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Title: Constituting the Invisible: An Examination of the Social Construction and Communication of Female Bisexual Identity

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Bisexual females experience unique forms of discrimination, but are often overlooked in scholarship. Recent research focuses on various aspects of bisexuality, yet female bisexuality is largely overlooked. Many existing studies focus on the experiences of bisexuals, rather than on social constructions of the identity and the role communication plays in identity development. This study bridges these gaps in scholarship by examining various ways the female bisexual identity is socially constructed and communicated. Interviews were conducted with 11 bisexually-identifying females; by applying the communication theory of identity to interview responses, various themes of experiences are identified. Both thematic and theoretical analyses are conducted to provide insight to the ways female bisexuality is socially constructed and communicated. Study results suggest that the impact rhetoric and language have on this particular identity construction are influential in the way it is understood on a social level. When female bisexuals are overlooked, spoken for, and ignored, the result is an erasure of the identity; this study also addresses the consequences of this.

Constituting the Invisible: An Examination of the Social Construction and Communication of Female

Bisexual Identity

by

April L. Whitney

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April L. Whitney, Author

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents (continued)

Chapter I: Introduction

There has been recent academic research conducted with a focus on bisexuality as both a social construct and recognizable identity. However, little research has been conducted with a focus on female bisexuals, specifically. Such oversight in academic recognition should not occur, and research that focuses explicitly on bisexually-identifying females is necessary to bring their marginalized voices to the center of the discussion. Moreover, few studies exist that aim to examine bisexuality from a communication perspective. The communication of bisexuality between bisexual females and other members in Western society has specific challenges over communication between heterosexuals and homosexuals, or bisexually-identifying males or transgender individuals. A specific focus on the communication of a female bisexual identity and the challenges and consequences it has deserves scholarly attention. As a result, the focus of this study is to interview females who identify as bisexual in attempts to explore how they describe their identity, how they communicate it, how they sense others' perceptions of their identity, and how others' perceptions influence their own avowal of this identity.

I identify as a bisexual female, an identity that played a significant role in the development of this study. I self-identified as heterosexual, until two years ago when I met and fell in love with the woman I am now engaged to. This revelation in my sexual orientation caused me to self-reflect about the way I conceptualize bisexuality. While difficult to define, my own definition of bisexuality is that it is a sexual orientation that is not restricted to dualistic categories of sexuality and includes the romantic, emotional, or sexual desire, attraction, or interest in members from either side of the gender binary. This desire for self-reflection assisted in the development of this research and led me to question how and where individuals in Western culture receive messages about female bisexual identity. Further, I am committed to explore

issues of social justice and the way female bisexuals experience oppression[1] and marginalization on a different level than male bisexuals.

Human sexuality is conceptualized in Western Culture as a fixed, non-fluid, and dichotomous identity, which plays a profound role in the way bisexuality is both conceptualized and communicated. Heterosexuality is assumed, portrayed, and communicated as inherent and natural. This "truth" results in the homosexual subject being the assumed unnatural opposite of the heterosexual. Since societal beliefs maintain that sexuality is dualistic, sexual orientation is reduced to a simplified false dichotomy; an individual can only identify as either heterosexual or homosexual (Denney et al., 2012; Carr, 2011; Comeau, 2012; Dodge et al., 2013; Scherrer, 2013). A dualistic categorization of human sexuality is inadequate and forces humans into prescribed, socially constructed categories of identity. The creation of this false dichotomy of sexuality is problematic when the group of people under the research microscope is not recognized as a "real" sexual orientation, such as bisexuals (Thomas & Yost, 2012).

A dichotomous definition of sexuality cultivates heterosexist and monosexist beliefs that bisexuality does not exist (Denneny et al., 2012). This powerful belief in dualistic thinking and categorization of human sexuality constructions result in the oppression and silencing of bisexuals, who are unable to be viewed by society as a "true" sexual identity. Further, when bisexuality is assumed to be nonexistent, bisexuals tend to internalize feelings of biphobia (Sarno & Wright, 2013). However, such internalizations of biphobia do not have to occur. Heterosexuality and heteronormativity are neither inherent nor innate, but rather socially and historically constructed, situated, and normalized to the point of being culturally accepted as

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[1] For the purposes of this research, oppression is considered the state of being subjected to control or other unjust treatment as a result of an individual's sexual identification.

Truth (Brickell, 2005; Drazenovich, 2012; Foucault, 1979). As such, it is crucial to conduct research on female bisexuals; since they are unable to identify with one side of the binary or the other, it is important to investigate the complex ways in which they experience and communicate their bisexuality.

As mentioned previously, there is a large body of academic works that focus on people who identify as bisexual. Specific study focuses include issues with definition, including what it means to be bisexual as well as who is permitted to claim a bisexual identity (Comeau, 2012; Dodge et al., 2013; Herbenick & Schick, 2012; Scherer, 2013). Attempted definitions vary greatly from one another and communicate flaws in current and normalized ways of understanding human gender and sexuality. For example, Comeau (2012) defines bisexuality as "The transition phase during which a person drifts between heterosexual and same-sex orientation" (p. 321), while Scherer (2013) asserts that some definitions of bisexuality are based on sexual behavior while others are based on underlying feelings of desire or attraction. Some scholars claim that behavior and desire versus variables of willingness to participate in same-sex sexual activity convolute the definition, making it difficult to concretely define what bisexuality is (Herbenick & Schick, 2012).

Other studies have focused specifically on bisexual males (Dodge et al., 2013), or the wide array of health issues that bisexuals face, such as depression, eating disorders, and anxiety (Brewster et al., 2014; Chmielewski & Yost, 2012). Additionally, some studies explore harmful and normalized myths that circulate about bisexuality and the role of rhetoric and language, often rendering this identity invisible (Callis, 2013; Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Erikson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009).

Language and rhetoric are inherently interwoven in discussions about sexual orientation. Common conceptualizations of female bisexuality are normalized to the point of being accepted truths and can have harmful consequences for women who identify in this way. Some of the most common myths stem from ideologies that female bisexuals are more promiscuous than their monosexual counterparts and that they are incapable of monogamy, both of which are due to their attraction to more than one gender. Female bisexuals are also often accused of attention-seeking and experimentation, or that their bisexual identity is "just a phase", myths that stem from the normalized belief in dualistic categorizations of sexuality. Also related to this is the belief that, once married, a bisexual woman is actually heterosexual or homosexual, depending on the perceived gender of her partner. These myths function to circulate and reify notions that bisexuality has less credibility than other sexualities because language that implies promiscuity, indecision, and confusion reifies common conceptualizations and misunderstandings of a bisexual identity, which occur at both the societal and individual level (Scherrer, 2013). When normalized assumptions about bisexuality circulate, they function to reify the idea that it is an invalid sexual identity, rendering it socially invisible.

Identity is a complex and ever-changing construct. Bisexual identity construction is too complex and multifaceted to be analyzed through the use of a single-dimension framework. It is not a social construct that is formed individually, without influences from other facets of life. An overt example of this is that binaries of sexuality are directly connected to binaries of gender (Brooks, 2012; Chmielewski & Yost, 2013; Coates, 2013; McCarthy & Yost, 2011). According to Butler (1990), a key part of gender performance is performing heterosexuality. This is due to the social expectation that individuals will perform their appropriate gender and the default sexuality that accompanies it (Chmielewski & Yost, 2013). Gender and sexuality alike are both

conceptualized dualistically. Dualistic categorizations of each have been normalized to the point that any other categorization is nearly impossible for many to imagine and, because of this, it is oftentimes difficult for individuals who identify as either hetero- or homosexual to separate sexual identification from gender performance.

Since the study of sexuality requires the participation of human subjects, a qualitative approach was used for this research. This study examines the ways female bisexuals explain their avowed sexual identity and how they feel this identity is perceived or ascribed by others. The use of the four frames of identity from CTI are instrumental in highlighting the subtle ways avowal and ascription are negotiated through communication. Qualitative researchers are focused on how humans arrange both themselves and their surroundings to make sense of their reality through the use of symbols, social roles and structures (Berg, 2009). Moreover, qualitative approaches are concerned with the social construction of meanings, concepts, and definitions of subjective subjects (Cooper & White, 2011; Goodman, 2011). This research reflects this focus by examining the way female bisexuality has been socially constructed, conceptualized, and defined. Another goal of qualitative research is to explore messages that circulate about the other; since the female bisexual identity is on the margins of the discussion, and are viewed as others, a qualitative approach is appropriate to achieve the purposes of this research.

This research is grounded in CTI (Hecht et al., 2005), an interpretive theory that reimagines the role of communication in relation to identity. CTI posits that identity resides in four different frames of life: personal, relational, communal, and enactment. Each frame represents different aspects of a person's sense of self and operates both alongside, and in opposition to, one another. This theory is covered thoroughly in the second chapter of this thesis.

CTI provides the framework to ground this study as its qualitative nature and focus on communication as identity are beneficial in answering the following research questions:

RQ1: How do female bisexuals express or explain how bisexuality is communicated and perceived?

RQ2: What roles do the four frames of the Communication Theory of Identity play in the social construction and communication of bisexuality?

Since current studies have not solely focused on female bisexuals, this study aims to address this overlooked population through the use of qualitative research and by utilizing CTI to explore female bisexuality with the hopes of bridging this gap in academia.

Chapter II: Review of Relevant Literature

In recent years, the body of academic research focusing on human sexuality has experienced an increase in attention. While this may be viewed as progress, such research tends to focus heavily on the lived experiences of homosexuals in relation to heterosexuals. This has resulted in a specific identity group being overlooked and dismissed by scholars: the bisexual community. While there are studies that do focus on bisexuality, few specifically address the construction and communication of female bisexuality. The following serves to illustrate that bisexuality is a product of social identity constructions and merits an increase in academic attention on the grounds that it is the result of historical productions of Truth[2] that are oppressive to those who identify as bisexual.

In order to support this claim, several aspects concerning the historical and social constructions of human sexuality, various epistemologies (ways of knowing) of sexuality, the way(s) bisexuality is conceptualized and communicated, and the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) will be critically explored to lay the framework for this study.

The Search for Multiple Truths: The Shift from Modernity to Postmodernity

The following section explores how the historical shift from modernity to postmodernity has resulted in an increased need in academic research of bisexuals as well as how the shift from single truths to multiple truths has affected the way human sexuality is conceptualized. Specifically, the influence and goals of postmodernism, the concept of multiple truths, and an exploration of knowledge production are asserted in the following section to defend the claim

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[2] "Truth" indicates a strong universal belief, such in the dualistic way of categorizing human sexuality. This differs from "truth" in relation to the universality of it; "truths" are more individually-based.

that current common perceptions of bisexual identity are the result of historical and social knowledge production.

Over the past few decades, Western culture has witnessed the emergence of postmodernity, following the era of modernism (Mann, 2012). It is from the influences of modernism that the search for alternative truths of postmodernism was birthed. Prior to postmodernism, the categorization of human gender and sexuality was dualistic and oversimplified; such constructs of identity are not reflective of human identity development. Following and building on modernity, postmodernism rejects universal totalizing theories, or master narratives (Mann, 2012). This is because such totalizing theories had "…become so rigid and reified over time that they were incapable of dealing with the dramatic changes in social life…." (Mann, 2012, p. 213). As a result of the criticism master narratives have received, views of single realities have been questioned by the notion of multiple realities and truths (Mann, 2012). In the era of postmodernism, the deconstruction of cultural master truths, including cultural truths of human sexuality, is essential for an expanded understanding of life, identity, and culture.

It is due largely to the contributions of postmodernists that the Truth of sexuality is disputed. Trimble (2009) illustrates the importance of the search for multiple truths throughout her study of the socially constructed nature of human sexuality, specifically the development of various sexualities. She discusses the way that different cultures (conservative, liberal, hegemonic, non-conforming) have affected our abilities to create opportunities and room for acceptance (Trimble, 2009). Trimble (2009) claims that "The culture wars have translated into a watering down of the opportunities to wonder, to play with ambiguity, and have lessened our ability to work through the spaces between sexual knowing and not knowing, both individually

and collectively" (p. 56). This "watering down" of our opportunities in Western culture is a result of centuries of knowledge production and truth telling, and is combated by the search for multiple truths.

Master Narratives of Human Sexuality

Master narratives of sexuality function to provide a universal theory about sexuality identity development in Western culture; bisexuality is made both visible and invisible through these master narratives. It is essential to deconstruct such influential narratives in order to illustrate how they function to oppress and silence bisexuals.

There are two distinct master narratives that contribute to the development of bisexuality: dualistic categorizations of sexuality identity and heteronormativity. First, human sexuality is conceptualized in dualistic terms. Since this is the case, and heterosexuality is the assumed norm, homosexuality is inherently placed as it's opposite. Since bisexual identities cross the dualistic line between hetero- and homosexuality, it is often rejected as a valid identity. This rejection is a direct result of dualistic categorizations of sexuality, illustrating that such categorizations are inadequate in encompassing human sexuality. The belief that bisexuality is nonexistent can lead to bisexuals internalizing negative beliefs about their own identity, resulting in identity confusion. A study conducted by Sarno and Wright (2013) concluded that a lack of recognition that bisexuality is a real sexual identity results in negative depictions of self by bisexuals, resulting in negative internal identity confusion.

It is due to the oversimplification of sexual identity that terms such as biphobia and binegativity, which mean "a set of prejudiced attitudes about individuals with a bisexual orientation" (Thomas & Yost, 292, p. 692) have been coined. Chmielewski & Yost (2013) maintain that biphobia is a "daily reality" (p. 226) for bisexual individuals. Sarno and Wright

(2013) found that 94% of the heterosexuals and 100% of homosexuals interviewed for the study reported mild to moderate biphobia from others. Moreover, many bisexuals experience internalized biphobia in additional to biphobia from others. These negative things should be unnecessary but they will unfortunately continue unless perceptions of sexuality change.

The binary of heterosexual/homosexual is not the only master narrative at work in the assumed Truth of sexuality in Western culture. Heteronormativity is a term that was coined by Michael Warner in 1991, who defines it as: "the belief that sexuality is organized and regulated in accordance with certain societal beliefs about what is normal, natural, and desirable" (Coates, 2013, p. 537). This phenomena is grounded in societal beliefs revolving around normality and naturalness; this is evidence that sexuality is a narrative, one that has become so powerful that it operates as a master narrative of Truth.

Since postmodernists are concerned with exposing multiple truths by debunking master narratives and other Truths (Mann, 2012), several scholars disagree with the cultural Truth of the heterosexual/homosexual binary. Brickell (2005), Drazenovich (2012), and Foucault (1979) each maintain that the homosexual subject is a result of social and historical processes. Drazenovich (2012) maintains that in the year 1864, the initial theory of sexuality emerged; this theory claimed that homosexuality is inherently due to nature, and is not the product of a social fiction. Additionally, Foucault (1979) maintains that the construction of the heterosexual subject began when sex became salient as a fully developed science in the beginning of the 19th century.

By complicating the naturalness of heterosexuality, and calling into question the Truth behind such a master narrative, multiple truths are able to be uncovered and the historicization of heterosexuality can be revealed. It is vital that such master narratives and Truth claims are historicized in order to demonstrate how they have become normalized.

Epistemologies of Sexuality: How We Know What We Know

Combatting master narratives and claims of Truth by searching for multiple truths is a difficult yet required task when the goal is to uncover the ways that human sexuality has been historically constituted and constructed. An exploration of the way that members from Western cultures gain their knowledge constructions of sexuality is valid and relevant for an understanding of truth and knowledge production and reification. The section that follows explores various epistemologies that are specific to the production and reification of sexuality Truth claims in Western culture. The purpose of analyzing how citizens of the West learn about sexuality is to provide a foundation for the emergence of multiple truths of sexuality.

Epistemology is a study that is concerned with questions regarding who can be a producer of knowledge, the ways that knowledge is produced, and what constitutes privileged knowledge (Mann, 2012). Questions that often surround and inform epistemological inquiries function to illustrate what knowledge productions are as well as the purposes they serve. Within the epistemology of sexuality, many theories have been developed and critiqued. Some of the more prominent of these theories/approaches include the theory of the confession as asserted by Michel Foucault (1979), the role of rhetoric and language, and the concept of normalizing discourses[3] (Drazenovich, 2012, Foucault, 1979; Mann 2012), including performative practices as introduced by Judith Butler (1990).

Historical and current productions of knowledge contribute to the production of truth on a societal level. It is due to this that many epistemological studies are conducted with human sexuality as the focus (Ashcraft, 2012; Atkinson & DePalma, 2012; Brickell, 2005; Drazenovich,

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[3] Normalizing discourse is considered to be the arrangement of ideas and concepts through cultural, political, and social channels that construct meaning to human experience and culture (Drazenovich, 2012).

2012; Foucault, 1979; Trimble, 2009). One goal of studying epistemology is to uncover various false narratives and truths that have been communicated in Western culture that result in the marginalization, oppression, and othering of individuals (Foucault, 1979; Trimble, 2009). Bisexuals experience heightened levels of each due to false narratives of sexuality.

Michel Foucault is known for focusing on questions of the ways that the self has been constituted (Drazenovich, 2005). The concept of the *Confessional* is one way that knowledge of the self is produced. According to Foucault, the confession has become one of the most valued techniques of truth telling and knowledge production in Western culture. The production of truth of sexuality via the confessional has been developed over centuries by individuals confessing to their sexual behaviors and desires (Foucault, 1979). Over time, such confessional narratives became viewed as absolute truths, resulting in the confessional being an integrated and unquestioned mode of truth production in many facets of Western life.

The confessional continues to be a major form of truth production in Western culture, due to the way language is used to both communicate and reify sexual acts and identities that have become recognized as the "norm" of Western culture. Language has a powerful influence over knowledge production and sustainability. Coates (2013) maintains that language can and does have a drastic influence on conceptualizations of sexual identities. The rhetoric that surrounds the lesbian, bisexual, and gay (LBG) communities is a powerful and unavoidable factor that affects both the research being conducted and the social experiences of LBG members. Scherrer (2013) maintains that the rhetoric surrounding biphobia greatly and negatively affects identity development, sexual relationships and sexual health.

For example, female bisexuality, specifically, is often described as a changeable and temporary identity (McCarthy & Yost, 2012; Thomas & Yost, 2012). Further, female bisexuals

are often described as being promiscuous and incapable of monogamy (Chmielewski & Yost, 2013; Scherrer, 2013). Another common claim to female bisexuality is that those who identify as bisexual are confused about their "true" sexuality and are merely in a transition phrase until they decide what their "true" sexual orientation is (Chmielewski & Yost, 2013).

