

What are gender and sexuality spectrums and how do people use them to express their identity?

Annie Wyrick

Senior Project Advisor: Jessica Adams

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Animas High School
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Part I: Introduction

‘The state of being male or female.’ This is the definition of gender you will find in almost any dictionary. A definition that strictly conforms to the binary. Traditional views argue that there are only two genders, and both of these genders have their own set of ideals and expectations placed on them by society. The definition of sexual orientation is “a person's sexual identity in relation to the gender to which they are attracted”(Oxford Dictionary). Gender and sexuality are completely separate, yet they are interconnected and both exist on a vast spectrum that is unconfined to the binary.

Spectrums display a range between two opposite points, like a gradient. Recently spectrums have been used by members of the LGBT community as a visual aid to express their identity in more complex, yet more easily understood ways. Using spectrums embraces fluidity and all of the gray areas that exist in regards to gender and sexuality. The traditional view of gender is that it is binary, that there is only male and female. The definition of binary is “Relating to, composed of, or involving two things” (Oxford Dictionary). Although traditional views on gender and sexuality are still widely accepted as fact, gender and sexuality are vastly complex and not constrained to the binary, therefore the use of spectrums are required to express one’s identity accurately.

Part II: Historical Context

Gender roles and stereotypes have been present in all societies and cultures for centuries. One of the biggest theories on the origin of gender roles is that agriculture is responsible for shaping gender roles. Ester Boserup hypothesized in her 1970 book *Women’s Role in Economic*

Development that gender roles originated in agriculture. Boserup explains the difference between plough and shifting farm cultivation. Shifting cultivation was very labor intensive, therefore women would actively participate in the farm work using tools such as the hoe to tend to the fields. Plough Cultivation was cultivation with the use of a plough. The ploughs were pulled by oxen and guided by the men, not women, because of their advantage in upper body strength and grip strength. When plough cultivation is used, there is not a need for weeding, which was a job that had previously been undertaken by the women and children. Child Care is another factor that helped develop gender roles. Child care was typically undertaken by women while the men were working the fields. This combined with the widespread use of the plough in agriculture, led to men almost exclusively being responsible for working for his household. Women would stay home caring for the children and the house, while the man was working the fields. (qtd. In *Women and the Plough*)

Fast forward to the 1950's and the gender roles inspired by plough cultivation are still in effect. Women were expected to stay home and cook and clean while their husbands were at work supporting the family. But gender roles would slowly begin evolving. In 1972, Title 9 of the Education Amendments was passed, protecting women from discrimination in the education system (National Women's History Museum). Women were being educated, they had gained the right to vote, and they were even entering the workforce. Gender roles have continued to change. Women now play a large part in the workforce, they go to college, hold positions of power, and hold government positions. Gender roles in the United States are still evolving and being challenged, now more than ever with awareness campaigns from members of the LGBT community about gender and sexuality.

While the history of gender roles has a long and complex history, the history of sexuality studies has very brief history. Dr. Alfred Kinsey was a famous American biologist and sexologist who authored the books *Sexual Behavior of the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior of the Human Female* (1953). He also created what is now known as The Kinsey Scale, which appeared in both of his books. The Kinsey scale is a 0-6 rating scale between homosexual and heterosexual identities, with 0 being exclusively heterosexual, 6 being exclusively homosexual, and the numbers in between representing different levels of bisexuality (The Kinsey Institute). Dr. Alfred Kinsey observed that there was more to human sexuality than simply homosexual and heterosexual. He is quoted in his book *Sexual Behavior of the Human Female* stating “Many persons do not want to believe that there are gradations in these matters from one to the other extreme.” This quote from Dr. Kinsey demonstrates his belief that sexuality exists on a spectrum. Dr. Kinsey was a pioneer in the studies of human sexuality in a time where homosexuality was still considered to be taboo.

Part III: Research and Analysis

This section will discuss the finite details surrounding gender, sexuality, and spectrums. One can think of gender and sexuality as an onion whereas the top layer is a person’s physical appearance, perceived gender and/or perceived sexual orientation. The aim of this paper is to reveal the multiple layers of gender and sexuality so that the reader may gain a more nuanced and complete understanding of these constructs. There are several concepts that will be explained in this section, each one a different layer of the onion.

