



Creation and Validation of a Scale to Measure Belief in Performative Bisexuality

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Abstract

Bisexual individuals are subject to prejudice and discrimination of various forms, from within both the heterosexual and gay communities. Stereotypes include views of bisexual individuals as hypersexual, promiscuous, and confused about their orientation. Experiences with such prejudices can lead bisexual individuals to experience isolation, anxiety, and depression. Belief in performative bisexuality (BPB), the belief that bisexual women perform (or should perform) sexually with other women, primarily for the pleasure of others, is a particularly pernicious stereotype, potentially implying denial of bisexual women's sexual identity and disregard of their experiences and preferences. Assessing BPB is important for studying the phenomenon; however, to our current knowledge, no validated psychometric instruments exist for measuring it. A pool of 28 Likert-type items created to tap the BPB construct was administered to 457 online survey participants, predominantly university students. Content-based refinement and factor analysis resulted in a 12-item Likert-type scale for measuring BPB. This scale demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha=.87$) and predicted associations with subject demographics and scenario-based items assessing BPB. The BPB scale is offered as a reliable instrument with good initial evidence for validity, for measuring BPB in general research populations. Uses, limitations, and implications will be discussed.

Introduction

- Research on sexuality tends to focus on binary sexualities like heterosexuality and homosexuality.
- Bisexuality is often seen as a "transitory period," a phase, or as experimentation; in other words, a bisexual identity is considered invalid, or not real (Fahs 2009; Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Alarie & Gaudet, 2013).
- Bisexual people are often excluded from gay spaces, or not seen as members of the LGBTQ community (Bradford, 2004).
- Bisexual identities are delegitimized by heterosexual acts of experimentation, as female-female kissing in party settings is often seen as a heterosexual act done for male pleasure (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Lannutti & Denes, 2012).
- Bisexuals are believed to be unable to commit to monogamy, and also are viewed by others as having a higher likelihood of contracting HIV/AIDS as a result of this promiscuity (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Blake, Bastian & Denson, 2016; Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Halperin, 2009; Klesse, 2011)
- The term "performative bisexuality" delineates women acting in a manner that is perceived as "homoerotic" with other women, primarily to please, or tease, heterosexual men and gain their attention, our study is meant to legitimize this term by creating a psychometric scale in order to measure it (Fahs, 2009).

Method

Participants

The original N of this study was 457, consisting largely of undergraduate volunteers who received the incentive of course extra credit for participating, but also included a number of participants found through social media publicity. After inspecting BPB items for logically inconsistent response patterns 30 participants were removed (6.6%) leaving a total of 427. 85 participants were male (19.9%), 288 were female (67.4%), 15 responded with "other" (3.5%), and 39 gave no response (9.9%). Participants ranged from age 18 to over 32 (mean= 21.3 years, SD= 3.87). 265 participants were straight (62.1%), 38 were bisexual (8.9%), 36 were gay (8.4%), 22 were pansexual (5.6%), 13 identified as "other" (3%), 8 were asexual (1.9%), and 45 gave no response (10.5%).

Procedure

Participants were recruited from three sources: (1) student researchers' social networks--uAsing both online social media platforms and in-person contacts, (2) following in-person interviews conducted as part of a related study, and (3) in exchange for extra credit at a small public liberal-arts university.

Individuals who chose to participate did so at a time and from a computer of their choice. All responses were anonymous. Ethical oversight was provided by the Institutional Review Board of the university referred to above; informed consent was presented to each participant on screen before they began the survey. The full survey consisted of about 100 questions, most of which were related to bisexuality, sexual aggression, and related topics. All data were analyzed using R and JASP.

Results

Parallel analysis suggested three factors for the men only dataset and two factors for the monosexual dataset (Table 1), however, in both cases a single factor solution worked well also ($\alpha=.87$ for both samples).

Table 1. Factor loadings for the belief in performative bisexuality scale (BPBS) in two samples, in straight males (N=96) and in monosexual individuals (N=323).

item	Men Only				Monosexuals		
	F1	F2	F3	h2	F1	F2	h2
The phrase "Gay until graduation" means a person has same-sex relationships in college but not afterward. This is true of many women who say that they are bisexual.	.69	-	-	.49	.76	-	.51
When bisexual women have sexual relations with women, it is generally for male pleasure rather than their own.	.66	-	-	.49	.65	-	.48
The majority of bisexual women have made out with another woman at least once, for someone else's enjoyment.					.64	-	.40
After a few drinks, bisexual women will have sex with any other reasonably attractive woman who is willing.	.72	-	-	.53	.63	-	.42
Women often pretend to be bisexual.	-	-	-	.38	.61	-	.34
It is easier for a man to convince a bisexual woman to have sex with him than a heterosexual woman.	.70	-	-	.60	.58	-	.44
On average, bisexual women are more easily turned on and more interested in sex than straight women or lesbians.	.77	-	-	.58	.55	-	.39
If two bisexual woman are going to be sexual with each other, there would be no harm in asking them to make a video so others could enjoy the experience, later.	-	-	.57	.55	-	.71	.53
<i>If a man wants his bisexual girlfriend to have sex with another woman just for his personal benefit, he needs to rethink his priorities.</i>	-	.60	-	.33	-	.61	.27
If a bisexual woman is dating a man who is interested in seeing two women have sex, then she should agree to do it for him.	-	.73	-	.65	-	.51	.46
Bob is dating Christine, who is bisexual. Bob has asked, politely, to have a threesome with Christine's former girlfriend, who is quite willing. At this point, Christine would have to be pretty selfish to refuse.	-	-	.75	.55	-	.49	.33
Imagine a girl who says she is bisexual. Friends and acquaintances at a wild party want her to dance and grind with another girl, a stranger, who is clearly willing. She should at least consider doing it, for her friends' enjoyment.	-	.48	-	.41	-	.45	.42

BPBS scores predicted lower ratings of harm to a bisexual woman in a hypothetical BPB vignette ($r= -.56, p<.001$) and higher rating of responsibility for the situation ($r=.46, p<.001$). In response to another hypothetical BPB scenario participants with higher BPBS scores were more likely to recommend giving a bisexual woman alcohol ($r=.46, p<.001$) or reminding her of past same sex experiences ($r=.46, p<.001$) to increase the chances of bisexual performance and to believe that she actually wished to engage in performative bisexual acts ($r=.50, p<.001$).

Discussion

BPBS scores show positive correlations with BPB vignettes and scenarios: belief in performative bisexuality is associated with stereotyped perceptions of bisexual women and hypothetical sexual aggression against them. These findings, combined with high observed internal consistency, provide initial evidence of scale and construct validity. Belief that bisexual females participate (or should participate) in same-sex actions for male pleasure appears to be a measurable construct.

Limitations: There are indications that either the scale or the construct lack specificity when applied to stereotyping of bisexual women: the scale may be measuring general anti-bisexual stereotypes instead of BPB. Other limitations include use of a sample consisting mainly of college students on a liberal campus, with a disproportionate number of people from (or explicitly supportive of) LGBTQ+ communities; this might have reduced variability in BPB and other stereotypes.

Future directions: This scale should be applied to more diverse samples, with survey or research designs tailored to test hypotheses about BPB versus other stereotypes, and bisexual-specific versus generalized sexual aggression.

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