

SOCIAL PERCEPTION OF BISEXUALITY

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ABSTRACT

Amidst the gain in public exposure and recognition of variability in people's sexualities, much of the western world still defines another's sexual orientation by who she or he is currently intimate with (Brekhus, 1996). This leads to what Yoshino (2000) defined as bisexual erasure, or the invisibility of the bisexual community. This paper investigates a form of bisexual erasure, Anderson's (2005) one-time rule of homosexuality—the concept that one homosexual experience erases all heterosexual behavior. This study was designed to see whether people would perceive a target who had a heterosexual dating history with a current same-sex interest as bisexual, or if the target would be perceived as being heterosexual or homosexual. The majority of participants categorized the targets as bisexual (76.8% overall), and the male target (who expressed some other-sex interest) was perceived as being significantly more homosexual and less heterosexual than was the female target.

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Introduction

Pressing issues of social justice involving the queer community—such as gay marriage, gay adoption, the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell, and the rash of queer youth suicides in 2010—have been getting more media play in recent years. The general public is receiving more exposure to the queer community than they would have in past decades. However, amidst the gain in public exposure and recognition of the variability in people's sexual choices, much of the western world still defines another's sexual orientation by who she or he is currently having sex with or is in a relationship with (Brekhus, 1996). This presents a problem for individuals who do not subscribe to a monosexual identity. Few people who are bisexual openly date both men and women simultaneously (Rust, 1992). This leads to what Yoshino (2000) has defined as bisexual erasure, or the invisibility of the bisexual community. More of the United States population is being exposed to what is often referred to as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) population, but in every day life, bisexual individuals may not be as readily or accurately perceived as being a part of the LGBT community. In turn, this has led bisexual activists to demand a paradigm shift in how we conceptualize and study sexual orientation by breaking away from the dichotomous view of binary sexuality and embracing the idea of a sexual orientation gradient (Firestein, 1996).

Sexual Orientation Gradient

In 1948, Kinsey and his team of researchers published the book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. This text included the now famous Kinsey scale, which is a 7-point scale ranging from zero to six. Each point on the scale is accompanied by a label indicating varying degrees of heterosexual and homosexual inclinations (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948). Since then, research on sexual orientation has included theories about orientation as more than simply heterosexual or homosexual. Conceptualizing sexual orientation in this way, one could not only identify as exclusively homosexual or heterosexual, but with a multitude of gradations of heterosexual and homosexual identities. Ellis, Burke, and Ames (1987) took the concept of people being multisexual further by developing the first scale to measure sexual orientation as a continuous variable using both sexual fantasy and sexual experience. The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (1993) furthers the idea of multifaceted sexual orientations by

measuring individuals' heterosexual and homosexual leanings in sexual attraction, behavior, fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, lifestyle, and self-identification. These variables are assessed in the past, present, and ideal future. At the present time, there are several scholars who make an effort to think and write about sexuality as a continuous or flexible identity (Baumeister, 2000; Ellis, Burke, & Ames, 1987; Kinnish, Strassberg, & Turner, 2005; Klein, 1993; Schuster, 1987; Zinick, 1985).

Sexual Flexibility

There are various ways to frame sexual flexibility. One way is to look at sexual flexibility as sexual desire, behavior, and/or sexual orientation that changes in an individual over the years (Diamond, 2000; Kinnish, Strassberg, & Turner, 2005). Another way is to think of individuals who are bisexual as inherently more flexible than individuals who are monosexual (Baumeister, 2000; Zinick, 1985). Baumeister (2000) notes in his article on gender differences in erotic plasticity "bisexuality requires greater plasticity than homosexuality" (p. 353). The same would hold true when comparing bisexuality to heterosexuality, as both heterosexuality and homosexuality are monosexual identities. Zinick (1985) proposed the flexibility model of bisexuality, stating that the flexibility view "explains bisexuality as characterized by cognitive and intrapersonal flexibility" (p. 55). Both researchers' statements support the idea that in order to experience some amount of heterosexual *and* homosexual desire, one must embody more flexibility in her or his sexual identity than people with monosexual identities. It is also widely reported that women are much more likely to have greater levels of sexual flexibility than are men (Baumeister, 2000; Diamond, 2008; Kinnish, et al., 2005).

Several of the studies conducted on sexual flexibility have concluded that women describe and experience their sexual identity in terms that are more continuous, fluid, and ever evolving. Men are more likely to report experiencing their sexual identity in static, unchanging terms (Kinnish, et al., 2005). In the study conducted by Kinnish, et al. on comparing sexual flexibility over time across gender, the authors found that lesbian women were significantly more likely to have identified at a previous time as some sexual orientation other than homosexual than were gay men. Baumeister (2000) reported similar results. He argued that female sexuality is much more susceptible to influence of sociocultural and contextual factors than is male sexuality. This means female sexuality

may be more malleable and flexible. There are many suggestions as to why women possess more flexible sexual identities. These suggestions range from proposing women's sexual flexibility flows from lesser political and physical prowess paired with lower sex drives (Baumeister, 2000)—to women's sexual flexibility stemming from more media representations of bisexual women and more intimacy in same-sex friendships (Thompson, 2006).

Thompson (2006) observed that girls' friendships are comparable to heterosexual romantic relationships because of the similar emotional intimacy that takes place in both relationships, including "preoccupation, expressions of lifelong devotion, jealousy, fears of betrayal, inseparability, and separation anxiety" (p. 50). She goes on to note that it is also common for physical affection to be expressed in girls' friendships, such as cuddling and handholding. Not only are these types of relationships commonplace among girls, they are socially encouraged. When girls or women are less emotionally or physically open than expected, they may be cast in a negative light, e.g., "stuck-up" or "ice queen." Encouraging affectionate and intimate friendships could be one reason women develop more flexible sexual identities. Blumstein and Schwartz (1977) found that one of the three most common ways a person's introduction to bisexual behavior was through the context of an emotionally intense friendship that lead to sexual behavior. Blumstein and Schwartz's finding could also help explain why heterosexual identified men are much more static in their sexual identity, as emotionally and physically intimate male friendships are heavily discouraged by western society (Thompson, 2006).

