Since the 1970s, the ex-gay movement has brought together professional therapists, ministry leaders, and people struggling with “unwanted same-sex attractions.” Ex-gays in the United States are predominantly male, and the movement tends to attract white Evangelical Christians. In many ex-gay movement worldviews, “gender shame,” an underlying fear of being one’s assigned gender, is often thought to cause homosexuality, and confronting it is supposed to allow the expression of universally natural heterosexual feeling and behavior. These ideas are generally rejected in mainstream science as being based on stereotypes. Nonetheless, practitioners guiding clients through this process often blend theological and psychological concepts, theorizing that becoming heterosexual means aligning oneself with a vision of God’s design for men and women (Moberly 1983). Although the movement in the United States grew in recent decades, it has recently undergone serious setbacks as Exodus International, the leading ex-gay ministry in the U.S., disbanded in June 2013.

The movement began to fracture in 2012, the result of a division between ministry leaders, who claimed that leaving homosexuality meant lifelong struggle with same-sex attractions, and professional therapists, who claimed that full reorientation was possible. These divisions can be traced, in part, to a standard established by the American Psychological Association (APA) pertaining to scientific measurement. In a task force report published in 2009, the APA joined other professional mental health associations declaring that there is no evidence for the efficacy of sexual orientation change efforts, and these efforts are potentially harmful (APA Task Force 2009). To make these claims, the APA established a terminological standard that undermined the validity of the self-reports of ex-gays claiming to have become heterosexual as a basis of reorientation research. In the past, “sexual orientation” had been measured as a composite of identity, behavior, and attraction. The APA made a new distinction between “sexual orientation” as a set of physiological attractions and “sexual orientation identity” as the willingness or ability to recognize one’s sexual orientation. In effect, the APA’s new standards meant that self-reports of sexual orientation became nothing more than an expression of sexual orientation identity, unacceptable as evidence for the efficacy of sexual reorientation therapies. Moreover, in order to demonstrate reorientation, a physiological measure was now deemed necessary.
Through rhetorical calls for physiological tests, the APA enacted what Michelle Murphy has described as a process of “materialization,” making matter – in this case the matter of male bodies – relevant and perceptible in the world (Murphy 2006: 7). But at the same time, establishing notions of fixed sexual orientations based on the male body has a number of problematic consequences, including the erasure of female desire and the preclusion of conceptualizing multiple possible ways of being sexual.

Many recent difficulties faced by the ex-gay movement are linked to the APA standards through a complex and layered temporal process, since one standard may be based upon another (Lampland and Star 2009). For example, the APA’s claims of “no evidence for efficacy” and “potential for harm,” substantiated by the new standards, form an important basis for a new California law that bans reorientation therapy for minors, setting a new legal standard for therapeutic practice. Because the terminological standards became a basis for raising standards of methodology in reorientation research, they effectively debunked a sexual reorientation efficacy study conducted by influential psychiatrist Robert Spitzer (2003), leading him to write an apology to the gay community and to claim that he had misinterpreted his findings (Spitzer 2012). Thus, although remnants of the ex–gay movement persist, the APA standard has acted as a means for excluding ex–gay claims from scientific, public policy, and cultural arenas. In the past, ex–gay claims had been excluded from science primarily on the ethical basis that they were anti–gay, but terminological standards have provided a new reasoning for exclusion that seems to have even undermined the concept of reorientation in many contexts beyond science alone.

The terminological shift described in this chapter must be seen as a standardization process that makes concrete particular ways of seeing, manipulating, and accounting for the world (Timmermans and Epstein 2010). The terminological standardization of “sexual orientation” and “sexual orientation identity” has emerged through a dialectic encounter between the ex-gay movement, including experts predominantly relegated to the scientific fringe, and gay affirming mental health professionals in the scientific mainstream. Thus, these debates must be understood as part of a broader set of religious and political contestations, not as walled-off separate processes that took place “inside” science. One important result of standardization is that it has enabled mental health professional associations to engage in a type of boundary work (Gieryn 1999): by maintaining the view that sexual orientation cannot be therapeutically changed, they have effectively marginalized those reorientation practitioners and researchers who believe that attractions can be altered. To trace these terminological standardization processes, I draw on interviews with major players in sexual reorientation therapy controversies in the United States, including members of the APA Task Force, participant observation at relevant conferences, and content analysis of scientific and activist literature.