Callis (2013) found evidence of this in her study that examined the role of talk and rhetoric in Lexington, Kentucky. She found that both national and local discourses play a vital role in the constructions of participant sexuality. The study concluded with the claim that language, in relation to sexual identity constructions, reflects heteronormative order and is involved in the reproduction of that order (Callis, 2013). Essentially, this means that language functions to reify heteronormativity by the way it is used and applied to constructions of human sexuality. It is due to this that language and rhetoric function as normalizing discourses of sexuality, contributing to the increased marginalization of female bisexuals.

Discourses that serve to normalize are constantly reconstructed and are only able to be sustained through beliefs (Atkinson & DePalma, 2009), such as heteronormativity and dualistic categorization of human gender and sexuality. Other normalizing discourses, such as the belief in the heterosexual matrix and performative practices (Butler, 1990), assist in the production and reification of knowledge in Western culture (Drazenovich, 2012; Mann, 2012). According to Butler (1990), gender is nothing more than a performance. While Butler (1990) relates performativity and gender, specifically, sexuality is also performed and normalized by performances of gender. It is well recognized that sexuality binaries are directly related to gender binaries (Brooks, 2012; Chmielewski & Yost, 2013; Coates, 2013; McCarthy & Yost, 2011), which indicates that sexuality cannot be examined with the absence of gender norms, since the inherent social expectation is that individuals will

perform their gender primarily through heterosexuality. Chmielewski and Yost (2013) illustrate this concept in their study of body image issues among bisexual females. The authors maintain that participants in their study struggled both with their gender and sexuality performances, as well as finding their place within dominant gender and sexuality categories (Chmielewski & Yost, 2013). Gender constructions and performances serve as normalizing discourses because when individuals perform their gender "correctly" by identifying as heterosexual, heteronormativity is supported and reified (Chmielewski & Yost, 2013).

Butler (1990) offers an additional epistemology of sexuality, which she refers to as the heterosexual matrix. This matrix normalizes the assumed relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality (Atkinson & DePalma, 2009; Butler, 1990). This is so powerful that it has contributed to the normalization of heteronormativity, which is attained because the heterosexual matrix is "sustained by belief" (Atkinson & DePalma, 2009, p. 17). Atkinson and DePalma (2009) claim that the matrix of heterosexuality continues to be used widely as "a tool for framing theoretical understandings of the social world" (p.18). This matrix is also recognized as heterosexual hegemony, which requires complicity through consent in order for it to be constantly reified (Atkinson & DePalma, 2009). This notion of continual construction is reflective of the concept of normalizing discourse.

The confession, function of language and rhetoric, performative practices, and the heterosexual matrix each serve as powerful epistemologies of sexuality in Western culture. Each component contributes to the construction of bisexuality, and fosters an environment for increased oppression and marginalization of bisexuals.

Recent Research on Bisexuality

Even though bisexuality is misunderstood and possibly assumed to be nonexistent, there is no shortage of research focusing it. Research that addresses bisexuality ranges in purpose and findings. It is not uncommon that study results conflict with one another, which could be attributed to a lack of concrete understanding of what bisexuality is and how is it formed. The following section synthesizes recent research on bisexuality. The following themes were prevalent throughout the research: 1) normalizing discourses and communication that contribute to both the construction and reification of bisexuality 2) consequences that result from normalized discourses and false assumptions, and 3) scholarly efforts to complicate normalizing discourses. These three themes appear to function as overarching themes that are present in much of the research on bisexuality.

Normalizing Discourses, Social Construction, and Reification

Several studies have attempted to define bisexuality, with little success. Some scholars maintain that bisexuality is a transitional phase between a hetero- or homosexual identity (Comeau, 2012). Others are more concerned with what constitutes bisexuality and focus on highlighting issues with current definitions. Alarie and Gaudet (2013) conducted a study that identified four mechanisms that to invisibilize bisexuality. These mechanisms included: ignoring or overlooking bisexuality, depictions of bisexuality as a phase or temporary, dualistic categorizations that make bisexuality 'unreal', and claims that devalue bisexuality.

Herbenick and Schick (2012) reinforce these complications with defining bisexuality by discussing how the lines are often blurred when it comes to who can claim bisexuality as a sexual orientation. It is clear that bisexuality is a resistance to dualistic categorizations of gender and sexuality; however, definitions that have been asserted vary in relation to who can claim to

be bisexual, what bisexuality means, and which aspects of the human experience (thoughts, desires, sexual attraction) even constitute bisexuality.

A lack of clear definition is only a single form of normalizing discourse that contributes to the social construction of bisexuality. Another powerful contributor is the presence of false, and often damaging, myths that surround the identity and are assumed to be Truth. These myths include: the ideology that bisexuals are indecisive and incapable of monogamy, that they are promiscuous and confused, that they are attention-seekers, and that all bisexuals are actually closeted homo- or heterosexuals (Callis, 2013; Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Erikson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009). Callis (2013) asserted three common assumptions of bisexuals in her study; this includes bisexuality as illegitimate, dangerous, and limiting. Further, Sarno and Wright (2013) identify three additional themes of bisexuality in their study: bisexuality as a transitory state, indicating that the attraction to both sexes is temporary; bisexuality is a transitionary phase, meaning that the individual is merely making the transition from heterosexual to homosexual or vise-versa; and that bisexuality denies the "true" homosexual orientation. These myths, in combination with a lack of clear definition are both false and harmful to the bisexual community.

Consequences of Normalization

With rhetoric constantly surrounding a bisexual identity, the result is that individuals who identify as bisexual are often stigmatized (Callis, 2013; Carr, 2011; Barker & Evans, 2010; Chmielewski & Yost, 2013, Sarno & Wright, 2013). This stigmatization functions through the presence of the discussed discourses and assumptions that revolve around bisexuality. Negative depictions of self and the internalization of biphobia are both possible consequences. Sarno and Wright (2013) assert that bisexuals internalize feelings of self-doubt and hatred, due to

contributing factors such as homonegative microaggressions[4], and are a factor of the additional stigma that bisexuals face, from both themselves and others. Sarno and Wright (2013) examined the ways that these microaggressions affect bisexual men and women. They found that it is common for bisexuals to internalize the homonegative microaggressions and begin to self-doubt and hate, resulting in lower self-esteem and positive self-image.

Additionally, Callis (2013) conducted a study that focused on both the conceptualizations and consequences of bisexuality in Lexington, Kentucky by referencing commonly held assumptions about bisexuality. The purpose of the study was to understand how the sexual binary shifts with increased visibility of bisexuals, as well as how national and local discourses affect identity development of bisexuals. She found that when bisexuality is more visible, the binary becomes more fixed and rigid; bisexual visibility functions to reify dualistic categorizations of human sexuality (Callis, 2013).

There is also a significant body of work that focuses on the health interests and risks of bisexuals, specifically. It comes as no surprise that bisexuals experience heightened levels of marginalization and oppression than their heterosexual and homosexual counterparts; however the consequences of such oppression have the possibility to result in violence and negative health effects. While the concern with HIV/AIDS is predominant in this area of research (Emlet et al, 2013; Halkitis et al., 2013; Morgan et al., 2013), other risks and consequences have received scholarly attention.

Dank et al. (2013) and Gilmore et al. (2014) conducted studies with the focus of dating violence and sexual assault of bisexuals. The research conducted by Dank et al. (2014) was

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[4] Homonegative microaggressions are defined by Sarno and Wright (2013) as "small verbal, behavioral, or environmental slights, intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile or derogatory messages toward sexual minorities" (p. 63).

focused on illuminating the experiences of sexual, physical, psychological, and cyber bullying of gay and bisexual youth, compared to the experiences of heterosexual youth. Not surprisingly, gay and bisexual youth reported significantly higher rates of bullying. Gilmore et al. (2014) researched the effects of drinking behavior in relation to sexual assaults of bisexual women. Similarly, Hillard et al. (2014) examined the perceptions of harassment and bullying in school environments of LGB youth. The study concluded with a call for the continuation of creating safer environments in schools for LGB youth.

In addition to violence, harassment, and assault, there is research on the psychological harms being experienced by bisexuals. The research by both Brewster et al. (2013) and Chmielewski and Yost (2013) focus on psychological consequences of heightened stigmatization of bisexuals. Brewster et al. (2014) ground their study in response to the way that the media oftentimes represents bisexual women; bisexual females are illustrated to be hypersexual objects of the male gaze. With this reality, Brewster et al. (2014) conducted a study that examined how eating disorders develop in bisexual women. They study found a strong link between eating disorder development in bisexual females and the internalization of sociocultural standards, body surveillance and body shaming. On a similar note, the study by Chmielewski and Yost (2013) focused on the psychological influences on body image and acceptance of bisexual females. Their analysis resulted in four themes that included: the desire of bisexual women to accept their bodies regardless of societal objectification; the influence of dualistic categorizations that result in bisexual females feeling invisible; the role of LBGT community members; and both positive and negative influences romantic relationships have.

The consequences of the continued circulation of false myths and normalizing discourses that surround bisexuality are vast and reveal themselves in a variety of ills, whether physical,

emotional, or psychological. Fortunately, these dangerous consequences are not entirely unrecognized. There is a significant body of literature with a focus on awareness and complicating normalizing factors of bisexuality.

Efforts Questioning Normalization

The third prevalent theme throughout research on bisexuality is scholarly efforts to debunk powerful normalizing discourses that surround the identity. For example, Sarno and Wright (2013) developed their study in order to explain some of the inconsistencies in bisexual experiences. Through their study, several themes of bisexuality were reiterated: issues with self-disclosure, experiences with biphobia, the struggle against the notion that bisexuality is an illegitimate sexual orientation, and consequences of dualistic categorization. While these themes are not unfamiliar, Sarno and Wright (2013) utilized them to illustrate how bisexuals experience and internalize homonegative microaggressions differently from hetero- and homosexuals. The found that experience with homonegative microaggressions were experienced by bisexual participants from both sides of the binary. This "double discrimination" is unique to bisexuals and results in identity confusion (Sarno & Wright, 2013).

Further, Flanders and Hatfield's (2013) study focused on perceptions of masculinity and femininity, and their relationship with perceived sexuality, and a study by Esterline and Galupo (2013) functioned to critically explore the experiences of LGB individuals in relation to their gender and sexuality performances; each study focused on the role of performativity and dualistic categorizations of gender and sexuality.

Many scholars reject the notion that bisexuality does not exist since it is unable to be categorized dualistically. Studies by Hartman (2013) and Erikson-Schroth & Mitchell (2009) each approach bisexuality as a valid, visible, sexual identity that is worthy of social recognition

and acceptance. Specifically, Hartman (2013) was interested in exploring the ways that bisexuals make themselves visible. The study concluded that bisexuals make themselves visible through a variety of tactics; the use of gender displays and other types of verbal and visual cues were explored. Bisexuals make themselves visible through the use of visual displays, such as the way they walk, or how they wear their hair; clothing choices are also a method for visibility.

The study conducted by Erikson-Schroth and Mitchell (2009) addressed the assumption that bisexuality does not matter by positing that bisexuality confuses and blurs the gender/sexuality binaries in a way that allows for the emergence of other gender and sexuality non-specific identifying individuals. Erikson-Schroth and Mitchell (2009) concluded that bisexuality matters because it complicates the Truth of dualistic categorization of human gender and sexuality.

Studies that focus on deconstructing normalized ideologies regarding human sexuality are a necessity to shed light on the inadequate way human sexuality is categorized. The studies referenced above reflect important and vital work that is currently being conducted in the name if social justice from a sexuality viewpoint.

Female Bisexuals: A Distinct Identity for Research

It is clear that bisexuality has received significant scholarly attention in past years; however, female bisexuals, in particular, merit additional attention in research. While bisexuals have a unique voice in society (Carr, 2011; Chmielewski & Yost, 2013), specific attention must be paid to bisexually identifying females. First, female bisexuals experience unique forms of oppression, marginalization, and stigma from their male or monosexual counterparts. Second, there has been significantly less research conducted with a focus on the construction and communication of female bisexuality, and the consequences of such. According to Chmielewski

& Yost (2013), bisexuals are virtually ignored in research and there is even less research conducted in relation to the effects of communication on bisexual female identity. The following section provides a rationalization for additional research in this area of scholarship, with specific focuses on: a) two prominent myths about female bisexuality that contribute to heightened levels of experiences of oppression, and b) the communication and consequences of negative rhetoric that surrounds female bisexuality.

Harmful Myths

First, there are normalized myths associated solely to female bisexuals. One specific myth is that they are all sexually promiscuous, which is reified by rhetoric that describes bisexual females as "hot bi babes" (Chmielewski & Yost, 2013, p. 234), leading to the objectification of bisexual women by heterosexual men. This objectification from the lens of heterosexual males then operates to reify the myth that female bisexuals are sexually promiscuous. It is not uncommon for heterosexual men to assume a bisexual female's interest in threesomes and that female bisexuals experiment sexually (Chmielewski & Yost, 2013). These misconceptions further reify other false assumptions that are already associated with female bisexuality.

A second problematic myth that circulates is that female bisexuality is a form of attention-seeking. Female bisexuals are often assumed as simply "wanting attention" (Thomas & Yost, 2012; McCarthy & Yost, 2012); this belief in attention-seeking is prevalent and difficult to combat. A study conducted by McCarthy and Yost (2012) explored the recent popular phenomenon of self-identified heterosexual females kissing other self-identified heterosexual females in the environment of college parties. One question posed in the study is whether or not this new phenomenon is considered to be bisexual in nature. McCarthy and Yost (2012) found that 33% of heterosexual females have participated in kissing other heterosexual females.

Through interviews, it was discovered that the participants were driven by a variety of motivations; these motivations included social aspects such as pressure to engage, high levels of alcohol consumption and the heterosexist belief that college is the prime environment for sexual experimentation (McCarthy & Yost, 2012). Further, it was determined that each female had her own motivations; common themes included the desire for male attention, fun, being drunk, shock value, and as an instrument to achieve what they wanted (McCarthy & Yost, 2012).

When heterosexual women engage in same-sex acts with women, but only do so to perform their female gender under the male gaze, it discredits the reality of bisexual women and their experiences with same-sex relations. This phenomena affects the way that female bisexuals are viewed in society. When common beliefs echo the notion that female bisexuals are actually just attention-seeking heterosexuals, the consequence is an erasure of a bisexual identity.

Communication and Consequences of Harmful Rhetoric

In addition to commonly believed myths, harmful rhetoric that often surrounds female bisexuality results in an environment that makes female bisexuals more vulnerable to internalizing various ideas about their own sexual preference than other groups (Scherrer, 2013; Chmielewski & Yost, 2013). As discussed previously, bisexuals are more likely to internalize negative thoughts and feelings about themselves, oftentimes resulting in internalized biphobia. Female bisexuals are particularly vulnerable to internalizing negative feelings and perceptions of self. This stems from the reality that female bisexuals experience oppression and false assumptions from both sides of the binary.

Chmielewski and Yost (2013) found that female bisexuals experience binegativity from both heterosexual men and lesbian women, which is a type of negativity that neither heterosexual nor homosexual females experience. When female bisexuals are grouped by others with lesbians

on the homosexual side of the binary, they are questioned and skeptically viewed by lesbians (Carr, 2012). Conversely, when they are labeled as straight, they face objectification by heterosexual males (Carr, 2012). The rhetoric of dualistic categorization of human sexuality serves to control and manipulate bisexual identities into either heterosexual or homosexual identities, which results in further bi-erasure as well as instills binegativity in many female bisexuals. Further, the myths discussed above would not continue to exist without continuous reification of them through effective rhetoric. This merits scholarly recognition and attention as female bisexuals are exposed to more forms of biphobia and negative perceptions of self than their male counterparts, due largely to the constant rhetoric that surrounds the identity.

One consequence of the communication of false assumptions is that it can result in the internalization of harmful depictions of self in female bisexuals. Brewster et al. (2014) concluded that female bisexuals are so hypersexualized in the media and on a general level that they internalize feelings of self-doubt and hatred, oftentimes resulting in harmful body image issues. Chmielewski and Yost (2013) illustrate this idea throughout their study of body image issues among bisexual females. The authors maintain that participants in their study struggled both with their gender and sexuality performances as well as finding their place within dominant gender and sexuality categories (Chmielewski & Yost, 2013). This is due to the social expectation that individuals will perform their appropriate gender and the default sexuality that goes alongside it (Chmielewski & Yost, 2013). As a result, bisexual women who do not perform their assigned gender effectively blur the performance lines of that gender and the sexuality that accompanies it, inciting misunderstanding and discomfort among members of the dominant categories, heterosexual/homosexual. These feelings of self-doubt stem from rhetorical messages about bisexuality, specifically in relation to gender/sexuality dualism. Again, this results in the

marginalization of bisexuals from multiple sources from both sides of the binary (Scherrer, 2013), which results in stigma that often hinders the categorization of bisexuality (Carr, 2011). When bisexuality is not viewed as a valid and relevant identity, these consequences are the result.

A female bisexual identity is a specific category of research that could benefit greatly from increased scholarly attention. Past research reveals that bisexual females experience an increase in marginalization, oppression, and sexualization more than individuals who identify as heterosexual or homosexual, and even bisexual men. So far, research on bisexuality identifies harmful myths that bisexuals face each day. These myths are contributing factors in the ways that it is both conceptualized and communicated. Unfortunately, such myths are not Truth, but rather have been normalized to the point of being assumed Truth. Myths revolving around bisexuality are insufficient in accurately describe bisexuality. The reason is simple: a bisexual identity is not simple.

Intersectionality and Bisexuality

Previous research has indicated that gender and gender performance are vital to the conceptualization of bisexuality (Butler, 1990; Esterline and Galupo, 2013; Flanders & Hatfield, 2013; Mitchell, 2009). While not the main focus of this study, the intersectionality of identities is acknowledged. Similar to any other human identity, bisexuality is merely one part of an individual's entire identity; there are many other contributing identities and factors that must be considered when the focus is human identity development. While some studies reflect this notion (Brennan-Ing et al., 2014; Callis, 2013; Croghan et al., 2013; Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Flanders & Hatfield, 2013), others seemed to neglect it by communicating that all bisexuals experience

life in similar ways, simply due to their sexual identity (Dank et al., 2014; Hartman, 2013; Gilmore et al., 2014; Kollen, 2013; Scherrer, 2013).

