The Challenges of Bisexual Representation
Keyword: Scales and Graphs

Since the advent of sexology in the nineteenth century, human sexuality has been meticulously measured, categorized, and defined in highly scientific and clinical terms. Many people have claimed these terms as labels for themselves in a process of self-legitimization which Michel Foucault calls "reverse discourse"; such is the way in which words like "homosexual," "heterosexual," and "bisexual" have entered the vernacular of modern languages (101). Through this process, scales and graphs which attempt to map and measure sexuality have also become popularized and may be used by laypersons to describe the sexualities of themselves or others.

The most well-known models of sexuality are the Kinsey Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale developed by Alfred Kinsey in 1948, the Storms Sexuality Axis developed by Michael Storms in 1980, and the Klein Sexual Orientation grid developed by Fritz Klein in 1985. As Amanda Udis-Kessler points out in her essay "Notes on the Kinsey Scale and Other Measures of Sexuality," the most famous of these is the Kinsey Scale, for it accompanies the studies (*Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*) which transformed public opinion on the prevalence of homosexuality; yet the scale's greatest value lies in its emphasis on "sexuality as a continuum" (312). However, the bipolarity of this scale suggests that heterosexuality and homosexuality are mutually exclusive; by the mutual exclusivity of homosexuality and heterosexuality and the ambiguity of what it means to be a Kinsey 3, bisexuality is rendered invisible with the words "equally heterosexual and homosexual" (Udis-Kessler 313). In *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader*, Merl Storr notes that Udis-Kessler's discussion of the Kinsey Scale uses a reductive, albeit more recognizable, version of the graph presented in Kinsey's work; according to Storr, the original graph represents bisexuality as "mixtures of heterosexuality and homosexuality" (49). The juxtaposition of the two representations of sexualities derived from Kinsey's studies, Storr continues, illustrates the metaphysical debate around bisexuality as "a combination of heterosexuality and homosexuality, or as a position *between* them" (49).

The Kinsey Heterosexual-Homosexual Scale

0   1   2   3   4   5   6
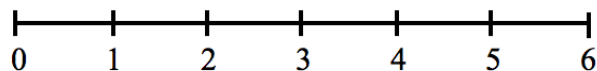
0. Exclusively heterosexual.
1. Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual.
2. Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual.
3. Equally heterosexual and homosexual.
4. Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual.
5. Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual.
6. Exclusively homosexual.

The Kinsey Heterosexual-Homosexual Scale Graph
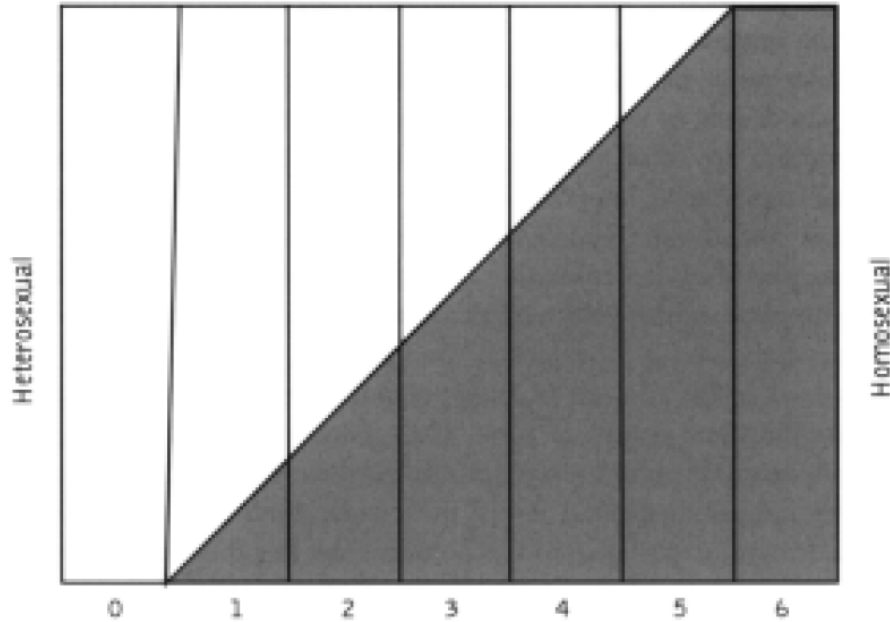