More broadly, this chapter extends Timmermans and Epstein’s framework for the sociological study of standardization by further elaborating on ways that standards can serve to exclude. They assert that “every standard necessarily elevates some values, things, or people at the expense of others, and this boundary-setting can be used as a weapon of exclusion” (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 83). Being “sensitive to exclusions” was also a major concern of Bowker and Star (1999), who laid a foundation for the study of standards as a family of processes including classification and infrastructure development. Bowker and Star argue that standardized classification systems “always have other categories, to which actants (entities or people) who remain effectively invisible to the scheme are assigned” (1999: 325). Such exclusions become part of the social order, yet in a case such as struggles over sexual reorientation, the domains from which ex-gays and associated experts have been excluded are complicated by the religious culture of the United States and the role of the media in promoting controversy. That is, while reorientation opponents within science have been able to keep
By focusing on processes of exclusion, I am by no means advocating opposition to standardization, as though it is always oppressive and dehumanizing. Rather, this chapter elaborates on ways that exclusion has operated in cases of standardization found in the science and technology studies (STS) literature, further supplementing understandings of standardization as means of coordination or promoting efficiency for those included. As standards embody values, exclusion through standardization may be necessary to promote justice or some other cherished goal, although it may have ironic effects, too. In the sections that follow, I first discuss the relationship between standards and social life, summarize Timmermans and Epstein’s framework for the sociological study of standardization, and review some ways in which standards can exclude. Then, I tell the story of how the standards of “sexual orientation” and “sexual orientation identity” have come about using that framework. Next, I discuss the case in terms of exclusion as the discrediting of people and practices, and then analyze how standards can exclude in the sense that they can preclude possibilities for being and knowing. Finally, I conclude by discussing the limits of considering standards as “weapons of exclusion,” as they rely on implementation and institutional authority.

Standards, social life, and exclusions

The power of standards, whether they be classification systems, rules for the production of objects, or guidelines for professional practice, lie in the ways they render the world uniform across time and space. Much of modern life would not be possible without standards, as they coordinate systems and infrastructure, and render people intelligible and subject to regulation by the modern state. Standards are not only just about the mundane and substantive things under consideration; rather, they entail ways of organizing people and things that are extremely consequential for personal biographies. Quite often, standards remain invisible, as a backdrop within infrastructures that we take for granted. Bowker and Star assert that the design of standards is always rooted in ethical judgments, and rendering them visible is a project with an “inherently moral and political agenda” (Bowker and Star 1999). This not only brings them to life from their fossilized state where they might be considered negotiable again, but also brings attention to those entities or people who do not fit into standardized systems, allowing us to reconsider the broader consequences of exclusions.

In some cases, the study of standards does not require rendering them visible, as they have already become targets of wide public contestation. The removal of “Homosexuality” from the DSM in 1973 is a case in which social movements successfully drew attention to the values embedded in a nosological standard, resulting in its demise (Bayer 1987). In another case, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation planned to construct the Orme Dam near Phoenix, Arizona, flooding land of the Yavapai tribe. The Yavapai contested a commensuration process which subjected their land and relocation to a cost-benefit analysis within a standardized system of dollar value, claiming instead that their land was part of their identity. Their advocacy made the values inherent in a standardization process visible, and effectively halted the dam project through protest (Espeland 1998). These examples show not only how visibility is a key aspect of standard contestation, but also illustrate how standards are part of the organization of social life.

Science and technology studies have disagreed about the relationship between standardized classification systems and the social order. Bloor (1982) and Douglas (1986) both assert that standardized systems of classification are really projections of political values onto the natural world, such that the natural world can be read back in a way that makes social values seem
inevitable and embedded in nature. On the other hand, Bowker and Star (1999) have argued, and Timmermans and Epstein (2010) concur, that standardization and the social order are simultaneously emergent, as standards themselves have agency in the social domain. This perspective aligns with Jasanoff’s idiom of co-production (2004), as the creation and implementation of standards and the development of social order are mutually constitutive phenomena. For example, Epstein (2007) observes that legal requirements for the standardized inclusion of racial minorities in clinical trials that embed race within medical knowledge simultaneously shape the lived order of racial classification.

Like Bowker and Star, Timmermans and Epstein agree that standardization is “a process of constructing uniformities across time and space through the generation of agreed upon rules” (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 71). As such, a “standard” might be a rule, a definition, or a measurement, developed in order to make the unruly world more predictable and manageable. Timmermans and Epstein provide a typology of standards including: (1) design standards, which define features of tools and products in infrastructure; (2) terminological standards, which “ensure stability of meaning over different sites and times and are essential to the aggregation of individual elements into larger wholes”; (3) performance standards, which set acceptable levels of complications or problems with systems; and (4) procedural standards, which express how procedures are to be performed (2010: 72). Rather than characterizing standardization processes as part of a grand trend of rationalization, these authors note that each standard has its own history, and must be evaluated in terms of its benefits and disadvantages. To analyze the life cycle of a standard, they propose three archetypal phases, which may overlap: creation, implementation, and outcome. Standard creation is a social act requiring the buy-in of multiple parties, and may proceed in a top-down fashion or be based on the formation of consensus. Once created, a standard must be implemented to survive, and is often reliant on some institutional authority for that to occur. The outcomes of standards may promote a range of interests from the most democratic to the most authoritarian, which must be empirically investigated. In sum, the Timmermans and Epstein approach involves considering a broad range of actors and outcomes, including considering those actors excluded, and acknowledging the full range of complexities and contingencies in any particular standardization process.