Biological Sex vs. Gender

Biological sex is defined as “Either of the two main categories (male and female) into which humans and most other living things are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions” (Oxford Dictionary). This means that at birth, all humans are categorized based on the physicality of their bodies such as testosterone and estrogen, chromosomes, reproductive organs, and anatomical features.

While gender and sex are often conceived as the same, they are two distinct and separate concepts. *The ABC's of LGBT* written by Ashley Mardell, defines gender as “the state of being a man, a woman, both, neither, somewhere in between, or something entirely different” (pt.2). In this book, Mardell states that gender is composed of self understanding and who we are beyond our biology. Gender is mentality, sex is physicality.

The authors of the book *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*, Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna, argue that “gender is a social construction, that a world of two sexes is a result of the socially shared, taken for granted methods which members use to construct reality”(qtd. Mayer, McHugh 87). This quote demonstrates that gender is not a physical thing, but merely a mentality and a social construct created to divide the binary male and female sexes into categories and provide each with it's own roles and expectations.

Intersex

Intersex is a variation in sex characteristics in a person that cannot be defined as strictly male or female. Intersex individuals are proof that biological sex fits on a spectrum in the same way that gender does. As stated on the Intersex Society of North America's website, “In human cultures, sex categories get simplified into male, female, and sometimes intersex, in order to

simplify social interactions, express what we know and feel, and maintain order.”(Intersex Society of North America). Intersex people make up 1.7% of the population, making them as common as someone with red hair (OII). Physically, intersex individuals are the gray area between male and female biological sex, confirmation that biological sex exists on a spectrum. Everyone, whether they are intersex or not, has an anatomy that varies, no two humans have the exact same sex characteristics.

Dysphoria

According to the *American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Edition 5*, gender dysphoria is “incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender” and “ clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning”(qtd. Mayer, McHugh 94). In her book, Ashley Mardell agrees, stating that gender dysphoria is “distress or unhappiness experienced because one’s gender does not match their sex/gender assigned at birth.” She also points at two different types of gender dysphoria, social and body. Social gender dysphoria being triggered by social situations such as people in public assuming your gender. Body dysphoria is triggered when gender identity clashes with physical appearance (Mardell). Dysphoria can be crippling for a person that suffers from it. Just imagine the feeling of having a body that doesn’t feel like it belongs to you, and having a gender identity that does not match your physicality or anatomy.

Transgender

Transgender is an umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity does not match their sex and/or gender assigned at birth (Mardell). The Intersex Society of North America states

that: “People who identify as transgender or transsexual are usually people who are born with typical male or female anatomies but feel as though they’ve been born into the ‘wrong body.’ For example, a person who identifies as transgender or transsexual may have typical female anatomy but feel like a male and seek to become male by taking hormones or electing to have sex reassignment surgeries.” Many transgender individuals struggle with gender dysphoria. In order to alleviate this, these individuals may transition.

Transitioning is defined as “the process of accepting oneself and/or pursuing changes in order to affirm one’s gender and/or alleviate dysphoria” (Mardell). Transitioning is different for everyone, and even those who identify as non binary or genderqueer (see table 1) may seek to alter their physical appearance to ease dysphoria. There are some transgender individuals who may choose to only partially transition, or to not transition at all. It is a very personal choice. Currently there are about 1.4 million transgender people living in the United States (Gender Revolution).

Scientists are still searching for what causes a person to be transgender. Some believe that exposure to testosterone in the womb is what causes transgender individuals to have the same brain chemistry as the gender they identify with (Gender Revolution). If a female fetus is exposed to excessive amounts of testosterone during the second or third trimester, it could affect brain chemistry causing the brain to be wired like that of a male. If a male fetus is not exposed to lower levels of testosterone during the second or third trimester, it could affect brain chemistry causing the brain to be wired like that of a female (Gender Revolution). Others propose that it is DNA. A study done on identical twins found that if one twin is trans, the likelihood of the other twin being trans is 40% more than the likelihood of both fraternal twins being trans. This points

to DNA being a possible cause, as identical twins share the same DNA (Gender Revolution).

Unfortunately, during the current political climate in the United States the rights of transgender individuals are in extreme peril.

