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Sexual and Affectional Orientation and Identity Scales

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Introduction

New concepts and new research offer opportunities to change the way people understand and conceptualize sexual orientation.^[1] This article explains how we use these ideas in teaching about sexual minorities.

Bobbi Keppel has tested this material with many groups in the last year. Whether they are heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual, many of the attendees report thinking differently about sexual orientation after these presentations. They say they are able to ask questions and discuss sexual orientation more easily when they use the common vocabulary and the model shown here. Frequently, this is the first time that people with several different identities have been able to find their commonalities and discuss their experiences and differences with understanding and acceptance.

The Klein Scale ([Figure 3](#)) and directions for filling it out ([Using the Klein Scale](#)) are grouped together in this file.

Use of a 3-dimensional visual model helps people see how sexual orientation is a complex construct made up of several different aspects or components. These aspects of sexual orientation may be represented either as cards which form a deck, or as slabs which form a block (see [Figure 3](#)).

In an intimate workshop setting, we encourage attendees to fill in a copy of the Klein scale, and ask those who are comfortable doing so to share their choices. There are usually enough interesting differences among people who share a sexual identity, and enough similarities between people who have different sexual identities, that many of the concepts in the Implications and Points to Make section at the end of this article are illustrated very clearly. In a less intimate setting, such as a lecture presentation, we bring up the points that we want people to hear and see. We then send them away with a copy of the Klein scale to mull over.

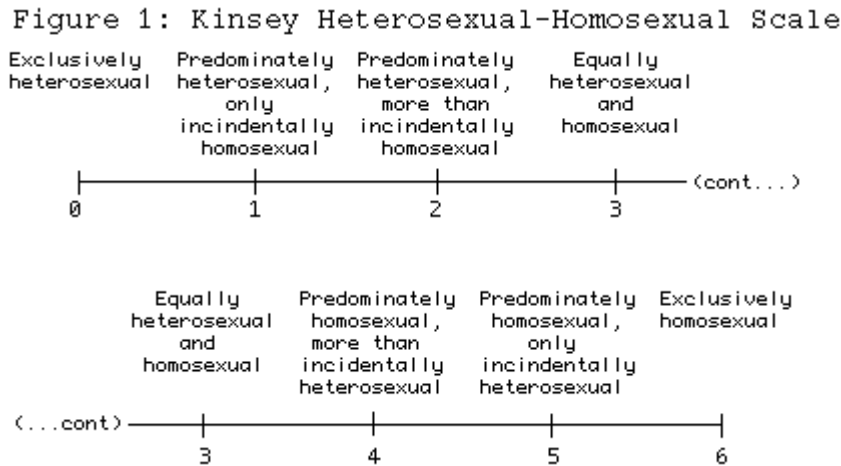
The rest of this article is the text of our presentation, including points to make during each presentation. Drawing figures freehand on a chalk board or overhead projector during the presentation makes it more visually interesting and encourages questions from and interaction with the attendees.

Kinsey

For many of us, our first concept of sexual orientation was simply that everyone was either heterosexual or homosexual. Period.

The Kinsey Heterosexual-Homosexual Scale provided our first reconceptualization of sexual

orientation. On the Kinsey scale, sexual behavior is represented as a continuum from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual (see [Figure 1.](#)) To make it easier to quantify behavior for research purposes, the scale has 7 equal, numbered intervals, but it is a continuum and in-between points (such as 1.5 or 2.67) may be used.



Using the Kinsey Scale

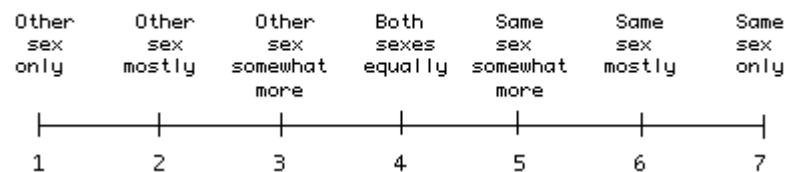
To use the Kinsey scale, choose a point on the continuum which corresponds to your relative amounts of sexual experiences with the same sex and with the other sex in your life up to now.

Klein[2]

When Fritz Klein *et al.* extended the conceptualization of sexual orientation far beyond Kinsey's earlier work, they offered us a chance to broaden our understanding further.[3]

The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid uses 7 classifications (the same number as Kinsey) and uses less emotionally "loaded" reference point descriptions (see [Figure 2.](#))

