EXPLORING BISEXUAL WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

by

JESSICA SARA LOWY

(Under the Direction of Merrily S. Dunn)

ABSTRACT

This study expands the literature on bisexual women by exploring their college

experiences. Many people still question the existence of bisexuality, consider it to be a

transitional phase, or hold negative stereotypes about bisexual individuals. As a result of

mononormative campus environments, bisexual students may feel that their campus

environments are unwelcoming. Through this phenomenological study, a queer theory lens was

used to examine the lived college experiences of 11 bisexual women. Participants were recruited

nationally and data collected between August and October 2016. Seidman's (2013) structure for

in-depth, phenomenological interviewing was applied in the conduct of two interviews with each

participant, the first focused on life history and campus experiences and the second focused on

perceptions of bisexual community. In between the two interviews, participants were asked to

draw a conceptual map of bisexual community based on Rust's (2000c) work with bisexual men,

which was used to guide the second set of interviews. Data were analyzed using Seidman's

(2013) recommendations for reducing and analyzing phenomenological interview text.

Results indicated that participants went through a lengthy process of understanding their

sexuality, marked by confusion and a lack of bisexual role models. Participants gradually

learned about the availability of nonmonosexual options and labeled their sexuality, although

labels changed over time and context. College represented a time of independence, providing exposure to new ideas and new people. However, participants struggled between a desire for authenticity and a desire for support in the face of dual marginalization within heterosexual and lesbian/gay communities. Participants reported varied experiences in LGBT environments and often found a sense of belonging in other contexts, most notably the performing arts and social justice activism. They identified factors critical to creating supportive campus environments for bisexual students, including dedicated spaces and resources, intersectional approaches, and visible bisexual leadership. These findings make clear that student affairs administrators must recognize that current resources are insufficient to meet the needs of many queer students, in particular those with nonbinary identities who struggle within binary and mononormative campus environments, and that targeted and intersectional efforts are needed to support communities of difference.

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by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Sedrick Lakpa, for his encouragement to begin this journey and for his unwavering belief in my inner strength.

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I am eternally grateful to my Goizueta family. Thank you to Andrea Hershatter and Libby Egnor for supporting me in this endeavor mere months after my arrival in the BBA Program Office. The flexibility they provided me enabled me to engage fully in this opportunity. If only everyone were as fortunate as to have these two in their corner. Integral to my survival

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

1.

You don't exist. He used to say it
to my face: You don't exist.

2.

You're what? What's that?
Oh.
Can I watch sometime?

Yeah, I've heard that's trendy right
now. You're just trying to be cool. You're just trying to be
politically correct.

You're a fence
sitter. We're all waiting
for you to come out
come down. We're all waiting
for you.

Which one are you more, really? Who makes you come
the most?

You just take it
wherever you can get it, don't you?

We're here to talk today about everybodyexceptyou. We're
working for the rights of everybodyexceptyou. The oppression of
everybodyexceptyou has got to end.

Don't worry, you'll grow out of it.

But you're one of us. You can't be one of us and
one of those, too.

I could never sleep with you.
I could never sleep with one of you.
I might get dumped might get thrown over for one of them might
get AIDS might die might lose all
of my friends.

Oh, so is that why you always
have such a hard time coming?

Yeah, I know that some people feel that way, but
why do you always have to
talk about it so much?

You can't ever be monogamous/get married/have kids/
have a stable relationship, can you?

You're just oversexed
horny desperate confused. Why, you'd sleep with anyone,
wouldn't you?

Is this your way of telling me
that you want to go to bed with me?

I went through that phase too. It lasted 2
minutes 2 months 6 months 2 years 10 years, but I
saw the light
eventually.

I feel that way too, but that doesn't make
me
one of you.

3.

WE KNOW THAT IT IS VERY DIFFICULT. WE KNOW EXACTLY HOW YOU
FEEL.
WE CAN HELP YOU. JUST STEP OVER HERE TO THIS
NICE LITTLE BOX WE HAVE FOR YOU. THAT'S IT, STEP INSIDE. COZY,
ISN'T IT? THERE NOW, WE'LL JUST PUT ON THIS LID NICE
AND TIGHT. IF YOU BREATHE REAL
SHALLOWLY, THERE SHOULD BE JUST ENOUGH AIR
TO LIVE ON.

NOW, DOESN'T THAT FEEL BETTER?

4.

and there is always that morning
fourteen in Foster City,
I woke up from what was not a dream
in which the two of you had taught me the meaning of a
new word.

epilogue[1]

"WE NEED TO HAVE THIS MEETING
AT THIS TREE
AIN' EVEN BEEN
PLANTED
YET"

[1] From June Jordan, Calling All Silent Minorities, in *Naming Our Destiny*, Thunder's
Mouth Press, 1989

- Susan Carlton, *This Poem Can Be Put Off No Longer,* in Hutchins & Ka'ahumanu, 1991

-

Bisexual women often feel locked between two worlds, accepted in neither. Longitudinal

research indicates that sexual behavior is fluid among women (Diamond, 2008), but many people

still question the existence of bisexuality or view it as a transition phase from heterosexuality to

homosexuality (Borver, Gorevich, & Mathieson, 2002; McLean, 2008a; Miller, Andre, Ebin, &

Bessonova, 2007; Oswalt, 2009). Bisexual women are frequently labeled immature, confused,

greedy, untrustworthy, and promiscuous (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Barker et al., 2012; Bradford,

2004; Daniels, 2009; Daumer, 1992; Eisner, 2013; Hayfield, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014; Israel &

Mohr, 2004; Lingel, 2009; Macalister, 2003; McLean, 2008b; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt, 2015;

Udis-Kessler, 1996). They endure dual marginalization and monosexism, as their sexuality is

questioned by both the heterosexual and lesbian and gay communities (Armstong & Tucker,

1995; Bradford, 2004; Burleson, 2014; Callis, 2009; Daumer, 1992; Deacon, Reinke, & Viers,

1996; Falek, 2013; Hartman, 2005; Highleyman, 1995; James, 1996; Lever, Kanouse, Rogers,

Carson, & Hertz, 1992; Lingel, 2009; McLean, 2008a; Ochs, 1996; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt, 2015; Udis-Kessler, 1995).

Bisexual women have been overlooked across the scholarly literature (Angelides, 2006; Burrill, 2001; Callis, 2009; Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Rust, 2000a; Young, 1997), contributing to feelings of invisibility on a broad scale (Ault, 1996; Borver, Gurevich, & Mathieson, 2002; Burleson, 2014; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; San Francisco Human Rights Campaign, 2011; Udis-Kessler, 1995), despite the fact that "self-identified bisexuals make up the largest single population within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community in the United States" (San Francisco Human Rights Commission, 2011, p. 1). This lack of acknowledgement of the existence of bisexuality contributes to poorer support systems and reduced self-worth for bisexual women as compared to lesbians (Bronn, 2001).

Colleges present environments of freedom in which students can develop an understanding of self and explore their sexual orientation away from the potential judgment of family (D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; DeSouza & Showalter, 2010). However, colleges are also environments fraught with incidents of discrimination and harassment for sexual minority students (Aberson, Swan, & Emerson, 1999; D'Augelli, 1992; Evans & D'Augelli, 1996; Franklin, 2000; Rankin, 2003; Sanlo, 2004). Sexual minorities are victimized at rates as much as four times higher than the general population (Comstock, 1991; Evans & D'Augelli, 1996), with bisexual teens more likely to experience harassment, violence, and injury than gays and lesbians (Beauchamp, 2004; Robin et al., 2002).

While sexual minority students, including bisexual individuals, undoubtedly exist on every college campus in the United States., there is a lack of literature regarding their existence, their experiences, and their persistence (Dean et al., 2000; Sanlo, 2004). LGBT students

continue to find college environments unwelcoming and lacking in adequate services to address the needs posed by their unique life stressors (Evans & D'Augelli, 1996; Rankin, 2003; Sanlo, 2004). As a result of biphobia, defined as a devaluing of bisexual individuals based on their sexuality (Bennett, 1992), and inadequate support from both the lesbian/gay and heterosexual communities (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Kim, Barkan, Balsam, & Mincer, 2010), bisexual students in particular may feel that their campus environments are unwelcoming. Research demonstrates that campuses have fewer services to support bisexual students compared to their gay and lesbian peers (Dugan & Yurman, 2011; Robin & Hamner, 2000).

While research exists on sense of belonging as a basic human need (Maslow, 1943; Strayhorn, 2012), much less is known regarding college students' sense of belonging specific to social identities such as sexual orientation (Strayhorn, 2012). Research that has been done has focused on lesbian or gay students, to the exclusion of bisexuals (Strayhorn, 2012), or focused on bisexual individuals in the greater community, without consideration of college campus environments (Bradford, 2004; McLean, 2008b; Pascale-Hague, 2015).

In the face of discrimination and harassment, bisexual students lack the support available to lesbian and gay students due to the erasure of bisexuality as a valid sexual identity, which can relate to increased physical and mental health risks (Eisenberg & Wechsler, 2003; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Gonzales et al., 1999; McCabe, Hughes, & Boyd, 2004; Scheer, et al., 2002) and poorer overall health (Cochran & Mays, 2007; Fredriksen-Goldsen, Kim, Barkan, Balsam, & Mincer, 2010). A recent study of 35 bisexual young women between the ages of 16 and 29 found that "they perceive monosexism and biphobia as significant challenges to their mental health at the institutional, community, interpersonal and intrapersonal level" (Flanders, Dobson, & Logie, 2015, p. 454), duplicating results from an earlier study that examined the topic

more broadly among bisexual men and women (Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). As a result, research that can facilitate the creation of inclusive campus communities for bisexual women is needed to support their success and retention in institutions of higher education.

From 2013-2014, I conducted a qualitative study in which I interviewed six bisexual women to explore their experiences receiving health care, both on- and off-campus. I heard stories detailing marginalization, infantilization, and disregard. Participants demonstrated a desire to be equal partners in their own health care and to be treated equitably regardless of their sexuality or relationship status. These interviews led to broader conversations regarding experiences of alienation on college campuses. The women I interviewed felt a distinct lack of community on campus and felt excluded from lesbian and gay groups, both internal and external to their institutions. They longed for a community in which they could feel accepted, understood, respected, and validated. These findings were the impetus for this research study.

Problem Statement

There is a long history of marginalization of bisexual women in the U.S. (Armstong & Tucker, 1995; Bradford, 2004; Burleson, 2014; Callis, 2009; Daumer, 1992; Deacon, Reinke, & Viers, 1996; Hartman, 2005; Highleyman, 1995; James, 1996; Lever, Kanouse, Rogers, Carson, & Hertz, 1992; Lingel, 2009; Ochs, 1996; Udis-Kessler, 1995). The participants in my previous research project reported that members of the lesbian and gay community defined the bounds of acceptable sexual and dating behavior and excluded bisexual individuals, making them feel that they weren't "queer enough." Such social exclusion, coupled with marginalization within heterosexual communities, results in lower levels of social support and higher rates of mental and physical health concerns in bisexual women compared to their lesbian counterparts

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(Bostwick, Boyd, Hughes, & McCabe, 2010; Bronn, 2001; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Steele, Ross, Dobinson, & Veldhuizen, 2009).

Institutional-level monosexism leads to an absence of bi-inclusive resources (Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015), which sends a message to bisexual students that they don't matter. Strayhorn (2012) developed a model of college student belonging that includes "perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g. campus community) or others on campus (e.g. faculty, peers)" (p. 3). Strayhorn's model, coupled with Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering, is useful in explaining the feelings of alienation, questioning of self-worth, and need for additional support experienced by bisexual women, especially during the period of transition to college. Schlossberg's theory emphasizes the importance of students feeling like they are an important and central part of the institution. A lack of inclusive resources may result in bisexual students feeling on the margins and like they do not matter, making them more likely to be dissatisfied with their experience and to leave the institution (Schlossberg, 1989; Tinto, 1987).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to magnify the voices of bisexual women to explore how they experience(d) their campus environments. Phenomenological techniques for data collection and analysis will be used to answer the research question: What are the lived experiences of bisexual women on college campuses?

Operational Definitions

For clarity and consistency, it is important to define several key terms and concepts. These definitions are rooted in the research literature. A more in-depth discussion around

variability in defining bisexuality can be found in Chapter 2.

Bisexuality is defined as "the capacity for emotional, romantic and/or physical attraction to more than one sex or gender…[which] may or may not manifest itself in terms of sexual interaction" (Miller, Andre, Ebin & Bessonova, 2007, p. 2).

Mattering includes feeling that one gets attention from others, is depended upon, is appreciated, serves as an ego-extension to others, and that our fate is of concern to others (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1989).

Monosexism is defined as "the oppression, discrimination, and prejudice found throughout Western culture towards polysexual individuals, including those who identify as bisexual, pansexual and, often, queer" (Falek, 2013, p. 36).

Sense of belonging is defined as "perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g. campus community) or others on campus (e.g. faculty, peers)" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3).

Limitations of the Study

There were three specific limitations to the present study. First, my sample lacked diversity in terms of race and relationship status. Although I recruited my sample nationally and purposefully targeted Facebook groups that attract bisexual individuals of color, nine of 11 participants identified as White. In addition, none of the participants were currently partnered with someone female-identified. Six of the participants were partnered with men, two were partnered with individuals identifying as nonbinary, trans, or genderqueer/male, and two were single.

Second, participation in the study was voluntary, which may have introduced selection

bias. Nonprobability sampling is typically used in research with LGBT participants due to difficulties in accessing the population, but it is important to note that such methods typically reduce the diversity of samples (Feild, Pruchno, Bewley, Lemay, & Levinsky, 2006). Since I recruited participants via LGB-specific online outlets, this also may have impacted the levels of outness and community connection among participants (Balsam & Mohr, 2007).

Finally, all of the study participants attended and graduated from four year institutions of higher education. This means that this study does not shed light on the experiences of bisexual women at other types of institutions, such as community colleges, nor does it include the experiences of women who stopped out or dropped out of academic programs. Students who experience social isolation and lack a sense of belonging exhibit poorer academic performance and lower retention rates compared to others (Berger, 1997; Spady, 1970; Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 1987; Walton & Cohen, 2007). Sexual minority students often consider dropping out or do fully drop out as a result of sexuality-related concerns (Mancini, 2011; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010; Sanlo, 2004; Sherrill & Hardesty, 1994) because chronic stress resulting from unsupportive environments and harassment lessens their ability to focus on academics (Sanlo, 2004; Sherrill & Hardesty, 1994), and their experiences were not captured in the current study.

Chapter Summary

Despite demonstrated disparities in resource availability, marginalization, and physical and mental health, little is known about the conditions that create an environment of support for bisexual women. As a result, a "bottom up approach," one that is exploratory in nature and allows the voices of bisexual women to be amplified, is key to understanding their perspectives and lived experiences and thus developing resources that will be rooted in their needs (Flanders,

Dobinson, & Logie, 2015). This study can provide information to facilitate the creation of more

inclusive campus communities that can aid in supporting the wellness and success of bisexual

women.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of the present study is to explore how bisexual women experience(d) their campus environments. This chapter provides a review of the literature in four areas related to this study. First, there is an overview of the challenges in defining bisexuality, including a discussion of cultural constructions of bisexuality. Bisexual identity development is then reviewed, followed by a section on bi-invisibility and marginalization, including a discussion of the lack of research on bisexual women and the role of the "coming out" process. Following this is a discussion of the literature on sense of belonging as a whole, as well as how it pertains to college students and to bisexual women. The chapter closes with the paradigm and theoretical framework for this study.

Defining Bisexuality

Sexual orientation is a difficult concept to define. Literature reviews indicate that researchers examining topics related to sexual orientation rarely include conceptual definitions, and that those that are provided tend to vary widely (Dillon, Worthington, & Moradi, 2011; Sell, 1997). Sexual orientation can be thought of as having affective and behavioral dimensions – some definitions include both aspects, whereas some include only one (Callis, 2009; Sell, 1997). Sexual orientation can also be conceptualized as essentialist (biologically determined) or constructionist (a function of culture), or more recently, a combination of the two (Dillon, Worthington, & Moradi, 2011; Jagose, 1996; Tolman & Diamond, 2001). Theorists generally

agree that homosexual behavior is pervasive, whereas homosexual identity changes based upon historical context (Jagose, 1996).

The matter becomes even more complex when it comes to bisexuality (Oswalt, 2009; Solarz, 1999). Bisexuality has been "repeatedly overlooked…or understood to be a combination of heterosexuality and homosexuality without maintaining a unique identity of its own" (Burrill, 2001, p. 97). As a result, defining the population of bisexual women has been a challenge and has resulted in a variety of representations in the research literature.

Over the course of history, the term *bisexuality* has denoted "biological hermaphroditism, psychological androgyny, and attraction to men and women" (Bowie as cited in McLelland, 2011, p. 351). The term bisexuality was originally used in the early 19th century to denote what we now know as *intersex*, an organism with both male and female reproductive anatomy (Callis, 2009). This definition morphed into that of an individual who possessed both anatomical components and psychological traits of both males and females, and by the 20th century came to refer to individuals attracted to both men and women (Angelides, 2006; Callis, 2009).

Miller, Andre, Ebin and Bessonova (2007) define bisexuality as "the capacity for emotional, romantic and/or physical attraction to more than one sex or gender…[which] may or may not manifest itself in terms of sexual interaction" (p. 2). Although researchers may consider bisexuality to be a function of self-identification or attraction, some consider it to be a function of sexual behavior (Miller, Andre, Ebin, & Bessonova, 2007; Oswalt, 2009; Rust, 2000a). James (1996) defines bisexuality as "the sexual or intensely emotional, although not necessarily concurrent or equal, attraction of an individual to members of more than one gender" (p. 218). Robyn Ochs, a prominent bisexual activist, defines her own bisexuality as "the potential to be attracted – romantically and/or sexually – to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not

necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree" (Ochs, 2014, para. 1). Yet others conceptualize bisexuality in political terms, as a means of subverting gender discrimination, the role of gender in social constructions of sexuality, and/or dichotomous constructions of sexuality and gender (Armstrong, 2005; Burleson, 2014; Eisner, 2013; Hartman, 2011; Hemmings, 2002; Rust, 2000a; Udis-Kessler, 1995).

Some individuals do not necessarily identify with the word 'bisexual,' but use it reluctantly for the "cognitive convenience" (Macalister, 2003, p. 30) of others. "Bisexual, despite being an inaccurate description that implies a bipolar theoretical orientation of sexuality, is a word that is generally understood, and is therefore still useful for individuals constructing identities and mobilizing for political change" (Hartman, 2008, p. 47). Other individuals eschew the term 'bisexual' entirely, believing that it has negative connotations (George, 1999), emphasizes sexual over other forms of attraction (Knous, 2006), or implies a gender binary (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Hall & Pramaggiore, 1996; Yoshino, 2000). Among college students, the terms 'pansexual' and 'queer' are increasing in use. The term 'pansexual' definitively rejects a gender binary, indicating attraction to all gender expressions and identities, including those not falling neatly into conventional perceptions of 'male' or 'female,' such as those who identify as trans or genderqueer (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008).

The term 'queer' is generally accepted to have gained popular acceptance in the early 1990s in response to the perception of the terms 'lesbian' and 'gay' and their related identity politics as exclusionary (Jagose, 1996). Although originally applied pejoratively, 'queer' has become a reclaimed term "loaded with a range of different meanings, both personal and political, and has emerged within the academy as a theoretical critique of fixed and binary categories of identity" (Barker, Richards, & Bowes-Catton, 2009, p. 364). Individuals with "culturally

marginal sexual self-identifications" (Jagose, 1996, p. 1) seeking to eschew labels, to be more fluid or inclusive in describing their desires, and/or to challenge hegemonic assumptions of a normative sexuality or stability of sexualities and genders, have come to utilize the term (Callis, 2009; Jagose, 1996).

'Queer' has been at times taken to mean a combination of lesbian and gay, but more frequently is considered to be an umbrella term used in social, political, and academic arenas for individuals who represent a wide range of marginalized sexualities, for some as a linguistic short-cut and for others in opposition to heterosexual societal norms (Angelides, 2001; Ault, 1996; Callis, 2009; Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Jagose, 1996; Young, 1997). In this way, the term 'queer' symbolizes a commonality between individuals with differing identities that does not disallow their differences. The term defies a single definition, and this elasticity is one of its core characteristics as it stands in opposition to normalizing forces, with a focus on incongruities between sex, gender, and desire (Jagose, 1996).

Whereas monosexual individuals are attracted to one gender or sex (i.e., they are heterosexual or homosexual) (Rust, 2000a), individuals who identify as having a fluid sexual identity are considered nonmonosexual. 'Bisexual' is often used as a catchall term to describe any individual who does not fall squarely on one of the poles of the Kinsey scale (i.e., completely homosexual or completely heterosexual). As a result, individuals lumped together under the umbrella concept of 'bisexual' may in reality have very little in common with one another, which may impact the formation of supportive communities (Burleson, 2014).

According to the San Francisco Human Rights Campaign's Bisexual Invisibility Report (2011), "there is no clear 'best practice' for terminology that fully honors gender diversity while not reinscribing invisibility for nonmonosexuals" (p. iii). Although there has been a move from

referring to attraction to both genders to referring to attraction to all genders (Barker, Richards, & Bowes-Catton, 2009), in particular among younger generations, the term 'bisexual' is still used most frequently in the research literature and is the most widely understood as descriptive of a nonmonosexual identity (San Francisco Human Rights Campaign, 2011). As a result, for the purpose of this study, I will use the term 'bisexual' to represent all individuals who identify as nonmonosexual except where participants are referencing their own sexual identities. In addition, I will use the terminology used by researchers to describe monosexual individuals ('gay,' 'lesbian,' or 'homosexual') when describing their findings.

Cultural Constructions of Bisexuality

Bisexuality has been constructed differently across cultures and time. Much like the classification of gender, the labeling of sexual orientations relates to separation and power within society (Bradford, 2004). In Eurocentric cultures prior to the 19th century, marriages were not based on emotional or sexual fulfillment but rather economic and procreative goals (D'Emilio, 1992; Jagose, 1996; Rust, 2002). Women were defined by their familial relationships to their husbands and children, which provided them with flexibility to engage in bisexual behavior while retaining their identity as women rather than bisexuals or lesbians (Rust, 2000a; Rust, 2002). This behavior was obscured because female sexuality as a whole was overlooked (Burleson, 2014; Jagose, 1996).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, economic circumstances improved and the basis for marriage became increasingly individualistic in the form of self-fulfillment, paving the way for the emergence of urban homosexual communities (D'Emilio, 1992; Jagose, 1996). During this time, sexuality became medicalized, with a push, led by Freud, to divide and classify humans, in particular their bodies and desires (Burleson, 2014; Eisner, 2013; Rust, 2000a). Men

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and women began to be defined by their attractions to women and men, respectively, rather than their roles as husbands and wives (Rust, 2002). Thus sexual attraction to a particular gender became the basis of defining one's own gender. Because women and men were classified as mutually exclusive, polar opposites on a single binary, this construction did not leave room for the existence of bisexuality (Bradford, 2004; Hartman, 2011). Cultural perspectives were such that it was not possible to be attracted to both ends of the binary, because attraction to one end would mean that one could not possibly be attracted to its opposite (Angelides, 2006; Rust, 2000a).

During this time, all people were considered to have bisexual potential and then to evolve to a higher state. As such, bisexuality was "rendered an artifact of our evolutionary prehistory, a state outside or prior to culture or civilization, a myth, a catachresis, and a (utopian) sexual impossibility" (Angelides, 2006, p. 136). Heterosexuality and homosexuality were defined in opposition to one another and as contradictory states, rendering the existence of bisexuality impossible (Angelides, 2006; Borver, Gorevich, & Mathieson, 2002; Callis, 2009; McLean, 2008a; Miller, Andre, Ebin, & Bessonova, 2007; Oswalt, 2009; Rust, 2000a; Rust, 2002). Bergler (1957) exemplified this position when he stated,

> BISEXUALITY – a state that has no existence beyond the word itself – is an out-and-out fraud, involuntarily maintained by some naïve homosexuals, and voluntarily perpetrated by some who are not so naïve. The theory claims that a man can be – alternately or concomitantly – homo and heterosexual. The statement is as rational as one declaring that a man can at the same time have cancer and perfect health. (p. 80)

This binary perspective has influenced virtually every model of sexuality that came forth in the 20th century (Angelides, 2006; Hall, 1996; Savin-Williams, 2011). Denial of the existence

of bisexuality has carried forward to current day bi-invisibility within Western cultures, in which those identifying as bisexual are perceived to be confused, fearful, and/or seeking the privileges of heterosexuality (Armstrong, 2005; Burleson, 2014; Daumer, 1992; Eisner, 2013; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Hartman, 2011; Hemmings, 2002; McGeorge & Stone Carlson, 2011; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyn, 2015; Ross, Siegel, Dobinson, Epstein, & Steele, 2012; Rust, 2000a; Sturgis, 1996; Udis-Kessler, 1995; Weiss, 2004).

Over time, alternative models of sexuality were developed that allow for sexual orientation to be viewed as existing on a spectrum (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948), consisting of several components (Klein, Sepekoff, & Wolf, 1985), and fluid in nature (Diamond, 2008). Although trained as a taxonomist, Kinsey eschewed dichotomous classifications, developing a scale by which sexuality can be rated on a spectrum from completely heterosexual to completely homosexual (Burleson, 2014; Sell, 1997). That being said, the Kinsey scale is not a true continuum in that individuals must be determined to fall into one of seven categories (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948), which can still be limiting for an identity such as sexuality. In addition, the Kinsey scale does not take into account the different aspects of sexuality, such as behavior and affect. This can result in individuals with varied types of sexualities being categorized in the same fashion (Sell, 1997). Klein addressed this concern by developing a Sexual Orientation Grid in which various dimensions of sexuality, such as attraction, behavior, fantasies, self-identification, and more, are rated separately (Klein, Sepekoff, & Wolf, 1985). Klein believed that bisexuality was defined as the ability to form intimate relationships regardless of gender, and that bisexuality was dismissed because it was perceived as a threat to dichotomous perceptions of sexuality (Rust, 2002).

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Some researchers reject scale type models such as Kinsey's and Klein's because they still construct sexuality in a dualistic fashion (Hansen & Evans, 1985; Rust, 2000a; Shively & De Cecco, 1977). Some researchers advocate measuring homosexuality and heterosexuality independently (Shively & De Cecco, 1977), because placing heterosexual and homosexual identities at respective ends of a scale implies that the two concepts are opposites. Thus in order to be more homosexual one must be less heterosexual, and vice versa, making the scale difficult to use for those who are bisexual or asexual (Dillon, Worthington, & Moradi, 2011; Sell, 1997).

While binary standards are heavily emphasized in the United States and Europe, non-Western cultures often have a more fluid and non-linear perspective of identity and behavior (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Eisner, 2013; Fassinger, 1991). For example, Native American's "Two Spirit" identity is adopted by individuals who take on varied gender roles and sexualities. They are often embraced by their communities and given special social and ceremonial roles (Walters, Evans-Campbell, Simoni, Ronquillo, & Bhuyan, 2006).

Western cultures construct perceptions of sexuality on the basis of only gender when there are a host of dimensions upon which sexual orientation could be constructed, including personal and physical attributes (Hartman, 2011; Sedgwick, 1990). As a result, bisexuality becomes constructed, ironically, by the one dimension that does not define it – gender (Rust, 2002). A different way to conceive of sexuality would be a scale that ranks the importance of gender in partner selection to a given individual. For individuals who are monosexual (i.e., lesbian, gay, or heterosexual), gender is a critical factor. For bisexual individuals, gender can have variable importance across individuals and time. Thus, such a scale could capture the full range of bisexuality (Rust, 2002). Research into bisexual identity has found significant within-group differences that impact identity development (Dillon, Worthington, & Moradi, 2011;

Savin-Williams, 2011; Worthington & Reynolds, 2011). As one participant in a study on

bisexual identity development remarked, "Bisexuality says more about what you're not than

what you are" (Bradford, 2004).

Bisexual Identity Development

The nature of bisexual social existence is always partial, most often experienced within

communities that do not recognise bisexuality as discrete (or viable), and filtered through

competing discourses of identity. (Hemmings, 2000, para. 1)

Although lesbian and gay identity formation models may be useful in helping to

understand how bisexual students come to terms with their sexual orientation, research

demonstrates that bisexual individuals experience identity processes differently than lesbians and

gay men (Fox, 1996; Klein, 1993). Bisexual women develop same-sex attractions later on

average than do lesbians, take longer to adopt a non-heterosexual identity, and exhibit more

variation in their attractions over their lifetimes (Diamond, 2000; Rust, 2002; Weinberg,

Williams, & Pryor, 1995).

Bisexuality, however, is under-theorized in the scholarly literature (Angelides, 2001;

Borver, Gurevich, & Mathieson, 2002; Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Young, 1997). Early models of

sexual orientation identity formation neglect both bisexuality as a valid identity as well as gender

differences in developmental patterns of sexual orientation (Fassinger, 1991; Rust 2000a). These

stage models typically posit that identity formation begins with the realization of same-sex

attractions, followed by use of defensive strategies as a means of coping, which may cause stress

and negative emotional health outcomes. This is followed by experimentation with same-sex

others and eventually acceptance of one's true identity as lesbian or gay (Cass, 1979; Minton &

McDonald, 1983; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005; Troiden, 1989).   Such linear models render bisexual

identities invisible by considering them to be only a point of confusion and denial on the transitional path from a heterosexual to a homosexual identity (Borver, Gorevich, & Mathieson, 2002). In reality, acceptance of a gay or lesbian identity may be a transitional phase on the way to a bisexual identity (Fox, 1996). College students who previously came out as lesbian or gay have reported challenges in coming out a second time as bisexual after realizing that bisexuality was an option available to them (Evans & Broido, 1999).

Bisexual identity development is highly complex in that the end point is not a static monosexual identity and in that bisexual individuals must often come out twice – once as lesbian or gay, and again as bisexual. Bisexual individuals may relate to different identities at different times based upon the gender of their partner and/or based upon their involvement in heterosexual or lesbian/gay communities (Diamond, 2000; Diamond, 2008; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Rust, 2000b; Rust, 2002; Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1995). Reliance on the lesbian and gay community during the initial coming out process can make full acceptance of a bisexual identity more challenging due to biphobia and difficulty finding a community of bisexual individuals (Rust, 2002).

Younger individuals may be more likely to identify as bisexual because of somewhat enhanced visibility of the bisexual label and communities (Highleyman, 1995), and many are rejecting the "tripartite system of stable identities" altogether (Russell & Seif, 2001, p.76), viewing the labels of gay, lesbian, and bisexual as anachronistic vestiges of the sexual cultures of the 70s and 80s (Pallotta-Chiarolli & Martin, 2008). Millennials (those born since the 1980s) have grown up in a world that has witnessed decreases in heteronormativity in certain settings (Savin-Williams, 2005). For individuals who have eschewed the labels of gay or lesbian, they may have never considered themselves a part of the gay and lesbian communities in the first

place (Highleyman, 1995), thus lessening the impact of dual marginalization. Counterintuitively, their placement outside the dominant constructs of gay identity and community and lack of a need for impermeable classifications lead them to experience "exclusion by inclusion" in society's polarizing binary of homo/heterosexual (Pallotta-Chiarolli & Martin, 2008). Such inclusivity of identity directly challenges the "myth of either/or which we have collectively swallowed" (Whitney, 2002, p. 114).

Cass's (1979) model of sexual orientation identity formation is the most widely cited theory of homosexual identity formation (Fassinger, 1991) and supports a binary view of sexuality. Cass's (1979) model of sexual orientation identity formation posits that individuals travel through six stages, starting with confusion and moving through comparison, tolerance, acceptance, and pride, until they reach synthesis, in which their sexual identity is integrated into their overall identity. Cass's and other early models hold self-identification as key to sexual orientation identity development and integration (Fassinger, 1991). However, for a bisexual individual to self-identify as monosexual would be denying a part of themselves. Cass's model does not allow space for such seemingly conflicting realities to exist in an individual with what she considers to be an integrated identity. In addition, were someone bisexual to seek out information to help resolve their confusion, they would likely encounter a lack of resources due to the lack of literature on bisexuality (Dean et al., 2000; Dugan & Yurman, 2011; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Markowe, 2002; Miller, Andre, Eben, & Bessonova, 2007; Rust, 2000a; Rust, 2002; Solarz, 1999) and a lack of a bisexual community (Burleson, 2014; Daniels, 2009; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Fox, 1991; Hemmings, 2002; Pascale-Hague, 2015; Woodard, 1991). Cass (1979) claims that individuals may take on both a bisexual identity and

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label others as bisexual as a means of coping with alienation, thus framing bisexuality as a form of denial.

Later models of identity formation were more inclusive of, although not specific to, bisexuality. D'Augelli (1994) developed a lifespan model of identity development that is considered more all-encompassing than Cass's (1979) and other stage models in that it takes social context into account (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). His model contains processes, rather than stages, that can be moved through non-sequentially or concurrently. The six processes, which involve interaction between the person and their environment, include exiting a heterosexual identity, developing a personal lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) identity status, developing a LGB social identity, becoming a LGB offspring, developing a LGB intimacy status, and entering a LGB community (D'Augelli, 1994). The model presents sexual orientation as fluid at certain points in the lifespan and indicates that individuals may be at different points of development in varied contexts. For example, an individual may have revealed their sexual orientation to friends but not to family members.

McCarn and Fassinger (1996) also created a framework for lesbian and gay identity development that takes contextual factors into account. It proposes two concurrent processes of development – individual and group – that the researchers felt were often conflated in previous models. Although prevailing models of sexual orientation development include outness as an indicator of positive growth, McCarn and Fassinger (1996) posit that degree of disclosure may actually be a factor of the degree of LGB affirmation in an individual's social context. However, the model is limited in that individuals must identify as lesbian or gay in order to participate in the instrument, so their research only samples those with a monosexual identity that have

reached a certain stage of progress in their identity development (Dillon, Worthington, &

Moradi, 2011).

Dillon, Worthington, & Moradi (2011) have proposed a unifying model of sexual identity development that can apply to individuals of all sexual identities and that examines aspects of sexual identity beyond simply sexual orientation. The model is non-linear and flexible and it accounts for varying contextual factors that impact individual and social processes of identity development. Aspects of individual identity include sexual orientation identity, which they define as "an individual's conscious acknowledgment and internalization of sexual orientation" (p. 650), as well as various dimensions of human sexuality, such as sexual needs, values, and behaviors. Aspects of social identity include group membership identity and attitudes towards social identity groups. Individuals pass through and may revisit five phases of development – compulsory heterosexuality, active exploration, diffusion, deepening and commitment, and synthesis.

More recently, researchers have begun to explore identity development models specific to bisexuality, although they are not without their flaws. Bleiberg, Fertmann, Friedman, and Godino (2005) utilized grounded theory to develop what they refer to as a layer cake model of bisexual identity development based upon interviews with eight self-identified bisexual students, seven female and one male. They begin with the assumption that bisexual individuals always retain a part of their original, i.e. heterosexual, identity. Thus they view bisexuality as a combination of both heterosexuality and homosexuality, rather than its own distinct identity. In the layer cake model, there are five layers of equal size that co-exist. The first layer consists of a heterosexual identity that is reinforced through familial relationships and the media. The second layer is the formation and realization of homosexual feelings and/or behaviors, during which an

individual may seek clarification, experiment, and potentially experience negative emotions about their feelings or behavior. The third layer consists of acceptance of homosexual attraction while maintaining a heterosexual identity due to lack of a belief in or the belief of others in bisexuality. They propose that the individual chooses to remain a part of the status quo (i.e., the heterosexual world) due to its ease. In layer four, an individual's heterosexual and homosexual identities are integrated. This layer indicates that these two identities form equal halves of an individual's sexual identity, and that the individual explores the meanings of different labels, such as bisexual, gay and lesbian, for themselves while starting to come out to others. The final layer of the cake is identification as bisexual. Individuals use their own definitions to describe their sexuality and tend to view sexuality and gender as more fluid than typically accepted within society (Bleiberg, Fertmann, Friedman, & Godino, 2005).

This layer cake model is simplistic in that it frames bisexuality as a combination of heterosexual and homosexual identities, rather than its own unique identity, although it does leave room for individuals to define the meaning of their bisexuality for themselves. The notion of bisexuality as a combination of heterosexuality and homosexuality has its roots in early 20th century dichotomous conceptions of gender and sexuality (Rust, 2002). In reality, some bisexual individuals are attracted not to men and women, but to people, with gender being irrelevant. The framing of homosexuality and heterosexuality as opposing forms of sexual attraction paves the path to several of today's stereotypes used to stigmatize bisexual individuals, such as assumptions that bisexuality is transitory in nature and that bisexual individuals are confused, emotionally immature, and/or promiscuous (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Barker et al., 2012; Bradford, 2004; Daumer, 1992; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Hayfield, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Lingel, 2009; McLean, 2008b; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt,

2015; Rust, 1996b; Rust, 2002; Scherrer, Kazyak, & Schmitz, 2015; Udis-Kessler, 1996; Weiss, 2004).

Around the same time as Bleiberg et al. (2005), Knous (2006) posited a stage model of bisexual identity development that is based on sociological deviance theory, with a focus on stigma management. The model contains three phases – the first is one of confusion, the second involves labeling as bisexual by self and/or others, during which the individual often faces judgment and stereotyping, and the third is acceptance and identification as bisexual. This model is particularly pertinent to my study in that it emphasizes the role of social support and networks in acceptance of a bisexual identity. Once an individual is labeled as deviant, they typically feel pressured and ostracized, leading them to seek support via groups through which their identity is affirmed (Knous, 2006). However, in the case of bisexual individuals, such support is often lacking (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Burleson, 2014; Daniels, 2009; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Fox, 1991; Hemmings, 2002; Pascale-Hague, 2015; Woodard, 1991).

Some research suggests that bisexual individuals never fully accept their bisexual identity because of the pressure to identify as either heterosexual or homosexual (Rust, 2000b; Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1995). Fox (1991) has advanced a model of bisexual identity development that proposes that community acceptance and emotional support are critical to the management of stigma and acceptance of one's bisexual identity. Similarly, Knous (2006) found that participants managed stigma in both individual and collective ways – specifically, by passing as heterosexual, by disclosing their sexuality to others, by joining community and political groups, and by having a strong social network through which they can feel supported when coping with prejudices and stereotypes.

Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor (1995) developed a stage model of bisexual identity development that is not based on previous models for lesbian or gay development such as Cass's. Although the model begins in a similar fashion, with a stage of confusion, it ends with continued uncertainty rather than a static sexual identity, due to lack of social support and validation for bisexuality (Dolan, 2013; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Rust, 2002; Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1995). Collins (2000) also developed a stage model specific to bisexual individuals, in this case based upon biracial identity development. In his model, individuals move from confusion to suppression to exploration and finally, to acceptance.

Based on findings that cultural attitudes impact sexual identity development, self-definition, visibility, and relationships, Bradford (2004) posited a bisexual identity development theory consisting of four stages: questioning reality, inventing the identity, maintaining the identity, and transforming adversity. In the first stage, bisexual individuals must develop their own reality in the face of a culture pressuring them to define themselves as either heterosexual or homosexual. They must then work to maintain this identity in the face of continuous invalidation and marginalization, leading to a need to create their own communities to enhance affirmation of their identities. This model differs from that of Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor (1995), which is marked by continued uncertainty, ending instead with transforming adversity into the creation of an affirming and active bisexual community.

Marginalization of Bisexual Individuals

Bi-invisibility

Macalister (2003) refers to bisexuality as the "Snuffaluffagus of sexualities" (p. 25). Our culture's binary construction of sexuality results in a bisexual population that is marginalized and often rendered entirely invisible (Falek, 2013; James, 1996). *Compulsory monosexuality* denies

individuals the ability to be attracted to more than one gender and thus devalues bisexuality much in the same way *compulsory heterosexuality*, a term coined by Adrienne Rich (1980) to challenge the devaluation of lesbians in feminist scholarship and activism, subordinates lesbians (James, 1996). Compulsory heterosexuality operates in our society so that individuals are assumed to be heterosexual unless some public action dictates otherwise (Rich, 1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and monosexuality result in societal norms that orient our views toward certain objects (in this case, heterosexual or homosexual), which then creates a field in which some objects move close and some are pushed further away so that they rendered imperceptible (Ahmed, 2008). "In a society where monogamous couplings are the norm, bisexuality is hard to see; a bisexual in a monogamous relationship will read as heterosexual or homosexual" (Callis, 2009, p. 218). Since there are only homosexual or heterosexual acts between two individuals, a bisexual individual may be viewed as having no identity unless engaged in an act that is one or the other (du Plessis, 1996; Whitney, 2002).

An inability to understand bisexuality due to its resistance to categorization and schema (Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Shuster, 1987) results in fear of bisexual individuals by others and an inability to connect with one another among bisexuals (Callis, 2009; Macalister, 2003). The maintenance of a sexual binary and denial of sexual fluidity results in the erasure of bisexual individuals from our history entirely, instead identifying such individuals as gay or lesbian (James, 1996). The absence of other visible bisexual people as role models increases feelings of isolation, leaving bisexual individuals more vulnerable to negative self-perceptions (Bradford, 2004; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998; Rust, 2002; Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1995).