Timmermans and Epstein assert that standards can be “weapons of exclusion,” yet this idea raises questions about what exactly is being excluded, by what mechanisms, and from what domains. In this chapter I consider two families of exclusions. The first involves the discrediting of people, practices, or claims, effectively excluding them from some socially legitimated arena. The second involves precluding possibilities for being or knowing altogether, as ontological and epistemological exclusions that may undermine what Stephen Collier and Andrew Lakoff (2008) call “regimes of living.” Such regimes are defined as “tentative and situated configuration[s] of normative, technical, and political elements that are brought into alignment in situations that present ethical problems” (2008: 23). Thus in one family of exclusions, people or things might be kept out of some arena, but in the other family, the very existence of kinds of people may be overlooked, ways of knowing may be made impossible, and regimes of living may be disassembled or reconfigured.

When considering the first family of exclusions in relation to the domain of science, the attribution of credibility to people, claims, and methods is largely shaped by culture (Shapin 1995). In this context, Gieryn (1999) explores how the cultural boundaries between science and non-science are maintained through the setting of standards for scientific expertise, a major component for attributing scientific credibility to people. This involves delineating appropriate professional qualifications and the standards of practice such as participation in peer review to draw the lines between scientists and non-scientists. Research practices themselves may also be
discredited, resulting in the crystallization of a “hierarchy of evidence” in which one method may be considered a gold standard for the production of knowledge, to the exclusion of others.

The second family of exclusionary forms involves the preclusion of possibilities for being and knowing. When taking a standardization path, whether it entails standardizing measurements, technologies, or categories, there are always myriad roads not taken (including having no standard at all). Each road leads to a possible regime of living, including an assemblage of standards and ways of being human. In the case of standardized classification systems, Bowker and Star (1999) argue that once a path has been chosen, people who do not fit the standard will often experience distress. They use the term “torque” to describe biographies of people cast into residual categories, as tension builds between the unruliness of lived experience and the rigidity of categories.

In addition to precluding ways of being, when particular category systems become standardized in infrastructures for producing knowledge, they can lead to the preclusion of different ways of knowing. Bowker and Star (1999) argue that terminological standards can establish “causal zones” that allow for construction of a constrained range of kinds of facts. For example, defining an illness in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) in terms of biological causes only allows for the collection of some kinds of data instead of others. As a result, biological agents will come to be understood as the only possible causes of illness disparities, as opposed to social disenfranchisement or marginalization. The problem of the reduction of the range of causal zones to biological properties is also present in research on biomedicine and race. In this book, Hatch shows how the standardized diagnosis of “metabolic syndrome” was consolidated through the practice of population research studies predicated on socially defined racial categories. This research has the effect of reducing causal understanding of these conditions to racial biology, not taking into account the role of social determinants of health. Hatch’s case also illustrates how “niche standardization” (Epstein 2007) has taken hold in research on metabolic syndrome, as different bodily thresholds have been assigned to different racial groups for diagnosis and risk assessment, further entrenching a reductionist biological understanding of race.

Finally, while standards often involve the creation of ethical norms in a regime of living, especially for following the standards themselves, they can also relegate previously normal behavior to the domain of abnormality. For example, the profit-based pharmaceutical industry has increasingly promoted the ethic to assess health risk, subjecting oneself to numerous tests and taking lifelong drug regimens even when feeling well. The threshold of normalcy is now based on test scores and risk assessments developed through clinical trials, and to be normal in developed countries is often to be on multiple preventive prescription drugs. Gone are the days when patients went to the doctor simply when they were not feeling well (Dumit 2012). Thus, as the pharmaceutical industry has gained increasing influence over the medical profession, and as medicine is increasingly based on evidence-based standards of care (Timmermans and Berg 2003), older styles of doctor–patient relationships have been replaced with ones technologically equipped to enforce higher thresholds of normalcy. This example shows how standards can reassemble a regime of living by constricting the range of what is considered “normal,” supplanting it with a new regime based on a different rationality.

While I have described two families of ways that standards can exclude, it should be noted that this distinction frequently applies to components of an exclusionary process that cannot be disaggregated. For example, Fausto-Sterling (2000) describes how the International Olympic Committee, concerned that men might compete in women’s sporting events, shifted from a system of determining sex by visual inspection to one based on genetic testing. Within the first family, this standardization process excludes the technical practice of visual inspection, and also
keeps people who test positive for Y-chromosomes from participating in women’s events. In other words, certain people and practices are kept out of the domain of women’s Olympic events due to the new standard. Within the second family of exclusions, this standard also precludes the possibility that a person with Y-chromosomes could officially be considered a “woman” competing in the Olympics, and also precludes the possibility of knowing how such people might fare in women’s Olympic events.

With this conceptual terrain of exclusions established, I now apply the Timmermans and Epstein framework to the terminological standardization of “sexual orientation” and “sexual orientation identity,” tracing the formation of the standard and then further discussing forms of exclusion that ensued.

