helps explain this phenomenon when she proposes that sexual desire and romantic love are related but independent constructs. Since the majority sexual orientation is heterosexual it makes sense that most people who fall in love romantically with their opposite gender would have a good chance of having the gender of their sexuality also aligned. The issue for mixed orientation marriage couples is they fall in love with the person of the expected gender but their bisexual, gay or lesbian sexual orientation is not aligned. Many mixed orientation couples miss this sign because even as our sexual attraction may be to a different gender than the person we fall in love with Diamond found that romantic attraction also often has a sexual attraction piece all of its own. This explains how a gay man can fall in love with a woman and find sexual attraction to her. In other words we can be sexually attracted to someone we love even if their gender does not match the gender of our sexual orientation. When this happens it appears that we have found the right partner because we have romantic and sexual attraction to a person of the opposite gender. (Diamond 2003) This does not change the fact that our sexual orientation and sexual interest is to a different gender than our spouse. The research by Diamond highlights my long standing premise that we fall in love with who we fall in love with and that person does not always match the gender of our sexual orientation.

I do take responsibility for how I played this stacked and rigged deck of cards. Some of us did better with what we were given than others. The pain that we have inflicted on our spouses, family and friends as we struggled with our bisexual attraction varies as well, but if there had been a proper place for us in society, perhaps we would have had a better understanding and acceptance of our sexuality.

I totally get that many straight spouses' lives have been changed forever by our coming out or discovery of our sexual orientation, and the straight spouses feelings are just as valid as the gay, lesbian and bisexual ones, but these are two different issues, and they need to be addressed separately. I am addressing why it happened, here in this chapter. In addition to societal pressures, I want to emphasize that many mixed-orientation marriages result from finding the love of our lives, our soul mates, with everything being perfect except for the sexual orientation piece. That creates a dilemma of what to do.

Once we discover the truth that we can, in fact, be the person we were born as, the journey of self-actualization and picking up the pieces begins. The hard work includes somehow rebuilding our relationship with the one we love. Sometimes, that is easier said than done, because sadly, the previous forced, fake life had manifested in all kinds of psychologically damaging ways. One of the keys to success is to process the recovery of the relationship as partners and friends. There is plenty of hurt to go around, but two people who love each other can work to heal each other's wounds.

In the kinder, gentler world I envision, before the marriage proposal is even made, the discussion of "I'm bisexual but love you and want to spend the rest of my days with you" should be had before marriage. Then everyone can enter into the marriage with full knowledge of what that means. If there is a lesson to be learned, it is that those of us in successful mixed-orientation marriages need to be role models for those who follow. Mixed-orientation marriages can be wonderful, but the work to make them so needs to start closer to the first date than the silver anniversary.

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# The Bisexual Identity

An important challenge in mixed-orientation relationships is that, in addition to dealing with the relationship dynamics created by the same-sex attraction, there are also challenges with understanding bisexuality. Even if we get past the straight box society would like to place us in, we live in a mostly binary world. A wide swath of society wants to classify us as either straight or gay. Bisexuals know this view of the world is not only overly simplistic but also just plain not true. As Alfred Kinsey (1948), who conducted foundational, landmark research in sexuality said, “Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. ... The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects.”

Dr. Kinsey created the Kinsey scale, which measures degree of sexual attraction to the opposite sex and the same sex. It is easy to fill out; just put a mark on the scale where it most accurately reflects the degree of heterosexual/homosexual sexual attraction.

Adapted from the Kinsey scale (Kinsey, 1948)

**Kinsey Scale as set forth in Sexual Behavior in the Human Male**  
(1948) by Alfred Kinsey, Wardell Pomeroy et al

Example Bisexual Mark

			X			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Exclusively Heterosexual	Bisexual					Exclusively Homosexual

Rating Description

- 0 Exclusively heterosexual
- 1 Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual
- 2 Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual
- 3 Equally heterosexual and homosexual (bisexual)
- 4 Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual
- 5 Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual
- 6 Exclusively homosexual
- X Asexual

**The Klein Grid: an improvement.**

A disadvantage to the Kinsey scale is that it is one-dimensional. The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid, developed by Fritz Klein, provides an improvement by taking into account past, present, and ideal elements of sexual orientation. The Klein grid is especially useful to help identify differences between one’s present situation and one’s ideal situation. It also represents multiple components of bisexuality. For example, it is not uncommon for a bisexual male to have an emotional preference for women along with a sexual preference for men. The Klein grid can be very helpful in making sure that how one leads one’s life is aligned with how one wants to lead it. This is the concept of making sure we are not being the proverbial square peg in a round hole. For example, if the Klein grid shows someone is sexually attracted to both men and women, fantasizes about both men and woman, and in an ideal world would find sexual satisfaction from both sexes, then it seems clear that a relationship with only one gender might cause a disconnect between actual living and who this person truly is. A review of the Klein grid certainly aids self-awareness.

In a sense, a bisexual person who pretends to be heterosexual is play-acting their way through life, and for many, this leads to negative personal consequences. Richard R. Trodden said “Homosexual identities are most fully realized when self-identity, perceived identity, and presented identity coincide; that is, where an accord exists among who people think they are, who they claim they are, and how others view them” (Trodden, 1988). The use of the Klein grid might raise some issues not previously examined, so it is best used in conjunction with counseling by a therapist trained in sexual orientation, gender identity, and mixed-orientation relationships.

The Klein grid (Klein, 1993) was developed by Dr. Fritz Klein, and this example of the use of the Klein grid was adapted from information obtained from his book.

	Past	Present	Ideal
Sexual Attraction	4	4	4
Sexual behavior	4	3	4
Sexual Fantasies	4	4	4
Emotional Preference	1	1	1
Social Preference	1	1	1
Heterosexual/ Homosexual Lifestyle	1	1	1
Self Identification	4	4	4

	Past	Present	Ideal
Sexual Attraction	4	4	4
Sexual behavior	4	1	4
Sexual Fantasies	4	5	5
Emotional Preference	1	1	1
Social Preference	1	1	1
Heterosexual/ Homosexual Lifestyle	1	1	1
Self Identification	4	4	4

	Past	Present	Ideal
Sexual Attraction	4	4	4
Sexual behavior	4	4	4
Sexual Fantasies	4	4	4
Emotional Preference	1	1	1
Social Preference	1	3	3
Heterosexual/ Homosexual Lifestyle	1	4	4
Self Identification	4	4	4

Key : 1 other sex/heterosexual only 2 other sex/heterosexual mostly 3 other sex heterosexual somewhat more 4 both sexes 5 same sex/homosexual somewhat more 6 same sex/ homosexual mostly 7 same sex/ homosexual only

The

Klein grid is used here for the limited purpose of furthering academic discussion of a specific case. For all other purposes, please refer to the original published work. A disadvantage to both the Kinsey and the Klein measures is that they are either–or oriented. Both imply that, as one becomes more attracted to one gender, one becomes less attracted to the other. This simply does not reflect the reality of most bisexuals. There are huge variations in the ways bisexuality manifests. In fact, the bisexual label serves as a great conversation starter, but to really understand a bisexual, you need to pull up a chair and have a meaningful conversation.

**Michael Storms—A multi-dimensional model.**

Michael Storms (1980) proposed yet another model of sexual orientation, in which sexual attraction to one sex is independent of that for the other. This is also known as the x/y model to reflect two independent axes. Storms found that bisexuals could be just as attracted to the opposite sex as heterosexuals while at the same time being just as attracted to the same sex as homosexuals. In my experience, this is true. This scale also allows us to properly account for the day-to-day ebb and flow of our sexual attraction. Variation in how sexually attracted we are to each gender appears to be a common attribute of the typical bisexual's day-to-day life. Sometimes this ebb and flow occurs over years. This is why sometimes a husband or wife suddenly discovers his or her same-sex attraction after years of believing he or she was straight.

Some bisexuals find that, on some days, they are very attracted to both men and women and would be happy with either, whereas on other days, they have a distinct preference for one sex or the other. In the early stages of accepting bisexuality, it is common for this ebb and flow to cause angst. Bisexuals who are in this questioning phase may ask themselves, "I think I might be gay, but I am also attracted to the opposite sex. How can I be attracted to both?" Eventually, we come to realize that, in fact, that is exactly who we are, bisexuals with attraction to both men and women.

## **Bisexuality—More than one way to live our lives with happiness and joy.**

At long last, our world is becoming more accepting of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people living in our society. Increasing numbers of bisexuals who are married to heterosexual spouses are coming out of the closet, ready to really start living their lives authentically. The lack of role models for success has resulted in a difficult journey for many, but in the end, many of us are finding pathways to success. It is important to understand that, if you put ten bisexuals in a room and ask them to tell you what it means to be bisexual, you may very well get ten different answers. This is why I am so fond of saying my bisexual identity is nothing more than a conversation starter because, to know who I really am, you need to pull up a chair and chat a spell. Our stories represent who we are, and we all have important stories to share.

Although it is an overly simplistic representation of the large variety of ways bisexuals live their lives, it can be helpful to take a look at the idea of sequential and concurrent bisexuals. In simplest terms, a sequential bisexual falls in love with the person and not the gender. Sequential bisexuals often have to deal with erasure because, while they are with a partner of one gender their attraction to the other gender becomes invisible. This results in others' trying to define us: "You must be straight if you are with an opposite-sex partner," some say, or "I knew it, you were gay all along, even when you were with a same-sex partner," others say.

Sequential bisexuals know all about the consequences of the erasure that this mistaken rush to judgment creates. While invisibility occurs passively when no one can see who we are, erasure of our bisexuality is far more hideous because it is done to us. Our bisexual identity is erased by someone else's mistaken belief that who we are with at a given moment defines who we are. The false

stereotypes are perhaps the biggest challenge facing sequential bisexuals because, by their very definition, bisexuals are happy with their current partner's gender no matter what it is. This doesn't change the fact that they are bisexual one bit.

Concurrent bisexuals face additional challenges and stereotypes. Concurrent bisexuals discover at some point that no one gender will satisfy them. Concurrent bisexuals need the best of more than one gender in their lives at the same time. It is the concurrent bisexual who traditionally has faced some of the greatest impact from stereotypes and negative remarks about bisexuality. We are labeled as promiscuous or selfish or that we never grew up. The list of hurtful remarks due to these false stereotypes is endless. From the constant barrage of hateful remarks, many of us became exhausted and surrender to society's expectations. In my case as well as countless others, it was simply easier to deny who we are to fit societal expectations. Sequential bisexuals have even been known to distance themselves from concurrent bisexuals by feeding into the stereotypes and saying we give bisexuals a bad name. We need to understand that our stories are varied and individual. Even labeling us as sequential or concurrent bisexuals is a poor representation and does a huge disservice to us because our relationships and needs are varied and complicated way beyond such a simple binary definition. As I am fond of saying, a bisexual is who I am, not what I do.

When I came of age in the 70s, there were no role models for bisexuals, and it was assumed that I would have to choose to live my life as either a straight or gay person. Like many, I was taught the big lie that bisexuality was a choice, and since I had fallen in love with a woman, the choice seemed easy. As most of us who were born as concurrent bisexuals now know, a relationship is not a simple either-or choice for us; we need some sort of "and" in our lives. I have a distinct emotional or sexual need to have more than simply a male OR female gender in my life. I was born this way; I have always been this way. Society tried to stuff me in a heterosexual box where I didn't belong. Like so many, I struggled for decades resisting who I was, and I spent years living a life according to a script that was not mine. I am fortunate that, nine years ago, I had some sort of epiphany. I simply woke up one day with acceptance and finally understood there is no shame in being born bisexual. We do, in fact, fall in love with the person we fall in love with, and we are sexually attracted to who we are attracted to, and sometimes, that involves more than one gender. Sometimes, all we need from others cannot be met by one particular person.

Accepting that we are all part of the rich tapestry of human beings is essential for the personal happiness of all of us. It is a huge injustice when 98% of the population wants to dictate how the 2% minority, who are not like them, have to live their lives. I am in that 2% and don't believe my life and the right to determine how I live it are any less important than anyone else's. Thank goodness, times have changed and society is accepting that all our lives are equally important and we are all entitled to personal happiness. Even as a concurrent bisexual male, there are many ways I can satisfy my sexual attraction to men while remaining a wonderful husband to my wife. My sex life is indeed very private and I have no intention of sharing those intimate details here, but let me simply say that our sex lives are not binary either. We do not live in a world of "sex/not sex;" there is a whole range of sexuality, and much of it is easily celebrated with love and understanding beyond the scope of typical binary thinking.

Living “out” as a self-actualized, happily married bisexual lets me serve as a role model for the next generation. There is nothing sadder to me than seeing a marriage between two loving people either never happen or fall apart after decades of marriage because the couple didn’t know that bisexuals can have wonderful marriages and that mixed-orientation marriages can be fabulous relationships.

Bisexuals do have a choice: they can choose whether to live their lives exactly as the persons they were created to be. We all deserve the chance to love and be loved, and I thank God every day I was given this chance. I hope that many more of us will follow because, once people get to know us, they can understand and accept us. When we live our lives openly and honestly, our parents, children, and friends can understand that bisexuals are normal, everyday people, and acceptance can follow. And as our partners come to know that living authentic, self-actualized lives brings love and joy to each day we are granted, we become much better husbands and wives.

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## Is my partner bisexual enough?



There is a common stereotype that bisexuals are often simply gay, but are in denial. No matter how hard we try, it seems impossible to get some people to accept that bisexuals really do exist. One of the problems is that many people do not understand what bisexuality is. Put ten bisexuals in a room and ask them what it means to be bisexual and you will likely get ten different answers. Labels are simply conversation starters, ways of saying, "Hey, here is something we need to talk about to find out more about each other." Negative attitudes toward bisexuals have also created an environment causing widespread reluctance toward adopting the bisexual label resulting in some bisexuals adopting the gay sexual orientation identity . There are wide variations in sexual attraction and the interplay with emotional attraction. For example, a wife married to a heterosexual man may have sexual interest only in women as well as emotional interest in both genders; the latter is sometimes called bi-romantic. Specifically, this woman has a romantic relationship with her husband. She may well be "just bisexual enough" to make the relationship work if they can mutually arrive at a solution to satisfy each other's sexual needs. Couples often get way too hung up on labels. One of the most common concerns I hear from the straight partner upon learning their partner is attracted to the same sex is the fear that the partner might actually be gay or lesbian. While the concerns are valid we need to look at behavior and desire not just at identity. One wife in one of the support groups I belong to refers to her husband as "gay plus me." That is all that is needed for the marriage to succeed.

**Lust and Love.** Lisa Diamond wrote that romantic love and sexual desire do not necessarily follow the same gender patterns. (Diamond, 2003). The gender of our lust can be different from the gender of our love. Even more Interestingly Daryl Bem professor of Psychology at Cornell University found as many gay men have found love has a sexual attraction component that can be different from the gender of our lust. Swan and Benack summarize Lisa Diamonds and Daryl Bems research with this informative quote.

"Sexual desire is gender oriented—we sexually desire members of one sex or the other—but romantic attraction is person oriented: We fall in love with a particular person, not his or her gender. . . . Many of the participants in Diamond's . . . study . . . report romantic attractions to and relationships with members of the sex to whom they are not typically sexually attracted. When asked if the sexual desire that often accompanies these romantic attractions generalizes to other members of that sex, the answer is typically no. (Bem, 2005)"

Swan and Benack in their research go on to write that this lust and romantic love dynamic accounts for the phenomenon of “One woman short of gay” found so often in the mixed-orientation marriage support groups (Swan & Benack, 2012). Research papers by Diamond, Bem, Swan and Benack all support my premise that bisexuality is not just a self-described identity or sexual orientation there is also bisexual behavior. In other words, some people identify as gay, lesbian or even straight but are bisexual in their emotional or sexual attractions and behaviors. Daryl Bem writes “ I have met many married men who say they are bisexual because they desire sex with men in general, but assert that they truly love their wives and enjoy satisfying sexual relations with them. When I ask them if they are also sexually attracted to other women, they say no. (Bem, 2005) ”

Some gay men do in fact pass through a bisexual stage in their identity development but many bisexuals are indeed bisexual and stay there. Also not mentioned is the gay men who discover they actually are bisexual. Some wives ask me, “If my husband is gay, why would he want to stay with me?” We have discovered that, sometimes, when we find the perfect person to spend the rest of our days with, that person doesn’t match our sexual orientation. This disconnect in sexual orientation does not take away the fact that we have found the person we most want to be with. I married my best friend, and in thirty-five years with her, I haven’t met anyone male or female who even comes close, so I am not about to let my sexual orientation take our relationship away from me. Interestingly, since my wife came to understand what it means to be married to a bisexual man, she agrees that yes I am “bisexual enough,” and we both hope to live out our days together happily ever after.

I do need to point out that, once the emerging gay or lesbian partner starts to really look at the freedom to live their lives as they choose, they may decide they are not bisexual enough to remain in the marriage, but it is worth being sure rather than assuming the marriage is over. I have seen successful mixed-orientation marriages even where the spouse identifies as 100% gay. The gay identity is just a label—what really matters is whether the relationship works for the couple.

I have seen a recent increase in straight spouses’ writing words such as, “My spouse first came out as bi; now they say they are gay; now what?” Many people who find themselves in mixed-orientation marriage are concerned about labels to describe their sexuality, especially the bisexual label. Many of us fall somewhere on a spectrum of sexual orientation, and our sexual attraction may be fluid throughout our lifetimes. I have seen spouses become very concerned when their bisexual partners start to drift toward the same-sex attraction end of the scale. I am sure that one person I know who has been married for fifty years terrified his wife when he said, “I’m bi,” then a few months later said, “No, I’m gay,” before settling on “Actually, I’m bi.” Thank goodness his wife stuck around, because fifty years of marriage is remarkable by any standard. Our sexual journeys take all kinds of paths, and it is important to remember it is a journey not a destination.

