



Domestic Violence Intervention and Education

Discussions and reflections on interventions for domestic violence perpetrators and related anti-oppression work.

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Thursday, August 31, 2017

The Permutations of Sexuality

I am presenting on the dynamics of LGBTQ+ perpetrators of domestic violence soon. While I am an advocate for the LGBTQ+ community, I feel cautious in speaking about a community I am not a member of. I have to be aware of my privilege, and work to be clear with myself and my audience that while my knowledge might be built on years of working with individuals and groups within the community, I make no presumption about my ability to understand or appreciate the experience of those who have struggled their whole lives for acceptance, validation, and equality. This article is designed to create more dialog about sexuality in batterer intervention and domestic violence groups, but also can create greater dialog in general about the layers of sexuality.

One of the big barriers to society in accepting, validating, and creating equality for the LGBTQ+ community is a willful ignorance and not wanting to understand or care about people who do not fit into the status quo of heterosexuality, and a belief that this status quo is a model of how "things should be done." The problem is that sexuality is mostly seen in binary terms. You're either gay or straight. Bisexuality is not even a part of the equation. People who might identify as bisexual are dismissed or ridiculed, because after all if they are a man in a relationship with a man they must be gay, right? Or a woman who is married to a man but says she is bisexual can't be sexually interested in both men and women because she is obviously with a man.

If we can't allow people to self-identify as being sexually interested in both men and women, how can we possibly move to understand other forms of sexuality? If sexuality is seen in binary terms, how can we have any discussions about sexual orientation without turning it into an "us vs. them" argument?

Binary understanding of sexuality is only a part of the confusion. There has been much public debate about transgender rights, and we've gotten confused about the difference between sexuality and gender identity. Someone who is transgender can be any sexual orientation. If you have a binary understanding, you get confused. If someone is M-F transgender, and is sexually attracted to men, I have certainly heard people wondering if that makes the person gay or straight. When people do not honor someone's identification, and stick to a "this or that" idea of sexuality, it becomes very difficult to properly gender an individual - not for the purposes of labeling, but rather the ability to properly respect their identification. If an individual is M-F transgender, they identify as FEMALE. If they are sexually interested in men, they are HETEROSEXUAL. Gender identity is separate from sexuality.

In this article, I am also not addressing Queer identity, as it goes along a few different categories - someone can be genderqueer, where they do not identify with any specific gender, or identify as both genders, or can also be associated with not identifying with a specific sexual orientation or interest. For such individuals, they can also be Questioning, and their not identifying might have more to do with an exploration of what identity they fit into as opposed to intentionally deciding and declaring a lack of association with an identity. Someone's choice to not identify should be honored as much as someone's choice not to disclose their identity, or someone's choice to be open about their identity.

To work against binary identification, consider that there are three layers of sexuality: Sexual Orientation, Sexual Frequency, and Romantic/Emotional Connection. The one we obsess over is sexual orientation, but understanding the other two layers creates a permutation of five sexual orientations, six sexual frequencies, and six romantic/emotional orientations leading to a total of 180 possible combinations of sexuality.

Layers of Sexual Orientation:

This layer is relatively static. Human beings start in life with a specific sexual interest, which develops in awareness and understanding as a child enters puberty, and it doesn't tend to change over the course of a lifetime. This is sometimes hard for people to accept, particularly because we talk about "coming out of the closet," or know someone who may have been married and has biological children but then "decided" they were gay. Someone could have been gay all their life, but never felt safe or comfortable telling others their sexual attraction. An individual could have attempted to squash that desire down and force themselves to be with someone not of their own gender. Some think of sexual orientation as a choice, but is it really a choice when our society has a number of consequences (both directly stated and implied) for telling others about a sexual orientation other than heterosexual? Who you are attracted to is not a choice, how you

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► January (2)

► February (1)

▼ August (1)

The Permutations of Sexuality



present that to the world is. Sexual behavior is not necessarily an accurate indicator of sexual orientation.

Heterosexuality is sexual attraction to someone of the "opposite sex". That term is problematic if you understand the idea of multiple genders (as well as [genetic sexual traits](#)) - however colloquially we get the idea, and accept it overall. The idea of multiple genders can make heterosexuality complicated, as when considering attraction and sexual interest, is it purely about someone's genitalia, or is there more to it than that? Homosexuality is sexual attraction to someone of the same sex.

The concept of "bi" in sexual orientation (and in layers of emotional/romantic attraction) [refer to a person who is not limited to sexual attraction toward one sex](#). Bisexuality can be someone's identity even if he/she is in a relationship with one person of same or opposite sex. Someone can be attracted to one sex, but together with another - which is part of the confusion some experience when they label others or do not accept their stated identification.