Non Binary and Genderqueer

Nonbinary means existing or identifying outside the sex/gender binary, being neither man nor woman, or being only partially or a combination of these things (Mardell). Genderqueer means someone whose gender exists outside of or beyond society's concept of gender (Mardell). These two terms are used interchangeably by some, as they are both umbrella terms for gender identities outside of the binary. They also exist as gender identities within themselves. Because of their lack of specificity, many people use these terms to label themselves to express that their gender is simply outside of the binary and not clearly defined. The genders that exist outside of the binary are vast, and new terminologies for identities are being created every day.

There is a lot of negative rhetoric being spread online regarding those who identify as non binary or genderqueer, and most of those who spreading these messages are saying there are only two genders. These people are false. It is well known by biologists that there are numerous species of animal which can change their gender. In an article by Ron Cowen for Science News, he writes about a study done on African Reed Frogs. He states in the article that "During the next few months, seven adult females -- including six previously observed to lay eggs -- developed functioning testicular nodules and aggressive behavior typical of male frogs, the researchers report in the current issue of COPEIA, released in January. Four of the seven 'secondary males' copulated with females, fertilizing up to 70 percent of the eggs and generating normal offspring, the investigators say"(Cowen). So even in nature, sex can change and morph, proving that

gender cannot be tied to biological sex. There are numerous other species known to change gender, including certain species of fish, shrimp, and toads. The notion that gender remains the same throughout one's life, or even that it is constricted to the binary, is false. The evidence in nature is too vast to ignore.

Gender Spectrums

There are several different spectrums that can be used to express one's identity, ranging anywhere from linear scales (see image 1) to colored gradients (see image 2). Each of these images are used by members of the LGBT community to visually express their identities in easy to understand ways. Table 1 in the appendix offers a variety of gender identities and their definitions. It must be reiterated here that there are new terminologies being created every day to help people label their gender.

Sexuality

Sexuality and gender are heavily entwined with each other, but they are two very separate things. Sexuality is defined as "A person's sexual orientation or preference"(Oxford Dictionary). A person's sexuality has a number of factors such as whether or not they actually experience attraction, and the gender(s) they are attracted to. Like gender, sexuality exists on a spectrum that is unconstrained to the binary.

Sexual Orientation vs. Romantic Orientation

There are different types of attraction that dictate a person's sexuality such as sexual orientation and romantic orientation. Sexual orientation indicates who someone is or is not sexually attracted to, such as what gender(s) they are attracted to, how often they experience sexual attraction, conditions under which they feel attraction, and how their sexual attractions

change or fluctuate (Mardell). Romantic attraction indicates who someone is or is not romantically attracted to, such as the gender(s) they are romantically attracted to, how often they experience romantic attraction, how often their romantic attractions fluctuate, and the conditions under which they experience romantic attraction (Mardell). A person's romantic attraction and sexual attraction may be different from each other. For example: a person who is panromantic and asexual. They could experience romantic attraction to any gender, but not experience any sexual attraction. The difference between romantic and sexual orientations is the difference between sex and love. Two different, yet closely related concepts.

Sexuality Spectrums

Like gender, sexuality exists on a spectrum. Several different spectrums. These include, but are not limited to: the asexual-zedsexual scale, aromantic-zedromantic scale, polygamous-monogamous scale, and the kinsey scale. The asexuality scale is used to outline how an individual experiences sexual attraction, if at all, and the aromantic scale is used to outline how an individual experiences romantic attraction, if they do at all. These scales and spectrums are widely used to express sexuality, but they are not perfect. For example, the Kinsey scale was created with a strictly binary concept, therefore it may not accurately represent sexualities for those who are not cisgender.

Asexuality and Aromanticism Spectrums

There are several different ways in which asexuality can be defined. In the article *Asexuality: Few Facts, Many Questions* by Houdenove et al, it is stated that there are four approaches have been proposed to define Asexuality. The absence of sexual behavior, absence of sexual attraction, self identification as asexual, and/or a combination of these. Aromanticism can

be defined similarly as the absence of romantic attraction and self identification as aromantic. In a personal statement from a person named Jonah in Mardell's book, they state "For me, being aromantic means that I don't experience romantic attraction. That does not limit me from experiencing other forms of attraction however, such as aesthetic attraction and platonic attraction"(Mardell).

Asexual/romantic identities exist on a spectrum, ranging from asexual/romantic to zedsexual/romantic (see figure 3). Some of the identities that exist on this spectrum are asexual/romantic, graysexual/romantic, demisexual/romantic, and zedsexual/romantic (See table 2). The asexuality spectrum is used to express how often one experiences attraction, if at all. One could use brackets, lines, arrows, or anything else to chart where their identity lies.