The ex-gay threat and the terminological standardization response

The process of terminological standardization began when the ex-gay movement developed a public presence in the late 1990s. This was propelled by large Religious Right organizations that funded a mass advertising campaign and by media coverage of newly conducted self-report research studies. Ex-gay groups challenged mainstream science claims that there is “no evidence” for reorientation efficacy by evoking representations of the self that Tanya Erzen (2007) has described as “testimonial politics.” Testimonies took different forms in each of these genres. Advertisements in newspapers and on billboards featured ex-gays telling personal stories of transformation, while researchers utilized self-report data in which ex-gays testified about the extent to which they believed they were now heterosexual within the confines of carefully phrased research questions and response scales. Three particularly prominent large-scale ex-gay self-report studies emerged from the movement at this time.

The studies are important to consider in some detail because of the different ways that they advance notions of sexual orientation change. First, Nicolosi et al. (2000) conducted a self-report “consumer satisfaction” survey published in 2000 with 882 respondents. This has come to be known as the “NARTH study” because of its authors’ affiliation with that organization, National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality. Using retrospective self-report ratings of “sexual orientation” before and after reorientation treatment but without defining that term, the authors asserted that respondents experienced statistically significant shifts from homosexuality to heterosexuality, in addition to improvements in overall well-being. In contrast to allowing respondents to define “sexual orientation” themselves, Spitzer (2003) defined this variable using a composite of measures of identity, behavior, and attraction, also with retrospective measures. While his sample was not representative, he claimed his study showed that reorientation was possible for some highly motivated individuals. Many people in his sample reported significant shifts toward feeling heterosexual attractions in addition to identity and behavior. Finally, a study by evangelical researchers Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse (2007) used a longitudinal self-report design which they argued improved on previous studies’ usage of retrospective measures. This came to be known as the “Exodus study,” as Exodus International funded it and was the primary source of research subjects. Jones and Yarhouse also measured identity, behavior, and attraction upon entering an ex-gay ministry and then one year later. However, in this study, ex-gays tended to report little shift in sexual attraction, but large shifts in identity and behavior. While one third of the cases were considered to have been “successfully” reoriented by the authors, half of these subjects were celibate, and most of the “success” cases reported lingering same-sex attractions.

In sum, while the meaning of sexual orientation change remained ambiguous in the NARTH study, Spitzer claimed that the significant attraction changes of his subjects
demonstrated reorientation was possible, while Jones and Yarhouse claimed successful reorientation with much less change in attractions in their data. Thus, it was Spitzer’s study that made the strongest claim about the efficacy of reorientation therapies. His study garnered immense publicity because he had been on the American Psychiatric Association Nomenclature Committee in 1973, played a central role in the decision to remove “Homosexuality” from the DSM (Bayer 1987), and had also been central in the development of later versions of the DSM. Thus, his credibility as a supporter of gay rights and famous leader in psychiatry made him a powerful spokesperson for the ex-gay movement.

According to Steven Hilgartner, the popularization of a fringe view can have an effect of “feeding back” on mainstream science, moving researchers forward by pressuring them to clarify concepts and assertions (Hilgartner 1990). While such a feedback dynamic occurred in the case of the APA Task Force responding to popularized ex-gay research and publicity campaigns in 2007, events leading up to the Task Force did not play out in exactly the way that Hilgartner might anticipate. Instead, the development of terminological standards involved a complex convergence process that drew in participants from both sides of the debate. In Timmermans and Epstein’s terms, this convergence involved buy-in from multiple parties. Although some activists and professionals maintained stalwart positions on the strict efficacy or inefficacy of therapies, some began converging on the idea that a mismatch between same-sex attractions and heterosexual identity might be typical and even desirable for some interested in living in accordance with religious values. Ex-gay ministry leaders, less invested in the complete elimination of same-sex attractions than more secular professional therapists, began claiming that such attractions are likely to linger for people who go through ex-gay programs.

In part, these confessions were a response to the increasing public visibility of “ex-ex-gays,” people who had gone through ex-gay programs, claimed that they failed, and often claimed they experienced some kind of harm. In the early 2000s, the visibility of ex-ex-gays was furthered by research conducted by Shidlo and Schroeder (2002), concluding that many ex-gays experience significant harms when their treatments do not work. In 2007 the “ex-gay survivor” movement held its first national meeting in the United States. Rather than challenging the testimonies of these activists, ex-gay ministries were now forthcoming about the existence of lingering same-sex attractions. Ex-gay ministries lowered expectations of change for new members in hopes of preventing people from leaving ministries and becoming outspoken “ex-ex-gays” or “ex-gay survivors.”