The other two sexual orientations get even more confusing with a binary focus. [Transamorous](#) is a form of sexual orientation where someone is sexually attracted to a transgender person. It is important to distinguish the difference between transamorous and someone who has a sexual fetish, as a fetish to a specific body part would better fit as a philia, below. One does not need to have surgery to be considered "transitioned" in the trans community. Many trans people never get bottom surgery, for a multitude of reasons, but when the individual says they have transitioned, they have, regardless of the current state of their genitalia. Someone who is transamorous has sexual desire specifically for someone who identifies as transgender, and there is often an element of queerromantic emotional attachment as a part of this orientation.

Philias, of which there are several, are also relatively rare but help to explain some things we often as a society do not want to understand. Objectophilia has gotten some attention on television shows over the past few years. It is where a person is sexually attracted to an object. While one example might be the movie, "[Lars and the Real Girl](#)" that explores a man's relationship with a sex doll, there are also shows which highlight a man in a relationship (sexually and emotionally) with his car, a woman who has sexual desire and wants to marry an amusement park ride, etc. This is bizarre to most people, and difficult to comprehend on several levels. Just because you do not understand does not mean it fails to exist. The most commonly focused on philia is pedophilia - the sexual attraction toward children. This can be very important to consider, as if you remember earlier in this article there being a comment about sexual orientation being STATIC. It tends not to change over the course of one's life. That means that there is no real "treatment" for making a pedophile stop wanting to have sex with children, as there is no treatment to stop someone from being gay. It is a sexual desire, and when I did work at a sex offender treatment program, therapists often discussed how with pedophiles the only thing to do is lifelong intensive monitoring, supervision, and treatment. There are other philias, but for the sake of keeping this article manageable, consider these two as an example of this orientation.

Sexual Frequency:

When it comes to sexual frequency, many of these labels are thought to be sexual orientations, which like binary association of sexuality cause much confusion. Regardless of sexual interest (orientation), every person has a desired frequency of sexual activity. This can create any number of relationship issues, and domestic violence intervention programs hopefully spend time speaking directly to frequency issues in relationships as it can often contribute to an abuser's sense of entitlement and disconnect from a partner. Frequency, unlike orientation, is fluid over a lifespan. This means that as a human being gets older, sexual drive may change, and sometimes may stop for an individual due to medical, social, spiritual and other factors in that person's life. Being aware of sexual frequency can help to navigate several issues, and understand some contexts of sexual interactions that otherwise are confounding.

Allosexual is possibly the most common sexual frequency, yet most people have never heard of the term. It indicates sexual desire within "normal" boundaries. Research has spent time trying to figure out what the definition of normal is in terms of sexual frequency, and often studies look at the [relationship status of the individual](#) as a part of this analysis. The theory is that if someone is in a committed relationship (married being one such example), then the couple will most likely have sex more regularly. This is not necessarily the case, and with technology and "dating" apps on phones and computers, this research may not hold up under the current social environment of anonymous contacts and [casual sex](#) being both more socially acceptable, and easier (and safer by being more discreet) to engage in.

Hypersexual is normally understood by the name itself, even if someone has not thought of it as a label. This is someone who frequently desires sex, and may have sex multiple times daily if possible. Sometimes, this drive is associated with mental health issues ([such as bipolar disorder](#)) when someone is in a manic state. Since sexual frequency is a fluid and changeable form of sexuality, this makes sense that a person may go through stages of wanting sex at rates much higher than average.

Asexuality is an oft maligned form of sexual frequency, and I am thankful to the asexual community for discussing the multi-layered dynamic of sexuality for many years. Sometimes people dismiss asexuality like they dismiss bisexuality, thinking it is a choice and placing their own sense of the world, their own perceptions, onto someone with radically different life experiences, perceptions, and desired frequency. People can understand if someone has medical issues which prevent them from having sex, but sometimes even someone within this category still DESIRES sex even if they cannot have it. Asexuality is simply the lack of sexual desire, but someone may still have a specific sexual orientation even if they do not have desire. For someone who identifies as asexual, their orientation may not be very important to them because they lack that interest altogether, and so there is an illusion that asexuality is an orientation in itself. However, there are heterosexual asexuals, homosexual asexuals, bisexual asexuals, etc.



Greysexuality is infrequent sexual desire, and is very similar to asexuality - but a major difference is that the person who is greysexual will still occasionally want to have sex, but not have sexual activity very often. People can be greysexual due to life experiences where they may have been hurt, have been sick, or experienced social, religious, or relationship issues that lead to a reduction in sexual desire they once had. There are several reasons someone might be greysexual, and in a relationship where one person is allosexual and another is greysexual - there could be several relationship issues that might develop from this mismatched frequency.