Multiple Gender Attractions

There are numerous sexual and romantic orientations that are defined by possible attraction to multiple genders. This includes, but is not limited to bisexual/romantic, pansexual/romantic, polysexual/romantic, omnisexual/romantic, multisexual/romantic, homoflexible, heteroflexible, trisexual/romantic and skoliosexual (Mardell) (See table 3). These spectrums are used to demonstrate to others which genders one may be attracted to and how intensely they may experience the attraction.

These orientations all involve attraction to multiple genders, but each of them has a different definition. For example, those who identify as pansexual and panromantic acknowledge that they have the capability to be attracted to anyone regardless of their gender. Omnisexual and omniromantic mean the same thing. The prefix pan and the prefix omni both mean 'all'. The prefix poly and multi both mean many, therefore those who identify as multisexual/romantic or

polysexual/romantic acknowledge they could be attracted to multiple genders, but not necessarily all of them (Oxford Dictionary). Those who are attracted to multiple genders may use any of these terms interchangeably to describe their identity.

There are a lot of people that say that sexuality is binary, meaning that everyone is monosexual. But it is important to point out that multiple gender attractions are natural and can be viewed in certain animal species. The bonobo, an ape that shares 98.7% of its DNA with humans, is one such animal species (Live Science) Studies suggest 75 percent of bonobo sex is nonreproductive and that nearly all bonobos are bisexual (Owen, James). The fact that these animals have nonreproductive sex with the same gender is evidence of how natural sexualities like bisexual are.

Orientations for Those Who Are Non Binary/Genderqueer

There are also exists numerous sexual and romantic orientation labels that were created specifically for those who identify as non binary or genderqueer. These include: diamoric, nomasexual/romantic, nowomasexual/romantic, masexual/romantic, womasexual/romantic and novosexual/romantic. These orientations are used by those who identify as non binary or genderqueer because they do not suggest the gender of the person using them (see table 4). For example, womasexual/romantic means attraction to women/femininity. This definition does not suggest the gender of the person using this term in any way. Diamoric is a special identity. It refers to a non binary person who has attraction and/or is in a relationship with other non binary people (Mardell). People who are non binary or genderqueer may identify in any way, but the labels above were created specifically for those whose gender is not strictly binary.

Single Gender Attractions and Fluid Attractions

Single gender attractions are sexual and romantic orientations involving attraction to only one gender. Homosexual/romantic and heterosexual/romantic are both single gender orientations.

Homosexuality/romanticism is the attraction to the same gender as one's own.

Heterosexuality/romanticism is attraction to the opposite binary gender as one's own.

There are other labels that exist to describe single gender attractions, such as the label "lesbian".

This label is used to describe women who are attracted to other women. It is also used by some non binary individuals and/or genderqueer people who feel a connection to womanhood and who are also attracted to women (Mardell).

There are also numerous orientations that are fluid, meaning that their romantic and sexual attractions have the ability to change. These terms include but are not limited to: abrosexual/romantic, novosexual/romantic, -flux, and -spike. (See table 5) Flux is a suffix that means "to flow or fluctuate", indicating an orientation that fluctuates/flows in amount or intensity. A prefix indicating the gender that a person is attracted to is placed in front of this suffix. Example: an individual who identifies as biflux may stay attracted to two genders, but their preference may change. Spike is another suffix that means "to flow or fluctuate". People who use this suffix in their identity use it to indicate that they often feel they experience no attraction, but then suddenly experience an intense spike in attraction for a period of time. Example: someone who is aceflux is someone who normally experiences no sexual attraction, and then lots of sexual attraction (Mardell). Each of these identities may be slightly different for everyone who identifies with one of these terms. The fluidity of their attractions may differ from

person to person. These fluid identities are evidence of a sexuality spectrum, that one may flow and fluctuate at any point on the spectrum.

Part V: Conclusions

I feel it is important to talk about my own sexuality and gender identity in this section. I identify as gay, and also as demigirl. I experience a very fragile connection to the label female, while the rest of my gender identity lies somewhere on the androgyne or neutrois part of the gender spectrum. Like most individuals, my identity is very important to me, and that is one of the reasons I am so passionate about LGBT education.

