

Bisexual Men's Identities: (Re)Defining What It Means to Be Bi

By

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B.A., Simon Fraser University, 2007

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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Bisexual identity is formed within the constraints of a heteronormative framework which is infused with power, promotes stability and alignment of apparently binary sex, gender identity, and gender roles, as well as promoting procreation, monosexuality and monogamy. Heteronormative models of sexuality fail to capture the complexity, ambiguity, multiplicity, and fluidity of bisexual experience. Using data collected through interviews with twelve self-identified bisexual men this research explores questions of how bisexual men make sense of what it means to be bisexual within a heteronormative framework of sexuality and if they disrupt or reproduce dominant understandings of sexuality. I found these bisexual men sometimes conformed to a dominant framework; however, as an example of how identity can be unstable in both meaning and expression they also took up a provisional bisexual identity and disrupted dominant discourses by redefining bisexual meanings – offering alternatives to the binary, gender based definitions of sexuality, and monosexuality.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Laurie – a brilliant mind and a loving heart.

Chapter 1: Introduction

[Bisexuality] will not lead to a tyranny of kink, in which only the people who play hard and wild are cool, if we can agree that our politics of inclusion is for everyone.

– Carole Queen, *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries, and Visions*, 1995, p. 159

I was inspired to do this research because of an after-dinner conversation around a kitchen table. Sometimes my family provides me with the best incentive for the social justice work that I do and I am indebted to them. In moments of heated discussion, we cause each other to question our assumptions and inspire each other. It was during one of these conversations that bisexuality came up for debate. Was bisexuality a valid, coherent identity? As someone who identifies as bisexual I have a very personal interest in how I am understood. How are complex and ambiguous sexual meanings of (bi)sexual identities constructed and challenged? Thoughts formed during that dinner-table conversation have led to this research and action. This project is a social justice project. My involvement in social justice work, becoming a queer activist on campus, my background in critical social theories, and coming to learn about queer theory in my graduate work have influenced my thinking and affirmed for me the work that still needs to be done regarding sexuality. I find the conventional categories of sexuality that are available to be limiting, exclusive, and problematic. My family, the youth in my life, and my many communities compel me to seek to examine how hegemonic heteronormative discourses operate in the erasure of bisexuality and other liminal identities.¹ Although

¹ Heteronormativity is a concept that exposes the hidden heterosexual assumptions and binary framework in discourses of sexuality when heterosexuality is taken as natural and normative within a society. Heteronormativity also reveals the power relations which regulate sexuality. This concept, along with homonormativity, is discussed in further detail in chapter two, *Heteronormativity, Stigma and Sexual Identity*.

the kitchen table can be a place where individuals learn heteronormative hegemonic discourses in everyday conversations; for me, the kitchen table is also a site of disruption.

As a bisexual and queer activist, my goal is to demystify and destabilize dominant binary discourses of sexuality, consider how they have structured sexual identities, and question their compatibility with non-normative sexual minority identities. The intention of this research is to understand what it means to bisexual men to be bisexual within a normative dichotomous framework of sexuality and whether they resist or conform to hegemonic understandings of sexuality. How do they navigate their everyday (bi)sexual identit(ies) within a heteronormative framework? How have dominant discourses of sexuality affected bisexual men's self-identities? How has the institutionalization of these dominant discourses stigmatized bisexual men and in what ways have these bisexual men resisted, or not, stigma and stereotypes based on dominant dichotomous discourses. Do they reproduce or disrupt heteronormative discourses?

The formation of a sexual identity is helped along by social processes rather than being innately determined (Foucault, 1997; Plummer, 1975; Seidman, 1997). Sexuality is constructed within social relations of power, the dominant discourse in Euro-Western societies being a heteronormative one which endorses heterosexuality as the norm and alternative sexualities as 'other' and, as such, different and abnormal. Feminist and queer theorists (Sedgwick 1990; Seidman 1999; Warner 1993; Weeks 2005) have noted that while heterosexuality is still considered categorically normative, homosexuality is becoming increasingly normalized. Although homosexuality is still considered inferior to heterosexuality, a parallel discourse of homonormativity is being developed thus

contributing to the marginalization of those who fall outside of these limited, polarized categories.

Historically, from a Euro-Western perspective, research on sex, gender and sexual orientation has been based on dichotomous and essentialist models of sex, gender and sexuality that structure identity as innate, stable, and unambiguous (Garber, 1995; Rust, 2001; Seidman, 1993). In this framework, individuals are thought to possess “one true identity.” Individuals whose experiences of sex, gender and sexuality involve ambiguity, multiplicity, and fluidity have not been very well described by such models. These views are now changing, albeit slowly. There is increasing evidence that dichotomous models of sexual identity based on innate, stable, unambiguous lesbian, gay or straight identities fail to capture the complexity, diversity and fluidity of bisexual experience (Connell 2005; Diamond 2008; McLean 2007; Rust 1996).

While there have been many critiques of dominant discourses of sexuality by queer theorists, and some critiques of homonormativity by critical, feminist, queer and gender theorists, there has been very little done from a bisexual theoretical perspective. I draw on critical social constructionist theories and a queer theory informed by poststructuralism to analyse bisexuality as a further challenge to heteronormativity and homonormativity.

Heteronormativity and its accompanying hegemonic discourses affect not just bisexuals but everyone. Certainly they affect sexual minorities disproportionately, but everyone suffers when expressions and identities of desire are circumscribed and limited. While Freud’s declaration that bisexuality will “provide all further enlightenment” may have been an exaggeration, bisexuality has been grossly underestimated in the

past and has an incredible amount to teach us about sexuality. Indeed, since Freud, bisexuality has for the most part been subsequently subsumed, disappeared, erased, and dismissed from the study of sexuality (Angelides, 2001). Using bisexuality, I want to destabilize these dominant understandings of sexuality in a tangible way. I hope my research is taken up by students and academics, community researchers and educators, public schools and universities, health care professionals, and Queer/LGBTQQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirited, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual) organizations in a way that can positively influence the lives and well-being of people with marginalized sexualities.

I begin my thesis by discussing how identity is socially constructed in relation to others within particular socio-cultural, historical contexts which are imbued with power. It is within these relations of power that individuals navigate and form their sexual selves. Next I describe in detail the concepts of heteronormativity and homonormativity as the institutionalized dominant discourses that configure and inform sexual identity formation. I examine this discursive framework so as to situate bisexual men's experiences within this broader social context. I also introduce the concepts of stigma and oppression to illustrate the effects of these dominant discourses on bisexual individuals and how bisexuals manage stigma and oppression. Next, I outline my theoretical perspective. I explore bisexuality using a *critical sociological queer theory informed by poststructuralism*. I integrate and use social interactionist and constructionist perspectives to analyse sexual minority identity formation in the everyday experiences of bisexual men. I employ a post-structuralist, queer theory perspective in order to question and destabilize heteronormative and homonormative meanings of sexuality, their emergence and their reproduction, in which bisexual identities are formed and that affect

all sexual subjects. By means of this integrated approach, it is my intention to empirically demonstrate queer theory in action.

I then explore the literature on sexual minority identity formation models, including homosexual identity formation models and bisexual identity formation models. These models are the framework, for better or for worse, against which we can understand how bisexual men form their identities. My intention in outlining these models is to describe how past social theorists and researchers viewed sex, gender and sexual orientation and (bi)sexual minority identity formation and to expose some of the problems inherent within these models. Before moving on to consider my findings and discussion, I outline my methodology. I employed a phenomenological approach in my research. I utilized a qualitative approach because I was looking for meaning in the experiences of bisexual men. In my findings and discussion section, I base my results on analysis of twelve interviews conducted with self-identified bisexual men in Greater Victoria and Metro Vancouver, British Columbia.

Interviews focused on the interaction between dominant social constructions of bisexual identity and individual meanings of bisexual identity. After describing participants, I discuss how participants felt bisexuality was seen from a dominant hegemonic discursive perspective. I explore these dominant meanings in order to evaluate some of the ways in which bisexuality is socially constructed and how stereotypes and stigma based on a heteronormative framework may impact bisexual identity formation. Additionally, I attempt to expose some of the heteronormative and homonormative discourses embedded in everyday meanings of bisexuality. I then discuss the meanings of bisexuality from the participants' perspectives. I describe and interpret what they told me about their various experiences of (bi)sexual identity

formation in relation to heteronormative discourses. I organize these two discussions together in my final chapter and articulate some of the ways in which heteronormative discourses contribute to the construction of bisexual identities and how bisexual men succeed in deconstructing those meanings. Through my exploration of bisexual men's experiences, I illustrate some of the ways that bisexual men work to transform hegemonic heteronormative discourses of sexuality. I conclude my thesis with a discussion of the implications of my research and some suggestions for further research. It is my intention that in using bisexuality to queer dominant heteronormative discourses my research will benefit everyone, not just bisexual men, and contribute to the goal of reaching maximum inclusivity.

Chapter 2: Heteronormativity, Stigma and Sexual Identity

Introduction

In this chapter I will give an overview of heteronormativity and oppression and stigma so as to situate bisexual men's experiences within this broader framework. I will also outline my theoretical approaches to studying the intersections of sexual identities within the broader context of heterosexual hegemony. I begin by briefly explaining the concept of self-identity. I then identify and discuss heteronormativity and homonormativity as an omnipresent backdrop to the study and experience of sexual identity. Next, I discuss how individuals and groups become stigmatized through heteronormative (and homonormative) discourses. I outline the components necessary for the stigmatization of individuals and groups and discuss briefly how stigma might change. I then discuss how stigma is managed by stigmatized individuals through passing and disclosure and outline three stages of stigma management and what that might look like for bisexuals. In the second section, I situate the formation of sexual identities within a "queer sociology," a *critical sociological queer theory informed by poststructuralism*, detailing how sexual identities are historically and socially constructed in relations of power to other individuals, groups, and social structures and are affected by heteronormative institutional discourses.

The literature on heteronormativity and stigma are integral to the discussion of my research question of how heteronormative discourses and stigma affect bisexual identity formation and whether bisexual men resist or conform to binarized categories of sexual identity. It is important to understand the broader social contexts and power relations in which sexual identity formation and stigmatization occur, as well as to have an idea of

how individual bisexuals might experience stigma. I investigate how bisexual men either reproduce or disrupt heteronormative discourses so I look at individuals and how they interact with social structures. I describe what they do and I relate it back to a heteronormative framework.

Self, Identity, and Self-Identity

To understand (bi)sexual identities and (bi)sexual minority identity formation, it is necessary to understand the relational and social character of identity. Self-identity is developed in relation to others within particular socio-cultural, historical contexts (Foucault, 1997; Butler, 1991). Identities are formed by the interplay between social structures and individual/group agency. Individuals are born into already existing social structures or institutions which embody norms and values and shape the behaviour of actors. In people's daily lives, they grapple individually and collectively with these larger social structures in an attempt to form various identities. Agency is the ability to engage with and challenge social structures and institutionalized social behaviours which are imbued with power. Identities can be seen as disciplining forces (Foucault, 1997); however, they are not just about domination and hierarchy. Identities can also be seen as "enabling or productive of social collectivities, moral bonds, and political agency" (Seidman, 1993, p. 134). The practices of identity *form and are formed* by larger social structures.

Self-identity is a subjective, reflexive matter where people see and feel themselves to be certain identities (which may include multiple identities). The self is the product of social experience (Mead, 1962). Self can be defined as one's consciousness of one's own being or identity (Troiden, 1988); an identity is a set of behavioural or personal

characteristics by which an individual may be recognizable as a member of a group (Farlex, Inc., 2009). Self-identity can be thought of as “a cognitive construct referring to an organized set of characteristics that an individual perceives as representing the self definitively in relation to a social situation, imagined or real” (Troiden, 1988, p. 27). An individual may have many contextually relevant self-identities (p. 31). Cass’s (1984) concept of *composite identity* refers to a person’s perception of themselves in relation to a social category or type e.g. bisexual identity. Goffman (1963) considered “ego identity” and explained that it is “the subjective sense of his [sic] own situation and his [sic] own continuity and character that an individual comes to obtain as a result of his [sic] various social experiences” (105).

Fraser (1999) argued that there are theoretical distinctions between the self and identity. She distinguished selfhood as grounded within, as internal or bounded and identity as relational. Self-identity can be contrasted with *social* and *personal* identities which are what others use to identify an individual (Goffman, 1963). Individuals construct their identity out of the same “materials [signs, symbols, language, stereotypes] from which others first construct a social and personal identification of [them]” (Goffman, 1963, p. 106). While individuals construct their own identities, they do so in relation to already existing categories of identity.

Identity formation is affected by institutions of socialization, such as family, peer groups, religious organizations, the education system, mass media, organizations, workplaces, the economic system, government, and laws. These institutions teach individuals how to classify people and things into meaningful categories through the use of language, signs, and symbols which transmit cultural and social values and norms

which guide identity formation. These social institutions are shaped by a heteronormative power/knowledge regime (Seidman as cited in Sullivan, 2003).

Language provides individuals and groups with the tools with which to categorize themselves. Language links us to the past; however, it is also possible to connect symbols in an infinite arrangement of new ways consequently opening up possibilities for future change. Troiden explained that “before people can identify themselves in terms of a social condition or category, they must learn that a social category representing the activity or feelings exists (e.g., [bi]sexual preferences or behaviour); learn that other people occupy the social category;...” learn that they are similar to that category; begin to identify with those in that social category; decide they should be included in that category; label themselves in terms of the social category; and incorporate that identity into their self concepts over time (Troiden, 1988, p. 42).

Structures of Power and Oppression

Heteronormativity and Homonormativity²

Sexual minority identity is formed within a heteronormative framework. Heteronormativity is a backdrop in everyone’s daily lives and it is also always present in the lives of bisexual persons. These structures affect all sexual subjects, not just bisexuals; all subjects are “(hetero)sexualized” (Namaste, 1996). It is a discursive framework that provides social contexts and shapes the ordering of desires, behaviours, social institutions, and social relations that constitute the self and society (Seidman, 1993; Sullivan, 2003). Heteronormativity is a concept that reveals the expectations, demands, and constraints produced when heterosexuality is taken as natural and

² When I use the phrases: the binary, binary framework of sexuality, the dichotomy, dichotomous framework, or heterosexual matrix, I am referring to a heteronormative framework of sexuality.

normative within a society. The power relations of heteronormativity are a driving force in regulating sexuality – the hierarchal structure places heterosexuality in a position of social power.

Heteronormativity is a term for a set of culturally-biased norms and values that hold that people fall into two stable, distinct and complementary genders (men and women) based on two stable, distinct and complementary sexes (male and female) with two natural gender roles (masculinity and femininity) and will be sexually attracted to people of their “opposite sex.” It maintains that heterosexual opposite-sex relationships are the “normal” sexual orientation and that homosexual same-sex relationships are “abnormal.” Furthermore, it states that sexual and marital relations are mostly or only fitting between one man and one woman. It privileges the nuclear family and the relationship’s intended function is meant to be reproduction. Consequently, a "heteronormative" view is a hierarchal one, infused with power, which promotes stability and alignment of biological sex, gender identity, and gender roles, as well as promoting procreation, monosexuality and monogamy.³

Table 1: Heteronormative Model

Sex	Male	Female
Gender	Man	Woman
Gender Roles	Masculine	Feminine
Sexual Orientation	Attracted to Women	Attracted to Men
Relationship type	Monogamy with one woman	Monogamy with one man

Homonormativity is also present in the lives of bisexual persons. *Homonormativity* mimics and defends heteronormativity. It upholds the same tenants as heteronormativity

³³ This definition of heteronormativity was a collective project created at a workshop I facilitated in September 2010. I took a basic, incomplete and inadequate definition from Wikipedia and challenged the group to correct it based on knowledge learned in the workshop. That knowledge was informed by queer and bisexual theorists including: Anderlini-D’Onofrio, 2009; Angelides, 2001; Butler, 1993; Duggan, 2003; Foucault, 1978; Jagose, 1996; Sedgwick, 1990; Seidman, 1997; and Sullivan, 2003.

except that individuals are in same-sex relationships. It privileges cisgender and the couple. Lisa Duggan (2003) defines homonormativity as “a [gay and lesbian] politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them” (p. 50). Some gay men and lesbians promote certain “respectable” sexualities that align with a heteronormative framework and thus take up a homonormative agenda. Homonormativity and gay narratives of being a “proper” gay serve as social control functions to restrict available identity choices and marginalize queer identities such as two-spirit, intersex, trans, pansexual and bisexual (Steinman, 2001). Just because an individual *is* queer does not guarantee a “position as sexually radical: it depends on how one lives one’s queerness” (Grosz, 1995, p. 217). According to Penny Griffin (2007) homonormativity upholds neo-liberalism rather than critiquing monogamy, procreation, and binary gender roles as heterosexist. Homonormativity stabilizes and reinforces heteronormativity.

Heteronormativity, homonormativity, discrimination, and oppression work at various levels from systemic and institutionalized (macro) to individual (micro) levels. The different levels of oppression are:

- Systemic/institutional – courts/laws, government, schools, health services (e.g. laws against multiple-partner marriage)
- Cultural/societal – norms and values (e.g. reflected in media biases towards heterosexuality and few positive representations of bisexual, trans, intersex, two-spirit, and queer people)
- Inter-personal – interactions among individuals (e.g. harassment, individual discrimination, etc.)

- Internalized – buying in to negative elements of oppression, towards self (e.g., low self esteem, depression, isolation, etc.)

Heteronormativity is marked by heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, discrimination, and oppression. Herek (as cited in Hunter, 2007) defines heterosexism as, “the ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community” (p. 5). Homophobia can be defined as the irrational fear of, aversion to, or hatred of homosexuals, homosexuality, or any behavior or belief that does not conform to rigid gender role stereotypes. It is this fear that enforces sexism as well as heterosexism. Biphobia is the fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of bisexuals, which is related to the current binary structure of sexuality. Biphobia can be seen *within* the queer community, as well as outside of it.⁴

The effect of this ideological system on bisexual-identified subjects (and other queer, non-conforming identified individuals) is that they have to contend with the oppression of stigma and discrimination (Hunter, 2007). It creates an environment of constant negotiation and dilemmas in navigating everyday life. It is also why bisexual persons go through a “coming out” or sexual-minority-identity-formation process which includes ongoing management of stigma and making decisions about whether to disclose their sexual identity to others.

⁴ Transphobia is the irrational fear or hatred of, aversion to, and discrimination against trans folk. Many trans people also experience homophobia from people who associate their gender identity with homosexuality.

Components of Stigma

Goffman (1963) defined stigma as “the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance” (preface). More recently, Link and Phelan (2001) have (re)defined stigma so that it takes into account the convergence of many interrelated parts: “Stigma exists when elements of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination occur together in a power situation that allows them” (p. 377). The interrelated parts of stigma can be conceptualized as: *distinguishing differences*, *negative stereotypes*, *separating “Us” from “Them”*, and *prejudice, discrimination, oppression, and power* (Link & Phelan, 2001).

Distinguishing Differences

Most of our human differences are ignored and are consequently socially irrelevant; but other differences, such as a person’s sexual orientation, are highly salient at this time in Euro-Western society (Link & Phelan, 2001). The differences that are considered prominent are socially selected by a high degree of consensus that a difference violates norms or social expectation (Link & Phelan, 2001). Goffman (1963) explains that “differentness itself derives from society, for ordinarily before a difference can matter much it must be conceptualized collectively by the society as a whole” (p. 123). The difference must be defined as a problem. This is the beginning of how stigmas are created. Oversimplification and binarized thinking are required to create simplified groups and subsequently real variability gets overlooked. Plummer (1975) explains that sexual difference is labelled as different by *both* formal social control agents and (more often) by informal self-labelling.

Negative Stereotypes

Stigma involves not only a label of difference but also a stereotype. The label links a person to a set of undesirable characteristics that form the stereotype (Link & Phelan,

2001). A stereotype is a preconceived or oversimplified generalization about an entire group of people without regard for their individual differences. Stereotypes are usually considered negative and can have a negative impact partly because of their broad generalizations (Link & Phelan, 2001). The stereotypes we hold form the basis of our prejudices. Some of the more widespread stereotypes of bisexuals found in the literature are: that bisexuals are confused about their sexuality, that they are gays or lesbians who do not have the confidence to come out, that they are promiscuous and unable to be monogamous or make commitments to one person, that they must have multiple partners at the same time, that they spread AIDS, and that they are obsessed with sex (Eliason, 2001; Garber, 1995; Hutchins & Kaahumanu, 1991; Rust, 2001).

Separating “Us” From “Them”

The labelling of a group of people with negative stereotypes becomes “the rationale for believing that negatively labelled persons are fundamentally different from those who don’t share the label” (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 370). When we think of people as fundamentally different from ourselves, it becomes easier to label “them” as different from “us” and in fact to think of them as “not really human” at all (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001). We are taught and learn to label, stereotype, and classify.

A stigmatized identity, such as homosexuality, is constructed in relationship to a “normalized other.” such as heterosexuality (Goffman, 1963). Goffman explains that understandings about normal and stigmatized individuals are generated in social situations (p. 138). However, despite an artificial separation of “us” from “them” the roles of stigmatized and “normal” individuals contain similarities and are complementary; at some point individuals play both parts of the normal-deviant role. Plummer describes the process of stigmatization as “reaction,” meaning that deviant persons are always understood in relationship to those who define them as deviant and can therefore not be

understood without these “others” (pp. 20-21). Creating boundaries also serves to create group solidarity for the in-group (Falk, 2001). Falk draws on Durkheim's insights about community and explains that out-groups create a sense of unity and community for in-groups.⁵ A sense of community is facilitated by the perception of a class of outsiders (Falk, 2001).

Prejudice, Discrimination, Oppression and Power

Prejudice and negative beliefs about a whole group of people and its individual members set up the rationale for “devaluing, rejecting and excluding them” (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 371). When prejudice is combined with the power to deny opportunities, resources or access to a person because of their group membership, there is discrimination and stigmatization. Discrimination can take many forms, including ageism, racism, classism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, sexism, ablism, and ethnocentrism, among others. Stigmatized groups are disadvantaged concerning a variety of life's essentials including income, education, psychological well-being, housing status, medical treatment, and health (Link & Phelan, 2001). There are a range of mechanisms for practicing discrimination including individual discrimination, structural discrimination, and internalized discrimination. The mechanisms of discrimination are not always direct, overt or apparent; they can be institutional, embedded, or concealed.

Many acts of discrimination build up over time, perpetuated against one relatively less powerful social group by a more powerful social group, leading to a group of people

⁵ Émile Durkheim wrote: “Imagine a society of saints, a perfect cloister of exemplary individuals. Crimes or deviance, properly so called, will there be unknown; but faults which appear venial to the layman will there create the same scandal that the ordinary offense does in ordinary consciousness. If, then, this society has the power to judge and punish, it will define these acts as criminal (or deviant) and treat them as such” (Durkheim, 1982).

being in a state of oppression. Oppression is the systematic control of a group of people by another group of people with access to social power. This results in benefits for one group over the other and is maintained by social beliefs and practices. Boundaries between the dominant group and the subordinated group function to maintain the privilege of the dominant group and keep the “other” group subordinated (Falk, 2001). Because oppression is institutionalized in our society, target group members often believe the messages and internalize the oppression by “buying into” the elements of oppression. When target group members believe the stereotypes they are taught about themselves, they tend to act them out and thus perpetuate the stereotype, which reinforces the prejudice and keeps the cycle going.

Power is the key element in the social processes of stigmatization. Link & Phelan (2001) emphasize this: “Stigma is entirely dependent on social, economic, and political power – it takes power to stigmatize” (p. 375). They suggest that sometimes the role of power is obvious; however, sometimes the role of power is not obvious because power differences “are so taken for granted as to seem unproblematic” (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 375).

Changing Stigma

Stigma is one effect of institutionalized discourses; we are produced by and reproduce structural/power relationships. As something that is socially constructed, stigma is also subject to change. Goffman (1963) states that conceptions about stigma were historically situated and “regularly changed by purposeful social action” (p. 138). However, according to Link and Phelan (2001) stigma is a “persistent predicament” which is why “the negative consequences of stigma are so difficult to eradicate” (p. 379).

However, members of stigmatized groups are not helpless victims. People “artfully dodge or constructively challenge stigmatizing processes” (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 378). Because benefits are distributed to the advantage of those in privileged positions at the expense of those in subordinated positions, it is not within the interests of the dominant group to give up those benefits without resistance and the impetus for change must usually come from the subordinated group (Grosz, 1995). As a subordinated group, I am interested to know how bisexual men might produce change.

Link and Phelan (2001) centre on two main principles in considering how to *really* change stigma. First, any approach should be “multifaceted and multilevel” to address the many mechanisms and multiple levels (individual and structural) of discrimination (p. 381). More importantly:

An approach to change must ultimately address the fundamental cause of stigma – it must either change the deeply held attitudes and beliefs of powerful groups that lead to labelling, stereotyping, setting apart, devaluing, and discriminating, or it must change circumstances so as to limit the power of such groups to make their cognitions the dominant ones... One should choose interventions that either produce fundamental changes in attitudes and beliefs or change the power relations that underlie the ability of dominant groups to act on their attitudes and beliefs. (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 381)

While Link and Phelan recommend fundamental structural changes in order to successfully challenge and change stigma, most other research on stigma has focused on how individuals manage stigma in their daily lives. Some of these management techniques can be challenging to the status quo and demand change while others may not be.

Stigma Management

Although stigma is social and we learn how to categorize, stereotype, discriminate, and ultimately stigmatize, stigma is still often portrayed as though it is an individual problem or attribute. In this vein, discussions of the challenges to stigma usually concentrate around individuals and the ways in which they manage their stigmatized identities, often leaving it up to marginalized groups to initiate and produce social change. Goffman (1963) explains that wherever there are identity norms there is stigma management (p. 130). He stresses that stigma management is contingent and situated (p. 55).

Passing and Disclosure

There are two key concepts when discussing how individuals manage stigmatized identities: *passing* and *disclosure*. Stigmatized identities exist because they do not meet society's standards of what is acceptable behaviour. In order to appear acceptable, if a stigmatized individual's stigma is not readily apparent, they must navigate their social identity by varying degrees of passing. *Passing* is the management of "undisclosed discrediting [social] information about self" (Goffman, 1963, p. 42). Goffman (1963) explains that individuals can voluntarily *disclose* their stigmatized identity therefore no longer having to manage information about themselves. Attempting to "pass" as either heterosexual or homosexual is one way for bisexuals to deal with stigma.

Individual Responses to Stigma

Stigma management has often been conceptualized as a series of stages. According to Plummer, a person labelled as different responds in one of three ways: *denial* of the identity; *diffusion* (anxious consciousness), awareness of their difference but not fully

accepting of it; and *deference*, coming to accept the difference. Three similar responses to stigma are outlined by Kitsuse and applied to bisexuality by Knous (2005) in her discussion of the way in which bisexuals form an identity and manage their stigma. First, a person is *unaware* of their difference or is unaffected by it. Secondly, there is *acceptance and disclosure* which usually involves a coming-out process and then increased participation in bisexual behaviour. And thirdly, there is *pride, positive affirmation and collective action* during which stigma management can be accomplished through positive affirmation of identity and collective action (Knous, 2005; Preves, 2000). There is resistance to discrimination and an acceptance and embracing of one's different sexual identity along with participation in community building (Knous, 2005, p. 49).

Preves (2000) uses the concept of 'oppositional identity work' to describe this resistance to stigma which was based on Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock's idea of redefining a stigmatized identity in a more positive and empowering way (p. 37). Preves (2000) says that "by rejecting normative values, individuals gain pride in marginal identities, coming to see their difference as valuable, worthy and sufficient" (p. 36). By virtue of being stigmatized and excluded from dichotomous categories of sexuality, bisexuals are often not recognized as full members of either a homosexual or heterosexual community; consequently, collective action such as working to redefine bisexuality in more positive and empowering ways is also part of this 'oppositional identity work' (Preves, 2000). Plummer (1975) suggests that collective organization done by sexually stigmatized groups renders stigma less problematic for them. These three responses outlined by Plummer (1975) and Knous (2005) are paralleled in the sexual-minority-identity-formation models described in the next chapter.

Bisexual Experience of Being “Doubly” Different

Bisexuals face unique challenges and experiences around stigma and the process of managing a bisexual identity. Most studies of sexual minorities and stigma assume gay or lesbian participants; therefore, there is relatively little empirical knowledge about bisexual persons' experiences of stigma. Similar to gay and lesbian subjects, bisexuals must cope with heteronormativity. However, they also must cope with homonormativity and specific negative attitudes, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices uniquely experienced by bisexuals (Garber, 1995; Ochs, 1996). Bi-negativity or biphobia, due to institutionalized heteronormativity, homonormativity, and monosexuality, often leads to a complete denial of bisexuality as a legitimate orientation (Balsam & Mohr, 2007). Balsam and Mohr state that bisexuals reported higher levels of identity confusion and lower levels of both community connection and outness than lesbians and gays (Balsam & Mohr, 2007, p. 312). They also found that bisexuals do not have the same community supports as do homosexuals and may feel excluded from gay and lesbian communities (Balsam & Mohr, 2007).