Gendered Sexuality

Women are potentially granted more emotional and sexual flexibility in western society today. Is this a reflection of society becoming more progressive and accepting of alternate sexualities, or is it yet another way to commodify female sexuality in order to serve the sexual pleasure of heterosexual men? Fahs (2009) conducted a study on heterosexual women participating in performative bisexuality. Performative bisexuality is defined as "engaging in homoerotic acts with other women, usually in front of men and most often in context of social settings like fraternity parties, bars, clubs, and other crowded sexualized spaces" (p. 432). Other instances of performative bisexuality can take place in more private settings, such as a man asking his female partner to participate

in a threesome with him and another woman. Fahs remarked that the phenomena of performative bisexuality is on the rise, and can be found not only at the aforementioned locations, but also through the media. Examples include *Girls Gone Wild*, the famed kiss between Britney Spears and Madonna at the 2003 MTV music awards, and most recently, the sex scene between Natalie Portman and Mila Kunis in the acclaimed film, *Black Swan*. Additionally, in the Academy Award nominated film, *The Social Network*, not only did scenes of performative bisexuality take place during a party montage, but time literally slowed down to allow the audience to take a better look at two women making out amongst cheers from the crowd.

Media, mainstream pornography, and social interactions increasingly present two women kissing or having sex as incredibly “hot,” and some academics have started to feel that performative bisexuality has become compulsory, or necessary if women are to appear sexually desirable to men. Levy (2005) warns that the abundance of performative bisexuality does not mean that bisexuality itself is becoming more socially acceptable, but rather that it is yet another way to exploit women through feigned sexual empowerment. Levy found evidence that several women who participated in performative bisexuality did not do so for their own sexual pleasure. It is important to note that the desirability of performative bisexuality hinges on the assumption that the women participating in this behavior are 1) traditionally attractive, and 2) will return to “real” sexual activity with men after the performance. There may be the perception of more social acceptance for female sexual flexibility than there is for male sexual flexibility, but we cannot be certain that this is genuine acceptance as opposed to the co-option of female sexuality for male pleasure.

While female sexuality is constantly monitored by western patriarchal society, male *heterosexuality* is also heavily policed. Anderson (2005; 2008) observed how the “one-drop rule” applies to masculine sexualities, which he has named “the one-time rule of homosexuality.” The rule “asserts that one homosexual act necessarily defines one as a homosexual...homosexual *acts* in American culture, whether active or passive, have been uniquely, and publicly, equated with a homosexual *identity*,” (2005, pg. 22). Anderson notes that giving homosexual behavior so much power prohibits men from ever being sexually involved with other men without being forced into a homosexual identity.

Similarly, Blumstein and Schwartz (1977) wrote “the idea is seldom questioned that a single homosexual act or strong homosexual feelings reveal the ‘true person’” (p. 346).

The idea that one instance of homosexual behavior among men erases a career of heterosexual behavior maps onto Brekhus’ model, also the “one-drop rule” of sexuality. Brekhus’ model “assumes deviance with the slightest hint of evidence” (1996, p. 514). Similar to Anderson’s one-time rule of homosexuality, Brekhus observed that in order to stay in the extraordinarily rigid and privileged cell of male heterosexuality, men must completely abstain from any sexual contact with other men. Blumstein and Schwartz (1977) found evidence in support of this perception in their study, as it was much easier for women to integrate same-sex behavior into their lives than it was for men. Women were “less likely to allow a single experience or a few experiences [of homosexual behavior] to lead them to an exclusive homosexual identification” (p. 349). Relating to the previous discussion on female friendships, the women in Blumstein and Schwartz’s study also reported that they felt their experiences with homosexual behavior was a natural evolution of their affection towards friends, but men reported worries of how a homosexual experience would affect their masculinity. Blumstein and Schwartz went on to note that for American men, masculinity is a highly prized trait, and homosexuality translates to “impaired masculinity.” Since masculinity is such a privileged position in American culture, it follows that men would be heavily policed for forgoing said privilege by participating in bisexual or homosexual behavior. Kimmel notes in his text, *The Gender of Desire*, “Within the dominant culture, the masculinity that defines white, middle-class, early middle-aged heterosexual men is the masculinity that sets the standards for other men, against which other men are measured and, more often than not, found wanting” (2005, pg. 30). In contrast, femininity, or womanhood, is not a privileged status, thus women have much less to lose by participating in same-sex sexual behavior.

Connell (1992) emphasizes the point that homosexuality affects a man’s perceived masculinity. However, she writes that not only does homosexuality impair masculinity, but it negates it all together. Additionally, Connell’s interpretation of Herek’s (1987) concept of hegemonic masculinity demands the eradication of all homosexuality in men, leaving only exclusively heterosexual men to be considered masculine. As a consequence, hegemonic masculinity is shaded as inherently homophobic. The multiple

reiterations of the link between masculinity and heterosexuality restrict the amount of sexual flexibility men are allowed to practice and still maintain a masculine status, which begs the question as to how much the greater occurrence of sexual flexibility in women is essential to human sexual development and how much it is socially constructed. If bisexual men were given more media attention (Thompson, 2006) and more political visibility (Steinman, 2001), and we as a society made more of an effort to deconstruct the link between masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality, perhaps we would find a higher occurrence of sexual flexibility among men.

Attitudes Towards Bisexuals and Bi-Negativity

A significant amount of the research on bisexuality was designed to gauge people's attitudes towards bisexuality and bisexual individuals. For example, Mohr and Rochlen (1999) conducted a study to measure the attitudes towards bisexuality in both heterosexual and homosexual populations. Their results were best summarized in two categories: tolerance of bisexuality, and the (dis)belief in the stability of bisexuality as an identity and the (dis)belief in the stability of bisexual people as romantic partners and friends. Mohr and Rochlen (1999) found that while both heterosexual and homosexual samples scored across almost the entire range (1-5) on both their tolerance of and their belief in the stability of bisexuality, both samples' mean scores were above the mid-point. This result indicates that heterosexual and homosexual people regard bisexuality positively.

