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“All of My Lovers Fit Into This Scale”: Sexual Minority Individuals’ Responses to Two Novel Measures of Sexual Orientation

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ABSTRACT

Previous qualitative research on traditional measures of sexual orientation raise concerns regarding how well these scales capture sexual minority individuals’ experience of sexuality. The present research focused on the critique of two novel scales developed to better capture the way sexual and gender minority individuals conceptualize sexuality. Participants were 179 sexual minority (i.e., gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, asexual) individuals who identified as cisgender (n = 122) and transgender (n = 57). Participants first completed the new scales, then provided qualitative responses regarding how well each scale captured their sexuality. The Sexual-Romantic Scale enabled the measurement of sexual and romantic attraction to each sex independently (same-sex and other-sex). Participants resonated with the way the Sexual-Romantic scale disaggregated sexual and romantic attraction. Although cisgender monosexual (lesbian/gay) individuals positively responded to the separation of same- and other-sex attraction, individuals with either plurisexual (bisexual, pansexual, or fluid) or transgender identities found the binary conceptualization of sex/gender problematic. The Gender-Inclusive Scale incorporated same- and other-sex attraction as well as dimensions of attraction beyond those based on sex (attraction to masculine, feminine, androgynous, and gender non-conforming individuals). The incorporation of dimensions of sexual attraction outside of sex in the Gender-Inclusive Scale was positively regarded by participants of all identities. Findings indicate that the Sexual-Romantic and Gender-Inclusive scales appear to address some of the concerns raised in previous research regarding the measurement of sexual orientation among sexual minority individuals.

KEYWORDS

Gender identity; monosexual; plurisexual; sexual minority; sexual orientation

Previous qualitative research raises concerns regarding how well traditional measures of sexual orientation capture sexual minority individuals’ experience of sexuality (Galupo, Davis, Gryniewicz, & Mitchell, 2014a; Galupo, Mitchell, Gyniewicz, & Davis, 2014b). The present research focused on the qualitative critique of two novel scales developed to better capture the way
sexual and gender minority individuals conceptualize sexuality. In an effort to better understand the diversity of sexual minority experience, analyses focused on the patterns of responses across both sexual orientation identity (monosexual, plurisexual, and asexual) and gender identity (cisgender and transgender).

Sexual orientation diversity and measurement

Sexual orientation is understood as an internal mechanism that directs both sexual and romantic interests (Diamond, 2003; LeVay & Baldwin, 2012; Rosario & Schrimshaw, 2014). The Kinsey Scale is one of the most commonly used sexual orientation scales and is composed of a single continuum with heterosexual on one end and homosexual on the other (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948). Many researchers use a contemporary alternative to the Kinsey Scale, which similarly conceptualizes sexual orientation on a single continuum with exclusively heterosexual and exclusively gay/lesbian labels at the extreme end points (Savin-Williams, 2010). More recently, sexual orientation has been conceptualized as encompassing identity, attraction, and behavior (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994; van Anders, 2015). The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG) was designed with the intent to better characterize both the multidimensionality of sexual orientation and the experience of bisexuality. The KSOG expanded the measurement of sexual orientation by prompting individuals to rate behavior, attraction, fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, lifestyle, and self-identification, in three contexts: past, present, and ideal (Klein, Sepekoff, & Wolf, 1985).

Both the Kinsey Scale and the KSOG were developed based on research that made sexual diversity central to their conceptualization of sexual orientation. Sexual minority individuals do report being familiar with these scales enough to indicate their typical responses; however, they raise a number of concerns surrounding the way sexual orientation is conceptualized and measured by these scales. Specifically, sexual minority individuals question whether their experience of sexuality is truly represented in traditional measures of sexual orientation (Galupo et al., 2014b). In particular, participants question the way the Kinsey Scale and the KSOG require individuals to rate same- and other-sex desire as opposite poles on the same continuum, rather than independently. In addition, participants note that neither scale captures the complexity and fluidity of their sexuality.

Additional qualitative research has shown that the criticisms of the Kinsey Scale and the KSOG vary among sexual minority individuals based on both their sexual orientation and gender identity. That is, there are important differences between individuals who endorse monosexual (lesbian, gay, homosexual) versus plurisexual labels (bisexual, pansexual, queer, fluid),
and between individuals who identify as transgender versus cisgender (Galupo et al., 2014a). Among a sample of all sexual minority (non-heterosexual) participants, those with plurisexual and transgender identities were most likely to report that their experience of sexuality could not be represented accurately by these traditional scales and specifically challenge the way sexual orientation is conceptualized as anchored on binary dimensions of sex and gender. In addition, they critiqued traditional sexual orientation scales as normalizing monosexual and cisgender experience and consequently distorting and even erasing experiences that fall outside of that conceptualization. These findings suggest that to better capture a true range of experiences, newer conceptualizations of sexual orientation that encompass an understanding of nonnormative/nonbinary identities should be considered.