However, reorientation ministries were also confronted with critical calls for phallometric testing, both from anti-reorientation activists (for example, Besen 2003) and from scientists responding to the Spitzer study (for example, Beckstead 2003). This method involves measuring the erection level of the penis with a “penile plethysmograph” device while a male research subject views erotic imagery designed to represent homosexuality and heterosexuality. The fact that ex-gays became more forthcoming about lingering same-sex attractions in the wake of these calls suggest that this technique, like the polygraph (Alder 2007), may act as a “truthing technology,” calling forth confessions as long as people believe in the methodology. Phallometric testing has become part of a family of technologies that might be considered “truth machines,” techniques for extracting truth from the body, such as DNA testing, which may trump testimonial evidence in various contexts (Lynch et al 2008). While a vaginal photo-plethysmograph device exists for women, it is considered a less reliable indicator of sexual orientation, as researchers argue that women’s subjective and physiological arousal do not correspond (Fishman 2004). Moreover, because men are the predominant clients of reorientation, discussions in this domain frequently use male sexuality as representative of all human sexuality with no qualification.
At the same time as ministry leaders became more forthcoming about lingering same-sex attractions, gay affirmative therapists began to promote “middle path” compromises for clients experiencing conflict between same-sex attraction and religious values. A special issue of the journal *The Counseling Psychologist* published in 2004 captured many of these efforts. Psychologists were particularly moved by working with clients or research subjects that experienced profound conflict, and in some cases, pursuing a heterosexual identity despite their attractions became a client’s chosen path. For example, Haldeman (2004) reported on a case in which an African-American male client married to a woman chose a heterosexual identity because he wished to keep his heterosexual family together and maintain his connections to his conservative religious community despite his same-sex attractions. While Haldeman suggests alternative possibilities for such a client, including the possibility that he might come back to therapy in the future, or seek help from evangelical groups that work to reconcile religion and same-sex sexual orientation, he acknowledges that the polarized options of gay affirmative therapy that might devalue religious experience, on the one hand, and sexual reorientation, on the other, are insufficient alternatives. In a commentary in this special issue, Worthington (2004), who would later serve on the APA task force, also proposed that sexual orientation identity be severed from sexual orientation as a means to clarify the language used in discussions over sexual reorientation therapy research.

Furthermore, research on ex-gays emanating from both sides of the debate suggested that reorientation changed attractions very little while behavior and identity did change. This was particularly the case with the Exodus study conducted by evangelical researchers Jones and Yarhouse. Psychologist A. Lee Beckstead, who would later become a member of the APA task force, had conducted an in-depth interview study of Mormons who attempted reorientation and argued that ex-gays experienced little change in attractions, even though they did experience some benefits from reorientation such as reduced isolation. Moreover, he argued that the heterosexual attractions that they felt were particularly weak. One respondent claimed that his response to men was like a “forest fire,” while the response to his wife is more of a “campfire” involving a sense of emotional closeness (Beckstead and Morrow 2004). Beckstead, who had worked in a phallometric laboratory as part of his training, argued that these kinds of characterizations of heterosexual attraction do not constitute sexual orientation change, but rather, reveal that living as an ex-gay involves living with incongruity. Beckstead had himself gone through a failed reorientation attempt at Evergreen International, a Mormon reorientation ministry. Being part of this world gave him particular insight into the ways that religious values can be more important to a person than their sexual attractions, and his role on the task force involved foregrounding issues in the psychology of religion (interview with Beckstead, Salt Lake City, UT, 2010).

With this convergence of some parties on both sides, the publication of the American Psychological Association’s *Task Force Report on Appropriate Therapeutic Response to Sexual Orientation* in 2009 marks the established terminological standardization of “sexual orientation” and “sexual orientation identity.” While other mental health organizations had created position statements opposing reorientation, the APA had become a gatekeeper on the construction of knowledge of reorientation efficacy, especially because the American Psychiatric Association had largely ceded jurisdiction over talk therapy to psychology following the pharmaceutical revolution in that field. The task force was formed in 2007 after gay rights activists raised concerns with the APA about the growing public presence of the ex-gay movement. In making their determination that “no evidence” exists for reorientation, the task force reviewed relevant literature over six decades, and establishing terminological standards effectively made self-report the “wrong tool for the job” (Clarke and Fujimura 1992) of measuring sexual orientation.
Building on these standards, they also established a “middle path” compromise therapeutic approach they called “sexual orientation identity exploration.” This therapeutic guideline advises mental health practitioners working with clients experiencing conflicts over same-sex attractions to let those clients determine the path of their sexual orientation identity development, as long as it is not based on anti-gay stereotypes, and as long as clients acknowledge that sexual orientation is unlikely to change (APA Task Force 2009).

Exclusion as discrediting claimants and practices

Within the first family of exclusions that involve undermining credibility, the APA standardization process has led to several outcomes. These entail the discrediting of reorientation practitioners who claim they can change sexual attractions, ex-gays who claim that they now have a heterosexual sexual orientation, and self-report as a means to demonstrate reorientation change. As Timmermans and Epstein note, the different phases of standard creation, implementation, and outcomes may overlap, and in this case, overlaps can be seen in the way NARTH nominees were excluded from the task force itself.