Despite mean positive attitudes regarding bisexuality in Mohr and Rochlen's study, bi-negativity, or negative attitudes about bisexual people, is alive and well. Bi-negativity can exist in several forms. Often, bisexuality is seen as a transitory identity that a once heterosexually identified person uses before she or he comes out as homosexual. Other negative beliefs are that bisexuals pass on HIV/AIDS to unwitting partners (Eliason, 1997), that they are incapable of being in a monogamous relationship (Spalding & Peplau, 1997), or from the perspective of the gay and lesbian communities, that bisexuals are less committed to the politics of the cause (Ochs, 1996). An example of empirical bi-negativity evidence includes Eliason's (1997) study, which found that among heterosexual college students, 50% thought bisexual women were unacceptable, and 61% thought bisexual men were unacceptable, compared to 38% and 43% for lesbians and gay

men, respectively. This is evidence that bi-negativity or biphobia does have differences from homophobia. Further, it is evidence that bisexual men are indeed less approved of than bisexual women. This disparity could be expected from the apparent difference in socially approved sexual flexibility between the two genders.

Besides the previously mentioned negative attitudes, another difficulty bisexual people face is the problem Yoshino (2000) outlined, bisexual erasure. One of the most common ways bi-negativity manifests itself is in the denial of the existence or of the legitimacy of bisexuality as an identity (Ochs, 1996). Often, sexuality is seen as a dichotomous binary system, despite the efforts of academics and activists mentioned earlier, with the only options being heterosexuality or homosexuality (Ochs, 1996). Anderson's one-time rule and Brekhus' one-drop rule help explain the erasure of bisexual individuals, especially bisexual men. Some people still hold the stereotype that women and men who identify as bisexual are really lesbians or gay men who are too afraid to come out fully, or who want to hold on to heterosexual privilege (Israel & Mohr, 2004), but many studies provide evidence of the acceptance of bisexuality as a legitimate identity. However, in most other studies that investigated attitudes towards bisexuals, participants were asked about bisexuality specifically. What would recognition (or lack thereof) of bisexuality look like if participants were not asked to evaluate bisexuality directly, but rather asked to assess the sexual orientation of an individual who desired or participated in sexual behavior with both men and women?

The Present Study

While academics such as Anderson (2005) and Brekhus (1996) have theorized that homosexual behavior can overrule any existence of heterosexual behavior, it has not yet been empirically studied to see whether or not people who have heterosexual and homosexual desires and experiences are indeed perceived not as bisexual, but as homosexual (or as primarily homosexual) instead. The present study was designed to see whether people would perceive a person who had a heterosexual dating history but a current same-sex interest as bisexual, or if she or he would be perceived as being either heterosexual or homosexual instead. The vignettes were created to represent a bisexual individual who is sexually attracted to both men and women, and to explore whether or not the sex of the target has an effect on participants' perception of her or his sexual

orientation. Specifically, if the target is male, will people be more likely to perceive him as more homosexual than when the target is female? Lastly, I investigated whether or not the target's perceived masculinity and femininity are correlated with her or his sexual behavior. I hypothesized the following:

H1: The male target will be seen as more homosexual than the female target.

Specifically, participants will rate the male target higher on the Kinsey scale and the homosexual scale than the female target.

H2: Male participants will perceive both the male and female targets as more homosexual than female participants will. Specifically, male participants will give higher Kinsey scale and homosexual scale ratings overall than female participants.

H3: People will be less influenced by desires than by behavior. Specifically, participants will rate behavior condition vignette targets higher on the Kinsey scale and homosexual scale than desire condition vignette targets.

H4: People will be less influenced by kissing behavior than by oral sex. Specifically, participants will give the target a higher Kinsey scale and homosexual scale rating when the target is performing oral sex than when kissing someone of the same sex.

H5: The more people perceive the male target as homosexual, the less masculine they will perceive him to be. Specifically, masculinity ratings will be negatively correlated with Kinsey scale and homosexual scale ratings for the male target.

Method

Participants

Participants were female and male undergraduate students from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. They were recruited from a research pool that consists of students taking the general introductory psychology class at UHM, as well as from various other undergraduate psychology courses. An incentive of extra credit was suggested for each of the participants. The sample included 234 participants.

Questionnaires

The questionnaires presented participants with a one-paragraph vignette describing a target that either desired or engaged in sexual behavior with another person. The

different conditions of the vignette included an individual with a history of heterosexual dating and a current same-sex interest. The target was either female or male. Half of the vignettes described the target as desiring to kiss or perform oral sex on her or his same-sex interest, while the other half describe the target as actually kissing or performing oral sex her or his same-sex interest. Here is an example of a female-behavior-kissing vignette:

Linda is a student at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. She is 20 years old, and plays soccer for an intramural team at her school. She also works part-time as a student assistant on her campus. Linda is currently single, and has only dated and had sex with men in the past. Recently, Linda has become interested in one of her classmates, Lucy. The two women went out to dinner together last weekend. After dinner, Linda and Lucy got back in the car, and Linda began kissing Lucy.

Regardless of condition, each of the narratives is similar, excepting the condition specific terms (i.e. name and sex of the target, name and sex of the same-sex interest, and stated desire or behavior). To exemplify these similarities and differences, here is an example of a male-desire-oral-sex vignette:

Sam is a student at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. He is 20 years old, and plays soccer for an intramural team at his school. He also works part-time as a student assistant on his campus. Sam is currently single, and has only dated and had sex with women in the past. Recently, Sam has become interested in one of his classmates, Brent. The two men went out to dinner together last weekend. After going out to dinner with Brent, Sam fantasized about giving him oral sex.