Recent research, particularly that which includes sexual minority individuals, emphasizes sexual fluidity (Diamond, 2008), relational context (e.g., polyamory, monamory; Manley, Diamond, & van Anders, 2015) and number of partners (van Anders, 2015) as aspects of sexuality not currently captured in traditional measures of sexual orientation. Other research explores the limits of language and labels used when describing sexual orientation across diverse samples (Dyar, Feinstein, & London, 2015; Galupo, Mitchell, & Davis, 2015; Rust, 2000). van Anders (2015) has recently proposed sexual configuration theory (SCT) as a more inclusive model of sexuality that takes into account all these variables. Specifically, SCT moves beyond sexual orientation by integrating gender/sex and diverse sexualities and, in doing so, presents a more nuanced understanding of partnered sexuality. With the advent of expanded theories of sexuality, it makes sense that new measures of sexual orientation should also be developed and explored.

**Purpose of the present study**

To begin reconceptualizing the measurement of sexual orientation in ways that better represent sexual minority experience, the present research explored sexual minority individuals’ qualitative critiques of two novel sexual orientation scales: the Sexual-Romantic Scale and the Gender-Inclusive Scale (see Figure 1). The Sexual-Romantic Scale was designed for the present research to address dual concerns raised by sexual minority participants with regard to traditional measures of sexual orientation (Galupo et al., 2014b). This scale was constructed to measure same-sex and other-sex attraction on independent dimensions rather than on the same continuum (consistent with Storms’s 1980 2-dimensional model of sexual orientation), and also to disaggregate the ratings of sexual and romantic components of attraction. The Gender-Inclusive Scale was designed for the present research to address concerns raised by sexual
minority participants generally (Galupo et al., 2014b) and to specifically
address the concerns of plurisexual and transgender individuals (Galupo
et al., 2014a). This scale was constructed to measure same-sex and other-
sex attraction on independent dimensions rather than on a single con-
tinuum, and to also incorporate dimensions of attraction beyond those based on sex. We incorporated both traditional components of attraction
(same-sex and other-sex) with the intention of capturing more normative conceptualizations of sexuality (monosexual, cisgender). We also incorpo-
rated novel components of attraction (masculine, feminine, androgynous,
and gender non-conforming) to address the concerns of plurisexual and
transgender individuals.

Feminist intersectional theory has been suggested as a useful framework
for considering the critique of sexual orientation measures (Galupo et al.,
2014a) as it allows for the examination of relationships among social iden-
tities as intersecting categories of oppression and inequality (Collins,
2000; Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005; Shields, 2008). The present research uses a
feminist intersectional framework to explore patterns of responses across
both sexual orientation (monosexual, plurisexual, asexual) and gender iden-
tity (cisgender, transgender). Studying sexual orientation within this frame-
work allows an understanding of the intersection of systems that assume and
privilege normative identities (heterosexual/cisgender) and that render non-
normative identities (sexual minority/transgender) invisible or abnormal.
Analyzing patterns of responses across participant identity is particularly
useful for understanding variations in how sexual orientation scales are
regarded by individuals with different identities.

Sexual-Romantic Scale
I am sexually attracted to individuals of the same-sex
I am romantically attracted to individuals of the same-sex
I am sexually attracted to individuals of the other-sex
I am romantically attracted to individuals of the other-sex

Gender-Inclusive Scale
I am attracted to individuals of the same-sex
I am attracted to individuals of the other-sex
I am attracted to masculine individuals
I am attracted to feminine individuals
I am attracted to androgynous individuals
I am attracted to gender non-conforming individuals

Figure 1. Novel scales of sexual orientation. Both scales rated on a 7-point scale between 1 =
almost never true to 7 = almost always true. *Based on the present findings the first two items
on the scale would have better resonated with sexual minority participants had they read: “I am
attracted to women,” and “I am attracted to men.” This is the suggested wording for use of this
scale in future research.
Method

Recruitment

Participants were recruited for a study on the experience and expression of sexual orientation among sexual minorities. To participate, participants had to certify that they did not identify as heterosexual. Recruitment announcements were initially cross-posted on social media and networking Web sites, message boards, professional Listservs, and throughout the local community with the intention of capitalizing on snowball techniques. Targeted recruitment was used to increase participation within bisexual/plurisexual, transgender communities. Participants reported learning about the study from a variety of sources: 67% of participants heard about the study through social media (Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter), 14.1% through online research Web sites (social psychology networks, psychology research on the Internet, and gayresearch.com), 18.3% heard via e-mail or “other,” and one participant gave no response (.6%).

Participants

Participants represented a convenience sample of 179 individuals who completed an online survey and identified as non-heterosexual. These individuals represented 40.22% of all individuals who completed the survey online (n = 445); 266 were excluded because they did not answer at least one of the questions of interest. About one third of individuals identified as transgender, under the transgender umbrella, or having a transgender history (31.8%), while the remainder identified as cisgender (68.2%). Participants endorsed monosexual (27.9%), plurisexual (68.8%), and asexual (3.3%) labels. Monosexual participants self-identified as having a primary sexual orientation identify of lesbian (56.0%), gay (42.0%), or homosexual (2.0%). Plurisexual participants self-identified as having a primary sexual orientation identify of bisexual (36.1%), pansexual (25.4%), queer (31.1%), fluid (2.5%), and other (5.6%). Participants ranged from ages 18 to 65 (M = 26.5, SD = 9.2). The bulk of this sample identified as White/Caucasian (78.2%). Approximately one fifth (21.8%) of the sample identified as racial minorities—specifically, 2.8% as Asian/Asian American, 2.2% as Black/African American, 2.8% as Hispanic/Latino, 4.5% as Biracial/Multiracial, 5.6% as Other, and 3.9% gave no answer. In terms of socioeconomic status, participants came from a variety of different backgrounds: 19% identified as working class, 19.5% as lower-middle class, 34% as middle class, 16.8% as upper-middle class, 1.1% as upper class, 7.3% did not know, and 1.7% did not answer. The highest level of education for the sample varied greatly: 1.7% had some high school, 6.7% had a high school diploma or GED, 40.7% had some college, 19.0% had a bachelor’s-level degree,
14% were pursuing a graduate or advanced degree, 11.2% obtained a master’s degree, and 2.8% obtained a doctoral degree.