When the APA announced that a task force would be formed in 2007, NARTH put forth four nominees. These included evangelical researchers Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse, authors of the Exodus study, and Joseph Nicolosi and A. Dean Byrd, both former NARTH presidents and authors of the NARTH study. Despite their experience conducting ex-gay research, all four were rejected. Task force chair Judith Glassgold explained that Jones and Yarhouse could not be on the task force primarily because their flawed research undermined their scientific credibility. In addition to problems with their statistics and sampling methods, she claimed that Jones and Yarhouse also had errors in how they define sexual orientation in their work. While the problem of definitions was also a basis for excluding Nicolosi and Byrd, Glassgold claimed that those nominees were rejected primarily because they could not likely adhere to the APA Code of Ethics, which requires affirming gay people as equal to heterosexuals (interview with Glassgold, Washington D.C., 2010). Furthermore, the nominees’ reorientation research had not been published in adequately peer-reviewed journals. Jones and Yarhouse’s study had been published in the religious Intervarsity Press, while Nicolosi et al.’s study was published in Psychological Reports, considered by many psychologists to be a “pay to publish” journal (telephone interview with psychologist Gregory Herek 2009).

Nicolosi, charismatic former president of NARTH, protested this exclusion, claiming that because the task force was composed of “activists in gay causes, most of whom are publicly self-identified as gay,” they could not be objective; they had already made a personal commitment to the idea that sexual orientation is fixed (Nicolosi 2009). This claim was matched by Glassgold arguing that Nicolosi could not be objective due to his anti-gay views. Thus, the terminological standardization of “sexual orientation” and “sexual orientation identity” and the outcome of undermining the credibility of reorientation researchers using self-report methodology occurred in a simultaneous process. Furthermore, these negotiations reveal that embedded within this terminological standard is an ethical commitment to affirmative equality on the basis of sexual orientation.

In its review of the literature, the APA task force also contributed to the formation of a hierarchy of evidence that favored physiological testing over self-report. Phallometry had been used in the 1960s and 1970s in attempts to condition arousal through aversion therapy, including experiments in which electric shocks and noxious chemical odors were applied to subjects as they viewed same-sex erotic imagery (for example, McConaghy 1969). At that time, behavior therapists found they could diminish same-sex arousal but could not induce heterosexual
arousal. Because it had been a means of demonstrating therapeutic failure back then, phallometric testing had gained some credibility among contemporary reorientation opponents. The task force pointed to this genre of research as the only reorientation research with any validity, effectively elevating phallometry over self-report as a measurement tool in this context. In interviews three members of the APA Task Force, including the chair, psychologist Judith Glassgold, psychologist A. Lee Beckstead, and psychiatrist Jack Drescher, endorsed of the need for phallometric testing for male ex-gays. Glassgold stated, “I think if you wanted to have a real empirical study, you hook people up with a plethysmograph… That would be the only way to study sexual orientation change. Everything else is just sexual orientation identity” (interview with Glassgold 2010). By citing phallometric studies as the best evidence that reorientation does not work, the APA rendered male bodies perceptible in a process of materialization.

While these factors point toward a standardization of phallometry in sexual reorientation measurement, this standardization has not coalesced. Even the task force described the limitations of the technique, including high numbers of men who cannot become aroused in a laboratory setting, discrepancies between types of measurement devices, and the possibility of faking arousal (APA Task Force 2009: 31). Whether to use a Kinsey-type continuum scale or some kind of orthogonal scale measuring different dimensions of attraction, such as emotional attachment and sexual desire, also remains in question. Complicating matters further, Beckstead (2012) has recently argued that measures of aversion to heterosexuality or homosexuality should be included in addition to attraction. Some psychologists, including prominent sexuality researcher Gregory Herek, remain skeptical of conducting any reorientation efficacy research at all (personal interview with Herek 2008). Nonetheless, the terminological severing of “sexual orientation” and “sexual orientation identity” undermined self-report methods in the context of reorientation research even if a gold standard did not fully come into being.

Exclusion as precluding possibilities of being and knowing

A second family of exclusions involves ontological and epistemological foreclosures, as various ways of being and knowing can become unworkable due to standards. Creating a terminological standard which locates sexual orientation as a fixed entity within the body is useful for opposing anti-gay politics (Waites 2005). This move bears many similarities to the severing of “gender” and “sex,” which has been subject to feminist critique for foreclosing a number of ways of being (for example, Butler 1990). As a form of essentialism, fixing sexual orientation within the body also designates biology as a “causal zone” in determining sexualities, precluding some ways of being sexually fluid as well as ways of knowing human malleability.