Monosexism

Heterosexism is the belief that heterosexuality is universal, superior, and/or natural, and that other sexualities are therefore unnatural or inferior (Morrison & Dinkel, 2012; Stevens, 1995). *Monosexism*, in parallel fashion, describes a systemic belief that monosexual orientations (i.e., heterosexuality and homosexuality) are legitimate whereas bisexuality and other fluid orientations are not, reinforcing binary conceptions of gender and sexuality and leading to bisexual erasure (Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt, 2015; Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). Falek (2013) defines monosexism as "the oppression, discrimination, and prejudice found throughout Western culture towards polysexual individuals, including those who identify as bisexual, pansexual and, often, queer" (p. 36).

Western cultures have a vested interest in "representing homosexuality as definitionally unproblematic, and in maintaining heterosexuality and homosexuality as radically and demonstrably distinct from one another" (Jagose, 1996, p. 18). The term *sexual preference* was replaced by the term *sexual orientation* for political rather than linguistic purposes, as the term preference implies personal choice whereas orientation implies a fixed condition (Weiss, 2004). Thus, monosexual populations have a vested interest in promoting bi-invisibility, entering into what Yoshino (2000) refers to as an "epistemic contract" of bisexual erasure. Such interests include maintaining the stability of existing categories of sexual orientation, protecting the norms around monogamy, and retaining sex as a distinguishing trait in our society. Bisexuality threatens the existence of monosexuality and oppositional notions of gender (Angelides, 2006; Lingel, 2009; Weiss, 2004; Yoshino, 2000). "Having battled to carve out a recognizable (if not respectable) place for homosexuality in the social strata, gays and straights are reluctant to undo,

undermine, or undervalue the truce (however uneasy) of binary sexual identity" (Lingel, 2009, p. 387).

Biphobia

  Biphobia refers to a devaluing of bisexual individuals based on their bisexuality (Bennett, 1992), including negative attitudes, behaviors and structures directed toward individuals attracted to more than one gender (Barker et al., 2012). It may take many different forms, including denial of the existence of bisexuality, assumptions of monosexuality, defining an individual's sexuality based on the perceived gender of their partner, exclusion from research and policy-making, and stereotyping of bisexual individuals as confused, greedy, promiscuous, and carriers of disease (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Barker et al., 2012; Bradford, 2004; Daniels, 2009; Daumer, 1992; Eisner, 2013; Hayfield, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014; Horowitz & Newcomb, 1999; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Lingel, 2009; Macalister, 2003; McLean, 2008b; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt, 2015; Udis-Kessler, 1996). Although prevalent in the literature, some researchers eschew the term 'biphobia' because of the psychological implications of the suffix 'phobia,' which represents an illogical and exaggerated fear. The term 'homophobia,' which is in common usage, has expanded to include all forms of discrimination against homosexuals, thus conflating fear with prejudice (Weiss, 2004). Therefore, terms such as 'binegativity' are at times used in lieu of 'biphobia' (Eliason, 2000). When discussing the literature in this area, I have chosen to use the terms used by the authors.

  Bisexual individuals are viewed as unstable or in denial regarding their true sexuality (Barker et al., 2012; Bradford, 2004; Brewster, 2010; McLean, 2008a; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyn, 2015; Rust, 1996b; Scherrer, Kazyak, & Schmitt, 2015), resulting in difficulties accepting a bisexual identity, fear of coming out, and feelings of isolation and exclusion (Bradford, 2004;

Daniels, 2009; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; McLean, 2008b). A nationwide survey of over 1,300 individuals who identified as heterosexual found that bisexual individuals were rated less favorably than all other groups assessed, including homosexuals and individuals of various races and political affiliations, with the exception of injecting drug users (Herek, 2002). At the same time, bisexual individuals may be viewed as traitors to the lesbian and gay community and/or as seeking the privileges of heterosexuality (Armstrong, 1995; Daumer, 1992; Israel & Mohr, 2004; McLean, 2008a; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyn, 2015; Udis-Kessler, 1996; Weiss, 2004). In reality, bisexual individuals receive fewer privileges compared to monosexual lesbians and gays due to a lack of acceptance within the significant lesbian and gay community (Armstong & Tucker, 1995; Bradford, 2004; Burleson, 2014; Callis, 2009; Daumer, 1992; Deacon, Reinke, & Viers, 1996; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Hartman, 2005; Highleyman, 1995; Lever, Kanouse, Rogers, Carson, & Hertz, 1992; Lingel, 2009; McLean, 2008b; Ochs, 1996; Udis-Kessler, 1995).

Minority Stress

Research demonstrates a relationship between perceived experiences of discrimination and psychological distress among marginalized populations (Pittman, 2011; Szymanski, Gupta, Carr, & Stewart, 2009; Szymanski & Stewart, 2010), and specifically among sexual minorities (Herek, 2009; Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009; Szymanski, 2005; Szymanski, 2009; Szymanski & Gupta, 2009; Szymanski, Kashubeck-West, & Meyer, 2008; Talley & Bettencourt, 2011), including bisexual individuals (Bertsch, 2014; Bostwick, 2012; Brewster & Moradi, 2010). Minority populations face an increased number of both distal and proximal stressors. Distal stressors include factors that are broad and societal, such as awareness of stigmatization and prejudice within society or one's environment. Proximal stressors are those that are personal,

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such as experiences of discrimination or victimization, concealment of sexual identity, as well as instances of heterosexism in daily life (Meyer, 2003).

In the case of bisexual individuals, minority stress includes both personal experiences of monosexism and biphobia as well as anticipatory fear of such experiences resulting from an awareness of their existence (Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Logie & Earnshaw, 2015). Such stressors inevitably place psychological stress on an individual, making the establishment and/or maintenance of positive self-esteem more challenging (Nesmith, Burton, & Cosgrove, 1999) and often resulting in internalization of negative messages and prejudices (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009; Meyer, 2003; Szymanski, Kashubeck-West, & Meyer, 2008), specifically internalized biphobia among bisexual populations (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt, 2015; Rust, 2002). Social support and group affiliation may help to ameliorate some of the effects of this stigma (Crocker & Major, 1989; Meyer, 2003). Specific to sexual orientation stigma, individuals who participate in sexual minority communities are able to better adapt to such stigma as these communities provide avenues for resources, socialization, activism, and support (D'Augelli & Garnets, 1995; Harper & Schneider, 2003). However, bisexual individuals report lower levels of connection to sexual minority communities than do lesbians or gays (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Morris & Rothblum, 1999).

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) social ecological model has been used to explain the mechanism by which minority stress impacts lesbian and bisexual individuals, with stressors operating at multiple levels within the model (Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015), from microsystems through macrosystems, and community ties impacting resilience (Zimmerman, Darnell, Rhew, Lee, & Kaysen, 2015). The relationship between stressors and negative mental health outcomes is attenuated by social support (Meyer, 2003). However, bi-invisibility resulting from a lack of

acknowledgement of the existence of bisexuality (Miller, Andre, Ebin, & Bessonova, 2007) contributes to poorer support systems for bisexual women as compared to lesbians (Bronn, 2001; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015). Research has demonstrated that interpersonal relationships can help buffer a lack of support in other areas for bisexual women (Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt, 2015).

Prior to the 2000s, researchers overwhelmingly combined homosexual and bisexual populations when examining disparities in physical and mental health concerns. However, studies that distinguish between the two have found consistently that bisexual populations exhibit higher rates of mental health concerns than do both heterosexuals and lesbians and gays (i.e., monosexual populations) (Barker et al., 2012; Bostwick, 2012; Flanders, Dobson, & Logie, 2015; Jorm, Korten, Rodgers, Jacomb, & Christensen, 2002). In fact, previous studies may have overestimated the rates of health concerns within homosexual populations due to this lack of differentiation. Bisexual individuals exhibit higher rates of anxiety, depression, and negative affect, and have reported more adverse life events and less support from family and friends, than do monosexual populations (Bostwick, 2012; Jorm, Korten, Rodgers, Jacomb, & Christensen, 2002). Mental health concerns and concomitant lack of social support may contribute to increased rates of substance use, sexual risk-taking, suicidality, and self-harm (Batejan, Jarvi, & Swinson, 2015; Blosnich & Bossarte, 2012 ; Conron, Mimiaga, & Landers, 2010; Eisenberg & Weschler, 2003; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Gonzales et al., 1999; Kerr, Santurri, & Peters, 2013; McCabe, Hughes, & Boyd, 2004; Scheer, Peterson, & Page-Shafer, 2002), which contribute to poorer overall health among bisexual individuals compared to monosexual populations (Cochran & Mays, 2007; Fredriksen-Goldsen, Kim, Barkan, Balsam, & Mincer, 2010).

Each year since 1966, the Higher Education Research Institute has collected data from hundreds of thousands of entering freshmen at a variety of educational institutions as part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (HERI, 2016). Tracking LGBT students has been difficult, but in recent years, more students have been arriving on campus open about their sexuality and gender expression (Renn & Reason, 2012). The 2015 year survey was the first in the Institute's 50-year history in which respondents had the opportunity to indicate sexual orientation – lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or other (LGBQ/other) (Eagan et al., 2015). As a result, any concerns faced disproportionately by these students previously went unnoticed and thus unaddressed. Not being counted sends the message that one does not matter. Trans activist and actress Laverne Cox commented, "Because the federal government does not track LGBT, specifically sexual orientation and gender identity data, the lives of LGBT people in this country, in a very specific way, do not count…. So many of us have tried to take our lives because we exist in a world that tells us our lives don't matter, that we're not who we say we are" (Irby, 2016, paras. 4 & 6).

The 2015 CIRP survey indicated that students identifying as LGBQ/other more frequently felt overwhelmed and depressed when compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Eagan et al., 2015). It is important to note that, consistent with other findings (San Francisco Human Rights Commission, 2011), for students indicating their sexual orientation, more than double the percentage identified as bisexual (3.2%) compared to those identifying as other (1.4%), gay (1.1%), lesbian (0.6%), or queer (0.5%). It is therefore pressing that campuses address the needs of bisexual students specifically, since they represent the largest percentage of the LGBT community on college campuses yet are often invisible in terms of resources, communities, and discourse.

The 2015 CIRP found that LGBQ/other students rated their emotional health status lower than did heterosexual students and reported an increased likelihood of seeking counseling services (Eagan et al., 2015). Almost six times as many students identifying as queer (46%) felt depressed and overwhelmed frequently in the last year compared to heterosexual students (8%). Notably, students identifying as nonmonosexual were more likely by 9.3 to 30.0 percentage points to have felt overwhelmed and depressed than those identifying as lesbian or gay. More than half of students identifying as bisexual or queer reported feeling overwhelmed frequently, and they were the least likely to rank their overall emotional health as "above average" or "in the top 10%."

Research on Bisexual Women

There is a lack of scholarly research on bisexual women due to popular attitudes about bisexuality (Burrill, 2004; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Markowe, 2002; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt, 2015; Rust, 2000a; Rust, 2002; Young, 1997), including the belief that bisexuality does not exist and that sexuality is dichotomous (Borver, Gorevich, & Mathieson, 2002; McLean, 2008a; Miller, Andre, Ebin, & Bessonova, 2007; Oswalt, 2009; Rust, 2000a; Rust, 2002), the lack of a standard definition of the term 'bisexual' (Callis, 2009; Meyer & Wilson, 2009; Solarz, 1999), and the marginalized status of bisexual women in society (Armstong & Tucker, 1995; Bradford, 2004; Burleson, 2014; Callis, 2009; Daumer, 1992; Deacon, Reinke, & Viers, 1996; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Hartman, 2005; Highleyman, 1995; Lever, Kanouse, Rogers, Carson, & Hertz, 1992; Lingel, 2009; McLean, 2008b; Ochs, 1996; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyn, 2015; Udis-Kessler, 1995). As a result of the lack of research on and miscategorization of bisexual individuals, it has been difficult to draw conclusions from the existing research about

bisexual women (Bradford, 2004; Miller, Andre, Ebin, & Bessonova, 2007; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt, 2015).

Sexuality research typically fails to mention bisexuality at all, or when it does, tacks it on to the identities "lesbian and gay" and then fails to address it again (Burrill, 2002; Callis, 2009; Young, 1997). Based on how sexual orientation is defined, researchers may opt to include bisexual women in their definition of lesbian while others may not. The majority of research examining bisexual women has traditionally either collapsed them into the same category with lesbians (Barker et al., 2012; MacDonald, 2000; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt, 2015; Rust, 2000a; Rust, 2002; Solarz, 1999; Young, 1997), "reflecting the unexplored assumption that they share more in common with lesbians than with heterosexual women" (Hughes & Eliason, 2002, p. 269), or deliberately omitted them from analyses entirely (Dugan & Yurman, 2011; Rust, 2000a; Rust, 2002; Solarz, 1999).

In the 1960s and 1970s, terms such as situational, latent, and secondary homosexuality were favored to describe supposedly heterosexual individuals engaging in same sex behavior due to contextual circumstances, thus denying the existence of bisexuality as a valid sexual identity and reaffirming the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy. Research on bisexual individuals increased in the 1980s, but was focused primarily on fear of the spread of HIV, male-male prostitution, and prison sexuality. Although research inclusive of bisexual individuals increased over the course of the 1990s, the majority of studies did not focus specifically on bisexual individuals, instead merely acknowledging their inclusion along with gay and/or lesbian participants (Rust, 2002).

While research is called for in areas that have been studied with lesbians and gay men, it is imperative that researchers acknowledge the complexity of sexuality in constructing their

studies, including design, sampling, analysis, and conclusions (Meyer & Wilson, 2009; Rust, 2000a). Nonprobability sampling is typically used in research with LGBT participants due to difficulties in accessing the population, but it is important to note that such methods typically reduce the diversity of samples (Feild, Pruchno, Bewley, Lemay, & Levinsky, 2006). Willingness to disclose bisexuality is related to class, race, and gender (Hartman, 2011; Laumann, Gagnon, Michaels, Michael, & Coleman,1994). Individuals self-identifying as bisexual tend to be White and upper- to middle-class (Burleson, 2014). A group of researchers who have conducted studies with bisexual participants put forth a list of best practices to keep in mind when working with this population (Barker et al., 2012). They emphasize the importance of ensuring bisexual participants are not rendered invisible, of reflexivity in addressing assumptions that may unintentionally impact research, and of taking a bottom up approach in which bisexual individuals are involved in all stages of research.

The Role of the Coming Out Process

"Coming out" is a process LGB individuals choose to undertake that serves the purpose of revealing oneself to others, which may enhance self-acceptance and self-esteem (Johnson & Guenther, 1987).   The models of sexual orientation development described previously (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994) feature disclosure of sexual orientation as a critical part of identity development. The process of coming out, however, may prove more difficult for bisexual individuals as bisexual identities may change and be renegotiated over time (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Rust, 2000b), requiring the individual to have to constantly reassert their sexual identity while at the same time advocating for the existence of bisexuality (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Diamond, 2008; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Lingel, 2009; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyn, 2015). In disclosing their sexuality, bisexual individuals must

face both heterosexist and monosexist assumptions, requiring strategic disclosure decisions that are impacted by cultural notions about bisexuality and by their romantic partner's gender (Scherrer, Kazyak, & Schmitz, 2015). Whereas some bisexual individuals feel safer not disclosing their sexuality at all, others feel pressured to disclose as monosexual (i.e. lesbian or gay) to counteract misunderstandings about bisexuality or to divest themselves of perceived heteronormative privileges (Scherrer, Kazyak, & Schmitz, 2015).

The impact of non-disclosure include negative physical and mental health outcomes. Non-disclosure of homosexual orientation among HIV positive gay men has been linked to a series of negative health outcomes (Cole, Kemeny, Taylor, & Visscher, 1996; Cole, Kemeny, Taylor, Visscher, & Fahey, 1996; Strachan, Bennett, Russo, & Roy-Byrne, 2007). Among students, concealment of sexual orientation has been linked to higher rates of depression and lower self-esteem (DeSouza & Showalter, 2010).

Research demonstrates that lesbians are more likely to disclose their sexual orientation than bisexual women (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Ontario, 1997; Davis & Wright, 2001; Johnson & Guenther, 1987; Meckler, Elliott, Kanouse, Beals, & Schuster, 2006; Witeck-Combs Communications, 2002). A bisexual woman's decision to disclose may be related to her comfort with her sexual orientation, her current relationship status, past experiences, and other contextual factors (Hitchcock & Wilson, 1992). Although non-disclosure of sexual orientation is related to negative outcomes, coming out also has potentially devastating adverse effects, as women report negative reactions such as invalidation, denial, ostracism, invasive questions, shock, fear, pity, or condescension (Bradford, 2004; Scherzer, 2000; Stevens & Hall, 1988)

Bisexual individuals facing judgment after coming out have to seek a new circle of friends (Knous, 2006). As a result, bisexual individuals at times conceal their sexuality, or 'pass,' in order to feel that they belong and to avoid labels and stereotyping (Knous, 2006; Pascale-Hague, 2015). However, while serving as a coping mechanism, the ability to pass simultaneously creates a sense of stigma that can be internalized, creating a negative self-evaluation (Lingel, 2009) and a cognitive burden that can then itself become a stressor (DiPlacido, 1998; Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Meyer, 2003; Miller & Major, 2000). College students with concealable stigmas, such as homosexuality and bisexuality, report lower self-esteem and higher rates of anxiety and depression than those with conspicuous stigmas, such as some disabilities or socioeconomic status (Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998). They feel better about themselves when surrounded by others like them (Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998), but those that choose to "pass" end up isolating themselves from community support that could help them to feel less stigmatized (Meyer, 2003).

Many college students choose not to come out because they are unsure of how to handle the resulting conflict (Gonsiorek & Rudolph, 1991), while others opt to maintain different, context-dependent identities – heterosexual to family and friends at home, and queer on their college campus (Evans & D'Augelli, 1996; Fassinger, 1998). Hypervigilance and the need to engage in impression management, making constant decisions on whether to make oneself visible, result in increased rates of distress and isolation (Barbara, Quandt, & Anderson, 2001; Bjorkman & Malterud, 2007; Croteau, 1996; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998; Hitchcock & Wilson, 1992; Major & O'Brien, 2005; Pascale-Hague, 2015; Pachankis, 2007; Scherrer, Kazyak, & Schmitz, 2015; Woods & Harbeck, 1992). "Many assume that individuals with a hidden stigma escape the difficulties faced by individuals with a visible

stigma. However…[t]he ambiguity of social situations combined with the threat of potential discovery makes possessing a concealable stigma a difficult predicament for many individuals" (Pachankis, 2007, p. 329).

Research on college students exhibits mixed results as to whether students who choose to come out to other students and to faculty experience negative interactions (DeSouza & Showalter, 2010; Gortmaker & Brown, 2006). Disclosure of sexual orientation is related to perceptions of a positive climate and the presence of supportive individuals and LGB role models (Evans & Broido, 1999; Rust, 2002). However, research demonstrates that approximately half of students surveyed at various universities feel uncomfortable disclosing their sexuality and actively conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity due to fear of intimidation, discrimination or negative consequences (D'Augelli, 1989; Rankin, 2003). College students rate bisexual individuals as less acceptable than lesbians or gay men (Eliason, 1997). Students who have come out to their roommates report diverse responses ranging from harassment to support (D'Augelli, 1989; Evans & Broido, 1999). Remaining "in the closet" helped students to feel secure and to gain confidence in their identity without having to endure harassment, but also meant that students had to live in fear of disclosure, cope with internal conflicts, self-censor, and distance themselves from others (D'Augelli, 1989).

Sense of Belonging

A need to form and maintain social relationships is innate to all human beings (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943). Research dating back to the 19th century demonstrates the importance of social integration to psychological health (Durkheim, 1897). Evolutionarily, it makes sense for individuals to seek group membership in order to enhance their odds of survival in environments fraught with danger and limited resources (Baumeister &

Leary, 1995). Lack of a sense of belonging and attachments to others can result in feelings of alienation (Strayhorn, 2008a; Strayhorn, 2012) and diminished mental (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier , 1992; Hagerty & Williams, 1999; Hill & Pettit, 2012; Lee, Keough, & Sexton, 2002; Turner, 1981; Woodward, Wingate, Gray, & Pantalone, 2014) and physical health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Cohen, 2004; Hale, Hannum, & Espelage, 2005).

Maslow (1943) set forth a hierarchy of five needs that motivate human behavior. The needs form a pyramid, so that when a lower level need is fulfilled an individual then becomes motivated by a higher level need. Lower level needs are physiological- and safety-oriented. Once a person is assured needs such as food and shelter are met, they become motivated by social and esteem needs until they reach a state of self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Social needs include giving and receiving love and feeling a sense of belongingness in the form of friendships and relationships with others. Esteem needs include self-esteem, recognition, self-respect, and respect from others (Maslow, 1943). Whereas Maslow positioned social needs as higher level than those that are physiological, Bowlby, the father of attachment theory, posited that attachment is a primary motivational system, on the same level as physiological needs such as food and warmth (Berkman & Glass, 2000; Bowlby, 1969). Regardless of their level, it is evident that social needs form an important component of the human motivational system.

Durkheim's sociological research on the impact of social integration on suicide rates (Berkman & Glass, 2000; Durkheim, 1897; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001), and subsequently research in the 1960s on the basic human need for social relationships (Litwak & Szelenyi, 1969), led to investigation of the concept of social support and its effects on physical and psychological health (Albrecht & Goldsmith, 2003; Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000;

Brown, Andrews, Harris, Adler, & Bridge, 1986; Henderson, 1984; LaRocco, House, & French, 1980; Lakey & Orehek, 2011; Norbeck & Tilden, 1983; Peirce, Frone, Russell, Cooper, & Mudar, 2000; Turner, 1981; Williams, Ware, & Donald, 1981; Uchino, 2006). Measuring social support has remained elusive, as the concept may be defined in various ways. Social support may be perceived as instrumental or affective (Henderson, 1984), objective or subjective (Sarason & Sarason, 1985), and as having a direct impact versus having a buffering effect (Hagerty & Williams, 1999; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001; Segrin, 2003; Wilcox, 1981). It has been measured in terms of social bonds (Henderson 1977, 1980), social networks (Mueller, 1980), meaningful social contact (Cassel, 1976), or availability of confidants (Brown, Bhrolchain, & Harris, 1975; Lowenthal and Haven, 1968; Miller & Ingham, 1976). Alternatively, Cobb (1976) conceptualized social support as having to do with information – the information that one is cared for and valued and belongs to a network of mutual obligation.

One of the ways in which sense of belonging has been operationalized is perceived support from others (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salamone, 2002a; Strayhorn, 2012). Individuals seek consistent and frequent social interactions in order to feel like a part of a larger whole, and much of their behaviors and thoughts are motivated by this desire (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Strayhorn, 2012). A sense of belonging is derived from frequent interactions with and persistent caring from the same individuals sustained over time. It involves one's perception of the quality of their social relationships – whether others include, value, and respect them (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Walton & Carr, 2011).

Even minor cues of social connectedness to unfamiliar others have been shown to impact self-identity and achievement motivation (Walton, Cohen, & Spencer, 2012). However, earlier social support research faced criticism for neglecting to look beyond frequency of contact, failing

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to incorporate aspects of resource exchange and interaction quality (Hupcey, 2001; Shinn, Lebman, & Wong, 1984). When examining the impact of social support, it is critical to consider the nature of relationships, and in particular their fit to an individual's circumstances, rather than their mere existence (Shinn, Lebman, & Wong, 1984). Individuals who do not receive the support they expect from a significant person in their life at the time of a crisis face an increased risk of depression (Brown, Andrews, Harris, Adler, & Bridge, 1986). The relationship between support and stressors has been shown to be bidirectional, in that stressful life events may reduce the amount of social support available to a person (Eckenrode & Gore, 1981). This is particularly true in the case of stigmatizing events or conditions that may make others uncomfortable (Weisman & Worden, 1977; Wortman & Dunkel-Schetter, 1979).

Another way to operationalize belonging is perceived sense of community. In this way, sense of belonging can be thought of as "the feeling, belief, and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group, and a willingness to sacrifice for the group" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 5). Thus, sense of belonging is reciprocal and relational – a group satisfies an individual's needs and vice versa through a shared commitment, which creates a sense of community and feelings of value and significance (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Strayhorn, 2012; Tovar & Simon, 2010). Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, and Collier (1992) define sense of belonging as "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment" (p. 173). Feelings of value relate to a sense of mattering (Tovar, 2013; Strayhorn, 2012), which in turn is related to success and persistence at an institution (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1989).

McMillan and Chavis (1986) propose that a sense of community is defined by four elements:

> The first element is membership. Membership is the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness. The second element is influence, a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members. The third element is reinforcement: integration and fulfillment of needs. This is the feeling that members' needs will be met by the resources received through their membership in the group. The last element is shared emotional connection, the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences. (p. 9)

Shared emotional connections are impacted by the quality of interactions within the community as well as experiences of reward or humiliation within a community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Sense of Belonging on College Campuses

In applying the concept of sense of belonging to college students, Strayhorn (2012) defines it as "perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g. campus community) or others on campus (e.g. faculty, peers)" (p. 3). The word 'perceived' is key – it implies that sense of belonging includes both affective and cognitive components. A student's cognitive assessment of their membership in a community or group results in an affective response (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Age has been found to moderate the relationship between social support and psychological health, with younger, college-aged individuals more reliant than older adults on receipt of social support from diverse sources in order to maintain a sense of well-being (Segrin, 2003).

Strayhorn's model of college student belonging (see Figure 1) examines seven core elements of sense of belonging and how they relate to one another:

1. Sense of belonging is a basic human need.

2. Sense of belonging is a fundamental motive, sufficient to drive human behavior.

3. Sense of belonging takes on heightened importance in certain contexts, at certain times, and among certain populations.

4. Sense of belonging is related to, and seemingly a consequence of, mattering.

5. Social identities intersect and affect college students' sense of belonging.

6. Sense of belonging engenders other positive outcomes.

7. Sense of belonging must be satisfied on a continual basis and likely changes as circumstances, conditions, and context change. (Strayhorn, 2012).
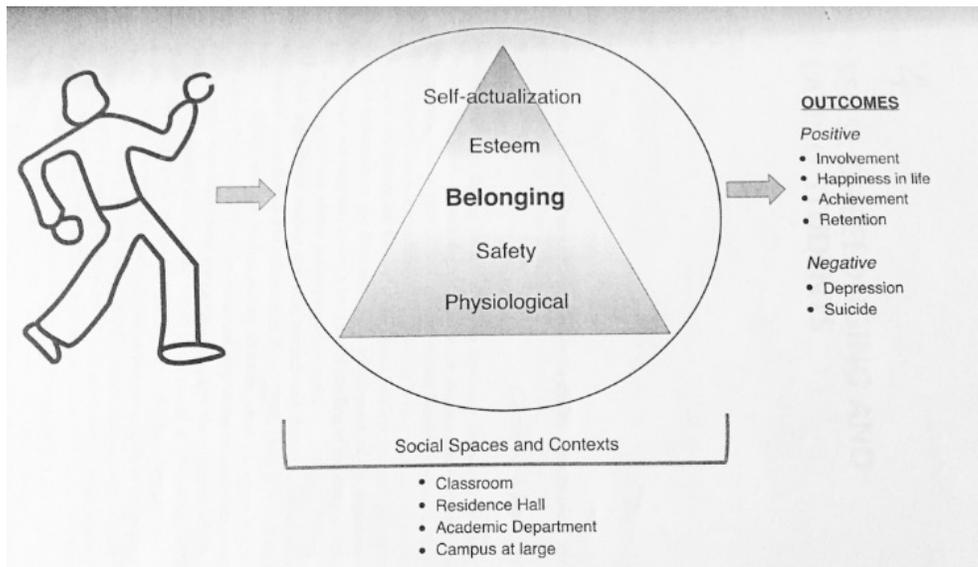
Figure 1. Strayhorn's hypothesized model of college students' sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 25).

The center of Strayhorn's (2012) model consists of a student's innate needs based upon Maslow's (1943) hierarchy. In descending order, they are self-actualization, esteem, belonging,

safety, and physiological. The need for belonging is highlighted as the focus of the model.

Arrows indicate that when these needs are met, the positive outcomes of involvement, happiness,

achievement, and retention are achieved, and that when they are not met, negative mental health

outcomes may occur. Also depicted in the model are the social spaces and contexts that students

may enter, including classrooms, residence halls, academic departments, and the campus at large.

These are the sites that a student typically must traverse and are therefore those in which their

needs will emerge in different ways (Strayhorn, 2012).

Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering indicates that feeling marginal on

campus, both inside and outside the classroom, presents a barrier to student learning. The

potential for feelings of marginality exists when individuals transition to new life roles, such as

entering college, and this feeling may be enhanced for those with historically marginalized social

identities. This feeling may result in negative psychological outcomes which may be

counteracted by those who feel that they matter. Mattering refers to our belief that we matter to

others, whether right or wrong. Again, the perception versus the reality is key. According to

Schlossberg (1989), mattering consists of five aspects, based on the work of sociologist Morris

Rosenberg and supported by her own research (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981):

1. Attention – feeling that one is noticed.

2. Importance – feeling that one is cared about.

3. Ego extension – feeling that someone will be proud of one's accomplishments and
   saddened by one's failures.

4. Dependence – feeling that one is needed.

5. Appreciation – feeling that one's efforts are appreciated.

The higher education research literature often conflates students' behaviors (i.e., involvement) with their psychological perceptions (i.e., sense of belonging) (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). Students who are involved on campus, determined by the physical and psychological energy they devote to a given experience, feel more connected to their institutions (Astin, 1999; Strayhorn, 2012). It is the behavior of involvement that then facilitates feelings of belonging and creates a sense of community by helping students to connect with others with similar interests and values, by familiarizing students with campus environments, by affirming students' identities and personal worth, and by creating feelings of mattering (Schlossberg, 1989). In fact, the desire to belong is often an impetus that motivates student involvement (Strayhorn, 2012), with membership in various peer groups facilitating student adjustment to campus environments (Attinasi, 1989; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Spady's (1971) determination of student integration reflects both behavioral and psychological components. Through a study of student persistence, he determined that involvement in various academic and social spheres on campus impacts students' sense of integration, which in turn impacts their satisfaction and drop out decisions. Perceptions of integration were determined by sense of belonging, nature of interpersonal relationships, and perceived congruence with campus norms. The latter factor may be particularly important when it comes to bisexual students given the hetero- and mono-normative climates of college campuses (Sanlo, 2004).

One of the main sources of student departure identified by Tinto (1993) is failure to become incorporated into the intellectual and social life of the institution, both via formal means such as academic performance and extracurricular activities, and via informal means, such as faculty-student and peer group interactions. The concept of integration, however, is not without

criticism. Tinto's (1987) initial theory, based on Van Gennep's (1960) concepts of separation, transition, and integration, required that students disassociate from their previous communities and engage in rites of passage in order to reach a state where they feel a sense of belonging. Integration, when framed in this fashion, may not be a desirable goal for marginalized populations, as it implies the need for assimilation to a dominant culture (Attinasi, 1989; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tierney, 1992).

Tierney (1992) argues that Tinto's theory is based in anthropology, yet ignores anthropological findings that rites of passage are specific to social groups, resulting in potentially harmful consequences for minority students. In addition, holding marginalized students solely responsible for their own acculturation absolves institutions from creating supportive campus environments for all students (Kuh & Love, 2000; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). As a result, Tinto (1993) revised his theory to shift from the concept of integration to a concept of membership in an attempt to more accurately reflect the experiences of marginalized populations on campus. Critics advocate adopting a cultural perspective to better understand the intricacies of student integration and departure and to create supportive resources and policies (Guiffrida, 2006; Kuh & Love, 2000; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000).

Perceptions of campus climate in regards to diversity (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1999) and experiences of discrimination (Hurtado, 1994) affect students' sense of belonging, feelings of alienation, and academic and social lives (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Research demonstrates that perceptions of climate are more significant to students' ability to transition successfully to college than are personal background characteristics (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory notes the importance of social support to effective transitions, with support featuring prominently as one of the "4 S's" that constitute one

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of the four coping mechanisms. Support is received from intimate relationships, networks of friends, family units, and from institutions and communities. For students feeling marginalized and perceiving a campus climate to be chilly, support will be all the more important to ease their transition to college.

Supportive relationships can have a profound effect on student outcomes (Strayhorn, 2008b). Such relationships aid a student's social integration into the campus community, which impacts their sense of belonging and their persistence (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tinto, 1993). Sanford (1966) posited that an adequate amount of support is needed to help students manage the challenges of college. Aspects of support include impactful relationships with others, feelings of security, and a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2008b). This support is even more critical for marginalized populations (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995; Schlossberg, 1989; Strayhorn, 2012). For instance, gay male students of color disclose that their desire to belong has led them to engage in unhealthy behaviors such as unprotected sex and overconsumption of alcohol, with these behaviors leading to negative psychological states, including depression and suicidality (Strayhorn, 2012).

Sense of belonging on campus is impacted by interactions with both peers and faculty (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salamone, 2000b), including discussions about course content with peers, membership in student organizations and on teams, and frequency of interactions with faculty outside of class (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Such relationships do not need to match the value norms of the institution – in fact, peer groups can form around common concerns (Newcomb, 1962), such as pushing back against sexual and gender norms.

Marginalized populations, however, may encounter difficulties forming peer relationships due to negative stereotyping (Hayfield, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014; Israel & Mohr, 2004; McLean, 2008b; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyn, 2015; Strayhorn, 2008b; Walton & Carr, 2011) and feelings of alienation when interacting with certain groups (Strayhorn, 2012). Stigmatization creates belonging uncertainty, in which individuals are sensitive to information regarding the quality of their social connections (Walton & Cohen, 2007). "People who contend with numeric underrepresentation and with negative stereotypes in mainstream academic and professional arenas are vigilant for cues that could communicate they do not belong or are not fully included in these settings. When encountered, such cues can undermine people's sense of belonging, motivation, and achievement" (Walton & Carr, 2011, p. 89).

Students from marginalized groups report that involvement can actually diminish sense of belonging when a student feels like a minority within a given group (Strayhorn, 2012), such as bisexual students involved in an LGBT organization. Even when feeling a part of cultural identity groups, sense of belonging is not always enhanced as these organizations provide outlets to share not just common interests but also common experiences of marginalization on campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), thus highlighting the chasm between the marginalized group and the majority group (Strayhorn, 2012). However, for those students who have experienced tension on campus, involvement in such groups can mediate sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). For instance, for African American primary and secondary school students attending elite predominantly White institutions, peer support helps ease their transition and contributes to their academic success (Datnow & Cooper, 1997). African American gay and gender non-conforming high school students indicate that "making space" in the form of taking classes together, meeting up between classes, getting involved in leadership activities, and expressing

themselves in artistic and performative spaces affirms their identities and helps them respond to marginalization (Venzant Chambers & McCready, 2011). It may be that students who participate in affinity groups but who have not experienced tensions on campus feel a greater sense of alienation after hearing about others' experiences of marginalization, while for those already feeling marginalized, such groups help to enhance sense of belonging.

Students who experience social isolation and lack a sense of belonging exhibit poorer academic performance and lower retention rates compared to others (Berger, 1997; Spady, 1970; Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 1987; Walton & Cohen, 2007). LGB students fear that their grades will suffer as a result of coming out and report that their personal struggles negatively impact their academic engagement (Quaye & Harper, 2014). Chronic stress resulting from unsupportive environments and harassment lessens LGB students' ability to focus on academics and thus increases the chances of attrition (Sanlo, 2004; Sherrill & Hardesty, 1994). As a result, LGB students are at a greater risk of attrition when compared to their heterosexual counterparts, yet there remains a lack of research in this area, in particular due to a lack of data on sexual orientation resulting from its fluid and controversial nature (Mancini, 2011; Sanlo, 2004). What research does exist demonstrates that sexual minority students often consider dropping out or do fully drop out as a result of sexuality-related concerns (Mancini, 2011; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010; Sanlo, 2004; Sherrill & Hardesty, 1994).

Bisexuality and Sense of Belonging

Both the lesbian community and the larger heterosexual culture are reluctant to include us. We have to create our own community; and fight for inclusion in the gay and lesbian world and for recognition and rights in the heterosexual world (Woodard, 1991, p. 86).

Sense of belonging is contextual – it becomes more critical during periods of transition and in situations in which individuals feel alienated, invisible, unwelcome, or unsupported (Anderman & Freeman, 2004; Schlossberg, 1989; Strayhorn, 2012). Thus social identities impact sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012) in that they may be related to marginalization on campus. The relationship between campus involvement and sense of belonging is often conceived of in a global fashion (Astin, 1999), but marginalized students in particular may need to develop multiple group affiliations in order to meet a variety of needs (Attinasi, 1989; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Affiliations with multiple subgroups may serve to scale down a campus environment so that it is more manageable and relatable when compared to the institution as a whole (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Social support is critical in the lives of LGB individuals in order to protect against minority stress (Detrie & Lease, 2007; Doty, Willoughby, Lindahl, & Malik, 2010; Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995). "[T]he longer someone is bisexual and the more support they get, the better they feel about themselves, the higher their self esteem" (George, 1999. p. 204). In particular, the presence of similar others increases self-esteem among those with concealable stigmas such as bisexuality (Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998). However, experiences of marginalization via negative stereotyping, which often happens to bisexual individuals in lesbian and gay communities (Armstong & Tucker, 1995; Bradford, 2004; Burleson, 2014; Callis, 2009; Daumer, 1992; Deacon, Reinke, & Viers, 1996; Hartman, 2005; Highleyman, 1995; James, 1996; Lever, Kanouse, Rogers, Carson, & Hertz, 1992; Lingel, 2009; McLean, 2008b; Ochs, 1996; Weiss, 2004; Udis-Kessler, 1995), are antithetical to developing a sense of belonging (Walton & Carr, 2011).

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Individuals with concealable stigmas often isolate themselves due to fear and negative self-image (Bradford, 2004; Daniels, 2009; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; McLean, 2008b). Bisexual individuals report higher levels of identity confusion and lower levels of visible, organized community support relative to lesbians and gay men (Balsam & Mohr, 2007). Confusion, lack of support, and awareness of stereotypes combine to discourage individuals from self-identifying as bisexual, which perpetuates a cycle of invisibility and cultural anonymity (Ault, 1996), which is further compounded for bisexual individuals in different sex relationships (Ochs, 1996). "[The] problem of invisibility is key to understanding the bi community. How can a community form when its potential members can't find one another?" (Burleson, 2014, pp. 65).

A sense of belonging, conversely, can help lessen the impact of negative stereotyping, leading individuals to believe that their qualities are recognized and valued (Walton & Carr, 2011). Similar people from the same socially stigmatized group can provide information about the stigma, allowing individuals to better evaluate themselves relative to group membership and leading to more positive self-perceptions (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998). A study of LGB youth found that locating parental figures within the LGB community as well as individuals who introduced the youth to the LGB community were both critical to protecting against risks related to biphobia (Nesmith, 1999).

While the importance of sense of belonging for sexual minorities as a whole has been recognized, research specific to bisexual individuals is rather recent. It is important to note that sexual minority women experience both heterosexism and sexism, a combination shown to be extremely detrimental to psychological well-being (Friedman & Leaper, 2010). Young bisexual women in particular report the intersection of multiple stigmas, namely biphobia, sexism, and

ageism, resulting in a more severe negative impact from perceptions of hypersexuality (Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015).

Individuals choose to associate with communities in which they feel their needs can be met. Bisexual spaces are rare, and those that do exist are often temporary and transitory, lacking connection to a wider bisexual community (Hemmings, 2002; Pallotta-Chiarolli & Martin, 2008). Bisexual individuals are in need of emotional support and community acceptance (Fox, 1991), but they often feel marginalized within lesbian and gay spaces and forced to choose between supportive relationships and authenticity (Burleson, 2014; Daniels, 2009; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Pallotta-Chiarolli & Martin, 2008; Pascale-Hague, 2015). Bisexual women report feeling excluded and uncomfortable in lesbian and gay spaces, as well as in wider society, due to stereotyping that renders their experiences invisible and/or invalid (Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Hayfield, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014; Highleyman, 1995; Israel & Mohr, 2004; McLean, 2008b; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyn, 2015; Weiss, 2004). As a result, they may isolate themselves, weakening their involvement to the point where their bisexuality can remain undetected (Daniels, 2009; McLean, 2008b).

Because bisexuality is viewed as inauthentic and because separate bisexual spaces and resources rarely exist (Dugan & Yurman, 2011; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Hemmings, 2002; Pallotta-Chiarolli & Martin, 2008; Robin & Hamner, 2000), passing as lesbian has been considered, unfortunately, to be a formative part of being bisexual (Hemmings, 2002). A recent study examining bisexuals' perceptions and experiences of community belonging and social exclusion found that they concealed their sexuality at times due to encountered stigma. Those who risked disclosing their orientation in favor of authenticity deepened their opportunities for meaningful community belonging (Pascale-Hague, 2015), but this may be challenging in the face

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of binegativity and bi-invisibility (Bradford, 2004; Hayfield, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014; Pascale-Hague, 2015).

Disclosing one's bisexuality and participating in community groups that embrace one's identity are key tools in managing stigma.