**Measures**

As part of a larger online study, participants first completed the Kinsey Scale and Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG), followed by two new scales. Qualitative analysis of responses to the Kinsey Scale and the KSOG are published elsewhere (Galupo et al., 2014a, 2014b). The present analysis focused on participant responses to two novel scales of sexual orientation: The Sexual Romantic Scale and Gender-Inclusive Scale. After being presented with each measure, participants were asked to respond to the open-ended prompt: “In what ways did this scale capture, or fail to capture, your sexuality?”

**Sexual-romantic scale**

Designed for the present research, the Sexual-Romantic Scale allowed participants to consider same-sex and other-sex attraction across sexual and romantic dimensions. Participants were asked to rate their levels of sexual and romantic attractions separately on a 7-point Likert scale, for same-sex and other-sex attraction independently. The Likert scale ranged from 1 = *almost never true* to 7 = *almost always true*. Participants were asked to respond to “I am (sexually/romantically) attracted to individuals of the (same-sex/other-sex).”

**Gender-inclusive scale**

Designed for the present research, the Gender-Inclusive Scale allowed participants to consider the nature of their attraction across six dimensions. Researchers typically conceive only two dimensions: same-sex and other-sex. The present scale also added additional categories of masculine, feminine, androgynous, and gender non-conforming. Participants were asked to respond to “I am attracted to (individuals of the same-sex/individuals of the other-sex/masculine individuals/feminine individuals/androgynous individuals/gender non-conforming individuals”). Participants were asked to rate their levels of attraction separately for each dimension on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *almost never true* to 7 = *almost always true*.

**Procedure**

Participants first completed demographic information about themselves and were then presented with four sexual orientation measures: the Kinsey Scale, KSOG, Sexual Romantic Scale, and Gender-Inclusive Scale, in that order. Upon completion of each measure, they were asked, “In what ways did this
scale capture, or fail to capture, your sexuality?” Our previous work details the responses to traditional scales (Galupo et al., 2014a, 2014b). The present analysis focused on participants’ open-ended answers to this question for the two novel scales (Sexual Romantic and Gender-Inclusive).

**Thematic analysis**

Using an inductive method, we sought to characterize the way in which sexual minority participants responded to two novel scales of sexual orientation. Participant responses varied, including both pointed critiques of the scales and characterizations of sexuality in general. Thematic analysis for each scale was conducted independently. After identifying themes, patterns of responses were analyzed across sexual and gender identity.

Members of the research team included a professor of psychology, a graduate student in counseling psychology, and an MA in clinical psychology. In a recursive process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), participant responses were discussed several times before a list of themes was generated by the research team. Overall coding categories for each independent scale were generated via collaborative group consultation by all members of the research team, after each team member had familiarized themselves with the responses of each scale. After several rounds of discussion, researchers reviewed the list of themes and noted any topics that occurred in participant responses. Team members then individually reviewed the data according to the initial list of codes. Through continued meeting and evaluation, the initial list of codes was transformed into the themes described below. Themes were developed independently for each scale.

Codes were collapsed and expanded to arrive at four themes for the Sexual-Romantic Scale and four for the Gender-Inclusive Scale. The present analysis focuses on the explication of these themes, as well as a comparison of the patterns of responses across sexual orientation identity (monosexual and plurisexual) and gender identity (cisgender and transgender). Quoted participant responses are used to illustrate themes. Quotes are accompanied by participants’ self-identified sexual orientation and gender identity.

**Results and discussion**

The results of the present study focus on participants’ feedback of two novel sexual orientation scales. However, the present analysis exists as part of a larger study that framed participants’ responses to the questions analyzed here. Prior to critiquing these novel scales, participants first completed the Kinsey Scale and KSOG. After responding to those two scales, participants completed the Sexual-Romantic Scale and the Gender-Inclusive scale, in that order. When interpreting participant responses, then, it is important to
consider the comparative content created by the order of scale presentation. When analyzing participant responses to the two questions, it is clear that many participants were critiquing the novel scales in ways that made explicit their comparison to the traditional scales and to each other. For example, one participant noted of the Sexual-Romantic Scale “This more accurately captures my sexual identity snapshot... has a better range.” Because this assessment was completed after rating the Kinsey and KSOG, the comparison is made in reference to these traditional scales. However, the statement should not be interpreted as comparative in relation to the Gender-Inclusive scale, which had not yet been presented to the participant. Another participant made the comparison explicit by saying, “I like this one best of the current 3.” In response to the Gender-Inclusive scale, one participant noted, “This scale is so much easier to answer than the previous ones because it is about gender presentation and identity more than sex characteristics!” Because of the order of presentation, this comparison could potentially be in relation to all of the other three scales (Kinsey, KSOG, Sexual-Romantic).