Second wave feminists utilized the sex/gender dichotomy to argue that the malleability of the cultural construct of gender proved that inequality between the sexes was contingent and could be changed. However, Butler (1990) has argued that gender does not merely map onto a fixed sex binary, but rather, the cultural construction of sex, seen in the surgeries on intersex infants, is based on gender first and foremost. That is, gender is not mapped onto sex, but rather, binary sex is a product of gender, resulting in the exclusion of intersex categories. This critique of the sex/gender dichotomy applies to sexual orientation identity/sexual orientation as well, as the contemporary notion of “sexual orientation” relies on an essentialist binary of sex for its very existence. Like “gender” of second wave feminism, identities of “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” and “heterosexual,” predicated on binary sex, are themselves performative enactments constituting divisions among human categories and erasing other experiences and possibilities such as intersexuality, or being attracted to a person who does not fit into the categories of “male”
or “female.” In other words, notions of fixed sexual orientation based on attractions to sexed object choices reinscribe the delineation of binary biological sexes. Further extending Butler’s logic to the newly standardized dichotomy, “sexual orientation” categories delimited within scientific experiments, even those based on physiology, cannot exist without a cultural system of “sexual orientation identity” – a set of cultural understandings of what constitutes “gay,” “straight,” etc. – that precedes them. In phallometric testing, for example, sexual orientation identity categories are built into the test through the selection of erotic imagery. As such, cultural constructs of sexual orientation identities, and the “sexual orientations” produced by them, are predicated on cultural practices of gender division (Butler 1990, see also Epstein 1991).

By invoking behaviorist studies using phallometric testing as the best evidence that reorientation does not work, and using this as a basis for the terminological standards of “sexual orientation” and “sexual orientation identity,” a notion of male sexuality has effectively been used as a stand-in for the definition of all human sexuality. Female sexuality is often theorized in science as being primarily emotion based, with emotional connection leading to sexual desire, and women’s sexuality is often understood to be more fluid because of this. While the APA does include both dimensions of “sexual and emotional” attraction in its terminological standard of sexual orientation, it is evidence of male sexual attraction that has become the primary basis for ascertaining the properties of “sexual orientation.” Emphasis on the phallometric technique, based on a narrow understanding of male sexuality (as defined by erection prompted by visual erotic imagery), potentially devalues a range of physical and emotional alternate bases for defining how human sexuality operates, and contributes to the erasure of female sexual subjectivity.

Even when the fluidity of female sexuality has been theorized in science, a male-centered notion of fixity has still been used as a foundational basis, especially given the need to maintain the idea that sexual orientation is “fixed” in public policy contexts. Psychologist Lisa Diamond (2008) has developed a model of women’s sexuality in which women are understood to have an underlying fixed sexual orientation, but a layer of fluidity rides on top of this fixed foundation. However, Diamond’s model, like all models of human sexuality that theorize fixed sexual orientation, effectively excludes sexual subjectivities characterized by spontaneous fluidity without any fixed sexual orientation foundation. Critical of how essentialism can preclude our understanding of human plasticity, Fausto-Sterling claims that she lived “part of her life as an unabashed lesbian, part as an unabashed heterosexual, and part in transition” (2000: ix). This is not a possible narrative within the current regime of fixed sexual orientation, even with considering a “layer” of fluidity as Diamond has theorized. Thus, while notions of fixed sexual orientation undermine the therapeutic reorientation of people into heterosexuality, they come with a cost of undermining possibilities of conceptualizing spontaneous fluidity of sexual orientation that may occur in either direction. Indeed, the idea that sexual fluidity is a layer on top of a fixed sexual orientation inverts and even precludes Freudian theory, in which a person’s inherent “polymorphous perversity” is later repressed into a fixed sexual orientation. For Freud, this fixity exists as a layer on top of an unconscious potential for sexual fluidity (Freud 1962).

Furthermore, establishing sexual orientation as a causal zone, fixed within the body, undermines research practices that might explore sexual plasticity more deeply. Even given Diamond’s model which allows for acknowledging change in attractions over the life course, any evidence that might suggest a change in a person’s sexual orientation would be ascribed to a secondary level of fluidity, rather than to sexual orientation change. Providing an alternative model of human development, Fausto-Sterling draws on Grosz’ metaphor of the Möbius strip, a ribbon with a single twist that is joined in a loop, to represent the relationship between biological and
social forces throughout life. If we consider the outside of the strip to be the environment, and the inside to be biological factors, then infinitely walking along this looped ribbon would represent the relationship between these entities in human development. While Fausto-Sterling does acknowledge that there are windows in a person’s development when plasticity is more or less possible, this model would allow for conceptualizing and researching a broader range of human sexualities. Such a conceptual shift in science might then be accompanied by alternate arguments for gay rights. Rather than being based on immutability, such claims could be pitched as being more analogous to rights of freedom of religion, where the state has no authority to force a person to change religions in order to obtain rights. Such conceptual possibilities are erased by establishing sexual orientation, fixed in a body, as a causal zone.

Beyond the exclusion of forms of fluidity and in-between categories, the collapse of Exodus International invites considering how the new APA standard may have contributed to this development. The technique of sexual reorientation therapy and the experience of being ex-gay have co-existed within a regime of living in the ex-gay world. In the wake of such a powerful statement about the fixity of same-sex attractions by the APA, Chambers disbanded Exodus claiming the group had been “imprisoned in a worldview” (Exodus International 2013). Even with the APA's acceptance of incongruity between same-sex attractions and sexual orientation identity in certain circumstances, it appears that such a regime of living might involve too much “torque” to be sustained. That is, with so much public knowledge that ex-gays maintain same-sex attractions and develop little heterosexual attraction, the idea of leaving homosexuality with little sexual satisfaction in one’s life may be too difficult to promote, especially in an era when sexual satisfaction is increasingly considered a criterion for fulfillment (Giddens 1992).