Sometimes in mixed-orientation marriages, same-sex attraction has taken over and there is virtually no sexual attraction to the opposite-sex spouse. When the spouse changes their identification from bi to gay, many spouses panic, sure they must start packing. I would like to suggest, not so fast. If there is still enough sexual interest to keep both spouses happy, it doesn’t matter how gay or lesbian the spouse identifies. What about when there is no longer any sexual interest in the straight spouse at all? The dynamics of a sexless marriage can be much more complex, and I’ll be the first to say they are

probably not for everyone, but it is important to look at all facets of the relationship. Some marriages were based on being best friends to begin with. This often happens when someone is pretty sure they are gay or lesbian but then confusingly falls in love with an opposite-sex friend, questions their sexual orientation, assumes they were wrong, and gets married. The incentive was so great to be straight that many of us grabbed hold of our heterosexual love and held on for dear life.

Sometimes, it may be a week or forty years later, the same-sex needs reappear. I am not a counselor and I have no idea what the experts say about such things; all I know is I have met many couples for whom the relationship is so wonderful that working out the sexuality piece is a side issue.

Again, if someone's sexual needs are with men but the person they love is a woman, do they abandon the love of their life just for sex? Do they abandon sex so they can have love? Why can't they have the love of their life and be sexually satisfied, even if that must be with two different people? It makes perfect sense to me. A situation in which different emotional and sexual needs are met by different people is an unusual mode of living, yet in other aspects of our lives we do not hesitate to find others who share those other interests. Of course, ideally, both spouses should share the attitude that everything else about the relationship is so great that they wouldn't give it up for all the sex in the world.

It is important to distinguish between sexual intercourse, sexual intimacy, and intimate expressions of love. Shere Hite in her Hite Report books on human sexuality wrote about society's expectation that foreplay must lead to sexual intercourse, which must then lead to orgasm. She suggests, and I agree, that in reality we can experience intimacy and our sexuality in many different ways. (Hite, 1989) If sexual intercourse isn't working for a couple, they shouldn't abandon all contact; instead, they should stick with the things that do work. Who doesn't like a warm hand on the shoulder, a hug, or some leisurely cuddle time on a Saturday morning? If we remove the expectations about where that cuddling will lead and embrace the moment, we will end up in a happier place. I know other couples where sexual intercourse isn't working for them but they love sharing the intimacy of mutual masturbation. Again, we live in a world of binary thinking: no touch at all or, once there is touch, if it doesn't end in intercourse and orgasm, why bother. As a society, we need to step back from that perspective. If your spouse has no sexual interest in you, but is your best friend and soul mate, the person you most want to spend your time with, then why not be together? Once that decision has been made, then the work can begin to discover how to satisfy each of your sexual needs. If enough intimacy cannot be found within the marriage, then either or both may need to find an external source of sexual satisfaction.

When I grew up in the late 60s and early 70s, we developed a very casual attitude about our sexuality, at least in my social circles. Instead of romantic love, just liking someone as a friend was often enough to justify sexual intimacy. This separation of our sex life from our love life worked for many people in my generation. Many of us felt this was something we were expected to outgrow, and then we were expected to settle down and love and have sex the way we were supposed to.

One way of looking at mixed-orientation marriages is to reexamine those attitudes we held in the 70s. Not everyone can separate sex from love, and not every couple can support multiple relationships, but for those who can, there is a whole world of possibilities. Our marriages are as unique as we are as individuals.

It has been my experience that a strong predictor of mixed-orientation success is some degree of attraction to our spouse. A significant number of gay identified men have found the right person to be married to even with the gender differences which makes them bisexual enough. No matter how gay or lesbian a partner identifies if they desire to be with their spouse that may just be “bisexual enough” to make a good relationship a possibility.

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## Coming out



Coming out of the closet as bisexual, gay or lesbian from keeping a secret no one must know to living an open, self-actualized and authentic life has many variations and stages. Even the process of coming out to ourselves can be an extremely complex and emotional process. Vivian Cass in her Cass Model describes the process from initial awareness of our bisexual, lesbian or gay attraction to formal identity development (Cass 1979). I write about the Cass model from a bisexual perspective in a blog post [Cass Model Revisited – A bisexual perspective](#). Once we come out to ourselves the process of deciding whom else to come out to begins. We all become aware of our bisexual, gay, or lesbian identity at different stages in our lives. Some of us are aware of our bisexual, gay, or lesbian attraction as far back as we can remember; others repress these feelings so much that they are in their 40s, 50s, or even older before discovering them.

We have learned that in some cases sexual attraction can be fluid so if one's spouse comes out at 50, 60, 70 years old and says this is something new it is important to know that late in life discovery of bisexual, lesbian or gay attraction is also a thing. (Calzo, Antonucci, Mays, & Cochran, 2011). There can be a huge gap between awareness and acceptance of our bisexual, gay, or lesbian attraction. Acceptance plays a huge role in our sense of self and willingness to share that part of ourselves with others. In some cases, the bi, gay, or lesbian spouse believes coming out to their spouse is an impossibility, and if they have acted on their desires, the fear of the consequences may trump any moral second thoughts. At some point the desire to live our lives authentically can sometimes become a greater force than our fears.

## **Coming out is only good for you if it is good for you.**

We all live in our own unique situations and each relationship has its own relationship dynamics. It makes sense and research supports the idea that coming out is only good for you if it's good for you (Legate, Ryan & Weinstein 2011). In other words while there are all kinds of benefits to living out, if

coming out will get you fired from your job, thrown out of your house, disowned by your spouse and family, beaten, tortured or killed then perhaps the bad consequences outweighs the benefits. Coming out to one's wife or husband has a variety of unique considerations and while it sometimes sets off a chain of events that result in an even better relationship coming out to one's spouse more commonly creates stress to the relationship that may result in separation or divorce or state of continued angst. You cannot un-comeout so a lot of thought needs to go into the process and this is another instance where a professional counselor can help guide you. Fear and self preservation are extremely powerful motivators towards maintaining secrecy.

## Coming Out to Our Spouse

Numbers of mixed-orientation marriages where the bisexual, lesbian or gay attraction is known by the straight spouse are hard to quantify because the social stigma of bisexual, lesbian or gay attraction continues and there is a lack of proper counting methods. There is a huge number bisexual and gay married men in mixed-orientation marriages where the husband is not out to anyone including their wives.

My own observation is men who are open about their sexual orientation with their wives are a very small minority. I am not sure if it is 1 out of 10 or 1 out of a 100 or even fewer but I am confident that most have found being open a challenge they choose not to deal with. Again I blame the negative hateful attitudes of our society toward bisexual, lesbian or gay attraction as well as the lack of positive role models of bi and gay men in happy marriages for making it so difficult to be open as the person we were created to be. Due to fear and other factors closeted bisexual and gay men face an ethical dilemma, they don't want to hurt their wives by coming out because they love them and they know disclosure would not only hurt their wives but statistics show coming out to ones spouse has the potential to destroy their marriage (Buxton, 1994).

The need for *Mixed-Orientation Marriage Pathways to Success* was created because of the lack of models that happy successful mixed-orientation marriages are even possible. If the only understanding of discovery or disclosure of mixed-orientation marriage is divorce then self preservation and the preservation of the relationship contributes to secrecy over disclosure.

In short many believe come out and the marriage may be over, keep it a secret and the marriage continues on its happy merry way, and of course get caught and the marriage may also be over but if the belief is the marriage might be over anyway there is incentive for the secret to remain. The ethical dilemma created by secrecy include the straight spouses right to know who they are married to. In addition the ethics of the openness/secrecy dilemma become even more important when there is secret sexual behavior with others outside the marriage especially because such activity has the potential to put the unknowing straight spouses health at risk. More than a few mixed-orientation marriages have become known due to the wife getting a mysterious sexually transmitted infection wondering how that could be. In addition to the health risks there are other damage. If a gay husband or lesbian wife has no interest in sexual intercourse with their spouse the spouse is left with all kinds of wondering why and perhaps a sense of loss that sexual intimacy is missing from their life. When the reason is known efforts can be made to find a mutually rewarding solution.

Another common issue in mixed-orientation marriage where the gay, bisexual or lesbian attraction is not known is the brooding and depression that can accompany an unfulfilled life. It is obvious something is wrong, but what? When we love someone we want to fix their pain but how can we when we don't know what's wrong.

In my own experience I decided my wife's right to know about my bisexuality transcended all other considerations. The risks of the consequences to my openness to the future of our marriage was one I had to take but while I believe this is the best approach that was my path. I can not emphasize enough that each individual situation is different and each person must decide for themselves what is best. *Mixed-Orientation Marriage Pathways to Success* is written specifically for those who are either already out or who have made the decision to come out. If you are still in the contemplative stage I highly recommend you find a local professional counselor to guide you in the process.

As part of my discussion on coming out I would like to discuss some of the variations of the process of coming-out to our husbands or wives.

First, there is the "I thought it was a choice, so I chose you" model. This is the version I experienced. I shared with my wife before I married her that I was bisexual but was choosing her. Shortly after I got married, I realized my bisexuality was not a choice, but in my mind it was too late, so I kept it buried deep in the closet. When I came out the second time, some twenty-five years of marriage had passed, and I had struggled for all those years. I couldn't repress it anymore; I had to bring who I really was into how I lived my life. As I shared who I was, my wife at first didn't remember that I had previously shared this information. I mention this because it is a common occurrence that happens way more often than I ever imagined: out of sight, out of mind, soon to be forgotten. One who is planning on coming out again needs to be aware of the possibility that it may be like coming out for the first time. Fortunately, in time, my wife remembered. This understanding is important because part of the coming out process is that we are revealing a secret that we have not shared with someone who has expected us to share all of ourselves. This has an effect on trust and frequently raises the question, "What else do I not know about this person?"

When the disclosure of the bisexual, lesbian or gay attraction happens long into the relationship, it may occur either before anything happens with a person outside the marriage or after. Coming out engenders a huge range of reactions, and the difficulties are greatly magnified if there is infidelity. Infidelity and its impact on trust often become an obstacle to resolving the greater issue of creating a working dynamic for the mixed-orientation marriage.

There are also variations in coming-out style. There is the "slowly rip off the band-aid" approach: "I think I am attracted to men," then a few days later, "I have had sex with a man," and then a little later, it's not just one man. And there is the approach of "here it all is, every last detail, all at once." Neither of these two methods results in what I would call a good time, but however it occurs, the coming-out revelation is a rite of passage that virtually every gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender person has had to cope with. There is also the difference between voluntarily saying, "Honey, we need to talk, I am bisexual," and the wife who discovers pictures of naked men on the computer or, worse, walks into the bedroom to find the husband in bed with another man. There is a huge difference

between coming out when you have had a chance to reflect and understand who you are and what you want and you have planned out what you are going to say, and when and you are being dragged out of the closet kicking and screaming. When the gay, lesbian, or bisexual spouse hasn't accepted him or herself and gets caught or discovered, it can be very frustrating to the straight spouse to deal with continued denial. "I'm not bi; those pictures were just idle curiosity," "What male porn on my computer; I have no idea how that got on there," or "We are just friends." Such denials add to the relationship complexities that need to be overcome. These difficulties are not a reflection on your spouse, but are a reflection of the shame that society places on bisexual, lesbian or gay attraction.

The actual coming-out to our spouse is often full of angst, agony, and struggles. More than a few people have come out only after being hospitalized for depression, panic attacks, or other traumatic events. For some the need eventually becomes so great that we share this deep dark secret, which begins a remarkable journey. The nuts and bolts of how we share are as varied as the coming-out stories. I chose to come out on a Saturday morning over coffee where we would have as much time as we needed. Some write and deliver a letter, and some read their letters out loud so they won't forget what they want to say. Some use the captive-audience approach, such as being alone in a car on a five-hour drive or away on a two-week vacation. There never seems to be a good time to come out: before the holidays ruins the holidays, after the holidays ruins the holidays, and anniversaries and birthdays are never good. Those simple words, "I am bi" or "I think I might be gay" cannot be unsaid. The chain of events they set in motion will mean change, hopefully for the good but not necessarily so.

I have learned from listening to hundreds of stories that, while we often have a good idea of the reaction we will get, we will never be sure. In a perfect world, our spouses totally understand our story, accept who we are, and work with us as our partners and friends toward making all well in our world. That happens sometimes, but usually, something else happens. Most commonly, there is an immediate reaction followed by an evolution of thinking that at some point resolves into a decision to stay together with continued struggle, stay together with mutual happiness, or separate and divorce. Regretfully, I don't have a model that says how you can tell; you need to go through the process to see how it will end. I will further discuss the evolution of coming out to our spouses in other chapters.

### **Coming out as a mixed-orientation couple.**

Coming out to the world and finding people who support us are two different things. In the early stages, support and having a trusted someone to talk to are important, and being publicly out can wait until there is a solid foundation for the new relationship dynamic. I recommend coming out to others only after both partners have confidence about who they are and what they want. If you yourself do not know whether you will be staying together, it makes it difficult to send a unified message. Coming out is a loaded topic that can start a huge debate. I put it up there with religion and politics. Some say it is no one's business what goes on in the bedroom. They are right; being bisexual

is about a lot more than what happens in the bedroom. It goes to our core identity. There is no shame in being bisexual, lesbian or gay. Coming out can often lead to a happier view of our lives especially if we overcome any sense of shame for simply being who we are.

There are complicated aspects of this whole process of coming out as a mixed-orientation couple. If the bisexual partner chose on their own to reveal to their spouse their bisexual attraction, the bisexual partner often feels a sense of relief that their partner now knows. If there was a discovery instead of a disclosure, it may take time for the bisexual partner to reach that point. Once the secret is revealed, the bi partner needs to determine how “out” they want to be. This can range from “It’s no one’s business at all,” to “I am so proud of who I am, I want the world to know.” Decisions about who to be out to include immediate family, close friends, personal support networks, trusted advisors and professional colleagues.

In a mixed-orientation couple, we also need to consider the straight partner’s feelings on the subject. When both spouses agree about whether to come out, it can be done together as a couple. When one spouse is ready and the other is not, some work needs to be done.

As we start thinking about the wider coming-out process, there are several important groups with their own considerations. First, our children: if you have young children, I highly recommend that your coming-out be under the guidance of a counselor whom you trust. How old is old enough is a subject open to debate. I’ll open with the fact that, in the 4th grade, I knew I was different, and if I had known I had a gay, lesbian, or bisexual parent, it would have been a huge validation. Nothing says we’re OK like Mom or Dad’s being one of us. How we come out to our children includes a trust aspect because our children want to believe they know the real us. In my case, coming out improved my relationship with my children. Then, there is the wider family of parents, siblings, and so on. Secrets create a slippery slope. The fact is, no matter how our mixed-orientation marriage plays out, there may be visible changes in the dynamics of our relationship for example all of a sudden the couple is running off to counseling sessions and there are hushed conversations behind closed doors, things have changed and our parents and siblings may pick up on them. Then we have the whole “You told so and so, why didn’t you have the faith to share with me?” There are those who say, “Why share this?” There is an element of joy when we reach the tipping point of self acceptance and we want others to share in our joy. The spiritual part of me did not want Mom and Dad looking down from heaven with tears in their eyes because I had had too little confidence in their love to share this part of who I am. Coming out to Mom and Dad was one of the hardest things I have ever done, but I discovered the meaning of unconditional love when I did.

The final coming-out decision is about whether to come out to our wider circle. As the bisexual one, I wanted to be out to everyone because I was no longer ashamed of who I was and was ready to live authentically. I wanted to be a role model for others who follow, but my wife was hesitant; she didn’t know how others would react. So I backed off and allowed several more months for our mixed-orientation marriage to percolate. When we approached the subject again, my wife was ready. The theory was to establish a posse of supporters who would most likely react positively. I would come out to someone, see how it went, then add another. We came out to a few individuals, then went to some cocktail parties. No one pointed and stared, and no one asked any awkward questions. My wife

started to feel better about the process. My initial coming out went on for about 18 months, culminating with the most difficult of all: to my mid 80's parents. I was most afraid of their reaction. As it turns out, it was a non-issue, and they were completely supportive.

## **Coming out for us was a joyous experience to be celebrated**

One of the most important parts of my coming out success was my wife's and my positive attitude. We came out as if having a bisexual husband was a good thing. When people see their friends excited about something positive they feel the excitement as well, never mind that it's kind of unusual to be positive about this. If the couple portrays their marriage as a train wreck, their friends will react accordingly. I recommend waiting until the couple has worked out a pathway to success before coming out to the wider circle. Even with our children, when I came out to them, we knew our marriage was going to last. That's all our kids wanted to know: whether Mom and Dad would still be together. For those couples who decide to divorce the coming out process can still be framed as a positive event even as the differing sexual orientations did not enable the marriage to continue.

All this said, even in the early stages, both the bi and straight partners need someone to confide in. This supportive person is different from those in the greater coming out. Find someone you can trust who will not be judgmental. At first, a counselor may be the only one you can talk to, but find someone. As a reminder you do not have to come out to anyone you don't want to. In some cases, being out can be bad because certain employers will find a way to discriminate even if illegal. In some parts of the country, it can be outright dangerous to live openly as a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person. Under the right circumstances, living openly can be wonderful, but it must be carefully considered.