Based on all of the evidence and research that has been cited, it can be concluded that gender, sexuality, and even biological sex exist on a vast spectrum. A spectrum that cannot be confined to the binary, traditional views that have so often been placed on them. To say that genders and sexualities beyond the binary do not exist, would be to say that the people who identify with those labels do not exist. Every label is valid and personal. Like the color spectrum where there are an infinite number of colors, the gender spectrum is infinite. Everyone experiences gender differently. The reason spectrums are used is because it allows people to accurately map the fluctuations, flows, and intensity that occur in gender identity.

This research is important because people need to be educated on gender and sexuality. People need to be aware that there are people in the world whose gender identity does not match their sex assigned at birth, and that there are people who struggle to figure out their sexuality, and that there are those whose anatomy is ambiguous. It is vital that children be educated about

gender and sexuality. Teaching this early in life will result in future generations who are also more educated and compassionate.

On the CDC's website page on LGBT it is stated that "For youth to thrive in their schools and communities, they need to feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe and supported. A positive school climate has been associated with decreased depression, suicidal feelings, substance use, and unexcused school absences among LGBQ students" (Center for Disease Control). Educating students in school will create an environment where LGBT students feel safe and accepted by their peers.

There are children who will grow up questioning their gender identity and/or sexuality. Being educated about this research could provide them with a label that fits their identity and could save them from years of questioning and confusion. There are teenagers and adults in the world who do not even know that there is so much more than male or female and gay or straight. It is my sincere hope that the research provided in this paper may find it's way to someone who is struggling with their identity. Finding a label that fits your identity is the first step on the long road of self acceptance. It is important to know that there are other people in the world that identify outside the binary, people that you may be able to relate to. Researching this paper is what helped me to find a label that I identify with. If I had been exposed to this knowledge as a child, I may not have spent so much time confused and questioning my own gender and sexuality.

Now more than ever is it important to be aware and to be open about gender and sexuality given the current political situation in the United States. LGBT rights have come a long way since the Stonewall Riots, but we are still in danger of discrimination and hate crimes. The

rights of the LGBT community are more at risk than they have been in years. Transgender students are especially vulnerable right now. In 2016, there were 27 reported murders of Transgender individuals (The Advocate). 41% of Transgender individuals have attempted suicide (Moskowitz, Clara) These are unacceptably high rates. We need to protect our transgender brothers and sisters, parents and student, teachers and children. We need the world to be educated and compassionate towards these individuals, as well as those who are non binary or gender non conforming.

It is clear through this that being LGBT is completely natural, and this is demonstrated by everything the animal kingdom to the brain chemistry of transgender individuals. By educating people on the science of being LGBT, it could help them understand the community, and lessen prejudice and fear.

So I leave you all with a call to action. Use this knowledge to better understand the complexities of the LGBT community. Use it to advocate to your representatives for LGBT rights and education. Use it to spread awareness and understanding, and maybe even help a friend discover their own identity in a way they may not have been able to before.