Pansexuality and omnisexuality are two terms with essentially the same definition - a person who just wants sex, period. While a person experiencing a hypersexual frequency will want increased sexual activity within their sexual orientation (ex. a heterosexual hypersexual who is male who wants to have a lot of sex with women), a pan/omniseexual will have sex when the opportunity presents itself, no matter the other person's sex or gender. HOWEVER, just because someone wants to have sex with anyone does not inherently make them bisexual, or homosexual if they choose sex with someone of the same sex. This becomes very confusing in certain circumstances, such as with [men who have sex at rest areas](#). Some of these men identify as straight, and take offense at direct or indirect accusations of being gay. For these men, sex is sex, and getting it whenever possible is the goal - not whether it is a man or a woman. For someone with a binary understanding of sexuality this makes zero sense, after all if a man is having sex with a man doesn't that mean he's gay? Or at the very least bisexual? No - because someone's sexual orientation does not always play out in how they act sexually. Pan/omniseexual is a start in explaining this. Histories of orgies also explain some of this behavior, where group sex might just be about having sex with anyone in the context of a party as opposed to a context of sexual orientation. There is also [discussion about pan/omniseuality being its own orientation](#), where someone is attracted to others by their personality or "soul" as opposed to sex/gender. However, in considering the layer of frequency as a part of sexuality, it opens up a greater understanding of how some people can be primarily sexually oriented in one way, but during certain events act [sexually in another way](#).

Demisexuality and sapeosexuality has to do with desire that is mixed with emotional/mental ties. The next layer of sexuality (romantic/emotional connection) is specifically about that dynamic, and these categorize more as a frequency than an emotional tie. Demisexuality is desire for sex ONLY if there is an emotional connection, whereas a similar type, sapeosexuality is sexual desire only with an interest in someone's intellect. This may mean that someone will not engage in sexual behavior with another person unless they feel a certain emotional/mental bond. This can complicate intimate partner relationships if someone has a lowered sense of emotional connection, and therefore does not desire sex with their partner. While on some levels, this is a normal and reasonable impact of harm in a relationship, on other levels there can be little or no harm and still someone may have an increase or decrease in desire based on that connection. I have heard many participants in batterer intervention programs talk about their partners not wanting to have sex anymore, and this could be one of several reasons why this might be the case. People who are demi/sapeosexual may be less likely to cheat, or may only cheat in very specific circumstances (or develop [emotional affairs](#)). They may have a harder time developing a relationship, regardless of sexual orientation. Often someone within this category may seem allosexual, but circumstances and context help to guide understanding about where someone might fit here instead.

Romantic/Emotional Attachment:

Everyone has different ways in which they emotionally bond with others. We often consider this as something separate from sexuality - but consider what it can mean if it is not so separate after all. To me, this category can help explain many relationship challenges, and motivations for abusive behavior in relationships. This layer of sexuality is tied specifically to whom someone is truly connected to, both inside and outside of an intimate partner relationship. This layer is also fluid and changes throughout someone's life due to circumstance, choice, and as new bonds form with others. Consider the following categories of this layer:

Heteroromantic is about how someone seeks out and fosters relationships mainly with people of the opposite sex. This layer has nothing to do with sexual desire, but rather emotional desire. Many of these categories harbor certain challenges. In this category, one can be a man who is only interested in developing friendships and close emotional ties with women. Consider the challenge of a man who is heterosexual, in a relationship with a woman, but his friends, mentors, and support network are overwhelmingly women. If his intimate partner does not understand these bonds as purely emotional, this might lead to various relationship challenges if she becomes jealous over the content and context of these connections. Sometimes, experiences in childhood (particularly trauma) can influence this emotional connection. For example, a boy who is bullied by other boys or who witnesses and experiences harm from a father or father figure may disassociate from boys and men, and find that they only create emotional connections with women. This could potentially lead an individual into having an emotional affair, where they share secrets and emotional connection with a person who is not their intimate partner.

Homoromantic can be more common due to gender role training. Early in childhood, boys and girls begin to notice differences in sex and begin to harbor stereotypes about the opposite sex, and while doing so, mostly create emotional bonds with and friendships to those who are the same sex. While children grow into dating ages and begin to develop sexual interests, emotional connections often change and the individual develops emotional connections to both sexes. For some, their connection emotionally to people of the same sex continues to be dominant, and people who are homoromantic might have a difficult time with connections in general with the opposite sex. I believe there are a significant number of male, heterosexual, domestic violence offenders who are homoromantic - and this explains much of their challenges in intimate partner relationships. They are only sexually interested in women, but all their emotional ties are to men. Their friends, their support, their sense of entertainment are all tied to other men. They can sometimes actively dislike women on emotional and mental levels (and be misogynistic as a part of this), and have a very difficult

time creating any sort of bonds outside of sex. Some men will flit from sexual encounter to sexual encounter, have children with several women, but never have a relationship that lasts beyond a short time frame. Gender role training often greatly supports this kind of emotional connection, and homoromantic leanings can lead to fathers having a difficult time with daughters, and mothers having a difficult time with sons.