# Openness and Secrecy

Adir Adler and Ben-Ari in their article and research study "The Myth of Openness and Secrecy in Intimate Relationships: The Case of Spouses of Mixed- Orientation Marriage" write about the dialectics of secrecy and openness, that is secrecy and openness are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The secrecy is bad openness is good dichotomy is not the only way to look at the mixed-orientation dynamic. (Ben-Ari & Adler ,2016). There are many different ways that couples handle openness and secrecy in their mixed orientation marriage. One element of secrecy is the issue of awareness of the same sex attraction by the straight spouse. Once the same sex attraction is known there are patterns of openness and secrecy regarding how the same sex attraction affects the relationship.

My discussion of openness and secrecy in mixed-orientation relationships is to help in awareness of observed patterns and underlying reasons for those patterns and not a specific recommendation because as I keep saying each situation has its own unique circumstances. The six patterns of openness and secrecy that Ben-Ari and Adir Adler identified in their study included complete secrecy, conspiracy of silence, initiated concealment, disloyalty/violation of agreement, selective sharing and complete openness.(Ben-Ari & Adler ,2016).

Conspiracy of silence is basically when it is suspected that the straight spouse knows about the same sex attraction but it is never really discussed. The classic “we won't talk about elephant in the living room” , It turns out sometimes the straight spouse indeed does at some level know about the same sex attraction but sometimes they don't.

Initiated concealment presents itself as separating ones straight life from their gay life and limiting intersections of the two, I describe it as our gay life and straight life existing in a sort of parallel universe. I believe this is common because of the conflicts that exist between the married straight life and the needs to celebrate one's same sex attraction. The multiple challenges of integrating same sex attraction into traditional heterosexual marriages manifests itself with this initiated concealment coming from different perspectives depending upon if the initiated concealment is initiated by the same sex attracted spouse of the straight spouse.

In the case of a bisexual or gay husband for example when they wish to keep their same sex world separate sometimes that suites the wives as the wives preference but other times it results in frustration because the wives want to address openly and mindfully. When it is the straight wife with the initiated concealment there are other considerations including the moral views of same sex attraction.

Disloyalty/ violation of agreement happens when the gay,bisexual or lesbian spouse reach an agreement on how the same sex attraction is going to be handled and then due to a variety of circumstances then behaves outside the terms of the agreement. My anecdotal observation is this

happens when the bisexual or gay spouse agrees to a boundary that does not actually meet their needs but is motivated to see the marriage succeed. In most cases I believe the agreements are made in good faith but sometimes they are based on an unrealistic understanding of the need for same sex satisfaction.

Selective sharing is often part of the negotiated terms enabling a continued mixed orientation marriage. This could be don't tell unless I ask or don't ask don't tell or any number of other ways to make the same sex activities palatable to the straight spouse. For example a spouse might say "I want to know who and where but the what is too much information." When this selective sharing is by mutual agreement it can be a common way to make MOMS work. Ben-Ari & Adler's study found complete openness to be relatively rare in mixed-orientation marriages and seem to advocate an openness of those in the counseling profession to be more open to many different options and degrees of openness based on the individuals, their specific relationship dynamics and cultural influences.

In summary openness and secrecy are not as simple a component of a mixed-orientation marriage as many would believe. It is my observation that these six patterns are not simply final resting points but that openness and secrecy is part of dynamic process and that it is not unusual to progress through several of these elements and even revisiting some over the life of the relationship

## **References**

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## The Line in the Sand



The first few days after disclosure or discovery of the bisexual, gay, or lesbian partner's sexual orientation, many discussions take place about what this is going to do to the marriage dynamic. As is often said, the bisexual spouse is the same person as before; you just know more about them. Now that it is out in the open, the bisexual, gay or lesbian partner has a huge sense of relief, but at the same time, a great deal of anxiety about the future. If the bisexual, lesbian or gay spouse has been repressing his or her same-sex desires, he or she wonders whether finally there will be a way to satisfy that need. I describe it as being like an itch. If we can scratch the itch just a little bit, it does not seem to itch so badly, but if we can't touch the itch, it will drive most of us mad.

The newly out bisexual, gay, or lesbian spouse in discussions with their straight spouse has choices that include celibacy, monogamy, monogamy with benefits, a friend with some sort of benefits, a friend with all the benefits, a closed loop relationship, a three-way relationship, an open marriage for one, an open marriage for both, and even a poly relationship where two become three. These are the most common solutions, and within each one, there are all kinds of additional variations.

Determining which solution is best for a relationship requires lots of communication as partners and friends. The couple needs to take the approach, "Let's work on this together to come up with a solution we can all be happy with." It simply does not work if the situation is treated like a battle.

I have found it useful to use a line-in-the-sand model to identify where each partner stands on integrating the same-sex dynamic into the marriage. If there were no differences, there would be no need for this book, but it has been my experience that a lot of couples start off the first few weeks after discovery or disclosure with very different ideas on what it means to have a bisexual, gay or lesbian husband or wife in the relationship. This is understandable because the idea of a husband or wife having same-sex needs beyond their partner may be a total surprise that was not previously part of the evolution of the understanding of the relationship.

It may be that differences in ideas about how the mixed-orientation marriage will work will cause a gap between the spouse's respective lines in the sand that lasts for weeks, months, or sadly, even years, while the couple works on other issues such as basic acceptance of the same-sex attraction. Eventually, though, work needs to begin on bringing these lines closer together. The movement is not consistent. Often, there will be two steps forward, time to see how or looks, and then a step back or a zig instead of a zag. Perhaps a couple tries something, and one of them says, "I thought I would be comfortable with that, but I'm not." So, through a series of baby steps, the lines move about until one

day, ideally, they end up close together. This is the magic point where both are happy. The odds are quite good that some compromise will be required, but both spouses hopefully can come to accept and be happy with the compromise.

It is important to note that there is not one single solution that works for every couple; each couple is different. Some bisexuals are perfectly happy simply being able to be themselves around their spouse. Some can be satisfied by using a sex toy, role playing, or being able to openly masturbate while watching gay or lesbian pornography. Others simply need a bisexual friend for what I call “Me too” and “I understand.” Still others need some sort of relationship with another bisexual, gay, or lesbian person. It is extremely important to understand that the line in the sand applies here as well. There are all kinds of relationships. Just because there is a person outside the marriage does not mean that relationships has to include anything-goes sex. This said, research shows that some sort of outlet for the bisexual, gay or lesbian spouse’s same-sex desire is a component of successful mixed-orientation marriages (Ben-Ari, 2010).

Two types of trust are required here. One is the bisexual, gay or lesbian partners trust in self to respect the agreed-upon boundaries. An important note here is that alcohol is famous for causing people to abandon boundaries. I suggest that extreme care be used around alcohol because this is serious stuff, and it is important to distinguish between authentic behavior done with a purpose and behavior that perhaps might not be in one’s best interests as a result of having too much to drink.

The other important element of trust is that the straight partner must completely trust their bisexual partner. The only way not to be miserable is to truly believe the bi partner is doing nothing more than what has been agreed upon. So if the bi partner is simply having a cup of coffee with a friend, their spouse needs to honestly believe that is what they are doing. If, instead, the straight spouse has visions of them in a motel room having sex, the straight spouse will never be happy. It is common for the same-sex attraction to come up in the first place because of the discovery of some sort of breach of trust, such as being caught in the act. What has happened before disclosure does not necessarily mean it will happen now that the bisexual, gay or lesbian spouse is out in the open but it is a legitimate concern.

It is hard to believe, but each baby step helps both partners determine whether they can be happy with that new position of the line in the sand. Relationships in which both are happy can move forward with a much greater likelihood of success. The key component seems to be acceptance of the bisexual/gay/lesbian partner as a bisexual/gay/lesbian, realizing, “This is who my spouse is, and I’m OK with that, and my spouse needs a way to be bisexual/gay/lesbian.” The difficult part is satisfying the bisexual/gay/lesbian spouse’s gay side while also meeting the straight partner’s needs in the marriage. We are seeking a win for everyone.

This is a nuts and bolts bisexual/gay/lesbian spouse toolbox chapter that probably will not be the easiest to read because I have yet to figure out the best way to present the content, but it covers several important concepts of a successful mixed-orientation marriage. It includes communication about what is needed to be happy, the role of compromise, the role of passage of time, and the magic

of mutual happiness. The line is in sand, not granite, because very often the bi/gay/lesbian partner and the straight partner start from very different places, and some movement needs to take place somewhere for a happy center to be found.

As an example of extreme binary thinking, the straight spouse initially demands that no same-sex oriented behavior can be on the acceptable side of the line, whereas the bi/gay/lesbian spouse is desperately seeking some way to satisfy or celebrate their same-sex attraction.

The area that we are seeking agreement in often has several components. To find a point of mutual happiness, all we need is some overlap. While the range of acceptance will vary, each of us has in our heart an intellectual understanding, which is different from basic acceptance, which, in turn, is different from happy acceptance. In my life, I try to find my wife's happy point, and I adjust my line in the sand to meet it. While I want to celebrate my same-sex needs, my wife needs to be happy about how I do that for me to be happy.

Society has created a model of what an ideal marriage should look like that fits 90% of society, whereas many of us in the other 10% fight a "we may be different but we are normal" battle. Looking at it another way, if I am in a room of 10 people and I am the only one who is bi/gay/lesbian, in any discussion, I will be seriously out-numbered. It is easy to feel that society supports the straight spouse. In this environment, the bi/gay/lesbian spouse is on the losing end of the discussion on day 1, and the next focus is the preservation of the relationship. "Either you meet me where I am, or you have to leave, and I have society and friends and family behind me." This ultimatum does not even need to be spoken; it is simply understood, "This is what marriage is supposed to look like, so move to my line or get out."

Many bi/gay/lesbian spouses who stay and want to make their mixed-orientation marriages work speak of their straight spouses as their soul mates and best friends. They love them so much they will do anything to keep that love; they don't want to leave, so they make the greatest compromise possible even at the expense of their own happiness. How much the bi/gay/lesbian spouse gives up of themselves depends upon the degree of their need, The fact is, there will always be some sort of tug. Sometimes the bi/gay/lesbian spouse is given a gift, and the straight spouse immediately understands the bi/gay/lesbian spouse's needs, and acceptance follows, but this is the exception. Usually there is a process of understanding that needs to take place over time.

Many straight spouses ask, "How do I know if my bi/gay/lesbian spouse will grow tired of white knuckling being straight and end up leaving me after all." There is no crystal ball. Most of us are people pleasers and want our spouses to be happy, and life goes on, but at some point, some of us realize the clock of life is ticking, and soon it will be over, and we have never lived our life as the person we were born as.

Ideally, before we reach that point, our straight spouses will reach an understanding of what it means to be married to a bi/gay/lesbian partner, and they will want the same happiness for us as we want for them. With this meeting of the minds, the lines in the sand move closer.

I talk often of the importance of time in a mixed-orientation relationship. It takes time for both partners to understand the dynamics of a relationship in which one spouse has sexual needs that cannot necessarily be met by the other spouse. The trick is for the new relationship dynamics to get in sync before it runs out of time. Typically, as the straight spouse achieves greater understanding and starts to move toward more openness, the bi/gay/lesbian spouse realizes that the life they are looking for may not be very realistic, so in their willingness to compromise, they move toward their straight spouse's ideal.

If the straight spouse can agree with a certain level of same-sex satisfaction but would be happier if it was a little less, then the bi/gay/lesbian spouse has a choice: to push for more or to limit themselves to that happy point where the straight spouse says, "I'd be happy if you could be happy with that "happy point." In a perfect world, they both have a happy point with the same behaviors.

This process of compromise places us at the almost "we all win" point in the evolution of the mixed-orientation marriage dynamic. There is a huge difference from the early days when it seemed we would never find common ground. The most successful mixed-orientation marriages I see seem to eventually reach this point of compromise where both end up in a happy place.

#### References

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# Monogamy /Non-monogamy and Mixed-Orientation Relationships

The needs of the bisexual , gay, lesbian and straight partners for a monogamous relationship or for varying degrees of non-monogamy are very individual in nature and the dynamics and belief systems of each mixed-orientation relationship will help determine the best solution for that couple. The default model for traditional relationships that do not have a mixed-orientation component is usually monogamy and sexual exclusiveness between the two partners. No matter how much exploring one might have done as young adults the only socially acceptable model presented to most was to find “the one” and settle down. Most of us in mixed-orientation relationships never even knew that having a relationship with more than one gender in our life at a time was an option which is how many of us ended up in mixed orientation relationships to begin with.

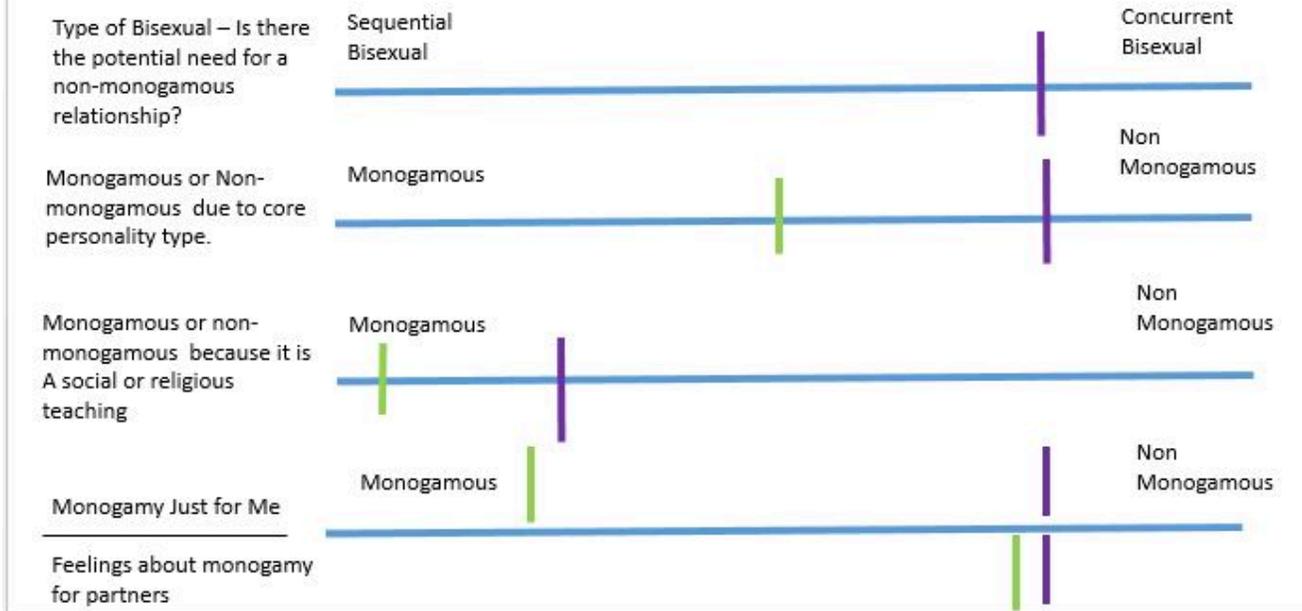
Often the evolution of a mixed-orientation marriage requires a renewed look at the role of monogamy in our relationships and this is especially true when the need for sexual satisfaction from a gender other than ones spouse becomes part of the discussion. The topic of monogamy is often a source of stress in evolving mixed-orientation relationships and it is helpful to look at how this dimension fits in our lives.

I find it easier to discuss this complicated topic in an in person lecture or discussion group setting but so many struggle with these issues I will attempt to explain these complicated dynamics here. This article makes no value judgment about monogamy or non-monogamy and I am not advocating or promoting one belief system over another instead it is an article about the interplay of peoples own understanding of these multiple dimensions and that interplay’s role in a pathway to mutual happiness .

Writing on the topic of monogamy and non-monogamy presents several challenges. First as you will see below our views about monogamy often change with time so what these chapters mean today may mean something completely different a year from now. The other challenge is some mixed orientation marriages find success and happiness from monogamy, some find happiness through some form of non-monogamy and some find happiness in a journey that contains monogamy for some periods of time and non-monogamy for others.

In any case it is not a question of whether mixed orientation marriages can be happy successful relationships that are monogamous or non-monogamous, of course they all can , but we need to understand the role of these belief systems as they interplay with our respective sexual needs in finding the paths to happiness. I am a firm believer that the personal happiness of both the husband and wife in mixed-orientation relationship is an important part of a successful mixed-orientation marriage. I hope some examples of relationship dynamics that make the pathway to success easier and what makes success more of a challenge will help in our understanding our own pathways to success.

## Monogamy / Non-Monogamy and Mixed-orientation Relationship Dynamics



I find it helpful to look at our belief systems about monogamy as a separate but related dimension of our sexuality. Bisexuality is an umbrella term that covers a wide variety of identities and behaviors and certain types of bisexuality are perfectly suited for monogamous relationships and some are more suited for a non-monogamous relationship. This chart and explanation attempts to show the interplay between bisexual needs, core personality and societal belief systems.

### Concurrent or Sequential Bisexual

The first question to be answered is “Is there even the potential need for a non-monogamous relationship?” The type of bisexual same sex attraction will influence the degree and importance of the monogamy/non-monogamy dimension. Sequential bisexuals who in an over simplification typically connect to partners because of who they are and not their gender by their very nature can easily live anywhere on the monogamous to non-monogamous spectrum. Many sequential bisexuals live very happy lives in traditional monogamous marriages.