APPENDIX 1

Image 1: Color Gradient Gender Spectrum

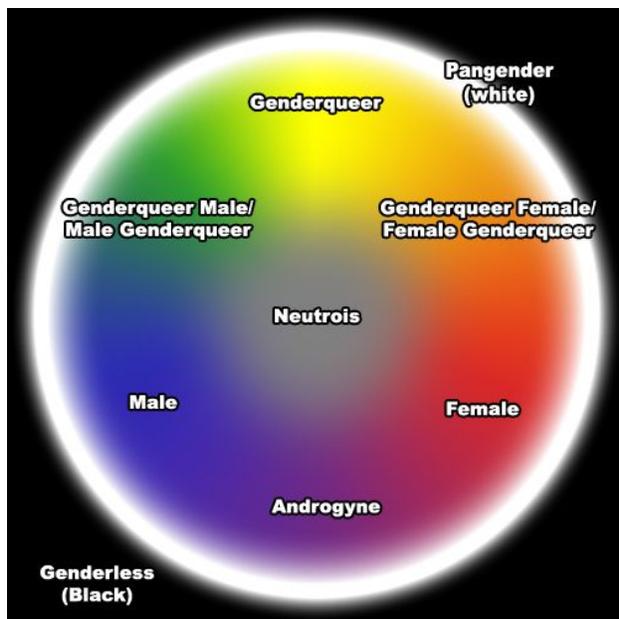
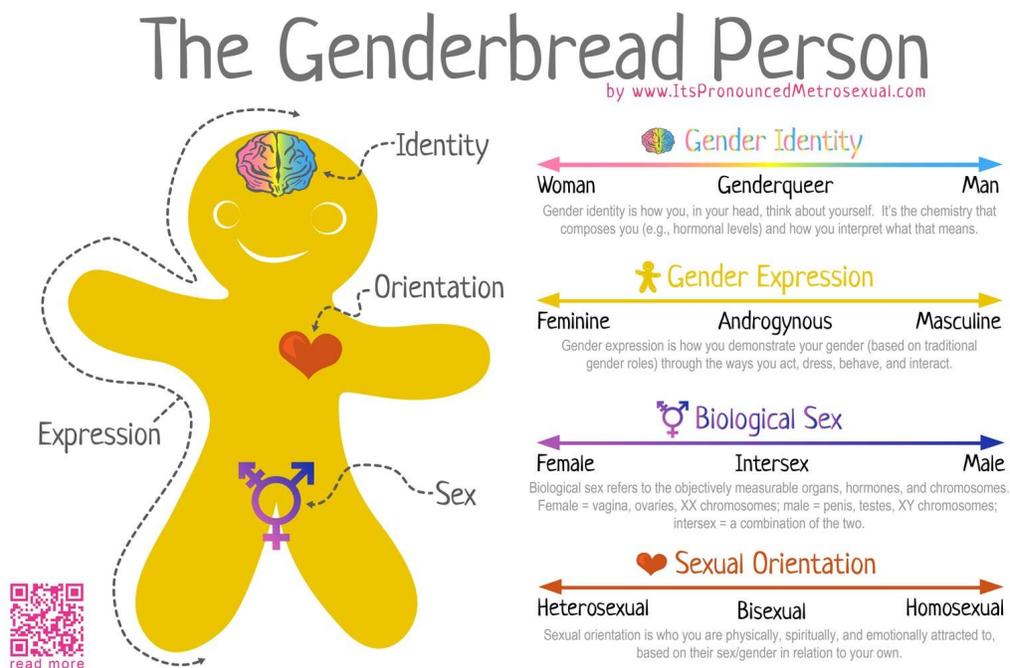


Image 2: Genderbread Person



APPENDIX 2

Figure 3: Asexuality Scale

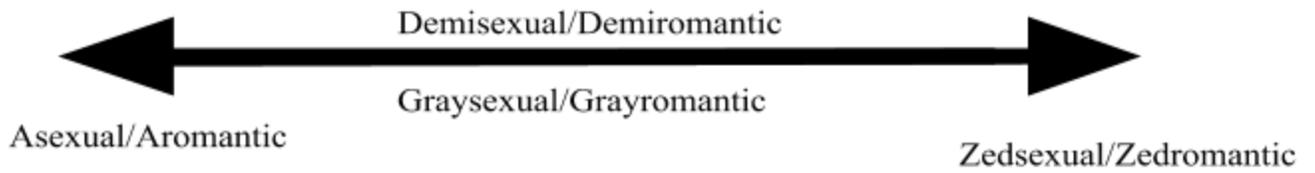
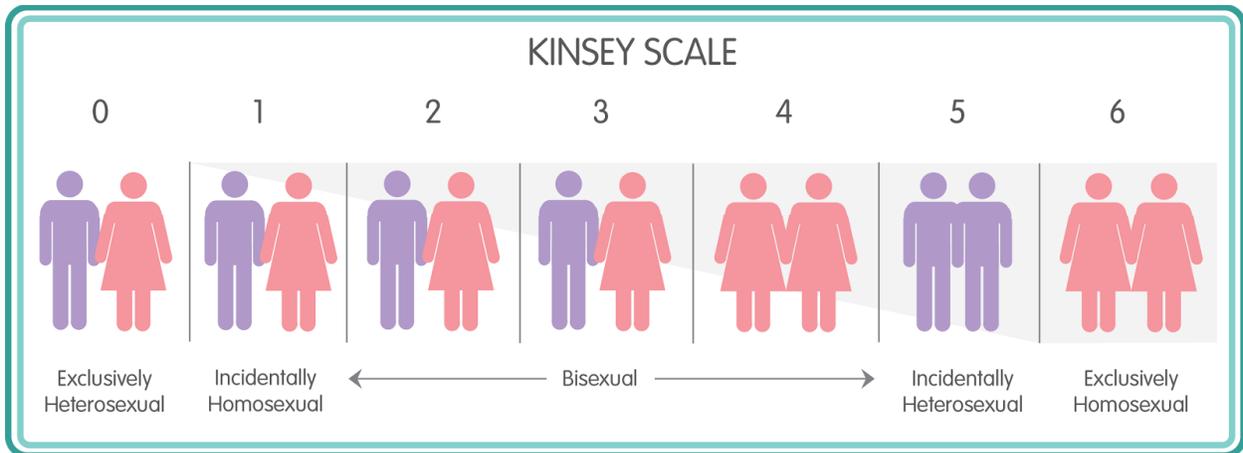