**Sexual-romantic scale**

Four basic themes emerged from participants’ critiques of the Sexual-Romantic Scale: (1) sexual/romantic dimensions; (2) same-sex and other-sex distinction; (3) who and what is left out; and (4) measurement. Table 1 provides an overview of the thematic structure as well as the patterns of findings across identity.

**Sexual/romantic dimensions**

Because the Sexual-Romantic Scale was conceptually organized around the distinction between sexual and romantic dimensions of attraction, it is not surprising that most participants commented on this distinction. One participant noted, “This is a lot better, since it separates sexual and romantic attraction and allows for intersecting both of them” (agender femme lesbian). Participants expressed that the distinction allowed them to represent the way that sexual and romantic attraction do not always mirror one another: “I really appreciated that this separated the concepts of sexual and romantic attraction because I find them to not always coincide for me” (cisgender lesbian) and “I liked the divide between sexual and romantic attraction, because I am sexually attracted to the same gender, but not romantically, and that’s an important part of my identity” (“heteroflexible” pansexual cisgender woman).

The majority of the participants saw the sexual/romantic distinction as resonating with their experience of sexuality, and this finding was consistent across sexual and gender identity. That is, individuals with both monosexual...
and plurisexual identities mentioned this as important, as did cisgender and transgender individuals: “Splitting up romantic and sexual attraction was very helpful” (pansexual FtM).

The difference between sexual and romantic attraction is the key. I have seen men and other-gendered people whom I consider sexually attractive, although I would never consider a romantic relationship with them. I think this scale captures that well. (cisgender lesbian, female-identified-attracted)

I like that it differentiates sexual attraction and romantic attraction because that's something I do in my mind; I'm always fantasizing about the same sex, but I don't often feel like I could have a loving relationship with the same-sex. (cisgender lesbian).

That participants resonated with the distinction between sexual and romantic dimensions of attraction central to the Sexual-Romantic Scale is consistent with sexual minority criticisms of the Kinsey scale for failing to do the same (Galupo et al., 2014b) and with theories of sexual orientation that acknowledge aspects of both lust and love (Diamond, 2003) or eroticism and nurturance (van Anders, 2015). Although individuals who identify on the asexual spectrum often make the sexual/romantic distinction explicit by endorsing both a sexual and romantic label (as in our participant who identifies as asexual bi-romantic), it is important to note that this distinction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Patterns of themes across identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual-romantic</td>
<td>Sexual/romantic dimensions</td>
<td>Generally noted across all identities as an important separation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Relevant to both asexual and verisexual participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same-sex and other-sex</td>
<td></td>
<td>Generally noted across all identities as an important distinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distinction</td>
<td></td>
<td>Binary assumptions in “same-” and “other-” sex language was more likely to be explicitly acknowledged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>as problematic by plurisexual and transgender individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who and what is left out</td>
<td></td>
<td>Plurisexual and transgender individuals were most likely to point out the ways that this scale left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>out specific identities and conceptualizations of sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement</td>
<td></td>
<td>Expressed similarly across all identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-inclusive</td>
<td>Dimensions of gender</td>
<td>Generally regarded positively across all identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inclusion of masculinity/femininity and androgy/ gender non-conformity resonated with participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same-sex and other-sex</td>
<td></td>
<td>Binary assumptions of “same” and “other” sex were noted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distinction</td>
<td></td>
<td>Regarded as less problematic than for the Sexual-Romantic scale because of the dimensions of gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>added to this scale</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is left out</td>
<td></td>
<td>Plurisexual and transgender individuals were most likely to express the ways this scale left out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>certain conceptualizations of sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement</td>
<td></td>
<td>Expressed similarly across all identities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Thematic structure and patterns across identity.
was relevant to verisexual\(^3\) individuals as well. In fact, many sexual minority participants saw this as central to the way they conceptualize and experience their own sexuality.

Although the majority of the comments related to the sexual/romantic distinction were positive, a few participants noted the distinction as problematic. Several participants expressed that these dimensions were more integrated for them: “I feel like romantic and sexual attraction are not separate entities of attraction, but sexual attraction is part of romantic attraction” (cisgender lesbian) and “My sexual and romantic feelings are not so separate from one another. They interplay and affect each other” (cisgender bisexual woman). Other participants questioned the focus on sexual/romantic dimension and felt that the emphasis missed their experience of sexuality altogether:

The main problem with it that I have is that (for me anyway) it depends on the situation. For example, I’m really not sexually attracted to any straight men, the sexual attraction is just toward gay sex. In other words, I like gay sex, and want it, but if a guy’s not gay, I’m never interested and not sexually attracted. I’m only sexually attracted to men when I find out that they are gay or bisexual or whatever...open to having sex with me. (genderqueer bisexual)

Being pansexual, it isn’t about sexual or romantic attraction. It’s about getting to know the person, and falling in love with who that person is. (cisgender pansexual woman).