Concurrent bisexuals by their nature have needs from more than one gender at a time. When concurrent bisexuals also have a degree of non-monogamy as part of their personality makeup their needs as a concurrent bisexual and their ability to meet those needs through responsible non-monogamy are in alignment. If on the other hand they have needs from more than one gender and their partner meets only some of those needs and they fall on the monogamous end of the monogamous/non-monogamous dimension then a hierarchy of needs may be established and their sometimes is an internal unresolved conflict between the bisexual needs and their monogamous relationship style. This is why some concurrent bisexuals must have same sex satisfaction with

another person besides their spouse and why others are happier in monogamous relationships. It can be helpful for the mixed orientation couple be open to the many different ways same sex attraction presents itself.

## **Monogamous / Non-Monogamous as core personality type or social teaching.**

One question that is often never asked is “Is our relationship Monogamous because of our individual core personality types or is it because of societal or religious teachings?” The distinction is important because presumably our degrees of monogamy or non-monogamy might be a fixed and immutable part of who we are or it might be a learned construct that might change.

When one examines the monogamous/non-monogamous dimension of our sexuality it may help to differentiate between core personality and learned societal and religious teachings. I find that many people have never looked at anything other than monogamous relationships so there is a learning process to separate the two. Most of us were taught that monogamy is the only proper way to have a relationship so even with non-monogamous core ideals many are monogamous because that’s how society has told everyone that is who we must be. The monogamous model works fine for many but some such as concurrent bisexuals may at some point start to feel other needs and reexamine their ideas about monogamy and non-monogamy.

Learned monogamy looks very similar to core personality monogamy and it requires mindful self-reflection to determine where we fall on the learned vs core continuum. Of course there is a reason why monogamous relationships are the societal norm and that is they are simpler to keep intact. In theory If we don’t insert the complexity of adding others it should be easier to manage the relationship. Many relationships end due the influences of an outside affair but this is a different situation. The needs of the husband and wife are different in a mixed orientation marriage and to make a mixed orientation marriage happy may require taking the risk of making it more complicated. I look at it as if the marriage may fail without mutual happiness anyway it is worth seeing if an alternative pathway to that mutual happiness can be found to save the relationship?

## **Monogamy / Non-Monogamy and our relationships.**

In a mixed orientation relationship especially where one person has needs for sexual satisfaction from another gender ones ideas about monogamy and non-monogamy need to be considered in conjunction with our spouses ideas about monogamy. For example if the bisexual spouse is non-monogamous and the straight spouse also is non-monogamous then there should be no relationship issues with the other spouses needs. If the straight spouse is monogamous then we need to determine is it learned monogamy with a core non monogamous. If that is the case does the straight spouse have the desire or ability to unlearn their monogamous teachings to align with their non-monogamous core and their bisexual spouses needs. Often we can’t tell until we go through the process. This self evaluation and reflection process is a learning process that may take several years and we won’t know the answer until we try. Once the process is complete if the straight spouse

discovers that they are both non monogamous at their core and have learned to accept non-monogamy as their learned belief system then again the mixed orientation relationship has a possible pathway to mutual happiness.

Adding to the complicated nature of this process is that even if in fact the core personality type is monogamous then an examination needs to be made is it monogamy for themselves and everyone else or can some degree of non-monogamous behavior become acceptable even as they themselves lead a monogamous life. Of course even if a straight spouse is open to non-monogamy for others there are “others” and then there is ones husband or wife. For some straight spouses that makes a difference for others it does not. It is important to note that like many aspects of our sexuality our degrees of monogamy falls on a continuum. And that can often allow for sufficient acceptable avenues to satisfy same sex needs.

Each couple is different. When we are examining the possible need for a non-monogamous relationship we also should look at the straight spouse’s needs. Sometimes in mixed orientation relationships especially those where sexual intimacy is lacking due to same sex attraction it is the straight spouse who has sexual needs outside the relationship. This model of learned and core personality applies here as well. All this said fairness always dictates that if it is OK for one partner to have an outside relationship it should be OK for the other. There are always risks to our relationships and we need to balance the risks with the benefits.

The important takeaway is to take the time to mindfully examine these various dimensions to our sexuality to determine actual needs for happiness vs how others have said you should be. It is your relationship and it can be shaped in the ways that meet who you are.

The idea behind the “line in the sand” model is to allow time for this process of understanding our personal belief systems to unfold while providing for compromise and meeting halfway along the way, The ultimate goal I believe is the win win , we are both happy. Understanding the dimensions of our sexuality and relationship style I believe will help us see if a pathway to success is possible. To summarize A sequential bisexual who is monogamous and wants just one partner at a time, will handle bisexuality very differently from a non-monogamous concurrent bisexual who has needs that can only be met by more than one person. Both these groups are bisexual, but they have different needs. Both concurrent bisexuals and sequential bisexuals can have successful mixed-orientation relationships, but their pathways to success may be very different.

It is silly for a couple to get all in a tizzy just because their partner has come out as bisexual, without looking at what that means to their specific relationship. What if the straight spouse is fully supportive of a polyamorous or non-monogamous relationship? The concurrent bisexual is then facing a non-issue. What if the straight spouse is totally against open relationships and their bisexual spouse is a sequential bisexual also with no interest in outside sex? Again, we have a non-issue and an easy pathway to success. Once acceptance has been achieved, the relationship dynamics are pretty straight forward.

Where it gets more complicated is when the straight spouse does not want to entertain the idea of sharing their spouse with a same-sex partner, yet the bisexual partner has unmet needs to do so. When this is the case, the bisexual partner needs to determine if his or her needs can be met within the marriage. This is a difficult question to answer, and in many cases, we won't know until we try it. In some cases, enough ways to satisfy same-sex needs can be found to provide satisfaction for the long term. In other cases, it proves to not be enough. One important aspect of this situation is that, often, by the time it is discovered the bisexual spouse needs more, the relationship is ready for more. In other words, after five years of living with an out bisexual spouse, there is a very different understanding about what that means. Nothing helps understanding more than personal experience.

Monogamous mixed orientation relationships can work just fine for couples where that is what they want. First, simply having the secret no one must know out in the open is huge. Acceptance of who we are by our spouse is vitally important to our self-esteem, and that alone can go a long way toward making a better marriage.

## **The Mindful Monogamy Option**

Mindful Monogamy, also known as conscious monogamy is a monogamous marriage or relationship that is monogamous by the mindful choice of the partners after a conscious review of all their relationship options. Mindful monogamy is a free choice and not because of external "that's the way it's supposed to be pressures." My discussion above about understanding core belief systems vs teachings about monogamy are examples of making our relationship options a free will informed choice and not a relationship escalator reaction. When a couple chooses monogamy because it most meets their collective needs it is done with love and it helps remove the resentment that can be found in marriages where one feels stuffed into a monogamous box they don't belong.

Mindful monogamy can also be a result of a self analysis of our hierarchy of needs. In other words while we may have a strong need to have sexual satisfaction from someone with a gender other than our spouse there may be other needs that are more important. If one's religion mandates monogamy in marriage and one believes their salvation is dependent upon that then that need may be more important than the sexual needs. The point of mindful monogamy is that it is essential that one internalize the decision as what is best for themselves and their marriage. This mindful review can also lead to an easier acceptance of other relationship styles. Remember this is our marriage we get to choose what it looks like for ourselves, no one else should tell us how to do our marriages.

## Finding sexual satisfaction in mixed-orientation relationships.



One of the issues to be resolved in mixed-orientation relationships is the sexual needs of the partners. One study on successful mixed-orientation marriages found that, in addition to acceptance of the gay spouse, it was also important for the couple to find an outlet to satisfy the same-sex attraction (Ben-Ari, 2010). The difficulty comes in defining what is acceptable to both the straight and bisexual, gay, or lesbian spouse to satisfy sexual needs. Each person is different, and each couple's relationship dynamic is different. It is hard to get past the dichotomy of no bisexual, lesbian or gay sexual experiences at all versus wild, anything-goes orgies. Very often, a solution that can keep everyone happy is found somewhere in between.

Although, ideally, as individuals we should choose our own relationship styles and practice our sexuality in ways that satisfies us, the reality in a mixed-orientation marriage is that we must include our straight spouse's feelings in any attempted solution. This will usually require compromise and an effort to find common ground. As the previous chapter on monogamy highlights It is important to realize that, as the new relationship dynamic of the mixed-orientation marriage matures, there may well be adjustments regarding what is acceptable to the couple.

The evolution of healthy relationship dynamics in a mixed-orientation relationship is a process that takes time because it is a rare mixed-orientation marriage that has a total understanding of how the sexual dynamics will be resolved in the early days. Some aspects of our mixed-orientation marriages can get pretty heavy, and discussions on sexual satisfaction exacerbate some of the difficulties, so seeking help from professional counselors trained in mixed-orientation marriages can really help with finding pathways to success. Some couples have been helped by a counselor who is also a certified sex therapist because they tend to have broad experience with various relationship styles. Some couples report very good results from their sessions with counselors who are members of AASECT ( American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists)

Keeping a journal to help get our thoughts in order as well as to see which needs are most important to us can also be very helpful. It is very satisfying to see an item on the "I wish ..." list become "I am so happy my wish became a reality..." list . Often a straight spouse will have an intellectual understanding of a solution but emotionally is not ready. A journal can help them see progress over time or perhaps see a need to take a step back and wait for our emotions to catch up. Sometimes, the bi, gay, or lesbian spouse thinks they want something but in the process of writing down their wishes

discover it is not realistic and on their own step back from what could have been an area of disagreement. This all helps self-awareness of our own relationship, which is important to finding a solution.

### **Monogamy, open marriage, or something in between.**

Everywhere we look, society tries to pigeon hole our lives into binary absolutes. Perhaps the best example of binary thinking in a mixed-orientation marriage is the whole monogamous vs. open marriage debate. Bisexuals learned a long time ago that our world is more than just on/off, white/black, gay/straight, or male/female. There are rainbows, bisexuals, and dimmers to allow any level of light you want. One of the most frequent issues is the line in the sand where the straight spouse shouts from the hills, "Monogamy for me and you, and that means there must only be me in thought, word, and deed." Many mixed-orientation couples in the early days stress over just the thought of the open marriage option. The term "open marriage" is an emotionally loaded one and those preconceived ideas of what that means are often a roadblock to success. The monogamy versus open marriage perspective is locked in binary thinking, and we do not live in that world.

Because we have stepped away from the way everyone else is doing marriage, many mixed-orientation couples find it difficult to find relationship models that meet their needs. We have identified the problem, but many couples just want it to go away because it all seems too hard to deal with. The problem is that we are often driven to find some sort of path to happiness, and for many, that requires finding a way to satisfy our sexual needs. Each of us is different, and each of us needs to find our own way for personal fulfillment and happiness. Despite these needs, many of us want our wife or husband to be part of our lives even as we search for that solution.

When we have a binary either-or choice of monogamy, you stay, versus open marriage, get out, the lines in the sand are dug in, and something has to give. The typical newly discovered mixed-orientation marriage has a narrow binary vision of the choices. Monogamy exists in which even lusting in one's head violates the sanctity of marriage and the open marriage option often consists of visions of being out all night screwing anything that moves. I do not believe a successful mixed-orientation marriage is likely to work with either of these extreme solutions.

We should look somewhere between the binary absolutes of monogamy and the anything that moves vision of open marriage. In my experience, the baby steps of acceptance and growth require our solution to be defined in broader intellectual terms. I have found it helps to define our needs in specific behavioral terms. For example, birds of a feather enjoy "I experienced that too" and "I understand," and we all need friends. Having bisexual, gay, or lesbian friends is a great way to build self acceptance. There are others in the world like us after all and it gives us a chance to simply be bisexual, gay, or lesbian. It's who we are, not always just what we do.

When I come back from a visit with a friend who understands what it means to be married and gay or bi, I feel good about myself. I am happier, and I come home with a skip in my step. That happiness translates to easier expressions of love to my wife. It does not matter if it's a sewing group or a game of golf with friends, our independent activities bring us happiness and make for vibrant enthusiastic lives that we can bring home and share in our marriages. What about dinner out with bisexual, gay or

lesbian friends changes any of that? I venture to say, nothing. This is often a process that requires baby steps. It sometimes takes two steps forward and one back, and saying today “I need to be at point B tomorrow.” is often not realistic in the typical mixed-orientation marriage dynamic . We need to focus on what we need to do today as a loving husband and wife so we can both be happy , today first and then we can find that when we string a whole bunch of days like this together we have created a happy life. Time and time again, I have seen attitudes change for the better as each day goes by. Will it work for everyone? No. I have seen couples where the absolute best thing they could do is to simply move on because the differences were too great. In the early days after coming out, bisexual and gay married men tell me one of their greatest needs is for like-minded friends they can talk to. Is having a friend with whom we can share what it’s like to live with same-sex attraction really going to cause the downfall of our marriage? I doubt it.

In my research I see that one of the keys to a successful mixed-orientation marriage is acceptance of the gay/bi/lesbian spouse’s sexuality along with some way to satisfy that sexuality. Rather than get caught up in words like monogamy and open marriage that have loaded preconceived baggage, it is far better to discuss the actual relationship dynamics. “Honey, I need to have a male friend I can visit every few weeks to share how much we love our wives even as we are sexually attracted to men.” This is far different from moving in with a guy and coming home for dinner every other Saturday night.

In my own marriage my number one priority is my wife’s happiness, when I do it right she is happier if I am happy. I am happiest when I can celebrate who I am as a bisexual by having bisexual, gay, and lesbian friends who understand what this all means while still being with my wife, who is my best friend, the love of my life, and my soul mate. It also turns out that bisexuals can celebrate their bisexuality in many ways that are sexual but that remain acceptable to the straight partner. The greatest gift a straight spouse can give their bisexual partner is the opportunity to find that happy point on their own. There is no resentment, no sorrow nor brooding about an unfulfilled life. The life the couple leads is built on mutual respect and love for each other.

I know from talking with others that we all have different needs and different levels of day-to-day expression of our sexual needs. Rather than live in fear, why not see if that happy middle ground can be found. There is a whole spectrum of needs and many ways to satisfy them.

## **Normalizing Masturbation**

Starting the conversation:

Masturbation in all its wonderful variations is a topic I believe we all need to learn to become more comfortable with. It would be great if we could talk about masturbation with the same comfort as we talk about the weather. Masturbation is an important part of self care and can have a healthy place in our relationships.

I am amazed at how masturbation, something so many enjoy, is treated with such secrecy and shame. I know very few people who were raised that masturbation is a fun activity that should be part of the celebration of being human. As teenagers many of us lived in fear of the bullying or shame that

followed being caught in the act of experiencing these simple pleasures. Many married couples of my generation just assumed masturbation was something horny single people did when sex with a partner was not available. I hear many stories that masturbation after marriage wasn't discussed by a lot of spouses and was done with the same secrecy as teenagers afraid Mom or Dad would walk in any minute.

The lack of comfort with this topic and poor communication results in masturbation becoming more of a problem than a solution. We have all heard stories of the husband who masturbated only to find out their wife wanted to have sex and now the husband being all satisfied isn't interested, causing resentment and frustration. As some men get older, the time needed after orgasm to get an erection can take longer so timing solo masturbation time with couple time can be helpful to a couples relationship. Better communication about masturbation can be as simple as "Are you in the mood to make love? or is this a good time for me to have some solo sexy time.? I believe masturbation should be an accepted part of the marital toolbox and an open discussion will help find its proper place in our relationships. I am pleased to find some people of our younger generations have a more open view of masturbation but I have heard hundreds of examples of spouses not sharing anything about their masturbation time with their spouses so it's a discussion more of us need to have.

## **Masturbation within the marriage to balance sexual needs**

Many couples with mismatched sexual libidos or interests in sexual intimacy have learned that masturbation is a great way to balance sexual needs in a relationship but it is often an unspoken secret solution. I believe it works better with open and considerate communication. Some bisexuals use their solo masturbation time to celebrate their different bisexual or gay fantasies. While some people do have an issue with excessive masturbation many simply enjoy it and it has a reasonable place in their lives. Best friends want their friends to be happy and have fun. Our spouses as our best friends should be happy for us and that happens best when they don't feel like they are missing out. Each couple is different, others would much rather share that pleasure together and that is the beauty of talking about it, the couple can find their own, masturbation narrative. I love to see couples who balance the benefits of solo and shared or mutual masturbation. They both can be helpful to our wellbeing.

Masturbation can benefit both the straight and the bi,gay,lesbian and asexual partners. The partner that feels they are not getting enough sexual satisfaction out of the relationship can help eliminate resentment by taking some of their sexual satisfaction into their own hands. Masturbation is not a poor substitute for partnered sex its a fabulous addition to our sexual enjoyment. While many men are natural born masturbators with no need for encouragement it's not uncommon for women to need to mindfully learn about and explore self pleasure. Research shows that not only is there an orgasm gap in that women take longer to orgasm than men but there is also a masturbation gap with fewer women masturbating than men. This is important in having initial conversations because there is one dynamic when both partners masturbate but simply haven't learned learned communication skills about it. When one partner masturbates and the other does not it can be more of a challenge to have understanding. Our masturbation habits don't form in a vacuum. Religious or social upbringing and family attitudes about masturbation can shape our feelings for decades. Sexual trauma both large

and small can also affect attitudes about sexuality and this all must be taken into consideration. That said It can be helpful to at least explore if introducing masturbation can help with the way they experience sexuality. Again this could be where a counselor trained in relationship counseling who has a sex positive view of human sexuality could be helpful. There are many success stories of women learning later in life the joys of self pleasure . Women can help their partners with knowledge of how to satisfy them by showing them. People of all genders need to become aware that there is a reason vibrators and sex toys have become so popular. They are simple great additions to our sexuality whether solo or with a partner.

