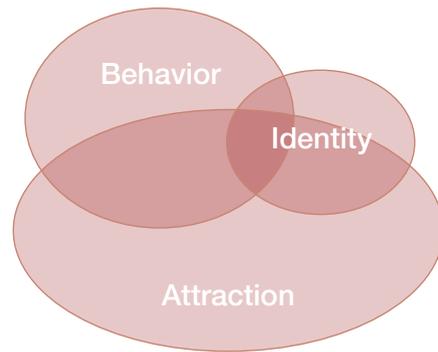


DEFINITIONS AND MODELS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Today, researchers understand that sexual orientation is more complex than sexual behaviors alone. The Religious Institute defines sexual orientation as an individual's enduring romantic, emotional, or sexual attractions toward other persons. Sexual orientation is a complex relationship among sexual attractions, behaviors, and self-identity.¹

“Heterosexual,” “homosexual,” and “bisexual” are examples of specific sexual orientations. Sexual orientation refers to feelings and identity, not just behavior. Individuals do not always express their sexual orientation through their sexual behaviors.



The purpose of this guide is to help congregations welcome a range of people who are attracted in varying degrees to people of more than one sex or gender. This guide defines bisexuality as “an enduring romantic, emotional and/or sexual attraction toward people of more than one sex or gender.”

A bisexual person may be attracted to one sex or gender more than another, equally attracted to all sexes and genders, or may consider sex and gender unimportant in terms of their sexual and romantic attractions. The intensity of a bisexual person's attractions toward one sex or gender or another may vary over time.²

Some bisexuals have not had sexual behaviors with another person. Others have had only same-sex experiences or have been only with partners of a different sex or gender from their own. As described in the “Prevalence of Bisexuality in the United States” section on p. 18, many people who identify as lesbian, heterosexual, gay, or another label have had sex with partners of more than one sex or gender.

Some people have been identified in the professional literature as “mostly heterosexual.” These are people who identify as heterosexual but who also have “a small degree of same-sex sexuality in at least one...indicator of sexual orientation (sexual/romantic attraction, arousal, fantasy, infatuation, and identity).”³

For some people, gender expression and gender identity are also factors in sexual attraction. For some bisexuals, gender is an important part of attraction. For other bisexuals, it is totally irrelevant. And to make things even more complex, some people are bisexual throughout their life while others find that their sexual and romantic attractions change during different periods of their lives.

Those who are attracted to people of more than one sex or gender may use a variety of words to describe their sexual orientation, including bisexual, “bi,” same and other gender loving, pansexual, ambisexual, omnisexual, fluid, and queer. There is no one word that everyone agrees captures the complexity of the range of sexual orientations. **For the purposes of this guide, the words *bisexual* and *bisexuality* will be used.**

This guide will address how congregations can better serve people who identify as bisexual as well as people who experience a range of sexual attractions, feelings, or behaviors with people of more than one sex or gender without identifying as bisexual.

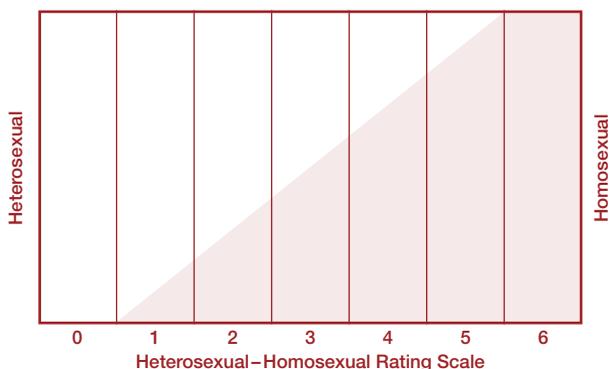
MODELS TO HELP UNDERSTAND THE RANGE OF SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS

In order to have a greater understanding about bisexuality, it is important to understand the complexity of sexual orientation. Many models of sexual orientation have been developed by researchers, social scientists and advocates over the past fifty years.

The Kinsey Scale

In 1948, the sexuality researcher Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues proposed a seven-point scale for sexual orientation based on an individual’s overt sexual experience and/or psychosexual reactions, although Kinsey’s research focused on behaviors.⁴ The Kinsey Institute now describes the scale this way: “The scale ranges

from 0, for those who would identify themselves as exclusively heterosexual with no experience with or desire for sexual activity with their same sex, to 6, for those who would identify themselves as exclusively homosexual with no experience with or desire for sexual activity with those of the opposite sex, and 1–5 for those who would identify themselves with varying levels of desire or sexual activity with either sex.”⁵ Kinsey’s 1948 report on American men estimated that 46% were in the range of 1–5 at some point in their lives.⁶



Kinsey described each point on the scale 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, only incidentally heterosexual
- 6—Exclusively homosexual

Limitations of the Kinsey Scale

While the Kinsey scale was revolutionary at its publication in advancing the understanding of sexual orientation as a spectrum, it has significant limitations, especially in its conception of bisexuality. The Kinsey scale could imply (and has been used to assert) that the only “true bisexuals” are those who have sexual behaviors equally with men and women. Instead of expressly using the term “bisexual,” the Kinsey scale uses the terms “heterosexual” and “homosexual,” even for people with behaviors in the 1 to 5 range. The Kinsey scale is also a linear scale that does not account for the possibility of changes over time, or the interaction of one’s own gender expression and identity with sexual attraction. It conflates the many dimensions of sexual orientation into a single number, whereas people may differ in the erotic, romantic, and affectional components of their sexual orientation.