Table 1 displays all of the vignette conditions. Below the vignette, the questionnaire included a series of questions about the target. Participants were asked to guess what the target's sexual orientation was and rate it using the Kinsey sexual orientation scale. They were also asked to rate the target's sexual orientation on three separate 7-point scales-- one for the perceived level of homosexuality, one for perceived level of bisexuality, and one for perceived level of heterosexuality. Participants were then asked to categorize the target as heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual. Next, the participants were asked to rate how masculine and feminine she or he found the target to be on two separate 7-point scales. Lastly, they were asked to complete the 24-item Personal Attributes Questionnaire

Table 1: *Vignette Conditions*

Condition		Desire		Behavior	
		Kiss	Oral Sex	Kiss	Oral Sex
Sex	Female	FDK	FDO	FBK	FBO
	Male	MDK	MDO	MBK	MBO

Note: D=Desire, B=Behavior, F=Female, M=Male, K=Kiss, O=Oral Sex

(PAQ) from the perspective of the target, meaning they answered each item as they thought it applied to the target. In addition to the main questionnaire, participants filled out a demographic questionnaire. See Appendix A for all questionnaire materials.

Procedure

The study was conducted online with questionnaires distributed via SurveyMonkey. Participants who volunteered to complete the study, completed it online at their choice of location. After accessing SurveyMonkey, participants were presented with a consent form (See Appendix B) and were advised to print it out for their records. Participants were instructed that by continuing on to the next page of the study, they gave their informed consent to participate. Participants were reminded that they were welcome to terminate their participation in the study at any point without penalty.

Results

Sample Statistics

The study sample consisted of 234 undergraduate students, 162 women and 68 men, at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. The average age (with standard deviation in parentheses) was 21.31 (3.33), with a range of 18-52. As Hawai'i has many multiracial individuals, participants were allowed to select more than one category for racial identity, resulting in 36.3% Caucasian, 29.9% Japanese, 21.8% Filipino, 15% Chinese, 7.7% Hawaiian or Part-Hawaiian, 7.3% Latino, 6.4% Korean, 4.7% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 4.3% other Asian, 3% Portuguese, 2.6% other, 1.7% Pacific Islander, and 1.3% African or African-American. For political identity, on a scale from 1-*very liberal*, to 5-*very conservative*, the average was 2.6 (1.02). Twenty-two percent identified as either atheist or agnostic, while 61.1% identified as spiritual or religious.

The majority of participants identified as heterosexual (88.5%), while 5.6% were bisexual, and 2.1% were homosexual. When asked whether they knew any bisexual or homosexual people, affirmative responses were 80.3% and 94%, respectively, while 65.8% stated they were friends with someone who is bisexual, and 84.2% stated they were friends with someone who is homosexual.

Data Analysis

To test whether the categorization of the targets as heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual was dependent upon the sex of the target subject, a chi square test was used. Sexual orientation categorization and target sex were found to be independent of one another, $X^2(2)=3.64, p=.056$. The percent of participants who categorized the targets as heterosexual was 12.9%, 76.8% classified the targets as bisexual, and 10.3% as homosexual.

Participant responses for the Kinsey, Heterosexual, Bisexual, and Homosexual scales were analyzed with a 2(target sex)X2(behavior vs. desire)X2(kissing vs. oral sex) MANOVA. Hypothesis 1, the male target will be seen as more homosexual than the female target, was supported. There was a significant main effect for target sex on the perceived sexuality of the target, $F(4, 221)=.002, r=.27$. Pair-wise comparisons with the Bonferroni correction showed the effect for target sex was significant for the homosexual scale, $F(1, 221)= 5.687, p = .018, r=.16$, and the heterosexual scale, $F(1, 221)= 12.643, p < .001, r=.23$, ratings, where the female target was rated as significantly less homosexual and more heterosexual than the male target. However there was not a significant main effect for gender on the Kinsey scale, $F(1, 221)= 2.55, p = .112, r=.1$, or bisexual scale, $F(1, 221)= 2.027, p=.156, r=.09$, ratings.

Hypothesis 2, people will be less influenced by desires than by behavior, was partially supported. While the overall MANOVA did not find a significant main effect for behavior versus desire, the pair-wise comparisons with the Bonferroni correction showed that there was a significant main effect for behavior vs. desire on the homosexual scale ratings, $F(1, 221)= 4.469, p=.036, r=.23$, with the targets only expressing desire rated as significantly less homosexual than the targets participating in sexual behavior.

Hypothesis 3, people will be less influenced by kissing behavior than by oral sex, was not supported. There was no significant main effect for kissing vs. oral sex in the

overall MANOVA, nor for any of the scales in the pair-wise comparison with the Bonferroni correction. Additionally, there were not any significant interactions. A complete report of the MANOVA descriptive results can be found in Table 2, the results for the main effects are displayed in Table 3, and the pair-wise comparisons for each of the scales can be found in Table 4.

Hypothesis 4, male participants will perceive both the male and female targets as more homosexual than the female participants will, was also not supported. When male and female participant ratings were compared with an ANOVA, the responses of the two groups were not significantly different for any of the dependent variables.

Hypothesis 5, the more people perceive the male target as homosexual, or less heterosexual, the less masculine they will perceive him to be, was partially supported. There were no significant correlations between masculinity and perceived sexual orientation for participant responses on the scale of 0, *completely unmasculine*, to 6, *completely masculine*. However, there was a significant correlation between both the Kinsey scale responses and the homosexual scale responses with the PAQ responses. There was a moderate negative correlation between the Kinsey scale responses and the PAQ responses, $r=-.281, p=.002$, and a small negative correlation between the homosexual scale ratings and the PAQ responses, $r=-.215, p=.019$. Additionally, there was a significant positive correlation between femininity ratings (on a scale from 0, *completely unfeminine*, to 6, *completely feminine*) and heterosexual scale ratings for the female target subject, $r=.241, p=.009$. All correlation data for masculinity and femininity can be found in Table 5, and the PAQ results in Table 6.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for the Kinsey, Homosexual, Bisexual, and Heterosexual scales