Queer Constructions of Sexual Identity

The above heteronormative structures of power are problematic – they are unequal and oppressive and can have negative effects on oppressed individuals/groups, including bisexuals, and require a sociological examination. A sociological inquiry of (bi)sexuality requires a theoretical framework. My theoretical perspective is multiple and interconnected. I explore sexuality using a *critical sociological queer theory informed by poststructuralism* in order to question these heteronormative meanings of sexuality, their emergence and their reproduction, that effect all sexual subjects (Namaste, 1996). I amalgamate and use social interactionist and constructionist perspectives to analyse

sexual minority identity formation in the everyday experiences of bisexual men. I use a post-structuralist, queer theory perspective in looking at sexuality and desire to interrogate heteronormativity and the binary oppositions of sex, gender, and sexuality and highlight the inherent instability of a heteronormative framework in which bisexual identities are formed. I have attempted to move away from a model of deviance to a model of difference (Namaste, 1996). To understand bisexual identity it is necessary to study both the subject and the systems of knowledge that produce the subject.

Seeing sexuality and sexual identity as a socially constructed and complex phenomenon, social interactionist and social constructionist theorists challenge the biological and behavioural focus of past approaches in the study of sexuality (Goffman, 1963; Plummer, 1975; Rust 1993; Seidman, 1997; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). In the last 20-25 years social interactionism and social constructionism have been the leading social science perspectives for studying sexuality (Steinman, 2001). Previous social theorists viewed sexuality and sexual orientation as inherent, static, discrete, and consistent across time and place, according to which view it was simply the expression of sexuality that varies due to social constraints (ibid). Social interactionism is a useful perspective in the study of sexuality (Goffman, 1963; Plummer, 1975) as well as social constructionism more generally (Falk, 2001; Link & Phelan, 2001).

Studying stigma from a sociological perspective is useful in exposing the social inequalities of stigma. In Goffman's (1963) influential book on stigma, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, he writes from a social interactionist perspective on the material aspects of stigma and provides a conceptual framework for the understanding of stigma. Plummer (1975) also theorizes about sexual identity, stigma, and differentiation by using an interactionist perspective.

Symbolic Interactionism

A symbolic interactionist approaches the study of sexuality from a micro-level perspective, looking close up at social interactions in specific situations; symbolic interactionists see society as the product of the everyday interactions of individuals and sexual identity is formed in relation to others. According to Plummer (1975) an interactionist perspective is useful in the analysis of sexuality and *differentiation* or *variation* (p. 8). It is this variation that becomes “stigmatizable” (p. 9). Plummer’s argument is organized around three tenets of the interactionist perspective regarding sexuality. An interactionist perspective believes that the world is seen as a *subjective reality*, as a *process*, and as *interactive* or a consequence of societal and self-reactions (Plummer, 1975). Using this perspective, sociologists can examine the multiple, emergent and socially constructed character of sexual meanings while also attending to constraints on sexual meanings.

Symbolic interactionists also focus on “the notions of meaning, process, ‘invented identities,’ and the cultural construction of communities” (Stein & Plummer, 1996, p. 131). Their focus on situational interactions at a micro level can sometimes lead them to understate how agency is restrained by the power of institutional discourses (Stein & Plummer, 1996, p. 137). Symbolic interactionists also have a tendency to overlook history and social structure in their emphasis on concrete social interaction (Epstein, 1996).

Social Constructionism

A sociological study of sexuality addresses the issue of social change by looking at empirical changes, explaining changes, and attending to the consequences of changing sexuality (Plummer, 1975). A social constructionist perspective sees human sexuality as an ongoing, dynamic process and emphasizes the changing character of sexual

behaviours and identities (Steinman, 2001, p. 22). Social constructionists argue that society does not just control the expression of some innate sexual desire but actually constructs sexual desires, behaviours, and subjects in a historically specific and changing social process. From a social constructionist perspective, we produce and reproduce structural relationships; reality is produced and reproduced by individuals acting on their interpretations and their experiences of reality (Foucault, 1997; Goffman, 1963; Garber, 1995; Seidman, 1997).

According to foundational social constructionist theorists, Berger and Luckman:

Identity is, of course, a key element of subjective reality, and like all subjective reality, stands in a dialectical relationship with society. Identity is formed by social processes. Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations. The social processes involved in both the formation and the maintenance of identity are determined by the social structure. Conversely, the identities produced by the interplay of individual consciousness and social structure react upon the given social structure, maintaining it, modifying it, or even reshaping it. Societies have histories in the course of which specific identities emerge; these histories are, however, made by men [sic] with specific identities. (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 173)

Social constructionism was seen as disruptive in its time, “radically critical and challenging of the status quo” although with retrospection the ideas may not now seem so challenging (Stein & Plummer, 1996, p. 131). Sometimes in their writing or research social constructionists make assumptions about time and place. Stein and Plummer suggest that social constructionist text is “lodged in its own time warp, capturing specific times and places in the hidden assumptions it harbours” (p. 137). Overlooking time and place makes it seem like sexual-identity-formation processes are constant and universal.

Social Constructionism and Stigma

While early social interactionists/constructionists helped to bring about public awareness concerning sexual identity and stigma, their focus remained mainly on homosexuality, viewing it as a social stigma to be managed (Seidman, 1997). With a narrow focus on the individual, they did not critically investigate the binary categorisation of sexuality and their approach was generally ahistorical. Moreover, they did not address bisexuality within the dominant paradigm of a hetero/homosexual binary. Steinman (2001) suggests that what is often overlooked in these explanations of stigma and identity management are the social control functions of contemporary gay and lesbian communities in relation to other non-heterosexual possibilities (Steinman, 2001, p. 24). For example, bisexual identity is constructed in relation to *both* normalized heterosexual and homosexual categories. Another problematic characteristic of social constructionism in the study of sexuality is that it has tended to develop a historically and socially coherent account of gay history, community, and identity by erasing differences and ignoring alternate experiences (Steinman, 2001, p. 23).

Although a social interactionist/constructionist approach to stigma is useful, the absence of a critique of the binary and social structures and an exploration of alternate sexualities to heteronormative binary ideas of sexuality limits its utility in the study of bisexual identity. There has been an almost parallel movement of queer theorists in the humanities who have eclipsed social constructionist theorists in studying sexuality and have specifically addressed relations of power. I believe a more effective approach to the study of stigma and (bi)sexuality would be a *sociological queer theory*.

Poststructuralism, Foucault & Power

It is not merely enough to say that sexual identity is socially constructed; we must also take into account that the social construction of identity is embedded in broad institutions

and discourses of power. Although Foucault is usually credited as a queer theorist, he also consolidated the social constructionist perspective with an analysis of power (Epstein, 1996).⁶ Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1978) was very influential in the late 1970s and 80s and noted a shift from prior theories that "posit agents as the source of knowledge and action" to a poststructural position "that they are effects of a specific social and cultural logic" (Namaste, 1996, p. 195). Foucault's aim was to "undermine the idea, which he attributed to Freud, that sexuality is a kind of natural essence to which we have till recently been denied access by repression" (Callinicos 2007: 283). Foucault describes a shift in the "tactics of power" from a focus on behaviour and sexual acts, to a focus on sexual personhood and sexual *identities* that were divided into normal and abnormal identities. He argues that sexuality is not a natural substance, but a historical construct, formed in a specific context of power-knowledge. Foucault views sexual and erotic desire as encompassing "a diverse set of practices, strategies, discourses, institutions, and knowledges that were historically contingent and were played out on a dispersed field of power" (Epstein, 1996, p. 150).

Foucault brings awareness to the "production of the homosexual" (Namaste, 1996, p. 195) and the subtle forms of power that invest the body and "make us simultaneously subjected to and subjects of sex" (Weeks 1995: 6). Sexuality is a product of heteronormative discourses; it has been constructed through institutional discourses which come to constitute "regimes of truth." Sexual identity relies on dichotomous ideas of sex, gender and sexuality and it is disciplined by these dominant discourses.

⁶ Stein and Plummer (1996) note that there is a sense of irony that queer theorists use social constructionism as though it were a new discovery.

Queer Theory

Poststructuralism has influenced queer theorists as they seek to make sense of the relations between heterosexuality and homosexuality and to critique heteronormative dichotomous understandings of sexuality. Although queer theory has not adequately addressed bisexuality specifically, I use the tenets of queer theory to help me explore and analyse the meanings of bisexuality within this binary framework. Queer theorists see queer theory as indeterminate, and prefer to avoid defining it and have it remain ambiguous; however, Annamarie Jagose (1996) broadly defines queer as

Describ[ing] those gestures or analytical models which dramatise the incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire. Resisting that model of stability – which claims heterosexuality as its origin, when it is more properly its effect – queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire (p. 3).

She goes on to explain that a queer analytical framework has been most prominently associated with “lesbian and gay subjects” but now “also includes such topics as cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery” (p. 3) but not bisexual subjects. Likewise, Nikki Sullivan (2003) prefers not to attempt to define queer theory; instead she is more concerned with looking at what queer theories *do*, how they function, and their effects. She explains that her aim is “to queer – to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimise, to camp up – heteronormative knowledges and institutions, and the subjectivities and socialites that are (in)formed by them and that (in)form them” (p. vi).

I roughly define queer theory as a practice that interrogates heteronormativity: the binary; its apparent stability; the alignment of sex, gender, and sexual orientation; and gender as the basis of sexuality. Queer theory is a post-structuralist approach to the

study of desire and a useful analytical tool for critiquing heteronormativity and the binary structures of sexuality; however, in its focus on a critique of the reproduction of heterosexuality it has tended to focus on a homosexual subject and has consequently overlooked other undermined sexual identities (Namaste, 1996). Until very recently, queer theory has seemingly entirely omitted the examination or exploration of bisexuality. If bisexuality is addressed at all by queer theory, it is usually subsumed under the category of homosexuality, tacked on as an afterthought to “gay and lesbian,” rather than as a separate, independent sexual category. Bisexuality has not been adequately (queer) theorized.

Bisexuality (II)luminated

Judith Butler’s and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s treatments of bisexuality illuminates some of queer theory’s limitations with respect to bisexuality. In *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), one of Sedgwick’s projects is to question and disrupt gender as the basis of sexual desire. Sedgwick rationalizes her inattention to bisexuality on the grounds that bisexuality reinforces or consolidates existing gender and sexual divisions and hierarchies (Feldman 2009). She explains that it is due to bisexuality being conceptualized as the ‘original’ sexual identity that sexuality has historically been read as an effect of gender difference (ibid). Bisexuality is subsequently dismissed by Sedgwick as not being capable of being a disruptive force and is overlooked because it is held responsible for upholding a binary, heteronormative framework of sexuality in which gender is the basis for sexuality.

Butler (1990; 1991) “queers” social interactionist ideas of identity as being produced in relation to an “other” by critiquing the binary that configures both the norm and the other. As a queer theorist, she critiques the dominant heterosexual paradigm that assumes dichotomous notions of sex, gender, and sexuality, all of which are caught up together in

the heterosexual matrix. She states that “[t]here are no direct expressive or causal lines between sex, gender, gender presentation, sexual practice, fantasy and sexuality” (Butler, 1991, p. 25). Heterosexuality attempts to “naturalize itself through setting up certain illusions of continuity between sex, gender, and desire” (Butler, 1991, p. 27). Binary opposites are arranged in a hierarchy. Butler exposes the dependency of the dominant term (heterosexuality) on its subjected other (homosexuality). Butler explains that “homosexuality emerges as a desire which must be produced in order to remain repressed” (Butler, 1990, p. 77). Butler argues that heterosexuality *requires* homosexuality in order to define itself, maintain its stability, and establish the “essential function” of heterosexuality.

Since homosexuality is *required* by heterosexuality to define it, homosexuality becomes the primary sexuality within the sexual binary which could be considered subversive to dominant heteronormative discourses that situate heterosexuality as the essential identity. However, Butler dismisses this subversive potential, maintaining that homosexuality cannot be prior to its cultural conception. Butler then also considers bisexuality as the original sexual orientation and heterosexuality as its constructed other through the process of repression, which could also be seen as possibly subversive to dominant heteronormative discourses. However, Butler dismisses bisexuality as subversive because there is, again, no account of its construction in the first place; bisexuality cannot be prior to its cultural conception within the sexual binary. Butler claimed that bisexuality cannot really be conceived of as a unique identity *outside* of the heterosexual matrix because even if it is considered as a distinctive identity it is still only in relation to, and deviates from, the heterosexual norm within the heterosexual matrix. She says that bisexuality is “the construction of an ‘outside’ that is nevertheless fully ‘inside,’ not a possibility beyond culture” (p. 77). Since Butler does not find bisexuality

subversive as a unique identity, she subsumes it under and along with homosexuality and affords it no more attention.

In general, these queer theorists disregard bisexuality and subsume it under homosexuality. Namaste (1996) notes that “the field of queer theory has said very little on the question of bisexuality” (p. 205). This inattention to bisexuality exposes the hidden *homosexual* norm within queer theory (Gustavson, 2009). Critics of the homonormativity in queer theory suggest that bisexuality can work alongside, strengthen, and expand the queering of queer theory. Laura Erickson-Schroth and Jennifer Mitchell explain that the continued erasure of bisexuality in queer theory “reveals that queer theory has not yet moved beyond its position as a homosexual opponent to heterosexuality, and therefore that bisexual theory has a role to play in queering queer theory” (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009, p. 298). April S. Callis says that while the exclusion of bisexuals has been noted, it has yet to be addressed, and that queer theory would be strengthened by the examination of bisexual subjects and realities (Callis, 2009). And Maria Gurevich, Helen Bailey, and Jo Bower lament bisexuality’s exclusion and argue that its capacity to disrupt hegemonic knowledges that shape heteronormative discourses should make it a clear ally to queer theory (Gurevich, Bailey, & Bower, 2009). Bisexuality specifically exposes the hierarchal, hegemonic ideas of heteronormativity as being based on monosexuality and monogamy.

Queer Sociology

By using a *sociological queer theory informed by poststructuralism* the study of sexual-minority-identity formation can look beyond the individual and incorporate institutional discourses and social structures; yet the structures should not be reduced to discourse and abstracted from the institutional contexts they critique. It is also important to acknowledge that individuals and groups, although constrained by social structures, also

have agency. There is a dialectics of identity formation. According to Stein and Plummer (1996), “[a]lthough sexuality is constructed through various discourses, individuals are not simply passive recipients of these cultural constructions” (p. 138). Identity is “a site of ongoing social regulation and contestation rather than a quasi-natural substance or an accomplished social fact. Identities are never fixed or stable...” (Seidman, 1993, p. 134). People are creative in actively constructing their lives.

Queer theorists also warn against strategies that rely on conceptual dualisms and reinforce the idea of a minority “other” while leaving the “centre” intact. Therefore according to queer theorists, when analyzing marginal experiences, it should be done specifically to “expose the deeper contours of the whole society and the mechanisms of its functioning” (Epstein, 1996, p. 156). However, this is not necessarily unique to queer theorists. In the sociological study of sexuality and stigma the goal is also to study the processes by which people become labeled “other” and therefore by contrast to expose “the ideological construction of ‘the normal’” (Epstein, 1996, p. 156). When looking at various sexual identities, it is important not to naturalize and normalize heterosexuality (Stein & Plummer, 1996) or homosexuality. “Queer sociologists” should remain vigilant against reification in their studies of identity formation (Epstein, 1996, p. 156).

Conclusion

In this chapter I reviewed literature on heteronormativity and stigma as well as some theoretical perspectives in the study of sexuality. I propose to use a sociological queer theory informed by poststructuralism to study how bisexual men form and manage their identities. Awareness of the social contexts of sexual identity formation and stigma provides a basis for understanding how individuals navigate their identities; how their identities form and are formed by social institutions and discourses. Models of stigma

endeavour to explain the social processes by which stigmatized individuals attain and manage their stigmatized identities while situating those individuals within the larger social context of heteronormativity is also important. The social concepts explored around identity formation and stigma management explain how identity formation is social, infused with power, relational, and subject to change. These concepts are useful tools for understanding bisexual men's experiences of stigmatization and their capacity for agency and to disrupt heteronormative discourses.

Chapter 3: Sexual Minority Identity Formation Models

Introduction

This chapter consists of three sections: homosexual identity formation, bisexual identity formation, and a discussion comparing and contrasting the two.⁷ First, I give a detailed overview and analysis of two foundational homosexual identity formation models. This is done so as to position the bisexual identity formation models to follow. I then give a detailed overview and analysis of three key bisexual identity formation models. Next, I compare and contrast the two types of models and discuss similarities, differences, and shortcomings of the sexual minority identity formation models. Familiarity with these models of sexual identity formation is important to my research as it provides the context in which I can understand bisexual men's processes of identifying as bisexual and what it means to them to identify as bisexual.

Sexual minority identity formation models, often called "coming out" models, describe a process of internal identity formation (Hunter, 2007).⁸ There are very few models of (hetero)sexual identity development. That people are heterosexual is simply taken for granted (Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1994). Homosexual identity formation is part of the larger process of *becoming homosexual* and adopting homosexuality as a way of life (Plummer, 1975). Homosexual identity formation models began to appear in the late

⁷ I am using the term homosexual because it reflects the language used in the original models of homosexual identity formation models; however, I acknowledge that currently the term homosexual is usually used as a reference category and not often as an identity label.

⁸ "Coming out" can also refer to the disclosure of one's sexual minority identity to others. Troiden (1988) explained that, "identity disclosure is more a matter of identity management than identity development" (p. 41). Since not everyone discloses their sexual minority identity to everyone all the time I will not use the term coming out to mean disclosure; I will use "coming out" only as a synonym for the sexual minority identity formation process.

1970s (Cass, 1979; Plummer, 1975; Ponce, 1978; Troiden, 1979) and were reformulated and tested in the mid-to- late 1980s (Cass, 1984; Troiden, 1988).⁹ These formative models have been taken up, tested, and contested ever since. Homosexual identity formation (Cass, 1984; Troiden, 1988) is known variously as coming out (Hunter, 2007; McLean, 2007; Rust, 1993), sexual identity development (D'Augelli, 1994), resocialization (Hunter, 2007) and identity acquisition (Troiden, 1988).¹⁰ All of the models begin with heterosexuality as the default identity. Although some of the models acknowledge that not everyone may complete the homosexual identity formation process, the assumption is that successful completion of all the stages is required in order to become a fully developed and mature homosexual individual.

Although there are numerous sexual identity formation models for coming out as homosexual (Cass, 1979; Cass, 1984; D'Augelli, 1994; Plummer, 1975; Ponce, 1978; Troiden, 1979; Troiden, 1988), there are very few models for bisexual identity formation (Bradford, 2004; Rust, 1993; Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1994) and they are much more recent developments than homosexual identity formation models. Perhaps this is because “coming out as bisexual is a more ambiguous status than coming out as lesbian or gay” (Hunter, 2007, p. 53). Bisexual identity formation meets many unique challenges. Bisexual individuals are required to reject “not just one but two recognized categories of sexual identity” – heterosexual *and* homosexual (Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1994, p. 26). Also, role models are cited as integral pieces of the coming out process for homosexuals yet bisexuals do not have accurate role models for their “dual attractions.” For example, bisexuals are usually conceptualized as having equal

⁹ For a more complete list please see Hunter, S. (2007). *Coming Out and Disclosures: LGBT Persons Across the Life Span*. New York: Haworth Press and Cass, V. C. (1984). Homosexual Identity Formation: Testing a Theoretical Model. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 143-167.

¹⁰ I will use homosexual or bisexual *identity formation* throughout this text in order to neutralize the concept of development which some of the models use.

attractions to men and women. However, bisexual individuals infrequently experience their attractions in this equal way. In fact, there is hardly any agreement as to what exactly constitutes bisexuality. The following models have some similarities but are all unique; no typical process or pattern seems to fit all bisexual individuals (Hunter, 2001, p. 53). The same can be said for homosexual identity formation models.

Despite particular differences among models, a general overview of models of homosexual and bisexual sexual identity formation processes describe very similar patterns or themes of change and/or “growth points” as key features of sexual minority identity formation. These themes of change occur over the course of identity formation. All the models attach importance to behavioural, cognitive (self images or self-perceptions), and affective aspects of the development process (Cass, 1984). Cass (1984) and Troiden (1988) outline five key features of homosexual identity formation that can also be applied to bisexual identity formation:

1. Sexual minority identity develops over time, and most models indicate that it involves certain steps or sequential stages of growth and change. There is an initial departure from a previous sexual identity and initial confusion.
2. Sexual minority identity formation includes increased self-acceptance of the label *homosexual* (or gay or lesbian) or *bisexual* as a self-identity and a positive attitude towards this identity.
3. Sexual minority identity formation is infused with stigma and requires the application of affective, cognitive, and behavioural strategies used in the management of a sexual minority identity in everyday life (i.e. passing and disclosure). This occurs throughout the identity formation process.

4. During the process of homosexual or bisexual identity formation there is increasing disclosure of identity at different levels: to self, to other homosexuals or bisexuals, to family and friends, to co-workers, and to the general public and heterosexuals.
5. Throughout the sexual minority identity formation process there is increased contact with similar individuals and community groups (Cass, 1984, p. 146; Troiden, 1988, p. 36).

In addition to the five key featured themes of change in homosexual identity formation identified by Cass (1984) and Troiden (1988), I have identified as significant two more themes of change present in homosexual and/or bisexual identity formation processes:

6. During the process of sexual minority identity formation, homosexuals and bisexuals can experience a sense of pride and participate in social justice action around marginalized sexual identities.
7. Sexual minority identity formation includes awareness of changes in language and actively making changes in the language available for self-description.

Not all of the following sexual minority identity formation models contain all of these seven elements.

Homosexual Identity Formation Models

The two most influential theorists on sexual minority identity formation are Cass (1979, 1984) and Troiden (1979, 1988). While there have been some changes in homosexual identity formation models, Cass (1979, 1984) continues to be one of the most referenced theorists of sexual identity formation models. Her original model has been taken up,

tested, adapted, and contested. Cass (1984) outlined six stages of homosexual identity formation that point to the “broad developmental changes” and specific events that occur at each stage (p. 147). The six stages in Cass’ (1979, 1984) model begin with *identity confusion*, which moves quickly to *identity comparison*. Third is the stage of *identity tolerance*, which progresses to *identity acceptance*. The fifth and sixth stages of Cass’ model are *identity pride* and *identity synthesis* (see Table 2).¹¹ Troiden (1979; 1988) presented a four-stage, ideal-typical model of homosexual identity formation. Troiden built on his own previous work (Troiden, 1979) as well as Cass’s (1984) six stages of homosexual identity formation, Ponce’s (1978) five steps of a “gay trajectory,” and Plummer’s (1975) four stages of adopting a homosexual “career.” Troiden’s model occurs through four discernible stages, beginning with *sensitization*, continuing through to *identity confusion*, *identity assumption* and ending with a *commitment* to a new homosexual identity (see Table 3).

I will examine further the components of Cass’ and Troiden’s models of homosexual identity formation by breaking them down into three different sections in line with the previously mentioned three responses to stigma. The sections are: departure from previous sexual identity and initial confusion; increasing acceptance of sexual minority identity and group affiliation; and normalization of sexual minority identity.

¹¹ Cass (1984) tested her stage model of homosexual identity formation and found the stages to be valid; however, there was some “blurring of adjacent stages” (p. 163). Most notable was the indistinction between stages 1 and 2 and between stages 5 and 6. This might suggest that identity formation may only involve four stages; however, Cass still found there to be six discernible stages despite some of the similarities.

Table 2: Cass's (1979; 1984) Stage Model of Homosexual Identity Formation¹²

Stages	Characteristics	Successful Outcomes
Stage 1: Identity Confusion	Questioning heterosexual identity	Accept possibility of a homosexual identity
Stage 2: Identity Comparison	Begin to believe/accept they are probably homosexual; realize they are now "other"	Consider seeking out contacts with other homosexuals to lessen feelings of alienation
Stage 3: Identity Tolerance	Begin to define self as homosexual but still uncomfortable; reluctantly seek out company of homosexuals to lessen isolation	Positive experiences with homosexual community result in further contacts and positive view of homosexual identity
Stage 4: Identity Acceptance	Increased contact with other homosexuals; gather information on subculture; begin to normalize their homosexual identity	See homosexual identity in a positive light; selective disclosure to heterosexuals
Stage 5: Identity Pride	Feel proud of homosexual identity; feelings of anger towards heterosexist attitudes and actively confront these attitudes; insular in-group affiliation and dichotomization of hetero/homo	Disclose identity to many; experience dissonance when expected negative attitude not encountered
Stage 6: Identity Synthesis	Acceptance and integration of new identity; no longer hide homosexual identity but it is not a primary identity; less anger and pride; increased contact with heterosexuals	Breakdown of strict divisions between homo/hetero; synthesis of self-perception and societal perception; feelings of peace and stability

Note: The thicker lines represent the four possible stages as indicated by the "blurring of adjacent stages" that Cass (1984) found in testing her theoretical stage model of homosexual identity formation.

¹² All tables are based on the table found in Bradford (2004).

Table 3: Troiden's (1979; 1988) Stage Model of Homosexual Identity Formation

Stages	Characteristics	Successful Outcomes
Stage 1: Sensitization	Before puberty assume heterosexuality; may feel 'different'	Sensitization to subsequent self-definition as homosexual
Stage 2: Identity Confusion	Questioning sexual identity; inner turmoil due to both heterosexual and homosexual attractions as well as stigma and lack of knowledge about homosexuality	Less confusion if conforming to homosexual stereotypes; may lead to denial, repair, avoidance, redefinition, and/or acceptance of homosexual identity
Stage 3: Identity Assumption	Adopt a homosexual identity during or after late adolescence; disclose identity to other homosexuals; explore and connect with homosexual subculture; decreased feelings of isolation but may also feel excluded from dominant group	Positive contact with homosexuals facilitates identity acceptance and development; negative experiences can result in non-homosexual self-perceptions; increased necessity to develop strategies for dealing with stigma
Stage 4: Commitment	Adopt homosexuality as a way of life; self accepting and comfortable with identity; actively disclose identity to most; may imitate heterosexual lifestyle, blend in, or take pride in homosexual identity including social justice action.	Achievement of same-sex love relationship as sign of commitment to homosexual lifestyle; increased satisfaction and happiness

Components of Homosexual Identity Formation

Departure from previous sexual identity and initial confusion

In the first two stages, both Cass (1979, 1984) and Troiden (1979, 1988) explain that individuals first see themselves as heterosexual, and begin to feel marginalized and see that their behaviour – thoughts, actions and feelings – might be different from their peers. According to Troiden, they perceive themselves as different based on *gender*; a child's social experiences of gender-neutral or gender-inappropriate interests or behaviours are considered more salient than same-sex attractions (emotional) or sexual activities (genital events) in generating perceptions of difference. It is during this time

that “childhood experiences [of gender-neutrality or gender atypical activities and interests] sensitize [those who later become] lesbians and gays to subsequent self-definition as homosexual” (Troiden, 1988, p. 43). Feeling different brings up feelings of confusion, as individuals now question their sexual orientation and believe that they may be homosexual (Cass, 1979, 1984; Troiden, 1979, 1988). Factors responsible for identity confusion include: altered perception of self, experiences of both heterosexual and homosexual arousal and behaviour, the social stigma attached to homosexuality, and inaccurate or lack of knowledge about homosexuals and homosexuality (Troiden 1979, 1988).

According to Troiden (1988), individuals at this stage respond to identity confusion and engage in stigma management through: *denial* (disclaim their homosexual feelings), *repair* (get rid of homosexual feelings or behaviours through professional help), *avoidance* (avoid their homosexual feelings and behaviour by inhibiting, decreasing or limiting their homosexual feelings and behaviour) *redefinition* (redefine homosexual behaviour and feelings along more conventional lines), and/or *acceptance* (accept their homosexual behaviour and feelings and seek out confirmation) (Troiden, 1988). He explains that one redefinition strategy is to define oneself as “ambisexual” –meaning bisexual – in order to deny a real homosexual identity by claiming that one’s feelings or behaviours are just a phase.

Increasing acceptance of sexual minority identity and group affiliation

The third stage of homosexual identity formation is almost identical for Cass (1979, 1984) and Troiden (1979, 1988). They explain that individuals begin to define themselves as homosexual, but are still uncomfortable with a homosexual identity. At this stage, individuals actively seek out the company of homosexuals in order to

decrease isolation and feelings of alienation and meet “social, sexual, and emotional needs” (Cass, 1984, p. 151). However, they are still reluctant to identify as homosexual, and they connect to homosexual communities out of a feeling of necessity rather than because they personally desire to do so. When individuals at this stage increase the frequency of contact with other homosexuals, the quality of that contact is important because positive experiences will facilitate identity acceptance and development, while negative experiences can result in continued non-homosexual perceptions of self, a distancing from homosexual communities and/or self-hatred (Cass 1979; Troiden, 1988). Attachment to a homosexual community decreases feelings of isolation; *group alignment* is also a strategy to deal with stigma by fostering a sense of belonging (which, however, may also bring up feelings of being excluded from the dominant group) (Troiden, 1988). Disclosure to heterosexuals at this stage is very limited.