The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid

Several decades later, building on the work of Dr. Kinsey and his colleagues, Dr. Fritz Klein developed a more nuanced two-dimensional model of sexual orientation, now known as the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid. It was first published in his book, *The Bisexual Option*, in 1978. The Klein Grid is designed to expand on Kinsey’s work in several ways. First, it accounts for the fact that a person’s sexual orientation may change over time, and asks people to rate their past, present, and ideal orientation on each factor. The Klein Grid includes seven variables that use a 1 to 7 rating criteria similar to the Kinsey scale, ranging from exclusive “opposite” sex attraction to exclusive same sex attraction. The 21 boxes are rated, and then can be viewed as a complex individual picture that cannot be reduced to a single number on a one-dimensional scale. The variables are:

- Sexual Attraction — to whom an individual is sexually attracted
- Sexual Behavior — with whom an individual engages in sexual behaviors
- Sexual Fantasies — about whom one has fantasies
- Emotional Preference — with whom one falls in love
- Social Preference — the sex of the people with whom one socializes

- Lifestyle Preference — sexual identity of the people with whom one socializes
- Sexual Identity — how an individual self-identifies⁷

Klein Sexual Orientation Grid

	Past	Present	Ideal Future
Sexual Attraction			
Sexual Behavior			
Sexual Fantasies			
Emotional Preference			
Social Preference			
Heterosexual-Homosexual Lifestyle			
Self-Identification			

Although some of the terms that Klein uses (such as “lifestyle” or “preference”) are outdated today, his insights that sexual orientation is composed of many variables that may fall at different places in Kinsey’s continuum and that sexual orientation is “an ongoing dynamic process” help explain the complexity of sexual orientation in a way that Kinsey’s model did not.

AER (Affectional/Erotic/Romantic) Model

Wayne Pawlowski, an AASECT-certified sexuality educator, created the AER model to address the complex interplay between affectional feelings, erotic feelings, and romantic feelings. He labeled these as affectional orientation, erotic orientation, and romantic orientation. The model is based on the following open-ended questions:

A: Affectional orientation: “With whom do you prefer to socialize? With which sex(es) do you feel most comfortable and relaxed?”

E: Erotic orientation: “Which sex(es) turn(s) you on erotically? To whom are you attracted as real, potential, or fantasy sexual partners?”

R: Romantic orientation: “With whom do you fall in love? With whom do you fall in love most easily?”

It is common to assume that these three areas are the same or at least closely related, but Pawlowski cautions that they can be three separate and distinct aspects of sexual orientation.

In fact, he suggests that what we call “sexual orientation” is actually a complex interplay of an individual’s affectional, erotic and romantic orientations working in concert with one another, not simply to whom one is attracted erotically.

Consider, for example, a man married to a woman—and the man periodically has sexual encounters with other men. Although some might assume he is gay, he indeed could be romantically in love with his wife and socially much more comfortable being in a relationship with a woman. His erotic attractions could fall anywhere from a Kinsey 1 to a 6, but his affectional and romantic attractions could indicate a bisexual orientation.

The AER model is completely different from the Kinsey Scale and the Klein Grid in that it doesn’t depend on a two-dimensional continuum of orientation. Instead, it asks open-ended questions. It allows for the possibility that a person may actually answer “no one” to the questions pertaining to one or more of the three orientations. Further, it allows for gender diversity in a way that previous models did not.

Pawlowski suggests that of the three orientations, affectional is the most influenced by environment/upbringing/life experience. The other two orientations (erotic and romantic) tend to be far less influenced by environment.⁸

In my congregation, I discovered that writing about my coming out...was really just the beginning. Not a single person in my church has reacted negatively to my coming out (at least not that I’m aware of), but for many, it prompted curiosity and a desire to know more and better understand. So in the weeks that followed, I had a number of conversation with parishioners and fellow staff members who wanted me to provide a kind of “bisexuality 101.” Those conversations were sometimes awkward for me, but they were clearly and invariably coming from a place of love and a sincere desire to understand.

— Rev. Summer Shaud, Associate Pastor, First Congregational Church, Natick, MA

Definitions

Asexual: Experiencing little or no romantic, emotional and/or sexual attraction or eroticism. Asexuality is different from celibacy, which is a choice not to engage in sexual behaviors with another person.

Biological sex: Biological status as female, male, or intersex. It is determined by a person's sexual anatomy, chromosomes, and hormones. Biological sex is often referred to as "sex" or "natal sex."⁹

Biphobia: Fear or hatred of bisexuals, sometimes manifesting in discrimination, isolation, harassment, or violence. Often biphobia is based on inaccurate stereotypes, including associations with infidelity, promiscuity, and transmission of sexually transmitted diseases.¹⁰

Bisexual: Experiencing enduring romantic, emotional and/or sexual attraction toward people of more than one sex or gender.