It is vital that bisexuality is understood as a multi-dimensional, rather than a single-dimensional, identity. Since identity is a multi-faceted and complex construction, intersectional approaches serve to bring to light such complexities and to offer multiple truths of our social reality. Female bisexuality is a complex and misunderstood identity; intersectional approaches inform epistemological notions about human sexuality and identity development. There are many important factors that contribute to the development of an individual's sexual identity. Factors such as the identities an individual has, including gender, age, ethnicity, and social class play vital roles in both the way an individual's sexual identity is formed and negotiated. In other words, bisexuality intersects with other identities that make up an individual. The Communication Theory of Identity provides the required complex framework that is necessary for a more complex analysis of the construction and communication of female bisexuality.

Theoretical Foundations of the Communication Theory of Identity

Bisexuality is a complex identity with many identity intersections that are influenced by various contributing social factors, and through the internalization of social beliefs through communication. The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) offers a complex and multi-dimensional framework for the analysis of the construction and communication of female bisexuality. It is interpretive, yet provides room for critical analysis. Theoretical foundations for CTI are social science theories. It builds off the notions of group memberships (from Social Identity Theory) and roles within such groups (from Identity Theory). CTI expands the social identity framework by incorporating the role of communication as enacted identity. This is a concept that is central to CTI and operates to provide important insight to the way human

identity is constructed and communicated.

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) was originally asserted by Tajfel (1974) as a method to introduce the concept of group membership as an influential factor to social identity formation. Within this theory, once individuals are socially categorized, identities are formed, based on membership of such categories, or groups. As far as SIT is concerned, an individual's social identity is maintained by comparisons between in-group and out-group experiences; in-group comparisons are generally more positive while out-group comparisons are typically more negative (Tarrant, 2002). This process then results in social identities connecting individuals to society through group memberships, which tend to influence the beliefs, behavior, and attitudes of an individuals in their relationships with members from other social groups (Hecht et al., 2005). SIT highlights the social aspects of identity formation and the role that group memberships play in such identity constructions and was influential in the development of CTI because of this.

Identity Theory (IT) is the second influential theoretical approach to CTI. IT explains the relationship between individuals and society, similar to SIT. However, IT differs from SIT in that the relationship between individuals and society is analyzed through the use of roles. Specific to the IT framework for analysis, roles are "the functions or parts a person performs when occupying a particular position within a particular social context" (Hecht et al., 2005, p. 260). The role a person has is a pattern of social behavior that appears to be aligned with the expectations of others and the context of the social situation (Banton, 1965). Additionally, IT considers communication as only a role in identity development and as a means for communicating and expressing that identity, but not as an identity in and of itself (Hecht et al., 2005). What this means is that IT focuses on communication as a means to perform one's

identity; CTI builds off of this concept to view communication as identity itself and vice versa.

Both SIT and IT are objective approaches to identity theorizing. Even though these theories do illustrate some overlap in their approaches, each leave something to be desired within research. To address this gap, CTI utilizes SIT's central concepts of group membership and acceptance as factors in social identity formation. Specifically, CTI builds off of SIT by viewing social interactions as vital aspects to an individual's identity formation. While SIT did provide a significant foundation for CTI to operate from, it falls short with individual identity formation.

The Communication Theory of Identity

The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) was originally an interpretive theory, but has the space to include both critical and intersectional approaches. CTI is a theory that emerged as a result of various social knowledge trends, specifically ones that focus on identity and self, and focuses on communication as identity and identity as communication (Hecht et al., 2005). CTI conceptualizes identity as a fluid, dynamic, and multi-layered phenomenon. Identity is considered to be dynamic because it is not static, but rather changes over time and in relation to situations (Pettigrew, 2013), which echoes the notions of identity from intersectionality. It is due to this that CTI operates from the premise that communication and relationships are central components to constructions of identity (Nuru, 2014), specifically, that communication is relationships, and relationships are communication.

CTI posits two ways that communication is internalized as an identity. Hecht et al. (2005) discusses how the role of communication is prevalent within CTI. First, the symbolic meanings of various social phenomena are both created and exchanged through communication or interaction. Following this, an individual's identity is constructed when relevant symbolic meanings are attached to the individual. As a result, social interaction (communication) becomes

internalized as the individual's identity when the individual begins to form symbolic meanings that are associated with self. The second way that communication is internalized as an identity is when individuals organize themselves in socially recognizable categories. When this occurs, the individual communicates confirmation and validation that such social categories are relevant to them through social interaction. The end result of these two occurrences is that identity is created in social situations and interactions via motivations and expectations. While communication is internalized as an identity, it can also function as an external influence on identity development since various ascriptions and categorizations that are communicated to an individual also have an influence on the development of identity. It is due to this that identity is both internalized and externalized by communication.

CTI proves to be a thorough approach to the study of the communication and identity development as it is one of the most communicative theoretical approaches to identity (Hecht & Jung, 2009). It is this emphasis on communication as identity that sets CTI apart from other social theories. There are eight basic assumptions that CTI holds about identities. The first is that all identities are inherently individual, communal, and social in some way. Second, identity is changing and fluid. The third assumption is that identities are not only cognitive, but also behavioral and spiritual in nature. Fourth, identities have levels for interpretation both in content and relationships. Next, CTI posits that identities are composed of both ascribed and subjective meanings. The sixth assumption is that identities are forms of codes that are communicated in conversations, which then function to define an individual's membership in groups. The seventh assumption builds off of this; the properties of identities are expressed through core symbols, meanings, and labels. Finally, identities function to "prescribe modes of appropriate and effective communication" (Hecht, 2009, p. 79). Each of these assumptions of identity are

reminiscent of the way identity is defined throughout various intersectional and postmodern studies.

CTI asserts four main loci, or locations, where identity resides. These loci are asserted as frames, which are as follows: personal, enacted, relational, and communal (Hecht, 2009; Hecht & Jung, 2009; Hecht et al., 2005; Nuru, 2014; Pettigrew, 2013; Orbe, 2007). Each of these frames represents different aspects of a person's sense of self; this results in the frames working concurrently at times and in contradiction at others (Hecht et al., 2005). These frames are not intended to be viewed as separate from one another, but they coexist and inform one another. For example, it is difficult to analyze the sexuality identity (personal identity) of a bisexual without also giving consideration to the way society defines categorizations of sexuality (communal) and how other individuals perceive that individual as having a "real" sexual identity or not (relational identity). Identity is not a construction that can be analyzed in relation to one frame, but not others; all frames must be considered in relation to others.

The personal frame refers to the individual's feelings about self, self-cognitions, and a "spiritual sense of self-being" (Hecht, 2009, p. 79). Within this frame, identity is known as self-image and offers an understanding of how individuals define themselves both in specific social situations and in general (Hecht, 2009). This frame is present at the individual level of identity analysis as a characteristic of the individual (Hecht & Jung, 2009). For example, a bisexual's sense of self and the way they define themselves is an example of the way identity is individual.

The second frame is the enactment frame; within this frame, identity resides in performance. Identities are enacted throughout all social interaction through communication; such identities may be defined as those messages (Hecht, 2009). While not all messages revolve around identity, identity is inherent within all messages. Paralleling the work of performativity

by Butler (1990), the enactment layer defines the self as a performance. Through communication, individuals enact their identities and exchange those enacted identities (Hecht & Jung, 2009). For example, when a bisexual communicates their sexual identity through the use of propaganda such as bumper stickers or flags, they are enacting their identity and this can be analyzed within the enactment frame of identity.

The third frame of identity is the relationship frame. This frame operates under the assumption that communication is composed of both content and relationship elements. As the name implies, this layer is focused on identity as a product of relationships (Hecht et al., 2005). The relationship frame constructs identity through negotiation and communication in relationships and differs from the other frames in two important ways. First, since communication has content and relation dimensions (Hecht, 2009), the relational and enactment frames are generally more interconnected than other frames. This is because where there are relationships, there can also be enactment of identity. Second, the relationship frame has four levels: the first maintains that individuals form their perceptions of self partially by internalizing how others view them; the second level asserts that identity enactment is shaped by relationships; the third posits that identity is formed by relationships with others; the fourth level posits that a relationship can be an identity in and of itself, such as a romantic couple taking on an identity as a unit.

Identity does not only reside in individuals, performance, or relationships; it also resides in groups. The final frame of identity is the communal frame. This frame operates under the assumption that individual identities emerge out of networks and/or groups; identity within this frame is viewed as something that is claimed by a group of individuals, which then functions to bond that given group or network together (Hecht, 2009). This is reflective of various aspects of

SIT in that group members tend to share common characteristics, which then function to form the characteristics of the group identity.

Now that the four frames of CTI have been introduced, it is important to discuss the interpenetration of them. Interpenetration means that the four layers of identity can be analyzed separately or integrated illustrating various aspects of identity construction in various situations and are enhanced by considering two, three, or four frames at once (Hecht et al., 2005). For example, interpenetration is evident within the individual and enactment frames when an individual must have some sense of self in order for that self to be enacted in a social situation. An analysis of the personal frame cannot be conducted without also considering the influence of the enactment frame as well.

When the four frames of identity are not consistent with one other, identity gaps occur. Identity gaps are defined as "discrepancies between or among the four frames of identity" (Hecht & Jung, 2009, p. 268) and can occur between any of the four frames of identity. For example, a personal-relational gap occurs when the individual's personal identity (the way they view themselves) contradicts with their relational identity (the way others view them).

Previous and Current Research with CTI

Since its inception, CTI has largely been employed to conduct analyses on ethnic differences in communication. Hecht et al. (2007) analyzed the role of identity gaps, discrimination, and acculturation of international students and their satisfaction in American classrooms and the identity gaps of contemporary US immigrants was explored by Orbe and Urban (2010). There have also been studies conducted to investigate the experiences of Arab women before and after 9/11 (Witteborn, 2010) and the relational identities of "always-single" Japanese women (Hecht & Maeda, 2012).

While there are a significant number of studies utilizing CTI to explore issues of ethnic differences in communication, this is not the only focus of studies that utilize CTI. Other studies encompass a range of identity and communication focuses in areas such as education (Kennedey-Lightsey et al., 2013; Orbe, 2007), familial relations (Colaner et al., 2014; Hecht & Kam, 2009; Pettigrew, 2013), and human sexuality (Nicholas, 2010; Nuru, 2014). The studies that focus on human sexuality with the use of CTI are not as widespread as other areas of focus. The study conducted by Nuru (2014) focused on the negotiation of multiple identities of transgendered individuals, and the role communication plays in such negotiation. There was a focus on the specific sites that the transgender identity negotiation process occurred, which were between various frames, such as between the personal-enacted frames. In contrast, the study conducted by Nicholas (2010) focused on the relationship between LGB visibility in literature from an interdisciplinary standpoint. The focus was to examine the ways that constructions and communication of human sexuality via literature impacts the visibility of LGB identifying persons. These two studies utilized CTI in order to analyze a specific facet of LGB social experiences, however, neither were specific to female bisexuals. This study aims to analyze the way bisexuality is constructed, communicated, and conceptualized through the use of CTI. The studies by both Nicholas (2010) and Nuru (2014) offer valuable insight to the way communication affects LGB visibility. This current study aims to build this body of knowledge further by examining a specific identity within the LGB community that has not yet been addressed by scholars who ground their study with CTI.

A bisexual identity is both constructed and communicated through each of the four frames of CTI. Since CTI is an interpretive theory that is also capable of performing a critical function, it is argued that an analysis of bisexuality via CTI will provide new perspectives for

analyzing the identity.

Conclusion

It is clear that bisexuality has been addressed broadly in recent literature. This review explored several relevant concepts to the current study, ranging from bisexuality as a human sexual identity to the approach of intersectionality. Postmodernity as a shift in thought as well as the purposes it serves was explored. This discussion resulted in the exploration of both master narratives that exist about human sexuality and the epistemologies of sexuality. A brief history of sexuality was introduced in attempts to clearly illustrate the power of accepted master narratives and Truths. Following this initial section of the literature were the sections concerned with bisexuality as a sexual orientation, and female bisexuals, specifically. It was argued that female bisexuals, more so than their male counterparts, experience heightened levels of marginalization and oppression than their male, heterosexual, or homosexual counterparts. The prevalent issues that were brought to the forefront of the conversation resulted in a discussion over intersectionality and why its consideration is vital to a more complete comprehension of the way(s) that human identities are formed, negotiated, and communicated. In relation to other identities. Finally, CTI was explored and argued to be an appropriate theoretical foundation for the current study.

The review of literature was structured in a way that the following research questions could be considered:

RQ1: How do female bisexuals explain or express how bisexuality is communicated and perceived?

RQ2: What roles do the four frames of the Communication Theory of Identity play in the social construction and communication of bisexuality?

Chapter III Methodology

The purpose of this research is to gain insight into the ways female bisexuality is both perceived and communicated by individuals who do not identify in the same way as well as bring female bisexuality to the forefront of the conversation. In response to this focus, a qualitative approach is appropriate for research, as well as the use of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews for data collection. This research utilizes the Communication Theory of Identity for the purposes of analysis, a theory that is both descriptive and qualitative in nature. As such, semi-structured interview questions aimed to explore the way(s) that bisexuality is socially constructed and communicated in relation to the four frames of identity as marked by Hecht et al. (2005). Interview questions were designed to explore the following research questions:

RQ1: How do female bisexuals express or explain how bisexuality is communicated and perceived?

RQ2: What roles do the four frames of the Communication Theory of Identity play in the social construction and communication of bisexuality?

This chapter offers the following: a) a rationalization behind the use of a qualitative approach, b) the use of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, c) researcher reflexivity, and d) a discussion of how the research was conducted, specific to protocol, procedure, and participants.

A Qualitative Approach

This study appropriately reflects the need for a qualitative approach, since the goal of this research is to better comprehend how bisexual females situate and understand their complex social identity in relation to the way others both conceptualize the identity and communicate about it. The research questions that ground this study have a specific focus on the ways that others conceptualize and communicate various meanings of a bisexual identity to both

themselves and female bisexuals. Each research question aims to explore various aspects of lived experiences of female bisexuals in an attempt to provide insight as to how and where bisexuality is socially constructed, perceived, and communicated. As such, these research questions cannot be answered by quantitative methods, since not all questions are able to be answered by numbers (Berg, 2009; Goodman, 2011). Rather, a qualitative approach is most appropriate.

Complementary to this, qualitative research is concerned with how meanings, concepts, and definitions of reality are socially constructed (Cooper & White, 2011; Goodman, 2011) and assist researchers in better understanding only the people, but the cultural and social contexts in which they are located (Berg, 2009; Goodman, 2011). Specific to this study is the idea that human sexuality is an ever-changing, subjective construct, not nearly as rigidly and objectively defined as many believe it to be. Since one goal of this research is to better understand the way bisexuality is conceptualized, specifically in relation to the four frames of identity as asserted by Hecht et al. (2005), a qualitative approach is a better fit than the alternative. Further, an underlying goal of this research is to better understand both the social and cultural contexts associated with various conceptualizations of bisexuality. An example of this is that human sexuality is a convoluted and misunderstood concept, which contributes to the increased confusion about non-normative human sexualities, such as bisexuality. Since this is the case, qualitative research is beneficial in that it treats reality as something fluid, ever-changing, and subjective, rather than fixed and static (Cooper & White, 2011).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that "Qualitative researchers tend to stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is being studied" (p. 10). This is reminiscent of the idea of subjectivity in research because social constructs, while powerful, are not fixed. In relation to the current study, everything from the

participants to definitions of bisexuality to the contributing social factors are considered to be subjective, due to the social constructs of bisexuality. This introduces another reason why qualitative research is an appropriate application for this study. Since it seeks to answer questions by exploring various social settings and those who live within them (Berg, 2009), qualitative research has an inherent focus on the subjective.

Another characteristic of qualitative approaches is that they function to provide the foundations for information and representation about the Other (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). One goal of this study was to better understand the way bisexual females conceptualize and communicate their sexual identity; this goal is synonymous with this particular function of qualitative research, since it communicates certain messages about the Other. As a result, it is important to acknowledge that qualitative research methods have the power to affect the way that the Other is perceived and viewed (Berg, 2009). This is particularly relevant when the group of people under the research microscope experience heightened levels of marginalization and oppression, such as bisexual females. Areas of focus in relation to woman-centered ideas consider the deconstruction of lived experiences as well as the transformation of patriarchy and the empowerment of women (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). These focuses are relevant when the goal of the research is to conduct qualitative research on bisexually identifying females through the retelling of their personal experiences.

In relation to human sexuality and qualitative research, Levy and Johnson (2011) discuss six guidelines for conducting effective qualitative research with individuals whose sexuality is non-normative. These guidelines are directed toward the researcher, in attempts to encourage discussion and acceptance between participants and the researcher. These guidelines include: being comfortable with fluidity, being attentive to identity, be ready for questions, be sensitive,

prepare for the unknown, and be an advocate (Levy & Johnson, 2011, pp. 136-139). These guidelines have been presented as a means to enhance the experience of individuals whose sexuality is considered non-normative since it is often the case that such identities are under recognized and misunderstood.

A possible contributing factor to why this is the case is that qualitative research is interdisciplinary in nature, which allows for increased interpretations of Truth and breadth of research. Denzin and Lincoln claim that qualitative research "crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matters" (p. 2). This is an important contributing factor of a qualitative approach to this study in that human sexuality is inherent intersectional; there is more complexity in conducting research on human sexuality and communication than what disciplinary based approaches have to offer.

The Value of Interviews

Qualitative procedures may consist of techniques such as observations, interviews, focus groups, and historical analysis, and provide a way of accessing facts about the actual people the researcher interacts with or observes (Berg, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The procedure for this study was for all participants to participate in a semi-structured, face-to-face interview. Each interview lasted between 40-70 minutes and consisted of 21 semi-structured questions (See Appendix). The researcher would ask probing or follow-up questions as needed. Each of the interview questions aimed to explore the conceptualizations and communication of female bisexuality, while incorporating questions that assisted in illuminating the four frames of identity as asserted by Hecht et al. (2005) in attempts to effectively answer the research questions.

This specific procedure for conducting qualitative research was selected because of the nature of interviews. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), most interviews seek out various

forms of biographical information. Since this study is focused on examining the lived

experiences and opinions of female bisexuals, a primary goal is to collect biographical

information to analyze. In addition to this, interviews were selected because of the data they

generate in the form of narratives of human experience. . All interview data are stories about the

way study participant's views and understand the world. This is important when considering the

importance of storytelling since stories are considered to be a way of knowing. Seidman (2006)

claims that stories are "a meaning-making process" (p. 7). Considering this, it is easy to see the

importance in interviewing when the goal of the research is to better understand how female

bisexuals make meaning of their sexual identities as well as how others assign meanings onto

them. Building onto the notion of storytelling through interviews is the idea that when

individuals tell stories, they are providing access to the most complex social issues since such

issues are based on the lived experiences of those individuals (Seidman, 2006).