Normalization of sexual minority identity

According to Cass (1979, 1984) and Troiden (1979, 1988), homosexuals next move beyond toleration of their nascent identity and begin to normalize homosexuality as an identity and lifestyle, and see it in a positive light. They are self-accepting and comfortable in their identity and role. There is increased contact with other homosexuals and communities. According to Troiden, a same-sex “love relationship” signifies the onset of commitment to the homosexual lifestyle (Troiden, 1988, p. 53). While homosexuals no longer live two completely separate lives of heterosexual and homosexual, they continue to maintain a heterosexual “passing strategy” at relevant times (Cass, 1984, p. 152) and practice selective disclosure to heterosexuals.

According to Troiden (1988), in the last stage, homosexuals use different stigma management strategies like covering (acting “respectable” and imitating heterosexual

lifestyles) and blending (acting in “gender-appropriate ways and neither announce nor deny their homosexual identities”) (p. 56). Others may choose to ‘convert,’ which involves valorizing homosexuality and taking pride in being homosexual; individuals “confront rather than evade the homosexual stigma” (p. 57). This might include formal and informal action to inform the general public about homosexuality in an attempt to eliminate “oppression through education and political change” (p. 57).

According to Cass (1979, 1984), identity pride is an entirely separate fifth stage, in which individuals not only feel proud to have a homosexual identity and are devoted to and defend homosexuals as a group, but also recognize that society rejects homosexuality as an acceptable sexual identity. They experience anger towards anti-homosexual attitudes and behaviours of heterosexuals and prefer homosexual company. According to Cass (1979, 1984), there is a final stage of *identity synthesis*, which is very similar to Troiden’s (1988) stigma management strategies of covering and blending. Although individuals in this stage are no longer hiding their sexual identity, a homosexual identity is no longer primary, and disclosure becomes a “non-issue” (Cass, 1984, p. 152). Anger and pride become less prominent and less emotional. There is a synthesis of self-perception and views believed to be held by others resulting in “one integrated identity that unites both private and public aspects of self. This gives rise to feelings of peace and stability. With this, the process of identity formation is completed” (Cass, 1984, pp. 152-153).

Bisexual Identity Formation

In looking at bisexual identity formation models, I will first discuss two linear stage models put forth by Weinberg, Williams and Pryor (1994) and Bradford (2004), and then

I will discuss Rust's (1993, 1996b) non-linear model of sexual minority identity formation. Weinberg et al. (1994) were the first to come up with a model of bisexual identity formation. They took the homosexual identity formation process (Cass, 1984; Troiden, 1988) and used it as a point of departure for developing a model for bisexual identity formation. They approached their model by: looking at areas of overlap in homosexual identity formation and bisexual identity formation; questioning how recognizable, understood, and available the identity of bisexual was to people as an identity; and enquiring about the effects of an absence of a bisexual subculture on the availability of "information and support needed for sustaining a commitment to [a bisexual] identity" (Weinberg et al., 1994, p. 27). Weinberg et al. (1994) found four broad stages of bisexual identity development that captured the experiences of the bisexuals they interviewed – *initial confusion, finding and applying the label, settling into the identity, and continued uncertainty* (see Table 4). Bradford (2004) also posited a stage model of bisexual identity formation. Bradford's model expressly considers the effects of cultural attitudes – bias, denial, and personal invalidation of bisexuality based on a belief in dichotomous sexuality – on bisexual identity formation. On the basis of her findings, Bradford (2004) proposed four stages of bisexual identity formation, which included: *questioning reality, inventing the identity, maintaining the identity, and transforming adversity* (see Table 5).

Table 4: Weinberg et al.'s (1994) Stage Model of Bisexual Identity Formation

Stages	Characteristics	Successful Outcomes
Stage 1: Initial Confusion	Feelings of doubt and struggle about bisexual attractions; absence of bisexual category and information	Discover bisexual label
Stage 2: Finding and Applying the Label	Learn about the term bisexuality and apply it to self; make connections to other bisexuals; experience and enjoy attraction or sexual behaviour with both men and women	Realize they do not have to choose between their attractions to men and women; feel validated in bisexual identity
Stage 3: Settling into the Identity	More complete transition to self-identifying as bisexual; more self accepting and less concerned with other negative attitudes; continued connection to bisexuals and seeking information	Stable identity; absence of closure
Stage 4: Continued Uncertainty	Periods of doubt and uncertainty regarding bisexual identity; lack of social validation from heterosexual and homosexuals; lack of bisexual role models and community	Negative social reactions make it difficult to sustain bisexual identity; continued uncertainty, doubt, and confusion; accept a lack of closure

Table 5: Bradford's (2004) Stage Theory of Bisexual Identity

Stages	Characteristics	Successful Outcomes
Stage 1: Questioning reality	Struggle with doubt	Belief in own experience
Stage 2: Inventing identity	Search for meaning	Creation of own definition; rejection of cultural definitions
Stage 3: Maintaining identity	Encounter with isolation and invisibility; marginalized from both straight and lesbian/gay communities	Sense of own community and increased self-reliance
Stage 4: Transforming adversity	Character strengthening; social action; may take on a more visible role as bisexual; involvement in creating and sustaining bisexual community	Personal satisfaction

Components of Bisexual Identity Formation

Departure from previous sexual identity and initial confusion

Similar to the homosexual identity formation models, Weinberg et al.'s (1994) and Bradford's (2004) models define the first stage in the process of "becoming bisexual" as a period of *initial confusion* or *questioning reality* which includes feelings of doubt and struggle regarding bisexual identity. Heterosexuality is the starting point for bisexual individuals in Weinberg et al.'s model; however, in Bradford's model, some bisexuals begin with a homosexual identity. Questioning their heterosexual (or homosexual) identity leads to confusion when bisexual individuals think that feelings for same-sex (or other-sex) individuals means an end to their heterosexuality (or homosexuality) (Weinberg et al, 1994). Bisexual individuals doubt their own experiences of both same-sex and other-sex attractions based on the "denial, or invisibility, of bisexuality in the culture" (Bradford, 2004, p. 20).

Increasing acceptance of sexual minority identity and group affiliation

Bradford (2004) and Weinberg, Williams and Pryor (1994) explain that increasing acceptance of a bisexual identity relies on *finding or inventing the label*, a process in which bisexuals search for meaning, learn about the term bisexuality and are able to define themselves as such. The production of a new meaning involves "rejection of those definitions offered by the culture that are based on current relationship status and partner gender" (Bradford, 2004, p. 20). During this stage, bisexuals might connect with bisexual resources and seek or receive support from others who are similar to themselves. Their identity is also confirmed by having sexual experiences with men and women and realizing that they do not have to choose between seemingly contradictory desires and emotions (Weinberg et al., 1994, p. 30). They then feel validated in calling themselves bisexual.

Normalization of sexual minority identity

Once individuals feel validated in calling themselves bisexual, they then seek to maintain a bisexual identity and the meanings associated with it, in spite of a continual lack of acknowledgement from the culture in which they live (Bradford 2004; Weinberg et al., 1994). According to Bradford, this period is often marked by bisexual marginalization by both straight and lesbian/gay communities and feelings of isolation and invisibility. This marginalization results in bisexuals producing their own sense of community and increased self-reliance. In the end, Bradford suggests that bisexual individuals transform their experiences of difficulty into social action by taking on more visible roles as bisexuals and continuing to participate in, and become role models and leaders, in bisexual communities. In the final stage, bisexual individuals experience a sense of personal satisfaction.

Weinberg et al. describe dissonance between positive self-perception of bisexual identity and negative social attitudes towards bisexuality as lessening during this period. However, they state that even though individuals may seem to accept a bisexual identity completely, there is an “absence of closure.” According to Weinberg et al. (1994), this stage “seems unique to bisexuals” (p. 34). It is marked by “intermittent periods of doubt and uncertainty regarding [bisexual] identity,” despite having come to a point of apparent self-acceptance (Weinberg et al., 194, p. 34). There is a notable lack of social validation and support for bisexuals from both heterosexual and homosexual people. Not only are bisexuals abject to heterosexuals, their identity is often devalued and dismissed by lesbians and gays, which bisexuals can find particularly distressing. Negative social reactions make it difficult to sustain a bisexual identity over time. Lack of support also comes from “the absence of bisexual role models, no bisexual community... and nothing in the way of public recognition of bisexuality,” which often leads to continued

“uncertainly and confusion” (Weinberg et al., 1994, p. 37). Also, because it is expected that bisexuals must have equal attractions to men and women, when one falls short of this, it can lead to doubt about being a “real” bisexual. At the final stage, it seems that bisexual individuals come to accept a “lack of closure” (Hunter, 2007, p. 55). So although both Bradford and Weinberg et al. agree that there is a lack of social validation and continued marginalization of bisexual individuals, their models end with contrasting outcomes. One suggests bisexuals *transform adversity* while the other suggests *continued uncertainly* as the final effect of bisexual identity formation.

Rust’s Non-Linear Model

Rust’s (1993, 1996b) model of sexual identity formation begins with the premise that “coming out” is *not* a linear, goal-oriented, developmental process. She noted a disjuncture “between contemporary concepts of sexual identity and available models for describing sexual identity formation” (Rust, 1993). From this premise, she conducted a study on sexual identity formation among lesbian and bisexual women in an attempt to develop a non-linear model of identity formation that was inclusive of bisexual identity and “treats bisexual identity and homosexual identity as equally valid alternatives to heterosexual identity” (Rust 1993, p. 52).

Rust (1993) notes that respondents continued to wonder about their sexual identity even *after* adopting a sexual identity and that they underwent periods of “alternative identification or uncertainty about their sexual identities (p. 59). She also found that there was *considerable variation* among lesbian and bisexual women’s coming out processes – variation that was too common to be considered random or merely deviating from the norm. She argues that a development model is inadequate in accounting for this variation and should be replaced by a social constructionist model of

sexual identity formation, as situated in relation to other individuals, groups, and institutions which she calls “landmarks.” These “landmarks” exist on a socially constructed sexual landscape where variation and change are the norm (Rust, 1993, 1996b). Rust did find that there was one particular and consistent difference between bisexual and lesbian women – bisexual women describe less stable identity histories than lesbian women. Bisexual women are “more likely [than lesbians] to wonder about or change their sexual identities and they change their identities more rapidly and more frequently than lesbians” (Rust, 1993, p. 67).

Rust proposes that the process of identity formation is “the process of discovering oneself in terms of social constructs rather than a process of discovering one’s essence” (Rust, 1993, p. 68). As social contexts constantly change, so too does one’s sexual self-identity. Rust (1993; 1996b) outlines five types of changes in social contexts that she indicates may lead individuals to change their sexual identities: *changes in one’s location on the sexual landscape, changes in the sexual landscape, changes in the language available for self-description, changes in social context, and changes in the accuracy of self-description* (see Table 6).

Table 6: Rust's (1993; 1996) Model of Sexual Identity Formation¹³

Changing Contexts	Characteristics	Successful Outcomes
Changes in One's Location on the Sexual Landscape	Develop new relationships with individuals, social groups, or institutions Questioning identity based on new feelings and experiences	May have unexpected new sexual or emotional experiences with a different gender resulting in change in identity
Changes in the Sexual Landscape	New opportunities for self-identity such as a previously unseen landmark or historical change Connection to other bisexuals and finding or creating bisexual community	May meet new individual with unknown identity such as a bisexual or there may be a political movement that creates a new group available for identification resulting in change in identity Meet others like you; new identities come into being to choose from
Changes in the Language Available for Self-Description	Changes in language terminology and meaning over time and place Apply label bisexual to self; create more accurate label to reflect experience; reject negative stereotypes	Increased awareness of more terms beyond gay and lesbian, including bisexual; redefining inaccurate definitions of sexuality Finding a label; redefining it, rejecting societal definitions
Changes in Social Context	Changes in social contexts are influential on whether or not a person identifies in a certain way in a particular time or place; changes in context include racial-ethnic, class, generational, geographic, and political differences	Takes into account the contingent and situated variations in individual experiences; intersectional considerations Negotiated disclosure of identity
Changes in the Accuracy of Self-Description	Individuals become more accurate and/or honest in their self-description; more open about identity Accepting of bisexual identity	Feel more confident about self-identity and reject negative social reactions; congruence with identity and behaviour Increased disclosure of identity

¹³ All of Rust's "changing contexts" categories correspond with patterns or themes in the stage models; however, they are not prescribed to happen in any particular order or at any particular time in a person's life.

Components of Rust's Non-Linear Model of Bisexual Identity Formation

Rust (1993, 1996b) states that the most common type of changes reported by lesbian and bisexual individuals are *changes in one's own location on the "sexual landscape."* Change occurs in relation to objects or persons other than the self, as one develops *new* relationships with individuals, social groups, and/or social and political institutions. She further explains that *changes in the sexual landscape* create new opportunities for self-identity and may eliminate other existing possibilities. Changes might include "the appearance of previously invisible landmarks on the sexual landscape [i.e. another bisexual] and historical changes in the sexual landscape [i.e. a political movement]" (Rust, 1996b, p. 174). *Changes in language* are a reflection of change in "the social constructs that provide a language for the description of social location" (Rust, 1993, p. 68). In other words, these changes are similar to changes in the sexual landscape and they are often interdependent. Changes occur in meanings and in terminology (an entirely new word may be created or an existing word may change meaning). Change occurs over time and depends on place and context. For example, bisexuality might have been understood as a phase until encountered as a term to refer to a stable sexual identity, while the terms lesbian and gay are now "nearly household words" and are used outside of gay and lesbian communities (Rust, 1996b, p. 177).

Rust (1993, 1996b) also describes how individuals live their daily lives in various and different social contexts and identity *changes in social context*. Sometimes change in context is a reflection of racial-ethnic, class, generational, geographic, and political differences and their intersections with sexual identities. Variation could also be a reflection of different rates of historical change in "cultural pockets" (Rust, 1993, p. 69). Rust (1993, 1996b) also indicates that identity changes occur as individuals become more *accurate in their self-description* and/or more honest about describing their

locations on the sexual landscape. Individuals may feel that they are a certain identity but, because of negative social reaction, they do not disclose their “true location” (Rust, 1996b, p. 179). Also, behaviour may not be congruent with what one calls oneself and identity may change to align with behaviour.

Summary and Critique of Sexual Minority Identity Formation Models

Homosexual Identity Formation Models Review

Cass developed a foundational model for marginal sexual identity formation. Her model outlines six stages in the process of acquiring a homosexual identity, in which she indicates a goal of “identity *change* in which a previously held image of sexual orientation [usually heterosexual] is replaced with a homosexual image” (Cass, 1984, italics in original, p. 145). Troiden’s (1979, 1988) four-stage model of homosexual identity formation is similar to Cass’ (1979; 1984) model. Although useful, there are limitations to both models. They both include men and women but do not differentiate between genders, so it is difficult to ascertain if there might be gender differences in homosexual identity formation.

Both models are based on an uncritical assumption of binary ideas of sex, gender and sexuality that naturalize the binary between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Cass and Troiden do not account for more than two genders, nor do they address bisexuality or other variances in sexuality. Troiden unquestioningly conflates gender and sexuality and does not critically explore the alignment of sex, gender and sexuality and the heteronormative gender stereotypes that assume gay men are effeminate and lesbian women are masculine. He leaves unquestioned other possibilities for different gender presentations and behaviour while also reifying gender as dichotomous. Troiden’s (1988) model also validates heteronormative relationship ideals when he suggests that a

person cannot be a fully committed homosexual until they have entered into a real “love relationship” (p. 53).

Cass’ model does not acknowledge bisexual identity formation as unique and different from homosexual identity development, and, in fact, omits bisexuality identity formation all together. Troiden’s model explicitly dismisses bisexuality as a valid sexual identity, and suggests that taking up a bisexual identity is a way of managing an undeveloped homosexual identity. Claiming bisexuality as a “redefinition strategy” posits homosexuality as a more valid identity and bisexuality as experimental, not real, and not committed. Also, Troiden overlooks how redefinition can be an empowering way of redefining sexual minority identities away from conventional meanings.

Both models are linear and view identity formation as a progressive procedure of stages with a specific sequence, which begin with an assumed heterosexual identity and end with a “commitment” to a homosexual identity (Cass 1984; Troiden 1988), at which time “the process of identity formation is completed” (Cass, 1984, p. 153). Within her model, Cass (1984) allows room for “identity foreclosure” where individuals may choose not to continue any further in the development of a homosexual identity. Troiden stipulates that “some men and women ‘drift away’ at various points before the fourth and *final* stage and never adopt homosexual identities or lead homosexual lifestyles” (Troiden, 1988, italics added, pp. 35-36). Although Cass and Troiden account for deviations from the progress of forming a sexual identity, those optional paths are not explored, nor are they considered as invalidating the underlying linear process (Hunter, 2007). Furthermore, linear models can be read as prescriptive about what is *supposed* to happen during the coming out process. Movement towards the end is considered progress, and stalled progress is interpreted as regression, foreclosure, or immaturity.

There is an implied moral prescription in the “rightness and direction of progression” (Hunter, 2007, p. 62). The linear models imply that once an individual reaches the end stage, identity formation ends. This further implies that they have discovered their “true” sexual identity and that it will never change again. However, for many individuals this is not the case and sexual identity formation is a life-long continuing process. Although both Cass and Troiden’s frameworks are models of change, they imply a crossing from one normative identity to one that then becomes normalized. This model upholds heteronormative ideas of sexuality as dichotomous.

Neither model takes into account changing social contexts. Cass does integrate some social factors; however, the formation of a homosexual identity is presented as a process of *self*-discovery. Cass and Troiden describe an individualistic process that does not fully take into account the power relations between the individual and other individuals, groups, and social structures. There is a lack of critical engagement with social institutions and power; they focus on the *how* of identity formation and do not adequately address the *why*. While Cass acknowledges the socially constructed character of sexual identity, she fails to incorporate variances in social contexts and intersections of other identities in the ability of individuals to come out/form an identity. She also equates the final stage of homosexual identity development with full homosexual identity disclosure, so that people are only considered to be fully developed if they are out to everyone; however, identity management is contextual, situated, and contingent. Troiden’s final stage more accurately reflects the complex nature of identity management by suggesting multiple methods of stigma management.

Both Cass and Troiden describe a similar process of minority sexual identity formation that includes a series of linear, invariant, universal, and predictable steps or stages.

Although these linear models are theoretically outdated, as foundational models their effects on sexual minority identity formation have been long lasting; they have influenced ideas about bisexual identity formation, and they continue to reflect the heteronormative discourses of sexuality in the everyday experiences of bisexual men. Although these models are heteronormative, do not differentiate between genders and do not address bisexual identity formation, the *themes of change* in identity formation are still relevant and can be applied to further research on bisexual men's identity formation. The bisexual identity formation models address the omission of bisexual identity formation and Rust also questions the linearity of the process; however, there is still very little that attends to bisexuality in men.

Bisexual Identity Formation Model Review

Bradford's (2004) and Weinberg, Williams and Pryor's (1994) models of bisexual identity formation are similar in some ways. Bradford's and Weinberg et al.'s models, although dealing with bisexual identity formation, are still both linear. They include men and women in their samples, but did not distinguish between genders. So although bisexual identity formation is being addressed, it is difficult to determine if there might be gender differences in bisexual identity formation and bisexual men's identity formation remains unattended. They also do not incorporate matters of disclosure and stigma management into their models.

The models are also dissimilar in a few ways. To start with, Bradford's model does not begin with the assumption of a heterosexual identity; one third of her participants identified originally as homosexual. Bradford (2004) was also the first theorist to specifically attribute cultural attitudes and beliefs with shaping identity by way of explicitly naming discourses of dichotomous sexuality and the hierarchal power relations within

those discourses. Although other theorists (Cass, 1979, 1984; Troiden, 1979, 1988) have approached minority sexual identity formation from a social constructionist perspective, they have done so without adequately exploring the power relations inherent in contemporary society. They assume an “abnormal” sexual identity as constructed in relation to a “normal” sexual identity.

These two models also end differently. Weinberg et al. end the process of bisexual identity formation with an “ongoing absence of closure or lack of commitment to bisexual identity” and continued uncertainty (p. 34). However, Bradford’s model ends with agency and the establishment of community and affirmation of bisexual identity, despite struggles with marginalization. Ending with “continued uncertainty” leaves open the process of sexual minority identity formation, which might be beneficial for understanding sexuality as fluid and unstable in a contemporary capacity. However, there is also a noticeable lack of agency in Weinberg et al.’s model. Bisexuals are depicted as being *acted* upon by social structures, but not *acting* upon and forming any kind of resistance or negotiation to negative social reactions to bisexuality. There is no anger, no notion of pride in the acceptance of their identity, no community building, and no political action in this bisexual identity formation model, elements which are depicted in models of homosexual identity formation. While continued uncertainty of a bisexual identity is not in itself a limitation, suggesting that negative social reactions make it difficult to sustain a bisexual identity over time suggests a foreclosure of that identity rather than a broadening of boundaries of sexual identity. It is worth noting that there is ten years difference between these two publications during which time it is possible that bisexuality became a more socially acceptable identity, which might allow for less uncertainty and greater closure than in Weinberg et al.’s model. Changes in social contexts are addressed by Rust (1993, 1996b) and discussed below.

In Rust's model, identity formation is not orderly and predictable; different individuals experience different events in different orders. Rust's (1993, 1996b) model of nonlinear processes of sexual identity formation, although different from all the other models in that it is not a stage theory of sexual identity formation, is however similar in some aspects. First, the one similarity that respondents in all the models shared is the experience of questioning their *heterosexual* identity. The exception to this is Bradford's model, in which individuals started with heterosexual *and* homosexual identities. Again, this might be due to the ten-year time difference between publications, considering homosexuality has more recently become somewhat normalized and available as an identity choice.

Rust (1993) also notes that some respondents continued to wonder about their sexual identity even *after* adopting a sexual minority identity. This is very similar to Weinberg, Williams and Pryor's last stage of *continued uncertainty* in their bisexual identity formation model; however, Rust's model is also based on the experiences of lesbians as well as bisexuals, and therefore *continued uncertainty* is not completely unique to bisexuals as Weinberg et al. claim. This is the only model that specifically included both homosexuals and bisexuals. However, her study is also limited regarding gender as she only focuses on women and the question of bisexual identity formation in men remains unexamined. Although Rust's model is different in that it is not linear, it is still very similar to linear models of homosexual identity formation in that it contains all of the other patterns or themes of change mentioned in Table 7. Although Rust's model does not have sequential stages, it does posit that sexual minority identity develops over time.

Table 7: Comparison of Categories in Rust's Model to Themes in Linear Models

Rust's Categories of Change	Corresponding Themes of Change
Changes in One's Location on the Sexual Landscape	Identity develops over time: Begin to realize that you have attractions that are not heterosexual; begin to act on attractions and sexual encounters beyond heterosexual
Changes in the Sexual Landscape	Increased contact with similar individuals/groups: Finding others like you as role models, finding community, and creating community Change over time, socio-historical change. Macro.
Changes in the Language Available for Self-Description	Finding the words or the label to describe yourself. Social-historical change.
Changes in Social Context	Stigma management: Disclosure of identity and stigma management. Individual management techniques for situational differences every day. Micro.
Changes in the Accuracy of Self-Description	Stigma management, positive self-identity and increased disclosure: Becoming more comfortable with a non-heterosexual identity and self acceptance; increased disclosure, pride. Less dissonance between positive self-perception and negative social perception.

Differences Between Homosexual and Bisexual Models

Although the previously outlined seven key features of sexual minority identity formation models are consistent with Rust's non-linear bisexual identity formation model, there are significant differences between homosexual identity formation models and bisexual identity formation models (See Table 8). First, with the exception of Bradford, both Rust's and Weinberg, Williams and Pryor's models, have an 'ongoing' or dynamic 'end point,' whereas Cass' model ends with "identity synthesis" and Troiden's model ends with "commitment." Bradford's model ends with sustained resistance, which is not quite synthesis or commitment and could be interpreted as an ongoing struggle.

Bisexual models of identity formation also differ from homosexual identity formation models in that bisexual models are missing a well-developed account of disclosure and stigma management in the everyday lives of bisexuals, which do appear in models of homosexual identity formation. Weinberg et al. and Bradford do not discuss disclosure

and stigma at all in their models. Rust, however, does account for negotiated disclosure of a sexual minority identity and stigma management in her discussion of “changes in social context” wherein she recognizes the changing contexts of society that may constrain or enable identity formation and coming out.

Another way that the bisexual models of identity formation differ from homosexual identity formation models is that the bisexual models do not discuss pride and social justice action as a stand-alone element or stage of minority sexual identity formation. Bradford includes social action only as part of her final stage of “transforming adversity.” Weinberg, Williams and Pryor clearly omit it in their final stage of “continued uncertainty,” which indicates almost the opposite of pride and social action. Rust also does not clearly include pride and social justice.

The bisexual models of identity formation also differ from the homosexual identity formation models in that they specifically address change in social constructs and social changes in language and labels. Bisexual models variously discuss increased awareness of terms beyond gay and lesbian, including learning about the term bisexuality, and a search for meaning and redefining inaccurate definitions of bisexuality, as well as accounting for societal changes in terminology and meaning over time and place. Of course there have also been changes in social constructs around sexuality since homosexual identity formation was first explored. Whereas homosexual identity formation models appear to give all agency to the individual, Rust acknowledges the interplay between structure and agency.

Table 8: Comparison of sexual minority identity formation models across themes

Model	Identity develops sequentially over time	Increasing & Positive Self-Identity	Stigma Management	Increasing Identity Disclosure	Increasing Contact w/ Similar & Community	Pride & Social Action	Language Change & Redefinition
Cass (1979;1984)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Troiden (1979;1988)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Weinberg, Williams and Pryor (1994)	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓
Bradford (2004)	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
Rust (1993;1996)	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓

Note: Although Rust acknowledges that identity develops over time, her model does not involve sequential stages.

Conclusion

What is lacking in all the sexual identity formation models is an adequate discussion of power relations inherent in social structures and institutions. Most of the models do not account for the intersection of sexual identity formation with other pertinent factors such as class, culture, race and ethnicity, gender and transgender identities, ability, age, or even bisexuality in the earlier models. Surprisingly, none of the models address the issue of socioeconomic class, which can affect access to *knowledge* about sexual minority issues, labels, individuals and communities, as well as *capacity* to engage in social justice action. None of the models address disabilities or chronic illness despite the reality that these factors can further stigmatize sexually marginalized individuals. As well, having a disability or chronic illness can interfere with making connections to other sexually marginalized individuals and communities. Very few of the models account for cultural, racial or ethnic diversity, which can have various effects on the process of

identity formation, including barriers to community contacts and conflict between sexual identities and other identities. The sexual minority identity formation process may also function differently for individuals of different ages, depending on historical location. For example, individuals and communities may differ in awareness and access to sexual minority labels depending on the generational location of individuals.

Concerning gender, Rust focuses solely on women, and the other models, although they included men and women, do not differentiate among genders (male, female, or trans). The process of sexual minority identity formation may be influenced by different factors for different genders. For example, Steinman (2001) claims that bisexual men have not experienced the same exclusionary practices from gay men as bisexual women have experienced from lesbian women. This difference, he claims, has motivated women to create and celebrate a bisexual identity, but men have lacked the same impetus to politicize their identity (p. 38). Although women's bisexual identity formation has been studied, men's bisexual identity formation has yet to be adequately addressed. Models of coming out clarify the sexual minority identity formation process faced by many individuals with minority sexualities; however, these models all have notable limitations as discussed above.¹⁴ Although somewhat imperfect, they continue to contribute to understanding the social processes around changes in sexual identities.

Summary

This chapter reviewed literature on homosexual identity formation models and bisexual identity formation models and then engaged in a discussion comparing and contrasting

¹⁴ A more detailed and systematic critique can be found in Hunter, S. (2007). *Coming Out and Disclosures: LGBT Persons Across the Life Span*. New York: Haworth Press.

the two types of sexual minority identity formation models. Awareness of these models of sexual identity formation is important for understanding the context of bisexual men's processes of becoming bisexual, what it means to them to be bisexual, and how this might be similar or different from homosexuals' conceptions of their own identities. The elements outlined in the various models will provide me with a framework for my research in understanding bisexual men's identity formation within particular socio-cultural contexts.

To date, literature pertaining to sexual minority identity formation does not account for men's experiences of bisexual identity formation nor is there an adequate account of bisexual individuals' experiences in relation to heteronormative institutional discourses. The interplay between structure and agency goes mostly unacknowledged. My research will address the need for exploration in this area by examining how bisexual men's experiences of bisexual identity are affected by dichotomized institutional discourses and stigma and how bisexual men might resist or conform to those discourses.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Situating the Research Question

I am approaching my sociological research from a queer perspective influenced by poststructuralism in order to contribute to the deconstruction and exposure of the incoherencies between apparently stable categories of sex, gender, and sexual orientation and the destabilization of heterosexuality as the norm (Jagose, 1996, p.3). A queer theory influenced by poststructuralism has broad implications for sociological approaches to sexuality (Namaste, 1996, p.202). A queer post-structuralist approach recognizes that the subject is constituted through specific socio-political arrangements and that the individual is not simply an autonomous agent (Namaste, 1996). In an effort to understand how bisexual men navigate their identities within a heteronormative framework, and in line with the paradigm of a sociological queer theory informed by poststructuralism, I used a phenomenological approach in my research. I used a qualitative approach because I was looking for meaning in the experiences of bisexual men (Morse, 1998).