Scale	Sex of Target	Behavior vs. Desire	Kissing vs. Oral Sex	Mean	Std. Dev.	N
Kinsey	Female	Behavior	Kissing	3.13	0.99	29
			Oral Sex	3.25	1.04	28
		Desire	Kissing	3.04	0.92	28
			Oral Sex	2.72	1.41	29
	Male	Behavior	Kissing	3.38	1.34	29
			Oral Sex	3.41	1.15	29
		Desire	Kissing	3.1	1.18	30
			Oral Sex	3.27	1.46	30
Homosexual	Female	Behavior	Kissing	3.24	1.02	29
			Oral Sex	3.54	1.29	28
		Desire	Kissing	2.57	1.10	28
			Oral Sex	3.24	1.48	29
	Male	Behavior	Kissing	3.66	1.26	29
			Oral Sex	3.66	1.26	29
		Desire	Kissing	3.50	1.27	30
			Oral Sex	3.37	1.38	30
Bisexual	Female	Behavior	Kissing	4.21	1.18	29
			Oral Sex	4.25	1.55	28
		Desire	Kissing	4.18	1.33	28
			Oral Sex	4.03	1.35	29

Table 2 (Cont.)

Descriptive statistics for the Kinsey, Homosexual, Bisexual, and Heterosexual scales

Scale	Sex of Target	Behavior vs. Desire	Kissing vs. Oral Sex	Mean	Std. Dev.	N
Bisexual	Male	Behavior	Kissing	3.79	1.70	29
			Oral Sex	4.28	1.62	29
		Desire	Kissing	3.67	1.56	30
			Oral Sex	3.80	1.73	30
Heterosexual	Female	Behavior	Kissing	2.66	1.08	29
			Oral Sex	3.14	1.40	28
		Desire	Kissing	2.96	1.23	28
			Oral Sex	3.28	1.39	29
	Male	Behavior	Kissing	2.17	1.28	29
			Oral Sex	2.41	1.62	29
		Desire	Kissing	2.30	1.26	30
			Oral Sex	2.63	1.44	30

Note: Kinsey scale - 0 (completely heterosexual) to 6 (completely homosexual), Homosexual scale - 0 (not homosexual at all) to 6 (completely homosexual), Bisexual scale - 0 (not bisexual at all) to 6 (completely bisexual), Heterosexual scale - 0 (not heterosexual at all) to 6 (completely heterosexual)

Table 3

MANOVA results for the Kinsey, Homosexual, Bisexual, and Heterosexual Scales

Effect	F	Significance	Effect size (r)
Sex	4.44	.002*	.27
Behavior vs. Desire	1.35	.253	.15
Kissing vs. Oral Sex	2.146	.076	.19

Note: * indicates statistically significant value at at least $p=.05$

Table 4

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for the Kinsey, Homosexual, Bisexual, and Heterosexual Scales

Effect	Scale	F	Significance	Effect Size (r)
Sex	Kinsey	2.55	.112	.1
	Homosexual	5.68	.018*	.16
	Bisexual	2.02	.156	.09
	Heterosexual	12.64	.000**	.23
Behavior vs. Desire	Kinsey	2.78	.097	.11
	Homosexual	4.47	.036*	.14
	Bisexual	1.13	.289	.07
	Heterosexual	1.24	.266	.08
Kissing vs. Oral Sex	Kinsey	.000	.998	.000
	Homosexual	1.56	.213	.08
	Bisexual	.418	.519	.04
	Homosexual	3.76	.054	.13

Note: * indicates value is significant at at least $p=.05$, ** indicates value is significant at $p<.001$, all values have been adjusted with the Bonferroni correction to account for family-wise error

Table 5

Masculinity and Femininity Correlations

Masculinity/ Femininity	Scale	Target Sex	r ²	
Masculinity	Kinsey	Female	.013	
		Male	.166	
	Homosexual	Female	.014	
		Male	.021	
	Bisexual	Female	.016	
		Male	.103	
	Heterosexual	Female	.041	
		Male	.095	
	Femininity	Kinsey	Female	-.208*
			Male	.176
Homosexual		Female	-.372**	
		Male	.016	
Bisexual		Female	-.267**	
		Male	.094	
Heterosexual		Female	.241**	
		Male	-.120	

Note: *indicates significant at $p=.05$, **indicates significant at $p<.001$, Masculinity scale – 0 (completely unmasculine) to 6 (completely masculine), Femininity scale – 0 (completely unfeminine) to 6 (completely feminine)

Table 6

PAQ Correlations

Scale	Target Sex	r ²
Kinsey	Female	-.069
	Male	-.281**
Homosexual	Female	-.078
	Male	-.215*
Bisexual	Female	.096
	Male	-.017
Heterosexual	Female	-.080
	Male	.090

Note: *indicates correlation is significant at $p=.05$, **indicates correlation is significant at $p<.001$

Discussion

The Sex Effect

Though the majority of participants categorized the two targets as bisexual (76.8% overall) the male target (who expressed some other-sex interest) was perceived as being significantly more homosexual and less heterosexual than was the female target. This evidence suggests that the sex of an individual does impact how other people perceive her or his sexual orientation based on her or his sexual activity, though the actual size of the effect may be smaller than might be assumed when only considering anecdotal data of media representation or personal experience. The results of the current study support the notion that women may be granted more flexibility in their sexual behavior and desires than are men in a western college population, but what are potential reasons for this?

There are a number of explanations that could account for this effect, though it is more likely it is a confluence of multiple reasons. The explanations provided by the

following areas will be considered: 1) the higher occurrence of sexual flexibility in women, and 2) the gendered nature of sexuality—specifically the acceptability of performative bisexuality and the existence of hegemonic masculinity, illustrated in this paper by the one-drop rule.

Research in sexual fluidity or flexibility has been conducted for decades (Kinsey, 1948; Klein, 1993; Zinik, 1985), and much of the research supports the conclusion that women are more sexually fluid beings than men are (Baumeister, 2000; Diamond, 2008; Kinnish, et. al, 2005). Further, a study conducted by Mosher, Chandra, and Jones (2005) found that women were three times as likely to have had both male and female partners in the past year than men. If, on average, women are more sexually flexible than men (the argument for whether this is an essential or socially constructed trait for women is irrelevant here) it follows there may be an expectation for women to behave in this way while there is no expectation for men to do so. Thus, a same-sex encounter or desire for a woman with an exclusive sexual history of heterosexuality may not be as disruptive, or as “meaningful,” an event as far as how it changes others’ perception of her sexual orientation. For example, when given the opportunity to comment on their classification of the target as heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual, many participants commented on how the female target might be heterosexual, though she could also be bicurious.