Figure 2: Klein Sexual Orientation Scale



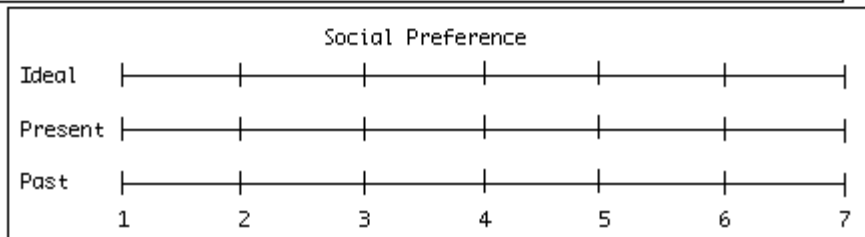
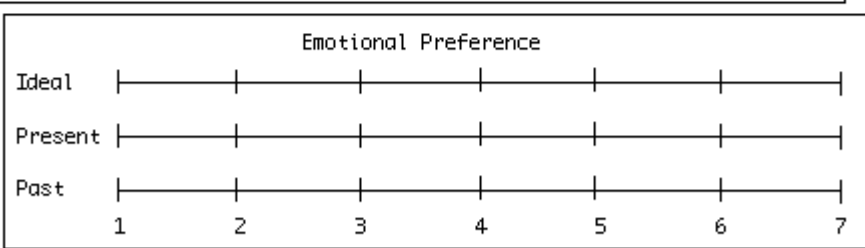
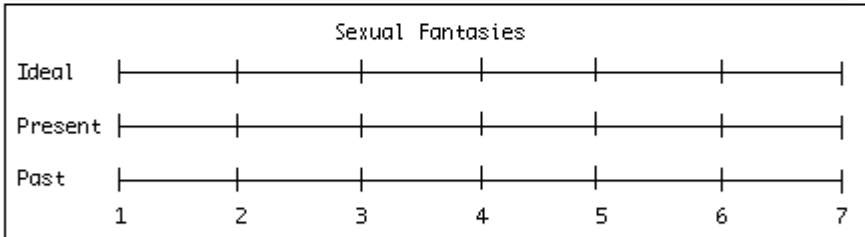
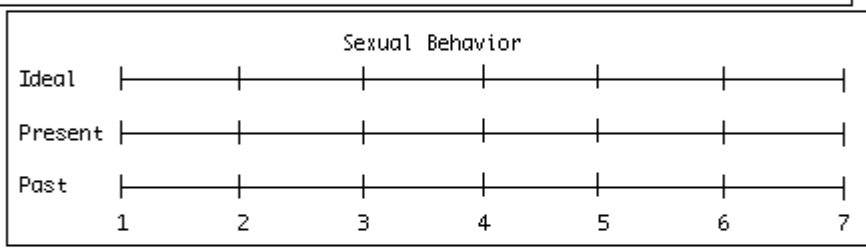
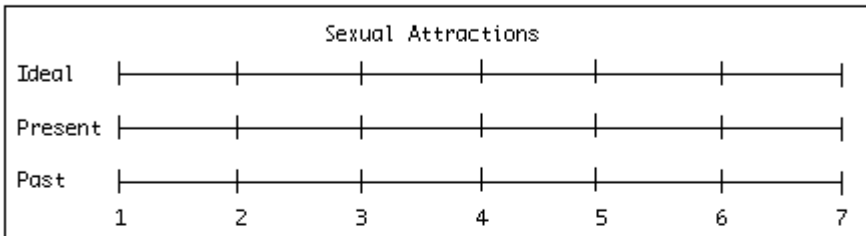
Klein examines the element of time in more detail than Kinsey. He asks about sexual behavior during the *present* (the most recent 12 months,) the *past* (up to 12 months ago,) and the *ideal* (which is as close as one can get to intention and prediction of future behavior.) At this point in a presentation, we draw two more scales, and label the three scales *Past*, *Present*, and *Ideal* (see [Figure 3](#)).

The biggest change from previous work is Klein's inclusion of many aspects of sexual orientation in addition to sexual behavior. These include *sexual attraction*, *sexual fantasies*, *emotional preference*, *social preference*, *lifestyle preference*, and *sexual identity*. (Keppel and Hamilton add *political identity*, and both Klein and Keppel and Hamilton have refined the reference point descriptions to be successively more descriptive and less emotionally "loaded.") [4]

We represent the aspects of sexual orientation as a stack of cards (see [Figure 3.](#)) Each card represents a particular aspect of sexual orientation (sexual attraction, social preference, etc.) Each card has three time scales (past, present, ideal.) Taken together, a deck of cards gives a view of several aspects of a person's sexual orientation over time, and can be used as a basis for discussing sexual orientation and identifying commonalities and differences.

Figure 3: Aspects of Sexual Orientation
 (adapted from Fritz Klein by Bobbi Keppel and Alan Hamilton)

Key: Choice of partner or associate	
1	Other sex only
2	Other sex mostly
3	Other sex somewhat more
4	Both sexes equally
5	Same sex somewhat more
6	Same sex mostly
7	Same sex only



Key: Own identity or lifestyle	
1	Heterosexual only
2	Heterosexual mostly
3	Bisexual mostly, somewhat heterosexual
4	Bisexual
5	Bisexual mostly, somewhat homosexual
6	Homosexual mostly
7	Homosexual only

Lifestyle Preference							
Ideal							
Present							
Past							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sexual Identity							
Ideal							
Present							
Past							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Political Identity							
Ideal							
Present							
Past							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Using the Klein Scale

To use the Klein scale, on each card choose one point on each of the three time scales. Each scale represents a continuum, so you may pick points which are not at any of the reference points. For instance, if you feel that you are halfway between reference points 1 and 2 on a scale, you can describe that as 1.5 or 1-1/2.

