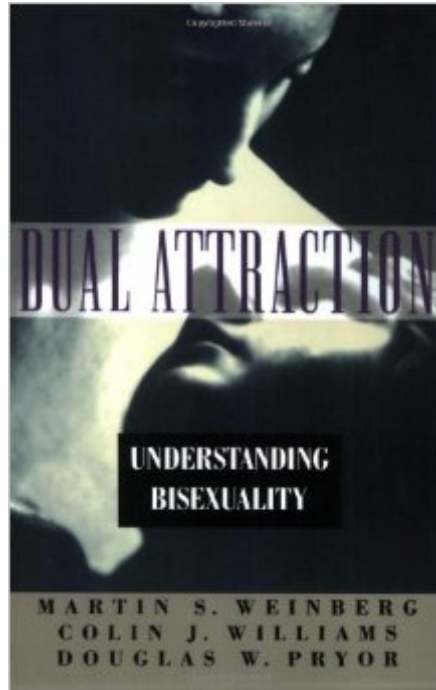


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Dual Attraction: Understanding Bisexuality



Synopsis

For the past two generations, extensive research has been conducted on the determinants of homosexuality. But, until now, scant attention has been paid to what is perhaps the most mysterious--and potentially illuminating--variation of human sexual expression, bisexuality. Today, as ignorance and fear of AIDS makes greater awareness of all forms of sexual behavior an urgent matter of private and public consequence, leading sex researchers Martin Weinberg, Colin Williams, and Douglas Pryor provide us with the first major study of bisexuality. Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor explore the riddle of dual attraction in their study of 800 residents of San Francisco. Fieldwork, intensive interviews, and surveys provided a wealth of data about the nature of bisexual attraction, the steps that lead people to become bisexual, and how sexual preference can change over time. They found that heterosexuals, more often than homosexuals, become bisexual; that bisexual men and women differ markedly in their sexual behavior and romantic feelings; that most bisexuals ultimately settle into long-term relationships while continuing sexual activity outside those relationships; and they also explain why transsexuals often become bisexual. Moreover, the authors discovered that as the AIDS crisis unfolded, many bisexual men entered into monogamous relationships with women, and bisexual women into more lesbian relationships. Recent media accounts attest that a growing number of researchers and writers are narrowing the fundamental cause of sexual preference to a single factor, biology. But if, as this study shows, learning plays a significant part in helping people traverse the boundaries of gender, if past and present intimate relationships influence their changing preferences, and if bisexual activity is inseparable from a social environment which provides distinctive sexual opportunities, then a mosaic of factors far more complex than those previously considered must be entertained in explaining the fuller spectrum of sexual preferences. *Dual Attraction* is one of the most significant contributions to our understanding of sexuality since the original Kinsey reports and Bell and Weinberg's 1978 international bestseller, *Homosexualities*. It is must reading for all those interested in the study of sexual behavior--especially now, since the onset of AIDS.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For people who are trying to make sense of their bisexual drives, or for people who are trying to be considerate of people they love who have bisexual drives, this book provides considerate feedback. I really appreciated the work that went into gathering the data for this book. The authors genuinely cared about the ethical, health, and life-affecting characteristics of bisexual behavior. The authors didn't just "mail it in". They moved in to the Bisexual Center in San Francisco, engendered the trust of the bi-sexual survey respondents and asked many significant questions. The book sets out to "show that sexual preference is a more complex, fluid, and emergent outcome than today's biological determinism dictates." They note that Kinsey reported that the direction of a person's sexual attraction or behavior does not necessarily remain stable: a considerable number of people change the heterosexual and homosexual mix in their sexuality during their lives." The authors' data & interviews appear to support that finding. The book uses "the term 'sexual preference' to emphasize that people take an active part in constructing their sexuality, as opposed to 'sexual orientation', which suggest that sexual preference is established at birth or fixed thereafter." The book is about 300 pages long, but there are about 150 additional pages of notes, citations, and table data. Browsing through the easy to read tables, showing the bi-sexual respondents answers to relationship questions, is fascinating. An easy critique of that data is the statistical sampling is way too small - but something is better than nothing.

Dual Attraction is a study of bisexuality, based on fieldwork conducted in San Francisco in 1983 and a follow-up study conducted in 1988. Its authors (Martin S. Weinberg, Colin J. Williams, and Douglas W. Pryor, who I'll refer to as WWP for short) argue that "sexual preference" is far more complex than a simple dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality and that bisexuality is an important phenomenon that deserves study in its own right. In evaluating this argument, the reader should remember that Weinberg was (with Alan P. Bell and Sue Kiefer Hammersmith) a co-author of Sexual Preference, a 1981 study that insisted on a strict dichotomy between

heterosexuality and homosexuality. Weinberg and his two co-authors in *Sexual Preference* accordingly largely dismissed bisexuality as an area of study, declaring that, "our theoretical interest was in determining whether homosexual and heterosexual respondents could be distinguished on the basis of their developmental histories not in explaining degrees of homosexuality or heterosexuality" and that "the placement of respondents into two boldly defined groups - homosexual versus heterosexual - represents a natural division between respondents." *Sexual Preference's* approach thus stands in stark contradiction to that of *Dual Attraction*. The fact that Weinberg was a co-author of both these studies is therefore strange and in need of explanation. One can only guess what the explanation could be, since no explanation of this issue is to be found in *Dual Attraction*.

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