The concept of sexual identity is a complex issue. The limits of identity politics revolve around thinking that identity is a unitary or essential phenomenon. This kind of thinking produces exclusion and marginalization; nonetheless, identity categories, however unstable and provisional, are often seen as politically necessary and can be taken up strategically (Marshall, 2000, p.158). Attending to the contingency and complexity of constructed categories should not cause the material consequences of identity categories to be seen as any less real. Identity constructions may be disciplining and regulatory; however, they also enable social collectives and political agency (Seidman, 1993, p.134). Bisexual identity is liminal. It is between hetero- and homosexual

categories and yet it belongs to neither -- it is qualitatively different. Despite being contingent on the binary, it also has the potential to disrupt the binary.

With the awareness of how identity is constructed in social relations and having learned from the literature that there are several unique challenges to the formation of a bisexual identity, I have conducted research on how bisexual men navigate their everyday (bi)sexual identit(ies) within a heteronormative framework. I specifically interrogate the heteronormative discourses that structure and stigmatize those identities and explore how bisexual men either reproduce heteronormative discourses or resist stigma and disrupt them.

Scope of the Research

The scope of my thesis changed and narrowed throughout the research process. My original research question was: do bisexual men display or show a coherent identity?; if so, how, when and why do they visibly communicate their identity in reference to pre-existing dichotomous categories of sexuality? Secondary research aims/goals included clarifying questions around presentations of identity, as well as questions regarding what it means to individuals to be bisexual in relation to binary categories of sexuality. In the process of analysing and writing up my findings, my committee and I determined that the data that I had collected based on these research questions had provided me with a substantial amount of information that was beyond the scope of a Master's thesis. The data lent itself to being easily divided into two sections: one section on visual displays of identity and the other section regarding bisexual identity formation and what it means to be bisexual within a heteronormative framework. Because I had already done a considerable amount of work on the identity formation section as a preliminary step to the visual displays section, this section was chosen by me and my committee as my

revised thesis topic. I intend to use the information on visual displays of identity in other projects. I have already presented some preliminary findings at local and international conferences which I propose to turn into a paper.

Recruitment and Respondents

I interviewed twelve self-identified bisexual men from Metro Vancouver and Greater Victoria who were over 19 years of age. In line with the tradition of qualitative methods, I chose my sample purposely (purposive sampling), aiming for one that is “information rich” (Patton, 1990) and that met the criterion of the study parameter, i.e. self-identified bisexual men over 19 years of age. My sample was also a convenience sample given that I chose participants who were readily available and convenient. In doing qualitative research the aim was not to choose a sample that was representative and about which I could make generalizations; however, I did select my sample according to gender and geographic location. I chose to talk to bisexual men from Vancouver and Victoria because they were geographically accessible. As well, sexual minority populations tend to live more densely in urban areas, so it made sense to find bisexual participants in these two cities.

I chose to talk to self-identified *men* because of the lack of research done with bisexual men to date and in order to bridge that gap in the current research. While men’s voices tend to hold dominant positions in research on sexuality in general, when it comes to bisexuality, men’s voices are hardly heard (Steinman, 2001).

In recruiting self-identified bisexual men, I purposely did not define the terms *bisexual* or *men* in my call for participants and instead left it up to participants to self-identify. I did this so as not to limit or influence participants’ discussions about their experiences

and their understandings of what it means to be bisexual men. I recruited participants who specifically identified as bisexual, rather than those who have simply engaged in bisexual behaviour at some point in their history. This was a critical distinction because my research explored how individuals construct and form bisexual identity categories in a particular time and place rather than how people engage in bisexual practices.

I have attempted to be mindful of intersections of identity and do not assume that a sexual orientation identity can be isolated from other identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, or class. Individuals experience sexual orientation always in a particular class, race, ethnicity, or gender-mediated way (Seidman 1993: 136). However, although I am aware that these intersections exist and are important, it was not possible within the scope of my research to take each into account in detail. I limited my sample by gender, focusing exclusively on men, and although it was not my intention to differentiate participants by race, ethnicity or class, participants tended to be homogeneous in race, ethnicity and class.

I sought participants by first making a call for participation on various departmental listservs at the University of Victoria, as well as on the UVic Pride listserv. (UVic Pride is an organization for all people who are queer, queer-positive, gender-variant and/or intersex at the University of Victoria.¹⁵ The listserv is confidential and membership is open to all students.) I also was able to send out a call for participants to other Victoria listservs which I thought might reach bisexual men, including Sagacity (a Victoria organization that supports the exploration of BDSM, bondage, dominance and submission, and sadomasochism, and alternative lifestyles), uNiQue Entertainment (a

¹⁵ UVic Pride website, <http://uvicpride.ca/>

Victoria based website with news and events about and for trans, gay, bi, and lesbian folks) and AIDS Vancouver Island's Men's Wellness Program (an initiative to empower gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men to make informed choices about their own sexual health and reduce HIV and STD infections).¹⁶ The call for participation briefly explained the intended research and asked those interested in participating to contact me privately via email (See Appendix A).

I also sought participants through personal email contacts and social networking sites such as Facebook. I discussed my research ideas with friends and acquaintances in a variety of queer communities in Victoria and Vancouver (including poly communities¹⁷) and asked them to help me find potential participants. If they knew someone, they would forward my call for participants to them, which included my contact information. I also employed a 'snowball sample' technique by looking for more participants through word of mouth by way of participants involved in the research. I asked participants and personal connections to let friends know about my research and to contact me if they were interested in participating. Participants contacted me directly to help maintain privacy. All participants originally contacted me by email to establish their willingness to participate in the research and to arrange an interview time and place. There were five men who indicated interest in participating and with whom I had email contact, but with whom I never met because by the time we were able to arrange an interview, I already had more than enough participants. Locations of interviews were determined between me and participants, depending on where the participants felt most comfortable, level of accessibility, and what was safe for me. Interviews took place in participants' homes, in

¹⁶ Sagacity website, www.sagacitygroup.net; uNIQue Entertainment website, <http://www.uniqueentertainment.ca/>; AVI Men's Wellness Program website, <http://avi.org/project>

¹⁷ Polyamory, or "poly", has many variations but is loosely defined as the practice of ethical and consensual non-monogamy (Club, 2010).

my office at UVic, and in a private room at a Vancouver Public Library.¹⁸ The interview locations were chosen to maximize confidentiality and minimize distractions.

Interviews

Data was collected through qualitative, in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. In-depth interviews are “bounded yet intense” as the researcher must form a close bond in a short period and then let go of that relationship (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002, p. 214). The interviewer needs to be non-judgemental, offer support and sympathy yet also possibly withhold information that might influence a respondent’s answers (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002, pp. 214-215). Understanding and encouragement must be balanced with a degree of guardedness (p. 215). One of the main reasons that in-depth interviews were chosen as a method of data collection in this project was because in-depth interviewing is a dependable means of investigating how personal stories intersect with social institutions and structures (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002).

In-depth interviews were also appropriate because it was not necessary to observe the research phenomenon in its natural context in order to understand it. It was adequate that participants described their personal accounts of bisexual identity in their own contexts and how they related to it (Lewis, 2003, p. 56). In her discussion of qualitative data collection methods, Lewis (2003) distinguishes between *naturally occurring* and *generated data*. Naturally occurring data involves methods of observation, documentary analysis, conversation analysis, and discourse analysis. The two main types of generated data are in-depth interviews and focus groups. In-depth interviews are preferred over focus groups for generating in-depth personal accounts, for

¹⁸ Magnus was interviewed at the Vancouver Public Library; Paul, Pat, Ernest, Jude, Gil and Amir were interviewed in their homes; and Parker, John, Rodney, Brandon, and Neil were interviewed in my office at UVic in the Department of Sociology.

understanding the personal context, and for exploring issues in depth and detail (Lewis, 2003). They are also useful in understanding complex processes and issues such as motivations, decisions, impacts and outcomes regarding bisexual identity formation (ibid). They are preferred over focus groups for exploring private subjects and sensitive issues such as sexuality. In-depth interviews were appropriate because although talking about (bi)sexuality is a sensitive topic, I did not think that the topic was so sensitive as to preclude frank discussion or to cast doubt on the truthfulness of participants accounts (ibid).

Interview methods are often seen as one of the best ways to gather qualitative data, privileging the accounts of “social actors, agents, individuals, or subjects, as data sources, and which assume or emphasize the centrality of talk and text in our ways of knowing about the social world” (Mason, 2002). In-depth interviews give participants “a direct and explicit opportunity to convey their own meanings and interpretations through the explanations they provide” (Lewis, 2003, p. 57). This is in contrast to naturally occurring data where interpretation relies more on the researchers interpretation of what is observed. Interview data may be further interpreted by the researcher but the participants’ interpretation remains paramount (ibid). It was important to me that the voices of participants be foregrounded.

Interviews consisted of some closed-format demographic questions to provide context, as well as previously established open-ended questions to elicit participants’ views on their experiences of bisexual identity formation. I began the interviews with general demographic questions before moving into asking more direct, personal questions so as to put participants at ease. I used an interview schedule as a research instrument to structure and guide the interviews (see Appendix B, questions one through four). My

research questions were chosen to elicit the essence of the experiences of participants with regards to thoughts and decisions about identity formation (Morse, 1998, p. 63). Broad questions allowed participants flexibility in telling their stories. When participants had difficulty explaining or I needed them to expand on a certain topic, I used pre-formatted “probes” to elicit information. Throughout the interviews, I also used “content mining questions” (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2004, p. 148) to explore, explain, and clarify and to achieve breadth and depth (ibid). The interview questions I asked enabled me to discern similarities and look for differences in experiences and understandings, which highlighted important factors and insights into the experiences of how these bisexual men formed (bi)sexual identities. The interviews resembled conversations as much as possible, which allowed participants an opportunity for full exploration and explanation of the phenomena of how they navigate their bisexual identity (Legard et al., 2004).

Each interview was approximately one to two hours in length, audio recorded, and transcribed by myself. All participants were emailed copies of their interview transcripts for verification and offered the chance to make edits, corrections, changes, clarifications, or additions to their transcript. They were also invited to add any additional thoughts on bisexual identity, the meaning of bisexuality, or reflections on their interview. It was at this time that I also gave participants an opportunity to choose their own pseudonym if they did not like the one I had selected. Before commencing interviews, participants were required to sign informed-consent forms, which I asked them to read and clarified prior to their signing them (see Appendix C). All participants freely consented to have their interviews audio recorded and for interview data to be stored and possibly used for future analysis for a period of up to ten years. Ongoing consent was sought where necessary -- for example, when participants reviewed transcripts (as a validity check).

Participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw at any time without consequence or need for explanation.

In-depth qualitative interviews are the “most basic and important method [in] research on homosexual and bisexual behavior” because they build the rapport and trust necessary in dealing with such a sensitive topic (Carballo and Parker, 1990, p. 518). Although I attempted to build rapport with participants, building rapport around sensitive issues such as sexuality can be difficult (Legard et al., 2004). One participant told me after the interview that he was shy and nervous. Possibly as a result of this, he did not seem to understand many of the questions I asked in the interview. Our conversation was interesting but not always necessarily relevant to my research, as he tended to talk more about other aspects of his sexuality. I was able to use some of this information in looking at intersections of other sexual identities with bisexuality. In this situation, and in retrospect, it might have been helpful to conduct a second interview after building rapport and trust in the first interview. Also, at this time I could have adjusted my questions so that they were more relevant to his life experience and situation. It also would have given him time to reflect and elaborate on questions. Unfortunately, I did not conduct second interviews with any of the participants due to time restraints and data limits.

I anticipated that risks to participants would be slight, if any, but due to the sensitive nature of sexual orientation, I thought that some participants may feel some emotional or psychological discomfort during or after the disclosure of personal information and so I gave all participants local contact information for counselling services (for both private and public resources) in case of psychological discomfort (see Appendix D). There were a few challenges in being interviewed for some participants. One participant told me that

he panicked a little when he decided to do the interview, but in the end felt fine. A few participants talked to me about their discomfort at the end of the interview. One participant (Amir) spoke about his sexuality being “natural” to him but “awkward” to talk about.¹⁹ Another (Rodney) found some parts of the interview “really hard.” And a third (Gil) told me at the end that he knew the interview process was going to be “uncomfortable” but wanted to do it anyways to “help with the greater good” and support me in my research.

On the other hand, I also anticipated that discussion of their experiences might be beneficial for some participants. They might feel less isolated by talking about their experiences and gain a better sense of community and well-being. This was the expressed case for five participants. One participant (Paul) really enjoyed the “cool conversation” and thought that the interview process was of “therapeutic value.” Through the interview process and association with me, he also felt a sense of connection to a “bisexual crowd.” He expressed wanting to be connected to a bisexual crowd and informed of any events or social gatherings. Another participant (Jude) joked about the interview being “free personal therapy” for him. A few of the men offered to do another interview if I wanted and expressed how important they thought my research was. One participant in particular stood out. The same man who was “nervous and shy” during the interview (Pat) contacted me afterwards and wanted to see me again to converse because he felt as though there was “so much more” he wanted to relate to me. The interview resulted in Pat wanting to talk more because he felt understood and safe talking to me. He expressed gratitude for the creation of that space for him to express himself without judgement.

¹⁹ Pseudonyms were used; all participants were given the option of choosing their own pseudonym and two participants chose their own.

Data Analysis

Exploring bisexual identity formation by means of qualitative methods required my analysis to be done by means of an iterative process, “one that is cyclical but not merely repetitive” (Palys, 2003, p.314). Throughout the process, it was important that the analytic ideas and concepts that were developed remained grounded in the data. I used the model of an analytic hierarchy (O’Connor, Ritchie, & Spencer, 2004) to demonstrate systemized categorization and organization. I used first, second, and third order interpretation -- firstly, organizing and preparing data; secondly, reading through data in a general sense, recognizing and identifying broad themes; and thirdly, carrying out a detailed analysis with coding. I organized my data by “examining the text thoroughly and then crystallizing out the most important aspects” (Malterud, 2001, p. 486). Through a process of both induction and deduction, I was able to make connections between my data/empirical evidence and my theoretical framework. Using the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software NVivo, I began by identifying concepts, themes, and connections in the data and then I analyzed them by using theories about stigma and identity formation (Bradford, 2004; Cass 1979, 1984; Goffman, 1963; Knous, 2005; Plummer, 1975; Rust, 1993, 1996b; Troiden, 1979, 1988; Weinberg, Williams & Pryor, 1994). I continued with a refining process of categorization and coding before entering into descriptive analysis and finally explanatory analysis. Through this process, patterns were detected, meanings were explored, and explanations were developed to explicate the phenomena of bisexual identity formation.

I used external validity to verify my qualitative data by having participants corroborate my findings “to see if the meaning or interpretation assigned is confirmed by those who contributed to it in the first place” (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). Participant checks of

transcripts helped ensure that my conclusions are credible to participants and representative of them (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998, p. 70). I also gave them an opportunity to read and review the findings and discussion from the interviews so that they could offer their input and opinions. In this way, my participants have been active in the co-creation of knowledge. I have also sought “catalytic validity,” which is aimed more towards an emancipatory project. I evaluated my work by “considering the extent to which it empowers people by enhancing their self-understanding and shows them possibilities of transformation” (Palys, 2003, p. 77). This can be gauged by the degree to which this research provokes participants to understand the world around them, the way it is organized, and their capacity to change it (ibid). I would add to this and suggest that this is a reciprocal process; I have evaluated my work by considering how much I have learned from my participants and through the process of doing research with them. It has been important to ask: to what degree has this research provoked me to understand the world around me and my capacity to change it?

Insider/Outsider Status and Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a crucial aspect of validity when doing qualitative research. Reflexivity is also an important means of recognizing the power relations between researcher and participants. As researcher, I am embedded in the research and therefore need to situate myself in the research process (Patton 1990); my position and perspective as a white, middle-class, queer, bisexual woman may have important implications. In approaching my research from a queer perspective, I cannot “bracket” my experiences when interpreting participants’ experiences; however, I have endeavoured to position my subjectivity and recognize my dual or multiple positions as both an insider and an outsider in my research. I have attempted to not impose my own understanding and constructions on the data. At the same time, I have also tried to recognize where my

prior knowledge comes into the analysis and to acknowledge my subjectivity embedded within this project. While it is significant that I strive to represent the experiences of my participants through their own unique voices, I also feel that my identity as a bisexual gives me a particular understanding of bisexual experiences.

As an insider/outsider, I was able to provide unique insight during this research, but at the same time acknowledge that how I intersected with participants may have been a limitation in my research. The varied yet particular meanings the male participants attributed to their bisexual identity may differ from the meanings which I might associate with bisexuality as a white, middle-class, bisexual female and therefore my own identity might be a potential barrier to understanding. Nonetheless, although these meanings were rooted in individual experience, I believe there was a sufficient degree of commonality to enable me to appreciate and comprehend the experiences expressed by participants. The possible limitation, however, was that sometimes my subjectivity as a bisexual might have led me to find more commonality in our experiences traversing bisexuality rather than see differences across gender.

Overall, being an insider during this research was tremendously beneficial on a practical level. First, it was easy to access queer communities and find participants because of my already established connections. As well, I was also able to bond with participants over similar interests and experiences, which helped build trust and understanding. I believe that my insider status facilitated more in-depth conversations during the interviews. Moreover, being an insider has brought with it a great deal of personal commitment to this research. I believe I am contributing to knowledge on a subject that is both personally and politically relevant, which has played a large motivating role in my research.

Conclusion

While research on bisexuality in general would contribute to a gap in research and lead towards a fuller critique of heteronormativity, exploring meanings of bisexual identity among men specifically will address a vast lacuna in the literature and therefore contribute to the growing and diverse body of sociological knowledge around human sexuality. Namaste (1996) argues that “a sociology of heterosexuality studies the manufacturing of heterosexist ideology in an effort to grasp how it affects all subjects” (p. 204). In doing research on bisexual formation of identity among men, it has been my intention to challenge dominant heteronormative dichotomous discourses of sexuality and, in collaboration with participants, work toward re-conceptualizing these oppressive discourses in order to promote a truer celebration of sexual diversity without stigma or exclusion – for everyone. It is my further intention through this project to promote inclusive and supportive practices within academia, queer organizations, and in everyday life.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter I will present and discuss my research findings and discussion. The following discussion of results is based on my analysis of twelve interviews conducted with self-identified bisexual men in Victoria and Vancouver, British Columbia. Interviews focused on the interaction between dominant social constructs of bisexual identity and individual meanings of bisexual identity. I will begin with a description of the participants. I will then discuss how participants felt bisexuality was seen from a dominant hegemonic discursive perspective. I explore these dominant meanings in order to assess how bisexuality is socially constructed and how stereotypes and stigma based on a heteronormative framework may impact bisexual identity formation. I also aim to expose some of the heteronormative and homonormative discourses embedded in everyday meanings of bisexuality. I will then discuss the meanings of bisexuality from the participants' perspectives and what they told me about their various experiences of sexual identity formation in relation to heteronormative discourses. I will bring these two discussions together in my final chapter where I will begin to answer the question of how bisexual men resist/disrupt/subvert or conform/reproduce hegemonic heteronormative discourses of sexuality.

Description of Participants

There were twelve self-identified bisexual men who participated in this research – Paul, Gil, Ernest, Jude, Parker, John, Rodney, Brandon, Neil, Pat, Amir and Magnus.²⁰ Self identification as bisexual and as men were requirements for participation in my study. In my call for participants, both the terms bisexual and men were purposely not

²⁰ Pseudonyms were used; all participants were given the option of choosing their own pseudonym and two participants chose their own.

defined so as to leave it up to participants to self-define as bisexual men in whatever way they chose. Although participants self-identified as bisexual, this was not the only way that they identified themselves. I will discuss their multiple identities further on in this chapter. None of the participants made known if they identified as trans men; however, several participants discussed cross dressing, the fluid nature of their gender presentations, and their gender neutrality, and so they could be considered gender variant as they do not necessarily conform to normative gender expectations of society.

At the time of the interviews nine men were living in Victoria, British Columbia, and three men were living in Vancouver, British Columbia. Their ages ranged from twenty-five to seventy-nine with half of them being in their mid-thirties.²¹ All the men were Caucasian and all were Canadian residents except for one European man who has since moved back to his country of origin in the EU. Two participants had technical training, three had taken some university courses, three had an undergraduate degree, and four had a graduate degree (two MA, one MSc, and one PhD). One of the men was a university professor and three were graduate students. Two men worked in technical trades, three men worked in the service sector and non-profits, and two men were self-employed artists and innovators. The seventy-nine year old was retired from marketing. Participants' socioeconomic status ranged from middle class to upper-middle class which I have surmised based on comments that they made about their occupations, education, wealth, and places of residence.²²

²¹ The men's exact ages were: 25, 26, 32, 33, 35, 35, 37, 37, 47, 49, 54, and 79.

²² I specifically asked participants about their place of residence, occupation and education but I did not ask participants about income levels or wealth; however, throughout the interview participants often offered information about wealth, such as owning their own home. Some participants also referred to themselves as coming from a particular class.

Relationship and family statuses of the men varied considerably. Three men were married to women. Three men were in relationships with women. One man was in a relationship with a man. One participant was in two separate relationships, one with a woman and one with a man. One participant was in a triad relationship with a man and a woman where both men were physically involved with the woman but not each other. Three men were single. Four of the men lived with their partners and the remaining eight lived alone or with roommates. Two of the men had trans partners, one transman and one transwoman. Three of the men were divorced from women. Four of the men had children ranging in age from six to over eighteen (See Table 9).

Table 9: Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Education Level	Occupation	Children	Relationship Status	Relationship Practice	BDSM and Kink Practice
Par 9	35	Undergrad Degree	Art, culture, recreation	No	Single	Non-monogamous	Yes
Par 8	35	Technical	Service Worker	No	Girlfriend	Monogamous	No
Par 7	79	Undergrad Degree	Retired	Two	Single	N/A	Yes
Par 6	37	Undergrad Degree	Grad Student	No	More than one partner	Polyamorous	Yes
Par 5	26	Some University	Service Worker	No	Girlfriend and platonic partner	Polyamorous	Yes
Par 4	33	Technical	Craft and related trade worker	One	Married	Polyamorous	Yes
Par 3	54	PhD	Professional	No	Girlfriend	Polyamorous	Yes
Par 2	37	MSc	Technician and associate professional	Two	Married	Polyamorous	Yes
Par 12	25	MA	Grad Student	No	Single	N/A	N/A
Par11	32	MA	Grad Student	No	Married	Monogamous	N/A
Par 10	49	Some University	Service Worker	No	Boyfriend	Non-monogamous	N/A
Par 1	47	Some University	Clerk	One	Girlfriend	Monogamous	Yes

Discussion of Intersectionality

When it came to the question of how participants felt bisexuality was impacted by other identities my intention was to elicit answers about how other identities, such as gender, ethnicity and class (as well as other gender and sexual identities), impacted their identities; however, no single participant interpreted this question in that particular way.²³ The question seemed to be somewhat confusing and elicited a variety of answers. Answers were varied and although participants were all white men and ranged from middle- to upper-middle class almost all of the men did not situate themselves as such; however, one participant mentioned his own gender, ethnicity and class in response to this question. I speculate that this is due to the “invisibility” of being in a dominant position, the fact that their middle- to upper-middle class and white maleness did not impact their lives in a negative way. However, this relative privilege might have enabled them the freedom to practice their sexuality and relationships more freely, as Jude acknowledged:

And it is a privileged place for me to be able to play with identity and play with labels... I just have every opportunity in the world [and] I am reflexive of that but still enjoy the benefits of it. So it certainly doesn't come to that I'm in a marginalized category, or at least I haven't yet thought of it that way... Any potential harm or difficulties with negotiating this are mitigated by all of these other factors – socio-economic position, maybe intelligence and space to contemplate...But I guess to conclude...I think that the many other social demographic factors or categories I fit into put me in this really privileged position [and] I am not blind to that privilege.

Participants described themselves variously as: vegetarian, parent, instructor, student, spiritual, academic, kinky, poly, creative, writer, musician, social activist, person living

²³ The question read: “How is your bisexual identity impacted by other identities?” Probes were used such as: “If I asked you to describe yourself what else would you tell me?”; “Are there other ways that you choose to identify?”; and “Such as gender, ethnicity and class as well as other sexual identities?” See Appendix B for the entire interview schedule.

with AIDS, trans ally, and good friend. These were the descriptions about themselves that they thought were important to know about them in addition to being bisexual. Two of the identity features that many participants had in common were being into “kink,” or bondage, dominance and submission, and sadomasochism (BDSM) and being polyamorous or non-monogamous. During the course of the interviews eight participants voluntarily made references to their involvement or interest in “kink,” or BDSM. Seven participants referred to being non-monogamous. Five of the men were explicitly practicing polyamory, one was in a non-monogamous relationship, and one man would be interested in an open relationship but was single at the time of the interview. Three of the men were monogamous and two did not indicate either way.

Although polyamory is not necessarily linked to any particular sexual identity, bisexuality and polyamory are interconnected and conceptually connected through their plurality which does not fit into the static singularity of the heterosexual matrix (Mint, 2004). In his study on polyamory, Kleese (2006) found that a significant part of the UK polyamory scene seemed to consist of bisexuals. It is therefore not surprising that polyamory emerged as one of the most frequent discourses on non-monogamy used by participants. Parker talked about the interconnectedness of bisexuality and polyamory and how when he comes out as bisexual then the poly surfaces and if he comes out as poly then the bisexuality surfaces:

Often it's both at the same time, people find out about both and so we don't spend a lot of time on that I'm bi. People tend to be much more interested in poly and what that means so it happens often that [disclosure] is at the same time... even if [bisexual] comes first people know I'm married so then right away they go “well how does that work?” and then poly comes, so if I come out as bi first it doesn't last long, ten seconds later we're into poly and if I come out as poly first then bi is kind of an aside or by the way...

Heterosexuality as a Default Identity

All the men I interviewed identified as straight before they identified as bisexual. A heterosexual or straight identity was seen as a kind of default identity by Jude meaning that it was the assumed primary identity. Jude explains: “I don’t think I necessarily identified as straight as much as assumed the kind of default position.” Like Jude, Neil assumed a kind of default heterosexuality and did “not really identify in any serious way” – until he started to make a connection to a gay community and to seriously date men. Then he began to identify as gay. Paul suggested that for him, taking up a default heterosexual identity was something he did simply because it was something he had been taught:

I was kind of raised in a fairly, kind of hetero, with heterosexuality as the role model that I should be following. Gays were ok but... up until I was in my mid-thirties I probably really resisted that homosexual side of me.

Some of men were straight identified until some kind of event changed their lives. For Ernest, the thing that changed the way that he sexually identified was meeting another bisexual person. Ernest explained that he identified himself as “straight but having... had gay encounters before” until very recently when he met a bisexual woman and they started to have conversations “about queers.” John’s experience was also very similar in that he met a woman who thought she was bisexual and over a series of long conversations and letters he “came out” as bisexual (and she came out as lesbian!) after being straight identified for forty-two years. He decided that it was important to him to come out as bisexual because “perhaps parts of me were not feeling fulfilled [and] this was something that I had to do something about.” Brandon identified as straight “for the longest time” until he got into university and encountered a large queer community that

provided an “open and easy atmosphere for that sort of situation [identifying as bisexual].”

Rodney stated that, “[I identified] as straight basically my whole life up until about ten years ago. And what changed really was that I just started noticing that I was attracted to men. There wasn’t some crazy event or experiment.” Parker identified as straight until he saw a show that discussed sexuality as being on a continuum at which point, he thought he could be bisexual. In the past he did not think he was bisexual because he thought he had to have a relationship with a “guy or like guys” more equally and he still liked women much more than he was attracted to men. Magnus also thought that identifying as bisexual required an actual, meaningful relationship with another man. He stated “That for me is the measurement that really made me say, ok, I’m bi, if I can have a boyfriend for a year that’s it, I’m bi as far as I’m concerned.”

There were also some men who identified not only as straight but also as gay before identifying as bisexual. Amir talked about a “short window of a year or so where [he] was just relating as a gay person and really in that community.” Neil also identified as gay “for a period of time” when he was dating and having long-term relationships with men and “moving around” in gay circles.

Bisexual Men’s Perspectives on Dominant Discourses of Bisexuality

To begin each interview I asked the participants what they thought bisexuality meant “to society in general” with the goal of reaching a greater understanding of dominant hegemonic discourses on bisexuality.²⁴ Exploring dominant heteronormative and

²⁴ The term “society” is used in a general sense in popular language. I have used it in this question as a conversational way of asking about dominant hegemonic discourses. However, using the

homonormative meanings of bisexuality provided me with insight into some of the context in which these bisexual men formed their identities, how their identity formation may have been impacted by heteronormative discourses, and by the feeling that they are stigmatized (through labelling, negative attributions and stereotypes, separation, status loss and discrimination) (Link & Phelan, 2001).