**Same-sex and other-sex distinction**

In addition to separating out sexual and romantic dimensions, the Sexual-Romantic Scale allowed for the independent assessment of same-sex and other-sex attraction. The general separation of the two was positively noted by participants. For example, a number of participants expressed sentiments similar to the following participant: “I like that I can consider same-sex and other-sex attraction separately” (bisexual cisgender woman). This overall finding resonates with sexual minority individuals’ criticisms of traditional sexual orientation scales for assessing same- and other-sex attraction on a single dimension (Galupo et al., 2014b). It is also consistent with Storms’s (1980) proposal of a two-dimensional model for sexual orientation, in which heterosexuality and homosexuality are treated as separate, independent factors.

Although participants responded positively to being able to independently rate their same-sex and other-sex attraction in theory, many participants problematized the way the scale anchored sexual orientation on dichotomous notions of sex: “I appreciate the separation between romantic and sexual attraction. I also appreciate the use of the word ‘other’ sex rather than ‘opposite.’ It is still problematic that the language assumes only two sexes” (cisgender pansexual woman); “I do not believe in binaries, so ‘same or other’ are terms I do not resonate with” (genderqueer/gender(less) queer). Participants’ responses often suggested that gender, rather than sex, should
be the main consideration in conceptualizing sexual orientation: “the ‘Other Sex’—aren’t there variations on a person’s sex? I don’t always know what sex someone is when I’m attracted to them, although I can see their gender presentation” (cisgender bisexual woman who prefers not to label); and “This is better because it isn’t time dependent, but same-gender would be more appropriate in my situation” (transgender gay man with a history of 21 years living as a woman).

Issues surrounding “same-sex” and “other-sex” language were raised much more often by plurisexual and transgender individuals, who often mentioned identity (either theirs or those they are attracted to) as central to their critique: “For a transgender person, what is ‘same sex?’” (queer FtM).

Once again, neither same-sex or other-sex make any sense for my identity. We need a paradigm that doesn’t identify sexual object choice in relation to the subject’s gender/sex arrangement. (trans woman for whom none of the sexual orientation labels work)

I don’t like the words ‘same-sex’ and ‘other-sex’ because it assumes there are only two sexes, and there aren’t. I have a romantic attraction to many genders and the person’s sex makes no difference to me. (FtX genderqueer queer).

Participants’ critique of the Sexual-Romantic Scale related to the use of binary conceptualizations of sex and gender is similar to the critiques directed toward the Kinsey Scale and the KSOG (Galupo et al., 2014b). In particular, the use of “same-sex” and “other-sex” was seen as problematic in that it reinforces binary notions of sex and gender and because it requires individuals to match their sex/gender designation to that of the individuals to whom they are attracted. This measurement issue speaks to a larger issue about the way sexual orientation is conceptualized generally, requiring a designation of one’s sex/gender in relation to that of a target individual or group (Galupo, Henise, & Mercer, 2016; van Anders, 2015; Weinrich, 2014).

**Who and what is left out**

Participants often identified what was not captured in the conceptualization of sexual orientation implicit in the Sexual-Romantic Scale. Participants commented mostly on transgender and nonbinary identities being outside of the scale’s conceptualization. These points were most often articulated by individuals who themselves identified as plurisexual and/or transgender:

I like this one best of the current 3, but it still renders transgender invisible or the self-evaluator has to determine whether trans partners are ‘same’ or ‘other’ sex as oneself, as opposed to being gender queer or some other appropriate third option. (cisgender bisexual woman).

I’m more attracted to androgynous and two-spirited or middle-sex or trans. Those aren’t even options! Total rubbish. (pansexual post-op male-to-female trans woman).
The scale would indicate that I am attracted to men and women, which is true. But I am also attracted to transmen, transwomen, and other people who fall outside the gender binary. (gender non-conforming pansexual).

The scale is pretty simplistic, and as with the Kinsey scale fails to take into account the complexities of trans* identities. (pansexual male-to-female trans woman).

This is better than the other two scales. However, it does not account for those who identify as genderqueer or such. (genderfluid pansexual)

Similar to sexual minority individuals’ critiques of the Kinsey Scale and the KSOG (Galupo et al., 2014b), participants regarded the Sexual-Romantic Scale as leaving out individuals who conceptualize their identities in ways that are nonbinary (with regard to sex, gender, and sexual orientation). In some cases, participants described their attraction to particular gender identities (i.e., transgender, gender non-conforming), gender presentations (i.e., androgyny), relational elements (i.e., polyamory), and power dynamics (i.e., kink) as being left out of the scales’ conceptualization of sexuality.

Again, gender identity is missing. Also—my identity also includes poly and kink elements, which have not been part of any scale so far. I didn’t even think about them until just now, because none of the other scales even came close to allowing for that much queerness. (cisgender queer woman)

These critiques are consistent with recent research that has emphasized the importance of considering relational identity (Manley, Diamond, & van Anders, 2015; van Anders, 2015), number of partners, and power dynamics (van Anders, 2015) along with sexual identity and gender when conceptualizing sexual orientation.