As with any research approach, there are both strengths and weaknesses to utilizing semi-

structured, face-to-face interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow for additional flexibility

over structured interviews and allow for the interviewer to actively engage with the participant

(Green et al., 2004). Active engagement with participants was particularly important for the

purposes of this study because of the frequency that probing or follow-up questions were needed

in order to most effectively encompass the thoughts of the participants. This is beneficial because

interviews are considered to be interactional encounters, and the way the interview is conducted

has the possibility to shape the nature of the knowledge that is constructed from it (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2005). It was beneficial to conduct semi-structured interviews because of the freedom it

allowed both researcher and participants to take advantage of. While interviewing can be time

consuming, it is a beneficial method because interviews are considered to be most consistent

with people's ability to make meaning through the use of language (Seidman, 2006), which is an important consideration with the current study.

Validity of Reflexivity

Within qualitative approaches, recognizing the role the researcher plays in the research is vital. Green et al. (2006) argue that qualitative social research is inevitably human in nature, meaning that all researchers will have, to some degree, an emotional involvement in the subject of their studies. This supports the idea that qualitative researchers attempt to explore the world of their participants from their own perspective (Green et al., 2006). As such, the role of reflexivity in research is worthy of attention since it is significant throughout qualitative methodologies (Green et al., 2006). One purpose that reflexivity serves is to gain plausibility of the research through the trustworthiness of the researcher, in order to enhance the accuracy of the research being conducted. Such trustworthiness is analyzed through the perceived transparency and credibility of the researcher in relation to his or her values, knowledge, biases, and beliefs (Berger, 2015). According to Berger (2015), reflexivity is most commonly considered to be "the process of a continual dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome" (p. 20).

There are several relevant, personal characteristics of the researcher that are taken into consideration with reflexivity. These personal characteristics may include sexual orientation, race, gender, personal experiences, age, affiliation, beliefs, preferences, and ideological stances (Berger, 2015). According to Kacen and Chaitin (2006), there are three major reasons why a researcher should address reflexivity in their research. First, they may be more able to access the intended field because participants may be more willing to share their life experiences with

someone they view as being sympathetic to their experiences and situation. Second, the relationship between the researcher and participant may be strengthened, which affects the level and type of information the participants are willing to share. Finally, both the worldview and background of the researcher affects the way in which they construct their reality; this is inclusive of aspects such as language uses, theoretical lens choice, and lenses used for filtering interview questions and responses.

When considering reflexivity, the researcher focuses the research lens on oneself in order to both recognize, and accept responsibility for, their own position within the research as well as the effect such a position may have on research outcomes and interpretations (Berger, 2015).It is also important to note that reflexivity is a crucial consideration throughout the entire research process, from the formulation of research questions to the interpretation of results (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Since human beings are inherently subjective creatures, it is important to recognize our biases toward various research components in order to establish the trust that is required with qualitative approaches. According to Lietz et al. (2006), reflexivity enhances the quality of research by allowing researchers to consider the ways in which who they are may both assist and hinder the process of co-constructing meanings. They also argue that the process of reflexivity allows researchers to both handle and present their data better. Green et al. (2004) reflect this notion when they argue that reflexivity is a form of self-awareness and that reflection functions as an important learning tool.

One relevant example of reflexivity is present in the study conducted by Green et al. (2004), which, in part, examined the effects of a researcher disclosing her sexual identity of lesbian to the participants in a study that focused on sexual orientation There were a variety of reasons behind the decision to disclose the sexual identity of one of the team researchers. One

prominent reason was to build rapport and trust between the researcher and participants. This is due to the sensitive nature of qualitative research on human sexuality. According to Green et al. (2006), human sexuality has strong normalized views that surround it; this makes individuals who practice alternative lifestyles more likely to experience heightened levels of discrimination. As such, when the researcher who identifies as lesbian disclosed her sexual identity to the study participants, it was done so with intent to increase trust and build rapport between the researcher and participants since it is likely that participants of the study would be less likely to trust and disclose to perceived heterosexual researchers.

The Greene at al. (2006) study concluded with the argument that the self-disclosure of the researcher was effective in enhancing trustworthiness between participants and researchers. Further, the researchers found that self-disclosure assists the researcher in the management of her own ideological viewpoints as well as help in the navigation of difficult situations and topics that are brought to the forefront of the discussion.

Personal Reflexivity in Study

The inclusion of reflexivity is beneficial and arguably ethically necessary when conducting qualitative research in human subjects, particularly when the topic of research is human sexuality. It is important for all study participants to feel comfortable and reassured that they can trust the researcher. As a result of this, the following section will offer my own, personal reflexivity within this study as well as my rationalization for including it.

I am a 28 year-old, Caucasian, cisgender bisexual female. It wasn't until I began my first year of graduate school that I began to self-identify as bisexual. During this time, I met and fell in love with my current fiancé, Laurel. I noticed myself experiencing feelings for this woman that I had only felt with men in the past. Until that point in my life, I self-identified as a

heterosexual woman, not really giving much thought to it, or the privilege that such an identity avowal held. As the days passed, and our relationship grew from friendship into something more, I didn't question it, only embraced it. However, it didn't take long before assumptions and beliefs of others began to shape the way I perceived myself as a bisexual woman. I have a young son from a previous heterosexual relationship, which has played a role in my interest in conducting research on bisexuality as many people communicate confusion and a lack of awareness about how I could have a child and be bisexual. There is so much confusion and rejection surrounding my own, personal sexual identity that I feel compelled to explore it through formal, academic research.

While I have been working through the navigation of my newly claimed identity, I have also been developing as a scholar and a mother. I am pursuing a master's degree that is interdisciplinary in nature, specifically with a focus on communication and women, gender, and sexuality studies. I am familiar with the concept and purposes of critical scholarship and activism. My fields of study have assisted me in navigating my identity as a bisexual female in that they have helped me understand the way social construction functions to privilege some while oppressing others. Moreover, the courses I have taken taught me to be critical of the world around me and to question assumed Truths about identity, and specifically, human sexuality.

Due to the courses I have taken over the past few years, I have become passionate about equality, activism, and awareness. Additionally, I have a particular interest in the way the "Other" is socially constructed and communicated. Upon self-identifying as bisexual, I had the realization that I was no longer a part of the dominant and privileged heterosexual community. Further, I began becoming interested in studying what bisexuality means as well as who assigns it, since I was on a quest to better understand aspects of myself. As a result, I have conducted

previous work on specific and damaging meanings that are often assigned to bisexuality as an identity, through this emic perspective.

However, my interest in the topic of female bisexuality is not purely academic; I have been on a journey to both discover and understand what it means to me to be bisexual. Additionally, I have my own experiences with discrimination, both in the form of micro-aggressions and overtly. Not only do I feel strongly that my own sexual identity is misunderstood by a large percentage of the population, but I also recognize that the way various perceptions regarding bisexuality (valid or otherwise) are communicated in a variety of ways and have negative consequences. Additionally, I recognize that my experiences are different than those of other female bisexuals, due to intersections between race, class, gender, etc.

I recognize that I am both an active participant and a quiet observer in the bisexual community. It is a space that I carefully navigate since I have my own preconceived notions about my sexual identity. However, I also recognize that these preconceptions I hold are both similar to, and different from, those of others. I am motivated to conduct this research in an attempt to better understand how and why preconceptions about bisexuality are so inconsistent with one another. As a result of this, I made the decision to overtly identify myself as bisexual to my participants at the start of each interview session. This strategy was used to encourage a connectedness and openness, as well as build trust, between myself and that participants.

Protocol of Current Study

The interviews for this study aimed to explore various aspects of female bisexuality[5], considering both the communication of the identity as well as the way it is conceptualized. Since

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[5] As stated in the introduction, for the purposes of this research, the term bisexuality is a sexual orientation that is not restricted to dualistic categories of sexuality and includes the romantic, emotional, or sexual desire, attraction, or interest in members from either side of the gender

bisexual self-identification was a requirement for participation in this study, no overt definition

of the term was offered to participants so that they were free to define it in whichever way they

deemed most appropriate. Interview questions were structured in a way as to address aspects of

the research questions. Before this study was conducted, IRB approval was obtained through

Oregon State University. Since this study is concerned with elements of human sexuality and

development, confidentiality of participants was of the utmost importance. In order to most

effectively ensure that confidentiality was protected, each participant was provided with an

informed consent form at the start of the interview. Once signed, the use of all collected data

throughout this study was permitted. To increase confidentiality, pseudonyms replaced the actual

names of participants and anyone else mentioned in the data, and all interviews took place either

in a private study room in the Valley Library at Oregon State University, or at a location of the

participant's choosing.

Procedure

There were three requirements for participation in this study. All participants, at the time

of the interview, were required to be biologically female, at least 18 years of age, and self-

identify as bisexual. This study focused on human sexuality development and communication

and, as such, it was deemed appropriate to only conduct interviews on individuals who are at

least 18 years old, the legal age for consent in Oregon. The requirement of participants being

biologically female was in relation to the research questions and overall purpose behind this

study: to explore the ways female bisexuals experience their sexual identity differently from

male bisexuals or other sexualities (both normative and non-normative). The review of current

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binary. However, I am hesitant to overtly define bisexuality since any definition is inadequate
and I do not want to create an explicit definition that might create a problematic stereotype.

and relevant literature focuses primarily on cisgender male or female bisexual experiences, rather than experiences of bisexual transgender individuals. Social experiences of biological female bisexuals is inherently different than those of transgender bisexuals, likely due in some part to the factor of gender performance and social expectations of the way one performs their gender. As a result, it is reasonable to require that participants are biologically female for the purposes of this research. Finally, the requirement that all participants self-identify as bisexual was necessary in order to most effectively recruit individuals who could volunteer and offer the most insider perspectives for the purposes of this research.

All participants were recruited via two methods: recruitment flyers and a word-of-mouth technique. Recruitment flyers were posted around the Oregon State University main campus as well as at various spots throughout Corvallis, such as the Interzone Café, Dutch Bros. on Monroe, and the Alternative Co-Op. Each flyer included necessary details regarding the details and purpose of the study. All flyers were "tag" style, which included the name and contact information of the student researcher on each tab. Interested participants were instructed to contact the student researcher via email to inquire about the study and set up a time to conduct the interview. The word-of-mouth technique for recruitment occurred alongside recruitment via tag flyers. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were offered the opportunity to provide details of the study to any other potential participants they may think would be interested in participating in the study. The student researcher encouraged participants to reach out to other individuals who may meet the requirements of the study and provide them with her contact information so that they may participate, should they be interested. Additionally, the student researcher made verbal announcements about the study in three Woman, Gender, and Sexuality classrooms as well as passed out flyers to interested individuals.

Once the interview had been scheduled, the student researcher would send out a confirmation email roughly 48 hours prior to the interview. Upon arriving to the interview, each participant was introduced to the student researcher and provided the informed consent form for them to read, review, and sign. Once the informed consent form was completed, the interview was conducted; these ranged from 40 – 70 minutes in length.

Participants

Following the recruitment phase of this study, a total of 11 participants participated in the study. Per study requirements for participation, all participants were biologically female, at least 18 years of age, and self-identified as bisexual. The following demographics of participants were considered throughout the study: race, education level, age, relationship status, and state of residency. The ages of the participants ranged from 18-30, and all but one reside in Oregon. Overall, eight participants identified as Caucasian, two as Hispanic, and one as mixed-race. A total of two participants had at least a high school education, five are current undergraduates, three are current graduate students, and one is a Ph.D. candidate. Finally, three participants were single, seven were in relationships (one of which was polyamorous), and one was married.

Thematic and Theoretical Analyses

Since each participant brought something different to the study, it was imperative that their voices be conveyed in the research. In order to most effectively achieve this, all recorded interviews were transcribed. Since interviews were the only method of data collection, it was vital that all participant responses be recorded so that data was not lost. Once all data had been transcribed and examined, two methods of analysis then took place.

The first method of analysis examined the research data, identified common themes, and explored them in further detail. This process is a thematic analysis, and aims to uncover various

patterns within existing data. In order to achieve a thematic analysis, the data had to first be coded into categories. Coding is the first step of the qualitative analysis process, and serves to both label and categorize research data (Flick, 2014). Once all data has been coded, a thematic analysis can then be conducted. Specifically, Braun and Clark (2006) define a thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic." (pp. 79). Additionally, Guest (2012) maintains that thematic analyses are "rigorous, yet inductive, set of procedures designed to identify and examine themes from textual data in a way that is transparent and credible" (p. 16). Once a variety of common experiences emerged, they were categorized into larger, more prominent themes for analysis. As a result, four main themes and several subthemes emerged, each of which were explored in detail.

Following this, a secondary analysis of the data was conducted. This process organized data in relation to the four frames of identity development as asserted in the Communication Theory of Identity, and so that it may be explored on a different level than a thematic analysis can offer. The theoretical analysis of data was conducted after the thematic analysis so that identified themes could be referenced to illustrate the influences each frame has on bisexual identity development, both independently and interdependently. The following two chapters will present the findings from these two methods of analysis; the results from the thematic analysis are presented in Chapter 4 and the results from the theory frames are presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter IV: Thematic Analysis

As stated previously, all participant data collected in this study was done so in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do female bisexuals express or explain how bisexuality is communicated and perceived?

RQ2: What roles do the four frames of the Communication Theory of Identity play in the social construction and communication of bisexuality?

This chapter explores four themes that emerged from data analysis and are intended to answer the first research question. The next chapter will explore the ways in which the four frames of identity influence these themes and is intended to answer the second research question. Each theme illustrates different, and oftentimes problematic, issues that bisexual females face in relation to the way their sexual identity is perceived by individuals who do not identify in the same way. The four major themes that were identified are: avowed identity labels, ascribed identity labels, manipulation of heterosexual/homosexual privilege, and experiences of oppression within the LBGT community. This chapter provides the following: a) a detailed description of each identified theme and any subthemes present within, and b) specific excerpts from the data to both illustrate and support themes.

Avowed Identity Labels

Perhaps the most identifiable theme that presented itself was in relation to the avowed sexual identities of participants and their considerations to the avowal of alternative identity labels. It is common for participants to express concern, misunderstanding, and outright rejection of the label bisexual. These expressions are interesting, considering that participants were required to self-identify as bisexual in order to participate in the study.

While all participants identify themselves as bisexual, several question whether a bisexual identity label is the best fit for their sexual orientation. First, nearly every participant expresses some level of discontentment with the label 'bisexual' and explores how other labels may be more effective in illustrating the way they feel inside. Other labels of sexual identity that are mentioned throughout the interviews are *queer*, *pansexual*, and *heterosexual*.

Specifically, five of the participants discuss their attraction to the label of 'pansexual', three to the label 'queer', and three to the label 'heterosexual'. While initially it seems contradictory for participants to take part in a study for self-identifying bisexuals, only to reconsider their sexual identity label during the interview, such inconsistencies presented an opportunity to explore the impact of identity labeling. This emerging theme brought into question if a bisexual identity label is the most appropriate fit for participants' sexual identities.

Pansexuality as an alternative label to bisexuality is mentioned in six interviews in response to the appropriateness of a bisexual label; it is communicated through participant responses that they conceptualize pansexuality as a sexual identity that reaches beyond dualistic categorizations of gender to be inclusive of all gender identities, not only biological males or females. The most noted difference between bisexuality and pansexuality is the idea that pansexuals are more likely to be attracted to transgender individuals as well as cisgender[6]. Heather states that "I guess pansexual is maybe how I would describe myself, but I don't know. I mean, bisexuality blends into pansexuality very much." Another participant, Teresa, shares "I am actually kind of debating if I am actually pansexual." Isabel states that she has "no problem being bisexual" but then shares that she does have concerns with the label when she asserts that

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[6] Cisgender indicates that biological sex and corresponding gender assignment match while transgender indicates that biological sex and corresponding gender assignment do not match.

"I don't want anyone I am interested in to think that I am only into cisgender people, which would bother me since it just isn't true, and so that's the big point." In response to this concern, Isabel began claiming a pansexual identity in 2009 and said that she knows she is pansexual because "I am not any of these other options."

Isabel's primary concern with the label of bisexuality is her opinion that it is too restricting to adequately encompass her identity. The assumed exclusion of transgender bodies is what caused her to re-label herself as pansexual, even though she maintains that bisexual suffices as well. Isabel is not the sole participant to share this contention; other participants expressed awareness with this as well. Susan echoes this notion when asked how she conceptualizes bisexuality when she states that:

> Honestly, my personal belief of bisexuality is that it is not just between men and women. I guess my definition would be closer to pansexuality because I don't think that the genitalia of a person is what makes them male or female, it's what is on the inside that counts.

This statement about bisexuality is reminiscent of Isabel's opinion of pansexuality in regard to the gender of the individuals involved. The idea that bisexuality is attraction to cisgender males and females reflects normalized ideologies regarding gender categorizations, and is rejected by both of these participants and replaced with inclusion of transgendered bodies and pansexuality.

In addition to pansexuality as an identity label, the label of 'queer' is also considered in a couple of responses. Heather claims that she is queer and referred to herself as queer several times throughout the interview. When asked why she is attracted to this label rather than the label of bisexuality, she responded "Well, I am not straight and I am not a lesbian, I am just, like, this little flower floating around." Kristen also identifies herself as. The ideology that bisexuality indicates an attraction in some way to biological males and females results in confusion and

rejection by bisexually-identifying individuals who experience attraction to transgender men and women as well.

The final label that is considered by participants was 'heterosexual'. This particular label is claimed by three of the participants. For the purposes of this section, the viewpoints of participants will be expressed, but not explored in-depth. The reason for this is that this claimed label is more appropriately situated under the theme of 'heterosexual privilege'. Marie, Madison, and Christine all claim both heterosexual and bisexual identities. Each of these participants are currently in relationships with men; one is married and one is in a dating relationship.