## **Mutual Masturbation Sharing the pleasure**

Mutual masturbation can be two partners just watching each other or include mutual touch . Both types of mutual masturbation can have a place in our sex lives and it can create that fabulous win-win situation that loving couples should strive for. Masturbation is a great way to become better tuned to our sensuality, sexuality , and what turns us on. We can then share that knowledge with our spouses as a way to improve our shared intimacy together, again another benefit to our spouses. Dilan Kılıç, Heather L. Armstrong & Cynthia A. Graham in their 2023 study explored mutual masturbation among women and men and investigated associations with sexual satisfaction and sexual self-esteem. ( Kılıç, et al. 2023). They write about many of the benefits of mutual masturbation in relationships and their research supports many of my thoughts on the benefits of masturbation, both on our own as well with our partners. Masturbation or sensual touch with hands is also a great way to improve sexual expression with men who do not experience erections or women who find vaginal intercourse painful of unpleasant, While many of these conditions can be treated by the appropriate professionals some just choose to switch gears and enjoy play with their hands. The key is to be mindful that lack of erections or lack of desire for intercourse is not a zero sum game its not all or nothing, there is lots of room for sensual pleasure in between. .

Once we have learned to talk with our partners about masturbation we can create a bridge to some other solutions for sexual satisfaction for our bisexual needs. Something as simple as occasionally being able to masturbate to bi, gay or lesbian porn openly and without shame is enough to satisfy some bisexuals. I know others who simply enjoy hanging out naked with their friends. It is a harmless way to celebrate one's sexuality, it may not be all the bisexual spouse needs, but it is a far cry from denying that the bisexuality even exists. Some spouses agree that mutual masturbation with a friend is a fun way to celebrate same-sex attraction; still others say they don't have a problem with oral sex, but anal sex is where they draw the line . What if the bi/gay spouse has no interest in anal sex, which happens way more often than straight people think? Well, all of a sudden, that same-sex sexual expression has become a non-issue. Simply discussing anal sex can often calm fears. Agreeing to bare backing (anal sex without a condom) in a rest area with a random stranger is not the same as safer protected sex with a long-term partner . Without acceptance and without a pathway to celebrate who we are its hard to find comfort . The key is to find mutually agreeable ways to celebrate our sexuality that keep everyone happy.

I totally get that it would have been better if this discussion had happened before we were married, but a homophobic and bi-phobic society that says there is no place for people who are gay, bisexual or lesbian made many of us believe it was a choice with only one answer. It turns out, society was wrong, and now we need to make the best of its mistake. At the end of the day, the gay, bisexual or lesbian spouse has suffered for a lifetime, and it is worth trying to find some happy middle ground so everyone can live happy, self-actualized lives. Let's find that point without using binary words or thinking that do nothing but keep us apart from the ones we love.

I do have one caveat, and that is the more extreme and fixed our thinking is, the less likely a happy compromise can be found. A mixed-orientation marriage needs both partners to be happy with the solution, so stuffing one partner into a monogamous box they don't belong or wish to be in is not a pathway to success. This caution also applies to our straight spouses as they also have core belief systems that they need to have compatible relationship dynamics. Be sure you are true to yourselves in choosing the best solution. It's okay if it takes a few years, but the ultimate goal needs to be a pathway to success. Depending upon the bi spouse's needs, needs that only they know, wonderful mixed-orientation marriages take on every imaginable dynamic.

### **Sexuality in Monogamous Mixed Orientation Relationships**

Some couples find that monogamous marriages can find sexual satisfaction that meets some same sex needs needs. Fantasy, role play, pornography, sex toys, and masturbation are all valuable tools to satisfy this need. The difference between masturbation time before coming out and open masturbation in a mixed-orientation marriage when bisexuals are out to their spouses is that the bi, gay, or lesbian spouse can openly celebrate their same sex sexual interests without shame. It is a huge relief for a husband to to simply say, "Of course it is gay fantasy or a gay video, after all I AM sexually attracted to men." Couples can discuss setting aside this alone time, which reduces resentment. Communication goes a long way toward eliminating resentment. In some cases, there is still a level of guilt associated with masturbation and celebrating our bisexuality. The straight spouse can do their bi partner a huge favor by showing acceptance and actually enabling them to have this private time.

Playing together is also an option, either with sex toys or role playing. There are sex toy penises that feel just like the real thing. Some wives feel incredibly empowered when wearing a strap on penis and being the dominant one in a sexual experience with their husbands. It all depends on your imagination and the extent that role play can satisfy the same-sex need. Please realize this type of role play is not for everyone. Some feel self-conscious or just plain don't enjoy it. Sometimes, it's the straight spouse who says you can be bisexual all you want, just don't make me do it. Many sexual activities are not gender specific. Wives who like oral or anal sex are in a position to enhance the role-playing aspect of their sexuality. Again this is enough for some, whereas others have needs from a gender other than their spouse. That is part of the individual nature of our sexual needs. It is important to realize that there are wide variations of how men and women want to celebrate their sexuality. Some are very visual, some are very touch oriented, some are into the rawness of it all, and others want a more tender touch. Each couple needs to discover for themselves what works and what does not. Again, we are seeking mutual happiness. If the idea of using a sex toy is a total turn off to a straight spouse, then that's the way it is, just as some people don't like oral sex. It is something we

need to accept about our sexual preferences. Interestingly, gay and bisexual men seem much more accustomed to spelling out what they like with their male partners. There are bottoms, tops, and versatile and those who don't want anything to do with anal sex. Some just like oral sex, and some could care less about it. Communication about each other's likes and turn offs can go a long way toward making things better in the bedroom.

Sometimes the straight spouse is all for some play with sex toys, but the bi spouse is not interested. The straight spouse should not take this personally. Again, the social stigma about some sexual desires is so strong that, even after coming out, there is a level of embarrassment about it. I suspect this embarrassment and social stigma is a contributing factor to men who seek anonymous sex hookups. As you can see in my frank discussion, a couple who wants to keep the bisexual spouse happy within the marriage must have excellent communication skills and be willing to try new things to see what works.

A question I get asked often is how I know whether this will be enough to satisfy the bisexual, gay, or lesbian spouse. You won't until you try it. A mixed-orientation marriage with no outside sexuality is a common framework in the early days, whether it remains that way or eventually ends up with some sort of freedom to have relationships with others. It is important to realize that you need to go through the process. Many straight spouses gain increased understanding of their gay, bisexual or lesbian spouses' needs, and often a compromise can be reached that makes everyone happy. Again, I strongly discourage the use of words like monogamy and open marriage and instead encourage talk about behaviors. Is skinny dipping in a pond with friends OK in a monogamous marriage? In some marriages it is, while others may not think so. Some categorize a massage or sharing the experience of masturbation as OK in a monogamous relationship. It is the behaviors that one needs to be comfortable with, not just some word that has a whole range of meanings. Remember the president who didn't think oral sex was sex? I advocate that those in mixed-orientation marriages discuss definitions ahead of time. So long as boundaries are established and agreements are made about what is acceptable behavior and what isn't, many mixed-orientation marriages can find pathways to success.

Again, there are many ways to make mixed-orientation marriages work. Some people require some sort of sexual satisfaction with a same-sex relationship others need nothing more than a loving spouse to share some fantasy time. A mixed-orientation marriage can also work with no outside partners, if that is what the partners in the marriage truly want for each other.

Coming up with a solution for meeting sexual needs will depend on both spouses' attitudes toward sexuality and relationship dynamics. When there is a need for outside sexual satisfaction, there are a wide variety of ways for that to happen.

If a decision is made to add others for sexual satisfaction to a relationship, a whole list of issues need to be discussed. I address some of these issues in the next chapter on open relationships. In all cases, our pathway to success needs to be found with loving care as partners look for ways that make everyone happy and satisfied with the outcome.

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# Open Marriage: An Option for Mixed-Orientation Marriage Couples

An open marriage or open relationship is a marriage or relationship where all involved mindfully and with honesty and integrity decide that a sexual and/or emotional relationship with others outside the relationship might enhance their lives. When the individuals in a marriage achieve self actualization and maximum joy with life this can often make them better partners in their relationships. Open relationships are an advanced relationship style that require a solid relationship foundation and excellent communication skills. They should not be considered an instant cure for troubled marriages nor are they the solution for every mixed-orientation marriage .

When the bisexual, gay, lesbian or straight spouse in a mixed-orientation relationship has unmet sexual or other relationship needs sometimes the pathway to success comes by agreeing to open the marriage to include additional sexual partners or relationships. Open marriages and relationships can work if both partners with love and understanding decide that adding another person or persons might help their relationship and enrich their lives. They work best when they are done with mutual love and understanding.

## Consensual and Ethical Non-Monogamy

Open marriages and relationships are often broadly described as consensual non monogamy (CNM) or ethical non-monogamy (ENM). This reflects the element of honesty and enthusiastic consent. Within the broad category of open marriages there are casual hookups, swinging, friends with benefits, polyamory, triads , platonic romance , sex for recreation and countless other versions of ways to experience ethical non monogamy and open relationships. Many of these styles of non-monogamy can have overlapping traits with each other and sometimes a relationship will evolve from one type to another.

Each couple will have their own relationship preferences and situations so part of the discussion will be what will work best for them. Questions to be answered include is the goal for just an emotional relationship or for friendship? Is it just a sexual friend with-benefits type relationship? Or is it both romantic and sexual relationship?, or some other variation? Is this relationship going to be integrated into both the husband's and wife's day-to-day lives?, or is it a split /parallel relationship where never the two lives shall meet, or something in between?

The evolution of a marriage to an open marriage involves a complex interaction of belief systems for all involved and not every mixed-orientation marriage or relationship is suited for an open relationship. It is also important to remember that our sexual orientation as a lesbian,gay, or bisexual person and our relationship style living a monogamous, non-monogamous, or open life are two separate aspects of who we are even though they are also often connected .

Sometimes as we gain a better understanding of our sexual orientation we also take a renewed look at the type of relationships that work best for ourselves and our marriages. This is a chapter for those who are comfortable having a conversation about open marriages, and if you are not comfortable with this topic, skip it for now.



If a couple decides to add a friend with benefits, partner, or other type of outside relationship, there will be a variety of important decisions that need to be discussed by the husband, wife or partner. There are a wide variety of relationship choices when we add others and this variety includes the degree of openness. Just as there is not just one type of monogamy, and monogamy is defined in different ways by different people, there are also variations in types of open relationships.

## **Polyamory as a mixed-orientation relationship solution.**

Some mixed orientation marriage open relationship options are well suited for one of the many types of polyamory relationships. Polyamory literally means “many love” however some believe that being polyamorous can be as much about our sexuality as it is about how and who we love. It seems like there are as many different ways of describing what it means to be polyamorous as there are people who are polyamorous.

Psychology Today uses this helpful definition: “Polyamory , consensual non-monogamy, is the practice of having multiple intimate relationships, whether sexual or just romantic, with the full knowledge and consent of all parties involved. Polyamory is generally not gender-specific; anyone can have multiple partners of any gender.” (Psychology Today 2019) . I prefer this open ended definition of polyamory that includes all different levels of romantic and sexual interests between more than two people as long as it is done with integrity, consent and ethically.

Many people can have meaningful relationships with each other while not identifying the relationship in romantic or love terms. Over the years there is a better understanding of the complexity of our relationships and the poly umbrella has become more inclusive.

## **Variations on the Triad theme**

A popular in theory ,yet challenging in reality, mixed orientation marriage relationship solution is both the straight spouse and the bi, gay or lesbian spouse having a relationship with the same other person. In this type of relationship the bi spouse has a relationship with a friend or partner that is also friends or in a relationship with their straight spouse. This could be both a romantic and a sexual relationship but it can also be just an emotional relationship with one and just a sexual or

sexual and romantic relationship with the other. These triads can be casual or some become deeply committed even sharing living arrangements. Some of these triads might consider themselves as a poly relationship but others do not.

My own observation of the triad dynamic is there are so many moving parts and the odds of them all fitting are a bit like winning the lottery. If you feel you want pursue the idea of a triad relationship please read everything you can, listen to every podcast you can find and then move forward ethically and kindly.

Three person relationships can be extremely complex and the ones I have seen work best are those that evolve organically from existing friendships and relationships. Couples should be very careful about the "Hey lets go find us a third" solution. This is known in poly circles as "unicorn hunting" (often a female third but sometimes any gender) or "dragon hunting"(a male third) and there are serious ethical considerations to this type of approach. Each of the three people in a triad need to consider the feelings and needs of the others and it is all too easy for the established couple to mistreat the added person. Clear communication is essential even for casual sexual hookup type friends. While it is understandable that the husband and wife of 30 years will prioritize their relationship with each other they must also insure they are ethical in meeting the needs of the other person. Ideally no one should feel like they are just a third. I believe that there are unique circumstances in mixed-orientation relationships that allow triads to work in an ethical and fair way for all involved but it requires mindfulness and great care in the process. In spite of these challenges I have seen enough successful triad relationships work to know they are a possible solution.

Another solution is for two couples to join together, which sometimes works nicely. I have even seen two couples who have integrated all four into each other's lives with an occasional fifth who is also married but has chosen to split the two. We simply need to be aware of the dynamics and not create a situation with a track record for failure.

## **Casual or Recreational Solutions**

Sometimes the bi spouse is simply looking to satisfy bisexual sexual urges and their needs really are just some casual or recreational sex. These can be more casual friends with benefits situations where it really is more about sharing mutual sexual pleasure than anything else. Of course even the most casual hookup can develop into a friendship. Think about how some of our non sexual friendships started; perhaps a simple hello, a conversation over a cup of coffee, or perhaps just standing in the same line!

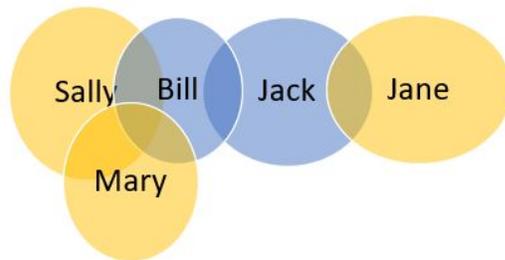
Sometimes both spouses are into more casual recreational sexual play and if both spouses agree sometimes satisfaction can come from lifestyle or swingers parties. While some of these events are quite casual other times friendships do develop. It is important to recognize that bisexual men are not always welcome at swinger events so check each situation in advance. While on the topic of sex just for recreation a sizable minority of bisexual men don't want intimacy with a guy they are simply

looking for sexual release with a another guy who understands these basic needs. I have seen many examples of bisexual men who are perfectly happy simply sharing mutual masturbation with a friend.

## Some Examples of Relationships found in Mixed-Orientation Marriages

We have covered a lot so it might help to see some examples. These names are not real names they are for example purposes only.

Mixed-Orientation Marriage  
Poly Relationship Example



Sally is a straight wife married to her bisexual husband Bill. Bill has a male bisexual friend with benefits Jack . Sally is happy that her husband Bill has his friend Jack but the wife is not part of a relationship with Jack. This is known as a parallel or parallel polyamorous relationship. This might also be considered Mono/ Poly if the wife chooses to remain monogamous while embracing the husband's relationship with friend Jack . Often this type of mixed-orientation relationship is maintained as hierarchical in that Sally's husband's relationship with Jack is hierarchical because Bill's wife Sally is a primary to Bill and Bills friend Jack is a secondary. This works because Jack has a primary relationship with his wife Jane. Also this type of relationship is sometimes known as a Poly Vee. In that Sally and Bill have a relationship and Bill and Jack have a relationship but Sally and Jack do not. In this case in poly circles the husband Bill might be known as the hinge partner. You might see Bill's friend Jack referred to as Sally's metamour. A metamour is our partner's partner.

Bill is a happily married poly person who has had Jack as his same friend with benefits for 15 years. They are dear friends but not in love. To me this looks like the perfect example of hierarchical relationship. Basically Sally enjoys a sexually monogamous relationship with her bisexual husband Bill. Bill's bisexual friend Jack is happily married to his monogamous wife Jane. What makes this a wonderful relationship is everyone knows about and accepts everyone else's role. Sally,Bill, Jack and Jane do not have any other relationships so this is an example of a CLR or a closed loop relationship. The theory behind a closed loop relationship is that by limiting the sexual contact to one's spouse and their friend who is also limiting their contact to their spouse it is safer than random hookups. A closed loop relationship requires a great deal of trust in the behavior of others in the loop. In a polyamorous relationship this arrangement could be closed but it could also just be part of a more complex relationship arrangement.

Some use the emotional connections as a defining characteristic of their relationship instead of romantic. In this example Sally also has an intimate platonic relationship with another friend Mary who is also intimate platonic friends with Sally's husband Bill . Sally Bill and Mary have what is known as a "kitchen table polyamorous " relationship.

In the triad solution mentioned above Sally and Bill agree they are going to open their relationship. In the parallel solution Bill meets John but Sally is never really part of Bill and John's friendship , in fact in some mixed-orientation marriages they might never even meet. In the triad solution Bill meets a new friend John and brings him home to meet Sally. At this point this is simply Sally having dinner with a metamour as there is no relationship or expectation of one between Sally and John.

They have dinner and Sally really likes John, in fact its hard to say who of the three is having a better time. The three spend more time together and a relationship organically evolves. Sally might just stay really good platonic friends with John while John and Bill also have a sexual relationship, in fact John might just stay a metamour but the lines can easily start to blur. In a few success stories John , Bill and Sally end up in a sexual and romantic relationship and all three live happily ever after. This type of triad success is the exception most people find triads the most difficult of all the solutions . The branches of a polyamorous relationship tree can get quite complex but they are full of opportunities for personal growth and to live a best life. The people in a polyamorous relationship for example Sally, Bill,Jack,Jane and Mary are sometimes known as a polycule or pod.