Figure 4: The Kinsey Scale



APPENDIX 3

Table 1: Gender Identities

Agender	Someone who is without gender, gender neutral, and/or rejects the concept of gender
Androgyne	A non-binary identity in which a person is both a man and a woman, neither a man or a woman, and/or somewhere in between man and woman
Bigender	Someone who has/experiences two genders
Cisgender	A person whose gender identity is the same as their assigned sex/ and or gender at birth
Demigender	Someone who has/experiences a partial connection to one or more genders
Graygender	Having a weak sense of gender and/or being somewhat apathetic about one's gender identity/expression
Genderfluid	having a gender that changes
Intergender	A person who identifies between or as a mix of the binary genders
Maverique	Someone who has an autonomous gender which exists entirely independent of the binary genders man and woman
Maxigender	Someone who experiences many, and sometimes, all available genders to them
Pangender/Omnigender	People who experience many, and sometimes, all genders
Multigender/Polygender	Someone who has/experiences more than one gender
Neutrois	Someone who is gender neutral
Trigender	Someone who has/experiences three genders

Transgender/Trans	An umbrella term for anyone whose gender identity does not match their sex and/or gender assigned at birth
Non Binary	Both a specific identity and an umbrella term for gender identities outside the gender binary
Genderqueer	Genderqueer means someone whose gender exists outside of or beyond society's concept of gender
Gender Non Conforming/Gender Variant/Gender Diverse/Gender Variant	Umbrella terms that refer to people who identify and/or express themselves in ways different from the binary norms

Table 2: Asexuality/Aromanticism Spectrum Identities

Asexual/Romantic	Someone who experiences little to no sexual/romantic attraction
Graysexual/Romantic	People who experience very low amounts of attraction, people who experience attraction rarely or only under certain conditions, and/or people who are not sure whether they experience attraction
Demisexual/Romantic	Someone who has/experiences attraction to people with whom they have formed a strong emotional bond
Zedsexual/Romantic	Someone who experiences sexual/romantic attraction

Table 3: Multiple Gender Attractions

Pansexual/romantic	Someone who has the capability to be attracted to any genders
Omnisexual/romantic	Someone who has the capability to be attracted to any genders
Multisexual/romantic	Attraction to more than one gender

Polysexual/romantic	Someone who experiences attraction to multiple, but not necessarily all genders
Bisexual/romantic	Being attracted to two or more genders
Homoflexible	Someone who is predominantly attracted to the same sex, but allows for and acknowledges possible exceptions
Heteroflexible	Someone who is predominantly attracted to the opposite sex, but allows for and acknowledges possible exceptions
Skoliosexual/romantic	People who are attracted to people of non-binary genders
Trisexual/romantic	Someone who experiences attraction to three genders

Table 4: Orientations for Genderqueer and Non Binary Individuals

Womasexual/romantic	Attraction to women/femininity
Masexual/romantic	Attraction to men/masculinity
Nowomasexual/romantic	Someone who is attracted to anyone who is not a woman
Nomasexual/romantic	Someone who is attracted to anyone who is not a man
Diamoric	To emphasize one's own non binary identity and their attraction to/relationship(s) with other non binary people

Table 5: Fluid Orientations:

Novosexual/romantic	A person whose attractions change based on the gender(s) they are experiencing
Abrosexual/romantic	Someone who experiences a fluid and/or changing attraction

-Spike	Someone who often feels no attraction, but then suddenly and intensely experience a spike in attractions
-Flux	Indicates a person's attractions fluctuate in amount or intensity

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