Marie was the first participant to identify dualistically as both bisexual and heterosexual. She is able to identify in such a way because of the way she defines bisexuality, which is more sexually-grounded, not necessarily based off of the ability to fall in love with another. Specifically, she claims "Yeah, I could have sex with a woman, though I don't think I could fall in love with a woman. The term bisexuality does not have to do with love." She continued to share that she is in love with her husband, so she claims a heterosexual identity in that regard, but that she is open to exploring herself sexually with women, which leads her to claim a bisexual label if necessary. Marie explains that she claims a heterosexual identity label a majority of the time and a bisexual label when it is appropriate. To illustrate, she shares "I have never really declared it [bisexuality]. This is the first time that I am consenting to the disclosure of this identity. I consent to you identifying me as bisexual." She elaborates further by stating "If I were to break up with Jeremy, and become involved with a woman, I would have to disclose my sexual identity." Later in the interview process, she stated "You know, it isn't that I don't identify as bisexual, like if someone were to ask me if I would have sex with a man or a woman,

at no point would I say no." For Marie, the male gender of her partner affects her disclosed sexuality as heterosexual.

Another participant, Madison, supported Marie's ideology of bisexuality. She stated that "For me, bisexuals are people that would be in a relationship with men or women, I've never wanted that. I am attracted to females, but I would never date one" and later shared that "bisexuality is being attracted to both sexes physically and sexually." Since Madison is married to a man, but willing to have physical relations with a woman, she also claims a dualistic sexual identity. The final participant that identifies as heterosexual also does so because she is in a heterosexual relationship, which results in no need for her to self-disclose her bisexual identity, even though she does claim it.

Overall, these participants do not believe that bisexuality is an effective identity label since it is inherently ambiguous, which can result in uncertainty in individuals who are bisexually-identifying. The data reflects that alternative labels are considered by participants when they perceive that their sexual identity label does not adequately encompass their feelings of self. Additionally, it suggests that multiple identity labels may be more effective in encompassing an individual's sexual identity due to the rejection and confusion with participants accepting a single identity label. Interestingly, the data reflects two different approaches to identity labeling: broadening labels to be less limiting, and narrowing them based on immediate relationships. These are vastly different approaches to identity labeling; however, they each function effectively for the participants who used one over the other.

Ascribed Identity Labels

Participant data illustrates that there is a problem with non-bisexually identifying individuals ascribing sexual identity labels to participants that do not adequately reflect their

feelings of self. This section explores some reasons as to why this is the case, as well as how these assumptions result in false identity labeling. The following will discuss how and why female bisexuals are categorized as either heterosexual or homosexual in relation to the following identified subthemes: a) gender performance, b) normalized ideologies about bisexuality, and c) the perceived gender of present (or absent) partner. While it is recognized that visible partnership is an inherent form of gender expression (meaning that it is a social expectation for biological females to be partnered with a biological male), the two subthemes are addressed separately due to the high level of participant responses that discuss how outside perceptions of the gender of their partners have affected their ascribed identity label.

Gender Performance

The most prevalent false label that is mentioned in participant responses is the label of 'lesbian'. Heather is particularly vocal about this when sharing her contention with being labeled a lesbian by others. She shares that "Most of my gay friends think that I am a lesbian and most of my straight friends don't give bisexuality much thought." This is not an isolated instance; she mentions that there are times that even when other individuals know the label she prefers, they still label her as something else. Specifically she states that "I have some participants in my class that already know I am queer, but usually label me as a lesbian." In response to what she thinks about this, she exclaims "I think that I am not a lesbian!"

An assumed lesbian identity was not only present with Heather's experiences. Penelope also expresses the tendency other people have with labeling her as a lesbian. She stated that "I think a lot of people, at first glance, look at me and assume I am a lesbian. It happens a lot and I assume that the reason this happens is because of the exterior that I present are not as feminine as the social norm demands." Hannah also discussed her experiences with being consistently

labeled as a lesbian by others, based off of her "masculine appearance." The way these participants choose to perform their gender has a significant effect on outside perceptions. This is reflective of the ideology that sexual orientation and gender are inherently intertwined with one another and are unable to be separated. However, participant responses communicate a different truth; gender performance is not always indicative of sexual orientation and cannot be considered a reliable indicator of an individual's sexuality.

Normalized Ideologies about Bisexuality

Research indicates that common ideologies assume that bisexual women are confused, or attention-seeking, when they claim a bisexual identity. Assumptions such as these can result in the erasure of bisexuality as a valid sexual identity, since assumptions and accusations of confusion and attention-seeking invalidate the identity. Responses echoed this indication; many participants communicated experiencing false labeling based off of invalid assumptions as well as their frustration with such normalized ideologies about their sexuality. Many participants indicated the assumptions that others have about bisexuality resulted in those people rejecting a bisexual identity of the participant

Many participants communicate their experiences with false assumptions about bisexuality and the influences such assumptions have on invalid identity ascriptions they receive. These false ascriptions oftentimes manifested into contentment and resentment in participants. Specifically, Hannah expressed her frustration with incorrect labeling when she shared her experiences with being labeled as a lesbian by others, based on the common assumption that bisexuality is only a phase some individuals go through while they decide if they are actually heterosexual or homosexual. She states "I am not a lesbian. I am not straight. I am bisexual, and it isn't a phase." Penelope also shared her experiences with the same ideology when she relayed

that since she is married to a woman, she is a lesbian, rather than bisexual, since she will be with another woman forever. However, Penelope maintains a bisexual identity and resents being categorized by others as anything else. Laura also echoes these experiences when she shares that her sister has a difficult time accepting her for who she is. She explains that her sister rejects her sexuality, commonly saying things such as "Oh, it's just a phase" and "You will make up your mind one day." Laura explained that it is very difficult for her sister to understand her sexuality as a real identity.

In a similar vein, Teresa reports experiences with outside doubt that bisexuality even exists. She shares how, when she discloses her bisexuality to others, the responses are often disbelief that she cannot just choose one gender or the other, or complete rejection of the identity. This notion that human sexuality is dualistic in nature is damaging and widespread. Amy also communicates experiences with being encouraged to 'choose' one side of the binary or the other. She said that she is frequently told that she needs to "pick a side" and that her sexual identity is "wrong". As a result to such dualistic thinking, both Teresa and Amy are categorized as either homosexual or heterosexual by others, rather than having their avowed identities recognized.

Participant data reflects various assumptions that are made when there is a lack of agreed upon definition of bisexuality. Participant contention with inaccurate ascribed identity labels not only communicate the problematic nature of a lack of clear definition, but also highlights how current definitions fall short of adequately encompassing what bisexuality is, resulting in harmful and invalid ideologies being formed regarding human sexuality; including which sexualities are validated, and which are not.

Definition by Presence

The third subtheme that presented itself was participant experiences with being incorrectly labeled by others dependent on the perceived gender of their counterpart. Similar to the subtheme of gender performance, the presence or absence of a perceived romantic partner has an influence on outside perceptions. Within this specific subtheme, it will be illustrated how the perceived gender of an assumed romantic partner effects outside perceptions of ones sexuality, and inherently, ascribed identity labels on female bisexuals. This section will explore participant experiences with this, including the consequences of it.

The most prevalent illustration of this is in regard to the three participants who self-identify as both heterosexual and bisexual. Both Marie and other, non-bisexually identifying individuals define her sexual identity as heterosexual, due mainly to the gender of her partner. Marie is married to a biological male, which allows her to maintain a visible heterosexual identity, even though she also claims a bisexual one. Christine and Madison communicate similar experiences; both are assumed heterosexuals, and claim that identity themselves even though they also claim bisexuality. They said this is primarily because they are visually involved with men. This visual relationship is assumed to be a heterosexual one, and shapes outside perceptions of their heterosexuality.

Some participants express experience with outside perceptions being shaped by the presence of a partner in other ways. Penelope shared a story of a soldier she knew in the military who self-identified as gay, but in wake of *Don't Ask Don't Tell*, maintained a heterosexual relationship with a self-identifying lesbian. This rouse was effective because other people assumed them to be straight due to who they were assumed to be in a relationship with. The perceived gender of visual partners was influential in the heterosexual label they were assigned by others. Penelope continued to tell a story about a friend of hers, who identifies as

heterosexual, being violently assaulted because she was talking with another female, when they were standing outside of a gay bar. In each of these accounts, assumed sexuality is assigned to individuals based solely off of the perceived gender of their partner.

As explored previously, Laura identifies as pansexual; however, many people assume she is bisexual. She shares "Some people will think of you as gay and some as straight and it all has to do with who you're with, it has nothing to do with you." She expands on this by explaining that when she goes through breakups, her well-intentioned friends tend to try and set her up with a person who shares the gender of her most recent partner; they assume that is what she wants. Laura also shared how she lived with a heterosexual female friend who was going through a divorce while they were actively serving in the military. Since they lived and spent a majority of their time together, both women were assumed to be lesbians by others, which resulted in the women being reprimanded by military officials, even though they were not partners with one another. Isabel communicates her understanding of sexuality assignments being made by the gender of a partner when she states "You are actually the first person I have met that identifies as bisexual and I don't know if that is because it is true, or because people allow themselves to be defined based off of their relationships. Another person I met who identifies as bisexual is a woman and I had a conversation with her. She said she will never compromise who she is because of who she's with. She and I really identified with one another in that regard."

In each of these accounts, sexual identity labels are assigned to participants based off of a single perceived truth, valid or otherwise. These assumptions have the tendency to result in confusion, since such perceptions are reflective of dualistic thinking and the sexuality of the participants is unable to be conceptualized in such a way. Moreover, not only are these

assumptions cultivated with the presence of a partner of a certain perceived gender, but also with the absence of one.

Definition by Absence

Isabel shared a time when she was assumed to be straight among other students in her STEM program, since none had seen her with a female partner previously. She claimed that she was talking about a female and everyone seemed confused so she declared that she is queer. The people around her expressed confusion since they had always assumed her to be heterosexual, based solely off of the perceived absence of a female partner. Laura offered another experience with this when she explained how, in the military, female soldiers who were not out to everyone played "games with language". They would refuse to say 'he or she' and 'boyfriend and girlfriend' when referencing their partner, instead opting for words such as 'they and them', and 'significant other and partner'. As a result, they were deemed straight by those on the outside looking in, since there was an absence of defined gender. Further, the three participants who are generally assumed to be lesbian are categorized as such based largely off the absence of a perceived male partner.

Additionally, there were two participants, who are currently single, that experience false assumptions from others because they have either not dated yet, or have not done so visibly. Both Amy and Laura are consistently assumed to be heterosexual. In both cases, this assumption is made by the assumed absence of another. Since neither woman has ever visibly dated, outside perceptions were formed, based on the default assumption of heterosexuality. This illustrates that when there is no other present to analyze one's sexuality by, it is often the case that that an individual is automatically assumed to be straight. This is reflective of the heteronormative way many people view human sexuality.

It is clear that false identity labels are frequently assigned to bisexual women for a variety of reasons. However, false assumptions that lead to false labels are often formed through many variables. This section offered several ways that incorrect identity assignments are made to female bisexuals: a) gender performance, b) normalized ideologies about bisexuality, and c) the perceived gender of present (or absent) partner. Bisexual females are frequently assumed to be either heterosexual or homosexual. This theme illustrates this notion and offers an explanation as to why this is the case. Since it is common for those who do not identify as bisexual to misunderstand the identity, it is not surprising that they are unable to effectively label bisexuals, specifically when a main point of influence is the perceived gender of a partner. Finally, it is reasonable that participants reject identity labeling that is a consequence of perceptions of gender since many have expressed contention with bisexuality only involving male and female genders, rather than also including transgender bodies.

Manipulation of Heterosexual/Homosexual Privilege

There is some overlap that is evident between the first and second themes of analysis. While each individual theme is valid in and of itself, it is also important to recognize the overlap between all themes; such an overlap assists in illustrating a more cohesive picture that illustrates why female bisexuals experience heightened levels of oppression and marginalization. It is here, within the third theme of *manipulation of heterosexual and homosexual privilege*, that significant overlap between the first three themes can be observed. An explanation of homosexual privilege is important here. From participant responses, homosexual privilege is an evident reality. Some participants are unable to access heterosexual privilege, so they instead focus on gaining some privilege on the homosexual side of the binary. Further, in this context, manipulation is not intended as a negative concept, but rather to illustrate the ways that participants use identity

ascriptions and gender performance to provide themselves with advantages that would otherwise be unavailable to them. It is important to recognize the complexities of participant manipulation of privilege; there are many motivations for this including social acceptance, avoidance of discrimination/marginalization, enhance perceived credibility, and to avoid potentially dangerous situations. Such manipulation of privilege can be either intentional or unintentional.

This theme was identified after several participants expressed awareness of both heterosexual and homosexual privilege, as well as their abilities to manipulate outside perceptions to access such privilege. Exploration of this will be presented in the following way: a) manipulation of heterosexual privilege, and 2) recognition and manipulation of homosexual privilege.

Manipulation of Heterosexual Privilege

From the data collected, it is most often the case that participants are able to recognize heterosexual privilege and manipulate their perceived sexual identity in order to access such privilege. Eight participants express their ability (and appreciation) to access this privilege. This section will explore various motivations behind participant non-disclosure of avowed identity in order to access heterosexual privilege. The predominant reason for participant non-disclosure of their bisexual identity is to avoid judgment by others. Participants communicate several areas of their lives where they feel the need to hide their sexual orientation. There were four prominent sectors of social experience identified: family, peers or friends, places of employment, and the military.

First, the opinions and influences of family members surfaced as motivation for participants to conceal their sexuality. There were eight participants who are able to manipulate outside perceptions, because of gender performance, and access heterosexual privilege. Of these

eight, three specifically mention doing so around family members. Primarily, the factor of religion is present when participants share their experiences with family members. Amy shared that her family is Christian and her parents believe that homosexuality of any kind is a sin. As a result, Amy communicates awareness that her parents would reject her bisexual identity if she were to disclose to them, so she chooses to not disclose her sexuality, and is inherently assumed to be heterosexual. She states "They are traditional and old. It's either their way or the highway, so it's just better this way [concealing her bisexuality]."Amy communicates her awareness of the necessity to manipulate her parents' perceptions of her sexual identity in order to access heterosexual privilege and avoid their judgments. Both Teresa and Laura communicate similar motivations to manipulate the perception of family members as well. Teresa's family is devout Roman Catholic and assumes a heteronormative view of human sexuality. She shared that it is common for her father to make offensive jokes targeted at the LBGT community, making her feel unaccepted without her parents even knowing her sexual orientation. As a result, Teresa chooses to not-disclose her avowed sexual identity so that such homophobic jokes are not made toward her by her father. Laura's situation with her family is similar, however her father identifies as gay. While initially this seemed like an opportunity for her to disclose her own sexuality to her family, she chooses not to since both her mother and sister express homophobic sentiments toward her father. Their comments and opinions cause her to hide her bisexual identity, therefore accessing heterosexual privilege, in order to avoid similar judgements.

In addition to family members, peers and friends also pose the risk of false judgement. Four participants communicated that they claim a heterosexual identity when meeting new peers, or are around familiar friends who may not be as accepting as others. Each participant expressed concerns with being misunderstood, judged, or ignored entirely by peers and friends. For

example, Christine states "it's just easier to not disclose the identity [bisexuality]" because "it really irritates me when people speculate and say that they don't care when they obviously do care." She went on to explain further that "Talking about sexuality with a straight person sometimes gets into awkward territory and then they make assumptions and don't want to talk about homosexual relationships, they really don't want to hear about it." In attempts to avoid awkwardness and misunderstandings regarding her sexual identity, Christine uses manipulation to access the same privileges heterosexuals enjoy when sexuality is brought to the center of the conversation. Two other participants communicate the same concerns as motivation for accessing heterosexual privilege. Laura claims that she is consistently told that she is "confused" and "actually straight" by both peers and friends. This common rejection of her sexuality causes her to assume a heterosexual identity around peers and some of her close friends in order to avoid being told she is something that she is not by others.

Laura is another participant who expressed similar sentiments. Specifically, she shared that when she is with her friends, she is "always pressured to hit on guys in my grade and I don't always want to." She continued to explain that many of her peers are homophobic and make ignorant comments, not realizing that she is bisexual, which makes it difficult for her to express herself around them. As a result, she hides her bisexuality and opts to manipulate the perceptions of her peers in order to avoid marginalization. Similarly, Isabel expressed contention with peers in her major field of study of engineering. She communicates that it is often difficult to be accepted in that environment simply because she is a female and that exposing her true sexuality would only "make things worse."

The third area where participants intentionally access heterosexual privilege is in relation to employment. A total of four participants expressed concerns with self-disclosure in

employment-related instances, all of which related to reasons of self-preservation. Isabel shared

an experience she had with workplace harassment after disclosing her bisexuality to a co-worker.

She states "it [her workplace] almost got unsafe for me", continuing on to say "Never co-workers

again. Never, ever again. It was just a bad decision." As a result, she decides not to disclose her

sexuality in the workplace environment. Her primary motivation for accessing heterosexual

privilege through perception manipulation in places of employment stem from her fear of

employment-related harassment from other employees.

Motivations behind the same decision for two other participants revolve around

employment security. Specifically, Penelope shared that "when I go to jobs and stuff, I try to

adhere to social norms because it is a lot easier to get hired that way." She says she dresses more

feminine by putting her hair up and applying make-up in order to be perceived as more feminine

and inherently assumed to be heterosexual, due to heteronormative beliefs about what a female

should look like. She stated that she does this because "when you deviate physically [from social

norms], it is a perception on your sexuality, and you can endanger yourself in certain

circumstances." This awareness of the safety that heterosexual privilege provides is a primary

reason for Penelope to access heterosexual privilege in employment-related instances. An

example provided by Teresa echoes Penelope's concerns. Her primary reason for non-disclosure

in the workplace is to avoid possible termination. She shared that she is a student worker on the

Oregon State University main campus and will not disclose her sexuality in order to feel like she

has more job security. She stated "my co-workers and my boss, I would never tell them.

Probably because I am already the only minority on the entire floor and being bisexual would

only make me more of a minority and I don't want to deal with that." Teresa clearly

communicates awareness of the benefits of heterosexual privilege and chooses to access such

benefits through perception manipulation while at work to avoid possible oppression from fellow employees. When heterosexuality is assumed, participants feel safer at work, and more confident that they will be able to find work.

The final area where non-disclosure of sexual identity is in the military. While the military is employment-related, it has been separated from the previous section due to the difference in risks that participants aim to avoid through assumed heterosexuality. Two participants have experience in the US military and communicated the dangers of being out or perceived as non-heterosexual.

