Bisexuality Might Be the Natural Human Norm: A Large-Scale Internet Study

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Summary

Sigmund Freud, Alfred Kinsey, E.O. Wilson and others have suggested that social pressure suppresses natural tendencies for humans to express bisexuality, the apparent norm for one of our two closest genetic relatives, the bonobo. An analysis of data obtained from a new online sample of 606,821 people in 219 countries and territories (70.1% from the U.S., U.K, and Canada) who took a validated test of sexual orientation lends some support to this idea. A histogram of scores from 0 (exclusive opposite-sex inclinations) to 18 (exclusive same-sex inclinations) forms a near-normal distribution. Although this distribution was almost certainly caused to some extent by sampling bias, it may also reflect the unusual honesty people show when taking online tests anonymously, as an increasing body of evidence demonstrates.

We present a formal mathematical expression of Bisexuality Theory (BT), along with empirical evidence and computational explorations that support the theory. According to BT, social pressure to be straight skews the normal distribution to the point at which it appears to break into two separate distributions – a large one for self-labeled straights and a small one for people whose same-sex attractions are so strong they can't be shifted. The apparent dichotomy does not mean there are two types of humans; it is simply an artifact of a social process that can be described mathematically. The validity of BT is suggested by its power to predict, across cultures, how various social systems change as a function of level of heteronormativity.

Among other findings in our study: Sexual orientation labels corresponded to broad, skewed, overlapping distributions of scores, and self-labeled straights reported that the larger the mismatch between their sexual orientation label and their actual sexual inclinations, the more distress they felt about their sexual orientation; a smaller effect was found for self-labeled gays.

Educating the public about the true nature of sexual orientation might quell the often rancorous public debates on this topic. Perhaps more important, recognizing that sexual orientation is a continuous variable allows the full power of scientific and mathematical methodology to be applied to its analysis.