> Stigma management allows the individual to normalize and affirm their behavior. It
> allows them to feel that what they are doing is normal, okay, and positive when much of
> society feels otherwise. This is especially necessary for bi's since they are minorities in a
> bi-phobic society. (Knous, 2006, p. 49)

Prior to establishing a sense of community, bisexual individuals report feeling lonely and not having others to talk to who have shared similar experiences (Bradford, 2004). Finding similar others leads to feelings of kinship, validation, and support. Research demonstrates gender differences in this area (Bradford, 2004; Burleson, 2014), with bisexual women reporting a higher need for affiliation with the lesbian community than do men with the gay community. In fact, bisexual women reported rejection by lesbian women as the greatest difficulty they face (Bradford, 2004).

Groups create boundaries to define who belongs to the community and who does not, and use deviants as a means of more clearly defining these boundaries (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The lesbian and gay community has defined bisexual individuals as deviants, thus more clearly defining who belongs and who does not (Knous, 2006; Whitney, 2002), or who is gay or lesbian "enough." Thus bisexual individuals may opt to define their identities in varying ways depending upon the social context – for instance, identifying as lesbian or queer within the lesbian community, but as bisexual among other bisexuals – in order to be best accepted and/or understood (Rust, 1996b). Lingel (2009) refers to this as "sexuality-based passing, where

bisexuals opt (or feel forced) to alternate between gay, straight, and (where available) bisexual communities" (p. 386).

Anti-bisexual attitudes have impacted bisexual individuals' participation in the lesbian and gay community, and as a result, historically bisexuals have not had the same opportunities for social and emotional support as monosexual individuals (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Bradford, 2004; Deacon, Reinke, & Viers, 1996; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; McGeorge & Carlson, 2011; McLean, 2008b; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyn, 2015). Bisexual women report being viewed as socially deviant and immoral sexual perverts and predators (Daniels, 2009). While passing as gay or lesbian compromises their sense of identity, they deem it necessary to avoid being ostracized (McLean, 2008b). "Without social recognition, there can be no bisexual community comparable to the gay community with its networks and institutions. And without community, there are no reference groups, supportive norms, or available symbols to counter the pull toward the two extremes of the continuum" (Lever, Kanouse, Rogers, Carson, & Hertz, 1992, p. 198).

Bisexual women have often found themselves in tension with and ostracized from lesbian communities (Armstong & Tucker, 1995; Bradford, 2004; Burleson, 2014; Callis, 2009; Daumer, 1992; Deacon, Reinke, & Viers, 1996; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Hartman, 2005; Highleyman, 1995; Lever, Kanouse, Rogers, Carson, & Hertz, 1992; Lingel, 2009; McLean, 2008b; Ochs, 1996; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyn, 2015; Udis-Kessler, 1995). Bisexual identity threatens gendered categories and binary ways of conceptualizing gender and sexuality (Rust, 1996b).

Some gay men and lesbians feel that the acknowledgement of bisexuality makes their own homosexuality less visible or less valid. It is the threat that bisexuals pose to a

dualistic view of sexuality and to identity-based foundations for organizing and

community-building that cause many gay men and lesbians to be so profoundly opposed

to bisexuality. (Highleyman, 1995, p. 85).

Bisexuality threatens biological determinism (i.e., the theory that individuals are born

homosexual), which is the basis upon which the lesbian and gay community has traditionally

sought equal rights (Highleyman, 1995). While a monolithic LGBT community was created in

order to gain political advantage through the pursuit of common interests, including bisexual and

trans individuals, who dismantle the notion of fixed and essential sexual and gender categories,

eroded the essentialist basis for a politics based on identity (Weiss, 2004).

The minoritizing logics of identity politics figure 'gayness' as another identity, like

straightness, and the in-between status of bisexuality seems to question too much the non-

threatening innateness upon which much of gay politicking came to depend: we're born

this way, after all, so please don't discriminate. (Alexander & Anderlini-D'Onofrio,

2014, p. 7).

The concept of fluid sexuality calls into question the model of sexuality in which identities are

neat, binary, inherent, and constant (Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Hemmings, 2002; Rust, 1996b;

Rust, 2000b).

The roots of the marginalization of bisexual women can be found in the political

movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Initially, the feminist movement distanced itself from any

connection with lesbianism so as to not undermine the mission to secure equal rights for women.

However, in 1970, women leaders at the head of the feminist and gay liberation movements

came together to assert the political connections between lesbianism and feminism and the need

for change (Jagose, 1996). In 1980, Rich urged feminists to challenge the cultural conception of

women as dependent upon men, economically and socially. Lesbianism came to be viewed as a natural extension of feminism, and involvement with men was deemed as consorting with the enemy and an attempt to reap the benefits of heterosexual privilege (Armstrong, 1995; Burleson, 2014; Daumer, 1992; Highleyman, 1995; Rich, 1980). Feminist activist Ti-Grace Atkinson once remarked that "feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice" (Burleson, 2014; Udis-Kessler, 1995).

Bisexual women who were a part of the feminist movement found themselves having to defend their 'credentials' as feminists because they were viewed as traitors to the cause. "In a lesbian-feminist framework, a woman's commitment to feminism can be measured by the strength of her commitment to women, which is sometimes evaluated by how thoroughly she manages to exclude men from her life" (Armstrong, 1995, p. 201). As a result of this mindset, the feminist lesbian community distanced bisexual women, viewing them as community members and as political activists only when they behaved in an outwardly lesbian fashion (Israel & Mohr, 2004; McLean, 2008b; Rust, 1993). "[M]uch of what we know as the present bi community has been defined by this tension between the lesbian feminist community and bi women. It is this casting out of bi women that gave the bi community its leaders, its organizations, and its flavor" (Burleson, 2014, pp. 86). Bisexual scholars have noted that, rather than distancing themselves from bisexual women, lesbian feminists would do well to embrace them, as they represent a means of carrying their message and values to outside communities (Whitney, 2002).

As a marginalized population on campus, bisexual students may struggle to connect meaningfully with peers and faculty (Sanlo, 2004). Although included in the LGBT label by name, bisexual students may not feel welcome in lesbian and gay spaces and/or may feel that

their needs are not met by traditional programming efforts (Burleson, 2014; Pallotta-Chiarolli & Martin, 2008; Pascale-Hague, 2015). Strayhorn's (2012) book on sense of belonging among college students contains a chapter entitled 'Sense of Belonging and Gay Students,' rendering bisexual students invisible.

Recent research examining the impact of social support on bisexual individuals finds relationships between social support and various mental health outcomes, including depression, life satisfaction, and internalized binegativity. Bisexual individuals may struggle to accept their sexual identity without adequate social support, which they often feel is lacking (Bradford, 2004; Callis, 2013; Knous, 2006; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt, 2015). More specifically, among bisexual students, general social support in the form of friends and family were associated with depression and life satisfaction, and sexuality-specific support was most predictive of internalized binegativity (Sheets & Mohr, 2009). Bisexual women report that a "pervasive lack of bi-inclusive community spaces and representation within community made it difficult for them to find spaces in which they felt they belonged" (Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015, p. 463) and that this lack of belonging led to internalized stigma, anxiety, depression, and sadness (Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Pallotta-Chiarolli & Martin, 2008).

Paradigm

A paradigm represents a worldview, a set of beliefs about the nature of the world (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The paradigm with which I align my research is critical postmodernism, detailed below.

Critical Postmodernism

Critical theory "emphasizes that particular sets of meanings, because they have come into being in and out of the give-and-take of social existence, exist to serve hegemonic interests"

(Crotty, 1998, p. 59). Critical theory is based on social constructionism, the idea that knowledge

is socially and historically constructed (Tierney, 1993). Those in power at a given time and in a

given society dictate prevailing knowledge, thus supporting oppression and injustice. Critical

theory lays the groundwork for researchers to "interrogat[e] commonly held values and

assumptions, challeng[e] conventional social structures, and engag[e] in social action" (Crotty,

1998, p.157) in order to emancipate the oppressed. Critical theory is modernist in nature due to

its emphasis on rationality, norms, and identity categories (Tierney, 1993).

While critical theorists emphasize rationality and narrative knowledge, postmodernists

posit that society is individualistic and fragmented, thus distrusting foundational metanarratives

in favor of subjective stories of personal experience (Lyotard, 1993). Postmodernism critiques

categories that are socially determined to be normative or deviant, including those pertaining to

sexuality and gender (Butler, 1990). Critical theory and postmodernism, at first blush, appear to

espouse principles that are in conflict with one another. For instance, critical theorists intend to

expose the oppressive structures of society and to contribute to conditions that allow the

oppressed to be liberated, whereas postmodernists reject the notion that we can understand the

nature of oppression through dialogue, instead contesting universal truths and focusing on

multivocality and difference (Tierney, 1993).

Due to the messiness and multiplicity of our reality, some researchers recommend

experimenting with and applying multiple theoretical perspectives. Feminist and postcritical

theorist Patti Lather (2006) is "against the kind of methodolatry where the tail of the

methodology wags the dog of inquiry" (p. 47) and instead supports "saying yes to the messiness,

to that which interrupts and exceeds versus tidy categories" (p. 48). Tierney (1993), Rhoads

(1994), and Abes (2009) recommend the use of a "borderlands approach" to utilizing multiple

theoretical perspectives in the dismantling of inequitable power structures. The term

borderlands is based on the work of feminist and queer theorist Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), who

posited that borderlands are cultural areas defined by difference, but whose boundaries are

permeable. Although Anzaldúa used this term to refer to the area that borders Mexico and the

United States, borderlands are not limited to geography and can also be used to signify cultural

areas (Tierney, 1993).

Tierney (1993) argues that critical and postmodern theories are not in opposition, and in

fact, can be applied in concert to impact how we view educational institutions and to create

communities defined by difference, rather than similarity. Whereas postmodernism posits that

differences are immutable and unbridgeable through dialogue and understanding, critical theory

leaves unexplored the assumptions behind normative conceptualizations of difference and

identity. Thus "critical theory's desire is to enable people to affirm their lives according to the

fixed categories that already exist" (Tierney, 1993, p. 16). It seeks to emancipate by working

within a system that is inherently oppressive, whereas postmodernism is skeptical of the

acceptance of the structures that constitute the system in the first place. Postmodernism

deconstructs categories and critical theory then provides educators with a direction for action

based on this information (Tierney, 1993).

Postmodernism raises the question of how individuals can overthrow the social order

when they are enmeshed within it (Rhoads, 1994). "How do you protest a socially imposed

categorization, except by organizing around the category?" (Epstein, 1987, p. 19). In the case of

bisexual women, how do they resist binary notions of sexuality without making their bisexuality

the foundation of their resistance? A borderlands approach that incorporates the empowerment

aspect of critical theory with the postmodern emphasis on difference brings into question societal

norms, such as sexuality and gender, while providing a direction for collective change. Tierney (1993) and Rhoads (1994) did just this when using a critical postmodern lens to examine the campus experiences of gay faculty and students, respectively.

> Tierney and Rhoads both suggest that by understanding and using the multiple locations or inscriptions of their diverse identities as a fabric of connectiveness, educators can create formative and powerful dialogues through and inclusive of difference. These dialogues of difference will lead to at least a provisional unity across our differences and, with time and effort, a common ground of struggle against contemporary forms of class, cultural, and societal oppression. (McDonough & McLaren, 1996, para. 6)

Critical postmodernists examine how power, culture, and language mutually influence one another to shape individuals' social experiences, with a desire to support human agency in reconstituting culture through an emancipatory struggle (Rhoads, 1994). In relation to this study, critical postmodernism empowers individuals living on the margins of sexual identity while simultaneously calling into question binary sexual and gender norms, allowing participants to explore alternatives for liberation. This would make room for what Tierney (1993) and Rhoads (1994) label "communities of difference," rather than communities based solely on socially determined categories of sexual and gender identity.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical perspective is "the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). It elaborates upon the assumptions one makes regarding our view of the world, or paradigm, which in turn impact our research. The theoretical framework with which I align my research is queer theory, which is detailed below.

Queer Theory

Queer theory is at times described as deriving from critical postmodernism (Frank & Cannon, 2010) and at other times postmodernism in the literature (Johnson & Lugg, 2012). Queer theory rejects the concepts upon which identity politics are based (Johnson & Lugg, 2012), centering difference and multiple voices (Tierney, 1993). It extends beyond feminist and gay/lesbian studies to critique the very categories, such as those pertaining to sexual and gender identity, that are socially determined to be normative or deviant (Butler, 1990; Johnson & Lugg, 2012). It examines identity categories, the social processes that shape these rigid categories, and the differences among individuals placed within the same categories (Johnson & Lugg, 2012; Rhoads, 1994; Tierney, 1993). It is deconstructive in that it

> make[s] strange or 'queer' what is considered known, familiar, and commonplace, what
> is assumed to be the order of things, the natural way, the normal, the healthy, and so on.
> In the spirit of deconstruction, queering does not mean improving upon or substituting
> one set of foundational assumptions and narratives for another, but leaving permanently
> open and constestable the assumptions and narratives that guide social analysis…
> (Seidman, 1994, p. xi).

Foucault's (1978) *A History of Sexuality* is often considered the foundational text for what would later become queer theory. Foucault rejected the prevalent notion that discourse around sexuality had been repressed, instead believing that sexualities were socially constructed by discourses created through systems of power. In Western cultures, those in power medicalized sex and pleasure, resulting in the creation of the stigmatized identity of homosexuality. Previously, individual sex acts (e.g. sodomy) were labeled as homosexual, without requiring the labeling of an individual as homosexual. Although condemned, these sex

acts were taken to be a temptation to which anyone might succumb, rather than an inborn trait confined to a specific group of people (Weiss, 2004).

Medicalization led to homosexuals being considered a separate 'species' of sexual deviants. This trend of utilizing language to categorize individuals represented a move from viewing sexuality as fluid and socially constructed to viewing it as stable and innate (Falek, 2013). While such classification became a tool of subjugation, it was also embraced by those classified as a "reverse discourse," being used to maintain an identity, to create homosexual community and culture, and to mobilize politically (Callis 2009; Falek, 2013; Foucault, 1978; Jagose, 1996). Thus, marginalized sexual identities are not simply repressed by systems of power, they are created by those same systems (Jagose, 1996). But the resulting stability of such socially constructed identities comes at the expense of fluidity, in this case, in the form of monosexuality (Falek, 2013).

Callis (2009) demonstrates that "this same process of medicalization, speciation, confession and reverse discourse can be used to illuminate many of the differences between the development of homosexual and bisexual identities and politics" (p. 223). Bisexuality was defined, historically, as a stage of development and/or as a baseline sexuality, with all individuals considered to have bisexual predisposition (Callis, 2009; James, 2006). Thus, bisexuality was not considered to refer to a specific type of individual in the same way as homosexuality. Because individual sex acts between two people could not be labeled bisexual, an individual could not be labeled bisexual. Without the creation of a medicalized and stigmatized label, bisexual individuals could not create a "reverse discourse" and thus could not locate one another in search of community and support. Bisexual identity politics eventually grew out of marginalization within gay and lesbian communities, rather than medical ones. Thus

a reverse discourse was created from a different source than was homosexuality (gay and lesbian political movements vs. the medical community), a process that still fits within Foucault's schematic (Callis, 2009).

Researchers studying topics related to bisexuality have utilized queer theory in order to center the experiences of their participants as invisible within existing binary constructions of gender and sexuality (Hartman, 2008; Miller, 2006). Although it has not focused much on bisexuality, queer theory opens the door to acknowledgement of the existence of bisexuality in that it deconstructs normative sexual categories (Angelides, 2006; Callis, 2009; Hartman, 2008). Callis (2009) posits that queer theory and bisexuality scholarship have much to offer one another. She states,

> Both schools have roots in gay and lesbian scholarship, social construction theory, feminist theory and postmodern theory. Like queer theory, much work done on bisexuality has focused on the deconstruction of binaries. Also like queer theory, much of the work written on bisexuality has focused on the problems with identity theories, and the "othering" which has been a result of identity politics. Further, queer theory and bisexual scholarship have questioned the naturalization of heterosexuality, studying its construction as a vital part of sexual categorization. (Callis, 2009, p. 219)

Queer theory provides a theoretical perspective that may be useful in understanding sense of belonging among bisexual students. The way sexuality is socially constructed in a binary fashion renders bisexuality invisible (Ahmed, 2008; Callis, 2009; du Plessis, 1996; James, 1996; Rust, 1996b). This invisibility leads to a lack of role models, resources, community, and support for bisexuals when compared to monosexuals (Dugan & Yurman, 2011; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Hemmings, 2002; James, 1996; Pallotta-Chiarolli & Martin, 2008; Robin &

Hamner, 2000; Rust, 2002). Queer theory deconstructs our society's hetero/homosexual opposition and the connections between gender and sexuality that we take as given (Angelides, 2006; Callis, 2009; Hartman, 2008). An application of queer theory, with its emphasis on fluidity and binary deconstruction, can be used to magnify the multiple voices of bisexual individuals, in particular via the concepts of heteronormativity, performativity, and liminality.

Heteronormativity. Queer theory focuses on how society categorizes genders and sexual identities, disarticulating gender from sex (Angelides, 2006; Jagose, 1996) and positing that "heterosexuality and homosexuality are binary social constructs that hold saliency only in certain historical moments, rather than descriptors of innate sexual types" (Callis, 2009, p. 215). Each side of this binary of homo/heterosexuality is only understandable in relation to one another (Angelides, 2006; Stein & Plummer, 1996) and identities become a form of social control (Foucault, 1978; Slagle, 2006). As a result, queer theorists explore issues of power and discourse that support the concepts of homosexuality and heterosexuality as well as the idea that defining individuals by sexual object choice is inherently normal (Henderson, 2003; Rhoads, 1994; Seidman, 2013; Steinman, 2001). "Queer theory takes as its purpose exposing the operations of hetero-normativity in order to work the hetero/homosexual opposition to the point of critical collapse" (Angelides, 2001, p. 168).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, compulsory monosexuality operates similarly to heterosexism in that it makes deviant attraction to more than one gender and thus devalues bisexuality in parallel fashion to the way that heterosexism subordinates lesbians and gays (James, 1996; Roberts, Hoyne, & Hoyt, 2015). When it comes to deconstructing bipolar conceptions of gender and sexuality, it would seem that bisexuality would be a logical place to start (Daumer, 1992; Jagose, 1996). However, in its efforts to deconstruct sexual and gender

norms via the concept of heteronormativity, queer theorists "end up reifying the binaries that they are attempting to challenge" (Callis, 2009, p. 220) as they rely on binary oppositions to distinguish homosexual from heterosexual (Angelides, 2006; du Plessis, 1996; Lingel, 2009). Queer theory's oppositional stance to heterosexuality has resulted in the obstruction of certain avenues of inquiry related to sexuality, such as monosexism, which ends up having a negative impact on not only bisexual individuals but also lesbians and gay men (Young, 1997).

Liminality. In order to be successful, lesbian and gay identity politics, and subsequently, academic studies, were founded upon an essentialist model in which a minority sexual identity is considered to be a constant category and gender preference defines sexuality (Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Seidman, 1997; Weiss, 2004). In the face of this exclusionary politics based on "reductive, homogenizing binary notions of who a movement's constituents are" (Young, 1997, p. 57), queer theory embraces fluidity and binary deconstruction, illuminating the voices of a wider swath of individuals (Angelides, 2006; Callis, 2009). It resists the idea that sexual identities are stable by introducing the concept of liminality, a state of flux between stages of being. "[L]iminality is a resistance strategy in which elements of heterosexuality and nonheterosexuality are incorporated into one identity that rejects normalized definitions of either heterosexuality or nonheterosexuality" (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p.621).

Performativity. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler criticizes feminist theory for its claim that women and men have inherent, immutable traits, basing her thesis on Foucault's (1978) assertion that marginalized identities, in particular those based on sexual orientation, are complicit with the power regimes they hope to counter (Jagose, 1996).   Thus she views feminism in its existing form as replicating normative definitions of gender and thus serving the interests of heterosexuality and patriarchy. She posits that gender and sexuality are unstable

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constructs created through the concept of performativity. Individuals learn what constitutes gender and sexuality by observing others performing them, and thus their own gender and sexuality become culturally influenced and malleable. Performativity cannot be equated with a singular performance, but rather is iterative and occurs in the context of cultural constraints (Butler, 1990). Ahmed (2008) supports this iterative notion in her work on queer phenomenology, stating,

> We walk on the path as it is before us, but it is only before us as an effect of being walked upon. A paradox of the footprint emerges. Lines are both created by being followed and as followed by being created. The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition. (p. 555)

If gender and sexuality do not exist in and of themselves and rather are performed, how can bisexuality fit in when it cannot ever truly be performed? The only potential means of bisexuality being outwardly performed would be for a person to be simultaneously engaged with individuals of more than one gender. Thus "the pressure which is often imposed on bisexuals to 'prove' that they exist is in direct conflict with the pressure to prove that they are anything less than sexual deviants and perverts" (Whitney, 2002, p. 118).

Two dissertations exploring bisexual performativity indicate that individuals perform bisexual identity through various verbal and visual cues in order to render themselves visible, resist misappropriation as heterosexual or homosexual, and divest themselves of heterosexual privilege (Hartman, 2008; Miller, 2006). Miller (2006) used grounded theory to posit a new theoretical construct, "doing bisexuality," to describe how individuals disrupt, resist, and

transform dichotomous constructions of sexuality. Hartman (2008) extended this work to explore performativity specifically among bisexual women outside of the bedroom, examining whether displays of bisexual identity are an attempt to seek community and why such community is important.

Research on bisexual performativity among women of varying sexual identities indicates that a form of 'compulsory bisexuality' is becoming more normative as women engage in same-sex erotic behavior in social settings, yet this performativity does not equate to more accepting views regarding bisexuality (Fahs, 2009). Fahs (2009) posits that just as compulsory heterosexuality dictated that women should adhere to socially acceptable heterosexual norms (Rich, 1980), women are now expected to engage in performative bisexuality to seek sexual validation within the context of heterosexual relationships and the larger heteronormative culture. The fluid nature of sexuality among women (Diamond, 2000) may make women more susceptible to changing social trends in pressures within a patriarchal environment (Fahs, 2009). The women studied by Fahs (2009), unlike the women studied by Hartman (2008) and Miller (2006), deny the significance of these same-sex encounters, which furthers the stereotype of bisexuality as temporary or imagined. At the same time, media representations of bisexual performativity among heterosexual women are increasing, trivializing and misrepresenting bisexuality rather than signaling increased acceptance (Diamond, 2005; Fahs, 2009).

Butler discusses how, in our society, sexuality and gender are considered intrinsically tied to one another, as each one is understood in its relationship to the other (Butler, 1990). Within queer theory, bisexuality must be silenced as a "category of worth" in order to support theories of hetero/homosexual difference (James, 1996). Bisexual epistemologies, in acknowledging fluid desires, present an opportunity to reframe and deconstruct discourses around sexuality

(Callis, 2009; Daumer, 1992; Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Hall & Pramaggiore, 1996; James, 1996; Young, 1997). "Fence-sitting – an epithet predicated on the presumption of the superiority of a temporally based single sexual partnership – is a practice that refuses the restrictive formulas that define gender according to binary categories, that associate one gender or one sexuality with a singularly gendered object choice, and that equate sexual practices with sexual identity" (Hall & Pramaggiore, 1996, p. 3).

Chapter Summary

Bisexuality is under-theorized and under-studied in the scholarly literature, yet what research does exist demonstrates that bisexual individuals encounter unique challenges related to their sexuality as a result of bi-invisibility, biphobia, and monosexism. The campus environment represents a microcosm of these forces at work in broader society, with bisexual students reporting experiences of harassment and discrimination. Bisexual-specific spaces and resources are typically absent from campus communities, despite the fact that bisexual students are in need of supportive relationships and a sense of belonging.

Critical postmodernism empowers bisexual individuals while calling into question binary sexual and gender norms, allowing them to explore alternatives for liberation. An application of queer theory, with its emphasis on fluidity and binary deconstruction, can be used to magnify the voices of bisexual individuals through the concepts of heteronormativity, performativity, and liminality.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction

The present study examined the following research question: What are the lived experiences of bisexual women on college campuses? Based upon my review of previous research, I anticipated learning about the significance of sexual identity in the lives of bisexual women, about their sense of belonging on college campuses, and about the factors that bisexual women believe are important to creating inclusive campus environments.

Overview of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is exploratory, descriptive, and inductive by nature (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative researchers seek to understand how people construct their world and make sense of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). It is based in constructivism, which views all knowledge as socially constructed out of human's interactions with others and with their world. As a result, qualitative researchers and their participants engage in a process of joint meaning making (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Crotty, 1998). This involves the researcher serving as the data collection instrument, observing the world, searching for patterns, and drawing conclusions from those patterns, rather than beginning with a preconceived hypothesis (Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickmott, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Schuh & Upcraft, 2001).

I conducted a qualitative rather than quantitative study due to the lack of research on this topic coupled with my desire for rich descriptions of bisexual individuals' lived experiences. Qualitative methodology is well-suited to describing complex phenomena, such as personal

experiences, in rich detail (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Qualitative research is increasingly common in the field of student affairs (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) state that "research ought to result in greater understanding of complex phenomena and that higher education can offer pathways to improved quality of life, particularly for those whose experiences and life situations are understudied and devalued in mainstream society" (p. ix).

Specific to research on sense of belonging among students, Strayhorn (2012) has reflected upon the limitations of existing quantitative surveys regarding student's sense of belonging. In addition to creating his own scale to measure student sense of belonging, he opted to add qualitative research to his explorations in the field. Both one-on-one and group interviews allowed him to gain a deeper understanding of students' academic and social experiences (Strayhorn, 2012). Through this qualitative, phenomenological research study, I seek to add to the body of knowledge on sense of belonging among students by exploring the experiences of an often marginalized group on campus, that of bisexual women.

Phenomenological Research

Phenomenology is the human scientific study of phenomena and a search for what it means to be human. According to Van Manen (1990), phenomenology is both a description and an interpretation of the meaning of lived experiences. It has its roots in philosophy, most notably the works of Husserl (1962), who founded phenomenology to be the science of consciousness, separate from the science of nature. He argued that what we can know is limited by our consciousness and that our body is the lived center of our existence, determining how we encounter other objects in the world. He developed the notion of the 'phenomenological

reduction,' through which we can analyze the content of consciousness in a detached fashion (Husserl, 1962).

Phenomenology calls into question what we take for granted in our world and explores the essence of human experiences about a given phenomenon, as viewed through the perspective of the participants (Creswell, 2009; Crotty, 1998). The focus is to understand the meaning of participant experiences, which are created through interactions with others in the world around them, rather than to generate models or theories around a given phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990). "The empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 16). The "essence" of an experience is that which makes it what it is, and without which, it would not be (Van Manen, 1990).

In phenomenological research, it is critical to allow the data itself to dictate the methods, with an absence of predetermined fixed techniques. Phenomenologists investigate phenomena as they are lived, rather than how they are pre-conceived (Van Manen, 1990). Van Manen (1990) explains, "The problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much" (p.46). In-depth interviews are typically used in phenomenological research because the primary source of data is the life world of the participant (Van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenology involves studying a small number of participants through prolonged engagement to develop an understanding of relationships of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology is well suited for phenomena for which it is important to understand several individuals' common or shared experiences. Individuals who have experienced the phenomenon

are selected as participants and asked to share information, typically through interviews. The researcher then takes the data obtained, reduces it, and develops a description of the common essence of the experience (Creswell, 2012).

I conducted a phenomenological research study because I seek to describe the lived experiences of bisexual women on college campuses and how they make meaning of those experiences.

Critical qualitative research uncovers the multiple lived experiences of individuals in the world and brings these lived experiences to light in an effort to emancipate individuals and groups from entrenched oppressive systems fueled by discriminatory and prejudicial policies and practices (Robison, 2012, p. 78).

As a result of its focus on personal, lived experiences, phenomenology fits well with a critical postmodernist perspective in order to shed light not only on metanarratives of hetero-/mono-normativity but also the interrogation of societally constructed binaries of sexuality and gender that constitute them. "Phenomenology can offer a resource for queer studies insofar as it emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds" (Ahmed, 2008, p. 2). Because there is limited research with bisexual women on college campuses, this approach is critical to understanding their experiences and needs (Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015).

Phenomenological Research Method

I relied upon the three-step research method outlined by Giorgi (1985), with the addition of guidance from Van Manen (1990), to structure my phenomenological research study. The steps included:

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1. Assuming the transcendental phenomenological attitude – The first step involved adopting an approach that is based in Husserl's focus on consciousness. This means the suspension of preconceived notions in order to understand the experiences of participants.

2. Searching for the essence of the phenomenon – The second step involved asking the question, what makes this instance an example of this type of phenomenon?

3. Describing the phenomenon – The third step involved using language to describe this essence of the experience. Giorgi (1985) emphasized that this step should include description and not interpretation, analysis, or construction. It is here that I incorporate Van Manen's (1990) perspective that phenomenology is both a description and an interpretation of the meaning of lived experiences.

Phenomenology and Queer Theory

Queer theory, with its focus on deconstructing the norms we take as given, is inherently fluid and defies a set definition (Abes, 2009). This makes this theoretical perspective a good fit with phenomonenology. Queer theory can inform phenomenology in that "[a] queer phenomenology would involve an orientation toward queer, a way to inhabit the world that gives support to those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place" (Goldberg, Ryan, & Sawchin, 2009, p. 536). In Ahmed's (2006, 2008) work on queer phenomenology, she applies the theory of phenomenology to queerness via the concept of disorientation. Being queer translates to being on the margins and defining oneself (Gould, 2009). What this means in Ahmed's (2008) world is that some spaces will have the impact of making some bodies and orientations seem out of place and strange. The question then becomes whether we retain objects by bringing them back in line with the norms of that space, or allow them to slip through into something new. In this way, queer phenomenology becomes a force of

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disorientation. For instance, some spaces are coded invisibly as White such that a White person inhabiting those spaces will not feel their whiteness, and will simply be. The invisible definition of the space as White only becomes evident to a non-White body entering the space and creating a sense of disorientation (Ahmed, 2008). The same could be said for a bisexual woman entering a space that has invisibly been coded as lesbian or as heterosexual. "Norms operate materially by structuring the relationships between spaces and bodies such that it is on the level of the materiality of the body that deviance is made publicly identifiable" (Gordon, 2008, p. 7).

Queer phenomenology views queerness as a "human, embodied, and lived orientation often against the landscape of heternormativity and homophobia" (Goldberg, Ryan, & Sawchin, 2009, p. 542). With educational systems being microcosms of the larger forces at play in society, they typically reflect heteronormative values (Grace, Hill, Johnson, & Lewis, 2004). "[Q]ueer phenomenology can help to guide [a] transformation through the establishment of accessible and informative documentation of the lived experience of queer women who identify outside of the socially determined binary" (Goldberg, Ryan, & Sawchin, 2009, p. 545). Thus, in this study, queer theory and phenomenology supported one another in examining the embodied experiences of bisexual women in educational landscapes that are normatively monosexist.

Site and Participants

I recruited participants based on my selection criteria in order to help me best understand the phenomenon of interest (Giorgi, 1985). Selection criteria for this study included:

1. Current undergraduate or graduate student in the U.S. or within three years of leaving an undergraduate or graduate program, including graduating

2. Identify as a woman (including cis and trans women) or genderqueer

3. Identify as bisexual, pansexual, fluid, or as another nonmonosexual identity; and/or are sexually active with people of more than one gender (i.e., women, men, people who are genderqueer or otherwise gender nonconforming); and/or are attracted to people of more than one gender

The last criterion is based on that used by Flanders, Dobinson, and Logie (2015), who chose to include a wider range of individuals than those who identified specifically as bisexual based on an understanding of commonalities among experiences of those who identify with a plurisexual, or nonmonosexual, label (Galupo, Davis, Grynkiewicz, & Mitchell, 2014), or who experience attraction or engage in sexual activity with individuals of more than one gender (Barker et al., 2012). I believed this criteria would allow me to capture the widest range of individuals with a fluid sexuality.

Phenomenology emphasizes setting aside pre-conceived notions and approaching the research from the perspective of the participants (Giorgi, 1985; Moustakas, 2004; Van Manen, 1990). Self-identification of sexuality and resistance to categorization are important components of bisexual politics' emphasis on self-definition (James, 1996). Thus the ability to self-identify sexual identity, behavior, and attraction is significant to my research methods. Research on nonmonosexual women has found that they prefer to actively define their identities as a means of resisting power structures (Daniels, 2009). In this way, self-definition becomes a means of resisting heteronormativity (Rhoads, 1994).

Recruitment

Prior to recruiting participants, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Georgia. I disseminated information about the study via the National Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals' (the Consortium) research

postings website and via the following Facebook pages: LGBTQ Research and Research Professionals, BiNetUSA, Bisexual Women, Bisexual Resource Center, Bisexual People of Color, and Bisexual People of Faith (see Appendix A for recruitment message). An incentive of a $10 gift card was provided to all participants at the end of each interview.

Once potential participants responded, I asked them screening questions to determine whether or not they met the study criteria (see Appendix B for screening protocol). I sent those who qualified and were interested in participating a Participant Information Form to gather demographic data (see Appendix C for Participant Information Form). Thirteen individuals indicated interest and completed the Participant Information Form. Two individuals did not respond to follow up, resulting in a total number of 11 participants.

Data Collection

I collected data for this study between August and October 2016. Each individual participated in two in-depth interviews and created a reflective drawing that served as the basis for discussion in the second interview. In-depth interviewing is supported by a phenomenological framework (Giorgi, 1985; Moustakas, 2004; Van Manen, 1990) and involves using open-ended questions in order to facilitate participant reconstruction of their experience with the phenomenon being studied (Seidman, 2013). Open-ended interview questions allow participants to speak freely in ways that make sense to them, rather than being constrained by pre-existing categories on a survey (Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickmott, 2009).

My interviewing process was based loosely on Seidman's (2013) structure for in-depth, phenomenological interviewing. Seidman (2013) recommends a series of three separate interviews with participants in order to build rapport and place the data obtained within the context of participants' lives. The first interview explores the context of the participants'

experience, asking them to provide information about themselves up to the present time relevant to the topic at hand. The second interview allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context of their present lives, in particular their social interactions with others. The third interview provides an opportunity for reflection upon the meaning of that experience and may take an orientation toward the future. In the case of my study, I condensed the interview structure to two interviews in order to ease the burden on participants (see Appendix D for interview protocol). The two interview phases were as follows:

1. Interview 1 – Focused life history and campus experiences. This interview focused on participants' self-definition of their sexuality, how they feel about their sexuality, and how their identity has been received by others, as well as their experiences with other students, faculty, and staff on campus.

2. Interview 2 – Bisexual community. This interview focused on participants' thoughts on the importance of bisexual community, their perceptions of their campus environments, and how they would envision a supportive campus environment.

Interviews ranged in length from 20 to 57 minutes, with the amount of information each participant had to share at each interview dictating its length. Seidman (2013) recommends that a participant's sequence of interviews take place three days to one week apart, but indicates that alterations to duration and spacing can be explored. I chose to schedule interviews two weeks apart to allow participants ample time for reflection and drawing.

In between the first and second interviews, participants were asked to draw a diagram of their bisexual community and their place in it. This prompt was based upon bisexual social theorist Paula Rust's (2000c) work with bisexual men's perceptions of bisexual community via

drawn images, or maps (see Appendix E for drawing prompt). These drawings were used to guide the conversation during the second interviews. Interviews are an inherently verbal and linear means of communication. Drawings allow for a less linear and more visual means of thinking about complex concepts (Rust, 2000c; Zweifel & Van Wezemael, 2012) and, as a result, can unearth unspoken thoughts and feelings that may be difficult to verbalize (Kearney & Hyle, 2006; Webster & Mitchell, 1995), in particular for those who prefer to communicate visually (Guillemin, 2004) and/or for topics that are sensitive in nature (Bagnoli, 2009).

In examining the use of drawings as a research methodology, Nossiter & Biberman (1990) found that drawings serve to focus responses and help promote respondent honesty. Drawings can be a useful catalyst for unstructured interviews, helping to guide questions and to reveal more than what might have been made available with the interviews alone (Kearney & Hyle, 2006). They can improve the interview process by serving as an ice breaker, prompting memories, improving interview flow, and helping develop shared understandings (Bagnoli, 2009). The use of participant-created visuals also promotes a shift in the inherent power imbalance between researcher and researched, shifting more control to participants to raise issues of importance (Frith, Riley, Archer, & Gleeson, 2005; Matthews, 2015). However, some individuals may feel uncomfortable participating in visual methods (Bagnoli, 2009; Kearney & Hyle, 2004).

Through their research, Kearney and Hyle (2004) have found that participant-produced drawings:

1) create a path toward feelings and emotions, 2) lead to a more succinct presentation of participant experiences, 3) require additional verbal interpretation by the participant for accuracy, 4) are unpredictable as a tool for encouraging participation in the research, 5)

combat researcher biases when left unstructured, 6) are affected by the amount of researcher-imposed structure in the scope of how they could be interpreted, and 7) help to create triangulation of study data. (p. 361)

In the case of this study, incorporating conceptual mapping served several purposes. The mapping process created a structured reflective space between the two interviews, prompting participants to spend time over the course of the intervening two weeks thinking about the concept of bisexual community and how it has impacted them personally. Subsequently, I used each participant's map as a guide for their second interview, which began with participants walking me through their maps in detail. I was then able to triangulate the data from the maps with the data I obtained in each participant's first interview and inquire about any missing or inconsistent information.

Interviews with ten participants took place online via Skype, and interviews with one participant took place in person, once in my home and once in the participant's home. I recorded the interviews for later transcription and analysis. I obtained informed consent from all participants prior to their interviews to ensure that their rights would be protected during data collection (see Appendix F for Informed Consent Form) and asked each to select a pseudonym in order to protect their identity (Creswell, 2009). To enhance the validity of my findings, I offered participants the opportunity to review their transcripts in order to clarify, change, or elaborate upon their answers (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

Data Analysis

Analyzing interview data is the process through which data are synthesized and through which the researcher begins to work across narratives. "It is moving from the individual stories to a more general composite stage of understanding, searching for commonalities of experiences

and meanings which enable the researcher not only to suggest common patterns of experience, but which can in turn illuminate the individual story" (Allen, 2001, p. 34).

I had the interviews transcribed professionally. After all interviews were complete and transcripts were prepared, I listened to the audio for each interview and made any edits to the transcripts that were needed due to errors or omissions, which allowed for me to become closer to the data before beginning analysis. Seidman (2013) recommends deferring in-depth analysis until all interviews are completed. This still allows for reflection between interviews and possible reassessment of the type of information my questions were eliciting, without imposing meaning from one participant's data to the next.

I used the software program atlas.ti (Friese, 2017) to organize and code the transcripts. Qualitative data analysis software programs do not conduct analysis itself, but rather make analysis more efficient by serving as an organizational tool. I based my analysis process upon Seidman's (2013) recommendations for studying, reducing, and analyzing phenomenological interview text. This first involved marking what was of interest by placing brackets around meaningful "chunks" of text and coding these passages. I approached the transcripts "with an open mind, seeking what meaning and structures emerge" (Rossman & Ralii, 1988p. 184). I coded inductively, deriving the codes from the data rather than starting with a preconceived set of codes (Charmaz, 2006).

I first used these marked passages to develop profiles of individual participants incorporating their own words. This narrative presents the participant in context, clarifies their intentions, and conveys a sense of process and time (Seidman, 2013). I then used the passages to make thematic connections between participants. I looked for similarities and contrasts between participants' stories using the constant comparative method, which is an iterative process that can

be used to identify patterns across multiple participants and to eventually move from lower level codes to overarching themes (Charmaz, 2006). "[T]he process of constant comparison stimulates thought that leads to both descriptive and explanatory categories" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 334-341).

Seidman (2013) recommends keeping codes and categories tentative. As I reviewed data, I wrote memos on patterns and questions and revised code names as I read to more accurately reflect the data. I then used Excel to sort through codes I identified to determine categories in order to see code groupings within the categories, as well as patterns between and within categories, eventually creating detailed charts that I consulted to write up my findings.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

I designed the study methodology carefully in order to maximize the trustworthiness and rigor of my findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that there are four aspects to trustworthiness and rigor in qualitative research:

- Credibility – demonstrating an accurate depiction of the phenomenon under study.

- Transferability – demonstrating the applicability of findings across different settings.

- Dependability – demonstrating consistency and repeatability of findings by other investigators.

- Confirmability – demonstrating that the findings come from the respondents themselves, rather than the investigator's preconceived notions.

The nature of a prolonged engagement, i.e. a series of two interviews spanning two weeks in time with each participant, contributes to the credibility of my findings. During the course of the second interviews, I was able to seek clarification on topics discussed during the

first interview. I also engaged in member checking, providing participants with the opportunity to review the transcripts from their interviews for any edits or omissions.

In this chapter, I have described in detail the methodology used for data collection and analysis in order to enhance dependability, the ability of others to repeat my work. This methodology underwent an external review by my dissertation Committee, which also serves to improve dependability.

In order to increase transferability, I interviewed a national sample diverse in terms of institution type and location, level of education, age, and religion, as well as self-definition of sexual and gender identity. In discussing my findings in Chapter 4, I have used the thick description that is expected in phenomenological research, which also enhances transferability.

Finally, in order to improve confirmability, I incorporated conceptual mapping as the basis for the second set of interviews, which allowed participants to take the lead role (Frith, Riley, Archer, & Gleeson, 2005; Matthews, 2015). I also kept an audit trail consisting of notes on my interpretation of raw data and made journal entries to make my assumptions explicit and to reflect on the process.