Penelope, who served in the military during 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell', shared that there are many ways that LBGT members hid their sexuality in the military, all stemming from the same reason of avoiding judgment and punishment. Specifically, she shared a story about a male soldier who was gay, yet maintained a heterosexual relationship with a self-identifying lesbian in order to access heterosexual privileges, such as housing. Both the female and males soldier were aware what consequences disclosure of their sexual identities would result in and decided to manipulate outside perceptions in order to avoid discrimination and punishment. Penelope continued to divulge that punishment for not identifying as heterosexual has severe consequences in the military. Specifically, she claimed that "they can kick you out and take away your benefits, no matter what you have done for your country."

Laura had similar experiences with the need to be perceived as heterosexual when she served in the US Navy. She shared that it was common for her to not disclose her sexuality, and is inherently assumed to be heterosexual, in order to avoid harassment and discrimination within her compartment as well as physical punishment from superiors. Part of her process to manipulate outside perceptions of her sexuality was by modifying her language as mentioned

earlier in this chapter. She would change her language to be inclusive of gender neutral pronouns so that others would simply assume her to be heterosexual. Further, she stated that more than once outside perceptions became suspicious, which resulted in her being ostracized and harassed by other members of her squadron, as well as physical punishment in the form of extreme exercise by her superiors. In this particular instance, Laura and her female friend were punished because she hugged her friend to provide her comfort since she was going through a divorce and in emotional distress. She stated that the punishment for being perceived as anything but heterosexual, even when no evidence to support it existed, was "very strict. So we got beat. They didn't hurt us physically, but they would work us until we were exhausted and that was our form of punishment for our interaction." Both Susan and Laura expressed that heterosexuality holds much privilege in the military, and when a soldier is perceived to be anything but heterosexual, the consequences are great.

Manipulation of Homosexual Privilege

While it may initially seem contradictory, participant responses suggest that privilege based on sexuality does not stop with heterosexuality; the presence of homosexual privilege presented itself in a number of responses. From the data, it is clear that participants understand heterosexual privilege to be the highest form of privilege; meaning that the chances of an individual being discriminated against for being heterosexual are very slim. This understanding is somewhat of an obvious one; however, awareness and recognition of homosexual privilege is not. As illustrated in the review of relevant literature, bisexuals experience oppression from both the heterosexual and homosexual sides of the binary (Carr, 2012). Several participant responses support this claim by sharing their experiences with oppression from both identity groups. As a result, it is clear that homosexuals have the power to oppress bisexuals, simply because

bisexuality is unable to be categorized on one side of the binary or the other. The following will explore instances when participants manipulated outside perceptions in order to access homosexual privilege as well as offer reasons why. It is important to note that the participants who communicated that they commonly access homosexual privilege were generally denied access to heterosexual privilege, based on their inability to manipulate perceptions of their non-heterosexuality.

First, some participants feel that heterosexual privilege is out of their reach, based off of assumptions of lesbianism made by others. Heather, Hannah, and Penelope are the participants who are most often assumed to be lesbians. The reasoning behind this is that they present themselves in ways that are perceived as masculine, once again linking outward appearance to assumed sexuality. It is relevant to note this here since these three participants are the only ones that express difficulties with tapping into their heterosexual privilege, and as a result, turn to homosexual privilege instead.

Hannah shared how she is never assumed to be heterosexual due to the way she performs her gender identity; she had long hair in the past, but cut it off to feel more like herself a few years ago. Since that time, she has become aware of how much influence her hair style has on outside perceptions. She stated "When I had long hair, people could look at me and not know that I am bisexual, I was always assumed to be heterosexual, but now that my hair is short, I am never seen that way and everyone thinks I am a lesbian. I dress more masculine, I am simply assumed to be a guy or a lesbian. But I have feminine characteristics that cannot be seen just by looking at me" and continues to state "I am a bisexual female who has short hair and wears men's clothing, but that doesn't mean that I am not still a woman." She continues to share that she is confident that her outward appearance is what negates her access to heterosexual privilege.

Since Hannah in unable to effectively access heterosexual privilege, she instead manipulates outside perceptions of her lesbianism in order to access homosexual privilege in certain social situations to avoid misconceptions about bisexuality that "are a result of false assumptions that lead to both ignorance and confusion." For Hannah, manipulation of outside perceptions is done in order to avoid being put in the situation that she will have to defend her sexuality to others who do not understand or outright reject bisexuality.

Heather expressed frustration with access to privilege since she blurs expected gender performance lines. She said "I realize that I can go back and forth with being privileged or not privileged, but I do look like a giant lesbian so there is that." She continued to share that when she is perceived to be lesbian, she is unable to access heterosexual privilege. However, she is most often perceived in this way, which provides her access to homosexual privilege. When Heather accesses homosexual privilege, she does so through perception manipulation by not disputing assumptions of lesbianism. While Heather did not offer explicit instances when she accesses homosexual privilege, she did offer the following reason why she chooses to not disclose her bisexuality when she stated:

> I don't identify with the dichotomy; I can't, we can't, it's just not us [bisexuals]. I find them both stifling. I don't know which one is more stifling: the assumption that I am heterosexual or homosexual. I am going to that the one that assumes I am homosexual is more stifling because it is so judgmental. It's so judgmental! I'm losing credibility because I am not a lesbian. So in groups where I am assumed lesbian, I am okay as long as they [lesbians] don't find out that I am bisexual or anything else because it would make me lose cred within the group.

Heather continued to explain "I think that straight people are more comfortable with bisexuality than gay people because of the credibility aspect of it." In addition to this, Heather discussed the relationship between her own sexuality and perceived lack of credibility by lesbians,

communicating that a primary reason for her manipulation for homosexual access is to be perceived as credible and to have a voice and be heard.

Penelope echoes these experiences with her own, sharing how it is often difficult for her to access heterosexual privilege since she is also perceived as lesbian, based on the way she performs her gender. Since Penelope is married to a woman, she is constantly categorized as a lesbian, even though she identifies as bisexual. She shared that lesbians often ridicule her and tell her that she is actually a lesbian since she married another woman. She experiences rejection and confusion from lesbians because of this, since normalized ideology maintains that once an individual is married, they are either heterosexual or homosexual (through definition of other); that bisexuality is an 'in-between' phase. She recalled being told "bisexuality is the in-between of crossroads and you gotta pick which way you're going to go and then you're done" by a self-identified lesbian in the past. Since this is commonly the case, she often opts to access homosexual privilege in order to avoid oppression and misunderstanding from the homosexual side of the binary as well as the necessity to defend her sexuality.

In each of these instances, participants are unable to access heterosexual privilege, based solely off the way they choose to express their gender identity. It is a common assumed truth that gender expression is indicative of sexuality identification. In relation to heterosexual privilege, participants who blur gender performance lines by wearing their hair short or by wearing clothing from the men's department are denied access, unless they alter their outward appearance in order to influence outside perceptions. However, when participants are unable to be viewed as heterosexual, they turn instead to accessing homosexual privilege for a variety of reasons, such as avoiding oppression, enhancing perceived credibility, and avoiding misconceptions that revolve around bisexuality.

Experiences of Oppression within the LBGT Community

The final theme that presented itself through participant data is their experience with oppression within the LBGT community. It is illustrated in the previous section that participants reported feeling oppressed by not only heterosexuals, but also by lesbians. These experiences are not only evident within individual relationships, but also in organizations of solidarity whose primary purpose is to provide a safe and open place for members of the LBGT community to be a part of, including bisexuals. However, responses reflect that many participants feel neither welcome nor understood within these environments, which is often a result of their experiences with discrimination by other members of the LBGT community. A total of five participants expressed experience with discrimination, either in the form of micro-aggressions or overtly, from other LBGT members. Responses communicated that participants felt judged by lesbians much more so than by gay men. Rejection and misunderstanding from lesbians has resulted, in some cases, in discrimination within groups of solidarity. The final section of this chapter explores the ways that participants have experienced discrimination from lesbians, which often results in oppression within organizations for solidarity, as well as offer some insight as to why such oppression occurs.

Lesbians are pinpointed by five participants as being the most likely to discriminate against female bisexuals. Participant experiences with the lesbian community are resoundingly negative. Isabel stated that she feels oppressed by lesbians since it has been her experience that lesbians are ignorant to what bisexuality is, which often results in oppressive and false claims and assumptions about the identity. Specifically she states "I have been around lesbians when they are talking badly about bisexuals, not realizing that I am one, so that is hurtful." She continued on to state that the most notable difference in acceptance is between lesbians and

bisexual women and confessed "I do feel more oppressed by lesbians than by any other social group."

Heather supported Isabel's ideas about marginalization by lesbians when she expressed how she feels she "loses credibility because of her sexual orientation" when in the presence of lesbians. She continues to explain how, when her credibility is questioned, oppression is the consequence. She explains that she often feels silenced and criticized by lesbians once her sexual identity is disclosed. This idea of diminished credibility was reflected in four other participant responses. Kristen stated "I honestly would say that lesbian women are the worst. They have no interest in bisexual women because I feel like lesbians identify bisexuals like we are just out to sleep with everybody, that we are greedy." She expressed her frustration with feeling misunderstood by others who assume they understand her identity better than she does.

When oppression and discrimination are fueled by ignorance, the consequences can be farther-reaching than in relation to interpersonal relationships. Of the five participants who expressed negative experiences with lesbians, four also communicate feelings of rejection and invisibilization within organizations of solidarity. Organizations of solidarity signify collective groups with similar life experiences coming together to support one another and to find solidarity. One specific organization that was mentioned throughout participant responses was the Pride Center on the Oregon State University Campus. Isabel stated "the Pride Center helped me to understand how I am perceived and always will be perceived, which is in a binary way, which is really upsetting." She continued to share how she eventually gave up on correcting others about her sexuality because it was frustrating since no one seemed to acknowledge her bisexual identity. Laura supported these sentiments when she stated "I have gone to the Pride Center a few times and I feel kind of on the outside, not included in the general group, even

though that is what they are there for." Heather also struggles with finding acceptance within organizations for solidarity, claiming that the perceived lack of credibility of her sexuality results in her being ignored and sexualized by lesbians within the organization. All three participants express agreement that the Pride Center is mostly supportive for individuals whose sexual orientation fits into the homosexual side of the binary, and even that members of the Pride Center are more welcoming of heterosexuals than bisexuals.

It is clear to see the ways in which ignorance and dualistic categorizations of human sexuality result in misguided assumptions about bisexuality. False assumptions are communicated to bisexuals both in general spaces and spaces that have been created to serve as a safe space for LBGT community members. However, since bisexuality is unable to be categorized in dualistic terms, the result is often rejection. Moreover, it has been illustrated that experiences of oppression from other LBGT members can and does result in marginalization within groups of solidarity.

The four themes explored in this chapter were presented in order to answer the first research question for this study:

RQ1: How do female bisexuals express or explain how bisexuality is communicated and perceived?

First, participants express confusion and doubt with their avowed identity label of bisexual. Second, responses illustrate the contentions participants have with being ascribed false identity labels. Third, the concepts of heterosexual and homosexual privileges were explored. This included various ways that participants are either granted or denied access, based primarily off of their gender performance, as well as an exploration of various rationalizations for participant non-disclosure. Finally, the concept of bisexual oppression by other LBGT members, and within

groups of solidarity, was discussed. By highlighting these four prominent themes, one is able to gain valuable insight about female bisexual experiences and sheds light on how common perceptions of bisexuality are inadequate and function to do more harm than good.

Chapter V: Theoretical Analysis

This chapter focuses on two goals; the first explores various frame interdependencies located within the data set, and the second examines present identity gaps that are highlighted through analysis. Frame interdependencies occur when identity frames influence, or are influenced by, other frames. Through an exploration of this, identity gaps resulting from inconsistencies between frames are examined as well as consequences that result from them. The following chapter will be organized in the following way: a) a brief overview of individual frames, b) a discussion of various frame interdependencies, c) an exploration of identity gaps and their influence on theme development.

Each of these sections include data-specific examples for reference and provide answers to the second research question of this study:

RQ2: What roles do the four frames of identity play in the social construction and communication of female bisexuality?

Independent Frames of Identity

The first frame is the personal frame, where identity resides within the individual. Identity is known as self-image within this frame, and offers insight to the ways individuals define themselves in relation to both general and specific social situations (Hecht et al., 2005). The second frame is the enactment frame, within which identity resides in the way an individual performs their identity. The third frame, the relational frame, is where identity resides in relationships. The final frame of identity is the communal frame, within which identity resides in groups. This frame assumes that individual identities emerge, develop, and are negotiated through groups.

Identity resides in different locations within each of the frames, and is both internalized and externalized through communication. However, it is important to note that it is not intended that the frames be considered as separate entities, but rather understood that they coexist and function to inform one another. The following section will explore this concept further by examining various interdependencies between the frames that were evident from participant responses, in attempts to illustrate the ways that identity is developed and negotiated through the communication of multiple frames at once.

Analysis of Frame Interdependencies

Frames of identity are able to be analyzed individually; however sole reliance on individual frames will not result in a complete analysis of data. While individual frames do offer some level of insight to identity construction and communication, they are inadequate in addressing the complexities of identity development. As a result, it is crucial that the relationship between individual frames with one another, or *interdependencies*, are also analyzed. The following section will explore various frame interdependencies evident in study data.

The following analysis will be presented from the frames deemed most influential on the construction and communication of a female bisexual identity to those deemed to have the least influence. As such, this section will be presented in the following manner: a) communal frame interdependencies, b) enactment frame interdependencies, c) relational frame interdependencies, and, d) personal frame interdependencies. Subheadings indicate the primary frame of identity that section aims to explore while being inclusive of interdependencies that occur between that frame and others. Examples of discussed interdependencies will be provided.

Communal Frame Influences

Participant data reflects the notion that group memberships have an influence on their sexual identity development and communication. This section illustrates how the communal frame is a primary frame with female bisexual construction, paying specific attention to the way(s) it is both influential to, and influenced by, other frames of identity. Before such an illustration can be made, it is crucial to explain what groups are considered as part of the communal frame within this study and why. This will assist in clarifying the role the communal frame plays in bisexual identity construction.

The communal frame is concerned with the way groups and group membership influences the development, negotiation, and communication of identity. From participant data, two major forms of groups were exposed: the existing social structure and individual groups that participants are members of. The existing social structure is included as a communal group in this study because of the profound influence it has on female bisexual identity development. This influence is achieved through normalized ideologies that surround human sexuality and gender, on a large social level; it is argued that constant reification of these ideologies function to ignore and erase a bisexual identity. The current social structure is considered differently in analysis than individual communal groups of participants because there is an evident difference in the level of influence each group holds on participant identity development and communication. This section will explore the influence(s) each type of group has as well as any relationships between them and other frames of identity.

Social expectations and ideologies of human gender and sexuality have been normalized to the point that they are considered accepted truths. Heteronormativity and dualistic categorizations (see p. 3 of literature review) have been presented as social truths so often that they go unquestioned. When ideologies such as these are left undisputed, the unfortunate result is

the communication of other assumptions that directly stem from them. However, none of these "truths" adequately support the complexities of human gender and sexuality.

Since sexuality is understood in dualistic terms, a bisexual identity is inherently unable to be located and understood on a social level. When confusion about what constitutes bisexuality occurs, false and often harmful assumptions about the identity are made, communicated, and reified. As explored in Chapters two and four, common myths that circulate around bisexuality often include invisibilizing claims, such as the identity being a phase or a call for attention; and oppressive claims, such as assumed non-monogamy and promiscuity of bisexuals.

All participants expressed that their bisexual identity avowal (personal frame) is influenced through the communication of social truths about sexuality and gender. Teresa, Laura, Amy and Hannah expressed that heteronormative claims by others influence their sexual identity development and understanding. Laura, Heather, Kristen, Penelope, Christine, Isabel, and Marie each shared that the communication of invisibilizing claims influence the way they understand their bisexual identity. Ideologies located within the communal frame influence the ideologies of individuals who have relationships with participants in the relational frame as well as participant's sense of self in the personal frame. When the relational frame is influenced by the communal frame in this way, social ideologies are communicated to participants, which influence their understandings of their avowed sexual identity. This is merely an overview of the way the communal frame influences other frames. Explicit illustrations of this will be presented in the following sections for reference. For the duration of this section, other participant groups will be analyzed through the communal frame as well as any relationships between it and other frames.

Many participants are members of individual groups, such as the Pride Center on the OSU campus, various religious groups, and OSU peer groups. These groups are situated within the communal frame alongside social views of sexuality and gender, but are considered separately, due to the difference in influence they have.

Participant responses expressed that individual groups function to communicate normalized social ideologies about gender and sexuality to them. While also considered part of the communal frame, individual groups are influenced by the larger social context that they are a part of. As a result, it is the case that individual groups tend to internalize normalized ideologies and communicate them to participants, intentionally or otherwise. To illustrate, Isabel is a student in a male-dominated major, engineering. She shared about a time when she disclosed her interest in women as well as men to a study group in an engineering class and the reaction of her peers was shock. Since they only communicate with her for course-related reasons, group members assumed she was heterosexual. This is an illustration of how communication of group internalization of heteronormativity is expressed to participants.

Participants also shared experiences with invisibilizing assumptions from groups they are members of. For example, Heather and Isabel are consistently ascribed sexual identities they do not avow by members of the Pride Center, an organization that is intended to provide a safe and welcoming place for all LBGT members. Heather shared that she is consistently labeled a lesbian, while Isabel is ascribed as heterosexual, by members of this group. Since normalized ideologies of gender and sexuality are unable to be considered separately, Heather and Isabel are categorized through their gender expression (Heather is masculine presenting, while Isabel is feminine). This automatic categorization into one side of the binary or the other is heavily

influenced by normalized beliefs of gender and sexuality and can function to influence the personal frame when participants receive messages that their bisexual identity is invalid.

It is important to note that these examples also illustrate various relationships between the communal and other frames. However, for clarity purposes, such connections will be explicitly made in the following sections where most appropriate. From participant responses, it has been determined that the communal frame holds a significant amount of influence over the way female bisexuality is able to be conceptualized and communicated. It functions to influence other frames in a variety of ways. Overall, it is demonstrated that the communal frame holds the most influential power over the social construction, communication, and negotiation of the female bisexual identity.

Enactment Frame Influences

Hecht et al. (2005) maintain that identity is communicated partially through enactment. For the purposes of this study, an important distinction of enactment must be made. During interviews, it became clear that enactment of bisexuality is so complex that it is often misinterpreted by others. This disconnect is directly and heavily influenced by the communal (social) frame in relation to gender performance expectations and the link between that and sexual identification categorizations. Heteronormative views on sexuality maintain that gender expression is indicative of sexual identification. This normalized link between sexuality and gender influence how participant enactment of their sexual identity is perceived by others within the communal frame. As such, neither the method nor intention of participant enactment of bisexuality is able to be viewed for what it is. Instead, it is assumed to be an enactment of hetero- or homosexuality.