The time scales are:

Past: Your life up to 12 months ago.

Present: The most recent 12 months

Ideal: What do you think you would eventually like?

For this explanation of the aspects of sexual orientation, we start with the card at the top of the page (the rear-most card in the deck), and work our way forward:

Sexual Attraction: To whom are you sexually attracted?

Sexual Behavior: With whom have you actually had sex?

Sexual Fantasies: Whom are your sexual fantasies about? (They may occur during masturbation, daydreaming, as part of real life, or purely in your imagination.)

Emotional Preference: Emotions influence, if not define, the actual physical act of love. Do you love and like only members of the same sex, only members of the other sex, or members of both sexes.

Social Preference: Social preference is closely allied with but often different from emotional preference. With members of which sex do you socialize?

(different reference point descriptions are used for the remaining aspects.)

Lifestyle Preference: What is the sexual identity of the people with whom you socialize? (Add "All" as a choice for each scale on this card.)

Sexual Identity: How do you think of yourself?

Political Identity: Some people describe their relationship to the rest of society differently than their personal sexual identity. For instance, a woman may have a *heterosexual* sexual identity, but a *lesbian* political identity. How do you think of yourself politically?

----- End Figure 3: Aspects of Sexual Orientation -----

Implications and Points To Make

Sexual identity (how people think of themselves) sometimes has little to do with their sexual behavior. Three different people may have the same distribution of sexual behavior in the past and/or present, but have three different sexual identities: homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual. This may be confusing at first, but is important to remember. This point is often useful in helping people to understand that just because someone has a different sexual identity does not necessarily mean that that person's sexual behavior is different from their own. Conversely, the fact that someone else has the same sexual identity does not mean that that person's sexual behavior is the same as their own.

People who think of themselves as bisexual, heterosexual, or homosexual may find they are quite similar in some aspects and different in others. For example, in choosing people to spend time with in social activities, most women hang out with women and most men hang out with men. That is, both women and men show a *social preference* for members of the same sex. According to many national surveys, whether their sex is male or female, and whether their sexual identity is homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual, most people have an *emotional preference* for women as close friends. We may all be more alike than we think.

Klein's research and the experience of many people indicates that sexual identity can be fluid (at least for some people), and can change from one period of a person's life to another. A person's identity may move to a new position on the continuum; that is,

a heterosexual may change to a bisexual or homosexual identity;

a bisexual may change to a homosexual or heterosexual identity;

a homosexual may change to a bisexual or heterosexual identity.

Many people were sure that they would be, for instance, heterosexual all their lives, but discovered later that they no longer were. It therefore behooves one to treat others as one would like to be treated, regardless of one's current sexual identity, because one's sexual identity may change.

Both Kinsey's and Klein's work gives some evidence that older people are more likely to have been sexual with both sexes than are younger people. This contradicts conventional wisdom, which says that sexual experimentation is common among youths but uncommon among adults.

Despite the fact that someone may have had different sexual identities at different times, each sexual

identity was appropriate and valid for that person in its time.

In some areas, the Lesbian and Gay male communities take the position that bisexuals are not welcome in the Lesbian and Gay communities, that they do not exist, and/or that they are "traitors to the cause" and "sleeping with the enemy." This collection of attitudes is often termed "biphobia." It usually occurs with greater frequency and virulence in Lesbian communities, where it is associated with negative feelings about and political action against patriarchy and women's oppression. It is also clearly present in Gay male communities, often in the more subtle form of deprecation and ridicule of bisexual identity. In biphobic communities, an individual who might otherwise identify as bisexual may choose to suppress attractions to and activities with one gender or the other in order to identify as either heterosexual or homosexual. Alternatively, a person may switch back and forth, trying alternately to identify as homosexual or heterosexual.

Where there is no information about and support for bisexuality, a person may identify as heterosexual or homosexual, or alternate between them.

Footnotes

[1] "Sexual orientation" and "sexual preference" have often been used interchangeably. To emphasize that how a person thinks of herself or himself is often not a matter of choice (preference), the politically correct term has become "sexual orientation."

[2] Bobbi Keppel and Alan Hamilton have adapted Klein, et al. (*op. cit.*) by using a scale like Kinsey's.

[3] Klein, Fritz, M.D., Barry Sepekoff, PhD., and Timothy J. Wolf, PhD., "Sexual Orientation: A Multi-Variable Dynamic Process," in *Bisexuality: A Reader and Sourcebook*, edited by Thomas Geller, Times Change Press, 1990.

[4] Discuss *social preference* and *emotional preference* from Implications and Points to Make section.

[5] Graphic consultation by Wilma Keppel.

About the Authors

Bobbi Keppel is a social worker. She is the Coordinator of the Maine Bisexual People's Network, is a co-founder of the Unitarian-Universalist Bisexual Network (later merged with [Interweave](#)), and served on the Advisory Board of the East Coast Bisexual Network. She is a trainer for the Welcoming Congregations program in the Northeast District.

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