“She seems be heterosexual, but i think that she would be considered bicourious [*sic*].”--Participant 65, Female

“I believe that you can be totally heterosexual, while being bicurious.”—
Participant 77, Female

“Heterosexual, but possibly bicurious?”—Participant 33, Female

Similar comments were made for the male target about his potential to be bicurious, though none of the participants remarked that he might be heterosexual instead of, or in addition to, being bicurious. Further, some participants commented on how only one same-sex experience or desire was not enough to classify the female target as bisexual.

“if this was the first and only encounter then she is probably heterosexual.”—
Participant 47, Female

“I would say that Linda is heterosexual because this is only one girl. If there happened to be more incidents like this in which she fantasized about oral sex of

the same gender, then she may be categorized as Bisexual. Linda could just be very attracted to Lucy's appearance, not necessarily her character.”—Participant 113, Female

As the above comments indicate, and as Diamond (2008) has observed, “though women—like men—appear to be born with distinct sexual orientations, these orientations do not provide the last word on their sexual attractions and experiences” (pg. 3). This flexible behavior may be becoming more evident to individuals in the college population, thus enabling people to perceive a woman as capable of multiple or changing orientations, where as men may still perceived as more static and only capable of one sexual orientation.

There is a perception that male sexuality as a “sexual predisposition for the same sex or the other sex is an early-developing and stable trait that has a consistent effect on that person's attractions, fantasies, and romantic feelings over the lifespan,” (Diamond, 2008, pg. 2). This may lead individuals to perceive a singular occurrence of same-sex behavior or desire differently for a man than for a woman. If people have the expectation that male sexuality is stable and unchanging, a sudden same-sex behavior or desire arising in college may be seen as a repressed or unexplored sexual desire that has always existed within that individual.

The second area to consider as an explanation of the gender effect is the gendered nature of sexuality, including performative bisexuality, hegemonic masculinity, and the one-drop rule. As to performative bisexuality, it appears to be much more common for women who do not identify as bisexual or homosexual to kiss or have sexual experiences with other women (in front of an audience), and then return to heterosexual behaviors, than it is for men (Levy, 2005). I believe this lessens the “seriousness” of homoerotic behavior for women. If it is commonplace for women to publicly participate in same-sex behavior, and then resume exclusively heterosexual behavior, the occurrence of the same-sex behavior may have much less influence over others' perceptions of such women. In fact, some bisexual women have expressed displeasure of straight women's performative bisexuality, as it is perceived by some bisexual women to lessen the legitimacy of bisexuality as a sexual orientation (Fahs, 2009; Levy, 2005). Because of the public nature of performative bisexuality for younger women (Fahs, 2009), it follows that college

students are more often exposed to female bisexual behavior as opposed to male bisexual behavior, which may partially explain why in the current study the female target was seen as less homosexual and more heterosexual than was the male target.

Another potential reason the sex of the target may influence people's perceptions of the sexual orientation of people participating in bisexual behavior and desires may be the influence of the hegemonic organization of masculinity within western society. There is the idea that a "real man" is a "man *in* power, a man *with* power, and a man *of* power" (Kimmel, 1994). And, according to hegemonic masculinity, to be in power, to have power, to be of power, a man must be heterosexual (Connell, 1987; Goffman, 1963; Kimmel, 1994). Thus, to participate in same-sex behavior—even just once—for men is to forfeit the global high status and power of manhood. While men have been shown to indeed have less flexible sexual identities, they are further restricted from any bisexual behavior (performative or otherwise) because of these strict rules of masculinity, and perhaps because of this, people may see a man with a strictly heterosexual history who is willing to participate in same-sex sexual behavior as *really* wanting it. Thus, even just one instance of same-sex behavior may be taken much more seriously when performed by a man instead of a woman.

Indeed, the results of the current study are evidence that the one-drop rule may apply more to men than women. The participant comments for the male target referred to the same-sex desire or behavior experienced by the male target at times implied the homosexual behavior (in contrast to a lifetime of heterosexual behavior) revealed his "true feelings."

"Jonathon's past could have been due to what he thought was normal and right instead of listening to his true feelings."—Participant 234, Male
"Bisexual, but technically there's not enough information to conclude that. He could have been in self-denial the entire [time] he has been with women, and only now accepting and allowing himself to be who is truly is, homosexual."—Participant 165, Female
"I think he was probably homosexual for a while, but was too scared to express himself."—Participant 117, Female.

Additionally, where earlier comments about the female target indicated one homosexual experience was not enough for some participants to classify her as bisexual, some participant comments for the male target implied that the existence of any same-sex desire or behavior meant he could not be heterosexual.

“Because he had oral sex, that shows his interest in men as not being purely heterosexual.”—Participant 158, Male

“Specifically, I would classify him as bi-curious. An interest in men does not mean that he necessarily identifies as being bisexual yet.”—Participant 203, Female

There were no participant comments that declared the female target was in any way revealing her “true self” by participating in homosexual behavior or desires.

The current study effectively demonstrated that the sex of an individual does influence how people will perceive her or his sexual orientation. Further research needs to be conducted to better understand the influence of each of the above areas on this phenomena, or to discover other explanatory factors.

Bisexual Erasure

Bisexuality is often discussed within the literature as an invisible identity (Firestein, 1996) with heterosexuality and homosexuality often being portrayed as society’s only options for permanent, stable sexual identities. However, when presented with the unique perspective of observing the sexual history of an individual participating in bisexual behavior or desires, the majority of participants categorized both the female and male targets as bisexual, with significantly fewer participants classifying the targets as heterosexual or homosexual. Admittedly, this does not provide evidence of whether or not bisexual individuals would be perceived by others as bisexual in their daily lives, for as stated earlier, few bisexuals publicly and simultaneously date both men and women. However, the current study provides evidence that most people may not believe some misconceptions about bisexual individuals. As indicated by the study results, most individuals may not believe that bisexuals must have equal amount of experience or preference for men and women, or that bisexuals must have actually had sex with both men and women.