There are several ways participants enact their bisexuality. Enactment tactics included: observable romantic relationships with others, overt self-disclosure to others, and gender performance blurring practices. However, since these tactics often unsuccessfully communicate a bisexual identity, it is difficult for the enactment frame to influence other frames. To illustrate, Penelope and Heather are both masculine presenting and always ascribed as lesbian by those in the relational and communal frames. This is because their bisexual enactment is unable to be perceived by others for what it is and is instead categorized as an enactment of hetero- or homosexuality. Here, the ideologies within communal frame influence the way others view participant bisexual enactment and function to reify dualistic categorizations.

In addition to gender presentations, romantic relationships are also a form of bisexual enactment. When participants are in observable romantic relationships, they are inherently enacting their bisexual identity. Unfortunately, these relationships are unable to be socially viewed as bisexual enactment, specifically, due to heteronormative ideologies that maintain an individual is either hetero- or homosexual. This disconnect is well illustrated through Isabel's experience. She expressed that when she goes through a break-up, her friends attempt to set her up with another individual who is the same gender as her previous partner. This gesture, while well-intentioned, communicates their understanding that Isabel must only be interested in a single gender, which inherently communicates heteronormative ideologies. This example illustrates the influence the communal frame has on shaping outside perceptions of Isabel's sexual identity enactment as well as how such enactment is unable to be viewed for what it is: an enactment of bisexuality.

However, there is one overt way participants expressed enacting their bisexuality. Explicit self-disclosure is the only enactment tactic expressed that is unable to be misinterpreted

as fitting into one side of the binary or the other. However, it was often the case that even disclosure of bisexuality was met with invisibilizing or oppressive comments that ultimately categorized participants in a heteronormative fashion. To illustrate, Heather, Hannah, Penelope, and Isabel each shared instances when disclosure of their bisexual identities was met with rejection and disbelief. They expressed that they are often accused of wanting attention or that they are going through a phase while deciding whether to avow a hetero- or homosexual identity. Once again the enactment frame influences the communal frame to reify heteronormative communal ideologies, achieving the opposite of what it is intended to do. This is an interesting occurrence since the communal frame is heavily influential on the way bisexual enactment is perceived. Here a major finding between the communal and enactment frames is exposed: the communal frame directly shapes perceptions of enactment that are presented within the enactment frame, but the enactment frame is only influential in reinforcing assumed norms about sexuality. As such, when participants enact their bisexual identity, such enactment is unable to be perceived as it is intended and instead is categorized according to social norms within the communal frame.

The communal frame also influences the relational frame regarding participant enactment of bisexuality. When participants attempt to enact their bisexual identity to individuals with whom they have a relationship, the response is very similar to that from the communal frame: a rejection or overlooking of bisexuality. To illustrate, Laura has self-disclosed her bisexual identity to her mother and sister, only to have them reject her identity with claims of confusion and transition. They communicate to Laura that her identity is merely a placeholder while she decides on her true sexuality as a hetero- or homosexual. The opinions of her family members are influenced by normalized ideologies and function to influence Laura. With this example,

Laura's enactment of bisexuality through self-disclosure was rejected in the relational frame, due to influences from the communal and relational frames.

However, Isabel discussed that when she self-disclosed her bisexual identity to her parents, the reaction was surprise and curiosity. Her parents wanted to learn more about her bisexual identity, which stemmed from enactment through self-disclosure that brought her bisexuality to the forefront of the conversation. Christine also shared that disclosure of her bisexual identity resulted in her mother's interest in learning more about her daughter's sexuality. While these examples are exceptions within the data, they illustrate how the enactment frame influences the relational frame by complicating preconceived notions about human sexuality from the communal frame.

In general, when participants enact their bisexual identities, they are met with claims and perceptions of oppression and invisibilization. As such, the enactment frame is observed to primarily influence the communal frame by reifying normalized ideologies located within it. However, this is dependent on how much of an influence the communal frame has on individuals that have relationships with participants. When individuals within the relational frame are less influenced by the communal frame, they are more likely to be influenced by the enactment frame. That is, when individuals such as Isabel and Christine's parents, are less influenced by normalized ideologies, they are more likely to acknowledge bisexual enactment, which illustrates an interdependency between the relational and enactment frames.

Female bisexual enactment is incredibly complicated and violates normalized expectations about gender and sexuality. It is within the enactment frame that the complexities of female bisexuality are particularly visible.

Relational Frame Influences

As briefly touched on in previous sections, the relational frame is influenced by both communal and enactment frames. In addition, the relational frame also intersects with the personal frame to influence participant perceptions of self. It was expressed by several participants that normalized ideologies of gender and sexuality (communal frame) is communicated to them by individuals they had relationships with. Participant relationships with others include romantic partners, individual family members, peers, and friends. These relationships contribute to participant understanding of their bisexual identities, which illustrate an interdependency between the relational and personal frames.

Many participants communicated how relationships with others influence their sense of self as well as how their bisexual identity is understood in a social sense. For example, Teresa shared that her father overtly expresses his disgust for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual. This heteronormative view is influenced by the communal frame, and functions to influence the personal frame in relation to the way Teresa views herself. Teresa explained that in response to her father's claims, she does not self-disclose her bisexual identity to anyone. In this case, the communal frame influences the relational frame when her father internalizes and communicates heteronormative messages to Teresa. The relational and communal frames then function to influence the personal frame with Teresa's decision to not enact her bisexual identity.

Additionally, identity is communicated through the relational frame in relation to whom participants are in romantic relationships with. Influences from the communal frame often make communication of bisexuality through the presence of romantic partners tricky for participants. Penelope, Heather, Hannah, and Kristen each expressed difficulty with communicating a bisexual identity through the presence of romantic partners. Penelope is married to a woman, but outside perceptions ascribe her as lesbian, rather than bisexual. This is an explicit instance of

how the relational frame (her marriage to another woman) influences the enactment frame (visibly performing her sexuality with the presence of her wife). However, as previously mentioned, enactment of bisexuality is unable to be viewed for what it is, due to normalized ideologies of sexuality (communal influence). This example functions to illustrate the way the relational frame both influences and is influenced by the communal and enactment frames.

There are times when romantic relationships help participants understand how they understand their bisexual identity within the personal frame. While Hannah experienced rejection and disgust from her mother in the years following her sexual identity development, she was also in a romantic relationship that helped her understand the validity of her sexuality. She shared that she began dating her female math tutor. During this time, her romantic partner showed her patience, acceptance, and understanding. This influenced Hannah to reevaluate the claims her mother had made about her sexuality, which then functioned to reinforce her own view of herself. Here, the influence of the relational frame (whether with her mother or romantic partner) was on the personal frame.

A similar occurrence happened with Amy, whose parents openly tell her that all homosexuals will "go to hell". The views of her parents are developed through the communal frame, in relation to their religious group beliefs about homosexuality. In response to this, Amy internalized negative feelings about her bisexual identity (internalized biphobia). However, she also dated another female who communicated acceptance and openness to her. It was within this relationship that Amy's perceptions of self were developed and solidified. With this example, frame influences are the same as with Hannah; the communal frame influenced the relational frame with her parents, which then influenced the personal frame. However, her romantic partner influenced Amy's perception of self, by the relational frame influencing the personal frame.

Other participants discussed the influence former romantic partners had on their personal and sexual development and understanding as well. However, whether the relationship between participants and others were romantic or not, they all had similar effects: the relational frame influenced the personal frame and was influenced by the communal frame. And, when applicable, the enactment frame was influenced by the relational frame.

Personal Frame

While the communal frame is attributed to being the most influential over the construction and communication of bisexuality, the personal frame is attributed to having the least influence. The reasoning behind this is that the communal frame influences outside perceptions to all other frames, however, the personal frame is the one that is most likely to be influenced by others. So, where the communal frame does the influencing, the personal frame is mostly only able to be influenced by other frames.

The personal frame locates identity within the individual through a sense of self and self-image. The way participants understand their bisexual identity is directly influenced by the communal and relational frames, specifically. To illustrate, all participants expressed contention or confusion with the avowing a bisexual identity label. Much of this stems from the communication of normalized social assumptions about bisexuality that contradicted with the way participants viewed themselves. This disconnect is one way the communal frame (and likely the relational) influences the personal frame. Moreover, when participants avow a bisexual identity, it is the personal frame that influences the enactment frame, or how the participant decides to enact their bisexuality. In this way, the personal frame influences the enactment frame since performance is driven by participant understanding of their own identity.

It is difficult for the personal frame to influence the communal and relational frames, however. Many participants expressed frustration with this. Heather, for example, rejects being labeled a lesbian, a conclusion drawn through her bisexual identity enactment. Since she enacts her bisexuality by blurring gender performance expectations, she is ascribed an identity label that does not match what she avows. In this way, the personal frame influences the enactment frame, however such enactment is unable to be viewed as bisexual enactment. When this occurs, Heather's avowed identity is overlooked and replaced with the more socially favorable option of lesbian. With this example, it is clear to see the level of influence the personal frame has in relation to the communal.

Other instances of participant confusion with their avowed sexual identities was discussed earlier in this chapter. Until becoming romantically involved with her math tutor, Hannah internalized harmful social ideologies that were communicated to her from her mother. These internalizations shifted when she became involved with her romantic partner, who communicated different values to her. Without the influence of the relational frame in these ways, Hannah's personal development would have happened differently. The relational frame is influential in Hannah's understanding and communication of her bisexual identity.

The irony of the personal frame holding the least influential power over participant bisexual identity conceptualization and communication is overt. Identities are generally assumed to be personal in the way they are constructed, developed, perceived, and communicated about. However, participant responses indicate that female bisexuality is not developed in this way, but rather in relation to the communal and relational frames.

Identity Gaps

Since frames of identity are able to be considered by their relationships with one another, there is the possibility that frames will not always function to inform and complement one another. Sometimes there are contradictions or discrepancies among the frames, called *identity gaps* that "exist between and among any of the identity layers" (Hecht et al, 2005). The following section will explore and analyze various identity gaps existing within study data and be organized in the following manner: a) communal-enactment gap, b) communal-personal gap, c) personal-relational gap, and d) personal-enactment gap. Deconstruction of these gaps will provide additional insight to the roles the four frames of identity play in the social construction and communication of bisexuality.

Communal-Enactment Gap

The existing gap between the communal and enactment frames is highlighted here because it provides particular insight to the way female bisexuality is socially constructed, as well as pinpoints an important disconnect between how participant identity enactment is perceived and what such enactment intends to communicate. Essentially, deconstruction of this identity gap functions to illustrate one way participant's view of their bisexual identity does not align with the perceptions of others.

Participant responses communicate the disconnection between these two frames specifically when discussing experiences of being ascribed sexual identity labels that differed from their avowed labels, due to misconceptions of bisexual enactment. As discussed previously in this chapter, social ideologies revolving around human gender and sexuality categorizations maintain a heteronormative view: that sexuality is only hetero- or homosexual, there is no room for sexualities that fall in the middle or on both sides of the binary. Gender performance plays a role here when normalized ideologies maintain that gender performance is indicative of

sexuality. However, it has been illustrated that this is not the case with female bisexuals. As a result, there is a gap between the way performances of gender and sexuality are conceptualized in within the communal frame and the way participants enact their bisexual identity.

To illustrate, consider the level of experience with participants being ascribed false labels, particularly lesbian. Penelope, Hannah, Heather, and Kristen are often ascribed as lesbians by others in response to the way they each enact their bisexual identity. To elaborate, Penelope's marriage and presence of her wife both contribute to the way she enacts her bisexuality. Since she is married, it is reasonable that she is seen by others with her wife. However, this is where the disconnection between the communal and enactment frames is evident. By marrying and being seen romantically with another woman, Penelope enacts her bisexual identity (enactment frame); but the identity ascribed by others is lesbian (personal frame). Ascriptions of lesbianism are made because of normalized beliefs in dualistic categorization. Since sexuality is socially constructed in this sense, it is not surprising that others ascribe Penelope a homosexual identity.

Other participants who are not married to a woman expressed experiencing the same identity ascription as Penelope. Hannah communicated that she is aware of how her gender performance shapes outside perceptions of her sexual identity. This highlights communal tendencies to link gender performance to sexuality. The general assumptions from others is that since Hannah is masculine presenting, she is a lesbian. This same experience was communicated by Heather. This assumption also stems from heteronormativity in that it is assumed that an individual can only perform one gender or the other and that performance of gender indicates sexual identification. Guided by misconceptions about gender performance expectations, Hannah and Heather are ascribed as lesbians.

Some participants overtly self-disclose their bisexual identity as a form of enactment only to have it rejected in favor of a more socially appropriate categorization (hetero- or homosexual). When social ideologies surrounding bisexuality render it invisible, even when participants are direct about their sexual identification, they are still at risk for rejection and false ascriptions by others.

Further, when the normalized connection between gender and sexuality are communicated to participants through false ascriptions of lesbianism, negative and unproductive outcomes occur. First, avowed sexual identities of participants is ignored and overlooked; this further contributes to the invisibilization of the female bisexual identity. Second, since ascribed identities of participants reflect dualistic categorizations, the result is often that dualism is supported and reified. Finally, since female bisexuality is often kept invisible because of this identity gap, participants experience oppression and marginalization within the communal frame.

Such a profound disconnection between frames was a primary contributing factor in the development of the identified themes of avowed and ascribed identity labels. If this particular identity gap did not exist, female bisexuals would have the space to enact their sexuality and have it recognized as a salient, avowed identity within the communal frame. Moreover, the theme of manipulation to access privilege developed partially in response to this identity gap.

Communal-Personal Gap

When considering the ways participants would define bisexuality, responses varied greatly in what constitutes bisexuality and who is socially permitted to claim the identity. Participant difficulty with defining their avowed identity is fueled by confusion about what bisexuality is as an identity. Similar to the communal-enactment gap, the disconnection between the communal and personal frames is a direct result of social ideologies of human sexuality

situated within the communal frame. However, there is a difference between these two identified identity gaps; the enactment-communal gap illustrates a disconnection between normalized ideologies of gender and sexuality enactment whereas the communal-personal gap illustrates the difference in perspective about what bisexuality is between the communal and personal frames.

Social ideologies communicated within the communal frame are oversimplified and do not allow room for a female bisexual identity. As a result, participants expressed frustration with understanding bisexuality in their own personal frames. When harmful, normalized claims about are made within the communal frame about the female bisexual identity, participants communicated internalizing those claims in order to better understand who they are as bisexuals. However, participants communicated rejection and confusion of normalized assumptions because they do not adequately describe how they view their bisexual identity.

To illustrate, Laura is often told by her peers that bisexuality is "only a phase" and that she will "decide" on one gender or the other to love eventually. These claims about her avowed sexuality cause her to reflect on the validity of such claims and negotiate the way she views her sexual identity. Penelope also communicated experiences with this; it is often the case that those around her believe she has "chosen" one side to love, and that her "phase" is over, due to her marriage. These assumptions cause her to be confident about the way she understands her sexual identity as well as ways to combat such claims. The normalized ideology of bisexuality being a phase communicates that individuals who avow a bisexual identity are actually just confused hetero- or homosexuals, rendering a bisexual identity invisible.

The common assumption of promiscuity of female bisexualism was also communicated as a site where participants struggled to understand themselves on a deeper level. When participants hear this claim, and they are not promiscuous, their sense of self is influenced. For

example, Teresa communicated awareness of ideologies such as these; which has an influential

impact on her decision to not disclose her bisexuality to anyone for fear of being falsely judged.

It is in relation to the communication of invalid and harmful stereotypes about bisexuality from

members of society to participants that negotiations of avowed identities occur.

No matter what social ideology participants communicated experience with, when

bisexuality is overlooked and ignored, the consequence is the erasure of a bisexual identity. Such

erasure forces bisexuals to be categorically placed on one side of the binary or the other, even

though neither category is appropriate. Since this is the case, false identity ascriptions and

confusion with identity avowal are common experiences of participants.

Relational –Personal Gap

In a similar vein as the communal-personal gap, the relational-personal gap influences

participants' sense of self as well as the way they understand their bisexual identity. As explored

earlier in the chapter, the relational frame is influenced by the communal frame and influences

the personal frame. As such, it is logical that many participants communicated experiences with

oppression and misunderstandings from individuals with whom they have a relationship with.

The relational frame is strongly influenced by the communal frame in relation to social

ideologies surrounding gender and sexuality and provides unique obstacles for female bisexuals.

Reflecting back to the example provided previously about Teresa and her father provides

an understanding for the repercussions of the gap between these frames. Since Teresa's father

expresses homophobic sentiments, she makes the decision to not self-disclose to anyone,

especially her father. She communicated feeling nervous that if he ever found out her sexual

identification, he would take away all financial support he currently provides Teresa with while

she attends school. In this case, the consequence of an identity gap between the relational and

personal frames is that Teresa recognizes the risk in self-disclosure and instead opts to communicate her bisexual identity only through the personal frame. Her father's opinions about homosexuality stem from heteronormative views of human sexuality and function to change the way Teresa understands her avowed bisexuality. Similar experiences were expressed by four other participants; in each case, participant understanding of their avowed bisexuality is influenced and negotiated. When bisexuality is communicated through the relational frame as an invalid sexuality, participants tend to not disclose their identity to that person (and sometimes not at all). This decision to not disclose inherently functions to erase bisexuality through non-recognition, which then communicates the ideology that it does not exist.

Personal-Enactment Gap

The final identity gap that is prevalent throughout study data is the personal-enactment gap. Here there is an identified disconnection between the way participants view themselves and their decision to enact their bisexuality. While keeping in mind that personal bisexual identity development is heavily influenced by the communal and relational frames, it is important to note that such influences may have an effect on participant decisions to not enact their bisexual identity.

Three participants communicated that they do not enact their bisexual identity in any way; they are not visibly romantically involved, they do not violate gender performance expectations, and they choose to not disclose their bisexual identity to many (if any) people. While they do avow a bisexual identity to themselves, these participants generally do not openly discuss their sexual identification with others for fear of oppression, rejection and misunderstanding. While Teresa's decision to not enact her bisexuality has already been discussed, the decisions of Christine, Madison, and Marie have not. Christine avows a bisexual

identity, and has communicated this with her mother who is supportive, but does not disclose it to others. She expressed that she keeps that part of her identity hidden from others because she is currently involved with a male so disclosure is unnecessary. Madison maintains a similar viewpoint; she does not want to put social focus on herself as a female bisexual when she has recently married a man. Finally, Marie avows a bisexual identity, but discloses a heterosexual one. Her reasoning for doing this is the same as the other participants; she is married to a man so she deems it unnecessary to disclose or enact her bisexual identity.