[*Figure 1*] Heterosexual-homosexual rating scale
Based on both psychologic reactions and overt experience, individuals rate as follows:
0. Exclusively heterosexual with no homosexual
1. Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual
2. Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual
3. Equally heterosexual and homosexual
4. Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual
5. Predominantly homosexual, but incidentally heterosexual
6. Exclusively homosexual

The Storms Sexuality Axis attempts to redress some of the deficits of the Kinsey Scale, namely the omissions of bisexuality and of asexuality. According to Udis-Kessler, Storms' research focuses on erotic fantasies and desire; this focus marks a significant departure from Kinsey's model, which relies primarily on sexual practice or behavior, and perhaps allows for more opportunities of bisexuality than the Kinsey Scale. By positioning bisexuality in the positive liminal space between homosexuality (x axis) and heterosexuality (y axis), Storms' graph depicts bisexuality as a sexuality which "incorporate[s] total heterosexuality and total homosexuality" (Udis-Kessler 313-314). This graph provides an effective guide for *conceptualizing* bisexuality (as opposed to measuring), especially as it does not depict bisexuals as being necessarily more sexual than heterosexuals or homosexuals. However, when not read with Storms' paper in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* this graph does not clearly indicate its basis in fantasy and desire rather than actual sexual behavior or self-identification; therefore, the graph may be more beneficial to laypersons if the labels read "Asexual or No Desire" for "Asexuality," "Heterosexual Desire" for "Heterosexuality," "Homosexual Desire" for "Homosexuality," and "Bisexual Desire" for "Bisexuality."

Unfortunately, despite the comprehensibility of the Storms Sexuality Axis, it is not discussed as widely among theorists or LGBTQ+ groups.

The Storms Sexuality Axis
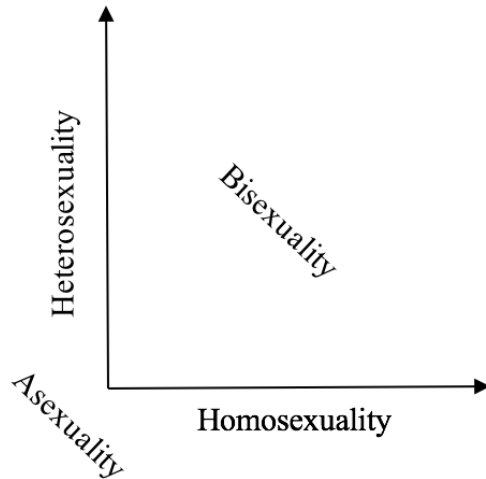
The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid responds more thoroughly to the Kinsey Heterosexual-Homosexual Scale, taking into account components of an individual's sexuality such as "Sexual attraction," "Sexual behavior," "Sexual fantasies," "Emotional preference," "Social preference," "Self-identification," and "Lifestyle" (Udis-Kessler 314-315). The grid also factors in changes in these components over time and the "Ideal Future Goal" of an individual's sexuality. The latter item in this grid emphasizes an element of self-determination that does not exist in other conceptualizations of sexualities and suggests that truly inhabiting one's sexual self is a process which requires time and effort. While this grid is novel in many ways, it also relies on the Kinsey Scale numbering system to calculate a person's sexuality, thereby perpetuating the heterosexual-homosexual bipolarity and the omission of an "asexual-bisexual distinction" from heterosexuality and homosexuality (Udis-Kessler 316).

The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid

In order to ascertain your sexual orientation, add the numbers in the twenty-one boxes and divide by twenty-one in order to see where you place on the Kinsey scale. If you have a dash in any box, divide by one less for each dash. You can then ask yourself if this grid is a fairly accurate indicator of your sexual orientation.

	Past	Present (in past year)	Ideal Future Goal
Sexual attraction			
Sexual behavior			
Sexual fantasies			
Emotional preference			
Social preference			
Self-identification			
Lifestyle			

Sexual attraction. Who turns you on? Who do you find attractive as a real or potential partner?

Sexual behaviour. Who are your sexual contacts (partners)?

Sexual fantasies. Who do you enjoy fantasizing about in erotic daydreams?

Emotional preference. With whom do you prefer to establish strong emotional bonds?

Social preference. Which sex do you prefer to spend you leisure time with, and with which sex do you feel most comfortable?