## Matching Solutions to your Relationship Style

Our decisions about different relationship dynamics often have an impact on how well different types of relationships will work. If the gay, lesbian or bisexual life is going to be split off from the marriage life, then usually the bi,gay or lesbian partner needs to divide their time between the straight spouse and their bi,gay or lesbian friends. I believe that, to work, the married spouse and family should take priority, and there needs to be an understanding by the outside partner that things come up.

Attending a son's school play should take priority over drinks with the special friend. When the friend also has a spouse and family, they understand these priorities and have other people in their life. This also goes a long way toward eliminating jealousy because everyone involved has an "other" in their life. I recommend that those who will not be integrating the third person into their day-to-day lives stick with other out married husbands or wives or a partner who is in an open gay, lesbian, or bisexual relationship already. A married person seeing a single person could create some sort of hurt feelings somewhere along the line because the single person will never get 100% of the attention from the married bisexual or gay spouse. Obviously, there are exceptions, but issues with the dynamics between single bi, gay, and lesbian persons and their married partners are common, and one needs to be thoughtful of these considerations before entering that type of relationship.

The goal is to choose a relationship style that matches the situation. A single bisexual person is ideal when the mixed-orientation couple wants to integrate the third person into the existing couple's day-to-day life. This is an ideal situation for a bisexual single person because they now have a full-time relationship that can thrive. Of course, it requires a special person because both the straight partner

and the gay, lesbian, or bisexual partner need to like or love this third person enough to be part of both their lives. I've seen it happen often enough to know it's possible. A variation to this solution is a bisexual married to an asexual spouse whose spouse wants them get their bisexual needs met outside the marriage connects with a married bisexual whose spouse wants to be part of the experience. This can create the classic win win for everyone involved.

This assessment of open relationship options is one that I don't expect all readers to agree with, but I have seen so many hurt feelings when bad relationship choices have been made that I would like readers to at least consider various options for defining the relationship style that best fits their mixed-orientation marriage. In other words, choose your friends wisely.

## **When one is Monogamous and the other is Poly or Open**

Mixed orientation marriages where the bi, gay or lesbian spouse has an open marriage with the opportunity for poly relationship with another while the straight spouse chooses to remain monogamous is a mono/poly or mono/open structure . This often happens in mixed orientation marriages where one partner is a concurrent bisexual with needs from more than one gender and the other is perfectly happy with their spouse. The mono/poly or mono /open structure is also a viable solution when one is asexual and the other has higher needs for sexual satisfaction which with mutual agreement is best met by others. As I write in the chapter on asexuality this is a common win/win solution for couples with mismatched sexual desires.

One common issue I see come up in open relationship discussions is the bi, gay, or lesbian partner wants a same-sex relationship but is not willing to grant the straight partner the freedom to add someone to meet their needs too. Fairness dictates that opening up a relationship be done with equal opportunities. The other spouse should also have the freedom to choose the nature of their outside relationship. One spouse may have sexual needs while the other might have more emotional needs. An asexual straight spouse may not want a sexual friend with benefits but a intimate best friend they can connect with and share activities with might add happiness to their life. The bisexual, gay lesbian spouse may have same sex needs while the straight spouse has needs from another like minded straight friend. Some straight spouses simply want to know what sex is like with another straight person. It is important that a mono/poly or mono/open relationship is that way by free choice and not an effort to make a mono/mono or poly/poly solution mono/poly against ones wishes. (Polyamory Today , 2021). While a mono/poly relationship has its challenges it is a good solution for many mixed-orientation relationships.

## **Putting the ethical in ethical non monogamy**

Another consideration for discussion is the openness of any potential friend in their relationships with their husband, wife or partner. Consensual non-monogamy should be a given in our own relationships but we will often run into others who are not in open relationships in their marriages. The potential devastation to the straight spouse from the discovery of same sex attraction as a result

of a secret sexual relationship with someone who is not out to their spouse is so great that some couples require as part of their agreement that any friends also be out to their spouse. It is not cheating if everyone involved with love and understanding is aware and accepts what's going on. Ethical and consensual non monogamy means the journey into having other sexual or other types of relationships happens ethically with good honest communication and ideally enthusiastic consent about what's going on.

## **Negotiating boundaries and agreements.**

There is no doubt that open relationships are complicated. Many couples choose to create an agreement about the nature of the relationship as well as set out sexual and emotional boundaries.

These agreements can cover everything from who, where, when, and what of our relationships. I suggest they be more about the spirit of the nature of what is expected than the details. An agreement with too many details is always subject to the okay-by-omission problem. The agreement could be ten pages long and cover every possible detail except the one that causes the meltdown, but it didn't say anything about meeting people at the supermarket. Agreements help make sure the couple has a meeting of the minds. Agreements should be living documents, as thoughts about what constitute a wonderful relationship will change and it is important to be willing to adjust with that change. An example of the openness to change occurred with the emergence of the new corona virus and the dynamics of social distancing. There are some great books that cover the nuts and bolts of open relationships in detail. One popular book is Tristan Taormino's *Opening Up: A Guide to Creating and Sustaining Open Relationships* (2008).

## **Emotional Challenges and Opportunities in Open Relationships**

### **Waiting for the heart to catch up.**

An important consideration in discussing open relationships is there is often a difference between intellectual understanding of the needs for other relationships and the emotional response. I have seen couples happily go through the process of deciding the kind of open relationship they want and then when they put the process in motion realize that there is an emotional conflict or they are not so ready as they thought.

### **"Yes I agreed to the concept of an open marriage but I didn't mean today!"**

A common example is a couple deciding to open the relationship and that very afternoon the husband has three dating profiles on the apps or the wife is off having coffee with a potential friend with benefits. This eagerness is often a trigger to the emotions of reality. Staying on the happy side of the happy point versus hard boundaries I write about in the chapter on the line in the sand can be helpful in understanding the importance of baby steps so that emotions can catch up. These situations are

often described as raging adolescence or a kid in a candy store. These reactions are understandable. The bi,gay or lesbian spouse feels like they have a lifetime to catch up on but the straight spouse is just cracking the door open. The cognitive approach to living says be aware of this and cool it.

## **Jealousy and Compersion**

Compersion, That is experiencing joy from our partners happiness even if it comes from others , is a wonderful concept if we can master it. Compersion is more than the opposite of jealousy. Its a gift we can give ourselves and our partners but not everyone has the mindset to put it into practice. Instead jealousy and fear of losing your spouse to someone else is a common reaction. This is often based on fear. There is a range of attachment styles in relationships , in some relationships there is no jealousy because its understood that additional people add to our lives they don't replace them. Of course in spite of our best intentions emotions can take on a life of their own some spouses actually do find someone else and that is always the fear. Really open communication can help alleviate those fears or at least put them in the proper perspective. Sometimes changing the nature of the open relationship can resolve hot button issues. For example, the parallel open relationship style where the spouse is not involved might cause jealousy but the triad solution where both spouses participate works great.

## **Trust**

A core ingredient to open relationships is trust. Married partners often find open relationships easier when they have 100% trust in each other. A locked cell phone, secret e-mail accounts, and mysterious phone calls all create a sense of "Hey, I don't know what's going on." I prefer a model of over-the-top openness. When we tell our spouse when they walk in the door, "I had a great call from my friend this morning," then when they then see the friend's name on the caller id, instead of wondering who they we talking to, now they already know. If I am having coffee with a bi/gay friend, I always leave a note or tell my wife where I'm going. This creates transparency. No one has to live their life this way, but instead of looking at this as giving up our right to privacy, look at it as building trust. My wife has never felt the need to look at my e-mail messages or text messages or see who called because she has a deep-rooted sense that she knows what she needs to about what is going on in my life.

## **Open relationships and new relationship energy.**

A common challenge in open relationships is dealing with NRE or new relationship energy. It is extremely important that everyone be aware of NRE in open relationships. A mixed-orientation marriage with an open relationship is not looking to replace the primary partners. We are adding to our tapestry of relationships, but the unique nature of NRE can make it seem like the new person has indeed taken over our spouse like some sort of zombie force.

How do you recognize NRE? If you think back to your teenage years and those passionate falling in love moments when you worshiped the very ground your girlfriend or boyfriend walked on, that was new relationship energy. It was all you could talk about, he/she was the smartest, most amazing person in the world, it became all consuming, and perhaps your friends and family said enough

already. In short, it looks like the person experiencing NRE has lost their mind. This is a very vulnerable time for our primary partner so we need to be very aware of NRE and tools for coping with it.

The good news is that true NRE usually settles down after a while. Of course, their hair is perfect; they just spent an hour getting ready. Three months later, it is Saturday morning and they are running around with bed hair and out come the sweat pants; this kind of puts a damper on the NRE. Reality sets in, The new person may be special, but so is our primary partner.

When we are aware of NRE, we can talk about it and that is also an important coping mechanism. “Honey, remember when we talked about NRE? Well, you just mentioned Billy like a 100 times in the last half hour; let’s talk about NRE.” As the new relationship unfolds, we need to pay special attention to our primary partner and make an effort to remind them they are the most amazing person in our life.

A useful technique is to use a cognitive trigger approach to NRE awareness. If you find yourself mentioning the new person’s name too many times in a short period of time, let your self-talk reign it in, sort of, “Whoa, sounds like NRE to me, time to cool it.”

A common tactic that I learned from a lecture by Tristan Taormino (2008, 2011) author of *Opening Up* is to redirect the NRE to our primary partner. We have all that euphoria and energy; why not put it to use to make the existing relationship better. When we are happy, we are more pleasant to be around. When we make that happiness about our primary partner, that energy then becomes a good thing for the relationship.

New relationship energy is a common aspect of any new relationship. If we are aware of what it is, we can look for it and then use the tools in our toolbox to cope with it in a proactive and productive way. To couples who are considering opening the relationship, I highly recommend Tristan Taormino’s book *Opening Up: A Guide to Creating and Sustaining Open Relationships*.

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# Understanding challenges to success

In studying the evolution of mixed-orientation marriages, I see a number of recurring challenges to finding our pathway to success. This chapter examines some of these common challenges as well as some reflections on how to resolve them.

## **The importance of time.**

Most of us are looking for the answer, today, to how our mixed-orientation marriage is going to end up. But this is a process that requires time and patience. As we learn about the dynamics of a mixed-orientation relationship, we need time to try out what we have learned and time to see whether our emotional understanding can catch up with our intellectual understanding. For example, the straight spouse may come to understand intellectually the bisexual, gay, or lesbian spouse's need for some "birds of a feather" time, yet remain jealous and fearful emotionally. It takes time to fully realize that these get-togethers are good for the marriage. It is not unusual for it to take a year or more to come to a meeting of the minds toward a workable future. More than once, I have seen a couple separate in the early turmoil only to discover they acted too hastily. Just as people who suffer a loss are advised to wait a year before making major decisions, it can be helpful to allow at least a year for a newly discovered mixed-orientation relationship to have time to develop.

## **Time management.**

We need to set aside time to celebrate our same-sex needs, but we need to find its proper place within our marriage. Whether it's alone time, time with our spouse, or time with a special friend, every relationship has hot button issues and important customs. For example, a couple may hold Saturday nights as especially important "us" time, so Saturday night is probably not the time to ask to go out with gay friends. Instead, part of our compromise might be Thursday night out with friends. The joy of that time should translate to an even better time with our husband or wife on our regular Saturday night together. As Tristan Taormino said in her 2011 Transcending Boundaries Conference workshop on open relationships, it is important to recognize that an hour doing grocery shopping with one's spouse on a Tuesday afternoon is not the same as dinner out and dancing on a Saturday night (Taormino 2011).

## **Communication styles.**

Our individual communication styles have a big impact on how we process our mixed-orientation marriages. Some spouses verbalize every thought. Others are internal processors who think but don't verbalize. Awareness of these variations helps us understand what's going on. For example, picture the bisexual spouse who starts to second guess their orientation but quietly processes their options before ultimately announcing, "Yup, I'm bi," Contrast that with one who processes out loud, "Honey, I think I might be bi;" then, the next day, they announce, "No, actually, I think I might be gay," and a

week later, “Never mind, I’m bi.” The internal process was the same, but I’m sure you can imagine the journey for the straight spouse was quite the rollercoaster. There are also issues regarding lack of communication that depend on whether it’s the bi spouse or the straight one who doesn’t want to talk about “it.” In any case, awareness of communications styles will help us understand the process and the nature of what is going on.

### **Trust.**

It is essential that we trust each other as we go through our day-to-day lives. My wife is completely happy about my visits with my bi and gay friends because she trusts me to live within our agreed upon boundaries. Often a person’s same-sex attraction is discovered as a result getting caught in a same-sex situation with another person. In that case, the breach of trust must be dealt with and confidence restored so that the trust issues are in the past.

### **Religious issues.**

Another tremendous challenge to mixed-orientation marriage success is religious teachings about homosexuality. One of the reasons many bisexual, lesbian, and gay spouses ended up in a mixed-orientation marriage to begin with was their church teachings that a gay, lesbian, or bisexual life was not an option. Like society in general, many religions are evolving in their thinking about sexual orientation, but many continue to have teachings at cross-purposes with who we are. First and foremost, the bisexual, lesbian, or gay person needs to reconcile a positive view of self with possible religious conflicts. Virtually every religion now has groups to help with reconciling our gay side with our religion. Sometimes, a change to a more gay-positive church can help. The challenge comes when the gay spouse accepts him or herself, but the straight spouse maintains their moral conviction that being gay, bisexual, or lesbian is wrong. The gay spouse is not going to change;—they can’t—so the only way the conflict is going to be resolved is to arrive at some sort of understanding and acceptance that our partner may not share our beliefs. There are many marriages with mixed religions. They succeed by accepting the differences in religious beliefs. Differences in beliefs about our gay side deserve the same kind of respect.

### **The Blank Canvas Challenge**

Some gay, lesbian and bisexual partners put their identity development on hold decades earlier when they went into the closet or denied and repressed their same sex feelings. . Once the mixed-orientation nature of the relationship becomes known there can be an opportunity for the bisexual, gay or lesbian partner to examine their life path choices and create a vision for the future. I call this new opportunity of self examination and identity development the “blank canvas” stage. This can be difficult period for all involved and this period of reflection can manifest itself in a distance, brooding or adolescent self centered behavior of the gay, lesbian or bisexual spouse as they look at their blank canvas of life and paint a new picture of who they really are not who others said they must be.

While this process of later in life identity development can be extremely challenging and upsetting for the straight spouse this resumption or revisiting of identity development for the bi, gay, or lesbian spouse is sometimes an important part of the evolution of a mixed-orientation relationships. If the straight spouse wants the bisexual, gay or lesbian partner to be motivated to work to find a pathway to success the bisexual, gay or lesbian spouse must have internalised their desire to make it work. If they themselves don't know if they want a mixed-orientation relationship it's pretty hard to work out a solution. This self examination of "Am I bisexual enough?" does sometimes lead to a desire for something different. As I mention in the bisexual enough chapter even those who identify as 100%gay or lesbian can be bi enough in behavior and desire even if the desire is only emotional to make the marriage work if that is what both the husband and wife desire.

One of the blank canvas outcomes does sometimes include pronouncements of "Nope I'm gay time to go lead the gay life." That outcome is just as important as knowing that the bi,gay,lesbian spouse wants to make it work. I speak often about the cognitive approach to living. If we can be aware of this blank canvas stage the gay bisexual and lesbian partner can perhaps go out of their way to be kind to their spouse as they go through the process. This awareness also leads to understanding that the straight spouse has their own blank canvas moment too, when the gay , lesbian and bisexual spouse emerges committed to making the marriage work the straight spouse has the opportunity to decide if that's what they want too and if they both agree the work towards a happy rewarding marriage will have the basic motivation to continue. The whole premise of this book is if both a husband and wife want to make their marriages work there are many possible paths to make it so even with the mixed-orientation sexuality.

The challenge with this blank canvas stage is that it often happens right in the middle of a whole list of other relationship challenges which is why awareness of its impact on mixed-orientation relationship outcomes is something to be considered..

### **When things start to go wrong.**

While most of our book is about making mixed-orientation marriages work, sometimes despite our best efforts, one or both partners can't see a path to relationship success, and the relationship becomes extremely difficult. I hope that those whose lives seem to be falling apart might gain some insight and understanding about what might be going on. One common issue is understanding how important acceptance of the bisexual, gay, or lesbian partner is. I am not talking about acceptance of sexual activity; I am talking about acceptance of who we are, acceptance of our core identity. When I came out, I was done with the shame. I finally accepted myself as the person God created me to be. It is essential to me that those I love also accept that.

When things go wrong, it is often because the line in the sand does not't budge toward acceptance of this basic bi, gay, or lesbian identity. The other thing I often see is that the bi, gay, or lesbian spouse is not willing to be patient while the mixed-orientation marriage evolves and the partners catch up with each other. However, a mixed-orientation marriage can only move forward at the speed of the slower spouse. Often, when we see a mixed-orientation marriage explode, it is due to one-sided ultimatums.

The husband might say, “I’m having sex with men, and there is nothing you can do about it,” or the wife might say, “My girlfriend is moving in, and you can sleep in the basement.” Or the straight spouse might say, “You may not even think about being gay. No support groups, no friends, you just get that silly thought out of your head.” This is not working together as partners and lovers who want to make a marriage work. It is important to note that our being bi, gay, or lesbian is just one aspect of who we are. If a spouse already has anger issues or is already abusive, that’s not going to change just because they are now out or in a mixed-orientation marriage.