The descriptions of what bisexuality means to “society” offered by my participants were multiple and varied and are limited in that they might not necessarily reflect the realities of everyone. When discussing dominant discourses around bisexuality, participants’ responses reflected a simplified binary understanding of bisexuality. They felt that this simplified binary understanding resulted in the labeling of bisexuals with negative stereotypes which impacted bisexual men by excluding them from straight and gay communities.

Desires Men and Women Equally

One of the most common (mis)conceptions, offered by eight participants, of what it means to “society” to be bisexual was the simple understanding that it refers to someone who desires both men and women equally.²⁵ This simple definition of bisexuality is based on dominant binary ideas of sex, gender, and sexuality that imply there are only two sexes and two genders and that bisexuals’ attractions must be divided equally between the two.²⁶ Parker described his perception of prevailing meanings of bisexuality as a “misconception” and explained why:

term “society” in this general sense risks reifying society and obscuring the power relations within a society and as a sociologist I recognize the danger in this and will make an effort to be more explicit in my interpretations.

²⁵ Paul, Gil, Earnest, Jude, Parker, Brandon, Amir, and Magnus

²⁶ I will use the words of my participants to reflect what they said regarding the use of sex and gender; however, in my writing, using my own words, I will refer to sexual orientation as being attracted to gender as I recognize that in everyday interactions we cannot assume a body’s sex based on the appearance of gender.

I personally think there is a misconception that bisexuality is sort of equally preferring men and women regardless of what gender you are, that it is like this half way point, like you are either heterosexual and have absolutely no interest whatsoever in the same sex or you're gay and have no interest whatsoever in the opposite sex and bisexuality is this point in the middle where you are equally interested in both genders and I personally don't think any of those points exist.

The idea of desiring both men and women could mean different things; participants variously referred to bisexuality as being based on attractions, behaviour, or having relationships with both men and women. Similarly to Parker, Ernest based his understanding of dominant bisexuality on the criteria of having a *relationship* with both men and women. Jude suggested that the criteria used by society in general for a dominant definition of bisexuality would be sexual *behaviour*. He explained, "What I think it means to society in general... I guess it means someone who has sex with men and women and probably a focus upon sexual behaviour." Amir and Magnus discussed the dominant definition of bisexual as based on *attractions*. Amir stated that what it means to "society," "in plain terms [is] obviously that I am attracted to both men and women." Magnus stated:

To society in general? You know, they [bisexuals] are attracted to both sexes. I think most people have a basic understanding of that, they might have values and things that they impose on it but the basic idea of bisexuality I think is fairly understood by most people

Magnus pointed out that this is a "basic" understanding of bisexuality which is an indicator that he thinks that it is more complex than this.

While Parker talked about bisexuals as being "interested in both genders" he also referred to them as being interested in the "sex" of individuals which was also how

Magnus framed it when he proposed a dominant definition that bisexuals are those who “are attracted to both sexes.” A dominant definition of bisexuality was also conceived of by Brandon as in the middle of the two dominant sexual orientations, perhaps as a third sexual orientation.

“Anything That Moves” – Bisexuals as Sexually Depraved

Hypersexual, Promiscuous, Indiscriminate, and Without Sexual Boundaries

While participants thought dominant discourses of bisexuality were dependent on simplified categories of sex, gender, and sexual orientation they also thought that several “undesirable” characteristics and stereotypes were applied to bisexuals through prevailing discourses. A common premise was that many people in society think that bisexuals are hypersexual, promiscuous, indiscriminate, and have no sexual boundaries. Some participants felt that there was a common societal belief that bisexuals are attracted to people indiscriminately – in other words, that they are attracted to *everyone* and anyone.²⁷ Paul explained that “a kind of stereotypical kind of myth seems to be more horniness. If you’re [bisexual] you’re probably more of a sexually active person or something.” Amir expressed having the same experience of being perceived as hypersexual in addition to being thought to be indiscriminate: “Others might think that I’m probably attracted to them, that I seem to be attracted to anyone, that’s one of the misperceptions I find very common actually and ... that in some way I am fixated on sexuality.” John joked that he supposed that “other people may think of the old Woody Allen joke that being bisexual means you have twice as good a chance of getting a date on a Saturday night.” Gil suggested that the dominant account is that bisexuals have, “an idyllic, wonderful existence where you get your cake and eat it too.”

²⁷ Paul, Amir, John, and Gil.

Sexual Disease Carriers

Another common description by participants about dominant understandings of bisexuality included characterizations of bisexuals as being sexual disease carriers. Participants felt that the label of disease carrier was connected to the idea that society has of bisexuals being promiscuous and hypersexual. Gil said that many people in society seemed to believe that bisexuals had spread HIV from gay men to straight women. According to Gil:

if a bisexual guy is having sex with one committed girlfriend or wife, and then he is also having sex with guys on the side he has the possibility of picking up HIV or spreading HIV or Hepatitis C to his partner.

The idea of the contaminated or diseased person was further indicated by Paul:

I think that if you were to come out and announce or confess that you are bisexual to a potential date, someone you are meeting or about to go out with or whatever, they would get quite a bit more concerned about getting an STD and condoms and that sort of thing.

Eroticized

In addition to the negative stereotype of disease carrier, the promiscuous, hypersexual bisexual label can also result in the eroticization of bisexual men. Gil explained how gay men eroticize bisexual men as the unattainable straight guy: "It is a bit of a fantasy because ... the opportunity for a gay guy to have sex with a bisexual guy is almost the opportunity of having sex with a straight guy which is fitted in that fantasy." Magnus also described how gay men may eroticize bisexual men through fantasy:

A friend of mine is a gay guy in the West End who is really interested in having sex with women with bi guys watching. He is really into bi guys. I think in a way he is just fascinated by it.

Bisexual men were also eroticized by straight women according to Parker: “there have been a couple of women who have been really interested, who think it’s really hot, the idea of guys being together.”

Debauched

Regardless of the exact narrative, these bisexual men felt that bisexual people are negatively perceived in society as decadent or debauched in general. Magnus suggested that prevailing discourses describe bisexuals as “out of control” and able to do “whatever they want”. According to Parker, “They are either one of two extremes -- they lack proper boundaries or they’re just exploring.” According to Paul’s conception of dominant discourses of what it means to be bisexual, hyper sexuality and a lack of boundaries is seen as having fewer moral boundaries. Amir described how he has had people think that his bisexuality is due to him being narcissistic:

[People thought my bisexuality] was because I was partially self-obsessed, that I was attracted to myself and therefore I was attracted to men and yet I was also wanting to be with women.

According to Paul, “there seems to be more sense of deviancy about bisexuality” than there is about homosexuality. He attributes this to the “secretive” character of bisexuality and the fact that it is not talked about in either gay or straight environments.

“Society Doesn’t Do Bisexual”

Really Gay or Straight

Although participants suggested that they felt bisexuality was generally viewed as “equal attractions between men and women,” they also expressed feeling skepticism as to whether the general public actually thought there was any such thing as bisexuality. The overriding belief by participants about dominant perceptions of bisexuality was that bisexuals were thought to be really either gay or straight. Eight of the twelve men felt

that bisexuals were seen in this way; moreover, it was a theme that repeated itself throughout the interviews and not just in response to my question about the meaning of bisexuality to “society” in general.²⁸ Magnus stated that “a lot of people don't even really believe in it [bisexuality].” Paul explained:

Well I think society in general, they know that it [a bisexual] is someone who likes both men and women, that's like just knowledge-wise that is what they know, but socially it's a whole different story, it seems that society in general really wants you to sort of be on one team or the other, you know, they can handle if you're gay and they can handle if you're straight but they, they, in general [laughs] -- society doesn't *do* bisexual.

When participants talked about how they felt people doubt the existence of bisexuality, these doubts were expressed through the idea of bisexuals as “fence sitters,” who are perhaps confused, who can't make up their minds, who are in a transitional phase, and in the end are really just either gay or straight. John elaborated:

They use the metaphor of sitting on the fence. It took me a long time actually to realize that the metaphor is inaccurate and that in some respects that for bisexuals there is no fence. There is no sense of a boundary and so they aren't deliberately trying to occupy and or to strategically act on one side or the other, or cross it.

Despite the fact that John did not feel like he was trying to cross any boundary, he and others in my study felt that bisexuality was often seen in society as a transitional stage. Brandon explained that, “It seems to be sort of a gray area from what I can tell. When people refer to bisexuals they don't quite have an easy definition so people just sort of assume they're just transitory sort of positions.”

²⁸ Magnus, Paul, Brandon, John, Rodney, Parker, Gil, and Jude

Rodney discussed how he felt this transitory view of bisexuality occurred specifically in reference to the gay community's perspective: "I think amongst the gay community my experience has been that bisexuality is seen as either a transitional thing or not really a valid lifestyle, sexuality choice, existence, whatever." Gil stated that he felt that there is no acknowledgment of bisexuality in dominant discourses: "Well, not that they thought I was bisexual, most people don't – bisexual doesn't even fit into the equation – you're either gay or you are straight." Paul and Jude felt similarly. Jude summarized the men's sentiments: "I assume that people either think I'm straight or gay. I just assume that."

But Really Gay

The idea of having to choose "one or the other" was the most common feature identified in the men's understandings of dominant definitions of bisexuality. Bisexuals were thought to be either straight or gay; however, when applied to their own experience some of the bisexual men with whom I talked felt that people more typically thought that *bisexual men were gay* rather than straight.²⁹ Brandon explained: "I've had people who are just totally concerned and completely convinced that I am like secretly, totally homosexual and that my attraction towards women is some sort of latent farce." Participants felt that bisexual men were labelled as gay by both the straight community and the gay male community and their experiences reflected this feeling. Furthermore they felt that bisexual men sometimes also labelled themselves as gay.

Some participants felt there was a socially sanctioned yet self-imposed monitoring of sexual identity that contributed to the erasure of bisexuality. Even when men felt they were bisexual, they thought they were gay because of society's expectations to conform to binary ideas of sexuality. Magnus suggested that often men who move from liking

²⁹ Brandon, Magnus, John, Jude, Ernest, Amir, and Rodney.

women exclusively to also being interested in guys tend to jump to the conclusion that they might be gay. He argued, "That is the biggest misunderstanding that people have and I think it should be spread around that it doesn't remotely mean you have to give up one orientation for the other." Some participants thought that men who were once were attracted to women who now identify as gay may reinforce the erasure of bisexuality by insisting that attractions to women that existed in the past were invalid and therefore they are now strictly gay. John, who was once married to a woman, talked about this; he said he found it frustrating when men who have been married to a woman and fathered a child with a woman, come out as gay later in life and say that they think there is "no such thing" as bisexuality, completely erasing their previous experience. He stated, "It boggles my mind for them to say that there is no such thing as bisexuality."

Some of the bisexual men I talked with discussed how they felt the straight community labeled them as gay.³⁰ John suggested that straight people classify all queer people into one group based on differences between themselves and others, on what is different from their own experience of straightness. John explained:

Among straight-identified people I found ... to some extent, bisexual means gay. That when I come out as bisexual they interpret that as meaning what is distant from their experience, therefore, having sex with men, and so they interpret it as a kind of placeholder when I really mean gay.

Some of the men expressed a fear or reluctance to come out as bisexual in the straight community for fear of being labelled as gay and ostracized by people in the straight community. Jude described how if he is interested in a woman it is difficult to come out as bisexual because of fear of rejection: "bi equals gay ergo no relationship possibility."

³⁰ John, Jude, Ernest, and Brandon

Brandon also experienced fear and reluctance to come out as bisexual at his workplace where most of his co-workers are straight men:

what I fear is that [if I] identified as a bisexual person other people out in society or in the [workplace] will then immediately view me as a homosexual ... So really I think it's sort of a misconception, the thought that anyone who likes boys is this way.

He elaborated further on his situation in the workplace:

[Some of the staff] was not comfortable at all with the idea [of bisexuality] and they would have just jumped to the conclusion that we were homosexuals and then they would have just gotten weirded out and everything would have become uncomfortable and terrible.

As a man who in the recent past identified as straight, Ernest discussed how there may be some internalized homophobia (when an individual is uncomfortable with their own sexual orientation) for bisexual men based on the belief that once a man has sex with another man, he is automatically considered gay. According to Ernest, for men to make a leap and even talk about same-sex encounters and their bisexuality "they have to be very progressive to be able to be open about that." Ernest emphasised how internalized homophobia underlies the belief that bisexual men are really gay:

Men openly saying they would have sexual encounters with other men is very hard still for people to be very open about that. [Men] do not want to be classified as gay. Unless they are gay, the majority of men are terrified of being labelled as such.

Attributions that bisexual men were really gay extended beyond the straight community. Some participants also felt that gay men thought that bisexual men were

really gay.³¹ The bisexual men thought that there were several stereotypes among gay men regarding bisexual identity as a transition stage, an immature identity, not real, untrue, and deceptive. John explained that “A lot of gay men, perhaps lesbians, say that bisexuals are immature, that they’re at a stage where after which, when it is complete, they will be fully out and gay, identifying as gay or lesbian.” Jude elaborated on this feeling of frustration when sometimes gay men would take a “forceful” and direct approach and tell him that his bisexuality was “not real” and that “I was just fooling myself.” Amir’s experience was similar: “[Gay men would] say I wasn’t true to my word, say that I was in denial, say that I was just afraid of being gay...” These bi men were told by gay men that they were fakes – that their bisexuality was essentially a ruse and that they were actually gay.

Rejection and Exclusion of Bisexual Men by Gay Men

Several participants felt that gay men specifically stereotyped and rejected bisexuality as a valid identity for men.³² According to participants, bisexual men not only experience homophobia and potential rejection from people in the straight community; they also experienced *bi-phobia* and rejection from people in gay male communities. The term biphobia is used to describe the irrational fear of bisexuality that creates distrust, discrimination and contributes to the invisibility of bisexuals (Rust, 2002). Participants felt that it existed in the gay male community. Some participants compared the dismissal of bisexuality in the gay community and the straight community, feeling that the refusal of bisexuality was just as, if not more, acute among gay men. According to Magnus he has experienced feeling ostracized and stigmatized by both monosexual groups based on a sense of exclusiveness, but more often by homosexuals. He argued:

³¹ John, Jude, Amir, and Rodney.

³² Magnus, Neil, Rodney, John, Jude, Amir, Gil, Rodney, and Brandon.

The straights and the homos ... they are both too stuck up about themselves in a lot of ways. There is a sanctimoniousness to them, that idea of contagion, of being on one side or the other, 'cause once you're bi, it's like fuck it. You know, I've probably accumulated more problems with homos than heteros.

Neil discussed his feelings about being stereotyped and stigmatized by gay men. He explained:

Certainly I found in gay male circles there is a definite stigma around bisexual identification at times... I became as disenchanted with mainstream gay male, I guess stereotypes, around it [bisexuality] as I am with hetero-mainstream stereotypes around it [bisexuality].

Not only did these bisexual men feel that they were excluded from straight communities for being bisexual, but in communities where they expected to be included because of their "other" relation to normative heterosexuality, they found they were not included – and they were surprised, disappointed, and angered. Their rejection felt more severe; they became "doubly different," and felt rejected from both normative categories of sexuality.

Jude explained that a tactic used by gay men to delineate themselves from bisexuals and delegitimize bisexuality was to assert their authenticity and purity "as very clearly gay and never even thinking about women." Magnus echoed what Jude stated and furthermore, he turned the tables. He implied that some gay men may actually be bisexual and that they are refusing to admit to it in order to maintain a stable identity:

I mean there are plenty of gay guys that are just closed to the idea of bisexuality. They are primarily interested in men so they only have sex with men and they call themselves gay, they ignore any interest that they may have in women and as an identity thing they are against that category [of bisexuality]...

Magnus emphasised his point of feeling excluded in stating that he had been “flat out ‘dissed’ by gay guys” who “don’t believe in bisexuality.”

Some participants felt that this kind of bi-phobia is customary in the gay community and based on ideas of purity. Amir described the fear and aversion he experienced as a bisexual man which speaks directly to the “tenuous position” of gay men:

There were times when I was ostracized by the gay community for [being bisexual]...There is just so much fear I felt in the community and I’m not saying [that] it’s anyone’s fault, it’s just the situation... So a lot of different men that I have known have been so tenuous in their position in life that when I did express my opinions about women and my love for women they would stop calling me to go out because they want to go out with people that are reinforcing who they are...

Brandon discussed how he was rejected from the gay community because he liked girls. He explained that gay men said “you can’t be gay, you like girls.” Jude spoke of gay men as being “misogynist” and he stressed the extent to which he felt gay men reviled bisexuals, “Honestly, the only thing more offensive than being a woman among these gay men would be being bi. I honestly think that it is a dangerous identity to play with.”

Bisexual men who had found a tentative place within the gay community said that they dreaded disclosing their identities for fear of rejection. Gil held a deep seated and very real feeling that he would be rejected if his gay friends knew he identified as bisexual and as a result he kept his bisexuality very hidden; “there is that part of me inside though that if I told my gay friends that there is the possibility that they could disown me again.” Jude explained his wariness of being viewed as a traitor and his sometimes hesitancy to

out himself as bisexual, especially when his relationship to the group or individual was new. In this case, Jude felt like his bisexuality would not be perceived as valid and he would be categorized into one of two heteronormative identities:

I mean when you don't have a lot of history with a group of people [where] the common element is this gay identity, or being gay is perceived as the common identity, ...then I'm saying, 'well, it's not really that,' I think it would be like saying, 'well, I'm straight!' ...So I am cautious of trying not to seem like a traitor or seem like I'm there under some false pretence.

Discussion of Participants' Understandings of Dominant Discourses of Bisexuality

The findings on the dominant "societal" meanings of bisexuality that bisexual men offered were interconnected. Here I attempt to make sense of these dominant meanings by trying to understand how these meanings were constructed in relation to hegemonic heteronormative discourses that have produced these dominant "societal" meanings of bisexuality. Some of the dominant discourses were that bisexual men had equal attractions to men and women, that bisexual men were really gay, or that they were hypersexual, promiscuous, indiscriminate, without sexual boundaries, disease carriers, eroticized, and debauched.

Fifty-Fifty Doesn't Add Up

Bisexual men perceived that the dominant "societal" understanding of bisexuality within a heteronormative framework based on fifty-fifty attractions between men and women was very simplified. This dominant understanding was based on hegemonic heteronormative conceptions of sexuality where sex, gender and sexual orientation are seen as binary, where there are only two sexes and two genders, and where bisexual attractions must be divided equally between the two. A heteronormative framework requires stability of sex, gender, and sexual orientation categories. Situating bisexual

attractions as equally in the middle serves to stabilize bisexuality (as opposed to situating it on a continuum which would allow for some flexibility). A “fifty-fifty” understanding of bisexuality as characterizing people who like both men and women equally is an oversimplification of bisexuality and relies on binary thinking, therefore overlooking real variability and complexity (Link & Phelan, 2001).

The common response from participants, that “society” understood bisexuals as people who were sexually attracted to men and women equally, situated gender as central to defining sexuality. The centrality of sex and gender in the dominant meanings of bisexuality is problematic. It assumes that sex and gender are the primary indicators of attraction; however, equal attractions could also mean that the sex and/or gender of the person is immaterial to bisexuals and that they are interested in people for reasons other than their sex or gender.

Additionally, there were assumptions that sex and gender correspond to each other within a heteronormative framework; however, this is not always the case and sometimes people’s sex and gender do not match. Among participants’ responses, there was no agreement on whether or not individuals’ attractions to others were based on sex or gender and sometimes participants used the terms interchangeably. The interchangeable usage of the terms sex and gender by participants in their dominant definitions appeared to be a conflation of the concepts of sex and gender rather than using the terms purposely and attempting to differentiate between the two.

Despite common thinking that bisexuality upholds gender-based sexual identity and binary thinking, the gender of a single object of desire can never be an indicator of whether or not a person is bisexual. There is also the implication that if desire is based

on gender, and if bisexuals like men and women equally, then they must have simultaneous relationships with both men and women in order to fully actualize their desires. However, a heteronormative framework does not allow for individuals having multiple partners at a time. Regardless, participants did not even agree on what actually constituted a bisexual identity – attractions or behaviours – which implies that being bisexual does not necessarily depend on behaviour but rather may also depend upon a potential that may or may not be realized through actions. So a person could identify as bisexual and have only had experience with one gender, or be in a monogamous relationship, or have never had a relationship with anyone at all. Actions and identity formation are not necessarily interdependent. This is in contrast to Troiden (1979, 1988) who suggested that a person must experience a love relationship to validate their sexual minority identity.

The conflation of sex and gender and the assumption that sexuality is based on gender can be problematic for bisexuals in everyday life. When a sex/gender conflation remains unquestioned it solidifies hegemonic heteronormative understandings of sex, gender and sexuality and promotes their alignment. Butler (1991) states that “heterosexuality naturalizes itself through setting up certain illusions of continuity between sex, gender, and desire” (p. 27). In this context, assuming that sex, gender and sexual orientation are aligned in a normative fashion leaves individuals limited options – men are male and women are female and they are supposed to be attracted to a person of the “opposite” sex and gender. In order to accommodate bisexuality, bisexuals may desire “both” men and women but the assumption is that this desire is based on fifty-fifty attractions. Participants suggested that this “basic” understanding was a “misconception” and that a simplified understanding of bisexuality within a

heteronormative framework as someone equally liking men and women fails to happen in everyday life.

Bisexual Equals Gay

There was a tendency in dominant discourses to erase bisexuality by subsuming it back into the binary through an assumption that bisexuals were either straight or gay; although, the more prevalent response was that bisexual men were gay. Attributions such as bisexuals being immature, in a transitional stage, not real, in denial, or afraid of being gay appeared to be based on heteronormative and homonormative ideas of sex, gender and sexuality. These ideas resulted in the assumption that there are only two sexual orientations from which to choose. Some participants believed that straight people in society view being bisexual as equal to being gay, and that when perceived as gay persons bisexuals would be rejected or excluded from straight communities. This contributed to bisexual men's secrecy, fear and reluctance to identify as bisexual among straight people for fear of being "misconceived" as gay and thus excluded. The homogenizing assumption that bisexual men are really just gay is tied to homophobia which can be defined as the irrational fear of, and aversion to homosexuality and LGBTTTQQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Two-Spirited, Queer, Questioning, Intersex and Asexual) or Queer folks. Based on his experiences, Brandon predicted that homophobia would likely be a reaction to his (bi)sexuality. In such cases it seems that participants found it easier to try to pass as straight in a straight environment, which they perceived as a "forbidden" space where their sexual identity as bisexual might be received in a hostile manner (Goffman, 1963, p. 81).

Some participants felt that gay men also thought that bisexual men were really gay. This was quite different from when participants thought the straight community attributed gayness to bisexuals. When done by the straight community it was to identify bisexuals

as “other” to straightness and to delineate clear lines between the two. In the case of gay men thinking that bisexual men were really gay, gay men were not situating bisexual men as “other” but rather trying to assimilate them and say “you are like us,” you are really gay. When this happens there is more tolerance of bisexual men by the gay community and the gay community acts as a “civil” space (Goffman, 1963, p. 81). However, when the bisexual men in this study did not assimilate they experienced rejection from gay men. Bisexuals can have “dual experiences of rejection and inclusion in monosexual communities” (Queen, 1995, p. 158); their position is liminal as they can be both included and excluded.

The attribution of bisexual men “really being gay” as opposed to “really being straight” differs from attributions given to bisexual women, who would be considered “really being straight.” Elizabeth Armstrong (1995) states that

because gay sex is so much more visible than lesbian sex, if both a self-identified gay man and a self-identified lesbian have sex with a member of the opposite gender, the general culture is more likely to point to his gay encounter and her straight encounter as most salient (p. 209).

In a phallogentric society, lesbian women are made invisible by the absence of a penis whereas gay or bisexual men are made highly visible through a focus on sexual practices involving penises and “real” sex through penile penetration (Armstrong, 1995). Heteronormativity reflects a “sexual system that is deeply implicated in the maintenance of male dominance” and which is monitored through gender and the policing of men’s masculinity (Armstrong, 1995, p. 207). Because gay men do not engage in the masculinising acts of heterosexual conquests, they are not considered as masculine as straight men. According to Armstrong (1995), men have “nothing to gain” by identifying

as gay and so there is little reason to question gay or bisexual men's self-identification, even if they also have connections to women. Armstrong (1995) attributes the assimilation of bisexual men by gay men to "gay men's lack of concern about bisexuality" (p. 212). Armstrong considers gay men as not being concerned with bisexuality due to gay men's sexism. She argued that "gay men may not believe that women are valuable enough to threaten their relationships with men" (p. 212).

There is a common belief that gay men are not concerned about bisexuality and are not as biphobic as lesbians (Steinman, 2001). However, the bisexual men I spoke to suggested that this was *not* the case and that gay men *are* biphobic and were threatened by bisexual men's attractions to women. Expanding on Armstrong, I would argue that because gay men are devalued as less masculine, devaluing women and relationships with women is a way of reclaiming and maintaining male dominance and (hetero)sexism. It is also a way of preserving boundaries for the maintenance of a homosexual identity.

When bisexual men do not fit neatly back into the binary and insist on being bisexual, they end up being rejected from the groups that might have included them. The labelling of bisexual men with negative stereotypes reinforces bisexual separation and the belief that bisexuals are fundamentally different from monosexuals. This justifies the devaluing and rejecting of them. Creating boundaries between groups also serves to create group solidarity for in-groups. Gay men would appear to be asserting their gay identity by the complete rejection of anything different from the "homo" norm. It seemed as though they disallowed desire for women in order to assert the completeness of their attractions to men, and that they excluded bisexual men by drawing lines around themselves and their community to create in-group solidarity. Bisexuality is disruptive to a heteronormative

framework – and to both heteronormativity and homonormativity. Biphobia, in this context, is the fear that bisexuality will disrupt male dominance and homosexuality as a reliable identity.

Negative Stereotypes and Stigma

In addition to the idea of equal attractions and bisexuality in men being equal to being gay, the stereotypes that I found most common from bisexual men's perspectives were: hypersexual, promiscuous, indiscriminate, without sexual boundaries, disease carriers, eroticized, and debauched – all negative attributes designed to label and portray bisexuals as undignified and less than human and a way of rationalizing the belief that being *monogamous* is the desired aim. These bisexual stereotypes also required a simplified understanding of (bi)sexuality based on heteronormative discourses. All of the above dominant stereotypes named by bisexuals were based on the idea that bisexuals were not monosexual and were therefore unable to be monogamous. Monosexuality and, in turn, monogamy, were the unacknowledged norms in relation to which bisexuality was constructed.

Rosemary Hennessy (2000) contends that dominant “discourses of sexuality provide the social contexts whereby sensations and affects are made intelligible in terms of normative and perverse sexual identifications and desires” (p. 217). Heteronormative discourses shame by naming “outlawed” sexualities as “perverse” or “any other illegitimizing names” (p. 217). Bisexuality was seen by respondents as shamed by negative stereotypes. Stigma results in part from stereotyping and can occur in a hierarchy. Although gay men may try to assimilate bisexual men, if bisexuals do not line up according to the binary by rejecting their dual attractions and choosing their “true” gay

identity, then they themselves are rejected. This can explain the attribution of being “doubly different”– bisexuals do not conform or comply with the norms of either monosexual category. Kate Millet (as cited in Donaldson, 1995) says that “gay militants” stereotype bisexuals to delegitimize bisexuals as “superficial and self-indulgent persons whose commitment to homosexuality is inauthentic” (p. 38).

Bisexuality as an Emergent Other

What I see in the construction of bisexuality as equally liking men and women is an attempt to *understand* bisexuality within a heteronormative framework as a *third* liminal sexual identity, in addition to heterosexuality and homosexuality. It is an *emergent other* and it has been formed in *relation* to monosexualities (heterosexual and homosexual). It is a kind of combination of the two that has arisen out of the constant tension between heterosexuality and homosexuality. However, it is still constantly rejected, excluded, and denied, rather than included in a “trinity” of sexualities (Angelides, 2001). My suggestion is that we look at bisexuality as a third sexual identity that is *qualitatively different*. It is generated out of the binary but it is not reducible to it. Bisexuality is the repudiated “other” to monosexual notions of sexual identity. This is what makes it different. In order to establish itself in a hierarchal manner the ideology of monosexuality represses and rejects bisexuality as different through the use of negative stereotypes and stigma.

There is a tension in that bisexuality seems intelligible when defined as fifty-fifty. On the other hand, when we see bisexuality as complex and not falling easily into a prescribed category of fifty-fifty, we can recognize that “the interface between the available modes of intelligibility and human affective and erotic capacity is never complete” (Hennessy, 2000, p. 218). Bisexuality does not fall easily into prescribed categories. The most obvious reason being that having attractions to more than one sex

or gender is in contrast to the basis of “one,” static attraction upon which heteronormative discourses rely.

There is also a hierarchy of permissible sexuality based on heteronormative ideas of romantic monogamous love. Carole Queen (1995) states that it is “sex-negative cultural history that makes everything but monogamously-married kink-free heterosexuality stigmatized, the ‘norm’ against which all these ‘variants’ are measured” (pp. 158-159). Although bisexual stereotypes were meant to delegitimize bisexual men within heteronormative discourses, this did not necessarily foreclose the option for these bisexual men of being sexually progressive or non-monogamous. Many of the bisexual men in this study actually did choose to be non-monogamous or to engage in erotic practices that were not socially sanctioned as proper. They also took up multiple identities including monosexual identities.