Personal Subjectivity Statement

It is critical that researchers be reflexive by detailing their subjectivity and explaining how it might impact their decision making (Roulston, 2010). This is particularly relevant in the case of a phenomenological study, in which a researcher strives to gain an understanding of the phenomenon being studied from participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2009; Giorgi, 1985). Dahlberg (2006) developed the concept of bridling, which posits that an individual's experiences are always with them, no matter how much effort is made to set them aside. Rather than entirely cutting off from our personal experiences, Dahlberg (2006) proposes that we can loosen or

tighten the reins, metaphorically speaking, on them. This perspective draws upon Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on our ability to "slacken the intentional threads which attach us to the world" (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1996, p. xiii). Thus bridling involves our ability to reflect upon and scrutinize our involvement with the phenomenon of interest and its meaning and to adopt an attitude of actively waiting for the phenomenon (Dahlberg, 2006).

I acknowledge the role my personal background and experiences may play in my research. I identify as a bisexual woman, which shapes the lens through which I approach this research study.   Although I did not identify as bisexual during my time in college, I have personally encountered heterosexism and monosexism since that time and believe that my sexual orientation has at times impacted my relationships with others. I believed that my insider status as a bisexual woman would allow me to connect deeply with participants as well as the subject matter (Zinn, 1979). However, this status may also have impacted the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes.

La Sala (2008) wrote specifically of lesbian and gay researchers who study lesbians and gay men, indicating that although they may bring special understanding that can facilitate data collection and analysis, they may assume common cultural understandings that lead them to probe less than would a non-insider. Van Manen (1990) emphasized that, in the case of phenomenology, it is possible to know too much about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, which can move us away from the experiences of our participants. In addition, participants may respond in what they perceive to be socially desirable ways to an insider. La Sala (2008) notes the importance of self-awareness, peer debriefing, and prolonged engagement to maximize the advantages and minimize the disadvantages of insider research.

In order to consider the impact of my identity on my research process, I engaged in reflexivity via journaling in order to remain aware of the role my personal experiences played. I also engaged in member checking, through which participants were provided the opportunity to review their transcripts and reports to ensure that I have an appropriate understanding (Roulston, 2010).

My previous academic background, including an undergraduate degree in psychology and master's degree in public health, trained me to be a researcher as well as a consumer of research. Through the educational process, I absorbed subtle yet ever-present messages about what constitutes "quality" research (Lather, 2004), namely structured processes in which theory, methods, and findings all neatly aligned. For this study, I relied on theoretical underpinnings that are inherently messy and which straddle different schools of thought. As a result, in framing my findings, I felt a palpable tension between celebrating this messiness and a habitual compulsion to make everything "neater." Just as the identities of my participants are not simple, intractable, nor easily placed into boxes with firm borders, my findings are layered and complex. Patti Lather (2007) argues that social categories have "sliding meanings and contested boundaries" (p. 5) and I believe this to be the case when it comes to sexuality. This liminality results in a "praxis of not being sure" (Lather, 1988, p. 487) since answers are never finite. By delving into the literature on critical postmodernism and queer theory and exploring how they apply to my research on bisexual women, I learned to let go of the need to bring order to the complexity.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of qualitative research methodology, phenomenology, and the methods I used to recruit participants and collect data for this study on the lived

experiences of bisexual women on college campuses. I utilized a phenomenological framework

to collect data from 11 bisexual women via interviews and reflective exercises. Queer

phenomenology can be used to capture the lived experiences of queer women who identify

outside of socially defined binaries. In addition to learning about their lived experiences, this

methodology allowed me to gain insight into sense of belonging and bisexual community based

on the work of Strayhorn (2008, 2012) and Schlossberg (1989).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the lived experiences of bisexual women on college campuses. As described in Chapter Three, I interviewed 11 nonmonosexual individuals identifying as a woman (cis- or trans-) or genderqueer twice between August and October 2016 about their experiences on college campuses. Between the first and second interviews, participants created a conceptual map of what bisexual community looked like to them while enrolled in an academic program(s), which I subsequently used to guide the second conversation. Participants ranged in age from 19-30, and were either currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program or had graduated from a program within the previous three years. Participants will be referred to in this report using their pseudonyms and preferred pronouns. All LGBT/queer centers or offices will be referred to as "LGBT centers" and all LGBT/queer-specific student organizations will be referred to as "LGBT student organizations" so as to reduce potentially identifiable information.

To analyze the data, I reviewed the transcripts from each interview, following Seidman's (2006) recommendations for studying, reducing, and analyzing phenomenological interview text. This included marking and coding meaningful passages in order to develop profiles of each participant and then using these passages to make thematic connections between participants. I used the constant comparative method to identify patterns across multiple participants and to eventually move from lower level codes to overarching themes (Charmaz, 2006).

The results from my study are presented in this chapter, beginning with an introduction to the participants via profiles using their own words. I then present themes that emerged from my analysis of the data, including direct quotations from participants, followed by a summary of results.

Introduction to Participants

As described in Chapter Three, I identified 11 participants using social media to seek a diverse sample to capture an array of lived experiences. Table 1 is presented below and provides demographic information for each participant. Participants self-identified their gender, sexuality, race, and religion, and responses in their exact language are below.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Sexuality	Age	Race	Religion	Significant Other
Anne	Female	Bisexual	19	White	Roman Catholic	No
Emily	Female	Bisexual	24	White	Jewish	Yes - Male
Emma	Female	Bisexual	27	White	Atheist	Yes - Male
Erin	Female	Bisexual	25	White	In the market	Yes - Male
Glenn	Female	Bisexual	26	White	Atheist	No
M	Female	Queer/Bisexual	22	White	Non-practicing Catholic	Yes - Male
Marie	Female	Bisexual	21	White	Episcopalian	Yes – Nonbinary
Martina	Female	Bisexual	30	White	None	Yes - Male
Riku	MtF Transgender	Pansexual	23	White	Agnositc theist	Yes - Male
Sam	Nonbinary/ sometimes Femme	Bisexual/Queer	25	Mixed mostly White, also Mexican & Jewish	Agnostic	Yes – Trans*
Vanessa	Female/ Genderqueer	Pansexual	22	Afro-Latinx	Christian	Yes – Male/ genderqueer

The participants I interviewed were currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program or had graduated from a program within the previous three years. Table 2, presented below, indicates educational information for each participant in order to place their experiences in context.

Table 2

Educational Characteristics of Participants

Pseudonym	Highest Degree	Year in School	Institution Type (Enrollment)
Anne	Bachelor's (Ancient Studies)	Sophomore	Urban public research university (14,000)
Emily	Master's (International Relations)	Graduated 2016	Undergraduate: Urban private Methodist research university (12,000) Graduate: Urban private Catholic/Jesuit research university (17,800)
Emma	Doctoral (Higher Education & Student Affairs)	First year	Undergraduate: Urban private non-sectarian research university (50,000) Graduate: Urban public research university (58,000)
Erin	Juris Doctor	Third year	Undergraduate: Rural private Ivy League research university (6,300) Graduate: Urban public land grant research university (18,800)
Glenn	Master's (Higher Education)	Graduated 2016	Undergraduate/Graduate: Rural public university (6,200)
M	Bachelor's (International Studies)	Graduated 2016	Urban private Methodist research university (12,000)
Marie	Bachelor's (Theater)	Senior	Rural private liberal arts college (2,500)
Martina	Master's (Urban Teacher Leadership)	Graduated 2015	Freshman year: Urban private research university (25,000) Rest of undergraduate: Suburban public university (14,000) Graduate: Urban public university (32,800)
Riku	Bachelor's	Graduated 2016	Rural private technological research

	(Game Design)		university (7,100)
Sam	Bachelor's (Gender & Women's Studies)	Graduated 2013	Suburban private, nonsectarian liberal arts college (1,600)
Vanessa	Master's (Sociology)	First year	Undergraduate: Urban private research university (14,500) Graduate: Suburban public land grant research university (35,000)

Participant Profiles

The profiles of the 11 participants are presented below in alphabetical order.

Anne. Anne is a single, 19 year old, White, Roman Catholic female raised in the Southern United States. She is a sophomore at an urban public research university on the East Coast, pursuing a bachelor's degree in Ancient Studies. She chose her school primarily because of its location relative to her home, its strong engineering program (although she subsequently changed her major), its small and walkable campus, and in-state tuition. Anne has a group of five LGBT friends on campus to whom she is close, and she has participated in LGBT activities, including panels and discussion groups, on campus through her school's LGBT student organization and multicultural center.

Anne started identifying as bisexual by her senior year of high school, but never participated in her school's Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) for fear that her strict parents would find out, a fear which has carried on to college. She lives in a residence hall but notifies her parents as to her whereabouts whenever she leaves campus. She has refrained from participating in LGBT events in the city because she is concerned her parents might discover her participation via social media. Despite reporting back to her parents, Anne believes that college represents a time of freedom for her. She stated,

The craziest part is just having all of this freedom. Like even without being able to drive

on campus… I don't have my parents telling me to do my homework, I don't have my

sister bugging me every once in a while.

Whereas her sister has been accepting of her sexuality, her mother has been ambivalent,

considering it a phase. Her father was initially hostile, exclaiming at a dinner party that "bi and

pan and trans aren't real things." While defending her friends at the dinner party, Anne disclosed

her bisexuality to her father. She said of the incident,

It went okay. It was very emotional. There was lots of crying and ….he's doing better

about it but him and my mom still have that little voice in the back of their heads saying,

'No, she's not really bi'…

Emily. Emily is a 24 year old, White, Jewish female raised in the Western United States

and is currently in a relationship with someone who is male-identified who she met in high

school and with whom she reconnected during her first semester in college. She received a

master's degree in international relations from an urban private Catholic/Jesuit research

university in 2016, and previously received a bachelor's degree from an urban private Methodist

research university, both located in the same urban area on the East Coast. In speaking about her

choice of undergraduate institution, she said that she liked that it was, "very socially aware and

politically active, [had a] high concentration of gays and Jews, more women than men, and then

[was] right in [a major city]." Her selection of graduate institution was based solely on the

strength of its international relations program.

Emily knew she was bisexual in high school, but did not start identifying as bi until

junior year of college because she was not comfortable with the label. She stated, "I kind of

bought into that bisexuals are people that can't choose or are too picky or too slutty or whatever.

So, I was just sort of uncomfortable with using that for myself."

She describes her hometown as "rich, White, conservative suburbs where people like to say that they're super open-minded" but in reality are not. Exposure to people in college who were comfortable with their sexuality, in particular several gay sorority sisters, allowed her to gradually come to an acceptance of her own bisexuality. She has disclosed her bisexuality to her friends but not to family members. In addition to the sorority, Emily's other form of involvement was her undergraduate institution's production of The Vagina Monologues for all four years of college.

At the time of our interviews, Emily was packing all of her belonging to embark upon a Fulbright Scholarship to the Balkans. She had previously spent a semester abroad in Jordan during her undergraduate studies, which proved to be a difficult time for her due to the criminalization of homosexuality and lack of rights for women but which, in the end, contributed to acceptance of her bisexuality. She stated that after being harassed on the streets of Jordan for being a woman,

> I sort of came to own that and take a lot of pride in that and just be like…'I deserve to be
>
> able to walk down the street and not be harassed,' and that just helped me work through
>
> other parts of my identity and so when I came back to America it was like, 'I should be
>
> able to embrace this environment and all parts of myself.'

Emma. Emma is a 27 year old, White, Atheist female enrolled in her first year in a doctoral program in Higher Education and Student Affairs at a large, urban, public research university in the Midwest. She previously received both a bachelor's and master's degree from a

large, private, non-sectarian research university in the Northeast. Emma is married to someone who is male-identified.

Emma's bisexuality is an important part of her identity, and she is looking forward to pursuing her dissertation research in the area of bisexuality. Emma started identifying as bisexual in middle school and co-founded her high school's GSA. She stated,

> I identified with the label, I was pretty open about it in high school. I knew that I was attracted both to men and women really as early as you could start feeling attraction and so I'd say even elementary school probably. I knew that I was attracted to women just like I was attracted to men. The 'bisexual' label is the one that I chose at that point because it's the one that was most obvious, it's the label in the LGBT acronym and so it made sense.

Despite her comfort with her own sexuality, during her undergraduate years Emma found herself frequently telling other women that she was a lesbian because of the "pervasive notion that bisexuality is a phase or that it's greediness or slutiness."

Emma chose her undergraduate institution based on its urban location, with a plethora of gay and lesbian bars, LGBT history, and a reputation for being LGBT-friendly. As an undergraduate, she was involved in her school's LGBT student organization and in social justice advocacy efforts. Although the school's reputation as LGBT-friendly panned out for her as an undergraduate, once she began working at the institution and pursuing a master's degree, she felt the need to retreat

> back into a closeted space because in my workplace…people were way more…I don't know, I guess people were really open about being gay men. Again, there weren't really

a lot of out women... And so that became really uncomfortable for me, like a huge step

backwards from where I'd been all throughout high school and undergrad.

Emma regrets not being more out when she was working during her master's degree, as she

believes that honesty is necessary in order to fully support students with their identity

development. It was this professional experience that led Emma to, when researching doctoral

programs, seek a campus and geographic location that would be LGBT-supportive and

specifically bisexual-supportive.

Having just entered the cohort-based doctoral program, she decided to disclose her

bisexuality to the rest of her classmates. Disclosure was important to her in particular because

she is married to a man, which she felt could erase her bisexuality in the eyes of others. In

describing the experience, she stated,

> One of the orientation activities that we did was a facilitated session of creating brave
>
> spaces. So, not just safe spaces but brave spaces and talking about what we needed out of
>
> our grad programs to be successful. And we talked a lot about identity as a part of that
>
> conversation and I basically looked for an opportunity to just say 'Hey, it's really
>
> important that you all know this about me because it isn't a visible identity but it's so
>
> fundamental to who I am as a person and also my research here and so I need you all to
>
> know this.'

Emma is out to her brother and mother, but not to her father. She anticipates that her

doctoral research will lead her to disclose her sexuality to her father in the near future, and is

unsure if he will be able to understand how she can be both non-heterosexual and married to a

man.

Erin. Erin is a 25 year old, White female in the third year of a law degree program at a public, land grant institution in the Northeast. She previously received a bachelor's degree from a rural, private Ivy League institution. She is currently in a relationship with someone who is male-identified.

Erin started identifying as bisexual as a freshman in college. She described herself as "boy-crazy" in elementary school, but attributes her growing open-mindedness to her bisexuality to her relationships with bisexual and pansexual high school friends and her gay brother. Since coming out as bisexual, Erin has had some tension with her brother. She stated, "He's not really that supportive at all of the whole bisexual thing which is interesting because I think he thinks it's insulting to his own identity and that I'm copying him." In addition to this experience with her brother, Erin felt marginalized within the larger LGBT community. She attended the same college as her brother, and when she participated in a mentoring program through her school's LGBT student organization, her mentor told her brother that she did not think she was bisexual, which Erin felt undermined her efforts with her brother around her sexuality. Erin also recalled an experience dating a lesbian who questioned her sexuality on their first date because of the length of her nails. She found the immediate jump to a sexual topic and the invalidation of her identity to be insulting.

Erin was involved in an a cappella group throughout her time in college. It was an alternative group that contained several gay and bisexual members, and felt more comfortable to her than the LGBT community on campus. In law school, Erin has found it easier to make friends than in college. She has been involved in social justice activities, including putting together her school's diversity week and attending a Rebellious Lawyer Conference. She recently agreed to become Vice President of her law school's LGBT student organization. Her

friend had signed on as President and asked if she would be willing to take on the role. In

between our first and second interviews, Erin co-led the group's first meeting of the semester,

and seemed excited about the level of interest but nervous about the possibility of coming out as

bisexual to the rest of the group.

Glenn. Glenn is a single, 26 year old, White, Atheist female working at a university in

the field of student affairs. She obtained her master's in higher education and student affair, as

well as a bachelor's degree from the same rural public institution on the West Coast at which she

currently works. She is a first generation student whose parents encouraged her to attend

college, but who were unable to provide her with much guidance in terms of school choice. She

stated,

> Mostly it was wherever I got in that I could afford was the main deciding factor. I'm a
>
> first generation college student and so I didn't really understand what college was, why I
>
> would go, why did it matter but my parents understood that college was important and so
>
> told me, 'Hey, you're going to college, figure out where you're going,' and so a friend of
>
> mine actually was attending [this university] and so the easiest thing to do was 'Oh, well,
>
> that's a college and so I guess I'm going with you.'

Glenn discussed coming to terms with her sexuality during high school in a matter of fact

manner. She developed crushes on both boys and girls and stated,

> In high school there were just more conversations about what that term meant and it was
>
> the first time I'd really heard it and I realized 'Okay, well, if I like boys and I like girls,
>
> and a person who is bisexual likes boys and likes girls then that must be what I am.
>
> Cool.'

Despite being comfortable with her sexuality by the end of high school, Glenn did not disclose

her bisexuality to anyone publicly until senior year of college, and had just come out to her

colleagues recently, after her disappointment in the adequacy of the school's response to the

Orlando shooting at the LGBT Pulse nightclub on June 12, 2016. Prior to her senior year, she

had chosen to disclose her sexuality only to partners and friends she knew already identified as

LGBT. Becoming a Resident Assistant (RA) as a senior made her aware of her school's

Spectrum group and offered her the opportunity to participate in diversity trainings with her

students, which allowed her to gain confidence in disclosing her bisexuality. Glenn shared,

> I was an RA and so we did a lot of the diversity trainings and so during one of those
>
> trainings, we did kind of the stuff for if you identified as…and during that, I was like,
>
> 'Well, I do, why am I not stepping forward?' and so I stepped forward and it was kind of
>
> this 'ah ha' moment.

Glenn still has not disclosed her bisexuality to her family "because they're very

conservative…and I'm a very stubborn person and so…my rebelliousness came out, I guess, in

the sense that my sister never had to come out as straight and so why should I have to come out

as queer?" In describing her upbringing, Glenn stated,

> [M]y parents were very religious, church every Sunday, Bible study, all that stuff,
>
> confirmation, whatever. And then I was a rebellious child for many reasons I'm sure and
>
> so I didn't agree with the church, I didn't agree with the concept of God and so I was
>
> very vocal about that with my parents and then that kind of created this dichotomy
>
> between me, my rebellious perspective and their very religious perspective and it kind of
>
> forced us away from the church a little bit. So, my parents have stopped going to church,
>
> they're not quite as religious. I think my radicalness has kind of brought them down a

little bit from that and then my sister actually took the complete opposite road… [S]he

married into a very religious partnership, raising her children very religious, all Christian.

M. M is a 22 year old, White, non-practicing Catholic female raised in the Midwestern

United States. She obtained a bachelor's degree in International Relations in 2016 from the same

urban private Methodist research university as Emily. She decided to stay in the city after

graduating to maintain distance from her family, as she struggled with both her mother and sister

as a result of disclosing her sexuality. She currently works for a non-profit organization and is in

a relationship with someone who is male-identified.

M chose her college because of its politically conscious student body, which contrasted

with her conservative upbringing in the Midwest. She told me,

I am from Indiana and a lot of people just didn't care about anything politics-wise and so

I really wanted to come to a community that really cared a lot about politics. When I was

touring the campus I talked to students and they were just really passionate about politics

but also about what they were doing.

Growing up, M had a troubled relationship with her family, in particular her mother.

My relationship with my mom has a toxic history I'd say. She's very, very strict and

very conservative in her ideas… She said 'how did I not see that I was queer' but she has

two older sisters who are gay… It's a lot like internalizing… My grandparents are very

homophobic. It's like very complicated because it's like they love they their daughters,

it's an Italian family and so family always comes first but then they'll also tell you that

you're screwing your entire life up in the same breath that they say they love you.

As was the case with Glenn, M found that her sister went in an opposing direction to her,

becoming more normative and conservative.

I think she didn't want the relationship my mother and I had which was yelling at each other all the time in high school and so because of that she swallowed everything of my mother's…basically became…a lot more conservative, lot more like normative on gender roles, lot more normative on sexuality, took off with that and ran with it because I ran in the opposite direction.

M is pleased that she has become closer with her sister in recent years. She attributes the change in their relationship to them living in different places and to their shared identities as sexual assault survivors.

M identifies her sexuality as queer/bisexual. She did not realize she was nonmonosexual until college. Until that time, she considered herself a physically affectionate person, but during her freshman year, she became attracted to a woman while being in a monogamous relationship with a man. She was honest with her partner, who is still her partner today, and he was supportive. She stated,

He always was just very comfortable with whatever I felt and so I was also able to talk about that in a way that was really healthy and admit that I felt attraction… So, I was able to just suss out that…I wasn't straight. And then from there I've come to learn so much more about definitions of pansexual, bisexual and stuff… I just kind of come to like catchall it as queer or bisexual in terms of the fact that I haven't experienced attraction to someone who has a transgender identity.

M found herself in a community she describes as "very…comfortable with their sexuality" through her participation in The Vagina Monologues each year. Being a part of this community led her to take classes in sexuality, through which she learned more about its fluid nature. In addition to The Vagina Monologues, M was involved in sexual assault prevention and

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support efforts on her campus. Her work affirming the experiences of survivors opened the door to her ability to self-validate her sexual identity.

> I was constantly saying, 'How you feel is valid, these circumstances don't make how you feel any less real' and so I realized that I'm saying this to so many people and it's like, that applies to me, too. I'm not any less queer because I have a boyfriend…that doesn't change how I feel about women and how I feel about myself. And so I…realized that as I evolved in my activism.

Another defining moment for M was her semester abroad in Denmark during her junior year. She was dating her current partner, but they chose to change their relationship from monogamous to open during her semester abroad as well as the summer that followed. This allowed M to more fully explore her bisexuality. She told me,

> Denmark is extremely, they don't have any of the homophobic legislation, everyone's very open about sexuality and it's just very casual. So, in Denmark I was able to publicly make out with women usually in clubs and stuff like that and no one gave a thought… [W]hen we were in an open relationship, I had sex with a woman and I experimented physically with women and that to a degree to just validated [my bisexuality].

Marie. Marie is a 21 year old, White, Episcopalian female raised in both the Northeastern United States and outside the U.S. She is a senior majoring in theater at a small, rural liberal arts college in the Northeast. She is currently involved in what she defines as a complicated, long-distance relationship with someone who identifies as nonbinary.

Marie identified as straight in high school and was involved in her school's GSA as an ally. She started to question her sexuality during her freshman year in college, eventually coming to identify herself as bisexual. Entering college represented a time of expanding

freedom for Marie, which allowed her to reflect upon her sexual identity. She deliberately chose

a school that was not close to where her parents currently live. She told me excitedly,

I did look at some schools in the area…but I really wanted to have more independence. I

didn't want to run into my mom walking the dog while I was off at college.   For me, I

was excited to sort of take the first step to independence.

Like M and Emily, Marie mentioned an active involvement in The Vagina Monologues.

As a theater major, she was also involved in several other productions each year. She also

enjoys outdoor activities with friends, because her campus is located in a rural, mountainous

area.

Marie spent a semester abroad in France, but unlike the case for M in Denmark, this

proved to be a challenging time for her because she felt that she needed to hide her bisexuality in

order to ensure safe housing with her host family. She informed me,

The tricky thing about when I was in France was that I was living closeted because…I

was living with a host family and I didn't think that it would be a problem but I didn't, in

case it was going to be a problem, I didn't want to say anything because it would've been

really, really awkward if like I said something and then had to live with them for four

more months and it really was uncomfortable. And it would've been a huge hassle to try

and change housing half way through the semester so I kind of made a point of not

seeking out queer spaces in France because I just didn't want the potential repercussions

that could bring.

Martina. Martina is a 30 year old, White female residing in an urban area in the

Southeast. She works as a teacher, but has left the physical classroom to teach online. She

obtained her Master's in Urban Teacher Leadership from a large, state university. She started

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her undergraduate education at a private research university in the Northeast, where she was raised, because of the proximity to her home and a scholarship offer. However, she was unhappy at the institution and also learned during her first year that her scholarship only covered a fraction of the costs associated with attendance. She decided to transfer to a suburban public institution on the beaches of the East Coast, which she defined as "conservative" but "laid back." Martina is currently in a relationship with someone male-identified. She had two previous long-term relationships, one with someone male-identified and one with someone female-identified, which seemed to distinguish the phases in her life.

Martina began identifying her sexuality as bisexual after college. She was in a long-term relationship with a man during her college years, and she began exploring her sexuality after they broke up. Although she had some awareness of her nonmonosexuality prior to that time, her partner's reaction caused her to wait for self-exploration because he was encouraging her to have threesomes or kiss other girls to please him.

Martina's brother is gay, but came out after she had left home. About coming to identify herself as bisexual, she told me,

> I don't think I knew any other terms. I don't even think I knew…when I was in middle school and high school really…I mean, I probably didn't know myself enough to be able to actually pinpoint like, 'Oh, this is why I feel this way'…but I'd never met anybody else that was bisexual and I don't think I knew, too, I just thought 'gay' and 'straight' were the things and I don't think I really thought about it that much.

Martina is out to her mother, who took some time to come to terms with it but is now accepting. However, Martina expressed concern that her mother does not understand her bisexuality, and possibly thinks that when she is partnered with a woman that she is a lesbian and

when she is partnered with a man that her lesbianism was a phase. Her friends are aware of her

sexuality because they have known her long enough to observe her in relationships with both

men and women. When she was still working in the classroom, Martina decided not to come out

to her colleagues or students since she was not married, but would have felt comfortable coming

out had she been married to a woman.

Martina's involvement in school activities at both the undergraduate and graduate level

was limited. She was involved in an academic organization for educators and participated in two

international service leadership trips. She lived off campus and spent most of her time with

friends one-on-one or in small groups.

Riku. Riku is a 23 year old, White, Agnostic theist, male-to-female transgender

individual from the Northeast. Riku graduated in 2016 with a Bachelor's degree in Game Design

from a rural private technological research university, and has remained in the same town as her

alma mater. Riku is currently in her first serious relationship, with someone male-identified.

Prior to her senior year in high school, Riku felt an inability to express romantic feelings

because she was "raised by parents with a fairly small world view." However, she attended a

Quaker high school she found to be open and accepting, and this exposed her to broader concepts

and allowed her to become more in touch with her emotions. Riku initially identified her

sexuality as bisexual at the beginning of college, but as she learned about the nonbinary nature of

gender and her frequent attractions to androgynous individuals, she changed the definition of her

sexuality to pansexual. Regarding the differences between her home and school life, Riku told

me,

> [T]he tenets of Quakerism include diversity and equality and my parents and my family
>
> ….I wouldn't say that they are racist or homophobic or transphobic, but I will say that

they definitely have few to none non-White, non-straight, non-cisgender friends. So, as a result, I never questioned any of that because that was the environment I was brought up in… [I]n the middle school, especially in the high school, it was completely acceptable to express your sexuality regardless of what it was… [T]hey made great efforts to have a diversity of students from around the world and there was a gay straight alliance and I had at least one or two trans friends. So, I came to understand these concepts at a fairly formative point in my life so I could…come to terms with the fact that that's fine, there is nothing wrong with being not straight and not-cisgender....

Riku is forthcoming with others about her sexuality and gender, having made a post on Facebook to make her wider social circle and extended family aware of her transition. She stated,

I'm at sort of the point in my transition, I'm about six months into hormones which means…on estrogen it means that there have been effects and changes but no one just meeting me is going to say, 'Oh, this person is obviously female' and someone having known me, 'Riku seems a lot different.' but I'm getting into that stage where I'm going to be visibly trans in the next couple of months. So, I do like to indicate that and then I also take the enjoyment of, well, this is novel, this is different for a lot of people.

Her parents have been accepting of her sexuality and gender, but were not pleased that she announced it so publicly on Facebook. She told me,

I think it comes from a place of an embarrassment that they're not able to or willing to put into words….I think there is that sort of implicit transphobia. And this also happened when I first posted about my relationship status with…my boyfriend. It seemed reasonable, because that's what couples do, they often say, 'Hey, on Facebook we're in a

relationship now'… And my parents weren't so much weirded out that I was now actually dating a guy because they knew I was pan… But my mom got kind of like weirded out by me posting that and as far as I can tell the only logical explanation for that is that she's sort of uncomfortable with people knowing. So it's like a social pressure or embarrassment...

Similar to several of my other participants, Riku's primary form of involvement on her campus was in the performing arts. There were openly trans and bi people in both her theater and a capella groups, so these were very comfortable communities. About the playhouse, Riku said, "There is a lot of racial diversity, there is a lot of diversity in sexuality and gender identities, and so there is all kinds of diversity and people are very accepting, everyone's very chill." The physical playhouse was a space where Riku spent much of her time in college, and continues to spend time.

Sam. Sam is a 25 year old, White, Mexican, and Jewish, Agnostic, nonbinary/sometimes femme individual who was raised on the West Coast. They graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Gender and Women's Studies in 2013 from a suburban, private liberal arts college, where they served as student body president as a senior. When looking for schools, Sam knew they wanted a rigorous liberal arts college on the West Coast, and also looked for schools that had dedicated LGBT centers. Sam is currently in a relationship with someone who identifies as trans*.

Sam identifies their sexuality as bisexual/queer. They began questioning their sexuality in sixth grade. They told me, "I remember spending a lot of middle school being terrified that I was a lesbian... And because I was interested in guys it was something that I was able to skate around and put to the back of my mind." Sam spent time being a supportive ally to their bisexual sister until their sophomore year of high school, when they came to terms with their own

bisexuality. They initially identified themselves as bisexual, and after starting college, began to embrace a combination of bisexual/queer.

Their freshman year, Sam built up the courage at an on-campus career fair to apply for a student position at their school's LGBT center, and would go on to work there throughout their four years. Of this experience, they relayed, "[F]inding that space as a first year, that was really my introduction to the word 'queer'." Sam's experience at the LGBT center led them to become a Gender and Women's Studies major, where they learned about queer theory and found a community that felt full of love and mentorship. Sam's other major involvement on campus was student government. They were involved in social justice advocacy efforts around issues such as worker's rights throughout their time on campus, which led to becoming student body president their senior year. They worked for social justice non-profits after graduating until recently. Sam has been open about their sexual identity in the job search for fear of ending up somewhere unwelcoming. However, they have felt less secure being entirely open about their gender identity since leaving the safety of their college campus.

Vanessa. Vanessa is a 22 year old, Afro-Latinx, Christian, female/genderqueer individual. They are in their first year of a pre-doctoral Master's program in Sociology at a large, suburban land grant institution in the Southeast. They previously received a Bachelor's degree from an urban, private research university in the Southeast. Vanessa is currently in a relationship with someone who identifies as male/genderqueer, who is still a student at their undergraduate institution.

Vanessa identifies their sexuality as pansexual and has come out to their parents, but did not receive a positive reaction. They relayed,

[W]e were Catholic and our church priest told us that the gay people started the war in Iraq and I was like, 'I can't go to this church' and so [my mom and I] had to have the conversation about me being bisexual and she was like, 'You can't be bisexual, you have to choose one.' And so we kind of left it there where she was like, 'Don't tell your father'… And then the second time [I came out to her] was in college and then my father was in the car and he thought I'd joined a cult and my mom was not surprised at this point, but [was still like] "I thought you were past that."

Because of this strained relationship with their parents, Vanessa looked for a strong community when they arrived on campus their freshman year. They told me,

I was really interested in Greek Life…because I had moved eight hundred miles away and so I knew I was going to be looking for an organization that felt like a family, a home away from home for me. And so I'm Black Latino and so I was looking at Black sororities and Latino sororities…but I hadn't found anything that really fit. And so one of my friends kept telling me, 'Come to this interest meeting, they're trying to bring this multicultural sorority to campus'… And so they showed us a lot of pie charts of their membership in every city, of like religion and race and age and education, etc. And then they had a gender pie chart and it's a sorority and it's like 90% women, like 99 even. There was like one percent genderqueer and one percent genderfluid and I just liked being represented in the pie chart, being able to see myself. And then they had the sexual orientation and pansexual was up there and just not being erased in that space just…I knew that was a space where all of my identities could be celebrated.

Vanessa attributes much of their growth around sexuality to their experiences within their school's LGBT center, which they found as a freshman, along with the other offices that

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composed the multicultural center. They felt comfortable in the LGBT center space, spending time and taking naps, and as a senior facilitated a discussion group for queer students of color, which is now co-led by their partner. Vanessa also joined a small multicultural sorority during undergrad, and still goes back to campus to participate in related activities.

Vanessa's choice of college related to their interest in the performing arts, specifically poetry and theater. Their freshman year, Vanessa joined a poetry slam team that became defunct, as well as a multicultural theater group that ended up getting folded into the larger theater community on campus due to a lack of space. Vanessa expressed disappointment at the loss of these communities. However, they made many friends as a result of those groups, and continued to be involved in theater on campus, including continued performance in The Vagina Monologues.

When applying to graduate programs to study sociology, Vanessa only considered schools with a Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and then attended the one school where they were admitted. Since Vanessa has started graduate school, they are just getting acquainted with the resources on their new campus. They attended an open house session for the school's LGBT center, but did not stay long because they felt overwhelmed, which is a common occurrence for them in crowded social situations. Between our first and second interviews, they attended a graduate student Pride mixer, and they intend to attend more events when they feel up to it.

Becoming Bisexual

Bi-Invisibility and Identity Inaccessibility

Identity confusion. Most of the participants in my study initially identified as heterosexual. Participants were unaware of the existence of bisexuality as an option when they

initially began to think about their sexuality. They had typically already experienced feelings for

boys and then became confused when they also experienced feelings for girls, until exposed to

the concept of bisexuality at some point, often through friends late in high school or during

college. Anne exemplified this when she stated,

> I started off actually just liking guys and I dated a guy but then around the same time I
>
> also started having similar feelings for girls, too, and it was confusing at first. But then I
>
> talked to my friends and they were like, 'Oh, there's this thing called "bisexual."' I just
>
> didn't know.

Marie felt similarly confused, stating

> I basically thought that I was straight through most of high school and it was really only
>
> in freshman year of college that I started to seriously question my sexuality and it took a
>
> long time for me to figure out that I liked girls because I spent a lot of time being like,
>
> 'No, but I like boys so I can't like girls, I can't be gay.'

Like Marie and Anne, Glenn was confused by her attraction to women because she knew she

was also attracted to men. She told me,

> In middle school I had my first crush on a girl, I was kind of trying to figure out what that
>
> meant because I also had crushes on boys…and so it actually took a while. It took until
>
> probably end of high school for me to actually put a name on it.

Several of the participants recalled identifying first as an ally to the LGBT community,

some by being involved in their high school's GSA and others in the form of supporting a gay or

bisexual sibling. Sam recounted,

> My younger sister came out as bisexual…and I played the kind of straight allied role to
>
> her and it wasn't until my sophomore year of high school when I finally came to terms

with the fact that I was also bisexual, that I wasn't this kind of gung-ho, straight ally.
And I pulled up some of the thoughts and feelings that I'd been repressing since I was in
sixth grade.

While participants all came to understand themselves to be nonmonosexual, several of
them expressed continued uncertainties. Emily, while packing up all her belongings to move to
the Balkans for a year, reflected on her bisexuality, "I don't know where I'm going from here
and where that aspect of my identity is going to play a role in the future… It's confusing, it's
scary…" Even Sam, who worked at their school's LGBT center and seemed quite self-assured
in their queerness, divulged that since graduating three years ago,

> I often still feel inklings of that shame or…uncertainty, like 'Is this person going to be
> okay with these aspects of my identity?' and 'What does it mean to be bisexual? Where
> does that come from?' Like a sense of feeling lost, I think? Less of feeling as though
> there is something wrong with me but more of frustration at feeling like I am operating in
> a world that wasn't necessarily built with nonmonosexuality in mind.

M, Marie, and Emma discussed struggling with the fluid nature of their sexuality and
believed that being bisexual presented more of a challenge than being monosexual in regards to
gaining an understanding of one's sexuality. M witnessed her friends come into their sexuality
when they arrived at college, and expressed jealousy over their ability to be so secure. She stated,

> [T]hey knew, there was no, 'Am I? Aren't I? I don't know.' There was a lot more like
> 'I'm gay but now I can be gay here, I can be out and really comfortable here…' I think I
> had a hard time when I was coming to terms with my queerness or my bisexuality or
> whatever because partially I was like, 'Am I gay? Am I straight?' There was no…it was
> like people just knew, like they were really gay or they were definitely straight.

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Marie expressed a similar sentiment in regards to the challenges of figuring out her sexuality due to being nonmonosexual. She commented,

> I know that not every straight person in the world has a very straightforward life, no pun intended, but it felt so much simpler and so much more like 'You go this way and then you go this way' than it does being queer. And then, [as far as the lesbian and gay community], it's not quite as simple and laid out as being straight, there is still a lot of twists and turns to it, but I feel like that world is easier to navigate just because it's more visible and it's more prevalent than the bisexual community.

Emma has continued to struggle with the fluid nature of her sexuality, finding validation in online communities. She relayed,

> One thing that really stands out to me is this notion of a bi-cycle, where your attraction to men and women fluctuate over time. The fact that a lot of people were articulating that feeling was really comforting because that's always something that I grappled with, this notion that sometimes I feel so much more predominantly attracted to women and then other times it feels a little bit more balanced.

Being partnered with a man. Many of the participants were partnered with individuals who identified as male, and they expressed distress regarding perceived invalidation of their identity and the rendering of their bisexuality invisible. Emma shared,

> I am married to a man, which complicates everything because that is something that I was less forthcoming about with my cohort. He did come to a potluck that we had and so everyone has met him now but I was really nervous about it because, again, I do have this fear that as soon as they meet him or find out about him that that will invalidate

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everything that I've just said and they won't believe that I'm honest about being bisexual because I've chosen a man instead of a woman.

Sam, who worked at their college's LGBT center throughout their four years in college, dated a man for half that time and felt that it invalidated their identity as queer.

I started dating someone who was straight and cis and male shortly after getting to college. We just connected really quickly, we dated for the first two years of my college experience and I remember kind of hiding him for a while and feeling like it delegitimized my participation as a staff member. So I didn't bring him around and talk about him. It was like six months into my employment there that folks found out that I was dating someone and they were like, 'We had no idea, why didn't you say anything?' and it was like, 'Well, you know…it feels like a different part of my life, I do my queer work here and then I have a relationship and it's hard to see how to bring them together.'

M is currently partnered with the same man she dated throughout college. She believes that although her friends were accepting and never intentionally invalidated her identity, being partnered with a man resulted in erasure of her bisexuality. She recalled,

[B]eing in a relationship with a straight man, and he was friends with a lot of them, too… it was more just silence around it. I would never say I had friends who would say, 'Oh, well you're dating a guy so you're not queer.' It was just like, 'Sure, you're attracted to women but you're in a relationship with a man.' It was just like…'you have feelings'…. I was still struggling with if my feelings were valid or not and so I didn't bring it up that much.

Both Sam and M had internalized the notion that dating a man made them appear less queer/bisexual, but did not personally encounter experiences of marginalization from friends or

co-workers in that regard. M indicated progress in regards to how she now views her bisexuality in the context of her relationship, stating

It sometimes makes me wonder if my queerness is less valid but I've gotten to a point where I just don't really feel that that's true, that my sexual identity is what it is, regardless of who I'm with… I'm not any less queer because I have a boyfriend…that doesn't change how I feel about women and how I feel about myself.

Erin expressed distress about the loss of her bisexual identity since she is partnered with a man. She worried,

I get paranoid because I'm like if I just stay in this heterosexual-appearing relationship and just don't ever talk about it…I don't know, is something going to happen, am I going to explode? If you don't talk about things, I feel like they probably eat you up inside even though it's totally fine to be in a monogamous relationship with just one gender.

Like M, Erin expressed growth in terms of comfort around her bisexuality. She found support in a video she discovered online of Anna Paquin, a bisexual actress, discussing her sexuality. She commented,

She's talking to [this] guy, and he's like 'How can you be bisexual when you're married to a man?' and she's just like, 'You don't stop being straight when you're married to a specific person, it's just an identity and it sticks with you.' She said it much more badass but… basically that's how I feel. You can't get rid of that part of you even if you wanted to and you can't stop a sexual identity.

M has not come out to her parents, and believes that being partnered with a man would completely invalidate her bisexuality in her mother's eyes. Erin, on the other hand, came out to

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her family as bisexual during college, and expressed that being partnered with a man made things easier, albeit less authentic, in terms of her relationships with them. She shared,

[I]t kind of shuts my family up because I was honest with my parents when I was attracted to girls in college. And my dad was fine with it, I guess, but my mom was definitely not and so…that's a lot easier to just not discuss it with her because I don't have to now. [I]t's the whole…like the generation of people that just don't really understand a lot of these things, it makes that a lot easier because I just don't really have to confront it with them, which I would have to if I was in a relationship with a woman, I would have to confront all of that bigotry and ignorance of not really understanding how it works.

Vanessa expressed a sense of frustration coupled with resignation regarding their mother's reaction to their current partnership with someone who identifies as male/genderqueer:

I've come out to my mom at least twice. I'm currently in a relationship with a male and before that, my last two relationships have been with men and so it's just like, 'Oh, well, I guess you've gotten over that stage of your life.' And so that's been interesting because you're like, 'No, I'm still queer but…that's fine.'