**Measurement**

In addition to critiquing the conceptualization of sexual orientation inherent to the Sexual-Romantic Scale, participants also discussed measurement issues. The Sexual-Romantic Scale was seen as “too generalized, vague, and limiting” (agender pansexual), and led participants to question whether sexual orientation could be measured on any scale, as illustrated in the following two responses: “Honestly, I think it’s all too complicated to make a number or whatnot for everyone’s attraction” (gender fluid queer); and “Again, using numbers to quantify my feelings and my emotional attachment to others doesn’t feel like it’s accurately representing me” (cisgender gay man).

Several participants raised questions about the wording of the labels used to anchor the numbers on the scale as exemplified by the following two quotations: “Sometimes but often infrequently’ and ‘occasionally’ mean the same thing to me (cisgender bisexual woman); and “‘Almost never’ and ‘Almost always’ made
me a little unsure if this was a frequency or strength of attractions rating” (cisgender pansexual). No patterns across identity emerged in the way participants discussed measurement issues for this scale.

**Gender-inclusive scale**

There was a general overall positive reaction to the Gender-Inclusive Scale from sexual minority individuals. Participants, regardless of identity, expressed a sense that this scale captured something the other scales did not. For example, one participant responded, “Nicely done. This scale is the closest I have ever seen to capturing the depth and breadth of my identity in a quantifiable manner” (cisgender bisexual man). Another stated, “It was inclusive and I feel like someone reading this would understand accurately how I identify” (cisgender queer woman). One participant summed up the general response to the Gender-Inclusive Scale in the following way: “Perfect! All of my lovers fit into this scale” (queer trans* man).

When examining the content of participants’ critique of the Gender-Inclusive Scale, four basic themes emerged: (1) dimensions of gender; (2) same-sex and other-sex distinction; (3) what is left out; and (4) measurement. Table 1 provides an overview of the thematic structure as well as the patterns of findings across identity.

**Dimensions of gender**

Because the Gender-Inclusive Scale introduces dimensions of gender in ways that other measures of sexual orientation do not, the majority of participants’ comments related to this theme. Participants generally noted the inclusion of gender in a positive manner, as illustrated in the following quotations:

- Not all of the responses are dependent upon defining the sex of the target individual. PERFECT. Excellent!!! (queer trans man)

- It recognizes that what I may be attracted to about a person isn’t necessarily what sex organs that person has. (cisgender lesbian)

- I like this scale because it made me think more on the nature of my attraction without considering the sex of the individual. (cisgender gay man)

- This is the first survey I’ve seen that addresses attraction to gender-presentation across genders. This definitely applies to me. (cisgender bisexual woman)

Participants also commented on specific aspects of gender represented in the scale. Many noted the inclusion of masculinity and femininity and the way that resonated with their experience of sexuality.

- This one is also simplistic but in a more useful way than the previous. It shows I am open to different kinds of sexual energy in another person, and that I am most sexually drawn to qualities of masculinity. (cisgender bisexual woman)
In some cases, participants stated a need for more nuance in the way masculinity and femininity were assessed. For example, one participant noted,

I’m into masculinity when worn by women and femininity when worn by men. I find very masculine men unappealing. If the question about masculine individuals was broken into men and women my answers would be different. (cisgender lesbian who, every once in a blue moon, is into a guy)

I like how this scale measures sexual attraction to masculine/feminine individuals regardless of sex. That being said, I think the definitions of masculine and feminine are in themselves fluid and not all encompassing. (cisgender gay man).

Participants also specifically responded to the gendered dimensions of androgyny and gender non-conformity:

“In response to particular aspects of gender I’m usually attracted to more androgynous people, so I liked having a scale to represent that.” (cisgender pansexual woman)

“My preference for masculine females and androgynous females, as well as androgynous males and feminine males is better reflected in this scale.” (cisgender queer man).

“It acknowledges the androgynous and non-confirming individuals and allows me to express my attraction to them.” (gender fluid/androgynous pansexual)

“I am attracted to a gender presentation, and I like individuals who exhibit a combination of both masculine and feminine. Andro is great too!” (cisgender lesbian)

“Gender non-conforming is a nice addition because I identify as bisexual instead of pansexual because I’m never attracted to anyone who is completely ambiguous.” (cisgender bisexual woman)

Although the overwhelming response to gendered dimensions of attraction was positive, several participants expressed reservations about their inclusion:

I’m attracted to a specific blend of masculinity and femininity, that isn’t quite androgyny. Also, ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are really hard to define. (queer man of trans experience/male-identified attracted)

Because I have not encountered as many gender-nonconforming individuals in my dating history, it is hard to determine if I am equally attracted to them. I see no reason why not to be attracted to them, I just do not have enough experience in that area to give a good answer. (cisgender “classic bisexual” woman)

This scale fails to accurately measure sexual orientation because it includes irrelevant variables other than the sex of the individual and the person or people to whom he or she can be romantically attracted. (cisgender gay man)
**Same-sex and other-sex distinction**

Although participants appreciated the inclusion of gendered dimensions, they also noted the way the Gender-Inclusive Scale incorporated attraction to individuals of the same and other sexes. Most comments related to same-sex and other-sex attraction mirrored participants’ critique of this dimension on the Sexual-Romantic scale and problematized the way these dimensions are worded to inherently assume a binary conceptualization of sex. However, participants usually tempered their frustration with the same-sex and other-sex distinction by acknowledging the inclusion of the gendered dimensions.