The rejection and exclusion of bisexual men appeared to be centred on heteronormativity, homonormativity, and biphobia. Such fears speak volumes to the powerful potential of bisexuality to be disruptive. Bisexuality threatens to expose heterosexual norms because it cannot be fully controlled. Bisexuality in men is confusing and threatening to the binary ordering of human sexuality. People cannot easily identify bisexual men based on the gender(s) of their partners. The assessment of the social constructions of bisexuality given by participants goes beyond a simple understanding of bisexuality as fifty-fifty attractions to men and women to a critique of binary conceptualizations of sex, gender, and sexual orientation and towards an even more complete critique of heteronormativity, including a critique of monosexualities and monogamy. Bisexuality is incompatible with monosexualities and can be situated in opposition to monosexualities and to monogamy. Exploring societal meanings of

bisexuality that are based on heteronormative discourses exposes those hegemonic discourses of heteronormativity (and homonormativity) that structure sexual orientation as focused on gender and a single person, thus naturalizing monogamy and rendering sexuality static.

Bisexual Men's Meanings of Bisexuality

In this section I discuss the meanings of bisexuality based on participants' expressed views of them and based on participants' various experiences of bisexual identity formation. I begin with looking at the role of community in the configuration of bisexual men's meanings of bisexuality and whether the participants felt the absence or presence of a bisexual community helped or hindered the formation of their identities. I then discuss the various meanings of bisexuality that bisexual men considered for themselves. As well, I describe how some participants assumed other various sexual identities in addition to bisexuality and I also discuss how some participants rejected sexual identity categories and labels all together. I end this section with a discussion of how, despite having formed bisexual identities, participants kept that identity suspended and remained sceptical of it.

Community

One way that bisexual men may form meaning about their identity is through their ability to connect to a bisexual individual or a bisexual community. Although participants felt that they were excluded as bisexual men from straight and gay men's communities, they did not seem to have much of a conception of a bisexual community of their own, nor did they claim to know many other bisexual men.³³ When I asked

³³ Magnus, Paul, Jude, John, Rodney, and Gil.

participants about their meanings about bisexuality what often came up was the fact that it was very difficult to define in general because of a lack of knowledge about other bisexuals and lack of contact with a bisexual community. They offered meanings based mainly on their own experiences, but they did not feel that they had much to relate it to in regards to other bisexual individuals or a community. However, they did express a desire for a bisexual community and described what it might look like.

No Bisexual Men?

Magnus, Paul and Jude spoke about how they personally were not familiar with any bisexual men. Magnus explained that he considered the absence of bisexual men to be a result of bisexual men not being readily visible:

Bi men in particular are a little more underground... I don't really know very many bi men myself even. It's not like I've gone out of my way to make bi friends although I would love to have some... I only have about two or three bi male friends, but there are not really that many around at this point, at least not ones that are out as bi.

Paul also thought it was difficult to identify bisexual men and he doubted that they would identify themselves. In fact, he was actually unsure if he knew any bisexual men at all: "I don't know any bisexual men actually, I don't think I do, that would say they are and I don't know many bisexual women [either] ... so I don't have a lot of other references to go with."

There were a few participants who indicated that they were familiar with bisexual people, which had made it easier for them to assume a bisexual identity.³⁴ Rodney described this process:

I knew other people who identified as bi and so it was easy I guess to use that label, it was convenient and pretty soon

³⁴ Rodney, Ernest, and John.

after, within six or eight months of sort of this whole process kind of unfolding, you know I more or less I guess said to myself “well I guess I like guys.”

Ernest and John knew bisexual women, which also made it easier for them to adopt a bisexual identity, but they were not familiar with any bisexual men.

Bisexual Community?

Jude talked about his experience in connecting with the gay community and contrasted it to the absence of any experience with a bisexual community:

There is also a [gay] community that I can tap into in a lot of places quite quickly and I have realized that there is a kind of shorthand to that ... I haven't experienced the same sort of shorthand with a bisexual identity or community.

John, who has identified as bisexual for quite a number of years, had experienced some bisexual community in the past but felt as though that visibility had disappeared to a large degree. John described how he presently connected to a larger queer community:

I did go to three of the conferences that Bi-net BC put on in the late 90's when they were going. I was involved in Bi Victoria when it was operating but I've never been in anything, except very briefly at particular events, like a large community of bisexuals that is a large enough group of people who were bisexual that bisexuality was the norm taken for granted... This is a trough that frankly there was more [bisexual visibility] when I was coming out in the mid-, late nineties... In this century it really declines.

Magnus discussed how he did not ever feel he was part of a specifically bi community:

I've never felt in my life that I was in a bi community, even at Burning Man I don't think there was a bi camp, there were queer things and there was poly stuff and swinger and kink people but not a bi group.

No Bisexual Media

It was also noted that there was a lack of popular media on bisexuals. Mass media is an institution of socialization that teaches people how to classify each other and transmits social values and norms which guide identity formation. Some participants were critical of this absence of bisexuality in the media and the fact that only heteronormative or homonormative identities were represented and bisexual identities were not. John noted the lack of bisexual representation in literature:

In aspects of queer literature it's always been gay literature, gay fiction or gay Canadian fiction and poetry. As far as I know, unless you re-read classic literature... there is no bisexual literature out there. There is gay literature, there is lesbian literature but if there is bisexual literature... I haven't found it....there are lots of [gay] coming out narratives but very few coming out narratives of bisexuals...

Rodney explained that he thought that an absence of bisexual representation left people with no knowledge of bisexuality:

Probably society's idea of bisexual people is really formed by the media, movies... and because there are relatively few examples of bisexual men in mainstream media I think there is really probably very little opinion formed about them, us, we, whatever.

Virtual Connections to Bisexuals

Gil and Magus had heard of a bisexual community or bisexual groups through the efforts of bisexual outreach projects but neither man had a personal connection to the community despite a desire to connect. However, they were both aware of the potential of connecting to bisexuals through the use of online networking sites. Magnus explained how he heard of a bisexual group through a local queer newspaper but did not connect despite his desire to do so:

I believe I saw this ad in *Xtra West* for a bisexual group to meet at the end of every month. I meant to go to it to see if

anyone actually shows up. But I might go to that because it is the only evidence I have seen at all in Vancouver of any bi-oriented anything, something that is a primarily bi thing, bi male, maybe bi female thing...

Correspondingly, Gil stated:

I almost joined the bisexual group here in town. One of them, they had a booth at the Pride festival last year... And I have another group that I have been chatting with online and they have been trying to get me to come to some of their socials and I get really scared.

Gil managed to connect to bisexuals through online networking despite not having actually met that many bisexuals. He said,

I see them on line, on the computer. That is how I met one couple, through Facebook and just talking dirty with his wife and talking dirty with him and on separate occasions... and sharing on an intimate level of vulnerability.

Magnus said that if he wanted to meet bi people he could go on Craigslist and put an ad up to meet more bisexual people as friends and he “would probably get some replies and meet some interesting people.”

Desire for Some Kind of Bisexual Community

Some participants desired a bisexual community and they envisioned that space as someplace that would be a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere for bisexual people to be themselves as well as a safe and “fun” social environment that was inclusive of everyone. Gil explained that he knows from the little experience he has had that contact with other bisexuals fosters a positive feeling for him that he can relate to and he desires more of that:

You know, I don't have a lot of contact with other bisexual people but when I do, there is a feeling that I relate to, there is a comfort level that inspired me and it's gentle and sometimes I feel playful... and that has been really nice.

Paul suggested regular private social gatherings for bisexuals as a way to increase his own “visibility,” be comfortable and have fun:

I’m thinking it would be fun to [have] a group that did cocktail parties or something. I’d probably really have fun socializing and flirting and being in that social scene if you knew that eighty percent of the people there were bisexual... and the rest were open to it. It would probably change..., the way ...in which I present myself.

Magnus was very creative when envisioning a bisexual social space and suggested a monthly designated social evening/event for bisexuals called “thank god its bi-day”. He envisioned it as a very “fun idea” that would attract alternative, sexually free people who “are bi-sensual if they are not bisexual.” He thought that an evening like this would be good for *everyone*.

Bisexual men also desired, or felt, that they had connections to other various communities depending on their intersecting identities. Pat was mostly interested in being connected to a kink community. Brandon, Parker and Rodney were connected to a poly community. Gil and Jude were connected to gay communities. John and Neil associated with queer communities. Ernest associated as straight in a social justice community. Magnus, Paul and Amir were connected to spiritual/artistic communities and Magnus also created his own bisexual media.

Alternative Bisexual Meaning(s)

Bisexuality (Un)defined as Open and Indeterminate

Although all of the participants expressed that they were generally comfortable with their bisexual identity – after all, they did respond to the call for participants who self-identified as bisexual men – the bisexual men with whom I talked emphasized the disjunctions between (hetero)normative societal assumptions and stereotypes about

bisexuality and their own personal bisexual experience. When I asked participants about the meaning of bisexuality to “society” in general their answers were often followed immediately by disclaimers that disputed the reality and accuracy of the often simplistic or stereotypical dominant definitions they felt were attributed to them. They felt that dominant attributions were misconceptions. Parker explained that he thought:

A lot of people see bisexuality as that equal fifty-fifty interest or if not that then many see bisexuality as people who can't make up their mind or are confused lesbians or gay or straight people or lack proper boundaries or they're just exploring or something. Which I see more as a misconception, I don't accept that as a definition of bisexuality.

When I asked John what he thought bisexuality meant to “society” in general he said, “I think it means a lot of different things but people think it means one thing. I don't know how many people out there, other than bisexuals, see bisexuality as complex.” Gil echoed this opinion, “I don't think it is black and white for [bisexual] people you know.” Parker, John and Gil clearly expressed the disjuncture they felt is evident between normative explanations of bisexuality and how they and other bisexuals see themselves.

These bisexual men resisted the stereotypical labels they thought were attributed to them and other bisexuals. All of the participants offered alternative meanings stemming from their personal experiences and used them to redefine meanings of bisexuality for themselves.³⁵ A common way that these bisexual men described bisexuality was as indeterminate – which to them meant open-ended, inclusive and non-limiting in terms of a wide range of kinds of relationships.³⁶ Parker talked about bisexuality being open and non-limiting; he insisted that he probably had “the broadest definition of bisexuality you

³⁵ Parker, John, Gil, Paul, Jude, Ernest, Rodney, Pat, Magnus, Amir, Brandon, and Neil

³⁶ Parker, John, Gil, Paul, Jude, and Ernest

could consider” and described it as “just an openness” and “an absence of a filter. Or an absence of a restriction, rather than it being the presence of something.” Paul described bisexuality as a “philosophy, in the sense of a tremendous amount of openness in attitude and free of judgement.” He explained, “It’s just like wind passing through trees.” There was for many of these men a reluctance to finitely define bisexuality, therefore leaving its definition open to interpretation. Jude called it a “precarious identity.” Gil stated, “I know of personally probably just three or four people that would consider themselves to be bisexuals -- but they don’t fit that example that I just gave.” Simply stated by John, “It means a lot of different things” and according to Ernest, “It is actually very undefined I think.” Although participants found it difficult to define bisexuality and did not necessarily agree on meanings there were some similarities in how they conceptualized bisexuality for themselves.

Continuum (Based on Gender but Not Fifty-Fifty)

Participants rejected dominant conceptions of bisexuality as involving equal attractions, preferences, or sexual behaviour with women and men. They redefined this in a few different ways. Seven participants redefined bisexuality as being somewhere on a continuum between homosexuality and heterosexuality and not having to be exactly in the middle.³⁷ Parker explained how he was sometimes overlooked as bisexual in society “because of this conception that bi is fifty-fifty and I’m not that. I’m like eighty-twenty, or ninety-ten, or I don’t know.” Rodney explained:

I think that sexuality is really very much a continuum from between really exclusively heterosexual, completely in every way and exclusively homosexual, completely in every way. And I think there are certainly a large number of people at either end, and I think there is a *very* large chunk of people somewhere in between the very ends of that spectrum. So I think the term bi could encompass people who are basically almost exclusively heterosexual but

³⁷ Parker, Rodney, Pat, Magnus, Gil, Ernest, and Brandon.

perhaps have had one or two experiences and enjoyed it with someone of the same sex.

An individual may be attracted more to one gender than another, or have substantially more sexual experience with one gender than another. As Pat described, “basically it’s a person who is interested from a sexual point of view of both male and females, some maybe more than others.” Magnus talked about how where he landed on the continuum sometimes changed:

I am more attracted to women, in general, but I am always interested in men as well. That’s why I think of myself as a ‘Kinsey Two’, I’m a straight leaning bi and [a Kinsey] ‘one’ would be a little bit too incidental for me...I guess in my less queer moments I might swing over towards more to one side but every now and then I might have been approaching half and half but I am consistently, primarily a hetero bi guy.

Correspondingly, Ernest also felt unbalanced attractions to men and women and he also pointed out that attractions to different genders may be unequal *and* for different reasons, associating particular characteristics with men or women: “There is a real attraction to both sexes for different reasons and one is stronger than the other. I mean definitely my attraction to females is much stronger than to males but still both are there.” Gil affirmed this as well:

So if you put a naked man and a naked woman in front of me [and] you said choose, okay, and if I didn’t choose from my mind and just choose from my physical reaction then a guy attracts me much more but I’m attracted to the softness and the suppleness of the female shape.

Brandon also expressed the difference between his feelings toward men and women. He explained that the way that he experienced attraction felt unique to him as a bisexual:

There is an ease and a comfort that comes with both male and female relationships for me but they are very distinct sort of comforts. Without going into too much detail, with the women it's more like I found someone to confide in, to hide away with, but with men it's more like I found someone to talk to endlessly and be understood on a different level entirely.

While some of the bisexual men in this study experienced an unbalanced attraction to men and women that included different reasons based on perceived gender differences, sometimes those differences became less important over time and gender mattered less. For example, although at one point Amir found that he was attracted to men and women for different reasons; those differences were becoming less and less important to him:

So the way that I am with men and the way that I am with women is becoming more and more the same. Where before it used to be that when I was with men it was a real opportunity for me to express my "being seen," being liked... I felt more attractive, I felt understood, like I could just release and relax and curl up in their arms, this strong person and now that is happening more and more with women...the polarities are starting to resolve themselves.

Rodney emailed me after the interview with some reflections about the interview.

Although he originally thought about bisexuality as on a continuum in the interview, in his email he amended this:

I had an interesting realization regarding the kinds of men and women that I am attracted to. I had never seen the pattern before, but realized that there are a lot of personality similarities between the women I'm attracted to and the men I'm attracted to. There are a lot of fundamental similarities, as I think about all the women and all the men that I've been really attracted to. It's interesting and begs the question, in my mind at least, is it correct to say that I'm "attracted to men" and "attracted to women"? I wonder if it's more correct to take gender out of the equation, and simply say that I'm "attracted to a certain kind of person?"

Gender Challenges

Challenging Gender as Central to Sexual Identity

Although some participants found meaning in bisexuality by conceptualizing it as on a shifting continuum of sexuality where attractions to genders varied in degree, another way that some bisexual men gave meaning to their bisexuality was through displacing the central importance of gender in defining their sexual orientation.³⁸ Neil believed that bisexuality “simply means that gender is not the primary basis of attraction. This is what I hope that it would mean in most places.” Paul described being bisexual as “being open minded and eclectic and a universal lover of all... or something else, you’re a humanitarian...” And Parker stated, “You don’t particularly care about gender explicitly.”

Parker explained further:

It is really about being open to relationships with people, regardless of gender. To me it’s really about not consciously restricting yourself by the gender of a person. I don’t consciously go around with this sort of strain or filter on my thoughts that if I feel an attraction to someone I’m not going to say no that can’t possibly be sexual because of that person’s gender.

Since John has been with his partner who is a trans woman he acknowledged the central importance of gender in people’s everyday lives; however, he felt gender was of less importance in terms of his conception of his sexuality: “I know many more trans people now than I did and I’ve come to think that gender is in some ways more interesting than sexuality and it pervades our lives much more.”

³⁸ Neil, Paul, Parker, and John

Challenging the Alignment of Sex and Gender

For some participants, questioning the role of gender in defining their sexuality involved questioning the alignment of sex and gender.³⁹ For example, when Neil started dating a female-bodied “trans guy” who “did some identity flip-flops” and switched gender identities several times while they were together, he began to change the way that he identified from that of a “purely gay male” to bisexual or pansexual in order to reject fixed, aligned, binary ideas of sex and gender. He explained:

These people kind of fell outside of the traditional models, the traditional boxes... and I think, in the end, I am attracted to aspects of masculinity really...and I don't think in my mind anymore I necessarily correlate the gender identity and the physical form of bodies that people are coming in as tightly as at one point I did.

Amir also questioned the alignment of sex, gender, and gender roles and realized that he could be attracted to certain gendered qualities that perhaps did not conventionally align with the expected sex. He stated that:

What's changing for me is that as I relate to more of the masculine aspects of women and the feminine aspects of men I could be dating a man for their feminine qualities and a woman for their masculine qualities.

Magnus indicated how his conception of bisexuality included being open to the idea of fluid gender identities and presentations. He believed that “bisexual to me is very comfortable because men and women, you know, gender bending, whatever you want to do, suites me.” Parker challenged dichotomous ideas of gender and the centrality of gender in defining sexuality, including when applied to himself; “I like to question gender

³⁹ Neil, Amir, Magnus, and Parker

and the role of gender and gender identity. Like I don't necessarily even fully identify as a man, I mean I do for the most part but, I like to question why."

Challenging the Limits of Only Two Genders

Participants also expressed their understanding of gender as being beyond a simple dichotomous construction of two possible discrete gender categories.⁴⁰ Rodney explained, "that the reality of humans as sexual and social beings is a lot more complex than the obvious societal messages of male and female, monogamy, happily forever after." Neil expressed a great discomfort with talking about gender as dichotomous, particularly since he has "dated people who did not fit into that binary quite as well." Jude found the notion of "bi as a binary, as two... problematic from the get go [because] it has to do with the notion of a binary." Magnus discussed wanting to get rid of the binary connotations to bisexual but feeling like binary understandings are too entrenched in society:

So that's why I like bisexual, I think in a way you can just drop the 'bi' off and it's just sexual, you know, but [I don't do that] given that [for] the vast majority of people the binary view of gender holds.

Multiple Sexual Identities

Although self-identification as bisexual was a requirement for involvement in my study, participants also identified as sexual orientation identities other than bisexual. Additional monosexual (i.e., gay/homosexual or straight/heterosexual), alternative (i.e., queer or pansexual), or compound sexual identities (i.e., more than one at a time) were employed for various reasons. Sexual identity labels may have been changed depending on context and were sometimes strategic. For some of the bisexual men in this study, bisexuality as an identity was not sufficient to completely or accurately describe *multiple*

⁴⁰ Rodney, Neil, Jude, and Magnus

aspects of their sexual selves and so they used different sexual identities to describe themselves.⁴¹

No (One) Term Will Do

Parker used multiple identities to more fully and accurately describe himself, and didn't even mind if one identity was mistaken for another. Parker said:

It's a gray zone, I guess I partly identify as heterosexual because I'm bi but I'm mostly attracted to women so I don't feel like it's totally wrong, I absolutely have a complete preference for bi over heterosexual. I think that heterosexual is a bit wrong <laughs> as a definition for me but ... gay is not one hundred percent wrong for me [either]... I'd like to have an emotional relationship with a guy sometime so, um, you know, you could say I'm a little bit gay. ... Often times I'll say queer and a lot of people think that means that I'm gay and that doesn't bother me either

Gil on the other hand had a hard time identifying as bisexual or anything within a heteronormative framework. Gil spoke candidly about this: "To me, to be bisexual is a very uncomfortable position because you haven't chosen a camp. It's like, well, are you gay or are you straight?" When talking about how he is supposed to act and the roles he is supposed to follow Gil was confused because all the roles he saw as available to him were either/or, gay/straight and he did not feel that he fit in with *any* of them.

Straight/Gay – Has Its Advantages

For some participants, shifts in sexual identity depended on a multitude of reasons and were situationally dependent. A heterosexual/straight or gay identity was taken up strategically depending on context.⁴² For example, Parker took up a heterosexual

⁴¹ Parker, Gil, Jude, Paul, Amir, Neil, John, Brandon, Magnus, and Ernest

⁴² Parker, Paul, Jude, Amir, Neil, and Gil

identity on certain websites so that he would attract and get responses from a particular type of person:

[I] choose heterosexual even though, it's kind of like voting for someone you don't really want because <laughter> they're the second worst choice or not as bad as the other guys. Like strategic voting. I identify more as bi but in this site I am going to choose heterosexual. You know, I have to say I identify as bi but there is overlap I think.

For Paul, it depended upon his mood:

It's almost like for me heterosexuality is my more official one and my gay one is more playful and deviant I guess. And in a way it makes it more fun, almost it's like the little jewel you kind of keep for every once in awhile, a little secret chocolate in a box or whatever

Although he had some reservations, Jude sometimes identified as gay simply because it was easier around gay men. He explained that he might choose "gay as a socially accepted, established identity that is easy to fit into without having to explain." However, he elaborated:

I feel like it [gay] would be an easier identity to assume because there... is at least some institutional precedence for [identifying as gay], there are many people who have gone through this before, I can rest on their shoulders.

Gil often identified as gay because he is involved with the gay community on a regular basis. He also joked about the benefits of identifying as gay when socializing with women because he gets to play the role of the gay male confidant. Gill explained his perception of the advantages: "But also by identifying as gay I get to feel women's breasts, like <in high voice> 'are my breasts ok, is this one bigger than the other one?'" In Gil and Jude's cases, their identifying as gay is more like an assumed identity that

they accept and adopt because it is easier. Jude attempted to clarify this and distinguish between sexual identity and acts of disclosure:

So I guess I am separating the idea of personal identity and disclosure, like personally whether or not I use the label...[If] I go out with a whole group of guys there is no conversation, "I'm gay, you're gay," there is an assumed kind of "we're together, we're going out for a drink," there is this kind of gay assumption, and it is a *gay* assumption, it is not a bi assumption, it is not a straight assumption, it is a *gay* assumption... So in that space, for all intents and purposes, I am gay.

Amir and Neil identified alternately as straight and gay during periods in their life when they were involved in the straight community or in the gay men's community. Amir explained that he identified as straight and gay alternatively:

[I] dated a woman for six years and I really just kind of shut down most everything and then I was relating to myself as straight for a couple of years and then in my twenties [there was a] short window of a year or so where I was just relating as a gay person and really in that community and then fell in love with another female you know, and that pulled me back into that world and then it's been back and forth.

Similarly, Neil also identified as straight and gay for different periods of time. When he was younger, in his early years of university, he identified as straight because he was a wrestler on the national team "and an open bisexual identity does not mesh with a national-calibre wrestler athlete." When he got a bit older he spent more time in gay communities and identified as gay because in his new profession, "there weren't any social consequences to my doing so anymore."

Pansexual and Queer – Inclusive and "Other"

When participants used terms such as pansexual and queer, they were often taken up to be terms more inclusive of marginalized sexual identities and of multiple aspects of

participants' own sexual selves.⁴³ Neil explained that he preferred to use pansexual because:

I don't find that gender is a primary determinate in relationships at this point so I guess one of the reasons for choosing pansexual as a label is that it is a bigger box than bisexual and the bigger the box the better in some ways.

Brandon also conceptualized his sexuality as so open that sometimes bisexuality wasn't quite inclusive enough and he used pansexual as another identity. He explained:

I sort of opened up my sexuality to include men and for a while I was with men and women, seeking relationships with both. Although through this process I think I'd opened up to the various other kinds of sexualities and sexual identities and I realized I'm more classified as a pansexual. There isn't really too many borders or obstacles for me when it comes to sexual attraction and intimacy.

Several bisexual men used queer as another identity that they felt was inclusive of multiple marginalized sexual identities and was also descriptive of them as being something other than the norm. Jude stated, "The only other option I can think of is queer, so I don't know [if] that is a synonym or substitute [for bi] but of the possibilities available <pause> I think something other than straight." Magnus elaborated on using queer as oppositional to the norm and as being inclusive:

Well, I identify as bi but queer. I'm fine with the queer label as well, I think. Queer is pretty much a catch-all for everything that isn't hetero. I like queer because it is inclusive of bi and gay and you know, whatever, in between.

⁴³ Neil, John, Brandon, Ernest, Jude, Magnus, and Parker

Parker used queer and pansexual as umbrella terms to imply being outside of the norm, being inclusive and encompassing his sexual identity in areas other than gender orientation. He explained:

I mean I also identify as queer – and pansexual. Again it's sort of about adjectives. These things fit me, but not as "everything in this box is absolutely right." For me queer is more just about being outside of the norm and it includes poly and bi and also being into some kinky things... [T]here's no restriction so, to me, queer encapsulates that, all of these kind of openness to things that are not necessarily completely normal and average. That's what appeals to me about [the term] queer even though a lot of people take it to mean gay and gay only.

John also took up a queer identity as a way to situate himself outside of the "mainstream that thinks of queers as somewhere out there." He explained that he has come to be a part of a queer community and think of himself as queer:

simply because that's inclusive and I value inclusive terms... because it includes everybody and it's not a list of categories... where people can choose one option themselves and exclude the others if they feel like it. To me, I like queer because it is inclusive...

In situating himself as something other than the norm, Ernest joked that he identified as a "weirdo": "I just tell them... I'm just a weirdo." On a more serious note, Ernest stated, "I do consider myself a queer in that aspect because I definitely do not follow a standard norm of society." Ernest also liked the term queer because it is more inclusive. He said that although "bisexual fits, I think I still find it limiting, queer I think is more freeing." Despite the fact that he considered himself to be queer, Ernest thought that "other queers" would object to him using the term because they would think that he was not queer enough because he has been married to a woman for seven years. He went on to explain that whether or not he used the term queer would depend on the context. He would not use queer in queer spaces because he felt that as a monogamously married

man “people who identify themselves as queer when people like me start taking up that space, you know, I think they would feel that we are taking something from them” but he would use queer when talking to “people who don’t consider themselves queer.”

Rejection of Queer and Pansexuality

Although some participants appreciated the openness and inclusiveness that pansexuality or queer provided, some participants objected to using these identities because they were not specific enough, were too specific, or were too political.⁴⁴ For example, Magnus was hesitant to use pansexual because it was *too* inclusive: “I don’t really like pansexual because to me that does include bestiality and other stuff because people certainly go further than I do... So that’s why I like bisexual.” Amir was hesitant to use queer because of its potential equivalency to gay and he did not want his bisexuality to be overlooked. He was also hesitant to identify as pansexual because of its lack of specificity: “Queer for me sounds like I am just attracted to men [and] pansexuality sounds like you are attracted to Disney characters.” Adding to that the fact that queer also could be considered political, Amir further rejected queer. He believed, “there is a connotation to queer for me that, in some way it, and I’m not going to say this is accurate, but it feels like it’s a rebellion of some sort and I’m rebelling I guess but I don’t have time for that.” For Amir, his sexual identity was not necessarily political.

Rodney expressed similar apolitical feelings about identifying as queer:

I guess the other one [identity] would have been queer but I have met and I know a certain number of people who identify as queer and... identifying as queer seems to be wrapped up in politics and political statements and a lifestyle of political activism that I am not. So...I’ve never called myself queer that I can recall and I don’t think I would because of that reason...

⁴⁴ Magnus, Amir, and Rodney

Resistance to (Bi)sexual Identity Labels

The bisexual men I spoke to emphasized the disjunctions between dominant normative assumptions and stereotypes of bisexuality and their own personal meanings and offered alternative meanings stemming from their personal experiences; however, I think it is important to note that some of the same men also *rejected* sexual orientation identity labels *altogether* and the imperative of having to choose one identity over another. Several participants indicated that their rejection of a label centres on a frustration with the imperative to choose one category from limited options that do not necessarily describe them accurately.⁴⁵ Gil is happiest when he does not have to choose any label at all, he doesn't "want to be one type." As he put it, "I hate labels. I really do. It's like if you are gay you are supposed to do this and if you are straight you are supposed to do that. It's like why can't we just throw all the labels away!" Paul also expressed exasperation with having to choose a sexual identity within the confines of binary sexuality. While Paul identifies more on the heterosexual side of the continuum, he says,

I have a side to me that is gay but because I am very attracted to women as well, that makes sense somehow to do that [identify as bi], but <sigh> over time I have kind of given up on all of that [and] some days I just think guys are cute and other days girls are...

Neil did not feel like any label accurately reflects his sexual self-identity and, in principle, he rejects labels but settles on a bisexual identity for now:

Because there is no better label. It's the-bigger-the-box-the-better kind of thing. I have some instinctive reactions against labels but, uh, they just don't seem to fit well, so I think bisexual or pansexual is simply the most accommodating label at this point.