At the end of our time together, Emma told me about an article she had read recently regarding bisexual women in monogamous relationships. She commented,

I was thinking about this the other day because I was reading something about it…this idea of how do bisexual women in long term, monogamous relationships maintain a bisexual identity and visibility and the article that I was reading talked about it as in some ways it's like a performance for your closest group of friends and family. And I just thought that was really interesting. I wouldn't necessarily describe it for myself as a

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performance because that feels more like putting on a show…but it is a really interesting concept to me and I think going back to that idea of outness, for me, kind of moving forward in my life, I just really want to make a commitment to myself to be as open with people that I meet as possible.

Bisexual performativity. Although in our second interview Emma said she did not feel that the notion of performance was personally relevant, during our first interview, she indicated that as an undergraduate, she had changed her hair and attire in order to be visibly recognizable as queer. She told me,

> Very shortly after getting to undergrad, I cut my hair totally off because I had kind of like the very short faux-hawk hair, started wearing clothes that were way more masculine than I would say was necessarily fitting of what I like. I'm not super feminine by any means but…now, I like my hair kind of long, I like sometimes wearing more feminine things and at the time I really was rejecting that so that when I showed up, visibly people would look at me and see the hair and see the boots and not think that I was straight. Now, I'm trying to be more myself but I think I read as straight to people and I don't love that.

Anne spoke about other bisexual students on her campus who 'pass' as queer through hair and attire as well. She stated, "there are definitely some people that are passing, like they do outwardly project themselves as part of the LGBT community and that's usually just with like the stereotypical dyeing of the hair and certain clothes." Anne has made a deliberate choice to not dress as what others would consider queer, because she's noticed other students making negative comments about students dressed in that fashion. She told me,

It makes me a little scared because…I'll be more conscious of what I wear and how I look which, I mean, I don't necessarily want to wear or look exactly like that but if I ever did, they'll make me feel a little bit upset and scared to possibly be made fun of, too.

Erin recalled choosing her major advisor because she perceived her to be queer based on visual cues. She relayed,

My faculty advisor, I don't think I consciously tried to pick her because she seemed queer or whatever, but she definitely seemed very queer. And then I found out later she was married to this man, this male philosophy professor. And it was like…betrayal. Which is probably rude because maybe she was bisexual, you know? Who knows? But she just dressed very genderqueer, and had like spiky hair and like, I don't know…so that was kinda funny.

Among participants, disclosure of their bisexuality could be viewed as a form of performing their queerness, in that it was related to visibility, authenticity, and divestment of heterosexual privilege. In speaking about the importance of disclosing their sexuality, both Erin and M expressed a sense of internalized guilt regarding being able to pass as straight and not having to endure the same amount of discrimination as lesbians and gays. M recalled,

I never really experienced people invaliding my identity directly… I didn't receive homophobic discrimination, I wasn't rejected by my parents because I didn't tell my parents. So those experiences I wanted to prioritize. Because it was my friends going through it, so I was always going to prioritize their experiences… Because queer or bisexuality is just not really even talked about. Like I said, they weren't maliciously like, 'Bi people aren't real!' or anything like that. I just never felt like I had really ever experienced discrimination based on my sexual identity. And so, I think that there was

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also this automatic kind of prioritization of their identities because they were receiving

direct discrimination from larger politics… [W]hen we talk about politics nothing is ever

supposed to be like the oppression Olympics and yet somehow sometimes it turns into,

'You're not literally out here getting murdered', 'You're not out here experiencing these

horrible things per se' and it's like, yeah, but we're also not out here at all.

And Erin told me,

[I]t's so hard to be bisexual and I understand why gay people have problems with

bisexual because often, I guess, what I'm doing right now, in their minds, is like

defecting, being in a relationship with the opposite sex and not having to deal with the

stigma of having an identity that isn't part of the majority… I understand if you've had

to fight your whole life, especially I never had to deal with this growing up as a kid,

which is why I totally understand people who are gay and they grew up with having to

deal with these emotions by themselves when they're kids, especially in earlier times

when it wasn't as accepted.

In this way, being partnered with a man inherently felt like performing heterosexuality

for Erin and M, as it did for Sam, who could not figure out how to merge both parts of their life –

their queerness and work in a queer sphere and their relationship with a man. Thus, disclosing

their sexual identity became a means of divesting themselves from heterosexual privilege and

making themselves visible. Sam relayed,

Currently, I would say that anyone who I spend regular time with, I usually try to find a

way to bring it up into the conversation, I think partly because of experiences of having

been marginalized, of feeling like I'm on the outside. Partly because a lot of really

wonderful community has come from understanding myself as queer and also because of

how easy it is for me to be read as straight and cisgender, it feels really important to me

to kind of mark myself early on. In the past, I might've been a little more selective but I

think once I entered college it felt like coming out was a form of advocacy and visibility.

So, the more I could do it even when it was scary, the more other people could see me as

a resource that I was creating that visibility for others.

Labeling

Many participants went through a process of exploring the suitability of different labels

to determine what felt most accurate to describe their sexuality. Most of the participants had

settled on the label 'bisexual,' and found its binary connotations to be an asset rather than a

deterrent. Some chose other labels but then returned to bisexuality because they felt it most

accurately reflected their attraction to both men and women and because they had not

experienced attractions to individuals who did not fall into those gender binaries (e.g.,

transgender or androgynous individuals). In these cases, the binary nature of the term 'bisexual'

was an advantage in that it described their attractions and sexual activities in an accurate fashion.

For instance, Anne stated, "I settled on bisexual because…'pan' is a little…sounds a little more

open than I am. I mostly tend to go towards to the people that actually present as male or

female." Marie shared,

> As for coming to the label 'bisexual' specifically, I toyed for a while with pan and queer
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> and where I fit on that spectrum. I got drawn in a little bit to the stigma associated with
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> the word 'bisexual' and 'Oh, it reinforces the binary' and all of that kind of stuff but
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> particularly in the past year or so I decided that bisexual is both the term that I feel most
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> comfortable with, it's a term that people understand, especially inside the queer
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> community.

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Several of the participants, including Marie, discussed choosing the term 'bisexual' in order to enhance understanding by monosexuals. Although they stated that they felt the label suited them, it seemed clear to me that seeking the understanding of others also played a significant role. Vanessa exemplified this phenomenon when she told me, "[A] lot of people I think just identify in terms that are easier for the people to understand, then to like have to explain their identities to people." Emma stated, "The 'bisexual' label is the one that I chose at that point because it's the one that was most obvious, it's the label in the LGBT acronym and so it made sense." And Erin shared,

> [Bisexual] is the most widely used or understood term for that, rather than trying to get
> into like 'I'm fluid' or 'I'm pan sexual.' I just think it requires a lot more description and
> I don't necessarily want to get into that with people that you're not that familiar with.

Sam, who identifies as bisexual and queer, initially eschewed the label 'bisexual' because they felt it was too sexualized. They commented,

> I think 'bisexual' came to me as a functional label, that it was true for me in that moment
> that I was interested in both guys and girls. It was something I struggled a lot with
> because I think there is a lot of stigma attached to the word and it felt very
> oversexualized. It felt like I was sharing something very intimate about myself to tell
> someone I was bisexual. So, I didn't love the word but I didn't really have any other
> options. And then I went to college and I had other options.

Participants discussed the political implications of various labels, with some embracing the political nature of terms like 'queer' and 'pan' while some found those interpretations to be off-putting or inaccurate. Sam moved from a solely bisexual identity, to a solely queer identity, eventually settling on a combination of bisexual and queer. They relayed,

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I loved [the term queer] for its politicization, for its defiance, for its flexibility and fluidity. At the same time I was kind of going through a process of unpacking the history and relationship that I'd had with 'bisexual' and felt like it was important to reclaim that and become re-comfortable with the word or really become comfortable for the first time. So, I like 'queer' and 'bisexual' together because of the accuracy but also the fluidity, the political aspect and that reclamation of I think both terms.

Erin, on the other hand, disliked the potentially subversive implications of terms outside of bisexual. She shared,

ʹ[P]ansexual' and other things like I think sometimes…connotes other things…other

ways that you identify in groups…like you don't necessarily like to be part of the mainstream society or anything like that. And while I have a lot of problems with mainstream society, I don't necessarily want that connotation as part of my identity because I want to make my own decisions when it comes to the other parts.

Unlike the others, Vanessa and Riku, who identify as genderqueer and trans, respectively, both changed their descriptions of their sexuality from bisexual to pansexual in order to use a term implying less of a gender binary. Vanessa stated,

I'm pansexual and so I changed from when I guess I came out in high school as bisexual. But that's only because of the words that I had at my disposal. So like before that I just identified as 'I like people' and I didn't have a word for that in high school and eventually I found out that there is a word for that and so 'pansexual' finally fit. Because it was that gender wasn't important to me rather than "Oh, yeah, I like men", "I like women" …there's just 'people' and so…just being able to like find that word in the college was really helpful… It describes more who I am and what I identify with. And

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especially as someone who doesn't really fit into the gender binary that well…it just

seems very odd to me to be 'Oh, I only like men and women' when I don't really identify

that way either.

Riku shared,

[I]t wasn't until the beginning of college…that I said, 'Well, I'm bi' and then eventually

as I came to understand how to define nonbinary gender and especially the fact that I very

frequently find people who are androgynous attractive. So I changed my definition to

'pansexual'.

Struggles With Disclosure

Desire for authenticity. Participants felt a sense of obligation to disclose their

bisexuality, both in order to present their authentic selves and in order to enhance bi-visibility so

that they could help others coming to terms with their nonmonosexuality. This sense of

obligation, however, was balanced with a desire for support and acceptance. Erin shared,

I don't really know honestly what it means to be out sometimes as a bisexual person in a

heterosexual relationship. It's weird because I'll talk about my boyfriend but then do I

add 'But I also used to like women?' I don't know how to do that really and what the

point of it would be… Like the point of it would probably be being open so that other

people feel the same way because they have a space or just so you bring the movement

forward… I think to me it's just…not lying to oneself and trying to fit into the box of just

being heterosexual and in a heterosexual relationship and honoring that identity

throughout.

Upon entering a graduate program in education, Martina felt it was important that she be

authentic about her sexuality, using the term 'responsibility.' She shared,

[I]t was important to me…in my graduate school that I wasn't going to hide it. I think

that was the first time I actually ever talked about it in a classroom setting. Because

before…I was kind of figuring things out for myself at a certain point and so I don't

know that I felt comfortable articulating that in front of a group of people. I just felt like

it was important for me to say something when we were having a conversation about

specific subsets and groups of students and people and diversity and how we can be

sensitive to them and be understanding of their life and their struggles. So I think that

was the first time I felt a responsibility to say something about it… I'm like 'Alright, if

anybody should be able to talk about anything, it should be in a classroom environment,

as a teacher.' I'm like that should be a safe place where you learn from each other and

you don't do that unless you become vulnerable and share things about yourself.

Across the two interviews with each participant, participants spoke of how our time

together prompted them to reflect upon how they could be more authentic with others, a means

of resisting and liberating themselves from societal perceptions of deviance. Both M and Emma

realized recently that they should be more open with others about their sexuality. At the end of

our second conversation, when I asked M what resonated most powerfully for her, she shared

with me,

I realize that I think I need to be more open in general about my sexuality with my

friends, even if they're not really good friends of mine…. I've been really proud of the

fact that I've built my own network of support here and so to do that though, I have to be

myself and I think realizing through talking with you, too, I've come to recognize more

that whether or not I'm in a monogamous relationship with a straight dude, being queer is

part of that and it's healthy to talk about and why don't I bring it up with people when it's relevant?

Emma shared,

> For me, it's a pretty salient part of my identity. It means not just who I'm attracted to physically but I think it also just colors how I see the world in terms of politics, in terms of all of the relationships that I form because I'm always wondering even if this is a platonic relationship, is this person going to believe me when I say that I'm bisexual and so for me, it's part of who I am but it's also something that kind of makes me a little bit timid going into every new relationship that I form.

During our second conversation, Emma felt nervous about disclosing her bisexuality during an upcoming lunch with a new friend but expressed determination to present herself honestly and openly, commenting,

> I don't know exactly how to weave it into a first conversation really but I want to try because that's the trap that I feel I fell into in my last job was that people would just assume I was straight and that would continue on indefinitely. And so I'd rather get it out of the way up front just so we can be clear about who we are as people.

Emma and Glenn, who both work in student affairs, expressed a sense of obligation to disclose their bisexuality to serve as a resource to students. Emma shared,

> It just was getting tiring, keeping up this like weird lie of sorts. It felt really inauthentic which just made me sad. But the other thing is I think to support students and encourage students to…own their own sexuality, I think it felt really disingenuous to be supporting students through that and not having worked through all of that on my own.

Glenn found that her experience as an RA allowed her to come to terms with her sexuality in a way that helped her support her students. She commented,

> The tipping point probably was being an RA and doing the diversity training and having that opportunity for specifically asking, 'Do you identify as this? And if you do, step forward' and it was kind of like this conflicting thing internally, like 'Why am I not stepping forward? If I don't, then am I lying by not stepping forward now that someone's directly asked?'

Strategic disclosure. Despite their desire for authenticity, participants were often strategic in their disclosure decisions, being out in some settings or with certain people only, or being out as lesbian vs. bisexual depending on the context and time. Marie had traveled abroad to France as a junior and had just returned to campus for her senior year. Although she enjoyed her time in France, she struggled with her decision to hide her sexuality from her host family and friends there. She shared,

> It's tough…it's painful to be put into a position where you either have to…straight up lie about your relationships or…choose between outing yourself and misgendering your partner. That's not a fun place to be in and it's a tough decision to make. Especially, like I made friends and I wanted to be able to be honest with them but…was hesitant to do so…because there was another foreign student who was also housing with me and I didn't want to tell her because I didn't know how she would react, I didn't know if she would slip and out me to the family…. But I didn't want to lie to her either and I didn't want to lie to my host mother. But it was a matter of what's worse, the discomfort of lying temporarily or potentially knowing that I'm living under a roof in which people feel…uncomfortable and unfriendly towards me.

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Emma discussed identifying as bisexual when she co-founded her high school's GSA, then moving to identifying as a lesbian in college depending on how welcomed she felt in particular spaces. Now that she has entered a graduate program, she is working towards being less strategic in her disclosure decisions and more open about her bisexuality. Emma feels that being selective in her disclosure decisions in the past was inextricably tied to identifying as bisexual as a result of monosexist cultural assumptions, but that this made her feel uncomfortable and inauthentic. She stated,

> The notion of being out and kind of coming out and how I think for monosexual, like lesbian and gay people, it's something you can kind of do once and so for me, it's something that I feel like I have to do in some ways every day and the fact that I have been selective about when and how I do that is something that I'm really not happy about. I think it's been detrimental to me in the long run. I feel bad for having lied to people that I've gotten close with because I felt like it would be easier for me and maybe easier for them, too. So, I think for me, it's one of the most….salient experiences that I have as a bisexual person is this notion of transparency and being out.

Although she tended to disclose her bisexuality at campus LGBT events, Anne found that many other women identified as lesbian until they witnessed her courage to come out as nonmonosexual. She said, "They won't say they're bisexual in the very beginning and so they say they're gay or lesbian and then they gauge afterwards when you're talking to them…. So if they see that someone is very open-minded they'll suddenly be like 'Oh, I'm actually bi.'"

Participants disclosed their sexuality to romantic partners, but were more selective when it came to family members. None of the participants lived at home while in school, so this afforded them a degree of freedom regarding family disclosure decisions. They typically based

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these decisions on their perceptions of the family member's expected reaction. Those who grew up in towns they deemed conservative or within a conservative family were less likely to bear the burden of disclosing in that setting. Participants also engaged in a calculation process regarding the stress of disclosing compared to the closeness of a given family member. For instance, Vanessa is out to their parents and sister, but not to extended family, who reside abroad. They said, "It's just not really worth explaining. I see them like maybe once every few years or so, it's really not like worth it." Marie also had not come out to her extended family, who she sees infrequently, stating,

> I haven't seen most of my extended family in person for a long while because we live kind of scattered to the winds, so I see them once a year, if that. And I missed all of them this summer so I'm like, 'I kind of want to make an announcement but I don't really know how'…. But that's a very specific instance because I feel like family is a little bit different [than friends], especially, you know…older, Southern family members some of whom are more conservative than others.

Anne, Emma, and Sam drew a distinction between disclosure in academic and professional environments, even when those professional environments were in a higher education setting. Emma said, "I took classes on diversity and campus subcultures and so in all of those spaces I was pretty open about my sexuality and various identities and ways that I wasn't back in my full time job." Even though she worked at the same institution where she took classes, Emma felt that her office environment was far less supportive of nonbinary sexual identities than it was of lesbian and gay identities.

Sam shared that they had transformed the way they viewed potential employers and approached interviews. They relayed,

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I would say that the more I became immersed in queer spaces in college and the more that I felt entitled to feeling safe and feeling known and feeling understood by other people, the harder it was to find myself in environments where I wasn't feeling safe and understood and I wasn't feeling like there was space for my identities and so…I would say in that sense, the fact of feeling like I did have to shape and adjust who I was depending on the atmosphere meant that I was intentionally trying to cultivate and looking for spheres where I was having to do that less and less.

Desire for casualness. Several participants expressed a desire to disclose their bisexuality in a casual fashion, as having to continually disclose and/or cope with others' reactions was tiring. Glenn stated that while she was in school,

I didn't like the idea that I had to have this formal coming out conversation with someone and so I'd just kind of throw it in conversation in a public setting where it wasn't a case of 'I'm telling an individual person who then has to decide what their reaction is going to be' but rather, 'It's in a public setting, clearly it's not a secret and you do what you want to do with it, it's your call but this is me and this is what you're getting if you want to hang out with me.'

Subsequently, when she came out at work, Glenn's co-workers 'made it a bigger deal' than she wanted, which resulted in her feeling uncomfortable.

Marie told me how she came out to a close friend of hers in a casual fashion, and that the thought of having to have repeated major disclosure events was exhausting. She said,

At this point, usually I try to just bring it up casually because I don't want to have like a huge coming out celebration to every person I meet because it just gets exhausting. So, you know, I try to mention it in passing like, 'Oh, my ex-girlfriend' or 'Oh, I was at a

queer event the other day' or whatever or 'Oh, that girl is really hot, I really like her'…. I

am still struggling to find a way to come out to my extended family which I'm sort of

oscillating between whether I want that to be a bigger statement or if I want to just kind

of try to let it slip in.

Whereas Marie figured out ways to casually reference her sexuality, Erin struggled with

how to disclose to others. When I asked Erin whether she had considered coming out as bisexual

to the LGBT student organization at her law school, who presumably assumed she was lesbian,

she stated,

> [I]t's super awkward and if I just said it randomly, or if I was like, 'Oh, I'm going to go
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> hang out with my boyfriend' and just tweeted 'But I'm bi'…. I literally have no idea
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> how I would say that without being super awkward. Unless it's having a personal
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> conversation with someone. Yeah, I have no idea.

Coping with and internalizing stereotypes. Participants recounted dealing with

monosexist stereotypes from both the heterosexual and lesbian/gay communities. The most

frequently encountered stereotype was that bisexuality is a temporary phase, thus rendering

bisexuality invisible. Now that she's dating a man, Erin's mother and her gay brother both refer

to her time in college dating women as her "crazy time," rather than viewing it as a stable

bisexual identity. She also encountered monosexist assumptions from friends. After starting to

date her boyfriend, Erin had lunch with a friend who joked, "Oh, my God, your parents must be

so happy that you're straight now." She views this friend as someone more progressive than

others in her life, and so was disappointed by this reaction. From within the LGBT community,

Erin felt that she received many negative reactions to her bisexuality, commenting,

I think they kind of think they earned a ticket to this club that people who realized that

they were bisexual later in life maybe didn't earn because they didn't have to deal with

all of that stuff. I don't know. Or…being in an ostensibly heterosexual relationship

whenever they want. So, consequently, I just think it's hard to be engaged in LGBT

spaces because they're largely dominated by gay people and I think I've experienced a lot

of just…not great reactions from them.

The stereotype of being able to choose attractions, as Erin shared, was expressed by other

participants, such as Martina, Marie, M, Vanessa, and Emma. Martina told me,

I feel like a lot of times people even within the gay community just kind of brush off

bisexuality as a phase or somebody who, it's almost like I felt a lot of hate from certain

people, it's almost like they wish they could have the option to do the 'normal

thing'…whatever, be heterosexual. And then from lesbians I felt a lot of hate because

they have this whole, 'Well, maybe you'll be with a girl for a little while but eventually

you're going to choose to be with a guy because that's what's easier for you and why

wouldn't you? Because if I had the option to be with a guy I probably would be, too',

kind of thing. So, I feel like there is a lot of that in the community, prejudices that are not

really addressed when you get lumped into that one category together.

Family members struggled with notions of choice and the existence of bisexuality, as was

the case with Erin's mother and brother. When Marie came out to her parents, "One of the first

questions that I got asked…was, 'Well, then how do you choose?' Which they didn't mean

anything negative by it but it's not a fun question to be asked." Vanessa and Martina's mothers

both assumed monosexual identities for them based on the gender of their current partner,

exhibiting an inability to understand nonmonosexual identities as true and stable. And M told

me she felt assured that if she came out to her mother as bisexual that her mother would invalidate the identity since she was partnered with a man.

Emma experienced the impact of this stereotype in the classroom, albeit in a different way in that sexual identity was implied to be a potentially political choice. She had a negative experience in a feminism course because the professor and her classmates insisted that lesbianism was a strategy in order to combat the patriarchy, which she felt invalidated her attractions towards both men and women, neither of which were a choice. She recalled,

> [O]ne of the things that came up and was a point of contention was about women choosing to enter into same sex relationships as a way of rejecting patriarchal structures, and that notion of lesbianism or whatever you want to call it as a political choice as opposed to an innate feeling really bothered me and it was a source of conflict with the professor and with other classmates at times. And I think it just bothered me because I wish that I could choose to be a lesbian, I think it would just make it easier but I just don't think it's possible to completely reject feelings of attraction towards men if that's a part of who you are.

M also struggled with the idea of sexuality being a political strategy. She felt that her lesbian friends conflated her genuine attraction to women with her feminism, and she struggled with how to differentiate the two, both for herself and for others. She recalled,

> [I]t's almost like being a queer woman got looped into like feminism, inherently, rather than just existing in its own sexuality space and spectrum, it kind of got looped into just being a free woman, period. Which I don't resent but in hindsight definitely made it more confusing for me…like figuring out my sexuality…. [T]his idea of just being like 'Women are beautiful, women are magical, vaginas are great and female orgasms are

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great and isn't it great when women have orgasms' and this kind of whole…almost like being in love with women essentially and celebrating everything that is female-identified is very much the tone of feminism at [my alma mater]. And so for someone like me who really was coming to terms with how I felt about female sexuality and having sex with women and the idea of having sex with women, like what all of that meant, I think it was almost hard to separate that at least, at first… I think people take that as progressive and radical feminism almost rather than the fact I'm talking about the fact that I want to sleep with women.

In addition to coping with the stereotype of choice, participants were faced with the notion that bisexual individuals cannot be monogamous and are greedy, which became part of a negative self-image they had to fight internally. In coming to terms with her sexuality, Emily "kind of bought into that [notion that] bisexuals are people that can't choose or are too picky or too slutty or whatever." In the past, Emma labeled herself lesbian instead of bisexual, even though she was confident in her bisexual identity, due to this stereotype. She found that the institution she attended for her undergraduate and her master's degrees was more affirming of gays and lesbians than bisexuals, and that lesbians there were distrustful of bisexual women, believing that they were slutty and would leave them for a man. So although it felt uncomfortable and inauthentic, Emma consciously chose to misrepresent herself in order to have the option of the types of relationships she was seeking. She also distanced herself from a bisexual friend who was engaged in polyamorous relationships. Because of the stereotype of bisexual individuals as unable to commit, Emma did not want to be associated with this individual. Emma spoke of how she was now learning to combat the stereotype of non-

monogamy as well as other stereotypes by opening herself up to and embracing them as positive

attributes. She shared,

> I think I realized that a lot of things that people say about bisexuals that are negative
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> stereotypes, that I conform to some of those and that's okay, too. I think we can't police
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> ourselves so much and play this respectability game because that is just another way that
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> we're kind of rejecting parts of who we are. So my husband and I have also started
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> talking more about the idea of open relationships and so yeah, it's definitely not
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> something that scares me away like it used to…. Now that I've had more interactions
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> with people that are poly or in other kinds of open relationships or just more sex-positive,
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> it's really changed the way that I look at that.

Martina, M, and Erin brought up the stereotype of women acting bisexual to please men.

Martina actively made behavioral changes to combat this stereotype, changes that may have

impacted her development negatively. Although she wanted to explore her attractions to women,

Martina pulled back because her boyfriend at the time encouraged her to experiment, in what she

believed to be a self-serving fashion. She recalled,

> [M]y boyfriend was like, 'Yeah, kiss that girl'…and it was kind of weird. Like I kind of
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> knew myself. Like I want to be with a woman at some point in my life for me, but it
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> made me not want to do it because I'm like 'Oh, I don't want to just have sex with a girl
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> because it gets him turned on'…. [H]e would try to push me to have threesomes…and I
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> was 'This is just not sitting well with me' because it wouldn't be the right dynamic. Like
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> him getting turned on by two girls together, that bothered me. That's not what I wanted.
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> So, it made me not want to explore that part of myself at that point in my life.

M, in less direct fashion than Martina, talked about how she too had altered her personal behavior as a result of this stereotype. She avoided dancing with women, for fear of being labeled a tease by straight men. Whereas Martina and M talked about how this stereotype affected their personal actions, Erin focused on the role of media in the perpetuation of this stereotype, telling me

> [T]here are some gender societal connotations in this realm…I think for some guys it's like 'That's ok' because they think girls being together is hot, which is completely ridiculous, and kind of unfair to male bisexuals…. [I]t's been portrayed as hot, which isn't really respectful to the identity at all. And I feel like usually the people that they're imagining together are not like actual women.

The Impact of College

The impact of college on participants' understanding of their sexuality was tremendous. College represented a time of freedom and of exposure to new ideas and new people, which expanded their worldview and provided them with an environment supportive of exploration. Sam stated that at their liberal arts college, "Most students were relatively progressive and accepting when it came to gender and sexuality." M joined what she described as a "very sexually comfortable community" at the beginning of her freshman year, when she became involved in The Vagina Monologues. It was at this time that she first began to experience same sex attraction. She was then exposed to the idea of sexual fluidity for the first time in a sexuality class.

> I think I had a hard time when I was coming to terms with like my queerness or my bisexuality or whatever because partially I was like, 'Am I gay? Am I straight?'….

[L]earning about the Kinsey scale or spectrum blew my mind freshman year. I was like, 'What do you mean, sexuality is a spectrum?!'

Marie was excited to leave home and have more independence, and found that college exposed her to more queer people. She told me,

I really look at college as the stepping stone between living at home with your parents and being able to live independently because you're not supervised 24/7 but you have a safety net… [W}ith particular respect to LGBT things, I guess it wasn't right away, but I did start questioning my identity pretty concurrently with the beginning of college…. [W]hen I got into college I think more of my friends started coming out as queer. I started knowing more queer people and I started feeling like that was a community that somehow I belonged in.

Similarly, Vanessa had their social circle broadened by the transition from high school to college. They told me,

I finally had an [LGBT] office and a queer community around. I went to Catholic school my whole life. So it wasn't like 'Oh, well, I'll go to this meeting or discussion group'…there wasn't really a community there.

As she was starting to settle in to her new graduate school environment, Emma expressed a sense of comfort and pleasure at meeting diverse individuals. She shared,

[E]ven if I'm meeting people that don't necessarily identify as bisexual, I think just meeting people that don't necessarily fit the norm of…I don't know, what a heterosexual cisgender woman 'should be' quote/unquote, is comforting to me. So, I guess the fact that I feel like I'm meeting people that I don't feel like I need to fit neatly into boxes with is really nice.

Participants depicted college as a bubble in which they could feel safe expressing their sexuality and/or gender identity. Riku, who identifies as trans, stated, "No one gives a shit what bathroom I use here. It's fine. But out in the real world…." And Sam reflected, "I think that I had quite the queer bubble in college and…that I was able to surround myself with people who affirmed me and in a way that's been tougher to find since then." Anne also felt that her campus was more accepting than the outside environment, stating, "It just feels safe in general on campus… The campus is much more open minded than I think if you go to a bigger [off-campus] event."

Whereas participants' experiences in formal LGBT-specific activities and spaces varied, most noted that college impacted their understanding of their sexuality positively, and often through more informal means. Both Riku and Sam spoke of the importance of personal, informal conversations about their sexuality with friends. Riku stated that she and her friends "very frequently are talking about our relationships, gender, sexuality, that sort of thing…" Sam echoed this sentiment,

> When I did have conversations about my sexuality I'd say that it was happening in late
> night dorm conversations… I think that one of the pretty central elements of being in
> college and in an intellectual community for me was about having access to those
> informal discussions and lots of people around who wanted to think and talk about things.
> After my first year I had a lot of choice of who I was living with and would often go
> spend time with friends in dorms and their spaces, and so late night conversations would
> feel like a classic part of my college experience in terms of just sorting things through
> and discussing and talking about identity and sharing stories and experiences.

Seeking Community

Experiences Within LGBT Communities

Participant experiences within LGBT communities and with LGBT individuals on college campuses varied. Sam, Vanessa, and Anne found their LGBT-specific communities and centers to be affirming of their nonmonosexual identities, whereas Erin, Emma, Riku, and Glenn discussed experiences of marginalization in these spaces. Marie, Martina, M, and Emily had limited direct involvement with the LGBT communities on their campuses, although M was tangentially involved in the community via friendships and collaborative partnerships formed through her other on-campus activities.

Welcoming LGBT spaces. Sam, Vanessa, and Anne all found their LGBT centers to be welcoming and spaces of safety and comfort. Anne appreciated her LGBT center's library of movies and books for rent, and Vanessa liked to take naps at their LGBT center, which even provided blankets, a tangible symbol of warmth and comfort. They relayed,

> It became one of the places where I just felt really comfortable. I started eventually
>
> spending a lot of time there when I started facilitating the [discussion group for queer
>
> students of color]…. [I could go there to] take naps during the day, just meet up with
>
> people between classes. It just became a space I could be in, I didn't have to go there for
>
> a specific purpose, it was on my way through the building, you'd just stop by.

Even though Vanessa's center did not have a pansexual flag hanging up, they found the environment to be welcoming and they decided to be proactive in making sure the space was inclusive by being out about their pansexual identity at events. They commented,

> I think it's really important to create spaces for other people by being in those spaces.
>
> We have Bisexual/Pansexual Visibility Day on campus, actively participating in that.

So…it was like, 'Of course, we have a pansexual flag up in our [dorm] room'…. I guess it was just like being present and not being afraid of showing or talking about my identity when it was being erased in spaces.

Sam, Vanessa, and Anne all commented on the supportive role that discussion groups had on their respective campuses, with Sam and Vanessa taking leadership roles in facilitating groups. Vanessa participated in a group specifically dedicated to bi/pan students and facilitated the group for queer students of color, so those both felt like inclusive spaces. Sam joined their LGBT center as a student employee as soon as they arrived on campus, before they had a sense of its role, and eventually facilitated weekly talks for a queer student group. They found it to be a space of community and mentorship, a complement to what they were learning in the classroom, and a source of self-esteem because they were trusted with increasing leadership opportunities over time. Sam commented,

The [LGBT center] was the first time that I'd had an opportunity to bridge learning I was doing in the classroom with understanding my identity. I became a Gender and Women's Studies major and was reading a lot of queer theory. I got mentored by a lot of older students and it was a time of I think radicalization for me, just really expansive learning and just a lot of love and community. I loved feeling like I could be active on a campus helping other students at the same time that I was getting community for myself.

Anne appreciated her institution's LGBT organization's meetings and their sponsored panel sessions focused on nonbinary sexual and gender identities. She felt an immediate sense of inclusiveness as people introduced themselves using not just names but also pronouns. Anne stated that she felt safe in various spaces on campus because of the amount of staff that are safe space trained. However, outside of LGBT-specific communities, such as in classrooms and

hallways, she reported experiences of overhearing harassment directed towards other students, primarily those with trans or nonbinary gender identities. These experiences caused her to be fearful about receiving the same sort of treatment due to her sexual identity.

Mentoring experiences. While Sam had experienced positive informal mentoring relationships through their LGBT center, Riku and Erin had undesirable mentoring experiences. Riku's mentoring program did not have any trans mentors, and since that was a more salient struggle for her at the time, she did not find the mentors she was paired with, one a gay male and one a cross-dresser, to be helpful. Riku felt that she got the support she needed from her trans friends. Because of this experience, Riku went on to serve as a mentor in the program in order to be a resource for other students needing similar types of support. Despite a lack of inclusivity of the mentoring program for trans students, Riku's institution did have a trans/nonbinary group in which she was active. Riku did not get involved in her institution's larger LGBT organization, as she had heard that it was a source of gossip.

While Riku's experience as a mentee was unhelpful, Erin's was markedly negative. Erin felt that her institution's mentoring program was not inclusive of individuals who did not identify as gay or lesbian, and felt misled that they were not clear about that. Erin attended the same college as her brother, and her mentor went behind her back and told her brother that she did not think she was bisexual, which was an invalidating and undermining experience. When she went to coffee with her match, Erin says that

> She clearly thought she was one hundred percent accurate at gaydar, which it's definitely not an exact science… [S]he told my brother that I was straight and…why did I even go, it just totally undermined me. It was just very confusing.

Glenn mentioned the importance of mentoring relationships and that she was in the process of developing a mentoring program and online resource that would pair staff with students and also allow staff to support one another.

Domination of White and gay male voices. Vanessa, Sam, Emma, Erin, and Glenn all spoke of the feeling that queer spaces were often dominated by White and/or male voices. Vanessa expressed that their school's LGBT student organization was White, gay male dominated and, as a result, discussion groups were formed on the basis of smaller queer communities that needed space. Although Sam felt quite comfortable personally at their school's LGBT center, they brought up the fact that students often felt it was a White dominated space. Although they are part Mexican, Sam thinks they are perceived to be White and that this perception frequently resulted in the privileging of their voice over others. Sam thinks that part of the reason affinity groups did not form on the basis of race or gender was sheer numbers and that another part was a history of exclusion of students of color. Sam stated that while there were students of color on staff, these students seemed to be more comfortable not having their queer community rooted in their race as well, and those that desired that type of community tended to leave their jobs at the center. Although efforts were now being made to reach out to a broader range of queer student communities, Sam believes the space was already marked as White as a result of a historical lack of engaging those communities, and thus it was difficult to build momentum to attract students of color to their events.

Emma, Erin, and Glenn felt that their LGBT centers were dominated by gay men, and this made them feel unwelcome as bisexual women. Erin recalled attending one meeting of her undergraduate institution's LGBT organization in which the conversation was dominated by three gay men. There was a speaker on gay marriage at the event, and Erin felt intimidated and

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excluded as the three men discussed detailed legal issues with the speaker. Emma also described a negative experience attending an LGBT event on campus, recalling,

When I first got to campus as an undergraduate there was an orientation for LBGTQ identified people and I went to that and I was the only female and it was all gay men…. Really, wonderful, sweet guys but not necessarily people that I identified with super strongly. And so from there on out I always just felt like most of the people that were attending those events were either gay men predominantly or women that were there more often than not identified as lesbian. So it was really just not seeing people that I identified like myself rather than overt kind of discrimination.

Glenn felt a sense of marginalization within the LGBT community based on her gender, commenting,

[T]he resources very much focus on either straight or gay and I do say gay and I don't mean lesbian, I do mean for our male, gay people because …or at least on my campus anyway, they'll always have resources on…like they'll have condoms but they never have dental dams, they'll have conversations about the experiences and struggles that gay men will face but we don't talk about lesbian experiences, we don't talk about bi experiences. We especially do not talk about trans experiences and so even within the resources that exist for the queer community in general, there is even less for the specific identities within that.

Both Emily and M, who attended the same undergraduate institution as one another, felt a need for more women-specific resources to support both lesbians and bisexual women, echoing Glenn and Emma's sentiments.

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Political emphasis. Despite Erin's experience at the meeting with the gay marriage speaker, she continued to seek support via other LGBT vehicles on campus, including the campus' LGBT center. However, she recalls only seeing a few bisexual people present, and she felt the center was exclusionary because it emphasized political protest over social support. She told me,

> I hung out there for a while but at a certain point…it was like they were combining political protest with the LGBTQ room…. I'm not sure if I'm going to be the one picketing for all of the causes that they were picketing for so it was just like, I don't know if it was that welcoming in terms of...there was this pressure to also do that in addition to having a resource for your identity… I know for me that 'queer' can mean like anything just not straight, basically, but I also think it can mean more of a politically radical-minded LGBTQ group…. I think that group was sometimes not as welcoming to people who are coming into the social group just because like it seems like, 'Okay, well, I had this LGBTQ identity but I'm not sure if I identify as queer in like a political sense' and…even people who identify as LGBTQ, not knowing all of the terminology that you're supposed to use for everything, especially with transgender or genderqueer populations… I think sometimes that can scare people away initially just because they're expected to say everything exactly right.

Marie also yearned for a space that focused more on social support than political issues, which felt intimidating, stating that she wanted

> social events and gatherings and places that are informal ways to meet queer people because it can be kind of intimidating to be like, 'We're going to go to this very serious meeting and we're going to talk about all of these very serious issues.'.

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Thus, the radical politicization that Sam embraced and found life changing to their worldview and that also drew M and Emily to their undergraduate institution was off-putting to both Erin and Marie. Sam seemed to understand that this type of political environment might not be welcoming to certain students, stating that many White, gay men on campus believed the LGBT center was too political. However, Sam believed that the expression of their conservative viewpoints and feelings of exclusion were a function of a sense of entitlement by White, gay men in general.

Lack of support for questioning individuals. The idea that Erin raised about it being intimidating to not know all the correct terminology was also reflected in her comments that the LGBT community did not seem welcoming to those questioning their identity (i.e., those who were newer to information about sexual and/or gender identities). She felt that she had to label herself in order to gain access to resources, sharing,

> I think portions of the LGBT community don't really take you seriously until you
>
> identify… Just sort of patronizing you a little bit, like 'Maybe you're having a dream
>
> about this or it's not real,' so I think in some ways it's like a legitimizing thing.

Yet once someone labeled themselves and worked up the courage to attend a meeting, they might feel excluded because they did not understand everything that was happening or being said.

Marie, M, Martina, and Emily echoed the sentiment that the LGBT communities on their campuses did not seem open to those who were questioning. Interestingly, none of these participants were actively involved in their institutions' LGBT organization or center. Marie thinks it took her so long to sort out her sexuality because she was unsure whether she belonged in queer spaces and did not want to intrude in case she were incorrect about her sexuality. She told me,

One of the most important things to me is just having resources and people willing to talk about what it means to be queer, both to straight people and to queer people…. I came into college thinking I was straight and I think a large part of the reason it took me so long to figure out that I was queer was that I never want to intrude, right? I never want to be too far in queer spaces…and I think it is still important to have places that are reserved just for queer people. But I think it's important to be inclusive and to make sure that there are spaces available for people to talk about exploration and questioning without judgment, because also another thing that scared me was like 'Well, what if I'm wrong? What if I think I'm queer but then I figure out that I actually am just straight?'… So I think having a supportive environment for discussing what it means to be queer, how did you figure out that you were queer, when did you figure out that you were queer...

M felt similarly lost trying to figure out her sexuality. She thought that more educational events would have been helpful, commenting,

I think that's half the problem of why people don't understand their feelings a lot sooner, it's because they get stuck figuring out themselves. At least for people in this middle space…. So maybe more educational opportunities or programming [around explaining] what some of these terms means and what makes them valid.

Glenn expressed a feeling of being trapped, or unable to travel between, different communities. She believes that people perceived her as straight until she came out, but that once she came out, she was constantly referred to the institution's LGBT organization for any resources. Thus there was no space for questioning or fluidity. Her bisexuality became the most salient thing about her and every need that she had was filtered through that lens by others, whether that community met her needs or not. This resulted in her consistently feeling welcome

by only half the community – the heterosexual community before she came out, and the LGBT

community afterward – and that there was no bridging this gap. Within the LGBT community

on campus, she felt welcome only some of the time, depending on who was present. She felt

more welcome at organized meetings or events, but less so on an interpersonal level because

"Some people didn't agree with the concept of bi as a thing or they didn't think that it was part of

the queer community."

During the second round of interviews, several participants expressed gratitude for the

opportunity to reflect upon the concept of bisexual community and some made concrete moves

to create their own community, in Sam's case by starting a local meetup group of bisexual

women, and in Glenn's case by considering expanding her upcoming mentoring program for

staff to include students and alumni.

Lack of organization. Both Marie and Glenn mentioned that one of the reasons they did

not engage in more LGBT-specific activities on campus was disorganization. Marie commented,

> I missed the sign up table for their email list and then they don't advertise very well and
>
> so I don't hear about what they're doing except occasionally another friend of mine who
>
> is queer will mention that they had a party or something, but they've not been especially
>
> visible or an active presence on campus.

Glenn had not actively sought out LGBT-specific resources on her campus, and was unaware of

the existence of her campuses' LGBT organization until one of her students told her about it

when she was an RA. After her student invited her to a meeting, she attempted to get involved

but the group never followed through. She recalled,

> I'd talked to them a little bit, had come out to them, and tried to kind of get involved.
>
> They were not very well organized or prepared to be a great resource and I had signed up

on the entrance [sheet to get] more information on the club. And then they lost the sheet

and I never heard back and then I never became active in that group just because I never

knew how after that.