“...The first two questions were still difficult to answer at large for me, but I can see their purpose much more once the other options are provided. These options so far were certainly the best.” (genderqueer queer)

“The same sex/other sex thing is still hard to figure out but the definition by gender of the attractee is helpful!” (transmasculine genderqueer queer)

Similar to their responses regarding same-sex and other-sex distinctions on the Sexual-Romantic Scale, the critique of this distinction for the Gender-Inclusive Scale was raised most often by plurisexual and/or transgender individuals.

**What is left out**

Although sexual minority participants generally found the Gender-Inclusive Scale to capture their experience of sexuality, a few disagreed. Most of these comments suggested that their sexuality had little to do with sex or gender as illustrated in the following quotation: “Attraction, for me, is not governed by gender” (cisgender bisexual woman). Instead, participants expressed their sexuality centered on other factors altogether:

I am attracted to people based on apparent health, their projected mood, identity and confidence, their interactions with me, their personalities, etc. In other words, individually, not as a group. (genderqueer queer)

This scale failed in that it focuses, again, on attraction to the individual’s qualities or traits, and not the underlying relationship I have with them. (cisgender bisexual man)

This scale failed to capture my sexual identity as it was primarily based on the sex or gender identity of those I’m attracted to, but for me, I’m more attracted to the person than the persons gender. (cisgender queer woman)

For some participants, sex and gender were not central to how they conceptualized their sexuality or attraction. Rather, participants suggested that it was the person and the relationship they had that informed their attraction. Consistent with sexual minority individuals’ critiques of the Kinsey Scale, and the KSOG (Galupo et al., 2014b) participants also criticized
the Gender-Inclusive Scale for not adequately capturing their experience of sexual fluidity: “It doesn’t really account for fluidity” (cisgender bisexual woman with a slight male preference).

**Measurement**

Participants’ responses to the Gender-Inclusive Scale spoke to a key issue of sexual orientation measurement. Sexual orientation is generally conceptualized in ways that require a designation of one’s sex/gender in relation to that of a target individual or group (Galupo, Henise, & Mercer, 2016; Van Anders, 2015). Participants responded favorably to the way four of the six items of the Gender-Inclusive Scale reduced measurement to a single dimension. This “focus on the beloved” approach (Weinrich, 2014) resonated with participants, as illustrated in the following quotations: “This is the key, it has more to do with the other person” (cisgender bisexual man); and “It doesn’t give me an identity, it just describes who I’m attracted to” (cisgender bisexual woman). Participants generally felt that this single dimension approach to measuring sexuality was more straightforward: “This is a concrete scale; ‘are you or are you not attracted to the following individuals?” (cisgender bisexual woman).

Several participants called into question the terminology used by the Gender-Inclusive Scale. By not distinguishing among different types of attraction (as one by the KSOG and the Sexual-Romantic Scale), the scope of the term attraction was unspecified:

It doesn’t really specify what it means by attraction, which could be good or bad, I suppose. If it means attraction in an all-encompassing way (emotional, etc.), that is a good thing. But if it means sexual attraction, all of my answers are wrong.

(cisgender asexual bi-romantic)

**Conclusions**

The present research investigated sexual minority individuals’ critique of the Sexual-Romantic and Gender-Inclusive scales of sexual orientation. We employed a thematic analysis of responses to an open-ended prompt regarding how each scale captured or failed to capture participants’ experience of sexuality. Because each scale was uniquely developed to address specific aspects of sexuality, analysis for each scale was conducted independently.

The Sexual-Romantic Scale was designed to disaggregate sexual and romantic aspects of attraction, and sexual minority participants of all identities responded positively to this aspect of the scale. Although asexual individuals endorse dual identity labels to make the distinction explicit (Flore, 2014; Przybylo, 2013), it is important to note that even verisexual individuals commented on the importance of measuring sexual and romantic
attraction on separate dimensions. Participants’ qualitative responses indicated the ways that sexual and romantic attraction did not always neatly align for them. Participants also positively noted the way this scale allowed separate measurement of same- and other-sex attraction. However, plurisexual and transgender participants often described the binary assumptions implicit in the language (“same-sex” and “other-sex”) as problematic. Relatedly, not all sexual minority participants felt this scale was inclusive and pointed out the ways that this scale left out certain aspects of sexuality. Participants noted that transgender and nonbinary identities fell outside this scale’s conceptualization of sexuality.