Bioromantic seems like an emotional/romantic attachment that has the potential to be the healthiest, in that this person will form bonds with both men and women. They often are simply interested in connection with others who share values and meaning, who have similar interests, who they enjoy spending time with - and all of these not attached specifically to the person's sex.

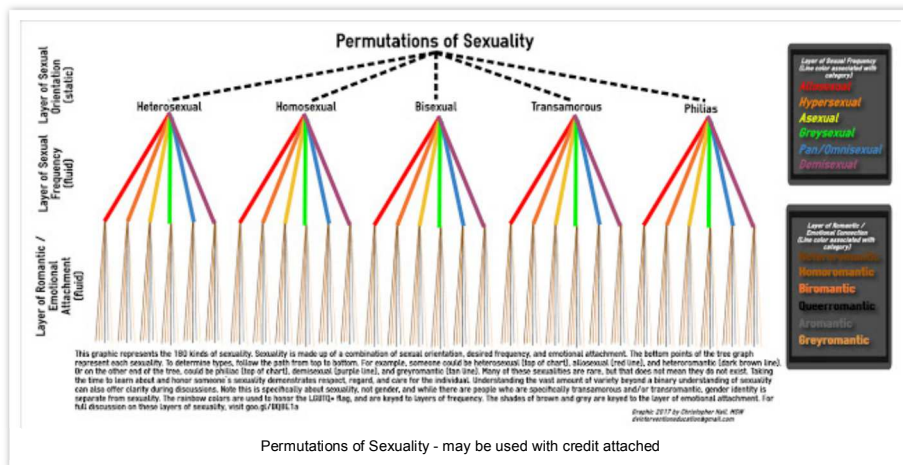
Each of these three romantic/emotional connections discussed so far can feed into heterosexism, cissexism, and homophobia in different ways. For a heteroromantic, they may in their distaste for the same sex have great disdain for people who are gay, cannot imagine an emotional connection at all, and for someone who is gay, they may be oppressive toward other gay people due to this distaste and can create toxic relationships. Someone who is homoromantic may recognize (consciously or subconsciously) that they only are interested in friendships with the same sex, and may adamantly oppose the idea of homosexuality due to fears that their connection with the same sex might make people think they are gay. This distaste or hatred of people who are gay can be a combination of self-loathing, judgment of sexual behavior, or even a judgment of emotional attachment. Someone who is bioromantic might enjoy connection with both men and women, but be judgmental of people who are transgender, or still make assumptions about how sexual behavior should happen despite that more balanced emotional connection.

Queerromantic is attachments mainly to people who are in the LGBTQ+ community. On occasion this emotional/romantic attraction is specific to one aspect of the community (such as romantic/emotional ties to transgender people), but due to the more validating nature of a community with common ties, this individual might have a difficult time forming connections with anyone outside of that community.

Aromantic is someone who does not like having emotional ties to anyone. They often are introverted, exclude themselves from social gatherings, and have few, if any friends or supports. With someone who is aromantic, they may keep distance between themselves and others (such as main sources of interaction being connected to online interactions), or cut ties with people who they once were associated with (such as distance from family). Someone who is aromantic, may still have layers of desired frequency and sexual orientation, but may fulfill these desires mainly via masturbation and/or sexually explicit media.

Greyromantic, like greysexual, is infrequent interest in connections with others. This may be much like aromantic, but this person will have a few close ties to others, or have occasional desire to have social interaction. It may ebb and flow, but this person is just as (or even more) content to be alone as having a specific intimate partner relationship.

In conclusion, understanding these layers of sexuality can be critical to respectful dialog, but also can be very useful in considering some specific circumstances of an abuser's pattern of relationship choices, history of emotional connections in general, and where discussion of a healthy support system may fit. I created a graphical representation of these 180 sexualities in the chart below:



***This article would not have been possible without discussions and information I have gathered from the asexual online community. I have had direct chats with individuals who I do not have names for, and have been particularly inspired by work focused on romantic/emotional connections via this graphic (I am unclear on the identity of the original author).*

****Thank you specifically to Darlene Pineda for specific wording and feedback regarding the section on transamory.*

Posted by Christopher Hall at 11:21



Labels: [allosexual](#), [aromantic](#), [asexual](#), [bioromantic](#), [demisexual](#), [greyromantic](#), [greysexual](#), [heteroromantic](#), [homoromantic](#), [hypersexual](#), [LGBTQ+](#), [omnisexual](#), [permutations](#), [philiias](#), [queerromantic](#), [sexual frequency](#), [sexuality](#)