While the majority of participants categorized the targets as bisexual, it is possible that this may have just been the best fitting sexual orientation out of the three choices available (heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual). While offering only three possible orientations excludes many sexual identities, it was necessary in the current study in order to make the hypotheses simple enough to test. That said, nearly half of the participants who chose to comment about their categorization of the targets stated that they would more accurately describe the target as “bicurious” or as exploring or experimenting—though the majority of participants did not comment at all on their categorization choice. Further research would need to be conducted to see whether people think of “bicurious” or “experimenting” as distinctly different from a bisexual identity. Only then would we know how these two categorization choices would affect the results of the current study.

Though it is possible that previous misconceptions of what it means to be bisexual are beginning to fade away, it is interesting that one homosexual thought or act amongst a lifetime of heterosexual behavior was enough for the majority of people to perceive someone as not heterosexual. Past research has shown that many people will identify as monosexual while having some bisexual experience or desire (Hoburg, Konik, Williams, & Crawford, 2004). While bisexuality may be more easily recognized now than previous decades, there still appears to be a limited amount of flexibility allowed within heterosexuality. Further research would need to be conducted to see if this is also the case for homosexuality.

Perceptions of Masculinity and Femininity

The results on how perceived masculinity and femininity correlate with perceived sexual orientation were mixed in the current study. When directly asked, “How feminine do you find [target] to be? How masculine do you find [target] to be?” masculinity and femininity did not correlate at all with sexual orientation ratings for the male target as was predicted. However, there was a significant positive relationship between femininity and heterosexuality for the female target with the same items, indicating that as the female target was perceived as more heterosexual, she was also seen as more feminine. There were also negative relationships between femininity and the Kinsey, bisexual, and homosexual scale responses, which indicates the female target was seen less feminine

when perceived as more homosexual or bisexual. Further, there were significant negative correlations between the PAQ score and the Kinsey and homosexual scale ratings for the male target. This indicates that as he was perceived to be more homosexual, he was seen as less masculine (or more feminine). However, there were not any similar correlations for the female target. What could have caused these mixed results?

For one, the PAQ may be a more valid and reliable measure of masculinity and femininity, as multi-item measures tend to be stronger than one-item measures in general. This could account for the differences in responses between the two measures. More research would need to be conducted to fully understand the differences in reliability and validity between the two measures.

Additionally, it is possible that stereotypes about gay men are lessening, or that it is understood to be politically incorrect to assume masculinity/femininity are dependent upon a man's sexual orientation. Many of the participant comments argued against a person being considered feminine just based on information about his sexual orientation.

“I don't think bisexual males have to be feminine to like or find interest in another male.”—Participant 117, Female

“it doesn't say anything about the say [*sic*] he acts. not all gay guys are feminine, and there was nothing feminine about this scenario.”—
Participant 166, Male

“I think that just because you're a man (or woman) and you experiment and even become attracted to a member of the same sex does not affect how masculine or feminine you are. In ancient Greece the soldiers in Athens often took male lovers and these guys were as masculine as masculine could get.”—Participant 195, Female

The PAQ does not directly ask participants how masculine or feminine they think a person is, but asks participants to consider more indirect qualities that are stereotypically thought to be masculine or feminine. It is possible that participants were uncomfortable openly basing a definition of a man's masculinity or femininity solely on his sexual identity, but there may be some lingering attitudes or stereotypes about the masculinity of gay men that appear in more covert measures. This argument, however, would not help explain why people had the opposite pattern of response for the female target.

Other potential explanations for the perceptions of masculinity and femininity for both targets include having them in either gender conformist (in the case of the male target) or non-conformist (in the case of the female target) positions as far as sexually active/passive roles. In both cases, the target was the sexual aggressor, which may have cast both in a more masculine light. As Kimmel (2005) noted, “women are raised to believe that to be sexually active or promiscuous is to transgress the rules of femininity” (pg. 5). Thus, what aids the male target’s masculinity impairs the female target’s femininity in this case. Further research should be conducted to investigate how influential transgressing sexual gender roles is on the perception of masculinity and femininity in contrast to sexual orientation.

Conclusion

The initial hypothesis that the male targets will be seen as more homosexual than female targets when they have one homosexual desire or experience was supported by the current study. This could be explained by several factors, including women’s apparent higher level of sexual flexibility in our society, as well as differing social expectations for women’s and men’s sexual behaviors and identities.

Bisexual erasure does not seem to be as prevalent within the context of this study, though that may be because of the unique perspective the vignette provides of the targets complete sexual history in brief. Additionally, forcing participants to choose between categorizing the targets as heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual may have influenced more participants to categorize the targets as bisexual instead of something more ambiguous, such as bicurious.

Lastly, the results for how participants perceived the targets’ masculinity and femininity are mixed, and further research should be conducted to find out whether an individual’s sexual orientation is truly a predictor of how her or his masculinity and femininity are perceived, or if other factors, like conforming to gender roles about pursuing sexual partners, are more influential.

Linda is a student at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. She is 20 years old, and plays soccer for an intramural team at her school. She also works part-time as a student assistant on her campus. Linda is currently single, and has only dated and had sex with men in the past. Recently, Linda has become interested in one of her classmates, Lucy. The two women went out to dinner together last weekend. After dinner, Linda and Lucy got back in the car, and Linda began kissing Lucy.