The Gender-Inclusive Scale was designed to retain traditional elements of attraction (same-sex and other-sex) but included four additional dimensions based on gender (attraction to masculine, feminine, androgynous, and gender non-conforming individuals). The inclusion of dimensions of gender was enthusiastically regarded by participants across all identities (monosexual, plurisexual; cisgender, transgender). Although attraction to “same-” and “other-sex” prompts were seen as problematic by some participants, their inclusion was regarded as less problematic (than for the Sexual-Romantic Scale, for example) because it was tempered by the gender dimensions. To strengthen this scale moving forward, we would recommend replacing these prompts to “I am attracted to women” and “I am attracted to men.” Participants noted that the scale’s conceptualization was inclusive of transgender and nonbinary individuals. Drawbacks were offered by individuals who conceptualize their sexuality as not focusing on sex or gender (but rather focused on the individual) or who view their sexuality in more fluid terms. Although this scale appealed to individuals with nonnormative identities (plurisexual and transgender), it is important to note that monosexual and cisgender individuals also found that gendered dimensions of attraction resonated with their experience and/or did not detract from the measurement of their sexuality.

**Limitations of the present study and directions for future research**

As our analysis was dependent on analyzing patterns across sexual orientation and gender, we employed an online recruitment strategy that is particularly useful for obtaining a large convenience sample of sexual minority participants (Riggle, Rostosky, & Reedy, 2005). Online sampling, however, has been shown to disproportionately represent educated, middle-class, White individuals (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2008), and our sample demographics are consistent with this trend. Interpretation of these data, therefore, should be done cautiously and within the noted demographics of the sample.

We used the broad term sexual minorities when recruiting participants for the study, which we intended to be inclusive of many different sexual identities. Potential participants may have been excluded if they did not
identify with the terminology we used. In addition, we were intentionally
inclusive in our recruitment to include sexual minorities who were also
gender minorities (either identified within the transgender spectrum or
those who had a transgender history or experience). It is important to note
that transgender and cisgender heterosexual individuals were not included in
this sample. Because individuals who identify as heterosexual experience a
range of both same-sex and other-sex desire (Morgan, 2012; Vrangalova &
Savin-Williams, 2010), future research is necessary to explore how
heterosexual individuals regard these novel scales as well.

The present research focused on qualitative responses to two novel sexual
orientation scales. These findings provide a first step in establishing the
conceptual groundwork necessary to evaluate these measures. Additional
quantitative research will be necessary to understand how these critiques
factor into participants’ overall estimation of these scales.

Implications for development of new measures of sexual orientation

The present findings have implications for researchers interested in developing
new measures of sexual orientation. The novel scales developed for this
research (Sexual-Romantic, Gender-Inclusive) were designed to address
previous critiques raised by sexual minority individuals (Galupo et al.,
2014a, 2014b).

Both the Sexual-Romantic and the Gender-Inclusive scales incorporated the
independent measurement of same-sex and other-sex attraction. This concep-
tualization is consistent with Storms’s (1980) 2-dimensional model of sexual
orientation, which suggests that homosexuality and heterosexuality should be
independently framed. Using this model, then, bisexuality is no longer con-
ceptually represented as a point between two opposite poles, and the presence
of same-sex attraction does not immediately have implications for ratings of
other-sex attraction. Although the disaggregation of same- and other-sex was
seen as relevant to individuals with bisexual and other plurisexual identities, it
also resonated with individuals who endorsed monosexual labels (e.g., gay,
lesbian). More problematic was the use of “same-sex” and “other-sex” termin-
ology used by both scales, which follows the traditional convention of sexual
orientation measurement by requiring individuals to designate their sex in
relation to the sex of the individual or group(s) to whom they are attracted
(Galupo et al., 2014b; van Anders, 2015; Weinrich, 2014). This terminology was
particularly problematic for transgender individuals and for sexual minorities
with nonbinary identities (bisexual, pansexual, queer, fluid).

The Gender-Inclusive Scale retained traditional elements of attraction (same-
sex and other-sex) but included four additional dimensions based on gender
attraction to masculine, feminine, androgynous, and gender non-conforming
individuals). In addition to conceptualizing sexual orientation in ways that did
not exclusively center on sex, the gender dimensions took a “focus on the beloved” approach described by Weinrich (2014), which reduces sexual orientation to one parameter (characteristic of the beloved) versus the traditional approach, which requires a match between two parameters (characteristic of the individual and characteristic of the beloved). These dimensions were embraced by participants regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Because the wording of the “same-sex” and “other-sex” prompts were the biggest drawback of the scale, one solution worth exploring would be reframing these two dimensions as attraction to “women” and “men” so that all six dimensions are similarly based on one parameter. Overall, the Gender-Inclusive Scale may represent a promising direction for researchers interested in developing a sexual orientation scale that better resonates with the conceptualization of sexuality as it is experienced by sexual minority individuals across a range of sexual orientation and gender identities.

Notes

1. We use the term plurisexual to refer to identities that are not explicitly conceptualized based on attraction to one sex and leave open the potential for attraction to more than one sex/gender (e.g., bisexual, pansexual, queer, fluid). We use the term plurisexual instead of non-monosexual throughout the article because it does not linguistically assume monosexual as the ideal conceptualization of sexuality.
2. When referring to individuals’ identities, we use transgender as an umbrella term to refer to identities of people who do not identify with the sex/gender they were assigned at birth, and to also represent individuals who do not identify as transgender but describe their transgender experience as a status or medical history.
3. We use the term verisexual to replace nonsexual or sexual so as not to reinforce the normative assumption of sexual desire.

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References


