

## The Challenges of Bisexual Representation Both/And

One of the challenges of accurately representing bisexuality in a monosexist society is the inability or unwillingness to accept on a cognitive level the possibility of dual desire. Outside the context of bisexual discourse, dual desire could refer to the simultaneous attraction or love that one person feels for two separate people of the same sex or gender. Such dual desire on the levels of heterosexuality and monosexuality is prominent in popular culture: classic love triangle plots utilize the dual desire dilemma of “Which man do I choose?” in movies like *Sabrina* (1954) and *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (2001), while adultery plots play on a more morally questionable version of this attraction in movies like *Love Actually* (2003) and *Last Night* (2010). While audiences readily accept these representations of (monosexual) dual desire as authentic experiences of attraction or love, these same audiences may resist bisexual desire—the simultaneous or sequential attraction to multiple genders and sexes.

Bisexual writers often refer to this monosexist mentality as “either/or,” and to its foil as “both/and.” Kathleen Bennett introduces these terms to bisexual discourse in 1992 with her oft-cited essay, “Feminist Bisexuality: A Both/And Option for an Either/Or World.” Bennett observes that the either/or mentality, which controls the way in which our culture perceives sex, gender, and sexuality, is part of its overwhelming tendency to think in dichotomies (205). Both heterosexism—which assumes a complementary and mutually exclusive relationship between masculinity and femininity—and monosexism—the belief that sexual orientation is naturally unidirectional—propagate the erasure of bisexuality and other fluid sexualities and genders with either/or thinking (207). By eliminating the possibility of bisexuality, either/or promotes the cultural dominance of monosexuality and even creates a hierarchical dualism which favors heterosexuality over homosexuality (209, 210).

Both/and is the bisexual response to either/or. In *A History of Bisexuality*, Steven Angelides cites Bennett’s argument and adds that “Being *either* heterosexual *or* homosexual implies the conceptual possibility of being *both* heterosexual *and* homosexual” (15). This directly challenges the conception of bisexuality in measurements like the Kinsey Scale as an orientation between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Echoing historians’ view that the concept of heterosexuality only came into being when physicians and psychologists created the concept of homosexuality, Angelides argues that “the concept of bisexuality as a dual sexuality [...] must emerge as a logical and conceptual possibility *at precisely the same moment* at which hetero- and homosexuality emerged as dualized identities” (15). Thus, as social constructs, heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality cannot exist without one another (16).

In positioning Bennett’s and Angelides’ arguments next to each other, one can see subtle differences between them. Bennett’s essay regards either/or as a social evil which limits the imagination of the possible varieties of gender and sexual orientation, but Angelides’ book suggests that either/or and both/and options are equally tenable with respect to sexual orientation. Perhaps the most crucial point of these arguments is that (both) either/or (and) both/and are valid ways of understanding sexuality, but one should never supersede the other.

See also: [FENCE](#); [PUNS](#); [TEMPORALITY](#)