What would you guess Linda's sexual orientation to be? (*Please circle one.*)

- 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

What would you guess Linda's sexual orientation to be on a scale from definitely not homosexual to definitely homosexual? (*Please circle one.*)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Definitely not
Homosexual

Definitely
Homosexual

What would you guess Linda's sexual orientation to be on a scale from definitely not bisexual to definitely bisexual? (*Please circle one.*)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Definitely not
Bisexual

Definitely
Bisexual

What would you guess Linda's sexual orientation to be on a scale from definitely not heterosexual to definitely heterosexual?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Definitely not
Heterosexual

Definitely
Heterosexual

How would you categorize Linda's sexual orientation? (*Please check one.*)

- Heterosexual
- Bisexual
- Homosexual

Comment:

4. How masculine do you find Linda to be?

Completely unmasculine 1 2 3 4 5 Completely masculine

5. How feminine do you find Linda to be?

Completely unfeminine 1 2 3 4 5 Completely feminine

How aggressive do you think Linda is?

Not at all aggressive 1 2 3 4 5 Very aggressive

How independent do you think Linda is?

Not at all independent 1 2 3 4 5 Very independent

How emotional do you think Linda is?

Not at all emotional 1 2 3 4 5 Very emotional

How submissive do you think Linda is?

Not at all submissive 1 2 3 4 5 Very submissive

How excitable do you think Linda is in a MAJOR crisis?

Not at all excitable 1 2 3 4 5 Very excitable

How passive or active do you think Linda is?

Very Passive 1 2 3 4 5 Very active

How able do you think Linda is to devote herself completely to others?

Not at all able 1 2 3 4 5 Very able

How rough or gentle do you think Linda is?

Very rough 1 2 3 4 5 Very gentle

How helpful to others do you think Linda is?

Not at all helpful to others 1 2 3 4 5 Very helpful to others

How competitive do you think Linda is?

Not at all competitive 1 2 3 4 5 Very competitive

How home oriented or worldly do you think Linda is?

Very home oriented 1 2 3 4 5 Very worldly

How kind do you think Linda is?

Not at all kind 1 2 3 4 5 Very kind

How indifferent to or needful of others' approval do you think Linda is?

Indifferent 1 2 3 4 5 Highly needful

How easily do you think Linda's feelings are hurt?

Not easily hurt 1 2 3 4 5 Easily hurt

How aware of others' feelings do you think Linda is?

Not at all aware 1 2 3 4 5 Very aware

How easily do you think Linda makes decisions?

Easily 1 2 3 4 5 Has difficulty

How easily do you think Linda gives up?

Gives up very easily 1 2 3 4 5 Never gives up easily

How easily do you think Linda cries?

Never cries 1 2 3 4 5 Cries very easily

How self-confident do you think Linda is?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very self-confident
self-confident

How inferior or superior do you think Linda feels?

Feels very inferior 1 2 3 4 5 Feels very superior

How understanding of others do you think Linda is?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very understanding of others
understanding of
others

How cold or warm do you think Linda is in relations with others?

Very cold 1 2 3 4 5 Very warm

How strong do you think Linda's need for security is?

Very little need 1 2 3 4 5 Very strong need

How well do you think Linda is able to handle pressure?

Goes to pieces 1 2 3 4 5 Stands up well under pressure
under pressure

Demographic Information

What is your age? _____

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Other: _____

Choose not to disclose

Which group best describes your ethnic identity, or the ethnic group with which you most strongly identify?

African, African-American

American Indian or Alaskan Native

Caucasian

Chinese

Filipino(a)

Hawaiian, Part-Hawaiian

Hispanic/Latino(a)/Mexican-American

Japanese

Korean

Middle Eastern

Other Asian

Pacific Islander (Samoan)

Indian, Pakistani, and other South Asians

Portuguese

Other: _____

Choose not to disclose

How would you describe your political affiliation?

1

2

3

4

5

Liberal

Neutral

Conservative

How would you describe your religious affiliation?

Atheist

Agnostic

Spiritual

Religious

Choose not to disclose

How atheist/ agnostic/ spiritual/ religious are you?

1

2

3

4

5

Not at all

Somewhat

Completely

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

Heterosexual

Bisexual

Homosexual
 Other: _____
 Choose not to disclose

Do you know any homosexual people? yes no

Do you know any bisexual people? yes no

Do you know any heterosexual people? yes no

Are you friends with any homosexual people? yes no

Are you friends with any bisexual people? yes no

Are you friends with any heterosexual people? yes no

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN
A study on personality inferences and forms of sexuality

Researchers:

Corey Flanders, Principal Investigator	(808)729-1012
Elaine Hatfield, Project Supervisor	(808)956-6276

Description of the study and participation:

The current study is a component of the psychology graduate program requirements. The principal investigator is a graduate student. The purpose of this research is to learn about people's ability to make inferences about someone's personality based on minimal information and to investigate issues on forms of sexuality. While there might not be immediate benefits to you as a participant, your participation will help us understand people's ability to make inferences on limited information, which can contribute to further studies.

The scientific validity of our study depends on the truthfulness of your answers, so please answer each question honestly and to the best of your ability. Some of the questions may make you uncomfortable. By participating in the study, you will be exposed to adult sexual content. If you find yourself experiencing discomfort at any time, please know that your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or loss of benefit to which you would otherwise be entitled.

Participation in the project will consist of filling out a form on demographic information about yourself, and completing one brief questionnaire. Data from the questionnaire will be combined with all other participant data. No one, including the researchers, will be able to link your name to your responses. No personal identifying information will be included with the research results. In order to keep your responses anonymous, please do not include your name or other self-identifying information on the questionnaire. Approximately 500 people will participate in this study.

Research data will be confidential to the extent allowed by law. Agencies with research oversight, such as the UH Committee on Human Studies, have the authority to review research data. All research records will be stored in a locked file in the primary investigators' office for the duration of the research project. All participant materials will be destroyed after completion of the project.

Completion of the form containing demographic data should take no more than 10 minutes.

The questionnaire should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. By participating in this study, it will be recommended that you receive two extra credit points for the class from which you were recruited.

If you have any questions regarding this research project, please contact the researcher listed at the top of the page.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the

UH Committee on Human Studies at (808)956-5007, or uhirb@hawaii.edu

Participant:

I have read and understand the above information, and agree to participate in this research project. I understand that by continuing on to the next page, I give my consent.

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