So a question that is often asked is, “Why is this person I once loved behaving like a monster?” I’ll start with the gay spouse. First, many people who have repressed who they are stopped their personal growth when they went into the closet. So a sixty-year-old gay husband who just came out feels like a raging adolescent with a lot of experiences to make up for. That explains but certainly does not justify the impulsive and even crazy behavior we so often see and hear about.

Often, when a mixed-orientation relationship starts to go sour, there is a ton of pent up anger and plain old meanness. Once either the straight spouse or the gay spouse decides to leave the marriage, sometimes they act out by poisoning the nest. They make living together so horrible that, instead of guilt, the response to separation or divorce becomes “Thank goodness I am free from that monster.”

Once we recognize what is going on, at least there can be understanding about why things changed so much so fast. I often find the marriage begins to unravel when there is a disagreement regarding where that magical line in the sand of mutual happiness is. When two people disagree, it is far better to seek common ground than to dig in the heels and say, “Never, never, never.” Two people who love each other as partners and friends can instead say, “You know what, today, this is what I need, and will you do that for me?” Someone has to give, for that to happen. When you really think about it, how hard is it to do something for someone you love just for today? I have found that a willingness to let time pass as things are worked out helps get past these rough spots. If one spouse says, “It is over, I am not compromising, I am not moving one inch, why bother trying,” that does not bode well for future success.

This is a book about success, but not every relationship can survive having a gay, lesbian, or bisexual spouse. I think it is worth moving mountains to make it work, but sometimes it just is not meant to be. When that happens, it is essential to recognize that our sexual orientation just is. It is not something someone is doing to you out of malice. In fact, more often than not, the gay spouse is just as much a victim as the straight spouse. Perhaps the pastor at church said too many times, “Pray away the gay; you can do it,” or Mom and Dad said too many times, “Of course you will get married (to a member of the opposite sex) and have two kids and two cats in the window,” or “You are not going to be one of those people in sissy pants under my watch.” Many of us were raised that being gay, bisexual, or lesbian was not an option, and we are told we had to be like everyone else, so no one can fault us for believing it was true. Most of us find out that the idea of making a gay, bisexual, or lesbian person straight is one of the cruelest hoaxes mankind has ever perpetrated.

A marriage that ends due to its mixed orientation is ending for a very different reason than a simple issue like an affair. In a perfect world, acceptance and understanding will come sooner rather than later. It is much easier if couples wind up their affairs and end the marriage in a mature adult fashion. The children especially will thank you. Believe me, I know this isn't easy, so I highly recommend professional counseling from one who understands the dynamics of mixed-orientation marriages. I get the sense there is a huge up-tick in newly discovered mixed-orientation marriages, and some are not going as well as they could, I hope this at least sheds some light on what might be going on.

What I really hope is that couples will take one last look at making their marriages work. Maybe someone can blink, and maybe they can step back from the abyss and make it work after all. My writings are for those who can find common ground, for those who don't see that path there are other resources to help them move forward. That is what this book is really about the I'm happy, you are happy, we are happy solution, but if we can't make the marriage fabulous, we owe it to ourselves to make our lives fabulous, and that goes for both the gay and the straight spouses. There is a reason why the majority of marriages don't survive the mixed-orientation relationship dynamic, they are complicated with a lot of moving parts, my writings are for those who have the kind of relationship where a MOM can work. It is very much a take what you can use and leave behind the rest resource.

# Talking about Sexuality

I have found a surprising number couples in spite of spending years together never really get comfortable talking about their sexuality. Some couples fall into the sex only with the lights off missionary position routine . Like so many things we learn about mixed-orientation relationships I found I could learn to have a sex positive outlook about our sexuality and I have become as comfortable talking about my sexuality as any other interest but that comfort only came after mindfulness and practice. Communication with our spouses about sexual preferences and what we enjoy can help find shared pleasures and a better understanding of our partners. I have heard a number of success stories where couples have renewed and refreshed sexuality within their marriages. Some couples describe the best sex in years in the period after coming out. This is often referred to as the "honeymoon phase" and enough couples experience it that I'd say it's a thing to be aware of and look to nurture it, have some fun. I have found these discussions work best when we look to build bridges to common interests and when there are differences look to see if there is a way to share in them or perhaps just leave it at "that sounds nice but it's not my thing"

## **Sexual Health and Sexually Transmitted Infections**

In mixed-orientation relationships where there is more than one sexual partner it is important to learn to discuss safer sex practices , STI's (sexually transmitted infections ), and proactive sexual health. It is beyond the scope of this book to talk in detail about STI's but it should be understood just as we all get colds we all can get an STI and some STI's are more serious than others. HIV and STI's do not know looks, or famous or how educated one is. Regular sexual health screenings should be part of every sexually active persons health management. Far too many primary care physicians and family practitioners do not ask or offer STI/HIV testing to their married patients because of false assumptions. That's slowly changing but if you don't ask to be tested they may well not offer. I personally feel that our personal physician needs to know about our sexuality so they can make informed medical decisions but for variety of reasons coming out to one's physician has many of the same concerns and fears as coming out to anyone else in our life.

Another option to consider, whether you are out to your physician or not , is your local family planning and sexual health clinic. I have found them to be best equipped to offer testing and sexual health counseling in a caring, compassionate , and confidential setting. First of all that is what they do so they are really comfortable talking about sexuality and sexual practices, Anyone who has searched the internet knows that there is often conflicting information about what is safe and what is not so talking with a professional in person with the benefit of understanding your personal situation can be very helpful.

Finally there are also online testing companies,you order and pay online , print out the lab requisition and visit the designated local blood lab just like you do with your regular lab work . No matter what option one chooses it is important for anyone who is sexually active to learn to talk about how they're managing their sexual health and that of their partners, When a marriage has some sort of open

relationship one needs to be mindful that it is not just about risks for oneself they must also consider the potential health risks for their partners. Part of that discussion about risks should be if condoms should be reintroduced to the marriages sexuality. There are many compromises that are made to make a mixed-orientation marriage the best it can be and this is one that may just make it work better .

Previous Understanding challenges to success Next Asexuality and Differing Sexual Desires

## Asexuality and Differing Sexual Desires in Mixed-Orientation Marriages

Sometimes asexuality and the differences in the degree of sexual desire between a husband and wife are contributing factors to the evolution of mixed-orientation relationship dynamics. I have seen mixed-orientation marriages where the straight spouse is asexual with no interest in sex and I have seen in some of those cases where a bisexual, gay or lesbian allosexual partner makes a perfect partner for an asexual husband or wife. Allosexual is an inclusive term for someone who is not asexual. Just as sexual orientation, gender identity, and degrees of monogamy fall on a continuum so too does our sexual desire. While for some of us our sex drive or libido is very high, there are others where it can be quite low. Until recently the societal message was everyone has to like sex and asexuality was not something that a married person typically advocated for themselves. With greater acceptance of bisexual, gay and lesbian identities there is also greater acceptance of the individual nature of sexual desire and asexuality has become a more accepted aspect of the diverse nature of human sexuality. Asexuality also appears to be part of the fluid throughout lifetimes nature of human sexuality. Sometimes people just become comfortable with their individual sexuality, whether its bisexuality or asexuality as they get older.

To be clear there are some marriages that have lost sexual intimacy due to the influences of same sex attraction of the bi,gay or lesbian spouse but on others it can also be attributed to asexuality and a lack of interest in sex by the straight spouse. When this happens the traditional societal model is I dont want sex and because of the societal model of monogamy for married couples you cant have sex either. This can create an "I've been thinking" moment by the bi,gay lesbian spouse and more than once I have seen emerging asexuality by one spouse bring on a discussion of same sex needs by the other.

My anecdotal observation from talking to mixed-orientation couples is that some gay or bisexual men tend to be kinder gentler about their sexuality and simply treat sex differently with women. Often times that gentleness is what attracts a woman to marry a gay husband to begin with. I sometimes hear of a women describing how they only had sex with their gay boyfriend if the woman initiated it. It is not uncommon to hear a wife in a mixed-orientation marriage say "He wasnt pushing me to have sex like the other guys and I liked that about him" . When one thinks about it , this is a better situation for an asexual then the I want sex everyday all day presentation by some men.

The point I'm making is there is sometimes an underlying reason why the mixed-orientation marriage or relationship came to be in the first place and sometimes it is because the gay spouses lack of sexual desire for their opposite gender spouse matched the straight spouses lack of interest in sex in general. Of course there is a little bit of which came first. Is the straight spouse not being sexual because they are asexual or are they not being sexual because they gave up because of a lack of desire by the non-straight spouse. Both situations happen , each couple needs to examine their own situation to see if they can determine if asexuality is a component of their mixed-orientation marriage.

If it turns out asexuality is a component of the relationship then during the couples discussions perhaps it is OK to say "You know what I don't like sex anyway perhaps we can have a fabulous marriage with all the good things we have and you can get your sexual satisfaction and same sex needs met in other ways" It can be a win win but requires looking at a relationship style that can be more complicated and outside the societal box. All the issues raised in the other chapters on monogamy and open relationships apply in this case too but it is important to be aware of the dynamics created when there are different sexual needs of all types.

I have seen some mixed-orientation relationships where a wife acknowledges her asexuality and becomes comfortable with the bisexual (allosexual) husband getting their sexual satisfaction from either male or female outside partners .Some wives feel less threatened by their husbands male sexual friends and limiting outside relationships to same sex partners becomes part of the compromise so common in mixed-orientation relationships. This compromise works best with a gay spouse as bisexuals will sometimes continue to have needs from more than one gender and may require further discussion about sexual needs. Asexuality knows no gender so of course in some mixed-orientation relationships it can be the male that is asexual with a allosexual wife. Even if both spouses are straight an asexual spouse can create many of the challenges found in mixed-orientation marriages which is why I include these types of mixed-sexuality marriages in my book. In any case awareness of differing sexual needs can be helpful in finding solutions that work in mixed-orientation relationships.

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## Keeping the happy in happy holidays and special events.

Many of the challenges to mixed-orientation marriage success revolve around interpersonal relationship dynamics and time management. Challenges definitely seem to increase during the holidays and other special events. Whether we celebrate our same-sex attraction monogamously or we have included a friend or partner in our solution, holidays and special events disrupt our day to day routine.

In some cases, these daily routines are carefully crafted to allow some time for the bisexual spouse to fill their same sex needs while at the same time keeping the straight spouse happy. The stresses of the holidays often leave everyone out of sync. More time at home visiting family and increased expectations can mean a full court press for others, which can leave both the bi and straight spouse feeling that their own personal needs are not being met. These challenges become easier to deal with when we are aware of the dynamics involved and improve our communication. Sort of a “Whoa, I know what’s happening here.” Examples of the stresses that I hear from others include bisexual men who are monogamous and who rely on private masturbation time for their bisexual or gay fantasies. However, a house full of visitors or a spouse home on vacation means no alone time for the bisexual spouse. For couples whose same sex solution is this alone time, it is important to communicate how that’s going to happen. A straight spouse who says, “I’m going out shopping with the kids and won’t be back for at least an hour, wink, wink, nod,” provides a tremendous gift to the bi spouse struggling for some alone time. Of course, it’s important for the gay, lesbian or bi spouse to return the favor, even if the other spouse just wants to sit and read a book and have a quiet hour. We all need some alone time, however we spend it.

For some mixed-orientation marriages, there is an outside gay, bisexual or lesbian friend or partner, and it is important to understand the changes that occur in those relationship dynamics during the holidays. Family obligations increase, so that regular weekly visit might not happen, and even the regular phone calls may have to be put on hold. All involved need to be aware that this is a special situation and that, if handled correctly, all will soon return to normal. Our families and spouses should be our priority. In our day-to-day lives, we work out ways to make it so while also having enough time to visit our gay friend and partner. But with special events, time often just becomes too short. The point is that, if we are aware of the dynamics, we can understand what’s going on and work around it. The bi spouse can assure their gay, bi or lesbian friend or partner that, in a week, the household will be back to normal and our special time will return.

Of course, we need to accommodate our friend’s or partner’s unique needs as well. If they are busy with their own family holiday traditions, it is easier for them to adjust if they are simply aware of what’s going on. If, however, you are your friend’s or partner’s day-to-day support, then it is important to work them into the holidays as well. Such accommodations are an expected part of this type of relationship.

The straight spouse can help by reassuring, “Yeah, I know it’s crazy around here, but the kids will be back in school in a few weeks, I’ll be back to work, and our routine will get back to normal.” This simple recognition that our bi/gay/lesbian life is not’t over will go a long ways toward keeping our mixed-orientation marriages fabulous. This is also a great time for the bi/gay/lesbian spouse to be aware of their spouse’s extra needs and perhaps skip that gay night out if it falls two days before a family celebration. At the very least, make sure the straight spouse is sincerely insisting you go anyway.

Clarity about the situation and good communication benefit both the straight and the bi/gay/lesbian spouses. By recognizing what’s going on, we eliminate resentment, and the bi/gay spouse happily provides the extra love and support around the home knowing that it’s a special occasion. Further, the straight spouse gets the extra help and support they need. With the assurance that things will return to a more balanced situation after the holidays or special event, a better time is had by all. This success all goes back to its not being the events that cause upsets, but our reaction to them.

## Finding Support

Many people in mixed-orientation marriages feel isolated and alone. They feel that their friends and family won't understand the unusual nature of their marriages. If you are like me, you want every resource available to help make our lives the best they can be. Support groups with others dealing with sexual orientation and mixed-orientation relationship issues are a valuable tool toward success. Online support groups are the easiest to get started with because, no matter what part of the world or how unusual the situation you are in, you will find others like you. Each support group has its own flavor; if one doesn't seem to work, look for another. Also, it is important to realize there is a wide variety of needs and solutions. Treat these groups like buffets; take what you can use and leave behind what you can't. As people become more comfortable being out about their mixed-orientation relationships they have been joining Facebook support groups. I have found these groups to be a terrific source of support.

Online support groups will also allow you to find out about real-world, in-person regional and national gatherings. A weekend of sharing, with "Me too" and "I understand," can go a long way toward removing isolation and helping people move forward in their relationships. A weekend sharing stories and strategies for success can be life changing.

The nature of the online groups is to have an ebb and flow of activity; sometimes they can be very quiet, but the archives of older messages have a wealth of wisdom to get you started. Then dive in and start your own thread, and it will not be long before others join the conversation.

I am also a firm believer in the value of counseling with a mental health professional to help guide us. Our journeys may each have an individual story, but there are underlying themes and processes that many experience in common in their journeys. Working with a trained counselor can help us understand some of these processes and stages. It is very comforting to hear, "Oh yea, that happens, and here is why, and here is what might happen next."

When looking for a counselor or therapist, look for someone whose expertise is in working with relationships, particularly one who has experience with sexual orientation issues and mixed-orientation relationships. Be wary of someone who seems to propose only one solution. If they say that all such marriages end in divorce, run as fast as your feet will carry you. There are a significant number of very successful mixed-orientation marriages, and you want to work with a counselor who believes in you and your relationship. The solutions need to come from within you; the counselor should serve as a guide to help you find them. If you already are working with someone you like but who has limited experience with mixed-orientation relationships, they should be willing to reach out to others who can help them better understand the issues.

Every couple has their own unique needs, level of understanding, and need for outside support. Both individual and couples therapy can be helpful. Each has a significant role, and having both should be considered as having all the proper tools to achieve the best possible outcome for all involved. So it is not unusual for those with a health plan or adequate financial resources to each have their own

individual counselor as well as a couple's counselor. Alternately, therapists in the field of marriage and family therapy have a primary focus on working with relationships and believe it to be most effective when one therapist serves as both the individual's and the couple's counselor. The most important aspect is to find a therapist who is a good fit for you, with whom you feel comfortable, and whom you feel you can trust. I often get asked how one finds a counselor experienced in mixed-orientation relationships. One way is by word of mouth. Ask on the support groups. If you live near a city of any size, most will have an LGBTQ+ support center, and they are an excellent source for information on support options in your area. Another good approach is to find a nearby university or college and check with their LGBTQ+ center because they will often have a local resources list.

I have listed a few support resources in Appendix A

Finally, build your own personal support network. Especially, find others who are in successful mixed-orientation relationships. I cannot over-emphasize the value of interacting with others who share your experiences—"Me too" and "I understand"—to help you find a pathway to success.

## Positive Thinking and Success

One of the challenges couples face is identifying why and how some marriages proceed through the initial crises after discovery or disclosure of their mixed-orientation marriage and emerge with a joyous attitude about what their marriages have become, whereas others do not.

When we love someone, we want that person to have a happy life, and there is no reason why this can't be so for both the husband and wife no matter what the dynamics of the sexual orientation. It is all in our thinking. We can have fun in our mixed-orientation marriages. We can learn to laugh and make them amazing relationships full of mutual respect and joy, or we can wallow in our misery. Compersion, the state of being happy when our partner is happy, appears to be something that a relationship has to evolve into, and it is an ideal that I am glad we found. I hope you can too. It's not easy in the beginning, but I know what goal I chose and you can too. It requires positive thinking, communication, and trust both in ourselves to do the right thing and in our spouses that they will do the right thing.

My wife and I love each other more than ever, even as I lead my life as openly bisexual. How do we get our heads and hearts into this magical place where we experience mutual happiness for each other as we each pursue some of our own interests? Why does my wife feel genuine joy for my happiness as a bisexual when other wives struggle and weep in agony? Same event, different reaction. If we have a positive attitude and a belief that events are a good thing, then we have pleasant reactions to those events.