When these participants avow but do not enact a bisexual identity, the result is erasure of their bisexual identity. This is not to suggest that all female bisexuals should disclose their sexual identity to others, but rather to highlight the potential consequences of this identified identity gap. When participants choose to not enact their sexual identity, many do so in response to fear of false judgment. This illustrates the influence the communal and relational frames can and do have on participant understanding of their bisexual identities.

Final Thoughts for Analysis

This chapter highlighted various interdependencies between the four frames of identity as asserted by Hecht et al. (2005) as well as existing identity gaps in the current study. An analysis of frame interdependencies illustrated the complexities of female bisexualism as well as the oversimplified nature of dualistic categorizations of both gender and sexuality. The analysis of identity gaps functioned to provide insight to the problematic nature of the way human gender and sexuality is socially constructed and communicated and exposed where female bisexual identity disconnections occur within the frames. This was done in order to highlight various consequences of these identity gaps, including erasure of a bisexual identity. This analysis was conducted to provide an answer to the second research question:

RQ2: What roles do the four frames of identity of the Communication Theory of Identify play in the social construction of bisexuality?

This chapter not only answers this question, but it provides a deeper analysis than the previous chapter did. It is clear that the four frames of identity play numerous, influential roles on the social construction and communication of female bisexuality from the way our society understands constructions of human gender and sexuality to the consequences of these constructions and the lived experiences of participants.

Chapter VI: Discussion and Conclusion

The previous chapters illustrate and explore several identified themes within the data set as well as various influences the four frames of identity have on the development and sustainability of such themes in attempts to answer the two research questions for this study.

RQ1: How do female bisexuals express or explain how bisexuality is communicated and perceived?

RQ2: What roles do the four frames of the Communication Theory of Identity play in the social construction and communication of bisexuality?

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize study findings and discuss how they provide answers to the research questions and will be presented in the following manner: a) an exploration of how this study answers the both the first and second research questions, b) a discussion of new knowledge that resulted from this study, c) limitations of the study, and d) directions for future research.

Participant Explanation of Identity Construction and Communication

A primary purpose of this study is to gain insight to the ways female bisexuals understand how their sexual identity is both communicated and perceived. The research included within this study provides such insight and offers an answer to the first research question. The following section will discuss important ways participants communicate their understanding of the social construction of their sexual identity.

Participants express or explain how a bisexual identity is socially constructed and communicated through shared experiences. These shared experiences offer insight to the various ways that female bisexuality is constituted and communicated since they are shared among

participants. Shared experiences provide a glimpse into the lives of female bisexuals, particularly in relation to the way their sexual identity is constructed, negotiated and communicated.

The themes of analysis from Chapter IV were identified in part from the influence of these shared experiences. Experience with rejection of the female bisexual identity was communicated from all participants; experiences with being overlooked, ignored and/or spoken for by others who do not avow a bisexual identity are expressed throughout responses. When participants are spoken for by others, other shared experiences include the communication of social assumptions of attention-seeking, promiscuity, and non-monogamy. Further, when these myths are openly communicated to participants, they internalize them, which results in confusion and, oftentimes, rejection of falsely ascribed identity labels. Each of these shared experiences contribute to experiences of bi-erasure.

False ascriptions are experienced by many participants. While some experience ascriptions of heterosexuality and others of homosexuality, the shared experience is still present: others who do not avow a bisexual identity ascribe participants a sexual identity that fits into dualistic categorizations of sexuality. Participants expressed frustration with inaccurate outside perspectives in relation to the way they enact their bisexual identities. Bisexual enactment is not perceived for what it is socially; instead participants are assumed to be enacting a hetero- or homosexual identity. Experiences with these assumptions contribute to the shared experience of being assigned invalid identity ascriptions.

Since participants communicated experience with issues such as false identity ascriptions and misconceptions of enactment, it is not surprising that many also communicated experience with manipulating outside perceptions in order to access privilege. They have experienced oppression from others for avowing a bisexual identity as well as ignorance regarding what

bisexual enactment looks like. Responses indicate that oppression came primarily from lesbians, which oftentimes resulted in participants being ascribed false identity labels from this communal group as well. As a result, participants expressed awareness of the power they have to manipulate outside perspectives in order to fit into dualistic categorizations of sexuality when desired since they experience oppression, marginalization, and rejection when they enact their bisexual identity.

These shared experiences shed light on the various ways the female bisexual identity is socially constructed and communicated. Participant experiences with the communication of normalized ideologies revolving around human gender and sexuality illustrate the difficulties they experience with having their sexual identity even recognized on a social level. This non-recognition of the identity contributes to the erasure of it and those who identify as bisexual. These ideologies are then communicated and reified by other members in society, whether that be through communal groups or individual relationships. The constant communication from others that bisexuality is not a real sexual orientation is experienced by participants within this study, and functions to reify harmful ideologies, which can result in participant internalization of them. These shared participant experiences highlight not only the ways female bisexuality is constituted and communicated, but also how communication of it functions to reaffirm social ideologies, which strengthen their believability.

Common experiences of participants provide insight to how they understand the way their sexual identity is understood by others. This research provides an answer to the first question of the study by illustrating the many shared experiences among participants, communicating the way they explain or express how the female bisexual identity is constructed and communicated.

The Roles of the Four Frames of Identity

The second research question is focused on exposing the roles the four frames of identity play in the construction and communication of bisexuality. As explored in the previous chapter, the frames of identity play a significant role in the development of identified themes. While all frames are influential, the enactment and communal frames arguably play the largest role with the construction and communication of bisexuality. Since the enactment frame locates identity within performance or expression, it functions to either reify or debunk normalized ideologies of that identity. However, as explored in the previous section, a bisexual identity is unable to be performed without being perceived as an enactment of hetero- or homosexuality. It is due to this notion that the enactment frame plays such a profound role in the constitution of bisexuality. In addition to physical performances of gender and sexuality, participant decisions to disclose or not disclose are included within the enactment frame. When participants understand that their identity is perceived as illegitimate, due to the way it is communicated to them by others, the result is often internal negotiation, within the personal frame.

The enactment frame would not hold as much power and play such a role in the construction of bisexuality if the communal frame was not also an influential frame. As discussed in the previous chapter, the communal frame has been determined to be inclusive of normalized social beliefs surrounding human gender and sexuality. Since this is the case, the communal frame is arguably the most influential in relation to this study. The powerful, socially assumed truths about bisexuality are the driving forces behind all four identified themes of analysis. When ideologies about bisexuality include harmful rhetoric, such as the communication of dualistic categorization, the result is bi-erasure. Consequently, it is logical that attempted performances of bisexuality are unsuccessful, resulting in false categorizations of bisexuals. As

long as the communal frame is inclusive of harmful social assumptions about human sexuality and bisexuality, specifically, an ineffective platform for the presence of bisexuality is developed.

From this platform, the roles of other frames in the social construction and communication of bisexuality are influenced. From participant responses, one role the relational frame can play is to communicate either acceptance or rejection of bisexuality to participants from individuals they have relationships with. Such rejection or acceptance is directly influenced by the (social) communal frame and the harmful ideologies communicated within. Communication of bisexuality in relationships between participants and others sometimes function to highlight and recognize the identity as a valid one, but more often than not, they communicate similar messages to participants as are communicated in the communal frame. This comes as little surprise, since the individuals in relationships with participants are shaped by the same communal ideologies as all others in this society. Therefore, the role of the relational frame is to either affirm or deny the validity of a participant's sexual identity.

Finally, the role of the personal frame will be explored. This specific frame was reserved for the end of this section because it is maintained that it has the least amount of influence on the construction and communication of bisexuality. This is an interesting notion considering how identity development is assumed to be personal. However, sexual identity development is not as personal as it seems with female bisexuals. The reasons have been presented above, but to summarize, bisexual females are bound by social constraints that are powerful enough to influence the roles each frame of identity plays in their identity development. The personal frame is influenced by all other frames, but most influenced by the communal and enactment frames. While the personal frame can and does have an influence on other frames, this influence is generally insignificant in comparison to roles other frames play. Negotiation of an avowed

sexual identity, performance, and self-disclosure occur within the personal frame. While each of these can and do influence outside perceptions, they are influenced by other frames on a greater level.

As a result, the four frames of identity play multiple roles in the social construction and communication of bisexuality. While there are several observable instances when frames operate interdependently to influence and inform one another, the primary role of the communal frame is to inform other frames of social expectations and normalized ideologies of gender and sexuality. It is here that common myths and assumptions are communicated about bisexuality. Strong communal belief in these ideologies function to inform the enactment frame, the role of which is to communicate identity from within an individual outward. When social ideologies (communal frame) influence the way performances of bisexuality are perceived (enactment frame), it is difficult for outside perceptions to categorize female bisexuals as anything other than hetero- or homosexual. The role of the relational frame is similar to the communal frame in that it serves to reify and communicate normalized communal ideologies. . Finally, the role of the personal frame is to negotiate a sense of self-image and to communicate avowed identities in relation to the other frames of identity.

New Knowledge about Female Bisexuality

This study was conducted to fill a gap in academic research on female bisexuality. While there have been recent and relevant studies conducted with bisexuals or bisexuality as the focus, such studies are not inclusive of female bisexuals as the sole population for research. Additionally, existing research revolving around bisexuality as a product of social construction does not address construction of the identity from the same perspective as was addressed in this study: through communication as identity. In addition to filling these holes in academic research,

this study also exposes various aspects of the social construction of bisexuality that were not overtly addressed in current literature; this section serves to discuss those aspects.

First is the idea that, aside from direct disclosure, bisexuality is unable to be performed (or enacted). Throughout this study, participant performances of bisexuality and the role of the enactment frame indicate that performances of sexual identity are influential in the social construction of the identity. However, following analysis, it was clear that whenever participants attempt to perform their bisexual identity, they are automatically categorized by others as either hetero- or homosexual. While social tendency to categorize others into dualistic terms is not a new and surprising phenomena, the idea that bisexuality is unable to be performed is. Regardless of the intent participants had behind their enactment, outside perspectives perceive the enactment as performing either a hetero- or homosexual identity.

This is in direct correlation with normalized gender categorizations. When participants attempted to communicate their sexual identity through enactment, they did so primarily by violating expectations of gender expression. When this occurs, outside perceptions categorize the individual the way others perceive them; masculine-presenting participants are deemed homosexual while feminine-presenting participants are deemed heterosexual. Therefore, dualistic categorizations of gender and sexuality, as well as the normalized connection between the two, function to directly influence outside perceptions of participant sexuality. It is in relation to this that there is an evident connection between language and rhetoric, and experiences of oppression and invisibilization of female bisexuals. Since language shapes realities, dualistic categorizations inherently function to erase the presence of a bisexual identity.

Another development occurred in this study in relation to dualistic categorizations. The idea of female bisexuals manipulating outside perceptions to gain access to homosexual privilege

is one that has not been addressed in existing scholarship. While heterosexual privilege is widely understood, homosexual privilege is not. Since bisexuals experience oppression from both sides of the binary, it is reasonable that those who identify as bisexual would not feel accepted by either hetero- or homosexuals. However, all participants recognized their unique ability to manipulate outside perceptions that are made based off of the same oppressive categories of gender and sexuality mentioned above. Through gender expression, participants were able to perform as either hetero- or homosexuals and access safe spaces within. However, it is the idea of masculine-presenting female bisexuals being ascribed a homosexual identity to them in order to access privilege that is new to scholarship. This finding speaks to the power dualistic categorizations have on identity development and negotiation.

The final aspect that was uncovered within this study was the surprisingly small role the personal frame plays in the construction, communication, and negotiation of female bisexualism. While identity is influenced by other facets of life, it is also deeply personal. However, an analysis of the frames of identity suggests that the personal frame is the least active frame in bisexual identity development. Further, while all frames function to both influence and be influenced by others, within this study the personal frame was influenced by others more so than it influenced others. The communal, enactment, and relational frames all heavily inform the personal frame while the personal frame may have a slight influence on the way participants choose to enact their bisexuality (enactment frame) and discuss their understandings of the identity to others they have relationships with (relational). Essentially, this study revealed that the female bisexual identity is formed primarily through the communal frame (social ideologies regarding sex and gender) and the enactment frame (stemming from the social belief that all individuals are inherently hetero- or homosexual).

These findings support criticisms of dualistic categorizations of human sexuality and gender as well as the language and rhetoric that is often applied to such identity constructions. Language that is currently available does not allow for an understanding of female bisexuality, the inherent result of which is heightened experiences of oppression of bisexual females. Moreover, when participants have no way to express their avowed sexual identities without being dismissed or overlooked, the consequence is bi-erasure. The findings within this study answer the research questions and provide insight to new ideas about bisexuality that have not been articulated in such a way before. The identification of prominent themes in the female bisexual experience assisted in a deconstruction of the various roles the frames of identity play in the social construction of a bisexual identity.

Conclusion

Utilizing Hecht et al.'s (2005) Communication Theory of Identity to inform this study as well as through the completion of a thematic analysis of data yielded insight to the ways female bisexuals understand how bisexuality is communicated and conceptualized as well as the various influences the frames of identity have on the social construction of bisexuality. The two research questions associated with this study were answered:

RQ1: How do female bisexuals express or explain how bisexuality is communicated and perceived?

RQ2: What roles do the four frames of the Communication Theory of Identity play in the social construction and communication of bisexuality?

This section will explore limitations to the current study, provide directions for future research, and offer concluding remarks.

Limitations of Study

This study has several limitations. Recruitment of participants occurred on and around the Oregon State University home campus. This resulted in participant demographics that are not as diverse as they could have been. Participant demographics were similar in relation to age, education level, occupations, and residence. Most participants were between the ages of 18-30, were students (or former students) at Oregon State University, were perusing their Bachelor's degree, and resided in Oregon. It is recognized that this population sample is limited geographically and in relation to racial-ethnic demographics. However, the participants that were included in this study still provide rich data material for analysis through their responses.

Additionally, this study was inclusive only of biological females who self-identify as bisexual. The decision for the exclusion of transgender female bisexual experiences was made due to time constraints as well as in response to existing literature. It was necessary to lay the framework for research regarding cisgender female bisexuals before research that is also inclusive of transgender narratives can occur. In addition, this study was designed in response to the gaps in scholarship that address bisexuality, but not exclusively from a biological female perspective. Each of these limitations of study are recognized as being factors that limit the breadth of this study.

Directions for Future Research

While this study aims to fill gaps in existing scholarly work focused on the social construction of bisexuality and a bisexual identity in general, there are still holes in research to be filled. Since one of the limitations of this study was in relation to the inclusion of transgender bodies, research that is focused on transgender bisexual experiences would further enrich the conversation. The data presented in this study was inclusive only of bisexual female experiences, which highlight the influence. Future research should seek out opinions and conceptualizations

of female bisexuality from heterosexual females and gay males to draw insight to why these identities seem to play less of a role in the oppression of female bisexuals. In addition to the inclusion of transgender bisexual, heterosexual female, and gay male experiences, future research should aim to address the variable of age in relation to conceptualizations of gender and sexuality categorization. This variable surfaced in two participant responses, each time participants communicated that individuals between the ages of 18-30 are generally more accepting of non-normative gender and sexual identities and are more critical of dualism. Future scholarship could also focus on the role popular culture influences play in the social construction and communication of a bisexual identity. Situating this influential variable in the communal frame could provide additional insight to the various ways that bisexuality is constituted.

Finally, the role of rhetoric and language should be examined in a variety of ways in relation to construction and negotiation of female bisexuality, particularly in relation to ascribed and avowed identity labels. The available language that describes human gender, sexuality, and experiences of such is inadequate in encompassing a complete human experience from a variety of perspectives. Future research should include critical approaches that shed light on the way language and available terms directly result in heightened oppression and invisibilization of female bisexuals.

Concluding Remarks

This study was conducted to gain insight to the ways female bisexuals express or explain how female bisexuality is communicated and conceptualized. All research for this study is grounded in the Communication Theory of Identity and employs both a thematic analysis as well as an analysis of the four frames of identity in hopes of filling gaps in current scholarship on bisexuality. As a result, four prominent themes are identified as well as various roles the frames

of identity play in the development of these themes. Two separate analyses were conducted to illustrate connections (and disconnections) between the frames and participant experiences. While CTI is intended to be an interpretive theory, it also served a critical function within the parameters of this study, providing insight to the breadth that language and rhetoric has in relation to the construction of social realities.

Bisexually identifying females are an under-recognized research population with current literature focusing on bisexual males or experiences of bisexuals in general. Since female bisexuals experience unique and heightened levels of oppression, discrimination, and misunderstandings, it is the responsibility of scholars to bring attention to this population.

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APPENDIX

Appendix: Interview Protocol

1. Can you please state your name?
2. What is your age?
3. Are you a resident of Oregon?
4. How would you identify your race or ethnicity?
5. How would you describe your relationship status?
6. To better understand aspects of your social identity, can you share with me the groups you belong to (organized, informal, etc.)?
7. Can you share a story about when you first identified as bisexual?
8. Can you share the emotions you experienced when you initially identified as bisexual?
9. Did you share this realization that you identify as bisexual with anyone? Who?
10. Can you tell me about a specific partner/relationship you have had who helped shape your bisexual identity?
11. Are there any other relationships (coworker, friends, etc.) that have helped shape your identity? Why do these ones stand out in your mind?
12. Can you share a specific time when a group that you are a part of helped you establish and understand your bisexual identity (This could be done through common histories and characteristics of group members, etc.)?
13. Can you share a time that stands out in your mind when you communicated your bisexual identity? How does this communication differ from other identities you claim?
14. In what ways is communication between two female bisexuals different than a female bisexual and another person who does not identify this way?
15. Can you share a time when you chose to hide your bisexual identity? What were the circumstances that surrounded this decision?
16. Do you find it easier to hide or embrace the communication of bisexuality? How come?
17. Who do you choose to communicate your bisexual identity to? How come?
18. Is there anyone, specifically, that you choose to communicate this identity with? How come?
19. Consider a time when another individual assigned meaning to your sexual identity; was this meaning different or aligned with your own assigned meaning?
20. Can you share a story about when a person who did not identify as bisexual made assumptions/false claims about the identity in an unproductive way?
21. What does being bisexual mean to you?