Further illustrating how the new standard reconfigures a regime of living, those who continue to challenge the APA position within the remnants of the ex-gay movement have interpreted the standard as an affront to a system of value and way of life. Former NARTH President Joseph Nicolosi claims that the APA position “implies that persons striving to live a life consistent with their religious values must deny their true sexual selves,” and ex-gays “are assumed to experience instead a constriction of their true selves through a religiously imposed behavioral control.” However, he claims that this position “misunderstands and offends persons belonging to traditional faiths.” Utilizing biblical values as guides and inspiration on a “journey toward wholeness,” such values lead ex-gays “toward a rightly gendered wholeness” that is “congruent with the creator’s design” (Nicolosi 2009). However, the materialization of male bodies, establishing the notion of fixed “sexual orientation” embedded within them, precludes thinking that living in a way that completely denies the experience of embodied sexual attraction could be a true form of “wholeness” in the way that Nicolosi describes.

Standards as limited “weapons of exclusion”

Using the case of the ex-gay movement and the terminological standardization of “sexual orientation” and “sexual orientation identity” by the APA, this chapter has explored a range of ways in which we might understand how standards can be “weapons of exclusion” (Timmermans and Epstein 2010). These standards have produced exclusions from both families in an interwoven process, as the exclusion of NARTH nominees and self-report methodology has happened alongside the reinscription of essentialist binaries. However, including these nominees and methods would not necessarily have brought about the inclusion of a broader range of possibilities for genders and sexualities, as these nominees were apparently involved in a project of promoting the idea of an underlying heterosexual essence for all.
Instead, this chapter invites the consideration of alternate possibilities for conceptualizing the categorization of sexualities.

As part of APA policy, these terminological standards might be thought of as part of a broader “intellectual opportunity structure,” or those features of knowledge-producing institutions which enable or constrain social movements in the construction of facts (Waidzunas 2013; see also Moore 1996). However, even though the organization Exodus International has disbanded, remnants of the ex-gay movement persist. NARTH continues in its advocacy, and many of the smaller religious ministries and religious reorientation camps continue to operate. Jones and Yarhouse (2011) also published an updated version of their longitudinal study in the *Journal of Marriage and Family Therapy*, making similar assertions but qualifying their conclusions as speculative in light of the APA’s position that undermines self-report as evidence of sexual orientation change. Thus, just because the APA has created this standard does not necessarily dictate how researchers should conduct popular studies or how people should fashion their own sexuality. The therapeutic guidelines in the APA report are not in any way legally binding, but rely on an APA Code of Ethics for their implementation, as practitioners are advised to keep up with these statements. While the state of California has passed a law against reorientation for minors, enforcement is particularly difficult as therapeutic offices are private spaces, and the law only applies to minors in one state. Although the APA is influential in other national contexts, it remains to be seen how far the standard might be considered relevant outside the United States. Psychological science may be authoritative in the U.S., but Evangelical Christianity remains a strong cultural challenge to its jurisdiction. Lack of closure also has been bolstered by the media, which often represents this issue as a controversy despite a strong scientific consensus on the matter (for example, Spiegel 2011). Thus, the implementation of this standard remains in question. Beyond its instability as a standard, the APA’s terminological standardization of “sexual orientation” and “sexual orientation identity” resonates with and reinforces cultural strains in the United States, including a strong heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy, especially for men (Sedgwick 1990), and a tendency toward essentializing gender and sexual orientation differences (Fausto-Sterling 2000).

Thus, looking at the particularity of the history of these standards exemplifies how standardization is often an ongoing process lacking absolute closure. The recent publication of the Jones and Yarhouse study in a scientific journal reveals how self-report can linger in this domain, despite the APA’s definitions, although the authors describe their findings as suggestive rather than definitive. While the terminological standardization that severs “sexual orientation” and “sexual orientation identity” has been achieved to a large extent, further questions remain about how these entities are to be more specifically defined and measured. For “sexual orientation,” physical and emotional attraction may mean many things to many people, and measures of attraction, fantasy, or laboratory-induced desire can take many forms. Whether sexual orientation should be measured on a continuum scale or some sort of orthogonal grid remains unclear, and this problem also exists for “sexual orientation identity.” The standardization of identity measures also faces the dilemma of whether the most important identity is the one held by an individual or one attributed by others.

Overall, standards may act as ‘weapons of exclusion’ in many different ways, and just because there will be exclusions does not necessarily mean that these exclusions are problems. Indeed, they may be warranted given the need to assert particular values, but their long term effects must be fully considered. While this chapter has shown some ways that standards can exclude, it is by no means exhaustive, and as it has emphasized, terminological standards, especially those related to biomedicine, raise questions about what kinds of exclusions may emerge with the development of other types of standards.
References