One task which these scales and graphs perform is identification. The models presented above may be a resource for individuals who lack the vocabulary to describe their sexual desires and experiences to themselves or others, or who have not considered the nuances of their sexuality in the ways in which Kinsey, Storms, and Klein propose. Meanwhile, sex researchers may rely on classifications provided by these models to broadly identify the sexualities of their subjects and to make meaningful observations about these sexualities. In "The Epistemic Contract of Bisexual Erasure," Kenji Yoshino recognizes that "the constituencies of heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and asexual have political and material consequence" (2). One may even go so far as to say that for many individuals active in LGBTQ+ affairs and

activism, sexual identities produce communities which catalyze social and political change. Queer theorists and proponents of the ambiguous category of "queer"—who work to deconstruct notions of identity because of identity politics' tendency to "minoritize" rather than "universalize" experiences of sexuality, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes—would contest the use of measures of sexuality as a basis of forming community (see QUEER). Furthermore, queers and queer theorists may argue that the minimal number of categories in these scales and graphs may constitute erasure of less commonly known sexualities.

The second task of these scales and graphs is representation. The models outlined above follow the common sense that absolute heterosexuality and absolute homosexuality are entirely separate; in fact, the Kinsey and Klein models begin with the presumption of a hetero/homosexual binary, with degrees of bisexuality between the two poles. This interpretation of the relationships between heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality may be detrimental because they tend to prioritize monosexuality above a simplified bisexuality. However, contemporary bisexual theory suggests that this hetero/homosexual dyad is not the most logical starting point for thinking about sexuality. In *A History of Bisexuality,* Steven Angelides proposes instead a triadic structure in which bisexuality "is part of the logical or axiomatic structure of the hetero/homosexual dualism"; that is to say, the concept of bisexuality comes into existence at the same moment as the concepts of heterosexuality and homosexuality because there cannot be an option of "*either* heterosexual *or* homosexual" without the option of "*both* heterosexual *and* homosexual" (15) (see BOTH/AND).

What, then, might a model based on this triadic structure look like? Perhaps a more alluring question is, what might a model which begins with the presumption of potential bisexuality, or pansexuality, look like? The Multidimensional Scale of Sexuality, developed by Branden Berkey, Terri Perelman-Hall, and Lawrence Kurdek in 1990, may be such a model. This scale affirms Kinsey's belief that sexuality is a continuum and incorporates the "behavioral and cognitive/affective components of sexuality" from the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (Berkey et al. 67, 83. Additionally, the Multidimensional Scale of Sexuality takes into account the concerns raised by the Storms Sexuality Axis by recognizing six variations of bisexuality which reflect the multitude of bisexual experiences, as well as heterosexuality, homosexuality, and asexuality (67). While the Multidimensional Scale of Sexuality may be useful from an academic and scientific point of view, it is difficult to imagine terms such as "sequential bisexual" and "concurrent bisexual" in casual conversation; thus, it is unsurprising that this particular scale has not enjoyed much success in bisexual literature or elsewhere.

The greatest obstacle to the popularization of more nuanced instruments which measure sexuality is sexuality itself. Many bisexual writers question or oppose the use of scales and graphs to measure bisexuality because sexuality is complicated. Gayle Rubin's "Charmed Circle," which maps the various circumstances in which sexual contact can occur, only scratches at the surface of the complexities of sexuality, for (bi)sexuality can be determined by desire, conduct, or self-identification (Yoshino 8). Donald Hall argues in *RePresenting Bisexualities* that "BISEXUALITY cannot be definitively REPRESENTED [emphasis in original]" because it manifests in innumerable ways (Hall and Pramaggiore 9, 10); thinking along these lines, Michael du Plessis recoils at the possibility that bisexuality could be so easily theorized and knowable as it appears in scales and graphs (Du Plessis 26). For these writers, scales and graphs could never effectively illustrate bisexuality because they are simply too abstract.

In thinking about scales, graphs, and other methods of measuring and conceptualizing sexuality, we must ask ourselves, why do we keep returning to these modes of identifying and

representing sexuality? More crucially, why are we so obsessed with measuring, categorizing, defining, and qualifying sexuality at all?

See also: BOTH/AND, EVIDENCE, QUEER, SYMBOLISM