Even Anne, who feels that she has gained a lot from her participation in LGBT-specific events,

was unaware of the existence of an online calendar of LGBT events until one of her friends

informed her of it its existence recently.

Off-campus resources. Some participants found LGBT community via off-campus

resources. In graduate school in a large, urban area, Martina built friendships through Pride

events, online dating, and meeting neighbors. Although M was not formally involved in her

institution's LGBT-specific organization, she had formed friendships with the leaders of the

organization and worked jointly with them on performing arts and social justice events, which

will be discussed further in the next section. She believed that these friends unintentionally

erased her bisexuality in both on-campus and off-campus venues. They made comments about

the local off-campus bar they frequented, saying they no longer wanted to go there because it

was consumed by gay men and by straight women who pretended to be gay to get drinks. M

recalled,

> I guess I never clarified how they knew these girls were straight and not bi…. I mean,
>
> they never said bi girls but that kind of scared me like, 'If I go, would I need to clarify if
>
> I'm queer or bi then? So as to like not seem like I'm like leading lesbians on?'

The institution Emma attended for her bachelor's and master's degrees was also located

in a large, urban area, one steeped in LGBT history, and thus she too found a lot of her activities

and relationships to take place off-campus. She told me,

I think because it's [this city], the bisexual community and the queer community more broadly is really inextricably linked with the history of the neighborhood and so part of the map would then also be the greater kind of queer community.... That's really I think important because whenever I would hang out with friends off campus and especially to do things related to bisexual or queer activism, that's really where we would spend a lot of time and that's where a lot of my socializing took place, in terms of off campus, just going out with friends or dating or things like that.

However, Emma, like M, found these spaces to be unwelcoming for someone bisexual. She frequented many bars and clubs that were either dominated by gay men, where she was self-conscious about being perceived as a straight friend tagging along with her friends, or lesbians, where she felt she had to lie about having dated men. As a result, she did not feel included in any of these spaces. This experience led Emma to seek an institution for her doctoral degree that was located in an urban area containing not only a vibrant LGBT community but also bi-specific resources.

Those who resided in rural areas, such as Glenn, found it more challenging to rely on off-campus resources, if they existed. Glenn eventually began exploring beyond the confines of her campus, but found that LGBT resources were far and that you had to know "exactly where they are and how to get to them in order to get to them, but you have to get to them in order to know how to get to them." The closest city with an existing resource was 45 minutes to an hour away from Glenn's campus, and she felt that it required a lot of effort to find a place that seemed to be appropriate for her needs and then to feel comfortable enough to talk to someone once there.

Some participants engaged in online communities, either due to this transportation barrier or due to a lack of a sense of belonging in physical LGBT spaces. Glenn, Marie, Emma,

Vanessa, Riku, and Erin all sought information and/or community online. Glenn used Google to search for local resources because they were difficult to find in her rural area. Marie and Emma went online to find people and information exclusive to bisexuals. Marie shared,

[T]he people that I do know that are bisexual, a lot of them are people that I found through online groups, like I've joined a couple of Facebook support groups and such and networks for bisexual communities.… I was mostly just looking for a place that I could learn more about what other bisexual people said about bisexuality and about the LGBT community. A lot of what gets posted is articles about how bisexuality is perceived and portrayed both by the LGBT community and by the world, the greater community at large, so how it gets portrayed in media, the problem of, you know, in a show it's always the person who doesn't like labels and never a person who is bisexual or pansexual or whatever.

Emma similarly commented,

[I]n most queer spaces, I feel like bisexual folks are largely overshadowed by lesbian and gay people. And for society at large, all of those marginalized communities are overshadowed by the heterosexual community, kind of the heteronormative expectations that go along with that. And so…I've never found a space that feels exclusive to bisexual people except online.

Emma shared that she went online to find other people like her in order to validate her feelings and attractions. Similarly, although Vanessa did not like to communicate with strangers online, they found comfort and validation in the ability to see people who they knew would "get it" via social media platforms like Instagram. They found that it was easier to connect with pansexual people online than in person because a lot of pan individuals had the pan flag in their

profile. Erin stated that she would often read articles on Autostraddle related to bisexuality and women when she was in college and still exploring sexual identities, but that at this point in her development, she does not feel she needs that source of affirmation. Riku is active in a Facebook group for nonbinary, trans, and gender-variant students and alumni. She appreciated the grassroots, social nature of the resource, utilizing group chat, asking and responding to questions such as how to find an endocrinologist, and participating in some in-person social events that were organized online.

Experiences online were not all positive, however. Emma noted that she would occasionally see comments on articles and other online forums that contained misconceptions and microaggressions that frustrated her. She noted that this was more common online than in face-to-face interactions. And at the same time that other participants appreciated the internet for connecting them to resources and information about bisexuality, Anne and Glenn were afraid that participating actively in online communities such as Facebook would unintentionally disclose their identity or whereabouts to their parents.

Experiences in Non-LGBT Environments

Participants often found acceptance and community in non-LGBT campus environments, either in addition to or instead of in LGBT-specific spaces, most notably the performing arts, social justice advocacy, and sororities.

Performing arts. Emily, Erin, M, Marie, Riku, and Vanessa were involved in the performing arts at their respective institutions, finding bisexual community through theater groups, playhouses, and productions and through a cappella groups. Absent the mentoring program and trans/nonbinary group, Riku felt that she did not need to be involved in her campus' larger LGBT community, stating,

I didn't need the environment to talk and I had my friends, my own support groups for that… I'm also not someone who flaunts my sexuality or anything… I don't really care about gay pride, I wish everyone accepted it but I'm not proud that I'm pansexual, I just want people to not have to care…. Being pansexual, I think less about the gay community or the lesbian community or the heterosexual community and I think more about the people [here], any of which I have the capacity for attraction towards because the gender doesn't matter.

Instead, over the course of her freshman year, Riku became involved in her university's theater and a cappella groups, where she found many openly trans, nonbinary, and bisexual students. These environments felt accepting due to their sexual, gender, and racial diversity. She believes that the arts are inherently more diverse than other activities and that she naturally gravitated towards these groups because of her interests in theater and music. The playhouse for the theater group became a physical safe space for Riku where she spent a lot of time socially, playing games and talking in addition to preparing for productions. In addition to receiving peer support through the formation of individual friendships via the playhouse, Riku received mentoring from a faculty member in her department who also happened to work on a production her freshman year.

Erin's most salient activity as an undergraduate was her membership in an a co-ed a cappella group that contained a disproportionate number of gay, bisexual, and trans individuals, which felt "super welcoming" to her. Erin and Riku believe that their a cappella groups were perceived as the "alternative" or "misfit" groups on campus. Riku found that sexuality was never an issue within the group and "was very amused that our tenor section at the end of last year was a cis male, a cis woman, a trans man, and a trans woman." Although Riku's personal

social group stemmed more from theater than a cappella, Erin's involvement in her group allowed her to form friendships, find roommates, and experience the sense of community that was lacking for her in LGBT-specific spaces on campus. Erin also expressed that although she did not feel she had a mentoring relationship with faculty on her campus, she formed the closest relationships with professors who taught her more artistic courses. She recalled,

> I was closer to faculty for the more artsy classes.... I think those professors were much more approachable. So my screenwriting prof was really cool, this older guy from Hollywood. Definitely had a close relationship. Like he referred a job to me, one of the summers that I worked. And yeah, I probably felt the closest to those more artsy/costume design ones.

Marie knew she wanted to be a theater major when she entered college, and thus was involved with her school's theater department throughout her time there. She participated in both faculty- and student-directed and produced shows. Like Riku's campus, Marie's school had a physical space specifically for student productions. Marie formed friendships with both faculty and staff in the theater department. Marie was also involved in other forms of the arts, including swing dance and writing book reviews for the college newspaper.

The performing arts played a significant role in Vanessa's college choice. They were especially interested in the school's poetry slam team, but unfortunately the group fell apart after their freshman year because "poets don't make the best presidents of organizations." Vanessa was also disappointed in the loss of another performing arts community after their freshman year, a multicultural theater group. These activities had allowed Vanessa to meet a core group of friends outside of their sorority, which consisted of only five people. After their freshman year, however, all of the campus theater groups were collapsed into one organization due to a lack of

space for multiple groups. Because of this loss of space, the theater community ebbed and

flowed for Vanessa more than it did for Marie and Riku. They commented,

> The theater community is so…nebulous, like sometimes it exists and it only exists when
>
> there are productions happening and then there are people…like the exec boards and stuff
>
> I guess, that keep it going at other times but it really didn't feel like a stable community
>
> to me… [I]t's like a pop up community, 'Oh, look, this show is happening' and so you're
>
> doing that for a few weeks and then it's gone, it just kind of disperses, those
>
> relationships, those friendships.

Vanessa found that having several theater groups had provided more of an opportunity

for freshmen to become involved. For instance, they were able to produce a play they wrote

their senior year of high school in which the main character spoke entirely in poetry. They

casted and co-directed this play for a two-night run and held an "FAQ" session with the

audience. The ability to showcase experimental theater in a small production format made for a

welcoming environment. Vanessa was also involved in an African Dance Troupe and in a

campus movie series in which students could create their own films.

Emily, M, Marie, and Vanessa were all involved in their campuses' productions of The

Vagina Monologues. This involvement figured most saliently for M and Marie. Marie has

performed in her school's production for two out of her three years thus far, and finds a

connection between the show's feminist emphasis and LGBT issues. She informed me that she

and fellow students had "been pushing to include monologues that students from the community

have written and trying to get representation from LGBT people, from people of color,

demographics that were not necessarily especially well represented in the original script." M

was involved in her school's production of The Vagina Monologues for all four years and was

drawn to the environment of women lifting up other women. She expressed gratitude for finding this empowering and sexually liberating environment so quickly once she entered college. Through her involvement in The Vagina Monologues, M met a lot of other queer women involved in the production and worked closely in partnership with her school's LGBT student organization. She described the group as open and fun, consisting of women willing to talk about their experiences. The Vagina Monologues for M was

> a space where everyone was just very open about their sexuality no matter who they were sleeping with and so it was just…less of a sexuality issue and more of a just breaking of this stigma against women being sexual issue. Like no one really cared who you were sleeping with but just that you had the right to sleep with people, period.

Although M found her experience with The Vagina Monologues to be affirming, she also found that the experience resulted in the conflating of her queer and feminist identities as she was trying to sort out her sexuality. She recalled,

> I think it was almost hard to separate that at least, at first, from doing stuff like The Vagina Monologues where a woman is moaning on stage, like faking orgasms and it's like funny but it's not funny but it's celebratory but then it's like 'Oh, is this like turning me on or am I enjoying this because I'm so feminist?' And so it's just very all intertangled… It was just like everyone loves vaginas, whether you were straight or not. It would be the wrong thing to be like, 'Oh, I don't like vaginas.' So I think that's where it got confusing.

Emily attended the same institution as M and participated in The Vagina Monologues for all four years of her undergraduate experience as well. This was a means of her finding like-minded

people, and although she did not intentionally seek out bisexual spaces, she thinks she unconsciously gravitated to that activity for that reason.

Social justice. Emma, Erin, Glenn, M, Sam, and Vanessa all participated in social justice advocacy efforts that spanned beyond LGBT issues. Vanessa's efforts in multicultural advocacy, primarily through their sorority, led to their helping to organize a social justice week on campus that featured a screening on Islamophobia. Erin assisted in organizing a diversity week at her law school recently. She focused the event on non-LGBT issues deliberately since that had been a focus in years prior and she wanted to be inclusive. Topics included socio-economic diversity, religious diversity, mental health and substance abuse, and Native American legal concerns.

Emma found that being involved in student political movements around issues such as labor laws, tuition, and undocumented students allowed her to meet like-minded individuals. She stated, "I felt like folks that were sort of toward the left of the spectrum politically, there was a lot of affinity there in terms of support for queer people and so it felt like a space that I really belonged in." Both she and M participated in student organizing and protest efforts frequently. Much of M's advocacy work focused on sexual assault. She worked with school administrators on campus policy and prevention efforts, worked one-on-one with survivors and training others to work with survivors, and played an integral role in the campus' Take Back the Night efforts. Her involvement in The Vagina Monologues was closely tied to this work. M found that her activism allowed her to become more understanding of her own struggles around her sexuality in regards to recognizing the validity of her feelings.

Glenn told me that she is passionate about social justice and believes that others think that her interest in social justice stems from her belonging to an oppressed group. As a bisexual, low income, first generation student and immigrant, Glenn agrees that these pieces of her identity

have informed how important social justice is in her life. She also thinks that her proclivity towards justice stems from her personality, telling me that as a child, she wanted to work as a human rights lawyer or for the United Nations. As an RA, Glenn coordinated social justice programs about human rights violations, child labor laws, and sex trafficking in collaboration with her school's women's and gender studies department. As part of her current social justice efforts, Glenn has been working to create a mentoring program to support other LGBT staff.

Like Glenn, Sam found a connection between their own identities, in their case as bisexual/queer and genderqueer/femme, and their sense of social justice across other realms. They commented,

> I would say that it gave me a sense of …that my body was my own, my identities were my own…so I think there is a connection there. I would say that sense of being aware of gender inequity is something that's also guided and been like the launching point for my understanding of inequity elsewhere and how that related to my own experience….
>
> [A]dvocacy is really important to me and I can often lead from a personal place.

Sam took on a leadership role in student organizing, eventually becoming student body president. They worked with students across various affinity groups, including LGBT, Asian American, and others, who were involved in political work, and assisted with student protest efforts for workers' rights. Working across various campus groups allowed Sam to partner both within their existing queer network as well as across other spaces to effect change. They found that

> depending on who was leading what was going on dictated how queer [it was]. So, my first two years of college, I'd say that the people heading up the organizing were less likely to be involved in queer community and my second two years of college, when I

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was more centrally involved and my networks were [there], it was more of a queer space. It would be the kind of thing where I'd look around and just realize that almost everybody was queer identified but not in an intentional way, that was just who was politicized and how we'd built our networks.

Although Riku's primary forms of campus involvement were in the arts, she became tangentially involved in student organizing when a vocal group of students protested the president of her institution because of financial misspending involving several large construction projects on campus. One of these projects is a performing arts center that is mostly inaccessible to students, resulting in the pulling of funding by a significant donor. Riku found that the playhouse became a hub for protest because of their significant presence on campus due to their "manpower, boots on the ground, intelligence, and political clout." As part of these efforts, Riku assisted with graphic design and guerilla marketing efforts.

Sororities. Emily and Vanessa discussed supportive experiences within sororities, whereas Glenn had a negative experience with a sorority. Emily arrived on campus with a negative perspective of sororities, but found what she deemed the "anti-sorority," one that ended up consisting of a lot of gay women and which felt like it was anti-establishment. After witnessing experiences of harassment against women while traveling abroad in Jordan as a junior, Emily returned to campus as a senior with a newfound sense of responsibility to her sisters. She took on more leadership roles within the sorority and worked to mentor incoming students. The sorority was under close watch after having been banned from campus, and Emily worked to support the new direction of the organization and foster a more inclusive space by attracting women who would not tolerate hazing. She expressed pride that the organization

seemed to turn around about a year later, and that one of the women she mentored had started a

gay, Jewish collective on campus.

Vanessa was one of the founding members of a multicultural sorority on their college

campu and felt a responsibility to "make Greek Life accessible for queer students." They joined

the sorority because of its representativeness nationally in terms of race, gender, and sexuality.

Through their involvement in the sorority, Vanessa found an affirming space where all of their

identities, including genderqueer, pansexual, Black, and Latinx would be celebrated. In

describing why they felt this space was needed, Vanessa said,

> [W]e need multiculturalism because so often people keep pushing multiculturalism as
>
> this type of erasure. 'Oh, well, we don't need a Black space or a Latino space or an
>
> Asian space because we have a multicultural space,' and that's not really what it's for.
>
> It's like people have multiple identities and people should be able to meet there and you
>
> should be able to have spaces to affirm your individual identities and bring all of those
>
> together. So, being able to be a part of creating that space through my sorority was great.
>
> I created "Multicultural Mondays,' going into the cafeteria and tak[ing] a table and
>
> invit[ing] people to come sit down with us to find out what multiculturalism has been like
>
> for them on campus, what they think we need to create those inclusive spaces.

Glenn joined a philanthropic sorority at the end of her sophomore year because the group

promoted itself as having a social justice emphasis, but it did not take long for Glenn to learn that

the organization was in reality conservative and not a good fit for her. She was appalled by her

sisters' reactions to certain situations, such as when they debated whether a male-to-female trans

student who wanted to rush the sorority qualified as a woman. Glenn never disclosed her

bisexuality to her sisters because she did not think they would be accepting after hearing

homophobic comments at sleepovers such as "Oh, did you see that dyke? That butch?" and "Did you see that girl, she's totally a lesbian, I would not feel comfortable having sleepovers with her." Despite the fact that she had signed a contract, Glenn decided at the end of her junior year that "there was nothing in that organization for me, there was no one in that organization who was like me or would support me and so I did actually leave." She did not disclose her sexuality when leaving because she felt she had other grounds she could share with the president and advisor about bullying and partying within the organization to justify her departure.

Creating Community

Significance of Bisexual Community

Between the first and second interview, each participant was asked to draw a conceptual map of bisexual community, as well as lesbian, gay, and heterosexual community, and to indicate their place within it. This mapping procedure was used as a means of reflection on the subject matter and was used to guide the subject matter.

Difficult to visualize. The participants in my study, when asked to describe bisexual community, frequently struggled. It was a concept many of them had never considered, despite involvement in the LGBT community in various ways. When I asked Anne about her conceptualization of bisexual community, she responded, "I'm drawing a blank." Emily stated, "I think the fact that I can't even conceptualize a bisexual community is part of the problem, you know? That sort of exemplifies…it's like I don't even know what that would look like because I have no frame of reference." In reflecting upon our time together, Vanessa commented,

I don't really ever get particularly reflective on being a part of a bi or pan community…
[H]aving a queer community of color was enough for me. I never really stopped to think that other types of communities were a thing that I would have been a part of, and so just

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spending the time to think about where I see those communities, where those exist on our

campus was pretty interesting for me.

Riku, like Vanessa, mentioned that she had never considered the possibility of a bi or pan

community, and believes that one currently does not exist. Sam similarly reflected,

[T]he question of bisexual community was really interesting to me because going to a

small college meant that I felt like I had queer community for sure, but I never really

thought about whether I had bisexual community and I think more just felt the lack of it.

At the end of our time together, Sam spoke of the isolation that one can feel as bisexual

and thus the need for connection via bisexual community. In reflecting upon their college

experiences, Sam voiced a wistfulness about a community they did not realize they needed,

stating

I think when it comes to marginalized identities, one of the biggest things is not feeling

alone, and the more isolated one feels, I think that can snowball really quickly to other

parts of one's life. I know for me I was able to feel really supported in my queer identity

[in college] and because of that, I had a lot to root in in terms of when feelings of

marginalization would arise. But I know I still have a hard time telling people I'm

bisexual sometimes and not that same difficulty with the word 'queer' and so…I think

about how different my college experience would've been had there been actual bisexual

community and what that even looks and feels like.

Difficult to find. Despite having not considered it previously, it was evident that

participants felt impacted by a lack of bisexual community and had simply never been asked to

reflect upon this and put it into words (and drawings). Participants expressed frustration and

disappointment over the difficulty of finding bisexual community. Part of the reason it may be

difficult to find other bisexual students is that it took several of the participants until mid-way through or the end of college to come to terms with their nonmonosexuality, coping with confusion in an environment that lacked resources for those questioning their sexuality.

Both Anne and Martina emphasized that they have encountered people uncomfortable with identifying as bisexual, instead identifying as lesbian or heterosexual because it is easier to choose a monosexual identity. Anne felt frustrated by the bisexual women she encountered at student events who identified as lesbians because it created a roadblock to forming friendships. She shared,

> I think it kind of sucks because I'm trying to find people that are like-minded and they have the same kind of sexual orientation as I do and other people don't necessarily trust the other students to be as accepting. It might just be from their background history, like what they've dealt with before, but it does definitely make it harder for me to find other bi, pan, and sexuality fluid people.

Glenn also discussed pressure to choose a monosexual identity, sharing

> I wouldn't really consider that there is a community for bisexuals because I think… the visibility aspect come into play, but then also the need to be told that you need to choose sides and so you never really get to have that conversation with someone because you always get judged based on what partnership you're in at the moment.

Erin also expressed that it may be difficult to find bisexual friends because many do not ascribe to a particular label. She reflected,

> I just think there is a large population of people who maybe don't identify as bisexual but act or feel in bisexual ways… Especially if you're not going to identify as bi or pan or fluid or whatever, then it's hard I think, without the identity, to find a community. But in

some ways, it's kind of sad because I don't think people should have to put themselves in a certain category just to find people who are like-minded.

Erin was unsure whether there were any other bi people with her at law school, and did not know how she would bring up the subject to find out. Vanessa echoed Erin's sentiment about labels, stating, "[S]ometimes people haven't found the words yet to describe what they're feeling, but they feel the exact same way as you." Vanessa expressed a sense of resignation around finding pansexual community, having had to limit its importance in their life because of its lack of accessibility. They shared,

> [I]t's really important, [but] at the same time it has to be not that important because it's hard to find. So, because it's so small, you can't really place that much importance on it because if you were like, 'Oh, what would I do if I didn't have this community?,' most of the time you're not going to. But I think it's special to have and occasionally when you can find other pansexual people it's great.

> Because Martina is now done with graduate school, in a stable relationship, and comfortable with her sexuality, she had not spent time thinking about the concept of bisexual community, but realized that the lack of it could be detrimental to college students figuring themselves out. She shared,

> I do think…[that] there should be a place for people that are struggling especially if we're talking about undergrad, for them to feel a sense of belonging, a sense safety on campus. And the fact that I haven't really been aware of that in both schools that I've been [to] is a little concerning to me. Like if I was maybe at a different point in my life it would be really upsetting.

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Means of connection and validation. Participants expressed that finding bisexual community was important because they wanted to connect with like-minded others who understand them and affirm their identities. Martina emphasized that it's important "that people are encouraged to have those communities and talk out and form the places where they can have strong relationships and identify themselves on campus." Emma reflected,

> One of the reasons that I was so excited about this interview is because it is creating a space to talk about these things that I haven't really had before, and so it just feels good to kind of talk it out and I'm hoping to find more spaces where I can do more of that.

> Glenn felt a sense of relief after coming out during her RA training, because it enabled

her to find a community. She stated, "It was like, 'Oh, cool, I am this, I have other people that I can commune with over that identity' and it was the first time I had friends that also identified as LGBT." Erin came out specifically for the purpose of finding community. She shared, "I think…probably a large part of identifying was because I wanted to find people who had similar feelings and emotions."

Vanessa and Marie yearned for a community where others would inherently understand them because they shared their pansexual or bisexual identity. Marie stated,

> I think bisexual community means a place where I can meet other people who have similar life experiences to me, a place where I can express and talk about my sexual identity without the worry that people are going to misconstrue what I'm saying or ask questions that are hurtful by ignorance.

Vanessa commented, "It's great being able to see other people that identify the same way as you, to have other people who get it, who understand, is really important. But it's also not as often found in person [compared to online]." Emma went online to seek this type of support, stating

that she was looking for "validation that the things that I'm feeling are things that other people are feeling, too." Emma combined online and in person resources to find the support she needed, sharing, "There is no one place where I necessarily found community and so it was really about stitching together little bits of each piece to find a complete self as I came into that identity."

Anne emphasized the importance of having a distinct bisexual community, apart from lesbian and gay communities, to be able to relate to others who understand their attractions. She noted,

> [W]ithin that community I think it's really important that we have the connection to talk about how we feel all of these different sexual attractions…like it's not limited to one gender and in that way, [although] we are a smaller part of the community, that kind of makes us stronger together, as opposed to when we talk to the other gay or lesbian communities.

Anne shared that the panels she had attended featuring bisexual people discussing their multiple attractions were validating for her, because attempting to relate to a singular attraction made her feel like she had to split her identity into 'half gay' and 'half straight'. Martina agreed that "It's different than being lesbian or being gay, it's a different set of needs, struggles, and community."

Emily, on the other hand, struggled with whether bisexual community should be separate or integrated with a broader queer community. At one point she complained, "[T]here aren't spaces for bisexual people, they're sort of lumped in with the gay community at large when there are probably needs that could be better met if there was a more cohesive community for bisexual people specifically." But a few minutes later, she mentioned that bisexual community should be integrated into the lesbian and gay community. When I asked her to say more about this, she

responded that she viewed it as a struggle between wanting to "recognize and celebrate our differences but at the same time our similarities."

Riku expressed that she did not need and thus did not seek the validation of a bi/pan community. Her gender identity was more salient for her, and thus where she sought support. She shared,

I don't identify strongly with my sexuality, it's simply an element of me. My gender I do identify more with, if only because it's an experience that sets me apart from a lot of people. So it makes sense to why it might be a larger part of identity. It was also a part of identity I had to struggle to understand.

It seems that participants sought community because of their struggles, in an attempt to affirm that the challenges they had faced and the attractions they felt were both valid. In Riku's case, that support took the form of the nonbinary/trans group.

Important Components

While bisexual students represent the largest percentage of the LGBT community on college campuses (Eagen et al., 2015), they are often invisible in terms of resources, communities, and discourses. Participants in the current study identified various features that they believe would contribute to a supportive campus environment for bisexual students. The factors mentioned most frequently were welcoming spaces, bi-specific resources, social programming, visible bisexual leadership and staff, intersectional approaches, inclusive health and counseling services, and faculty and staff education.

Dedicated queer spaces. Participants emphasized the need for spaces where bisexual students could feel comfortable. After spending time feeling isolated and othered, participants wanted a place where they felt seen and included. When Sam was researching schools, they

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looked for schools with a dedicated queer center/space, as this contributed to their feeling that queer students were valued by the institution. Sam mentioned that a dedicated space also typically means dedicated staffing and funding, which contribute to a welcoming environment. Anne commented that one of the things that made her feel most included at her school was the creation of a queer student lounge by a graduate coordinator who she saw as an advocate. Both Sam and Anne mentioned that their respective spaces helped them to feel safe and it was evident that such space was integral to them having an affirming experience on campus.

Erin cautioned, however, that spaces can be dominated by certain groups. She commented,

> It's hard when you have physical space sometimes because I think a certain friend group can dominate it and then it's like….as long as that group is still able to, if a new face walks in, immediately be welcoming to them. I think you have to be careful that a certain group of people doesn't just take over and then new people don't feel comfortable coming in. But I think having physical space is wonderful for a lot of people. But yeah, it's kind of hard within that space, how do you make sure that all of the different self-identities are valued and not overtaken by others.

Vanessa and Sam discussed how their LGBT centers tended to be dominated by White students. Vanessa said that what signaled their center to be a White space were the individuals in power, the students who were there most of the time, the pictures on the walls, and also general perceptions of why the space was created. They commented that "in order for spaces to have to not be White space, we have to take up space there." There is further information on this topic below in the section on intersectional approaches.

Emily and M, who attended the same undergraduate institution, emphasized a need for more female-specific spaces and resources, especially for non-heterosexual women. They both seemed to perceive a dominance of gay men in LGBT spaces and a higher level of acceptance of gay men as compared to queer women. Emma also found a need for empowering spaces for bisexual women, sharing, "[A]s a woman but also as a sexual minority, I feel like it's important to find spaces where those things are validated and empowered and feminist spaces can be those things although, certainly, there is biphobia and homophobia in feminist spaces at times."

Bi-specific resources. Participants felt it was important that schools have resources for bisexual students as well as those questioning their sexual identity. Emma chose her graduate institution in large part because of its bi-specific resources and programming. In researching the school, she was excited to find that their activities

> seemed like it was student meetings and demonstrations, not in the political sense but just like in [the] 'Let's be visible on campus' [sense]… So, it just seemed like they're doing a lot here to make sure that bisexual students don't get swallowed up by this larger umbrella of terms but they really have a space of their own."

M felt like her institution had strong programming for the L, G, and T of the acronym, but nothing specific to the B. She felt that bi-specific educational programming would help to create a more welcoming environment in that others would not make monosexist assumptions based upon the perceived gender of someone's partner. She recalled,

> I can't think of a single event where bi people were welcomed but maybe it would've been easier if they had carved out that space specifically. If they had programming that was specifically for bisexual individuals or people who at least identified as queer and not like lesbian and gay. I think in hindsight there was more programming that was geared

towards gay men or lesbians or it was just all inclusive and there really weren't events that were like queer/bisexual/not identified people.

Having attended and now working at a rural institution, Glenn mentioned that it is also important for schools to help connect students with off-campus resources. She stated,

I think having resources on the campus for those student populations, but then also knowing that the campus doesn't have the resources and actively connecting students to resources off campus or bringing those off campus to the campus, so it's not a case of a student having to go on this big hunt for resources off campus because the campus doesn't have that type of support.

Enhanced social programming. Several participants mentioned a desire for more casual social programming. Depending on the institution, some student LGBT centers and/or organizations had more of a political focus, whereas others had more of a social focus or were simply less active. Whereas some students embraced a focus on political protest as a function of the LGBT center or organization on campus, others felt intimidated or excluded by such an emphasis and called for more social gatherings. Emily wanted more "social, meet up groups" for bisexual students, in particular for women. Erin stated, "I like a balance of some intellectual, more like social/political events but then just some carefree, fun stuff that people can walk in and out of and feel comfortable, like getting ice cream or stuff like that."

Erin talked about how high stress levels were in law school, and the pressure that students felt to be involved in skills based activities such as mock trial court versus more socially oriented activities. In discussing her new leadership role within the school's LGBT organization, she said, "[W]e're going to hopefully get better because hopefully people will go to things and we're going to make it more of a social thing. I think law school can be really high pressured, so

to have like something just chill and social can be good." Marie echoed this sentiment about the stresses of school and social programming as a counterbalance, sharing that

you spend a lot of time talking about serious stuff in classes and I think sometimes what you want is you want the opportunity to go out and meet people in a way that's more relaxed and more enjoyable. So, yeah, it doesn't have to be like 'party hard, get drunk' but like 'We're gonna go get coffee on a Saturday afternoon' or 'We're gonna make cookies.'

When asked what would constitute a supportive environment for her, Riku automatically responded, "largely, the biggest element for me would be a social component." Several participants, such as Riku, Emma, and M, expressed that they had not experienced homophobia or transphobia directly, so they were instead focused on finding social support among a circle of like-minded individuals who are rendered invisible on college campuses.

Visible bisexual leadership and staff. Emma, Erin, Glenn, Martina, and Sam emphasized the importance of having visible bisexual leadership and staff to represent and reflect the student population. When she worked in Admissions, Emma found that it was encouraging to have an out bisexual supervisor. She recalled, "There was one woman, my supervisor, who identifies as bisexual but is also in a long term relationship with a guy and so it was nice to at least see an older version of myself in that way." When Sam arrived on campus, they felt lonely because there was only one other out bisexual individual, and they were automatically expected to be friends due to a lack of options. They shared,

I think visibility has a really important place. Getting to a space and feeling like the first, it's not fun. And that was, I would say, a really challenging part of my experience. Like by the time I was a senior, knowing a good handful of people who identified as bisexual

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but arriving as a freshman and knowing one other person and I didn't like her, we didn't connect… So I think having people in positions of power, having visible people, having spaces so that students can feel comfortable expressing those identities means that every time a new group comes in, they get to mesh with that, too.

Sam asserted that, too often, bi-specific activities were thrown together as an afterthought. They felt that having staff (and funds) dedicated to bisexual resources and concerns would have been helpful and would have made bisexual students feel more valued by the institution. At first, they questioned the need for this, but then came to realize that bi-specific resources were necessary in order to appropriately address distinct concerns. Sam stated,

[I]t's just so easy to collapse bisexuality into the rest of the queer community and leave it kind of untouched and I think there is a popular assumption that it's easier to be bisexual, having one foot in the straight community, and I think in my experience that's the most challenging thing about bisexuality. It's sort of feeling dividedness and being split and not having a place. So, I think the more that had been named and dedicated to bisexual people and resources, that would've been amazing. There is a tumblr called Bisexual Resource Center and when I first saw it, I was like 'That's so specific' and that's so funny that it's so specific, but there are a ton of people that identify as bisexual, hundreds and hundreds and it wouldn't have felt specific to see the words 'Lesbian Resource Center,' so why does it feel so niched to see the words 'Bisexual Resource Center?' Yeah, I think it just wasn't named enough on campus.

Sam's comment about feeling divided and split was reminiscent of Anne's reflection that she had to split her identity into 'half gay' and 'half straight' pieces and Glenn's thoughts on feeling welcome only half the time. It is clear that participants desire bi-specific resources in order to

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merge their "two halves," to have support systems and communities that address their integrated and distinct bisexual identities.

Glenn commented on the need for bisexual leadership to make campuses more welcoming. She stated, "On our campus, I think it would take someone who identifies as [bisexual] to be in a leadership position to be able to make those changes because I think, you can't really blame a person for not understanding an experience they've never had." Similarly, Erin felt that it is difficult to truly understand another's perspective in this realm without having gone through the same sorts of experiences. She advocated for an advisor for sub-identities such as bisexual and trans that are typically marginalized within the larger LGBT community. She believes that having visible advisors to represent these students and serve as resources would encourage students to be more comfortable being out and participating in activities.

Martina discussed the need for more bi-specific resources both for bisexuals and for the wider community. She had an article on bisexuality assigned for one of her graduate courses, and it made her realize that there should be more bi-specific resources and literature in classroom settings as well as out, in particular to expose non-bisexual people to these concepts. She reflected,

> I feel like there's so little out there, any sort of way to expose people who might have that kind of closed minded or just not have experience being around people like that, I think that should be a part of [things], especially in education, where [there is an emphasis on] diversity and social justice and culturally relevant education."

Intersectionality. Several participants spoke of the need for an intersectional approach to supporting students. In speaking about their LGBT center, Sam raised the issue of a lack of intersectionality that made the environment unwelcoming towards students of color. Vanessa

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felt like they had to go back and forth between the various spaces on campus that supported their identities. They shared,

> [W]e tried to bridge those gaps, we try to have discussion, not in the [LGBT center] but in the [Black student center] about different sexualities, which was decently attended, but there is this idea that you have to either choose to be in a Black space or choose to be in a queer space.

Vanessa wanted

> more spaces in which my identities could interact and intersect with each other. So, if my Black spaces didn't feel like straight spaces, my Latino spaces didn't feel like straight, heteronormative spaces, if my queer spaces didn't feel like White spaces, if theatre was year round. I think just having those spaces to exist definitely would make up for a lot of the in-class interactions that are mostly White and heteronormative at the same time. So, having spaces outside of that would I think, be enough for me.

Vanessa called for institutions to recognize that students have multiple identities and to provide spaces where those identities could be brought together and affirmed. They found that kind of affirmation in their freshman year via the multicultural theater group.

Anne spoke of a discussion group at her school that examined religion and spirituality from a queer perspective, and how she appreciated the opportunity to discuss how these identities connect. This made Anne think about how it would be supportive to have additional groups for other intersecting identities. M said she wished that her school had had counselors that were trained on intersecting needs because "they took a really general approach…and they just try and do like a 'treat all'" and she felt that was ineffective.

Inclusive health and counseling services. M, Marie, and Emma emphasized the need for inclusive health and counseling services to support bisexual students. Marie received sex education in high school that was entirely heteronormative, and when she got to college she wished she had a resource for information on health concerns and safe sex that addressed her lived reality involving sexual interactions with both men and women.

When M was in college, she wanted to see a counselor to help her come to terms with her sexuality. However, the school's therapists were constantly scheduled out for months and she could not ask her parents for money for counseling off-campus because her mother did not support the idea of therapy. Although this was a concern that spanned beyond support for bisexual students, M said she would have valued accessible and confidential counseling services. After having had a negative experience with a therapist, Emma believed that an inclusive campus would need to include student health and counseling services that are responsive to the needs of bisexual students and this was an important factor to her in selecting her doctoral program. She recalled,

> When I was younger, like an adolescent, I was seeing a therapist for anxiety and she would refer to my sexual identity as 'your problem.' For me, it wasn't a problem. I mean, perhaps it was manifesting in problematic ways because I wasn't necessarily always able to work through it, but it's certainly not a problem. And so I stopped seeing her largely for that reason and so I haven't accessed the counseling center [here] yet. I will be soon, just to ease in this transition. But from everything that I've seen in terms of counseling resources on the web and people in that office that I've spoken to, it seems like a really culturally sensitive place.

Faculty and staff education. Anne and Emma discussed the importance of faculty

education on creating and managing inclusive classroom environments. Anne had experiences in

the classroom in which she overheard students make homophobic and transphobic comments.

She said that the professors were safe space trained and asked students for their correct pronouns,

but they did not know how to address inappropriate responses and thus unintentionally created a

potentially hostile environment. Emma had also experienced hostile classroom environments as

an undergraduate, stating,

> [Creating a welcome environment has to do with] the interactions you're having in the
>
> classrooms. Are the fellow students hostile? And if they are, how are faculty managing
>
> that? In [my] feminist theory class students sometimes…I don't think they were hostile,
>
> they just felt misinformed to me and I did not feel faculty support. I kind of pushed back
>
> and challenged them based on my experiences and things that I read…and the faculty
>
> member just took their side and told me that [being a lesbian] is a choice and here is why.
>
> So I think that classroom spaces can be really telling.

Glenn advocated for faculty and staff education around queer identities and the potential

implications of disclosing these identities, so that they could understand the distinct ways in

which bisexual students might be at risk. She shared,

> I think a supportive campus environment would be if the staff/faculty/administrators are
>
> educated on the queer community and the different identities that fall under it, as well as
>
> what that can mean as far as your history or as far as the percentage of …if they're
>
> looking at the percentage of food and housing security, like the percentage of how many
>
> of those students may or may not have been rejected by their family or their friends.

Glenn felt that education of staff and administrators is critical to being able to assess whether an institution is offering resources to address bisexual populations, because they may think their resources are inclusive when in reality they are not. She stated,

> [Y]ou have to seek out those experiences or seek out an understanding of those experiences if you haven't had them, but there is also to some extent like you don't know what you don't know and so I think people think that they're doing all of these great things and 'We're providing these resources for queer people' but we're not, the person who is in charge of that isn't necessarily as educated as they could be in order to know that they're missing something. So, I think that would be really important.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented my findings on the lived experiences of 11 bisexual women as they came to terms with their sexuality and sought community while enrolled at institutions of higher education. Participants described a lengthy process of coming to terms with their sexuality that was marked by initial confusion and lack of awareness regarding the existence of bisexuality. Participants then engaged in a process in which they chose a label for their sexuality, which often changed over time and in different contexts. Participants expressed a desire to be authentic and open about their sexuality, yet frequently made strategic decisions regarding to whom and when to disclose. They often had to cope with binegative stereotyping and monosexism, personally and from society at large. College represented a time of independence and an avenue for exposure to new and wider circles of queer friends, which helped them progress in their understanding of their sexuality.

In talking about their experiences seeking community on campus, participants reported varying experiences within LGBT communities. Some found LGBT spaces to be welcoming

and affirming, whereas others felt marginalized and a lack of support for individuals who were questioning their identity or were nonmonosexual. Some participants embraced the political progressivism of LGBT student organizations whereas others felt intimidated and excluded by a political versus social emphasis. Participants, particularly those who attended schools in urban areas, often sought resources and community outside of campus, and some participants sought support online. Most participants found strong sources of community in non-LGBT specific realms on campus, most notably the performing arts, social justice advocacy work, and sororities.

Participants identified several factors they felt are critical to creating supportive campus environments for bisexual students. They stated a need for dedicated queer spaces not just for organized meetings but as a comfortable, safe space they could visit at any time and for any reason. They specified a need for resources and staff, and particularly social programming, to directly address bisexual students' needs, which differ from those of lesbian, gay, and transgender students. Participants mentioned that having visible bisexual individuals on staff and in positions of power sends a message of inclusivity to bisexual students. They called for an intersectional approach to bisexual student support, so that they could feel affirmed in their multiple identities. Participants emphasized the importance of inclusive health and counseling services as well as education for faculty and staff so that they could better understand bisexual students' needs and experiences.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Bisexual individuals feel marginalized within a society that emphasizes binary understandings of gender and sexuality, and students are no exception. While colleges often represent environments of freedom and independence, they also are a microcosm of the larger society in which they exist. Gaining an understanding of the experiences of bisexual women on college campuses in the U.S. allows student affairs professionals to design more appropriate programs and resources to meet their distinct needs.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of 11 students and recent graduates who identify as bisexual or sexually fluid and who identify as women, genderqueer, or transgender. This study amplifies the voices of a population of students often rendered invisible within heteronormative and mononormative campus environments. Listening to these voices allows us to be better informed about their experiences related to their sexuality and their sense of belonging at institutions of higher education. I utilized Seidman's (2013) phenomenological framework to guide this study consisting of interviews and conceptual mapping. In addition to learning about their lived experiences, this methodology allowed me to gain insight into participants' sense of belonging and bisexual community.