Several years ago as we were working out mutually acceptable ways to celebrate my bisexuality I went away on a five-day vacation to a tropical paradise in Florida. Nothing so unusual about that, except I went away by myself, and that tropical paradise was a men's gay clothing-optional guest house. It was an amazing few days of "I understand," simply enjoying sharing stories with others like me. Some might say, "Who would let their husband do that?" and, "Wasn't your wife a wreck with worry?" No, she wasn't; my wife was genuinely happy that I was having fun and getting some time to celebrate my bisexuality by sharing stories and lives with men who understood what living with same sex attraction is about. Clothing optional resorts mean some of us were nude, but social nudity is not sex, and this was a harmless way in my wife's eyes for me to celebrate my bisexuality.

When I return home from my trips like that I repay the gift my wife gave me of a few days being me, by being an amazing husband, cooking dinner every night, shopping, and making sure the honey-do list gets done after only being asked once. This has the effect of creating an "aha" moment. The connection is not lost: let a husband live life as the person he was born as, and an amazing, wonderful husband is the result.

So what kind of marriage lets a spouse go away for a five-day vacation by themselves? It surprised me to find out that a study by the travel site TripAdvisor in July of 2012 showed that 59% of married couples have taken separate vacations. Subsequent articles have expressed support for the concept. If a husband loves golf and the wife does not, it does not make sense to me that they should go on a

golfing vacation together. A wife who is fascinated by genealogy will have a lot more fun if she doesn't have to worry about her husband's being bored. And so it is with the opportunity to make a trip to Provincetown or a conference on sexual orientation or just laying out in the sun around a pool with other gay and bisexual men. At the end of the day, my spending time with my bisexual and gay friends is just another special interest not shared by my straight wife. When I return, our relationship has a richness that the synergy of outside interests can bring to any couple's life.

As our mixed-orientation marriage has evolved we have added other mutually acceptable more sexual ways to celebrate my bi side but these trips to bi/gay clothing optional resorts continue to be an important part of my journey. If the couple has trust about respecting boundaries, then it should be a happy moment, one where we are grateful for the opportunity. It is especially important that the straight spouse also find something fun and rewarding to do; this is no time to scrub the kitchen floor.

I am not sure how to help readers reach the same magical place we have except to keep trying, keep tweaking, and keep talking with the right amount of laughter and a we-can-do-this attitude.

## **What If We Could Do it Over?**

A common question among those of us who have gone through the coming-out process after twenty, thirty, or more years of marriage is, knowing what we know now, would we still have gotten married, and what would we have done differently? The various answers to this question may be helpful to the many young people who have a chance to enter into a mixed-orientation marriage with better understanding of what is involved. Too often, I hear the advice to simply run in the opposite direction as fast as your feet will carry you. The true answer is not so simple. Although many existing mixed-orientation marriages end in divorce, it is important to remember that a significant number of them are wonderful, thriving relationships.

About six months before I was married, I sat my wife-to-be down at the kitchen table, and we had the talk, a review of the whole laundry list of our mutual hopes and dreams. Where do you want to live? Near the coast. How many kids do you want? Two. I'm bisexual and have had sex with just as many men as woman, but I am choosing you! Without missing a beat, she said, "That's nice, so long as you are choosing me, doesn't matter to me, we will just put that part of your life behind us now won't we."

As those who have read my story know, not so fast, it was not that simple. My bisexuality was not a choice, and it was not up to me to choose any one gender. That's not who I am. That said, I had found my soul mate and my best friend.

What I would have done differently knowing what I know now is, instead of the mistaken choice of one or the other, I would have said, "I am a bisexual, and we need to figure out a way to celebrate that part of me within our marriage because I can't choose, it's not a choice, a bisexual is who I am." In the throes of love, I probably still would have promised the world, but again, hindsight is terrific. Doing it over, I would say we need to be prepared for a marriage that doesn't look like everyone else's.

Together, we will need to work out what it means to be married to a bisexual. We will work it out

together so it's a solution we can both be happy with, but I know that there will need to be some way for me to celebrate who I am. I need to live my life, not repress and stifle who I am. That is the key difference. I might not have known exactly what my needs were, but I needed to be prepared that I might not fit in the nice, neat box of what most believe a marriage should look like. My wife-to-be would at least need to be aware that openness to an alternative way of living would probably be essential to our future success.

The difficulty, of course, is that often a mixed-orientation marriage needs to go through a process involving several years of learning and adjustments of core belief systems. I have already written at length about the need for a meeting of the minds and about needs for acceptance and a way to satisfy our diverse sexual needs. When the gap between the two partners is huge, one needs to consider the reality of this meeting of the minds. It requires a lot of work and a couple in a marriage of twenty years may find a greater incentive to make it work than a couple just starting out. However, sometimes a couple is meant to be together, and walking away from a relationship because of a mismatch in sexual orientation may be mistakenly abandoning an otherwise amazing lifetime of happiness. So a hard discussion about a meeting of the minds is necessary. Without it, the decision to simply marry or run in the other direction is simply repeating the mistakes of those of us who came before us.

Of course, this wasn't just a decision for me, and a more open discussion would have also given my wife a chance to review the real consequences of marrying me and make a more informed decision about making that commitment. Recently, I heard a discussion about our partners' being the sum of many aspects, some we adore and some we could do without. We all have our idiosyncrasies, yet when the good outweighs our quirks, a successful relationship is made. When I thank my wife for accepting me as a bisexual, she replies, "Thank you for accepting me." She is not bisexual, but her reply simply acknowledges her differences and the fact I love her anyway.

In answer to the opening question, we would do it over in a heartbeat. I married my best friend, and I am still married to my best friend, and even after 41 years of being together, there is no one I would rather spend my days with. What a tragedy if my wife had decided to run in the other direction.

## Living Life on the Pathway to Success

Our journey to develop a happy mixed-orientation marriage takes many varied paths with twists and turns and zigs when we should have zagged, but eventually I hope we each find our pathway to success and our own happiness. It may seem hard to believe, but with the passage of time and some hard work, the all-consuming nature of the day-to-day life of the early post-disclosure mixed-orientation marriage often loosens its grip. One day we hope to find that all the obsessing gets sorted out, and a new relationship dynamic replaces the turmoil. In the best of all worlds, the marriage is now in a place that is better than before. Hopefully, through lots of love and communication, both the bisexual, gay, or lesbian spouse and the straight spouse have found a winning solution to their mixed-orientation relationship challenges. No matter what the final solution—happy marriage, separation, or divorce—ideally, everyone involved finds peace and is happy with the outcome.

We have learned that when we treat our mixed-orientation relationship as a challenge to be tackled together as partners and friends toward mutually agreeable solutions, we both end up happier. We have also learned we don't live in a binary world with rigid, one-size-fits-all boxes. These are our lives, and together we can find our personal pathways to happiness. We understand that we can celebrate differences and build bridges to similarities. We have learned there are all kinds of ways to satisfy our same-sex needs. Sometimes, just acknowledging who we are and becoming visible so we can find others like us is enough. Other times, we find that happiness means having a same-sex friend or partner; then, it is my hope that we have learned that these friends are in addition to our world of people we care about, not a replacement. Love and friendship are not like a gallon of milk that gets used up and is gone; we have infinite capacity to share our lives in different ways with others. A self-actualized, happy life led authentically and with integrity can bring unbelievable happiness to our relationships. One day, we look around and realize that, for the first time in a very long time, we are really, fully living our lives, just as they were meant to be, with happiness, comfort, love, and joy. I hope this book has helped you find your own pathway to success.

# Mixed-Orientation Marriage Support Groups and Forums

**A listing of some of the online support groups that provide support to those whose lives are touched by Mixed Orientation Relationships.**

These are peer lead support groups and the tone and helpfulness will vary by what the members post at any given point in time. There are times when these groups are very quiet and there are times when the nature of the posts are not helpful to our particular situations. There are other times when the posts seem to be exactly what we needed to hear. As I am fond of saying treat these like a buffet , take what looks good and leave behind the rest.

## Making Mixed Orientation Marriages Work

This group has been created for those who are in mixed orientation marriages. Straight spouses who are married to gay, lesbian or bisexual spouses and also the married gay, lesbian and bisexual spouses themselves.

<https://mmomw.groups.io/g/main>

## HUGS

HUGS is an acronym for Hope-Understanding-Growth-Support

HUGS\_Couples is a list for couples of mixed sexual orientation who are working to keep their relationship strong and growing. It provides a positive environment where these couples can EXPRESS their concerns, SHARE their successes, and GIVE and RECEIVE support and encouragement. The requirements for joining are:

1. The couple is of mixed sexual orientation; that is, one or both partners is g/l/b.
2. The couple is interested in and working on maintaining their relationship.
3. The couple desires to receive and give support in a POSITIVE way with other MSO couples.
4. Since the list is for couples, both partners must join. <https://groups.io/g/HUGS3>

## Alternate Path

This is a group for women seeking help with finding alternative solutions to divorcing their Bi/Gay husband. We want to provide positive discussions that will help the wives adjust to the news that their husband is gay/bi. Please use common sense when applying for membership to our group, if you want your identity kept private, use an alternate ID at the time you apply for membership. Use this same precaution when posting details to the group that you do not want to have known by your spouse or anyone else, as we cannot guarantee complete privacy.

<https://groups.io/g/AlternatePath>

## HOW-Husbands Out to Their Wives

<https://how-support.org/>

Husbands Out to their Wives is support group for married Gay or Bisexual men who either have or intend to come out to their wives. (The requirement is that a commitment has been made to themselves that it is necessary for their personal well-being and to have absolute honesty with the wife.) The on-line support group uses an on-line social network style forum environment to provide shared experience and support.

In addition to the on-line support the New England members also meet for dinners and an annual barbecue hike at locations around Southern New England. For information on how to join visit their website at <https://how-support.org/>

## **GAMMA**

GAMMA is a peer support group for men who are gay, bisexual, questioning or don't identify themselves as any of the above, but who are attracted to men; and who are, or who were, married or otherwise involved with a woman. We are a self-help group. Everything we do is done by volunteers who originally came to the group for support and have stayed on to help out and perhaps continue to receive support. GAMMA has been meeting regularly since 1978.

GAMMA Support

## **Facebook Groups**

Facebook has become a valuable resource for support . As most of the Facebook groups are either private or secret groups the best way to find them is through either searching directly through Facebook or as a resource mentioned in one of the above support resources. My current impression is the Facebook groups seem to be more positive and success oriented than some of the older email based groups.

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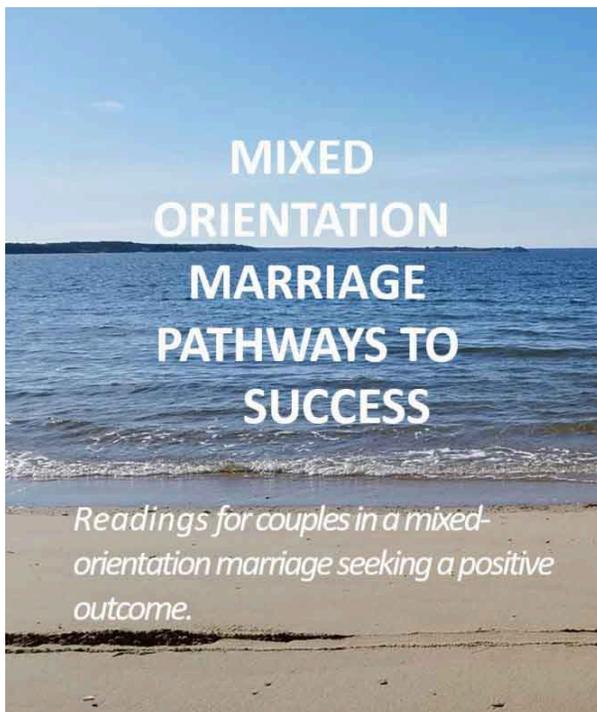
Winston D, Lingren J, Matlack E (Hosts) 2014- Audio Podcast Multiamory  
<https://www.multiamory.com/podcast>

# Mixed-Orientation Marriage Glossary



- Allosexual - Not asexual. An allosexual can be any sexual orientation.
- Asexual - Someone who has little or no interest in sexual activity.
- Autosexual - Someone who is sexually attracted to themselves. The degree of ones autosexuality is often on a continuum. Considered by some to be a sexual orientation but does not preclude someone from being autosexual AND gay or autosexual and bi etc.
- Bigender- Someone with more than one gender identity either at the same time or at different times.
- Bisexual - Sexual and/or emotional attraction or behavior with more than one gender. People with bisexual behaviors and attractions may or may not formally adopt the bisexual identity. See The bisexual Identity
- Bisexual Identity- Someone who formally identifies as bisexual. “I am bi”
- CLR Closed Loop Relationship
- Closed Loop Relationship - A form of open relationship with sexual exclusivity between three or more people.
- Compersion - The opposite of jealousy, The experience of happiness and joy when our partners experience joy even as that joy comes from others.
- Concurrent Bisexual - Interest in more than one gender at the same time. See Concurrent Bisexual or Sequential Bisexual and Why it matters
- ENM - Ethical Non-Monogamy -
- Ethical Non-Monogamy - A common solution in mixed orientation marriages where with openness and understanding there are sexual or emotional relationships or behaviors outside the marriage.
- GAMMA - A support group for men with both in person and on-line support options. See Support Groups list
- Gender Fluid- Someone whose gender varies over time. Some have variations with in the day other’s it varies throughout a lifetime.
- HOW- Husbands Out to Wives a support group for men who are either out to their wives or intend to come out to their wives. See Support Groups list
- HUGS A support group for couples in mixed-orientation marriages, both the husband and wife must join. See Support Groups list
- Metamour - In poly circles a metamour is our partners partner.

- Mixed-Orientation Marriage- A marriage with husbands and wives who do not share the same sexual orientation, As used in our book we have expanded this to include those with differing ideas of gender expression, differing sexual interests and ideas of sexual expression.
- MMOMW - Making Mixed Orientation Marriages Work A group io online support group for anyone in a mixed-orientation marriage looking to make them work. See Support Groups list
- Mixed-Orientation Relationship Similar to mixed-orientation marriage but the mixed orientation couple may or may not be married.
- Mixed-Sexuality Marriage - A marriage that includes partners with different ways of experiencing their sexual expression. These include mixed-orientation, variation in gender, differences in sexual interests, kinks, differences in libido.
- MOM Mixed-Orientation Marriage
- MOR Mixed-orientation Relationship
- Mutual Masturbation Two or more people masturbating together. Usually but not always involving mutual touch.
- Non-Binary not just two as in not simply male or female.
- Pansexual -Sexual and or emotional attraction or behavior with any gender. Contrast with bisexuals who have attractions to more than one gender. The distinction is often described as pansexuals are attracted to the person no matter what their gender while bisexuals may be attracted to any gender just like pansexuals but some bisexuals have specific gender preferences.
- NRE- New Relationship Energy or sometimes New relationship Euphoria The added excitement that new relationships bring to us.
- Open Marriage / Open relationship is a form of ethical non monogamy where the couples have decided to allow for some form of emotional or sexual connections outside the marriage or relationship. Often with agreements as to acceptable boundaries.
- Polyamory (Poly) - A type of open relationship with more than two romantic and/or sexual partners with the knowledge and consent of all involved. see the chapter obj open marriages
- Sequential Bisexual - Someone who is content with whichever gender they happen to be in a relationship with at the time but is open to other genders in their future relationships.
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## About the Author

Mark has a lifetime interest in the study of human relations and sexuality. As a happily married bisexual Mark has a unique first hand perspective of the challenges faced by those with variations in sexual orientation . Mark lead his first college human relations and sexuality discussion groups at the University of Vermont in 1976 and has presented at the Transcending Boundaries Conference, Five College Queer Gender and Sexuality Conference as well as presenting guest lectures to college human sexuality classes.

Mark is an advocate for a positive approach to the rich tapestry of sexual and relationship diversity. As the author of *Mixed-Orientation Marriage Pathways to Success* Mark hopes to make this a kinder gentler world for those to follow. Married almost 40 years to his best friend and soul-mate he is incredibly grateful for the blessing of finding his own pathway to success in his own marriage and enjoys sharing what he has learned

## About Mixed-Orientation Marriage Pathways to Success and Mixedorientation.com

The content of *Mixed-Orientation Marriage Pathways to Success* and mixedorientation.com was written over a period of years beginning with a journal on a self-help forum in 2007, my outreach continued as blog posts to a section on Mixed-Orientation Marriages at Livingfabulous.org. On October 6, 2013 the articles were consolidated into chapters for a proposed book and migrated to mixedorientation.com with a title of *Mixed-Orientation Marriage: Pathways to Success*.

In January of 2018 we again changed our structure eventually landing on the format you see today which features the free on-line book version of *Mixed-Orientation Marriage: Pathways to Success* as well as a more informal blog currently titled Mixed-Orientation Marriage Musings. I have decided against formally publishing a print version of our book for a couple of reasons. First by keeping my costs low I can offer this resource for free. Second , as my understanding of sexuality,gender and relationship dynamics evolves I can easily add material, rephrase existing material and in general be responsive to our changing world. Finally as I mention in the Challenges Writing About Mixed-Orientation Marriages blog post, I hope to someday offer a more dynamic approach to presenting this material depending upon the audience. Thank you for visiting mixedorientation.com I hope that you have found something here helpful and interesting. I can be reached at [mark@mixedorientation.com](mailto:mark@mixedorientation.com)

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Thus, you recognize and agree that we have not created any professional-client relationship by the use of this Website.

## **User's Personal Responsibility**

By using this Website, you accept personal responsibility for the results of your actions. You agree to take full responsibility for any harm or damage you suffer as a

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## **No Guarantees**

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