⁴⁵ Gil, Paul, Neil, Jude, Parker, and Ernest

Jude spoke to the tension between not wanting to have to identify as bisexual but doing so anyways in order to make connections with members of multiple gender groups, establish relationships, and participate in a queer community. In the process of applying the label to himself he states: “I am still kind of green on the use of labels for myself.” Ernest clearly illustrated the tension between purposely claiming a bisexual identity for himself – as a political identity that opens up available identity categories beyond binary choices of gay and lesbian – and claiming no identity as a kind of resistance against naturalizing and solidifying identities:

[Y]ou know, I think, in a way, defining the term bisexual is a progressive move that we are breaking from heterosexual and homosexual. So we are opening up a new door, but it still keeps you in a box. You see, we are still boxing people into a particular stereotype...I think we should just...work on defining what a human being is.

As Good as It Gets for Now

Inaccurate but Understandable

Several men struggled over their ambivalence about applying the term bisexual to themselves.⁴⁶ The uncertainty came from feeling like there was no better word to describe them and that it was the best option available at that moment to describe themselves which other people would also understand to some degree. Paul talked candidly about his conflicting thoughts about identifying as bisexual. He explained: “I don’t even know if the word bisexual actually works for me, it’s still kind of a title that <pause> that I’m not sure that it works somehow.” This is similar to what Rust (2001) found in her research. She said, “[s]ome respondents describe themselves as bisexual not because the term reflects their own self-understandings completely or accurately, but because it is the term that is most intelligible, acceptable, or believable to others, or

⁴⁶ Paul, Jude, Rodney, Neil, Ernest, and John

because it conveys a particular aspect of their sexuality that they want to convey clearly even at the expense of misrepresenting other aspects of their sexuality” (p. 56).

Some of the participants used bisexual because it was convenient but they treated it as conditional. Jude explained that “even though the label bisexual doesn’t work” and he did not feel that it accurately or completely conveyed his self-conception he used it to explain himself to other people because “for all intents and purposes I have relationships and attractions to both men and women so there is something, whether or not I use the label bisexual.” Rodney explained that identifying as bisexual was a “kind of process of elimination” where he had previously identified as straight but that didn’t fit and he knew clearly that he “wasn’t gay so that didn’t fit...[and] bi just seemed to be just a very simple idea, an obvious sort of label to use.” In Neil’s experience, he used it as a matter of convenience, a sort of short-hand, in order to be understood without having to explain himself “because at times it’s just not worth getting into the pansexual discussion if it comes up casually with someone I’m not interested in going into details with. I think bisexual is the closest, kind of commonly understood orientation term.” Ernest also suggested that it was a term that he could use easily so that others would understand him:

I think it is a term that would allow people to understand me. In a way, it would help them understand my sexual inclinations but I don't think it would be a reflection of who I am... Because technically I follow what I think society interprets a bisexual person to be but if you ask me, “do I really think I am a bisexual,” I just think I am a human being.

Some participants attempted to resolve their ambivalence about identifying as bisexual so that others could understand them. John talked about how bisexuality was the most understandable identity – at this time:

I'm not sure that it's [bisexual is] a good description but it's as good a description as there is now. There are days where it does not make any sense at all to me to think in terms of an exclusive, prescriptive sexual orientation, it just doesn't seem like a logical way to think about human behaviour. That said, most people do think in those terms and so one has to address them, that's the world we live in.

When I asked Jude why he used bisexuality as an identity when he felt it did not work well for him, he stated that he used it “as a placeholder.”

Challenging but Honest

Some participants did *not* think that bisexuality was an easily understood sexual identity and found using bisexual as an identity challenging; however, they used it anyways because it seemed like the most authentic choice.⁴⁷ Jude used bisexual as an identity despite feeling that it is “a cumbersome, problematic category.” Magnus also very firmly identified as bisexual most of the time but emphasized the challenges in navigating binary notions of sexuality; “in terms of identifying as bi it can be more trouble than it is worth. I don't do it all the time myself.”

Despite feeling like it was not the easiest identity to negotiate, Amir says that he chooses to identify as bisexual “because it's the truth. You know. It's also a challenge. It's a great challenge to be meticulously honest about these things.” Ernest also identified as bisexual because he believed it “is the most honest out of the available choices, even with its limitations.” He elaborated:

⁴⁷ Jude, Magnus, Amir, and Ernest

Because it definitely fits, it's more honest for me to say that I am bisexual. Within the limitations that the language offers me it is more honest for me to tell you that I am bisexual than to tell you that I am heterosexual or homosexual because those would definitely not be true because that would be hiding another part of me whereas this one at least doesn't hide my sexual practices throughout my life. That is the reason I choose that one, because it is, out of the flawed options that I get, it is the one that most resembles what my sexual predisposition is.

Discussion of Bisexual Men's Meanings

On Community

Participants generally felt that there was no bisexual community and that they were not familiar with many bisexual men because bisexual men were not "visible." Some participants did say that they knew bisexual women, which made it easier for them to identify as bisexual. Their inability to connect with other bisexual men could be due to bisexuality not being readily perceptible, that is their stigma is not noticeable and they "pass" in whatever group they are in, be it a gay community or a straight community, unless they actively disclose their bisexual identity. The reason they can pass within either group is because of heteronormative assumptions of only two sexual orientation choices of gay or straight.

Although participants thought there was no substantial bisexual community and a lack of bisexual media, they talked about having other types of "community" they could access: a gay community; *ad hoc* bisexual community moments, such as conferences, newspaper advertisements, and a booth at Pride; and alternative sexual communities like queer, polyamory and kink. Not having a tangible, central community and having their connection to community being dispersed widely may be due to bisexual men's diversity. This suggests that bisexual men have not drawn strict boundaries around their

identity. They have not created rules defining who is included and who is not, but rather they have been inclusive and allowed for diversity. Also, feeling like they could access such a variety of communities may speak to the fact that although they may feel they are excluded from some communities, they also are included in many groups. However, this inclusion may not necessarily be based strictly on their bisexual identity but more on the basis of the fluidity of their identity and their other intersecting identities.

The idea of inclusivity was also featured in participants' desires and conceptions of bisexual communities. Their idea of community was expressed through a desire for spaces that were inclusive, safe, and welcoming for everyone. They wanted spaces that fostered positive feelings about their identity and where they felt comfortable enough to disclose their bisexual identities. Such spaces were conceived of as something that would be good for *all* of society and include everyone. None of the suggestions for a bisexual space excluded other identities; in fact, they specifically included other sexualities – provided they were bi-positive and open minded. According to Falk (2001), a sense of community is facilitated by the in-group's perception of a class of outsiders. Yet these bisexual men were involved in all sorts of groups and visualized a community that could potentially include all kinds of people.

On Bisexuality

Most participants saw bisexuality as complex, even if they did not state it directly. Some participants expressed difficulty in defining bisexuality, in part because they did not want to define it.⁴⁸ They wanted it to remain open-ended, non-limiting, and inclusive. None of the men conceived of their sexuality as a simple binary split between liking men and women equally. Some participants eased social interactions by adopting socially

⁴⁸ Parker, John, Gil, Paul, Jude, and Ernest

available monosexual identities while other participants rejected the pressure to identify completely.⁴⁹ And in some way, all of the participants chose to *adapt* and *redefine* socially available concepts of (bi)sexual identity.⁵⁰

Conceptualising the Continuum

One way that participants adapted and redefined bisexual identity was by conceptualising (bi)sexuality as on a “continuum” ranging “from between really exclusively heterosexual... and exclusively homosexual” (Rodney). This meaning of bisexuality is very inclusive and extended beyond “fifty-fifty” attractions; as Rodney stated, a “very large chunk of people” could land in the middle of these two points. The idea of a sexual orientation continuum was first introduced by Alfred Kinsey. Kinsey (1948) stated that “Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual ... [as] nature rarely deals with discrete categories...” As a more accurate measure of showing the “many gradations [of sexuality] that actually exist” he suggested a seven-point scale ranging between exclusively heterosexual and exclusively homosexual. Then “based on the relative amounts of heterosexual and homosexual experience or response in each history... An individual may be assigned a position on this scale, for each period in his life...” (pp. 639, 656).

The idea of a continuum reveals the fluidity of sexuality in that where a person lands on this continuum can change, as Magnus pointed out. This is in contrast to a heteronormative model of sexuality which relies on a static notion of sexuality in which

⁴⁹ Parker, Paul, Jude, Amir, Neil, and Gil adopted monosexual identities at different points while Paul, Jude, Rodney, Neil, John Gil, and Ernest resisted static categories of sexual identity.

⁵⁰ Parker, Rodney, Pat, Magnus, Gil, Ernest, and Brandon (continuum)
Neil, Paul, Parker, John, Amir, Rodney, Jude, and Magnus (gender challenges)
Neil, John, Brandon, Ernest, Jude, Magnus, and Parker (queer and pansexual)

individuals are supposed to develop an identity in a linear fashion and when they have reached the end of the process they are fully developed then and their sexual identity will be unchanging (Freud, 1962). According to Diamond (2008), “individuals whose experiences of gender and sexuality involve multiplicity and fluidity have been ill-described by such [heteronormative] models” (p. 365). This idea of sexuality being fluid challenges the apparent stability of sexuality within dichotomous discourses.

Another notable point in defining (bi)sexuality as a continuum is that gender plays a significant role in the orientations of some bisexual participants. Some participants emphasized that their attractions differed depending on the gender of a person. Gender as a socially important characteristic can be associated with other characteristics “such as personality traits, sexual appetite, and sexual availability” (Rust, 2001, p. 52) therefore gender can play a role in their attractions and in the quality of their sexual experiences. This concept of sexuality as gender based is in line with heteronormative conceptions of sexuality which consider sexual orientation to be based on the genders of persons. The concept of a continuum is a limiting one, to the extent that it assumes that there is a coherent gendered order that can be easily mapped between two poles. The continuum also “reaffirms the idea of a sexuality divided between hetero and homo” (Katz, 2005: 58).

A Continuum of Challenges to Gender

Brandon and Amir disrupted the role of gender as indicative of sexual orientation when discussing how their attractions differed in relation to men and women on a continuum. They both stated the reasons for their attractions were based on how they acted and felt in relation to the other person, not on the actual gender identity of the other person. When they spoke about their attractions to different genders they described characteristics of those genders; they spoke about how they felt in relation to that

person's gender role. Their actual sex or gender did not matter; in this way they actually displaced gender identity as central in their attractions.

For Amir and Rodney, the salience of gender changed over time and with reflection. Slow change over time in this realization may have come to them because “non-gendered object choice of bisexual desire is ill-defined and unstable in our culture” (Connell, 2005, p. 74). For them, and for Neil, Paul, Parker, and John, gender was not central in their conceptions of bisexuality and some of them even found binary gender limiting. Some participants objected to “the reification of gender implicit in this conception of bisexuality” (Rust, 2001, p. 51). These bisexual men displaced the centrality of gender in defining sexual identity by describing it as irrelevant or incidental. In describing gender as irrelevant to their sexual identity they were not dismissing the importance of gender to individuals' everyday lives and conceptions of their selves. Displacing gender as the basis of sexuality is disruptive to normative expectations that sexual orientation is based on a gendered object choice.

Beyond challenging the centrality of gender in a bisexual identity, some participants also challenged the alignment of sex and gender and they challenged the limits of only two genders. They recognized that they might be attracted to certain gender characteristics but those characteristics did not necessarily line up with a sex. It was also recognized by Magnus and Neil that the gender of a person was fluid and could change. In challenging the limits of only two genders participants specifically referred to the “bi” of bisexual as referring to a “binary” of gender but noted that that was not the way that they conceived of their own identities. They felt binaries were problematic and challenged those ideas. Some participants even questioned the stability of their own gender.

Heteronormative conceptions of sexuality dictate that sex and gender should only consist of two binary options, that they should be aligned in a particular way, and that they should not change. Due to dichotomous discourses of sex and gender, the alignment and consistency of sex, gender and sexual orientation become naturalized. Homosexuality and heterosexuality rely on male and female sexed/men and women gendered object choices, either of the same gender or an “opposite” gender. Although some of the bisexual men with whom I spoke conceptualized their bisexual identity as gender based, as can be seen in their references to being attracted to both men and women, bisexual identity can also incorporate “a rejection of the gender restrictions characterizing heterosexuality and homosexuality” (Rust , 2001, p. 51).

(Un)limited Sexual Identities

Another way that bisexual men expressed feeling that identifying as bisexual was complex was through the use of multiple sexual identities.⁵¹ Their use of multiple identities reflects their dissatisfaction with the choices that they felt were available to them. They variously could use them all, or use none. Parker, Paul, Jude, Amir, Neil, and Gil, in addition to using bisexuality, sometimes used normative gay and straight identities because it was easier in certain situations. It was easier for other people to understand which also made it easier because then they did not have to explain anything to others about bisexuality. They felt that monosexual identities were considered more official and acceptable. It seemed they would rather be mistaken for gay than be misunderstood as bisexual. Taking up a normative identity also gave them a feeling of belonging.

⁵¹ Parker, Gil, Jude, Paul, Amir, Neil, John, Brandon, Magnus, and Ernest

Participants also used non-normative identities of queer and pansexual. Neil, John, Brandon, Ernest, Jude, Magnus, and Parker did this because they saw queer and pansexual as highly inclusive, incorporating other sexual minorities including gay, bisexual, kink and poly. They sometimes saw these identities as synonymous with bisexuality and capable of representing multiple aspects of themselves. They saw queer and pansexuality as open and free of constraints. They also saw queer as an identity that situated them in opposition to whatever was “normal” i.e., straight, hetero, mainstream, monogamy. In addition to these identities being taken up because they were highly inclusive they were also taken up in opposition to the norm, as a way of excluding what is “normal”. As a result, another oppositional relationship was introduced between queer and straight; in this way, queer too can be marginalizing. Although queer can also be seen as in opposition to gay, these men did not conceptualize queer in this way. Magnus, Amir, and Rodney specifically rejected the use of queer and pansexuality because they felt the terms were not specific enough and would obfuscate their bisexual identity. They also rejected queer on the basis of it seeming to be “too political.”

These participants felt that any one sexual orientation identity could not describe them accurately and that labels were limiting of erotic possibilities.⁵² Although they wanted to reject labels completely they still recognized the necessity of using them. On the one hand, these bisexual men actively resisted labels and did not want to be boxed into a narrow conception of what bisexuality means or to have their sexuality defined permanently. On the other hand, some of these men identified as bisexual to others because they felt they had to do so in order to be understood. Some of these bisexual men identified as gay or straight to fit in, some identified as queer as a way of

⁵² Parker, Gil, Jude, Paul, Amir, Neil, John, Brandon, Rodney, Magnus, and Ernest.

distinguishing themselves from the norm. This led to, and indicated, conflicting feelings and thoughts about identifying as bisexual.

It was daunting for the bisexual men in this study to try to articulate a bisexual identity when they did not feel that it is a fixed and stable category. Some men really struggled over using the term bisexual to describe themselves but did so as a matter of convenience. The ambivalence came from feeling like it was an intelligible identity within the binary but also recognizing that it was only recognized in very simplistic terms. This was in direct contrast to the complex meanings that these bisexual men ascribed to their identity. They chose to use bisexuality for simplicity's sake but they did so with great hesitation and the possibility of being grossly misunderstood. Despite feeling that identifying as bisexual was a challenge because of the potential to be misunderstood, they did so anyway because it was the most "honest."

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Weeks (1995) argues that identity categories, particularly sexual identities, although troubling and full of paradoxes are necessary as political vehicles. Identity constructions may be disciplining and regulatory; however, they are also enabling of social collectives and political agency (Seidman, 1993, p. 134). Alternative, minority, or oppositional sexual identities are often seen as subversive since they are disruptive to boundaries and order and challenge the idea of natural, fixed identities.

The purpose of this research has been to understand what it means to bisexual men to be bisexual within a heteronormative framework and whether they resist or conform to hegemonic understandings of sexuality. How do bisexual men navigate their everyday (bi)sexual identit(ies) within a heteronormative framework? How have dominant heteronormative discourses affected bisexual men's self-identities? How has the institutionalization of these heteronormative and homonormative discourses stigmatized bisexual men and in what ways have these bisexual men resisted, or not, stigma and stereotypes based on dominant dichotomous discourses? Do they reproduce or disrupt heteronormative discourses?

What I found is that the bisexual men in this study navigated their sexual identities in complex ways. As they came up against the limitations of the discourses available to them and the nuances of their lived realities, it was challenging for the men I interviewed to label themselves within existing hegemonic heteronormative discourses of sexuality. In attempting to define their sexuality outside of a heteronormative framework, some of

them occasionally felt compelled to conform to it, while at the same time some of them resisted stigma and contributed to the disruption of dominant dichotomous discourses by redefining bisexual meanings and/or refusing to solidify a bisexual identity.

Situating the Research Question

In order to fully answer the first part of my research question, “How do bisexual men navigate their everyday (bi)sexual identit(ies) within a heteronormative framework? How have dominant heteronormative discourses affected bisexual men’s self-identity?”, I assess the similarities and differences of my findings with the sexual minority identity formation models in my literature review (Bradford, 2004; Cass 1979, 1984; Rust 1993, 1996; Troiden 1979, 1988; Weinberg et al. 1994) by systematically comparing my findings to the seven key features of sexual minority identity formation and the three sections/stages of stigma responses and identity formation. To more fully answer the second part of my research question, “How has the institutionalization of these heteronormative and homonormative discourses stigmatized bisexual men and in what ways have these bisexual men resisted, or not, stigma and stereotypes based on dominant dichotomous discourses. Do they reproduce or disrupt heteronormative discourses?” I use a queer analysis to evaluate bisexual men’s identities using discourses about stigma and heteronormativity.

The traditional homosexual identity models by Cass (1979, 1984) and Troiden (1979, 1988) that describe similar processes of minority sexual identity formation that include a series of linear, invariant, universal, and predictable steps or stages have notable limitations (Hunter, 2007); however, the seven key *themes of change* in identity formation are still relevant and can be applied to a discussion of bisexual men’s identity

formation. The bisexual identity formation models by Bradford (2004) and Weinberg et al. (1994) address the omission of bisexual identity formation in the homosexual models; however, they are also linear. Rust (1993, 1996b) questions the linearity of the sexual minority formation process and describes identity formation as located in relation to other individuals, groups, and institutions which she calls “landmarks.” These “landmarks” exist on a socially constructed sexual landscape where change and difference are the norm (Rust, 1993, 1996b). In line with Rust’s more postmodern understanding of sexuality, instead of using a linear approach, I will use the seven key features from the sexual minority identity formation models as “landmarks” along with the three sections of stigma responses and identity formation as a guide. I will also consider intersections of socioeconomic status, ability, race and ethnicity, age, and gender.

The three sections of stigma management and sexual minority identity formation are: *departure from previous sexual identity and initial confusion*; *increasing acceptance of sexual minority identity and group affiliation*; and *normalization of sexual minority identity*. The seven key features/themes are not discrete categories and sometimes their components overlap and intersect with each other. They are:

1. Sexual minority identity develops over time, and most models indicate that it involves certain steps or sequential stages of growth and change. There is an initial departure from a previous sexual identity and initial confusion.
2. Sexual minority identity formation includes increased self-acceptance of the label *homosexual* (or gay or lesbian) or *bisexual* as a self-identity and a positive attitude towards this identity.
3. Sexual minority identity formation is infused with stigma and requires the application of affective, cognitive, and behavioural strategies used in the

management of a sexual minority identity in everyday life (i.e., passing and disclosure). This occurs throughout the identity formation process.

4. During the process of homosexual or bisexual identity formation there is increasing disclosure of identity at different levels: to self, to other homosexuals or bisexuals, to family and friends, to co-workers, and to the general public and heterosexuals.
5. Throughout the sexual minority identity formation process there is increased contact with similar individuals and community groups.
6. During the process of sexual minority identity formation, homosexuals and bisexuals can experience a sense of pride and participate in social justice action around marginalized sexual identities.
7. Sexual minority identity formation includes awareness of changes in language and actively making changes in the language available for self-description.

All of the models state that identity develops over time; however, the models do not agree on how that formation occurs, in what sequence or even if in sequence, or how, or even if, it ends. Given the variations and limitations of the models it is challenging to discuss how the men fit the models and how they did not. It was not my intention to identify what “stage” these bisexual men were at in their identity formation but rather to appreciate how they understood their identity at the time of the interview and explore that understanding in relation to the key themes of sexual minority identity formation models.

Increasing and Positive Self-Identity

According to sexual minority identity formation models, a key feature in the process of sexual identity formation is that bisexuals should have a sense of increasing positive self identity and should be increasingly comfortable with their identity to a point of feeling their identity is normalized over the course of their identity formation (Bradford, 2004; Cass 1979, 1984; Rust 1993, 1996; Troiden 1979, 1988; Weinberg et al. 1994). However, most of the bisexual men whom I talked to seemed rather ambivalent about their bisexual identities, regardless of how long they had identified as bisexual. Even John who had identified as bisexual since the early 1990's did not always feel positive about bisexuality. The men used other terms; they rejected identity labels all together, and they felt that a bisexual identity was inadequate. They did not doubt their bisexual identity as was suggested by Weinberg et al. (1994) but neither did they fully accept it. According to Cass and Troiden, reluctance to identify is associated with being uncomfortable with a sexual minority identity. Yet the men I talked to were not uncomfortable with a sexual minority identity; rather, they were uncomfortable with *restricting* themselves to static labels that did not feel accurate. However, participants did suggest that it was the most "honest" identity to describe themselves, which is congruent with Rust's (1993) non-linear identity formation model and *changes in the accuracy of self-description*.

Increasing Identity Disclosure

Another key feature in the process of sexual identity formation is that individuals should have increasing identity disclosure (Cass 1979, 1984; Rust 1993, 1996; Troiden 1979, 1988). However, Bradford (2004) and Weinberg et al.'s (1994) models of bisexual identity formation did not include this key feature. I also found that disclosure was not a key feature for the bisexual men with whom I talked. Bisexual men did not always

actively disclose their identity and it often depended on context and whether or not they felt their identity would be easily understood. Sometimes these bisexual men even chose to pass as gay or straight. This could be due to the fact that bisexuals can easily pass wherever they are as they are understood as “both” heterosexual and homosexual. As bisexuals within a dichotomous framework where the choices are limited to heterosexual or homosexual, bisexuals are *always* invisible unless they actively disclose. I think it is odd that if bisexuals want to be visible within this framework it requires active disclosure of identity for bisexuals; however, disclosure is not a salient feature of identity formation for them. Homosexual identity formation models have equated full development of identity with full disclosure; however, for bisexuals, disclosure is a continuing and ongoing process. This may be true for other identities as well.

Language Change and Redefinition

I would suggest that the bisexual men in this study were very aware of changes in language which was a significant feature of the *bisexual* identity formation models (Bradford, 2004; Rust 1993, 1996; Weinberg et al. 1994). In the interviews, the bisexual men’s ambivalence about bisexual-identity acceptance was sometimes expressed as lacking adequate language. Being aware of new language that extended beyond bisexual, such as queer and pansexual, allowed these bisexual men to further explore their sexual identities; nonetheless, they also found these and other identity categories available to them to be deficient in adequate meaning. Although participants found the language around (bi)sexual identities limiting, participants were able to *redefine* bisexuality beyond simple dominant definitions so that it was more suitable to their self descriptions and reflected their experiences. Redefining what bisexuality meant to them also helped the bisexual men in this study to reject negative stereotypes and at times

resist normative values. Redefining meanings was something that was specific to Bradford (2004) and Weinberg et al.'s (1994) bisexual identity formation models as the stages *inventing identity* and *finding and applying the label*. According to Bradford, the production of a new meaning involves "rejection of those definitions offered by the culture that are based on current relationship status and partner gender" (p. 20).

Pride and Social Justice Action

Another important element in sexual minority identity formation was pride in one's identity and social justice action on behalf of that identity. Redefining meanings of bisexuality and resisting heteronormative definitions of sexuality could be considered social action towards change; however, most of the men with whom I talked did not consciously consider this to be a social justice action. Few of the participants identified with any particular social justice action about their bisexual identity, and some of them flat out said that they were apolitical; however, some participants did directly challenge gender norms by challenging gender as central to sexual identity, challenging the alignment of sex and gender, and challenging the limits of only two genders. By challenging gender norms they disrupted heteronormative constructs. These challenges to gender norms could be considered political in the sense that bisexual meanings were not just a description of their sexual feelings and behaviours but also a reflection of their gender politics (Rust 2001b). Some of the men were quite intentional and active about their gender politics (Jude, Neil, Parker, and Magnus) while others did this simply by virtue of being bisexual.

Claiming or not claiming a bisexual identity was seen as political by some men. Ernest expressly acknowledged that claiming a bisexual identity was a political identity that was meant to open up available identity categories beyond binary choices of gay

and lesbian; however, he also considered no identity as a kind of resistance against naturalizing and solidifying identities. As well, some participants did various activities advocating for bisexuality in the way of writing poetry, newspaper articles, and blogs which indicate involvement, however small, in creating and sustaining bisexual pride and community. There were aspects of pride shown by the men, such as a sense of anger about homonormativity and about being excluded from homosexual communities, but this did not seem to manifest in insular bisexual in-group affiliation as Cass' (1979, 1984) model described. In fact, their reaction to not being included in gay community was not to be exclusive but rather specifically to be *more* inclusive in their own real or envisioned community building.

Increasing Contact with Bisexual Individuals and Community

Having an increased connection to other bisexual individuals and creating a sense of community are also considered important parts of identity formation in all of the sexual identity formation models and are thought to be positive elements of forming an identity. An absence or lack of role models and community, as identified by Bradford (2004) and Weinberg et al. (1994), is considered to be an obstacle to identity formation. When bisexuals attempted to access gay men's communities where they thought they would be welcomed, they were only accepted on the basis of their attractions to men, not on the basis of their bisexual identity. As bisexuals, they were excluded; this marginalization from the homosexual community was distressing for the bisexual men in my study, as was also found by Weinberg et al. Yet, rather than the absence of public recognition resulting in uncertainty and confusion, the bisexual men with whom I spoke were able to find inclusion and a sense of belonging through various other community connections. What I saw in my findings was neither a fully developed bisexual community nor a complete lack of a community but rather a wide-open sense of

communities that bisexuals could access that exist in various forms and are inclusive beyond just people with a bisexual identity. Although participants did not have any male role models, they connected to bisexual women and also to queer communities which impacted their identity formation. The idea of inclusiveness also extended to these bisexual men's design of an imagined space for bisexual community. Although inclusive of bisexuals, these spaces were envisioned as also inclusive of individuals who were not bisexual, a space where everyone was welcome.

Identity Develops Sequentially Over Time

The final element I will discuss in identity formation models is that sexual minority identity is theorized to develop over time and involve certain steps or sequential stages of growth and change. All the models except for Rust's (1993, 1996) conceptualized identity formation in this linear way. Although all the participants identified as heterosexual before identifying as bisexual, and these bisexual men's identity formed over time, it was not necessarily sequential or linear. First, although all of the men with whom I talked started off identifying as heterosexual they did not all progress directly from heterosexual to bisexual; two of the men also identified as gay before identifying as bisexual. They changed identities more than once, which none of the models took into account. Second, some of the men conceptualized their identity as on a continuum which allowed for fluidity and change. Third, some men assumed various and multiple sexual orientation identities at once; they did not developed one, static, "true" bisexual identity to which they were committed. In fact, some men's commitment to a bisexual identity seemed dubious in the finding that they were not even sure if it fit but said that "it will do for now."

It is daunting for bisexual men to try and articulate a bisexual identity when they do not feel that it is a fixed and stable category (Steinman, 2001, p. 27). These bisexual men might have felt hesitant to identify as bisexual (or any identity for that matter) but it seemed to have more to do with not wanting to be boxed in than with being “uncertain and confused.” The usage of terminology such as “uncertain and confused” in the sexual minority identity formation models is probably a holdover from linear homosexual models wherein the implication is that an individual is supposed to, in the end, *know* what their identity is and if they do not then they must be confused. However, the bisexual men with whom I talked did not describe themselves as “uncertain and confused” but rather as not wanting to solidify their identity, refusing to be boxed into a category, and desiring to remain with an open and dynamic identity. This was intentional.

Intersections

Cultural and Socioeconomic Status

While I think it is radical that the men with whom I talked were able to reject and transform heteronormative discourses for themselves I would also like to acknowledge that the men with whom I spoke were all in relative positions of privilege and power. All the men had some level of education and four of the men had post-graduate-level education. Men with high levels of education have easy access to knowledge about sexual minority issues, labels, individuals and communities, as well as capacity to engage in social justice action. Also, men in urban centres have easier access to queer communities which would also give them access to knowledge about sexual minority issues. Had I done my research in a more remote geographic location and/or talked to men from a wider range of socioeconomic classes the men with whom I talked might have had different experiences of their (bi)sexuality. Participants were also all able-

bodied white men. None of the men disclosed a disability or chronic illness which could have further stigmatized them or interfered with making connections to other sexually marginalized individuals and communities, and none of the men discussed cultural, racial or ethnic diversity that might have affected their process of identity formation, including barriers to community contacts and conflict between sexual identities and other identities.