In Chapter Four, I reviewed the findings from my analysis of the interview data I collected. In the present chapter, I will discuss these findings in the context of queer theory as well as research in the field. This will be followed by a discussion of implications for practice in

student affairs and recommendations for future research based upon the limitations of the current study and information that arose during data collection and analysis.

Discussion of the Findings

In the current study, the queer theory concepts of heteronormativity (and, in this case, mononormativity) (Angelides, 2006; Callis, 2009; du Plessis, 1996; Lingel, 2009), performativity (Butler, 1990; Hartman, 2008; Miller, 2006), and liminality (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Angelides, 2006; Callis, 2009) shed light on the experiences of bisexual women on college campuses. Participants described overwhelmingly mononormative campus environments in which they felt invisible and struggled to find a sense of belonging. They understood the importance of performing their bisexuality and made strategic decisions regarding their displays based upon the level of expected affirmation and the importance of belonging within a given context.

The liminality of participants' sexual identities disrupted their primarily mononormative environments by calling into question binary conceptualizations of sexuality and gender, resulting in marginalization within both heterosexual and lesbian/gay spaces. The concept of liminality also gave way to a sense of belonging for many of the participants within the performing arts on their respective campuses, a feeling they were often unable to find in LGBT-designated spaces. Theater and other performing arts provided participants with nonmononormative environments that recognized and embraced fluidity, both on and off the stage. Participants also found a sense of belonging through social justice advocacy and participation in nontraditional sororities, both of which provided environments containing like-minded people accepting of others.

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Sexual Fluidity

Even though participants in the current study subscribed to stable labels through which they describe their sexuality, be it bisexual, pansexual, queer, or a combination of these, they depicted their sexuality as inherently fluid. Their attraction to a combination of genders did not change over time, but could look different at different points in their lives, as could their identities. Rust (1999) found that women tend to use multiple sexual self-identities more frequently than men. Instead of treating "sexual identity as a unitary reflection of individual essence…[they are] more likely to use sexual self-identity to reflect their romantic, social, and political relationships with others as well as their sexual feelings and behaviors (Rust, 2000a, p. 215).

Sexual fluidity relates to the notion of liminality, or a state of flux between stages of being (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Angelides, 2006; Callis, 2009). Liminality resists the idea that sexual identities are stable. Rather, they are performed and thus innately fluid (Butler, 1990). Viewing identities as stable, distinct categories obscures the variations within groups (Tierney, 1993). Thus, when it comes to the construct of sexuality, those who do not fit neatly into society's binary categories of heterosexual and homosexual may be considered to be in a liminal state, or a "not-category" that resists categorization (Whitney, 2002). In addition, bisexual women change sexual identities with more frequency than do lesbians, often alternating between lesbian and bisexual identities repeatedly over time (Rust, 1996b). As a result, bisexual women may frequently find themselves in a liminal state.

Bisexual individuals' placement outside the dominant constructs of gay identity and community and lack of a need for impermeable classifications lead them to experience "exclusion by inclusion" in society's polarizing binary of homo/heterosexual (Pallotta-Chiarolli

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& Martin, 2008). Flanders, Dobinson & Logie's (2015) study of young bisexual women found that they felt they could never be their full selves, and the current study replicates those findings with bisexual women on college campuses. "Exclusion by inclusion" was evident in some of the participants' interactions and observations in LGBT centers, organizations, and programs. Glenn described such "exclusion by inclusion" as feeling accepted only half the time, based on whether she was perceived as heterosexual or homosexual (but never bisexual). Anne described this as feeling as though she had to fit into "half gay" and "half straight" molds in order to find community. Sam described it as a feeling of "dividedness and being split and not having a place." Because their sexualities are less restrictive and more inclusive of various genders,

Glenn, Anne, and Sam ended up feeling excluded by both the lesbian/gay and heterosexual communities on their campuses. In essence, participants were rendered invisible in both environments and would have had to "pass" in either in order to be seen. Experiences of "exclusion by inclusion" led participants to reject other forms of binary thinking. Erin, M, Marie, and Anne discussed the importance of learning more about the trans community as a result of their own experiences with a nonbinary identity.

College Environments

Colleges present environments of freedom and independence. For students who have non-heterosexual identities, this often provides them with the opportunity to explore their sexuality away from the potential judgment of family (D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; DeSouza & Showalter, 2010). In recounting what they remember about their transition to college, Anne, M, and Marie talked about the sense of freedom they felt upon arrival on campus. This newfound independence, coupled with exposure to a more diverse community of individuals, resulted in a widening of their understanding of their sexuality. College represented

a time of exposure to new ideas and new people, which expanded participants' worldview and provided them with an environment supportive of exploration. Anne, M, Riku, and Sam all made statements supporting a view of college as a bubble in which they could feel safe expressing their sexuality and/or gender identity. In the Winter 2017 issue of Bi Women's Quarterly, Mary Jo Klinker dubbed this phenomenon "queer utopia," based on her graduate school experience in rural Washington (Klinker, 2017, p. 17).

That being said, with college typically being more of a time of exploration than solidification of sexual identity (Horowitz & Newcomb, 1999), a lack of support for individuals who are questioning their sexuality could counterbalance the element of freedom for bisexual individuals who feel unwelcome in lesbian and gay spaces. The multitude of labels used to describe nonmonosexual individuals, a lack of consistency in definitions, and the fluid nature of nonmonosexuality and sexuality as a whole, may serve as barriers to accessing communities for those who are unfamiliar with terminology or resources (Dolan, 2013). Rust (1996b) has found that bisexual individuals may use different language to describe their nonmonosexuality at different times, as language evolves and as individuals are afforded more options, linguistically, socially, and politically, that better describe their locations on the landscape of sexuality. She also found that the language bisexual individuals use to describe themselves may change because the construction of the sexual landscape varies across social contexts. Pressure to conform to certain labels that feel inaccurate may cause those who are questioning their sexuality or who have fluid sexualities to feel confused (Eliason, 1996). Some individuals do not necessarily identify with the word 'bisexual,' but use it reluctantly for the cognitive convenience of others (Macalister, 2003) or in order to mobilize for political change (Hartman, 2008). Whitney (2002) writes,

It's useful to be queer when you want to suspend certainty to pose interesting questions, but when you want to relate to others, it may become strategically necessary to act as though your desires consistently matched up with a recognized identity label.

Whereas labels can be useful in seeking out community, Erin pointed out that they can also be a means of division or isolation. In addition to Erin, Marie, M, Martina, and Emily all felt that their school's LGBT communities were not open to individuals who were questioning their sexuality and looking for information. This resulted in participants feeling intimidated, confused, and excluded. A lack of support for individuals questioning their sexuality translates into a lack of tolerance for liminal sexual identities that are not constant and may not fit into proscribed societal categories. In Ochs' and Rowley's (2009) anthology of bisexual experiences, B. J. Epstein shared,

> [I] didn't feel any need to define myself. I was just me. And my sexuality, like other parts of my personality, was fluid, with soft, wispy edges... [S]omehow, I began to feel I had to have a label; this would prove I was brave, mature, and ready to tell others who I was... Also, I resented the way LGBT people were treated, and I thought it was important to stand with others, even if in a small way. There was a strength in group identification. (p. 163)

Participants seemed to be pulled in the same directions as B. J. Epstein – on the one hand, to resist labels and embrace the fluidity of their sexuality, while on the other hand, to label themselves in order to gain access to community on college campuses. They were feeling what Whitney (2002) described as a "liminal desire to belong and yet retain fluidity of identity" (p. 112). Erin talked about having to label herself in order to seek community, only to find herself feeling excluded within that community. Glenn described this double-edged sword in her

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experience after her disclosure. Once she embraced a bisexual label, Glenn found that others

filtered all of her needs and experiences through that label – there was no "going back" in her

eyes, there was no room for fluidity. B. J. Epstein relates a similar feeling when she writes, "I

long for the days before I called myself bisexual. I long for the days when I dated people of both

genders and accepted my attraction to both men and women, but didn't feel any need to define

myself."

After embracing a bisexual label and joining an LGBT community, instead of the sense

of validation typically felt by lesbians and gay men, bisexual individuals often experience

exclusion and isolation because of the community's lack of acceptance of nonbinary identities

(Bradford, 2004; Daniels, 2009; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; McLean, 2008b; Rust,

1996b). In the current study, participants' lived experiences with difference and exclusion

within LGBT communities often led them to desire bi-specific community.

Bisexual communities are inherently infused with difference because they are constructed

by the one dimension that does not define it – gender (Rust, 2002). Whereas modern

perspectives view communities as based upon commonalities, postmodern perspectives view

difference and conflict as integral parts of community (Rhoads, 1994). Thus a critical

postmodern perspective would dictate that there should be dialogue between bisexual and

lesbian/gay communities (Rhoads, 1994) to "lead to at least a provisional unity across our

differences and, with time and effort, a common ground of struggle against contemporary forms

of class, cultural, and societal oppression" (McDonough & McLaren, 1996, para. 6). This is the

tension that Emily discussed regarding the idea of whether bisexual community should be

separate or integrated with a broader queer community, which she described as a struggle

between wanting to "recognize and celebrate our differences but at the same time our similarities."

Bi-invisibility and Isolation

Sense of belonging becomes more critical for individuals at certain times in their lives, in unfamiliar environments, and in situations in which they are likely to feel marginalized or unwelcome (Anderman & Freeman, 2004; Schlossberg, 1989; Strayhorn, 2012). Bisexual students face a confluence of these factors. Students typically enter institutions of higher education in late adolescence, which is a time when individuals are establishing their identity, developing mature interpersonal relationships, and developing a purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Entering an institution of higher education is a transitional phase in which individuals are newcomers to already established groups (Schlossberg, 1989; Strayhorn, 2012). Bisexual students are not only undergoing a transition to an unfamiliar environment consisting of established groups, they are also entering contexts that are typically hetero- and mono-normative (Sanlo, 2004). Denial of complexity and fluidity in favor of binary models of sexuality and gender is likely to heighten the importance of sense of belonging for bisexual students.

My findings support earlier research that bisexual individuals seek emotional support and community acceptance (Fox, 1991) and often have trouble finding bisexual spaces and community (Hemmings, 2002; Pallotta-Chiarolli & Martin, 2008). Participants discussed a desire to feel connected to other people like them, who would inherently understand the challenges they faced in regards to acceptance of their sexual fluidity. Vanessa described this as a desire to connect with people who simply "get it." Marie described this as a need for a community that would not misconstrue what she said or ask invasive or offensive questions.

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Anne described this as a space where she could feel whole in her bisexual identity, rather than trying to fit into "half gay" and "half straight" molds.

The bisexual women in this study reported feelings of acceptance and safety as well as feelings of isolation, invalidation, and discomfort within their schools' LGBT communities. These findings echo those of Cashore and Tuason (2009), who found resources for nonbinary students (both bisexual and trans) to be a "double edged sword," placing individuals in a liminal state between feeling invalidated and feeling supported. For participants in this study, the negative feelings and experiences seemed to outweigh the positive ones. Although LGBT students, when considered together, report feeling validated by participation in an LGBT organization (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005), there is currently no research on the impact of LGBT group membership on bisexual students specifically.

Anne appreciated her school's focus on nonbinary identities. She felt understood when other students discussed their attractions to multiple genders, something to which lesbian and gay students could not relate. Sam began working for their school's LGBT center immediately upon arriving as a freshman, finding within it mentorship and a strong sense of community. Vanessa also found community through their leadership roles within their school's LGBT center. Although these students generally felt a sense of belonging when it came to their schools' LGBT communities, they mentioned behaviors that indicated that, in reality, they did not feel entirely comfortable. In Anne, this took the shape of choosing her attire carefully. In Sam's case, this involved hiding a relationship with a man. And Vanessa made it a personal goal to proactively contribute to making LGBT spaces on their campus more inclusive of pansexuals and students of color, requiring a high level of confidence to increase their own visibility and outspokenness. In

this way, Vanessa created what Ahmed (2008) refers to as a sense of disorientation, making clear to others the invisible definition of these spaces as White and lesbian/gay.

Although the presence of similar others increases self-esteem among those with concealable stigmas such as bisexuality (Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998), it is hard for bisexual individuals to find community when they are so frequently rendered invisible within monosexist environments. As a result, they report lower levels of visible, organized community support relative to lesbians and gay men and higher levels of identity confusion (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Morris & Rothblum, 1999). This is further amplified for bisexuals partnered with the "other" gender (Ochs, 1996). Tierney (1993) describes this as a politics of silencing in that "when we assume that everyone is similar, any difference disturbs the de facto norm. This assumption of similarity thereby reinforces a culture of silence for those organizational participants who are different" (McDonough & McLaren, 1996, para. 15). Just as Tierney (1993) hopes to encourage the remaking of educational institutions so that the power of the norm of heterosexuality is eradicated, we must work to eradicate the power of the norm of monosexuality so that it no longer controls what is deemed normal or deviant (McDonough & McLaren, 1996).

Emma, Erin, Glenn, M, and Marie all had experiences that mirrored the literature on the marginalization of bisexual individuals within the LGBT community (Armstong & Tucker, 1995; Bradford, 2004; Burleson, 2014; Callis, 2009; Daumer, 1992; Deacon, Reinke, & Viers, 1996; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Hartman, 2005; Highleyman, 1995; Lever, Kanouse, Rogers, Carson, & Hertz, 1992; Lingel, 2009; McLean, 2008b; Ochs, 1996; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyn, 2015; Udis-Kessler, 1995). They struggled with disclosure of their sexuality due to personal experiences of marginalization and/or awareness of societal stereotypes about bisexuality (Ault, 1996) and often found themselves within a liminal space when confronted with

the difficult choice between authenticity or social support (Burleson, 2014; Daniels, 2009; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Pallotta-Chiarolli & Martin, 2008; Pascale-Hague, 2015).

Participants in the current study described experiences of not feeling welcome in lesbian and gay spaces, such as when Erin was undermined by the mentor provided through her school's LGBT center and when Emma attended her school's LGBT orientation only to encounter a room full of gay men. They felt that their needs were often not met by traditional resources and programming efforts, such as when Glenn found that discussions on her campus were not inclusive of nonbinary individuals and that her school's safe sex kits did not provide resources for women who have sex with women (Burleson, 2014; Pallotta-Chiarolli & Martin, 2008; Pascale-Hague, 2015).

Participants not only struggled to find bisexual communities, they often did not think to look for them in the first place. Having come to terms with their sexuality in mononormative environments, they had, as Emily put it, "no frame of reference" to envision what a potential bisexual community would look like. They discussed feelings of isolation within and outside LGBT communities, aligning with previous research indicating that bisexual individuals often feel isolated and excluded (Bradford, 2004; Daniels, 2009; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; McLean, 2008b) and supporting a need for a distinct bisexual community.

Current support efforts on college campuses tend to group bisexual students with lesbian, gay, and sometimes trans students as part of a monolithic group of individuals who deviate from sexual and/or gender norms and thus share a common source of marginalization. However, reliance on the lesbian and gay community during the initial coming out process can make full acceptance of a bisexual identity more challenging (Armstrong, 1995; Rust, 2002). Bisexuals must create and filter their identities and experiences via communities that do not recognize them

and only include them to the extent to which they are perceived to be lesbian or gay, ensuring that bisexual individuals are never full members of a community (Eisner, 2013; Hemmings, 2002).

Even when community organizations purport to include bisexual individuals, if bisexual-affirming norms are not in place, the benefit of this type of support may be outweighed by marginalization (Balsam & Mohr, 2007). However, interpersonal relationships can help buffer a lack of support in other areas for bisexual women (Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt, 2015). Both Riku and Sam emphasized the importance of their personal relationships to their identity development. The one-on-one and small group discussions they had in their residence halls, the playhouse, and other campus locations provided them with an opportunity to explore their sexual and gender identities. In Riku's case especially, it appeared that these interactions factored more prominently in her sexual and gender identity development than did her involvement in more formal LGBT activities. They both extolled the value of the individual friendships they made and conversations they had, through which their comfort with their sexuality and gender were enhanced. Emma also reflected upon how her personal conversations impacted her acceptance of her sexuality, stating,

> I think it was really easy to identify as gay as well but there were a couple of people that I
> think really were great to talk to and try to work through some of those identity issues. I
> started to realize that even people that identified as gay often had some hints of bisexual
> feelings and so that was great.

Contrary to Riku's and Sam's experiences, Glenn found that she felt more accepted in organized activities than she did in one-on-one relationships with individuals from her school's LGBT organization because some of the individual members did not believe in the validity of a

bisexual identity. It seems that having a group of people, likely with mixed opinions on bisexuality, served as a buffer for Glenn from binegative feedback from individual members.

At times, participants such as Anne, Emma, Erin, Martina, and Vanessa sought support, community, and information online because they could not find it in person. Previous research confirms that LGBT youth ages 16-24 use the internet to compensate for perceived deficits in offline information and relationships (DeHaan, Kuper, Magee, Bigelow, & Mustanski, 2012). However, the internet can also be a source of exclusion and harassment for bisexual women.   A content analysis of online communities found that half of the comments made in sampled discussion threads contained expressions of biphobia and/or normative monosexism, including denial of bisexuality, statements that bisexuality is a transitional state, and stereotypes that bisexual women are promiscuous (Sweeney, 2012). Emma commented that she encountered biphobic comments online. However, she did successfully find validation online, and as she alluded to, pieced together a patchwork of community from various online and face-to-face sources.

Strategic Disclosure

Bisexual identity development is complex in that the end point is not a static monosexual identity. Bisexual women must often come out multiple times due to the fluid nature of their sexuality (Diamond, 2000; Diamond, 2008; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Rust, 2000b; Rust, 2002; Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1995), a process which can be stressful, as evidenced by Vanessa's account of disclosing her pansexuality at least twice to their mother and being doubted due to their partner's gender. In disclosing their sexuality, bisexual individuals must face both heterosexist and monosexist assumptions, requiring strategic disclosure decisions that are impacted by cultural notions about bisexuality and by their partner's gender (Scherrer, Kazyak,

& Schmitz, 2015). Vanessa underwent stress in having to constantly reassert their sexual identity while advocating for the existence of bisexuality as more than a transitory state (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Diamond, 2008; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Lingel, 2009; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyn, 2015). This sort of "constant mediation can be emotionally and physically taxing, as individuals may feel trapped in an identity or isolated from a community" (Falek, 2013, p. 36).

Participants struggled balancing their need for support and acceptance with their desire to present their true, authentic selves to those around them, a "liminal desire to belong and yet retain fluidity of identity" (Whitney, 2002, p. 112). Emma, Erin, Glenn, M, Marie, Martina, and Sam all conveyed a fervent desire to be open and honest about their bisexuality, regardless of their relationship status. Yet they often faced the need to make strategic disclosure decisions because they were unsure of the reception that awaited them. They were well aware of the multitude of prevalent stereotypes about bisexuals, including being viewed as confused, promiscuous, or greedy (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Barker et al., 2012; Bradford, 2004; Daumer, 1992; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Hayfield, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Lingel, 2009; McLean, 2008b; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt, 2015; Rust, 1996b; Rust, 2002; Scherrer, Kazyak, & Schmitz, 2015; Udis-Kessler, 1996; Weiss, 2004) or as traitors and seekers of heterosexual privilege (Armstrong, 1995; Burleson, 2014; Daumer, 1992; Hartman, 2008; Highleyman, 1995; Israel & Mohr, 2004; McLean, 2008a; Miller, 2006; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyn, 2015; Scherrer, Kazyak, & Schmitz, 2015; Udis-Kessler, 1996; Weiss, 2004). As a result, they frequently made behavioral decisions based upon this knowledge in order to preserve or enhance their sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012).

In Marie's case, she hid her bisexuality for the duration of her studies abroad in France, despite a desire to be authentic with her new friends, for fear of creating an uncomfortable housing situation or losing her housing altogether. In Glenn's case, the Orlando shooting prompted her to be more open with her co-workers, only to receive the "over the top" reaction that she feared and that had kept her in the closet at work previously. In M's case, she avoided dancing with girls in public because others knew she had a boyfriend, and she feared being perceived to be a tease or confused. In Sam's case, they hid a relationship from their co-workers at the LGBT center, for fear of being perceived as less queer or benefiting from heterosexual privilege.

Despite their desires for authenticity, participants were often strategic in their disclosure decisions, being out in some settings or with certain people only, or being out as lesbian versus bisexual depending on the context and time. This supports prior findings that bisexual individuals may opt to define their identities in varying ways depending upon the social context in order to be best accepted and/or understood (Lingel, 2009; Rust, 1996b; Rust, 2006). Whereas some bisexual individuals feel safer not disclosing their sexuality, others feel pressured to disclose as monosexual (i.e. lesbian or gay) to counteract misunderstandings about bisexuality or to divest themselves of perceived heteronormative privileges (Scherrer, Kazyak, & Schmitz, 2015). Research has found that the degree of disclosure by bisexual individuals may be related to perceptions of the level of LGB affirmation in a given environment (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Bisexual women frequently misrepresent themselves as lesbian when in lesbian environments (Rust, 1996b). Indeed, Emma discussed making a conscious decision to identify as lesbian while in college in order to be accepted in the lesbian community, which she felt

adhered to binegative stereotypes. Emma compromised her sense of identity in order to feel like she belonged.

Bisexual women frequently pass as lesbian both as they are coming to terms with their sexuality and subsequently for fear of stigmatization, resulting in feelings of isolation (Hemmings, 2002). Anne expressed frustration with other bisexual women who felt pressured to pass as lesbian, yet she at times chose her attire carefully so as to pass as heterosexual. Sam mentioned that they had initially identified as queer rather than bisexual, but had started to disclose their bisexuality to an ever-widening circle of individuals, which had increased their level of community support. These findings support research that indicates that bisexual individuals who disclose in the face of binegativity and bi-invisibility can deepen their opportunities for community belonging (Pascale-Hague, 2015).

Identity Confusion

In his dissertation on the college experiences of transgender students, Bilodeau (2009) discusses participants' inability to self-identify as trans due to a lack of exposure to LGBT issues and peers, and a life spent in a society that values binary gender systems and thus renders trans identities invisible. He labels this phenomenon "identity inaccessibility" (Bilodeau, 2009, p. 122). I found a parallel process occurred among the participants in my study in regards to their sexual identities. They were typically unaware of the existence of bisexuality as an option due to a lack of role models and systemic monosexism.

While some participants, such as Anne, Emma, Sam, and Vanessa, recognized their bisexuality while still in high school, many, such as Emily, Erin, Glenn, M, Marie, Martina, and Riku, did not consider bisexuality until college. This finding is not surprising considering bisexual individuals have access to fewer role models, as well as less access to accurate

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information about their sexuality, compared to lesbians and gay men (Rust, 2002). Marie exemplified this when she stated, "[N]ot everyone knows at the age of seven that they like whatever gender and that is very often the narrative that's presented, that you've just always known. And that's not always true." M also felt less secure in her sexuality than her lesbian and gay contemporaries, stating, "[I]t was like people just knew, like they were really gay or they were definitely straight." Emma struggled with the fluid cycles of her sexuality until she found validation online from others with similar feelings.

The maintenance of a sexual binary and denial of sexual fluidity results in the erasure of bisexual figures from our history (James, 1996), and the absence of other visible bisexuals as role models leaves bisexual individuals feeling isolated (Bradford, 2004; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998; Rust, 2002; Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1995). Erin discussed the relief she felt when she found a video online of Anna Paquin defending her bisexuality, stating with disappointment, "[T]here are so few bisexual celebrities." Erin, Riku, and Sam sought out mentoring relationships in a desire to find sexually fluid role models, and Glenn is in the process of creating a mentoring program for staff at her institution for this reason. Both Erin and Riku had negative mentoring experiences, while Sam's was more positive. "Such double-edged characteristics of these resources, where the same resource can be positive to one and negative to another, or positive at one point and negative at another, reiterate the significant impact of these on bisexual and transgender identity processes" (Cashore & Tuason, 2009, p. 396).

The development of bisexual identity among participants appeared to adhere to the stage models posited by Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor (1995) and by Knous (2006). Both of these models propose an initial stage of confusion regarding sexual identity, followed by a labeling

process and a need to cope with the consequences of such labeling (i.e., judgment by others). The two models part ways in the third stage, with Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor (1995) considering the final stage to be one of continued uncertainty due to a lack of cultural acceptance of nonbinary identities and Knous' (2006) final stage being one of acceptance and identification as bisexual. Some research suggests that bisexual individuals never fully accept their bisexual identity because of the pressure to identify as either heterosexual or homosexual (Rust, 2000b; Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1995).

In the current study, Emma, Emily, M, Marie, and Sam all expressed continued uncertainties about their sexual identities. This may be because they anticipated that their identity development would be linear, as that is what is generally expected when it comes to sexual orientation among monosexuals. However, bisexual women often alternate repeatedly between bisexual and lesbian identities due to the fluid nature of their sexualities (Rust, 1996b). Their locations on the sexual landscape may shift due to the changing nature of their relationships with others, be it romantic, sexual, social, or otherwise. Their identities can shift accordingly, indicating "not a state of searching immaturity, but a mature state of mutability" (Rust, 1996b, p. 66). However, it was clear from participants' feedback that mutability of sexuality was generally not accepted on their college campuses.

Being Partnered With a Man

One of the ways in which society renders bisexuality invisible is by assuming someone's sexuality based on the perceived gender of their partner (Dolan, 2013; Hartman, 2008; Horowitz & Newcomb, 1999; Scherrer, Kazyak, & Schmitz, 2015). This prevents a person from being seen as bisexual unless they are actively seeking out or involved with others of "both" genders

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(Hartman, 2008). As B. J. Epstein puts it in Ochs's and Rowley's (2009) anthology of bisexual

voices,

> [I]f you are in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, maybe you are really
>
> heterosexual, and you don't belong with the queers; if you are in a relationship with
>
> someone of the same sex, maybe you are actually homosexual and not bisexual; if you
>
> are polyamorous, you fulfill the stereotypes and give bisexuals a bad reputation; if you
>
> aren't polyamorous, you aren't truly bi. (p. 164)

Because bisexuality must be performed in order to be societally validated, rendering bisexuality

and monogamy incompatible, bisexuals partnered with someone perceived to be of the

"opposite" gender face an increased risk of invisibility as sexual minorities (Hartman, 2008;

Ochs, 1996; Whitney, 2002).   My participant Emily elucidated this concept this when she stated,

"I think it would be really uncomfortable to show up [to a queer space] as a bisexual person in a

straight presenting relationship. I think I would show up and they'd be like, 'I don't know what

you're here for really, we don't have anything to offer you.'"

Emma, Erin, M, Sam, and Vanessa talked about experiences of invalidation and their

insecurities about their sexuality as a result of their partnerships with men. Compulsory

monosexuality creates a cultural assumption that individuals are either heterosexual or

homosexual (James, 1996). As a result, Emma, Erin, M, Sam, and Vanessa worried that their

partnerships with men erased their sexuality in the eyes of others, and sometimes in their own

eyes. As Sam explained when discussing why they hid their relationship from the other staff at

the LGBT center, "[I]t feels like a different part of my life, I do my queer work here and then I

have a relationship and it's hard to see how to bring them together."

Although M and Sam believed that they did not directly experience marginalization due to their relationships with men, they were still on guard about how others perceived them. M and Sam seemed to exhibit stigma sensitivity, in which they experienced increased awareness of negative evaluations of their sexuality (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Major & O'Brien, 2005). Sam and M had internalized binegative cultural messages and were hypervigilant for such cues in their personal environments, in the case of Sam, to the extent that they hid their relationship for over a year. This is a form of minority stress, which includes not just personal experiences of monosexism and biphobia but also anticipatory fear of such experiences (Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Logie & Earnshaw, 2015) and which often results in internalization of negative messages and prejudices (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009; Meyer, 2003; Szymanski, Kashubeck-West, & Meyer, 2008). The hypervigilance and impression management engaged in by M and Sam (Barbara, Quandt, & Anderson, 2001; Bjorkman & Malterud, 2007; Croteau, 1996; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998; Hitchcock & Wilson, 1992; Major & O'Brien, 2005; Pascale-Hague, 2015; Pachankis, 2007; Scherrer, Kazyak, & Schmitz, 2015; Woods & Harbeck, 1992) increased their levels of isolation and prevented the development and maintenance of a sense of belonging.

Intersectionality

While the need for belonging is universal, it does not apply equally to all people. Social identities such as sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and class intersect to influence sense of belonging and affect the impact of varied social contexts on belongingness (Strayhorn, 2012). Intersectionality grew out of the field of critical legal studies in order to speak to the lived experiences of individuals with marginalized identities, specifically Black women (Crenshaw, 1991). It "addresses the overlapping, mutually reinforcing, and intersecting matrix of

subordination that impacts the lived experiences of Black women which, at the time, could not be easily understood within existing feminist frameworks or anti-racist frameworks" (Pitcher, 2015, p. 4). Intersectional approaches provide a lens that can be applied to understand the complexities of individual and group identities in order to address inequalities (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009).

Participants' call for more intersectional approaches aligns with critical postmodern perspectives, as it is based in acknowledging the intersections of their multiple identities, including gender, race, class, and sexuality (Chapman, 2011; Robison, 2012) and thus the differences between individuals placed in the same identity categories (Johnson & Lugg, 2012). The other social identities possessed by participants had a definite impact upon their feelings of belonging and their perceptions of their social environments. Participants who held multiple marginalized identities were more attuned to the privileging of Whiteness within LGBT spaces. Sam and Vanessa both spoke of the ways in which Whiteness, in addition to monosexuality, were centered. Research indicates that individuals with multiple subordinated identities encounter "intersectional invisibility" because they do not fit the prototypical image of a member of their respective identity groups (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Vanessa spoke of this specifically when they wished that their "Black spaces didn't feel like straight spaces…Latino spaces didn't feel like straight, heteronormative spaces…queer spaces didn't feel like White spaces." Sam recognized the privileging of their voice during meetings in their LGBT center because although they were part Mexican, they were perceived by others to be White.

As a result of the domination of privileged groups within LGBT spaces, several participants mentioned their desire for more intersectional approaches.

Different racial and ethnic cultures…have different constructions of sexuality, different

norms for sexual behavior, different attitudes toward women as autonomous sexual

beings, and different levels of tolerance for sexual diversity that affect the experiences of

individuals in those cultures. (Rust, 2000a, p. 216).

Sexuality is impacted both by the norms of one's culture of origin as well as the position of that

culture relative to the dominant culture (Rush, 1996a). Marginalized groups attempt to retain

their values and traditions in the face of pressure to assimilate. In this context, bisexuality may

be viewed as a threat to such cultural values and traditions (Rust, 1996a). In a study of over 500

respondents of varying races and ethnicities, Rust (1996a) found that most cultures in the US are

inhibitory regarding nonheterosexual sexualities, with sexuality either being dismissed entirely

or nonheterosexuality being proscribed.

Intersectionality focuses not merely on multiple identities, some of which may confer

advantages and some disadvantages, but rather on the experiences of multiple forms of

subordination (Pitcher, 2015). In the current study, participants possessed multiple culturally

subordinated identities. For instance, Glenn identifies as a woman, bisexual, and atheist, Sam

identifies as Mexican American, Jewish, queer/bisexual, and genderqueer/femme, Vanessa

identifies as African American, Latinx, pansexual, and genderqueer, and Riku identifies as trans

and pansexual.   These identities are not additive nor mutually exclusive. Rather, they are

integrated, inseparable, and synergistic (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Bowleg, 2008; Monro, 2015).

While students' lived experiences of their identities is seamless (Strayhorn 2012), distinct

identity-based centers situate them in different physical spaces, sending a message that these

identities are and should be kept separate (Kenney, Dumont, & Kenney, 2005; Strange &

Banning, 2001). As Vanessa lamented, their Black and Latino spaces are straight and queer

spaces are White. Having to navigate different lives within different communities can result in

> a fractured sense of self, in which one separates one's sexual identity from one's racial
>
> identity from one's American identity and experiences these identities as being in conflict
>
> with each other. (Rust, 1996a, p. 67).

Vanessa described this as "the choices…happening when you're going back and forth between

those spaces, it's a walk down the hall but it's kind of like choosing which parts of your identity

are most salient." Renn and Bilodeau (2005) insist that "intervention by advisers and student

affairs professionals may be necessary to maintain LGBT spaces on campus that can meet a

range of student identities and needs" (p. 327).

Bisexual Performativity

The desire to display one's bisexuality is related to a desire for authenticity (Hartman,

2008), an impulse that was readily apparent in many of the participants in the current study.

Butler's (1990) concept of performativity is particularly relevant here.   Emma's, Anne's, and

Erin's comments all indicate that they have an understanding of the notion that sexuality is

performed, that others (and they themselves) make assumptions based on others' appearances,

and that bisexuality is challenging to make apparent and often rendered invisible as a result.

Previous research on bisexual women has found that they perform their bisexuality through

verbal and visual cues in order to render themselves visible, resist misappropriation as

heterosexual or homosexual, and divest themselves of heterosexual privilege (Hartman, 2008;

Miller, 2006).

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Hartman (2008) found that bisexual women were motivated to display their bisexuality by the desire to appear available to both men and women. Glenn, one of the single participants in my study, identified this as a need, stating,

> [I]t was also important for me that people know [about my bisexuality] because I was single at the time and interested in finding a partner. And I had the realization that I was never going to be able to make a connection if no one ever knew I was queer. And especially if they had seen me in a partnership with a male partner and them not knowing that I was bisexual meant that would in their minds take me off as an option, right?

On the other hand, bisexual women in monogamous partnerships with men have exhibited a reluctance to display their bisexuality for fear of misleading someone (Hartman, 2008). Research demonstrates that college students judge a woman kissing another woman in public as more promiscuous than if she were kissing a man, yet still judge her to be heterosexual rather than lesbian or bisexual (Lannutti and Denes, 2012). These findings show that, because bisexuality tends to be erased culturally, people assume that women who are seen kissing other women must really be heterosexual and simply vying for the attention of men. As a result, these women are labeled promiscuous and misleading. M expressed concern that she might be considered a tease if she displayed her bisexuality by dancing with both women and men, especially since she was already partnered with a man. She stated,

> [I]n hindsight, through college…I was probably thinking along the lines of 'Oh, I have a boyfriend' and so especially I don't want to lead a woman on when I have a boyfriend. So it probably deterred me from dancing with girls, which is ridiculous because I danced with guys at parties all the time.

Bisexual displays among women in order to attract men have become increasingly normative, setting the bar too high for anyone to be deemed legitimately bisexual (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013). Women who identify as bisexual may be reluctant to display their bisexuality when it is perceived to be for the male gaze. Martina discussed how she avoided kissing other women, despite her personal desires, because she did not want to feed her boyfriend's cravings with a legitimate part of her identity. Erin discussed the role of the media in supporting this portrayal of bisexual women. Media representation of bisexuality perpetuates negative stereotypes and contributes to stigma (Johnson, 2016). Diamond (2005) questions the role of power in these displays, stating,

> [S]uch images implicitly convey that the most desirable and acceptable form of female–female sexuality is that which pleases and plays to the heterosexual male gaze, titillating male viewers while reassuring them that the participants remain sexually available in the conventional heterosexual marketplace. (Diamond, 2005, p. 105)

In a phallocentric rendering of sexuality, women's sexuality is viewed in relation to men (MacKinnon, 1982). Martina felt that her boyfriend was demanding that she convert her genuine attraction to other women into "a spectacle for men's viewing pleasure" (Fahs, 2009, p. 446), leaving her frustrated with his exploitation of her sexuality. In a society in which the cultural demand for performative bisexuality is increasing, women who possess a stable bisexual identity are further rendered invisible and are tasked with the stressor of hypervigilance to prevent being rendered a fetishized prop in the male sexual imaginary (Fahs, 2009).

Performing bisexuality can be a means of divesting oneself of heterosexual privilege, as bisexual individuals may be viewed as traitors to the lesbian and gay community, particularly if they are engaged in a relationship perceived as heterosexual (Armstrong, 1995; Daumer, 1992;

Israel & Mohr, 2004; McLean, 2008a; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyn, 2015; Udis-Kessler, 1996; Weiss, 2004), despite the fact that they receive fewer privileges compared to lesbians and gays due to a lack of acceptance (Armstong, 1995; Bradford, 2004; Burleson, 2014; Callis, 2009; Daumer, 1992; Deacon, Reinke, & Viers, 1996; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Hartman, 2005; Highleyman, 1995; Lever, Kanouse, Rogers, Carson, & Hertz, 1992; Lingel, 2009; McLean, 2008b; Ochs, 1996; Udis-Kessler, 1995). M and Erin both expressed internalized negative stereotypes regarding their privilege compared to their lesbian and gay counterparts and discussed their struggles with how to make their bisexuality apparent. It is important that bisexuality not be viewed as "merely performative, as existing only in the form of sexual acts rather than as an identity that encompasses but also outlives performance" (Pramaggiore, 2002, p. 249). Butler (1990) emphasized the need for repeat performances of sexuality, but this raises the question: "[W]hat is the performative moment when one can identify as part of a group and move from posturing to authenticity?" (Whitney, 2002, p. 116). To use Alarie and Gaudet's (2013) metaphor, when is the bar lowered enough so that someone can claim they are legitimately bisexual?

Women are frequently motivated by queer and feminist politics to display their bisexuality (Hartman, 2008; Rust, 2000b). Rust (1996b) has found that individuals may intentionally use their identities to prompt social change in different contexts, and some students argue that "to be queer means to be political" (Rhoads, 1994, p. 4). For queer students, coming out is more than an individual process meant to claim a public space; coming out is also a political effort designed to create greater awareness and achieve increased rights and visibility for all queer people (Rhoads, 1994, p. 113). In the current study, M and Sam were drawn to queer and feminist politics and spoke of the interconnected nature of their sexuality and their

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politicization. For other participants, such as Erin and Marie, the interconnectedness of politics and LGBT identity served as a barrier to sense of belonging, causing them to feel intimidated and excluded.

Sam began identifying as a feminist in high school and used college as an opportunity to delve into women's and gender studies to explore the intersectional nature of identity. Their academic studies and involvement in a politically-oriented LGBT student center allowed them closer access to their queer and feminist identities. M also learned more about her queer and feminist identities through academic exploration of sexuality and involvement in feminist-oriented activities. M, however, struggled with attempts to display her bisexuality in these progressive environments, as her attraction to women was often misconstrued as a display of support for feminism and female empowerment. Just as Ti-Grace Atkinson once remarked that "Feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice" (Burleson, 2014; Udis-Kessler, 1995), M's identity/practice was rendered invisible by feminism because of the perceived parallels between lesbianism and feminism.

Historically, lesbian-feminist communities have been chilly to downright exclusionary toward bisexual women, viewing bisexuality as a lack of full commitment to women (Armstrong, 1995; Rich, 1980). In M's case, she felt no direct hostility towards her bisexual identity. Rather, her perceived heterosexuality was accepted and her bisexual identity was rendered invisible, an impossibility in an environment in which everyone was expected to be unabashedly pro-woman and pro-vagina, whether gay or straight. As a result, the bar was once again raised too high for M to be considered bisexual (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013). Emma endured a similar challenge to her sexuality in a feminism class in which her professor and fellow students vehemently supported Rich's (1980) view that lesbianism is a political choice rather than arising

from women's innate sexual desires. Like M, Emma did not feel directly attacked for her bisexuality or attraction to women, but she did feel that her attraction to women as well as men was erased and invalidated by this experience.

Non-LGBT Communities and Sense of Belonging

    Performing arts. Over half of the participants in this study were involved with and found community in the performing arts, most notably theater. Historically, there is a connection between bisexuality and performers (Garber, 1995; Pramaggiore, 2002) – "What is pathologized in the clinic is celebrated on the stage and at the box office" (Garber, 1995, p. 142). Theater has proven useful to help girls from ethnic minority backgrounds living in predominantly White communities explore questions related to identity, belonging, and systematic marginalization in an intersectional fashion (Lee & Finney, 2005). African American gay and gender non-conforming high school students indicate that expressing themselves in artistic and performative spaces affirms their identities and helps them respond to marginalization (Venzant Chambers & McCready, 2011). Research with youth ages 12-30 indicates that theater provides a safe space within which they can comfortably take risks and can explore, express, and control their thoughts and feelings. They report feeling known, supported, and accepted in theater environments, with peers that allow them to experiment with their identities with fewer constraints than the outside, institutionalized world (Hughes & Wilson, 2004).

    The concept of liminality comes into play in performance theory in that when individuals play out different ways of behaving, they enter a liminal space, a transition from one role to another. Experimenting with different roles in this way can provide emotional release, an understanding of concerns from a different perspective, and the opportunity to reinvent one's identity free from societal constraints (Hughes & Wilson, 2004). Specific to LGBT youth, a

relationship exists between the narrative nature of performance and identity development. The performance of personal narratives allows LGBTQ youth to explore their own identities and the performance of others' narratives exposes them to possibilities for the future (Halverson, 2005). This opportunity is significant for individuals whose social environments did not allow for the exploration of multiple possibilities, which seems particularly relevant for bisexual women coming from monosexist environments that often restricted them to binary options.

Although the participants in the current study did not indicate experience performing their own stories, they discussed their involvement in narrative format performances, most notably The Vagina Monologues. The Vagina Monologues is a play performed in colleges and communities throughout the world. It consists of a series of monologues depicting various facets of the female experience in order to combat gender-based violence and empower women (V-Day, 2014). Emily, M, Marie, and Vanessa all referenced their involvement with their schools' productions of The Vagina Monologues. M, in particular, emphasized how her involvement in the show brought her into an empowering community of sexually liberated women, the likes of which she had not found previously. Reading, observing, and performing stories portraying both struggles and comfort with female sexuality allowed these participants to learn more about their own sexuality, validated their sexual identities, and helped them to navigate their own life experiences.