Gender: The collection of characteristics that form the cultural constructs that define people as boys/men, girls/women, or other.

Gender expression: The outward expression (behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice or body characteristics) of a particular gender role and/or identity.

Gender identity: An individual's internal sense of self as boy/man, girl/woman, or other. Gender identity may or may not align with an individual's biological sex, and may or may not be accurately perceived externally.

Gender roles: A set of social and behavioral norms that determine what is generally considered appropriate for either a man or a woman in a social or interpersonal relationship.

LGBT: An acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender." Lengthier versions include "LGBTQ" to include people who identify as "queer," and "LGBTQQIA," to include "queer, questioning, intersex and asexual." The "A" may also be used to refer to "allies" or "advocates," i.e., people who support justice for LGBT persons.

BI-FRIENDLY

Throughout this guidebook, we use the term "bi-friendly" to refer to organizations, events, websites, print materials, and healthcare and other service providers who are knowledgeable about and welcoming to persons who identify as bisexual, who have bisexual attractions, and/or who engage in bisexual behaviors.

Questioning: A term used to describe people who are unsure of or exploring their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Sexuality: The sexual knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviors of individuals. Its dimensions include the anatomy, physiology and biochemistry of the sexual response and reproductive systems; gender identity, sexual orientation, roles and personality; as well as thoughts, attachments, physical and emotional expressions, and relationships.

Sexual identity: An individual's sense of self as a sexual being, including natal sex, gender identity, gender role, gender expression, sexual orientation and sexual self-concept. Sexual identity may also refer to the language and labels people use to define themselves. Sexual self-concept refers to one's assessment of one's sexual identity.

Transgender: A term for individuals whose gender identity or expression differs from the cultural expectations of their biological sex. Some people transition from male to female or from female to male, often taking steps to align their biological sex and their gender expression with their gender identity. Other people do not identify as women or men; they might identify as a little of both or as a different gender entirely. The term "transgender" does not provide information about a person's sexual orientation; transgender people may identify as gay, lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual, or another sexual orientation.



WHAT'S THE RIGHT WORD?

Choosing words carefully can help counter bisexual invisibility and prejudice. Here are some common examples to consider.

Use

lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender

bisexual

anti-LGBT bias

different sex couple, other sex couple

marriage equality

questioning

LGBT rights, human rights

Avoid

"gay/lesbian" to represent all LGBT people

bi-sexual, switch-hitter

anti-gay bias

opposite sex couple

"gay" marriage

bi-curious

gay rights

If you want to know how people identify, ask, and then use the terms they prefer. Avoid making assumptions about sexual orientation based on the sex or gender of a person's partners. Peoples' definitions of terms describing sexual orientation and gender identity may vary, and all individuals have the right to define themselves and to have that definition respected by others.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do the models of sexual orientation aid your understanding? What is most helpful? Is there anything that is still unclear to you? Where might you seek additional information?
2. How comfortable are you in using the terms in the definitions section? Do you need information about any other terms?
3. When did you first encounter the term *bisexual*? Was it in a positive context or a negative context? What messages (if any) did you receive as a child, adolescent, and young adult about bisexuality?
4. When you hear the words *bisexual* and *bisexuality*, what images come to mind? How might you learn more?
5. What difference does it make when your congregation says “LGBT” rather than “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender”? Do people hear the “B” in LGBT?
6. How can the language used in your congregation and faith community be more inclusive of people who have bisexual experience or identity?

Notes

- 1 Illustration of components of sexual orientation by John Sylla, President of the American Institute of Bisexuality.
- 2 Timothy and Palmer and Rev. Debra W. Haffner, *A Time to Seek: Study Guide on Sexual and Gender Diversity* (Westport, CT: Religious Institute, 2007).
- 3 Ritch C. Savin-Williams and Zhana Vrangalova, “Mostly Heterosexual as a Distinct Sexual Orientation Group: A Systematic Review of the Empirical Evidence,” *Developmental Review* 33 (2013): 58–88.
- 4 Robert T. Francoeur, *The Complete Dictionary of Sexology*, ed. (New York: Continuum, 1995), 329.
- 5 The Kinsey Institute, “Kinsey’s Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale,” <http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/research/ak-hhscale.html>.
- 6 Alfred C. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998). Originally published by W.B. Saunders Company, 1948.
- 7 Fritz Klein, M.D., “The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid,” American Institute of Bisexuality, <http://www.americaninstituteofbisexuality.org/thekleingrid/>.
- 8 Wayne Pawlowski, in discussion with the authors, May 29, 2013.
- 9 Planned Parenthood, *Female, Male, & Intersex*, <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/sexual-orientation-gender/female-male-intersex-26531.htm>.
- 10 San Francisco Human Rights Commission, *Bisexual Invisibility*, <http://sf-hrc.org/index.aspx?page=128#LGBT> and Intersex Communities, 2011, p. 35.