Research indicates that LGBTQ individuals are attracted to theater environments because the nonheteronormative climate allows them to feel validated and affirmed (McGinty, 2013). Riku discussed how her involvement in theater exposed her to a large group of openly trans, nonbinary, and bisexual peers. Just as Lee and Finney (2005) utilized theater methods with Canadian ethnic minority girls to explore their lived realities of being silenced and rendered

invisible, it seems that the participants in this study frequently found their way to the performing arts as a means of making themselves feel visible. Theater provided an environment of freedom in which a community of peers supported participants as they dealt with sensitive issues and became comfortable with who they are and the possibilities of who they could be.

Social justice advocacy. Pitcher (2015) defines social justice as a process that involves "efforts intended to foster the full and equal participation of all groups by eliminating institutionalized domination and oppression" (p. 5) and states that institutions of higher education serve as important sites of resistance to injustice. Emma, Erin, Glenn, M, Sam, and Vanessa participated in an array of social justice advocacy efforts that spanned beyond LGBT issues. While research has been conducted on the impact of identity-based activism among LGBT students (Renn, 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005), there is no body of literature on the impact of allyship on LGBT students or on the impact of identity-based or non-identity-based leadership on bisexual students specifically.

Allies for social justice become involved in their efforts in order to free both the oppressed and themselves in the process. Through understanding the interconnected nature of oppression, allies realize their own full humanity (Edwards, 2006). In Renn and Bilodeau's (2005) study of LGBT student leadership, identity-based leadership was at times a springboard to activism in other social justice arenas. As bisexual individuals who have endured erasure and stigmatization, the participants in my study may have been seeking to regain their humanity through social justice efforts. Involvement in these activities provided participants with the opportunity to collaborate with diverse students across their respective campuses, brought together by a mutual desire to fight oppression in all its forms. For example, M discussed how her work on sexual assault advocacy allowed her to collaborate with her school's LGBT

organization and Sam talked about partnering with the Asian student organization on their campus on workers' rights efforts. By supporting others who are marginalized, participants gained a sense of mattering through feelings of dependence and appreciation.

Some of the participants' activism was related to their salient identities. For instance, M became involved in sexual assault prevention efforts because she identifies as a sexual assault survivor, Glenn became involved in human rights efforts due to her identity as low-income and a first generation immigrant, and Sam was a queer activist leader. Both M and Sam, interestingly, chose academic pursuits that mirrored these interests. Sam ended up pursuing a degree in Gender and Women's Studies, with much of their coursework focused on queer theory, and M completed a minor concentration in Identity Politics. Research shows that some LGBT students select majors that align their academic work with their involvement and emerging queer identities (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005).

Other participants became involved in causes that did not personally impact them, but which they felt passionate about because of their understanding of and desire to ameliorate inequities. For instance, Vanessa worked on efforts to combat Islamophobia and Emma supported efforts for undocumented students. Regardless of whether their activism was identity-based or non-identity-based, participants expressed comfort in their assurance that the other students involved in these causes would be like-minded to a certain extent, whether they were queer or not. Emma reflected that "outside of [the LGBT] identity space, people were just really supportive. I had a great core group of friends that were all interested in the same academic and political things that I worked on."

Sororities. Participation in sororities and fraternities may tap into feelings of mattering for members. In his research with nonheterosexual men, Dilley (2005) found that involvement in

fraternities helped students fit in and find a source of companionship on campus. Research indicates that LGB students join fraternities and sororities primarily for friendship, an enhanced social life, and a sense of belonging (Case, Hesp, & Eberly, 2005). However, a study of over 500 individuals reported that over 70% of them did not disclose their sexual orientation and had experienced homophobic or heterosexist behaviors or attitudes within their chapters (Case, Hesp, & Eberly, 2005).

Emily, Vanessa, and Glenn discussed their participation in sororities. Glenn and Emily participated in what might be deemed more traditional sororities, whereas Vanessa chose a less traditional group that was just getting off the ground with a chapter of five students. Vanessa chose this sorority because of its multicultural focus and emphasis on inclusivity. Knowing that the sorority was seeking nonheterosexual and nonbinary members made them feel comfortable joining. Seeing the words 'genderqueer,' 'genderfluid,' and 'pansexual' on the slides at an interest meeting immediately provided Vanessa with feelings of attention, importance, and appreciation.

Whereas Vanessa chose their sorority because they were certain their experience would be supportive, Emily and Glenn took more of a risk and had disparate experiences. Emily unknowingly joined a sorority with a large percentage of queer members. She chose the group at the time because she felt that it was the "anti-sorority" in that its members eschewed normative sorority culture. The group's anti-normative stance gave Emily the confidence she needed to join, given that she had not planned on participating in a Greek organization. Her identification with the values of the sorority likely contributed to feelings of attention for Emily in that her perspective was being noticed positively as aligning with group norms. Glenn chose her sorority because of its purported emphasis on social justice and community service. Whereas Emily had

a positive experience within her sorority, one that contributed to her understanding of her bisexuality, the environment within Glenn's sorority was so toxic that she withdrew her membership after a year. Glenn never felt comfortable disclosing her bisexuality to her sisters, as rampant heterosexist and transphobic remarks caused her to feel unappreciated and uncared for.

Windmeyer and Freeman (2000) created an anthology of stories they received from 25 bisexual women and lesbians about their experiences within sororities. Their contributors shared experiences of both support and rejection within their sororities, and were oftentimes challenged by the LGBT community regarding their involvement in what was perceived to be a heterosexist institution. Bisexual women, specifically, reported that getting their sorority sisters to acknowledge their sexuality when they did come out proved challenging (Windmeyer & Freeman, 2000). Vanessa and Emily were both affirmed in their pansexuality and bisexuality, respectively, within their sororities, but only because they chose sororities that aligned with their identities and/or values, which resulted in feelings of mattering to their respective organizations.

Whereas Glenn felt that she, too, was selecting an organization based on shared values (i.e., a passion for social justice), she failed to ascertain that the organization's other values were far more conservative than her own. In fact, it likely was not possible for her to ascertain this during the rush process, as the homophobic conversations and actions she described occurred behind closed doors and would not have been apparent to non-members. The need to be hypervigilant about the underlying values of a student organization could be considered an additional form of minority stress for bisexual women, resulting in an increased sense of isolation (Barbara, Quandt, & Anderson, 2001; Bjorkman & Malterud, 2007; Croteau, 1996; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998; Hitchcock & Wilson, 1992;

Major & O'Brien, 2005; Pachankis, 2007; Pascale-Hague, 2015; Scherrer, Kazyak, & Schmitz, 2015; Woods & Harbeck, 1992), as was the case for Glenn.

Implications for Practice

This study adds to the limited literature available on the experiences of bisexual women on college campuses in the United States. The information shared by participants indicates that bisexual women may at times feel welcome in LGBT spaces on college campuses, but often find themselves rendered invisible or marginalized within these environments that continue to adhere to mononormative, binary systems of thinking about sexuality and gender. Student affairs practitioners can use these findings to understand the impact of monosexism on bisexual women and to recognize the potential influence they can have on the sense of belonging bisexual women feel on their campuses.

> By studying and seeking deeper understanding of the barriers that nonmonosexual people face due to monosexism, the meanings and truths of genuine nonmonosexual identities, and what nonmonosexual communities need in order to feel understood and supported, student affairs scholars and professionals can begin to understand the unique barriers and obstacles that these students face. (Dolan, 2013, p. 29)

The findings of this study point to a need for college administrators to demonstrate top down support for nonmonosexual students by valuing and affirming fluid sexual identities. This requires fostering an environment in which monosexuality is not inherently assumed and in which complexity and difference are embraced. Previous research on gay and lesbian students has found that campus inclusivity can be enhanced through policies recognizing the diversity of sexual identities, the availability of safe spaces and resources, trained staff sensitive to the needs of these students, and inclusion of queer lives in classroom environments (Rhoads, 1994).

Findings from the current study extend this prior work, highlighting the unique needs of bisexual women in campus environments. Specific ways that administrators and practitioners can affirm nonmonosexuality and support bisexual women on campus are discussed below.

Visible Bisexual Leadership

Bisexual women lack role models. When bisexual women are featured in fictional media, they are typically portrayed negatively (Ochs, 1996; Johnson, 2016; Spaulding & Peplau, 1997) or their bisexuality is trivialized (Diamond, 2005). Participants in the current study lamented the lack of out bisexual celebrities and their excitement at being able to connect with someone with a nonbinary identity, be it online or in person. Such encounters help women to understand and validate their sexuality and gender identity. Research indicates that having accessible and visible lesbian and gay role models encourages lesbian and gay students to come out (Evans & Broido, 1999; Gortmaker & Brown, 2006). Bisexual students rarely, if ever, have the same opportunity. Role models in the form of visible bisexual leadership on campus would serve as a source of support and normalization for bisexual students as they come to terms with their fluid sexual identities.

Bi-Specific Resources and Programming

Practitioners should dedicate funding and staffing to the development and implementation of social and educational programming for students who have embraced a sexually fluid identity as well as those who are questioning their sexuality. Too often this sort of work, if it happens at all, occurs as an afterthought or merely a tacking on of a 'B' to an institution's resources to support lesbian and gay students. While the word 'bisexual' may appear in an organization's name or mission statement, it is critical that such resources actually serve the distinct needs of bisexual women (San Francisco Human Rights Campaign, 2011).

There is a need for both social and educational programming for bisexual women on campuses. Examples of social resources include discussion groups and relaxed activities such as ice cream socials so that students can connect with each other in environments they find comfortable and approachable. Examples of educational resources include bisexual speakers and panel sessions that allow students to learn about the validity of sexual fluidity and the various forms that it may take. For instance, the University of Texas Austin has offered a Bisexuality, Pansexuality, Fluid Sexuality: Non-Monosexual Sexual Identities workshop in which community members discuss terms used to describe their attraction to people of more than one gender, the history and work of bi, pan, queer, and fluid advocates, and strategies for interrupting biphobia, bi-erasure, and pressure to conform to monosexuality (Places to Go in Austin, 2016).

It is important to note that participants in the current study found their interests to be aligned with or took an interest in trans student experiences and communities due to the commonality of having nonbinary identities and the resultant invisibility and invalidation experienced (Cashore & Tuason, 2009). In creating inclusive environments and enhancing resources for bisexual students, student affairs practitioners should consider the benefits of more holistic efforts to address and deconstruct binary notions of gender and sexuality, which would serve to support all students with nonbinary identities.

Faculty Training on Nonbinary Identities

Administrators should spearhead faculty training on how to effectively manage classroom environments in regards to nonbinary sexual identities. The University of Rhode Island, for instance, offers a Fluid and Non-Binary Advanced Safe Zone workshop for individuals who have already participated in their Safe Zone training. The workshop "explores fluidity and non-

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binary perspectives through the lenses of history, biological sex, gender, and sexuality" (The University of Rhode Island, 2016).

Just as gay students have expressed frustration in being left out of classroom discourses (Rhoads, 1994), participants in the current study felt that nonbinary identities were also rendered invisible by assumptions of monosexuality. The maintenance of a sexual binary and denial of sexual fluidity results in the erasure of bisexual individuals from our history entirely, instead identifying such individuals as gay or lesbian (James, 1996). The lack of inclusion of bisexual voices in the classroom was evident by Martina's surprise at being assigned an article on bisexuality for one of her graduate courses. Even in situations in which faculty are safe space trained, they may lack the knowledge base to bring nonbinary perspectives into the classroom and/or the skill to proactively manage student interactions, despite their own efforts to be inclusive. Both Anne and Emma relayed classroom experiences in which their professors did not effectively manage the reactions of other students to course content.

In particular, courses focused on women and gender studies, feminism, and queer theory, to which many bisexual students gravitate, should be examined for inclusivity of nonmonosexual identities. For instance, Hollibaugh and Moraga (1983) developed a feminist theory of sexuality that competes with Rich's (1980) theory. In their theory, women's sexual pleasure and sexual agency are centered, lesbianism is not privileged as the only answer to combating patriarchal structures, and bisexuality is deemed less threatening as a result (Armstrong, 1995). Based on participants' experiences, including these alternate perspectives in the classroom would empower all women, bisexual and otherwise, to consider their personal desires when it comes to their own sexuality.

In addition to offering educational and social programming to address bi students' need for belonging, the wider monosexual campus population needs to be educated about nonmonosexuals' lives. Administrators might consider offering a course specific to bisexuality and other fluid sexual identities, such as Dr. Margaret Robinson's Introduction to Bisexual Theory and Bisexual Women and Christian Theology courses at the University of Toronto (Robinson, 2006).

Welcoming Spaces for All Queer Students

Student affairs practitioners should maintain dedicated queer spaces that are welcoming to students of varying identities and work to ensure that such spaces are not dominated by one group on campus. Although the current findings indicate that bisexual students desire bi-specific resources and programming, they also seek intersectional approaches to support. An expanded view of diversity is needed, one through which we are speak to students' multiple identities and their intersections with one another (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Bowleg, 2008). "Adding an intersectional analysis to a social justice framework moves away from singular understandings of identity and towards a model where the multiple, intersecting identities of students are addressed" (Pitcher, 2015, p. 5). Such an approach would center marginalized students by affirming non-dominant ways of being rather than assuming that the experiences of the majority apply to everyone (Pitcher, 2015; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). It would acknowledge that students have multiple, intersecting identities and would work to address the needs of students in a holistic fashion, taking into account differences between and among groups (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; McCann & Kim, 2002; Pitcher, 2015; Tierney, 1993). An intersectional lens, coupled with a queer theory framework, allows for more complexity in understanding within group differences and the interaction of various identity processes (Torres, Jones, & Renn,

2009). Such a lens takes into account the reality that the experiences of lesbians and gay men do not inherently represent the experiences of bisexual women, that the experiences of White bisexual women do not represent the experiences of Black bisexual women, and so on.

Tierney's (1993) and Rhoads's (1994) work on building communities of difference is particularly relevant here. Current support efforts on college campuses tend to group bisexual students with lesbian, gay, and sometimes trans students, each of whom have unique needs. Adding a critical postmodern, queer theory lens to support for bisexual students would open up a means to focusing on difference and multivocality (Tierney, 1993), rather than embracing a pseudo-consistency amongst groups of students who find themselves and their experiences to vary. This does not preclude the formation of community. Rather, such difference can become the basis of community as practitioners engage students in meaningful dialogues that are inclusive of difference, leading to enhanced connectedness. Such dialogues should challenge individuals' perspectives, encourage open sharing, support confidentiality, and occur in comfortable settings (Pitcher, 2015), affirming difference while advancing a common sense of identity (Rhoads, 1994).

Sustained educational initiatives in this regard are more beneficial to capacity building and community development than one-time programs (Pitcher, 2015). For instance, Emory University offered a Sustained Social Justice Dialogue Initiative featuring a "series of dialogue-based panels, lectures, film screenings, and other creative mediums, with an emphasis on facilitating conversation between students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members, around the critical, sensitive social justice issues of our time" (Emory University, 2017). And the Intergroup Dialogue approach, developed at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, explores commonalities and differences within and between social identity groups and relies on sustained

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communication to bridge differences and encourage deep engagement (Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007).

It is important to note that intersectionality may play out differently for those with a concealable stigma or unmarked characteristic such as bisexuality, as visible identities may override issues related to sexual identity when it comes to individuals' lived experiences (Monro, 2015). My research findings indicate that bisexual women currently do not feel that they are represented within LGBT spaces and programming on campus, at times because of their sexual fluidity and at other times because of their other salient identities, most notably race. This confirms Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie's (2015) findings that women's bisexuality intersects with their other identities or social locations, in particular for women of color, such that they felt they could never express their full selves. The current findings are also reminiscent of previous research indicating that although trans students find on-campus LGBT centers to be an important source of safer space, they find these environments to be highly racialized and thus not fully supportive of all queer and trans students (Pitcher, 2015). Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) call on student affairs professionals to "know and be aware of the campus culture and how the culture relates to students' representation and development of their multiple identities" (p. 20), and these findings reaffirm that call to action. Discussion groups such as those held on Vanessa's campus for queer people of color and for bi/pan students can be a significant first step to affirming students' multiple and intersecting identities and legitimizing those with non-dominant identities.

There is debate within the field of student affairs as to the utility of identity-based centers (Pitcher, 2015), with some professionals supporting their continued existence (Renn, 2011) and others calling for a shift to strategies that address students' multiple and intersecting identities (Patton, 2011). In campus environments that are often hostile for students with non-majority

identities (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Sanlo, 2004), identity-based centers contribute to a sense of belonging and symbolize an institutional commitment to diversity (Renn, 2011; Patton, 2011). Instead of dividing students, identity-based centers can serve as part of a larger strategy to address oppression on campus, particularly if student affairs administrators work at the intersections of identity to address structural divisions between different social groups on campus (Pitcher, 2015) and if other units on campus do not absolve themselves of responsibility for ensuring a safe and equitable environment for all students (Patton, 2011).

Utilizing Theater Performance to Enhance Campus Climate and Belonging

Theater can be used as a tool by student affairs administrators both to enhance bisexual women's sense of belonging on campus and to promote a positive climate on campus among monosexual individuals. The use of theater in higher education environments has been increasing due to the effectiveness of the format in areas such as peer education and orientation (Iverson, 2006). Research demonstrates that theater can positively change college students' attitudes towards LGBT students (Iverson & Seher, 2014) and that this attitude change results in a heightened commitment to advocate on behalf of LGBT individuals (Iverson & Seher, 2014; Wernick, Kulick, Dessel, & Graham, 2016). Given that theater has been shown to be effective in destabilizing heteronormativity on college campuses (Elsbree & Wong, 2007), it could serve as a useful tool in disrupting mononormativity as well.

Participants in this study frequently found a sense of belonging through the performing arts, in particular involvement in campus theater productions. Theater environments allow students to feel known, supported, and accepted, and to explore identities free from societal constraints (Halverson, 2005; Hughes & Wilson, 2004). Theater and artistic expression have proven useful in helping African American gay and gender non-conforming high school students

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explore questions related to identity, belonging, and systematic marginalization (Venzant Chambers & McCready, 2011). Student affairs administrators should support complexity and meaningful dialogue by creating and maintaining performance spaces on campus through which bisexual women can explore multiple, non-binary possibilities related to sexual and gender identity.

Supporting Social Justice Efforts

Many participants in the current study were involved in social justice efforts, some LGBT-relate and others not, based on a vested interest in freeing both the oppressed and themselves. Involvement in these activities provided participants with the opportunity to collaborate with diverse students across their respective campuses, brought together by a mutual desire to fight oppression. These efforts stem from a need to remain hopeful that a more socially just world is feasible, and student affairs administrators play a critical role in providing opportunities for this type of work (Pitcher, 2015). Student affairs administrators should integrate a social justice perspective into all of their efforts, ensuring this work does not remain the sole purview of identity-based centers, and should support students' social justice efforts. "By aspiring together, practitioner and student, it is possible to collaborate in the creation of a new vision of the world" (Pitcher, 2015, p. 7).

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Recommendations for Future Research

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The present study provided an in-depth examination of the lived experiences of 11 bisexual women on college campuses throughout the United States. The limitations and findings of this study lead to several potential avenues for future inquiry.

Future Research Resulting from the Limitations

Although the participants in this study were diverse in regards to geographic location, the sample lacked diversity in regards to relationship status, race, and persistence. All of the women in this study were either partnered with a man or single, although some had been partnered with women previously. Some participants were reflecting on their current experiences on college campuses, whereas others had recently graduated and thus were looking back on their time in undergraduate and/or graduate school. Replication of this study with bisexual women partnered with women would allow for exploration of their lived experiences, which may differ in terms of sense of belonging and community compared to those who are partnered with men or single.

All of the participants in the current study had completed an undergraduate degree or were in the process of completing their bachelor's degree. Therefore, I was unable to explore the lived experiences of bisexual students who stop or drop out of institutions, for sexuality-related or other reasons. Sexual minority students often consider dropping out or do fully drop out as a result of sexuality-related concerns (Mancini, 2011; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010; Sanlo, 2004; Sherrill & Hardesty, 1994). Thus, it is be important to understand the experiences of these students in order to gain a fuller picture of bisexual sense of belonging and community on college campuses. In addition, none of the participants attended two-year institutions. It would be interesting to replicate this study with bisexual women from other institution types to explore their experiences. Finally, future research should attempt to include bisexual women who are not involved in LGBT communities. Participants were recruited from LGBT online resources, and thus their experiences may differ from those who are not connected in this way.

Future Research Resulting from the Implementation

Directions for future inquiry also arose as a result of the information participants shared in the current study and these recommendations are detailed below.

Experiences outside the LGBT community. Further research is warranted to explore how bisexual student experiences outside the LGBT community contribute to their sense of belonging. Many of the participants were actively involved in social justice and diversity efforts on their campuses, both related to LGBT issues and to a broader range of concerns. Although there is research on the impact of identity-based leadership on LGBT students, the current literature does not separate out each identity nor does it explore the impact of non-identity based leadership on these populations (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). Participants' activism was quite meaningful to them, and thus I believe it would be fruitful to examine how involvement in identity- and non-identity-based efforts impact bisexual students specifically.

Over half of the participants were actively involved in the performing arts on their campuses. Given that such environments provide nonmononormative contexts that embrace fluidity and allow students to experiment with identities (Garber, 1995; Hughes & Wilson, 2004; Pramaggiore, 2002), student affairs practitioners should examine how to proactively harness the potential of the performing arts to support bisexual and other nonbinary students. Given that theater has been shown to be effective in destabilizing heteronormativity on college campuses (Elsbree & Wong, 2007), it would be enlightening to explore the utility of theater in disrupting mononormativity as well.

Participants in the current study frequently sought information and/or community online after experiencing a paucity of support offline. Outside of a study on the prevalence of biphobia and monosexism in an online message board (Sweeney, 2012), these is a lack of research on the

impact of online communities on bisexual women, and none on the impact on college students specifically. This would be an interesting line of inquiry, as student affairs practitioners could learn about the most effective ways to incorporate online resources to help support their bisexual students beyond the on-campus LGBT community.

Impact of family experiences. Although not a primary focus of the current study, participants spoke at length about their strategic disclosure decisions related to their parents and other family members. Despite college representing an environment of freedom, the financial dependence of most students during this time period can result in material and symbolic violence warranting further investigation (McDonough & McLaren, 1996). Rhoads (1994) wrote of the social control of populations deemed culturally deviant, such that physical and legal punishments designed to enact social norms gave way over time to a system of constraints upheld by fellow citizens, in a "brother's keeper" fashion. In the case of bisexual students, those who comply with mono-/hetero-sexuality benefit from the rewards of financial support while enrolled in college, while those who do not comply are punished by the withdrawal of material support. M, for instance, mentioned that she did not seek out needed counseling services because she feared her parents would receive an itemized bill.

McDonough & McLaren (1996) criticized Rhoads (1994) for not analyzing the family as a source of social oppression in his research on male students' coming out in college, "[g]iven the role that parents play in financing their child's postsecondary education, maintaining links to personal histories and communities of origin, and providing emotional sustenance and a safety net" (para. 29). Based upon my findings, this would be a valuable direction for future research among bisexual women as well.

Intersectional identities. My findings confirm that experiences of monosexism and biphobia may be experienced differently by bisexual women based upon their other identities or social locations (Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015). As a result, future research is warranted into how bisexual women of differing identities, including race, religion, and immigration status, experience marginalization, and how campus resources can be created to be more inclusive and represent students' whole selves via intersectional approaches.

Impact of the transition out of programs of higher education. As individuals transition to new life roles, such as exiting an academic program, they may feel marginalized. This feeling may be enhanced for those with historically marginalized social identities such as bisexuality, resulting in negative psychological outcomes (Schlossberg, 1989). Three of the participants in this study, Anne, Emma, and Sam, mentioned the impact of the transition from college to the workplace or concerns about an impending transition to the workplace. Some participants had experienced their college environments as "queer utopias" (Klinker, 2017) in the sense of the support they received from intimate relationships, friends, and communities (Schlossberg, 1981). It would be worthwhile to conduct research on the impact of a transition out of this environment on bisexual women, given that participants either experienced a loss of support, as was the case with Emma when she moved from her undergraduate program to a professional role on the same campus, or feared a loss of support when moving from collegiate to professional environments, as was the case with Sam in their current job search.

Hypervigilance. Hypervigilance and the need to engage in impression management result in increased rates of distress and isolation among individuals with a concealable stigma (Barbara, Quandt, & Anderson, 2001; Bjorkman & Malterud, 2007; Croteau, 1996; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998; Hitchcock & Wilson, 1992; Major &

O'Brien, 2005; Pascale-Hague, 2015; Pachankis, 2007; Scherrer, Kazyak, & Schmitz, 2015; Woods & Harbeck, 1992). Participants described experiences of hypervigilance in a variety of contexts, from the need to research organizational values that may not be readily apparent, as was the case with Glenn, to increased awareness of the audience of their sexual displays in order to prevent exploitation of their bisexual identities, as was the case with Martina and M. As a result, research on various forms of hypervigilance among bisexual women and their impact on health and psychological well-being is warranted.

Conclusion

The present study examined the lived experiences of 11 bisexual women on college campuses. It sheds light on the impact of college on the development and acceptance of their bisexuality, their struggles to find community, their efforts to belong, and their recommendations to create more welcoming and accessible campus environments. This information provides student affairs professionals as well as faculty and other administrators who work with students, some of whom are undoubtedly bisexual but whose sexuality may not be visible, insight into how this population experiences their environments.

These findings suggest that bisexual women on college campuses feel invisible and lack role models to help them come to terms with their sexuality. Their access to supportive resources is hampered by the need to label themselves, when oftentimes such social labels do not seem accurate due to their lack of fluidity or malleability. Participants described a variety of stressors in their daily lives, including the need to make strategic disclosure decisions, pressure to pass as monosexual, and invalidation and marginalization within both lesbian/gay and heterosexual environments. They at times described experiences of inclusion with LGBT communities and also found community in non-LGBT environments, including the performing

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arts, social justice activism, and non-traditional sororities. Participants sought community as a means of validating their identities and connecting with like-minded others. They yearned for dedicated spaces, resources, and programming, visible bisexual leadership, inclusive classroom environments, and intersectional approaches to supporting students with varied identities in a holistic fashion.

There remains a great deal of progress to be made in advancing the inclusivity of our campus environments for bisexual women. It is quite telling that when asked to envision bisexual community, students were at a loss – sitting silent and shocked. Resources and programming to support bisexual students should be a central part of a university's diversity efforts, rather than considered as an afterthought or, more often, not at all. Because bisexual students endure dual marginalization, they are in great need of support that affirms their nonmonosexual identities as valid, rather than as a threat to monosexuality or as a passing phase.

Currently, bisexual students must choose between their desire to be authentic and a desire to belong. No student should have to make this choice. Bisexual women spend years confused about and/or hiding their sexual identities and combating stigma within overwhelmingly mononormative environments. Student affairs administrators must recognize that current LGBT resources are insufficient to meet the needs of many queer students. The unique challenges faced by bisexual women, coupled with a palpable lack of community, results in disparities in both mental and physical health. In order to prevent these disparate outcomes, administrators must proactively address the needs of queer students, in particular those with nonbinary identities who struggle daily within binary and mononormative campus environments, via targeted and intersectional efforts that support communities of difference.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT MESSAGE

I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia. I am currently conducting a research project to explore nonmonosexual women's experiences at colleges across the U.S., and I would like to invite you to participate in my study. The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of nonmonosexual women's college experiences and to understand more about the factors that contribute to different on-campus experiences for this population. The goal is to provide information that will contribute to the creation of welcoming and supportive environments on-campus.

In order to participate, you must:
1. Be a current undergraduate or graduate student or within three years of leaving an undergraduate or graduate program, including graduating
2. Identify as a woman (cis or trans) or genderqueer
3. Identify as bisexual, pansexual, fluid, or as another nonmonosexual identity; and/or be sexually active with people of more than one gender (i.e., women, men, people who are genderqueer or otherwise gender nonconforming); and/or be attracted to people of more than one gender

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a series of two audio-taped interviews and a brief written reflection exercise related to your sexuality and perceptions of your college experiences.   Meetings will be held at a mutually agreed upon location or via Skype. A $25 gift card will be provided for participating in this study at the end of the second interview.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation in the study will remain confidential.

If you are interested in participating or have questions about the study, please contact me at jlowy@uga.edu. Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Jessica Lowy
Department of Counseling and Human Development Services
678-520-2557 – jlowy@uga.edu

Principal Investigator: Merrily Dunn, Ph.D.
706-542-3927 – merrily@uga.edu

APPENDIX B: SCREENING PROTOCOL

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. As my e-mail indicated, I am conducting research to fulfill the academic requirements of my program under the direction of Dr. Merrily Dunn in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services in the University of Georgia's College of Education.   This research study explores the nature of bisexual and other nonmonosexual women's on-campus experiences. The goal is to provide information that will contribute to the creation of welcoming and supportive environments on college campus.

I would like to ask you some question(s) to determine if you qualify for this study.   This should take less than 5 minutes of your time. Your involvement in this study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.   You may also stop this conversation at any time.

If you qualify for this study, you will be asked to you will be asked to participate in a series of two audio-taped interviews of approximately 60 minutes each related to your identity and perceptions of your college experiences. In between the two interviews, a brief reflection exercise will be sent to you and can be emailed back to the researcher or brought to the second interview. After the interviews, you will have an opportunity to review your interview transcripts, answer any follow-up questions that arrive throughout the research process, and review a draft copy of the research results.   Overall, I anticipate that you would spend between two and a half to three and a half hours of time in total assisting me with this research project.

The only people who will know that you are a research subject are myself and my dissertation director. No individually identifiable information about you, or provided by you during the research, will be shared with others, without my written permission unless required by law. You will be given the opportunity to create a pseudonym (alias), or will be assigned one, for the purposes of data collection and corresponding research reports. The pseudonym code will be maintained in a password protected electronic document in the researcher's computer files and will be destroyed within three years after the final report has been written.

As a result of participation, you may come to a greater sense of self-understanding or awareness through the reflective process inherent in interviewing.   Discoveries of this nature may be healing or painful.   The potential for revealing painful discoveries is expected to rarely, if ever, occur, and the degree of discomfort is expected to be minimal given the nature of the questions. Additionally, because of the nature of internet communication, confidentiality cannot be ensured when email or other modes of communication are used.   For this reason, you have the option of communicating in this study completely via Skype or face-to-face.   Any information received via internet communication will be stored on a password-protected computer only accessible by the researcher.

If you are eligible and agree to participate in this study, you will receive a $25 gift card for your involvement at the end of the second interview.

Do you have any questions at this point? You may ask any questions now or at any point during the course of the study. Do I now have your permission to proceed with the screening questions?

Screening Questions:
- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Do you attend a college in the U.S. as an undergraduate or graduate student or have you attended a program within the last three years?
- Do you identify as a woman (cis or trans) or genderqueer?
- Do you identify as bisexual, pansexual, fluid, or as another nonmonosexual identity; and/or (b) are you sexually active with people of more than one gender (i.e., women, men, people who are genderqueer or otherwise gender nonconforming); and/or (c) are you attracted to people of more than one gender?

Thank you for answering my question(s) today.   You [do/do not] qualify to participate in this research study.

[If qualified]

    You quality for the study, so I would like to ask you some more questions regarding participation requirements of this study:
- Would you be willing to participate in this study?
- Are you comfortable with having your interviews audio-recorded?
- Would you be willing, although not required, to review the transcripts of the interview and make clarifications at a later date?

Participant Information
Thank you.   I will be sending you a participant information form shortly to gather some demographic data as well as your preferred meeting times and locations.

Closing
Again, thank you so much for speaking with me today.   If you have any other questions regarding this study, please call me at 678-520-2557 or e-mail me at jlowy@uga.edu. You may also contact Dr. Merrily Dunn at 706-542-1812 or merrily@uga.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

Contact Information
Name: Phone:

Email Address: Pseudonym:

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of bisexual and other nonmonosexual college students' college experiences and to understand more about the factors that contribute to different on-campus experiences for this student population. The goal is to provide information that will contribute to the creation of welcoming and supportive environments on-campus.

Time Commitment
This study involves two phases, to be completed within 2-3 weeks. As a participant, you will engage in two audio-taped interviews, either face-to-face or via Skype, of approximately 60 minutes each related to your sexuality and perceptions of your college experiences. The interviews will be audio-recorded for later transcription. You will have the opportunity to review your interview transcripts for accuracy or clarification; however, you may waive the opportunity to do so. In between the two interviews, a brief reflection exercise will be sent to you and can be emailed back to the researcher or brought to the second interview. The total estimated duration of my participation in this study will range between two and a half to three and a half hours depending on length of interviews, transcript review, and time to respond to the reflection.

Sociodemographic Data
Age: Gender:

Sexuality: Race:

Religious Affiliation: (Anticipated) Graduation Date:

Degree Type (bachelor's, master's, doctoral, etc.):

(Anticipated) Major(s):

Where were you raised?

Significant other? (yes/no)

Availability

What dates and times are you available for the first interview?

If you are located within 75 miles of Atlanta, we will schedule an in-person interview at a location convenient to you. Please indicate your preferred meeting location (on campus, coffee shop, etc.):

If you are not located within 75 miles of Atlanta, we will schedule an interview via Skype.

Researcher Information
Jessica Lowy
Doctoral Candidate, The University of Georgia, College Student Affairs Administration Program
Phone: (678)520-2557   Email: jlowy@uga.edu

Dr. Merrily Dunn
Principal Investigator
Phone: 706-542-1812   Email: merrily@uga.edu

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

Hi. My name is Jessica Lowy and I am a doctoral candidate in the College Student Affairs Administration program at the University of Georgia. I am conducting a research project on the campus experiences of bisexual and other nonmonosexual women. I appreciate your participation, and I look forward to getting to know you better and to learning about your experiences.

The first thing I'd like us to do is for you to read and sign an Informed Consent form. This form will give you information about this study and asks you to sign indicating that you agree to participate. [Student reads and signs consent form.]

I look forward to discussing your thoughts about your experiences at [Institution Name]. Before we begin the interview, I want to reiterate that while I will be asking you questions, if at any time you have questions throughout the interview, please feel free to ask. At this point, do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Interview Questions

Interview 1: Focused life history and campus experiences

1. Thank you for completing the participant information form. Can you tell me why you selected this pseudonym? *(question to build rapport)*

2. I understand from your reflection that you identify your sexuality as [insert information here from submitted Essay One].
   a. How did you come to choose that identification?
   b. Have you ever identified your sexuality in a different way?
   c. When did you come to your current identification?

3. What does your sexual identity mean to you?
   a. Do you feel that you have embraced your identity? How so or how not?
   b. Is it important to you that other people can identify your bisexuality? Why or why not?

4. Talk to me about disclosing your sexual identity to others in your life.
   a. How did you decide to whom to disclose?
   b. What has been their reaction?
   c. How did you disclose your sexuality? (verbal or other methods)

5. Are you currently in a relationship? If so, tell me about it.

6. Tell me about your transition to [Institution Name].

7. What factors were important to you in your college choice?
   a. Did support for bisexual or LGBT students play a role in your decision?
   b. If you could choose again, would you choose your school? Why/why not?

8. Tell me more about your social life on campus.
   a. Describe your relationships with peers.
   b. Describe your relationships, if any, with other students on campus who identify as bisexual or sexually fluid. How did you seek out these students? What do these relationships look like? How would you describe their importance in your life?

9. Describe your relationships with faculty and/or staff on campus.

10. Describe your involvement in activities on campus outside the classroom.
    a. How did you come to be involved in these activities?
    b. Describe your involvement with bisexual-specific and/or LGBT related social and/or political organizations on campus.

11. Tell me about your experiences, if any, with the lesbian or gay community on campus.
    a. If you interact with the lesbian or gay community, do you do so as bisexual, lesbian, or another identity? What does that look like for you?

12. How have you managed your identity as bisexual on campus?
    a. Have you tried to find other bisexuals to relate to?
    b. Have you changed your social circles and interactions?

13. What major challenges have you faced, if any, related to your sexuality on campus?

14. Is there any additional information you would like to share at this time?

15. What is your availability for our next interview?

Interview 2: Bisexual community

1. Please walk me through your drawing of bisexual community.

2. What does bisexual community mean to you?

3. How would you describe your institution's bisexual community?

1. How has your sexuality impacted your college experiences?
   a. Is your sexuality something that is visible to others in the campus community?

2. In what ways, if any, has your current relationship status impacted your college experiences?

3. How have your experiences related to your sexuality at your institution impacted you?

4. What defines a supportive campus environment?
       a. If you could change your campus to be more supportive, what would that look like?

5. Of all of the things we've discussed across these interviews, what is the most important and why?

6. Is there any additional information you would like to share at this time?

Thank you again for your participation. Your willingness to share deeply with me today is greatly appreciated. It is my hope that through this study we may be able to better understand your experiences and the experiences of other bisexual women.

Please feel free to continue reflecting on today's questions. If you think of anything you'd like to share with me, there will be time when I reach out to you to ask that you review the transcript for any additions or changes you would like to make before I begin analyzing them. If you have any questions before I reach out to you again, please do not hesitate to email me or call me at 678-520-2557. Thanks again, and have a wonderful day.

APPENDIX E: DRAWING PROMPT

Please take a blank piece of paper. Draw a map of what your bisexual community is like and what it looks like to you. Then add the lesbian, gay, and heterosexual communities to the map. Finally, please indicate your location within the map with an X.

Feel free to think outside the box. I know that if you are not a visual thinker or graphically oriented, you may find this task difficult. Please try anyway, and do not worry about what 'kind' of map you are expected to draw. Different people draw very different kinds of maps, and the point is to draw your own unique kind of map that reflects the way you see things.

If you don't feel that there is a bisexual community, please read this question as if it refers to the network of bisexual people and organizations that you know about, even if you don't consider this network a 'community.'

Once your drawing is complete, please take a photo of it and email it to Jessica Lowy at jlowy@uga.edu.

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
BISEXUAL WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Researcher's Statement
I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Jessica Lowy
PhD Candidate, Counseling and Human Development Services
Telephone: (678) 520-2557, Email: jlowy@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of bisexual and other nonmonosexual college students' college experiences at and to understand more about the factors that contribute to different on-campus experiences for this student population. The goal is to provide information that will contribute to the creation of welcoming and supportive environments on-campus. You are being asked to participate because you are a current graduate or undergraduate student or within three years of enrollment in an undergraduate or graduate program, identify as a woman (cis or trans) or genderqueer, and identify as bisexual, pansexual, fluid, or as another nonmonosexual identity; and/or are sexually active with people of more than one gender (i.e., women, men, people who are genderqueer or otherwise gender nonconforming); and/or are attracted to people of more than one gender.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a series of two audio-taped interviews, either face-to-face or via Skype, of approximately 60 minutes each related to your sexuality and perceptions of your college experiences. In between the two interviews, a brief reflection exercise will be sent to you and can be emailed back to the researcher or brought to the second interview. Each interview will be audio-recorded for later transcription. You will have the opportunity to review your interview transcripts for accuracy or clarification; however, you may waive the opportunity to do so. The total estimated duration of my participation in this study will range between two and a half to three and a half hours depending on length of interviews, transcript review, and time to respond to the reflection exercise.

Risks and discomforts

As a result of participation, you may come to a greater sense of self-understanding or awareness through the reflective process inherent in interviewing. Discoveries of this nature may be healing or painful. The potential for revealing painful discoveries is expected to rarely, if ever, occur, and the degree of discomfort is expected to be minimal given the nature of the questions. In the event that you experience heightened emotions that may need to be further discussed with a professional, you will be directed to your campus counseling center.

Benefits

You will not benefit directly from this research outside of the opportunity to reflect on the research topic and receive a gift card as an incentive. The findings of this research may lead to educators having a greater awareness and understanding of the campus experiences of nonmonosexual women. It is the aim of this research to gain a greater understanding of student experiences in order to enhance college environments for nonmonosexual women in the future.

Incentives for participation

You will receive one $25 gift card for participating in this study at the end of the second interview.

Audio/Video Recording

Interviews will be audio-recorded for later transcription and analysis. Transcripts will be kept for a period of three years beyond the completion of the final research report. You will be given the opportunity to create a pseudonym (alias), or will be assigned one, for the purposes of data collection and corresponding research reports.

Privacy/Confidentiality

The only people who will know that you are a research subject are members of the research team. No individually identifiable information about you, or provided by you during the research, will be shared with others, without my written permission unless required by law. You will be given the opportunity to create a pseudonym (alias), or will be assigned one, for the purposes of data collection and corresponding research reports. The pseudonym code will be maintained in a password protected electronic document in the researcher's computer files and will be destroyed within three years after the final report has been written.

Because of the nature of Internet communication, confidentiality cannot be ensured when email or other modes of communication are used. For this reason, you have the option to communicate in this study completely through phone, Skype, or face-to-face. Any information received via Internet communication or other forms of collected data will be stored on a password-protected computer or a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Jessica Lowy, a graduate student at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Jessica at jlowy@uga.edu or (678)520-2557. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.