Age

The process of bisexual identity formation may also function differently for individuals of different ages, depending on historical location. Individuals and communities may differ in awareness and access to sexual minority labels and communities depending on the generational location of individuals. I found this to be the case for my participants. Participants represented was a wide variety of ages, ranging from twenty-five to seventy-nine, although most of the men were under fifty-four, two-thirds were under forty, and half of them were in their thirties (25, 26, 32, 33, 35, 35, 37, 37, 47, 49, 54, and 79). The men in their forties, fifties, and particularly Pat, the seventy-nine year old, spoke about their sexuality more in terms of being secretive and somewhat shameful. This could be due to coming from an era when homosexuality was regarded as less acceptable (Troiden 1988). The heterosexual assumption of marriage and reproduction peaked post World War II partly as a regressive reaction to women's strong independence and position in the economy during the war (Hawkes, 2004; Katz, 2005). It was during this time that Pat married and had children and Paul and Gil would have grown up during this time. John, the fifty-four year old, spoke about having had a connection in the past to a bisexual community that he feels is no longer available. There was not the same element of shame in John's dialogue, perhaps because he felt a sense of bisexual community that the other men did not have.

Gender

None of the sexual minority identity formation models specifically address the sexual identity formation of bisexual men. Rust (1993, 1996) focused solely on women, and the other models, although they included men and women, did not differentiate between genders (male, female, or trans). The process of bisexual identity formation may be influenced by different factors for different genders yet there is an overall lack of research done on bisexual men. Bisexual men are often thought of as gay and are therefore considered less likely than bisexual women to be excluded from queer or gay men's communities. Steinman (2001) claimed that bisexual men have not experienced the same exclusionary practices from gay men as bisexual women have experienced from lesbian women due to the "entire ocean rule" (Brekhus cited in Steinman, 2001) in which gay men need an "entire ocean" of evidence of heterosexuality in order to rule out bisexual men as objects of desire. The fact that bisexual men might also sleep with women is not seen as a significant factor in ruling out bisexual men's potential as sexual partners. Armstrong (1995) attributed this to gay men's sexism. Steinman suggested that it might even result in an increased interest due to a "fetishization of straight men by some gay men" (p. 32). This was true for some of my participants in that they expressed their experience of this "eroticization" or fetishization of bisexual men by gay men.

Despite the common belief that gay men are not apprehensive about bisexuality and are not as biphobic as lesbians (Steinman, 2001) the bisexual men with whom I spoke suggested that this was *not* the case and that gay men *are* often biphobic and were threatened by bisexual men's attractions to women. Although bisexual men can pass easily among gay men because of the "entire ocean rule," when they choose to purposely disclose their bisexual identity, they foreclose a homosexual identity and are

then frequently rejected by gay men. The gay community acts as a “civil” space (Goffman, 1963) until bisexual men fully disclose their identity and then they are often rejected. Due to their liminal position, bisexual men can thus experience alternately both rejection and inclusion in gay communities (Queen, 1995, p. 158).

Although some gay men do actually have a “significant negative view of bisexual men,” Steinman (2001) suggests that bisexual men may not have the same imperative as bisexual women to disclose their bisexual identity in gay circles (p. 38). This is because “interactions have not made these attitudes salient enough to be publicly displayed,” resulting in less explicit exclusionary actions (ibid). This difference, he claims, has motivated women to create and celebrate a bisexual identity and community, but men have lacked the same impetus to create community and politicize their identity (Steinman, 2001). This might explain why many of the bisexual men with whom I talked did not feel as though they were political. Additionally, a lack of role models and community might make it more challenging for bisexual men to identify as bisexual. Rust (2001a) did a study on bisexual men’s perceptions of community and found that feelings of isolation and lack of community are very prevalent among bisexual men. I also found that the bisexual men with whom I spoke felt that there was either no community at all, that they were challenged or not able to access one if it did exist, or that it had disappeared.

Other possible differences for bisexual men may centre on ideas of hegemonic masculinity. According to Connell (1992) there is a significant range of masculinities in regards to the institutionalized practices of men in gender relations. In Euro-Western societies, among this range of masculinities, “certain constructions of masculinity are hegemonic, while others are subordinated or marginalized” (Connell, 1992, p. 736). The

relationship between heterosexual and homosexual men is central in conceptions of hegemonic masculinity. Connell explains that many individuals believe that homosexuality is a negation of masculinity, and homosexual men must be effeminate; therefore, “antagonism toward homosexual men may be used to define masculinity” (p. 736). Homosexual practices became delegitimized and hegemonic masculinity was redefined as “explicitly and exclusively heterosexual” (p. 736) resulting in hegemonic masculinity being constructed as homophobic. Hegemonic masculinity is heteronormative; women exist as potential sexual objects for men while men are negated as sexual objects for men. Women provide heterosexual men with sexual validation, and men compete with each other for this (Connell, 1992). These two aspects of hegemonic masculinity may contribute to the challenges that bisexual men have in forming a bisexual identity.

It may be more challenging for bisexual men to form a bisexual identity due to homophobia. When associated with being gay and confronted by homophobia by straight communities, some participants found it easier to pass as straight. Also, it might not be as important for bisexual men, as it is for bisexual women, to resist stereotypes about being hypersexual, promiscuous, indiscriminate, and without sexual boundaries because labels of being sexually corrupt and promiscuous differentially affect men and women. Hegemonic masculinity reinforces the suggestion that women who are perceived as promiscuous are usually seen in a negative light and labelled as a “slut” whereas men who are perceived as promiscuous are usually seen in a positive light and labelled as a “stud.” It may also not be as important for bisexual men to resist eroticization of bisexuality for the same reasons.

The key themes of sexual minority identity formation help clarify the process faced by the bisexual men with whom I spoke despite the models' notable limitations. Although somewhat imperfect, they continue to contribute to understanding the social processes around changes in sexual identities and how bisexual men navigate their everyday (bi)sexual identit(ies) within a heteronormative framework.

Do Bisexual Men Reproduce or Disrupt Heteronormative Discourses?

My study indicates that bisexual identities can be understood through queer theory as disruptive to hegemonic heteronormative discourses. Bisexuality can also contribute to queer theory through the explicit interrogation of monosexuality and monogamy.

The undertaking of forming a sexual identity can be challenging for bisexuals who do not fit neatly into hegemonic heteronormative categories of sexuality. The fact that participants saw bisexuality as complex can be understood as part of their not feeling like they fit into the sexual binary and as part of their resistance to simple taxonomic categorizations of sex, gender and sexual orientation identities. Individuals are socially required to construct a sexual identity that accurately describes them, and at the same time also effectively communicates an understandable identity to others. To the extent that one's own sense of sexual identity differs from socially available heteronormative concepts, "one will have difficulty finding terms for self-description that are both accurate and effective in social interaction" (Rust, 2001b, p. 62).

According to Hartman (2005), "[b]isexual identity can be a source of both knowledge that one does not fit into the system and agency in not trying to fit in" (p. 75). Clearly bisexual men with whom I spoke had a difficult time naming themselves within the existing heteronormative binary discourses of sexuality. They struggled between the

constraints of the popular discourses available to them and the complexity of the lived reality of their everyday lives. When they attempted to define their sexuality outside of the binary norm, participants were sometimes obligated to conform to it in order for others to understand them and their (bi)sexuality (Namaste, 1996). They used bisexual as a conditional term because others understood it. It was also a position from which they could then start to redefine what it means to be bisexual. Attempting to redefine meanings of bisexuality beyond heteronormative binary norms, to more fully reflect their experiences, was sometimes an effective site of resistance for these bisexual men against binary models of sexuality.

Although difficult, it was important for participants to challenge heteronormative assumptions of sexuality based on a static and binary conception of gender. Regardless of whether or not participants thought of themselves as political, simply taking on a bisexual identity places an individual outside of monosexual norms and challenges normative assumptions. On many levels, these bisexual men were very aware of this daily resistance which came from simply naming themselves as bisexual. They found that they had to constantly negotiate binary discourses and their own lived realities and they found it challenging and exhausting. Yet despite feeling liminal because of not being easily classified within heteronormative discourses, participants still chose a bisexual identity. Despite being an “intelligible” identity, bisexuality is difficult to define and open to interpretation. It is often misunderstood by society in general and used as a descriptive identity, yet it meant so much more to participants: It is “adequate”; it is a “best case scenario”; it “fits”; it is the “biggest label available”; it is the “most honest”; it is the “most accurate”; or it is not necessarily accurate but “it will do – for now.” Bisexuality was a provisional identity for them.

Bisexuality as a Provisional Identity

As a provisional identity, bisexuality can be said to perform some of the critical work of queer theory. The aim of queer theory is to elude definition and to destabilize “heteronormative knowledges and institutions, and the subjectivities and socialites that are (in)formed by them and that (in)form them” (Sullivan, 2003, p. vi). Furthermore, queer theory is employed to trouble “allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire” (Jagose, 1996, p. 3). Queer theorists question the stability of binary categories of heterosexual and homosexual subjects within a heteronormative framework. They challenge the idea of the “homosexual” as a static, universal subject and instead conceive of identities as multiple, arbitrary, unstable, and exclusionary social constructions (Seidman, 1997). Queer theorists also question the idea of sexual identity or ‘sexual orientation’ as based on sex and gender.

A queer approach to identity also “involves breaking down sexual categories instead of using them as bases for identities” (Rust, 2001b, p. 67). Queer theorists caution that in the assertion of identity there is risk of reifying and fixing identities that are actually unstable. Identity politics can also be limiting in that they can be essentialist and exclusionary. However, Seidman (1993) stated that sometimes queer theory sways towards a politics of anti-identity and denies differences by trying to subsume all identities into an “undifferentiated oppositional mass” or attempting to make compulsory the demand to remain undifferentiated (p. 135). He argues that “the aim is not to abandon identity as a category of knowledge and politics but to render it permanently open and contestable as to its meaning[s] and political role[s]” (p. 138). It appears that for the men with whom I talked, bisexuality was a permanently open and contestable identity and, by default, these bisexual men could be said to have been political simply by way of their being bisexual because they resist heteronormative ideas of sexuality as

static and stable. I found that for these bisexual men, their social action was not necessarily linked to pride and it was not necessarily always conscious.

Despite the fact that the bisexual men with whom I spoke sometimes conformed to dominant heteronormative discourses, as a provisional identity, bisexuality is also a disruptive identity. Bisexual identity is a real example of how identity can be unstable in both meaning and expression. These bisexual men contributed to the destabilization of heteronormative knowledges of sexuality by way of conceptualizing bisexuality as open, non-limiting and inclusive of multiple sexes, genders, and sexualities. They did not experience bisexuality as dichotomized attractions split between liking men and women equally, nor did they see sex and gender as limited to only two binary choices. They conceived of their sexuality as fluid and on a continuum. They challenged the central importance of gender as defining sexual orientation. Not only did they displace gender as a site of attraction, they also destabilized the alignment of sex, gender, and sexual orientation. They considered their sexual identity to be fluid and multiple rather than stable and singular. They expressed difficulty in defining bisexuality, in part, because they did not want to define it. They wanted it to remain permanently open-ended and inclusive. Although the bisexual men in this study were “engaged in a struggle to develop a sexual sense of self” (Rust, 2001b) they did not solidify its meaning by agreeing on a definition and, in fact, they seem incapable of doing so. Bisexuality remained open and indefinable for them. They redefined bisexuality and, at the same time, they refused to solidify their definition of bisexuality.

There are political implications and possibilities for sexual politics in the analysis of bisexuality as an incoherent alternative to fixed identities within the sexual binary – offering alternatives to the binary, gender based definitions of sexuality, and

monosexuality. By having refused to solidify a definition of bisexuality, by not forming an exclusive community, and by resisting a stable identity, the bisexual men with whom I spoke resisted an “ethnic-style” bisexual identity. By avoiding ethnic-style identity politics, these bisexual men, in turn, avoided defining a boundary separating those who belong from those who do not. In this way, they resisted perpetuating sexual oppression and resisted becoming part of the oppressive structure of hegemonic heteronormativity.

Further Disruptions

Not only can bisexuality do some of the critical work of queer theory through disrupting conceptions of sexuality as gender based, binary, aligned and stable, it can also disrupt dominant heteronormative discourses by critiquing monosexuality and monogamy. As an ally to queer theory, bisexuality theory can critique heteronormativity by moving beyond being merely a theory of oppositional identity to heterosexuality as the norm by being inclusive and refusing to perpetuate sexual oppression. Bisexuality can work alongside, strengthen, and expand the queering of queer theory. A thorough exploration of bisexuality compliments queer theory and enables a more encompassing interrogation of aspects of heteronormativity and homonormativity; both of which contribute to the structuring of sexual orientation based on singularities (a single individual), thereby naturalizing monogamy and rendering sexuality static.

Along with gay and lesbian studies, queer theory has sometimes overlooked or subsumed bisexuality into the category of homosexuality, and at times heterosexuality, without asking or addressing the issue of what makes bisexuality different from homosexuality and heterosexuality. Monogamy/monosexuality is the unwritten, unsaid, invisible norm that ‘others’ and makes deviant bisexuality and also non-monogamy,

polyamory and other multiple forms of erotic attraction. So, although queer theory is very useful in conceptualizing sexuality as constructed, fluid and open, attention to bisexuality helps to take this critique of a heteronormative framework of sexuality further.

A critical look at bisexuality exposes the hierarchal, hegemonic ideas of heteronormativity based on monosexualities and monogamy. Looking at homonormativity and why the bisexual men with whom I spoke have been rejected from homosexual communities helped to illustrate this. Bisexual stereotypes, such as that bisexual men are hypersexual, promiscuous, indiscriminate, indecisive, fence sitters, and really gay, upheld this component of heteronormativity by attempting to shame individuals into being “proper” monogamous monosexuals. However, many of the men with whom I spoke did not conform to these ideals and practiced various forms of non-monogamy as well as kink and BDSM practices.

Limitations, Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

One of the major limitations of this study was that I was not able to report on all of my data. My original research question was: Do bisexual men display a coherent identity; if so, how, when and why do they visibly communicate their identity in reference to pre-existing dichotomous categories of sexuality? While I was able to explore how bisexuality identity was formed in relation to hegemonic discourses on sexuality and how it challenged dominant heteronormative discourses, I was not able to fully explore visual displays of bisexual identity as intended. In particular, I was not able to explore the body as a site of resistance to normative ideas of gender and sexuality as inherent, static and unambiguous. Recognizing that the body is the object of dichotomous discourses of sex, gender, and sexuality and as such is the instrument through which bisexual identity

is performatively generated, future research could focus on bisexual men's feelings of (in)visibility and how they attempt to manage that through visual displays of identity.

The sample for this study may be seen as limiting. The sample size was small and limited to two urban geographical areas. It would be interesting to look at suburban and rural populations for differences and similarities. My sample was also unintentionally homogeneous. All of the men were in middle to upper socioeconomic classes, had some kind of post-secondary education, and were white. Although I was not looking for external validity or to make generalizations, the sample was potentially biased in that individuals practicing kink/BDSM and polyamory may have been more likely to answer my call for participants due to where I advertised for participants. It is entirely possible that the reason that so many of the bisexual men with whom I talked practiced kink/BDSM and polyamory was due to the method of sampling and had nothing to do with being bisexual. It would be interesting to explore the relationships among these non-conforming, non-“normative” sexualities.

The relationship practices of bisexuals would be an interesting area of further study. There was a wide variety of relationship statuses among the men, including single, married to women, divorced from women, and partnered, polyamorous, and non-monogamous with multiple genders including men, women, and trans partners. Future study regarding bisexual relationships could be remarkable for two reasons. First, it would be interesting to explore the distinction between feelings, capacities, and behaviours and what Rust (2001b) calls the concept of “potential” wherein bisexual individuals invoke the theoretical possibility of being involved with more than one gender while they are in committed monogamous relationships. Secondly, it could be interesting because of bisexuality's awkward relationship with monogamy. While it is not

impossible for bisexuals to have monogamous relationships, in order to actualize their full erotic potential they would conceivably have to have more than one partner.

Although polyamory is not automatically linked to any particular sexual identity, bisexuality and polyamory are conceptually connected through their plurality and their disruption to heteronormative monogamy.

Hegemonic discourses of sexuality are not simply problematic when they exclude individuals who do not conform to ideas of what is “normal.” When heteronormative discourses erase bisexual experiences they have very real material consequences. An Ontario study exploring the link between bisexuality and poor mental health stated that bisexual people are more likely to experience poor mental health compared to straight or gay people (Dobinson et al. 2003). Despite this knowledge there is a scarcity of services targeted to bisexual individuals (Dobinson et al., 2003). In the area of health research, the dispelling of stereotypes and myths and the promotion of equity and social inclusion can have positive impacts on bisexuals’ mental and emotional well being. Dobinson et al. recommended more research that focuses solely on the prevalence of anxiety, depression, suicidality, and substance use among bisexual people, and which includes an analysis of marginalization and anti-bisexual discrimination. They also suggested that additional research is needed into health differences between male and female bisexuals. Additionally, the experience of bisexual trans people also requires further study.

My research can be of educational use to community groups, gay/straight alliances, positive space networks, teachers, youth and anyone else interested in learning more about how heteronormative discourses effect bisexuals and other non-heteronormative sexualities, genders and sexes. Specifically including information on bisexuality from a

bisexual perspective will help in making visible some of what binary discourses erase. It can also be of educational use to queer/trans or LGBTTTQQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirited, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual) community organizations in the creation and implementation of policies that are inclusive of bisexuality and other non-homonormative sexualities, genders and sexes.

Conclusion

Looking at how heteronormative discourses have been used to ostracize and exclude people is beneficial for everyone. Broadly speaking, this research can contribute to the promotion of social justice in relation to sexual inclusivity. Although sexual minorities are affected disproportionately by stigma and oppression, disrupting hegemonic heteronormative discourses and their effects can be advantageous to all. What the participants in this study were doing is not necessarily exclusive to bisexuals. While some individuals may select one sex, gender or sexual identity as primary and stable, many people experience sex, gender and sexual orientation as unstable, fluid and multiple. Claims that bisexuality is revolutionary (Rust 1996) through its resistance to being static, stable and unambiguous are only true because of the potential to expose the dynamic nature of sexuality in general. My hope is that bisexuals keep queering queer, expanding meanings of sexuality, and creating maximum inclusivity so that everyone benefits and belongs.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Sample of Call for Participants

Draft Script Email

This is a draft script of the email to be sent to friends and acquaintances informing them of my research and call for participants.

Dear Friends,

As many of you know I am conducting research on bisexual men and visible displays of bisexuality. I am now in the process of looking for participants to interview and I want to get the message out to as many people as possible.

If you know any bisexual men over the age of 19 that you think might be interested in participating in my research could you please pass on this message? Also, please feel free to post this information on your Facebook page (with privacy settings so that my contact info is not public), or to otherwise distribute it, to help get the word out.

I have put together the following blurb about my research for you to cut and paste in an email or on Facebook, etc:

I am a Master's student in Sociology at the University of Victoria doing research on bisexual men and visual displays of bisexual identity. I am looking to interview individuals who are self-identified bisexual men over the age of 19 who live in Metro Vancouver or Greater Victoria. The interviews will be strictly confidential and will require approximately one hour of your time in a private, convenient location to be determined between yourself and me, the researcher.

If you would like to participate or if you have further questions about my research, please contact Lisa Poole by email at lisap@uvic.ca or by phone at 250 885-5240 or you may contact my supervisor, Aaron Devor, at ahdevor@uvic.ca.

Please forward this message to anyone who might be interested.

Thanks for your support everyone!
lisa

Appendix B: Interview Schedule

Interview Questions

1. Demographics:
 - 1.1. How old are you?
 - 1.2. What is your occupation?
 - 1.3. What is your level of education?
 - 1.4. Where do you live?
 - 1.5. What is your current living arrangement?
 - 1.6. What is your relationship status?
 - 1.6.1. Married, single, poly?
 - 1.6.2. Gender/sex of partner?
 - 1.6.3. Children?

2. Meaning of bisexuality:
 - 2.1. What do you think it means to society in general to be bisexual?
 - 2.2. What does it mean to you as an individual to be bisexual?
 - 2.2.1. Do you view bisexuality differently from how you think wider society perceives bisexuality?

3. Sexual Identity:

There are various sexual identities to choose from:

 - 3.1. Why do you choose to identify as bisexual?
 - 3.2. Why don't you identify as queer or any other sexual identity such as gay or straight?
 - 3.3. Have you ever identified differently?
 - 3.3.1. When? For how long?
 - 3.3.2. What happened to make you change your mind?
 - 3.3.3. How long have you identified as bisexual?
 - 3.4. What is it about bisexuality that works best for you over all the other identities?
 - 3.4.1. If it doesn't work "best" why do you still use it?

4. Other identities:
 - 4.1. How is your bisexual identity impacted by other identities?
 - 4.1.1. If I asked you to describe yourself what else would you tell me? Are there other ways that you choose to identify?
 - 4.1.2. Such as gender, ethnicity and class as well as other sexual identities?
 - 4.2. Where would bisexuality fall on this list? How does bisexuality fit?
 - 4.2.1. How does bisexuality fit in with your other identities?
 - 4.2.2. Do you see bisexuality as a central identity?

5. What does it mean to look bisexual:
 - 5.1. Under what circumstances do you do you show your bisexual identity and how do you do this?
 - 5.1.1. Can you give me any specific examples?
 - 5.1.2. Can you show me?

- 5.1.3. What about body language? Is there any body language that you use that indicates your sexuality?
- 5.1.4. What about dress/clothing?
- 5.1.5. Body art – tattoos or piercings that indicate your sexuality?
- 5.1.6. Language or speech – what you say or the way you talk?
- 5.2. Under what circumstances do you hide your bisexual identity and how do you do this?
 - 5.2.1. Can you give me any specific examples?
 - 5.2.2. Can you show me?
 - 5.2.3. What about body language? Is there any body language that you use that would conceal your sexuality?
 - 5.2.4. What about dress/clothing?
 - 5.2.5. Body art – tattoos or piercings that may obscure your sexuality?
 - 5.2.6. Language or speech – what you say or the way you talk?
- 5.3. Under what circumstances have you changed the way that you look so that you can fit in more (i.e. with the queer community/the straight community/family/friends)?
 - 5.3.1. In what context did you change it?
 - 5.3.2. How did you change it?
6. Other's knowledge of sexual identity:
 - 6.1. Who knows about your bisexuality?
 - 6.1.1. Your family?
 - 6.1.2. Close friends?
 - 6.1.3. Other communities such as queer or cultural? Workplace?
 - 6.1.4. How many of them know?
 - 6.2. How do they know?
 - 6.2.1. Did you tell them?
 - 6.2.2. Did they guess?
 - 6.3. Why do some people know and not others?
 - 6.3.1. Where is it okay for others to know? Why?
 - 6.3.2. Where is it not okay for others to know? Why?
 - 6.3.3. How do you conduct yourself differently in these different situations?
7. How do other people read or label your sexual orientation:
 - 7.1. Do you think that other people can tell that you are bisexual from how you look?
 - 7.1.1. How can they tell (what are the indicators)?
 - 7.1.2. Can you give me an example?
 - 7.1.2.1. Can they tell by body language?
 - 7.1.2.2. Dress/clothing?
 - 7.1.2.3. Body art – tattoos or piercings?
 - 7.1.2.4. Language or speech – what you say or the way you talk?
 - 7.1.2.5. Is there anything you are doing right now that would indicate your bisexuality?
 - 7.1.3. How do you know they can tell?
 - 7.1.3.1. Do they give you some sort of signal? Wink?
 - 7.1.3.2. Do they ask you?
 - 7.1.4. When can't they tell?
 - 7.1.4.1. How do you know they can't tell?
 - 7.2. Does it matter to you? Do you want them to know?
 - 7.2.1. Why or why not?

- 7.3. Under what circumstances do you correct people if they label you incorrectly?
 - 7.3.1. Why or why not? How?
- If participant has told some groups and not others:
 - 7.4. Why did you tell some people and not other people?
 - 7.4.1. Where is it okay and where is it not okay for others to know?
 - 7.4.2. How do you conduct yourself differently in these different situations?
- If participant told others about their sexuality:
 - 7.5. Were they surprised?
 - 7.6. Did you try to give them any clues beforehand?
 - 7.7. Did anyone else give them clues?
- 8. More questions around when and how bisexuals display their identity:
 - 8.1. Do you display your identity differently when you are looking for romantic partners than when you are looking for friends?
 - 8.1.1. Why?
 - 8.2. Are you looking for a romantic partner?
 - 8.3. Are you looking for other bisexual people as friends?
 - 8.4. How do you show people you are interested in them?
 - 8.5. Is it different depending on the context?
 - 8.5.1. Why?
 - 8.6. Do you display your identity different depending on the gender of the other person(s)?
 - 8.6.1. Why?
- 9. How do you identify bisexuality in others:
 - 9.1. Can you tell if individuals are bisexual from how they look?
 - 9.1.1. Do you rely on body language?
 - 9.1.2. Dress/clothing?
 - 9.1.3. Body art – tattoos and piercings?
 - 9.1.4. Language or speech – what they say or the way they talk?
 - 9.2. Are there any other ways you can you tell if an individual is bisexual?
 - 9.2.1. What other indicators do you rely on when you are looking for romantic partners?
 - 9.2.2. Friends?
- 10. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
- 11. Is there anything that you would like to ask me?

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form



University
of Victoria

Department of Sociology
COR A333, 3800 Finnerty Rd.
PO Box 3050 STN CSC
Victoria British Columbia V8W 3P5 Canada
Tel (250) 721-7572 Fax 721-6217
E-mail soci@uvic.ca
Web <http://web.uvic.ca/soci/index.html>

Participant Consent Form

Bisexual Visibility: What do Bisexual Men Look Like?

Principal Investigator: Lisa Poole, M.A. Student
Department of Sociology,
University of Victoria
Email at: lisap@uvic.ca.

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Bisexual Visibility: What do Bisexual Men Look Like?* that is being conducted by me, Lisa Poole. As a graduate student, I am expected to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master's degree in Sociology. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Aaron Devor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Victoria. You may contact my supervisor at ahdevor@uvic.ca.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

My central research question will be: how, when and why do bisexual men visibly display their sexual identity. I want to understand if bisexual men might feel as though they do not belong or fit in to gay and/or straight communities or categories of sexuality.

Importance of the Research

This research is important because the insights gained through this research will broaden the base of knowledge about bisexual identity and begin to fill in some of the gaps in understanding of bisexual men and visual displays of identity. This research on bisexuality can also have important implications for social policy, particularly in the areas of education and health. In the area of health research the dispelling of stereotypes and myths about bisexuality and the promotion of equity and social inclusion of bisexuals can have positive impacts on bisexuals' physical, mental and emotional well being. This research may also be of use to community organizations in the creation and implementation of policies that are inclusive of bisexuality.

Participation and Involvement

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and no compensation for your participation is offered. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an adult man who self-identifies as bisexual. If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include one interview that will last approximately one hour. The interview will cover such topics as your personal background and if and how you visibly display your bisexual identity. Each interview will be scheduled at a time and location of your convenience. I will ask permission to audio record your interview;

however, this is optional and I can instead take written or computerized notes. In addition to recording the interview, I will also take a few handwritten observational notes which will pertain to the interview content and environment. I will also seek permission to take a photo of you. The photo will be used only for my personal reference and will not be published in any way. If you will consent to the interview being recorded and/or your photo being taken, please check off the appropriate box(s) at the end of this form. You will also be asked at a future date to read over your transcript(s) to verify accuracy of the interview. A summary of the findings will be available to you; I will offer you an opportunity to read and review the final draft of my study so that you may offer your input and opinions if you choose. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw, your data will be deleted from the study and your records will be destroyed.

On-going Consent

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research after signing the consent form before the first interview, I will revisit the contents of this consent form verbally and I will ensure your verbal consent to continue.

Risks

Risks to you will be slight, if any, but due to the sometimes sensitive nature of sexual orientation, there is the potential you may feel some emotional or psychological discomfort during or after the disclosure of information. To prevent or to deal with these risks I will aim to be as sensitive to you as possible and to 'check in' with you during the interview to ensure your continued comfort (i.e. ask you how you are feeling). You may take a break at any time if you need it and/or stop the interview and reschedule or cancel the interview altogether. If you become upset, I will offer to debrief with you or to call someone (e.g., a friend or family member) and stay with you until that person arrives. I have also provided a list of contact information for counseling and support services in the case of psychological discomfort.

Benefits

Your participation in this study may be beneficial to you as discussion of your experiences may be welcome. You may feel less isolated by talking about your experiences and gain a better sense of community and well being. This research has the potential to provide feedback to various community organizations on inclusive policies towards bisexuals as well as inform policies and practices around education and health issues and bisexuality. This research will also provide benefits to the state of knowledge as there is a lack of empirical evidence documenting male bisexual experiences and visible displays of bisexual identity.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants

In the case of a teacher/student relationship between myself, the researcher, and you, the participant, no research relationship will proceed or interviews will be postponed until final grades have been submitted in order to prevent this relationship from influencing your decision to participate.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

There could be some limits to your confidentiality because you were referred to this study by a person outside the research team by either word of mouth or Facebook. However, all information that you provide will be kept confidential. No information will be used which will personally identify you. You will be referred to with a pseudonym in the

transcripts of interviews and in all stages of the study thereafter. All documents associated with your interview and the observations, including photos and observational notes, will be identified only by a code number known only myself and will be used for analysis only. I will also remove any other information that might personally identify you. All data will be stored in a locked office or file cabinet and/or on a password protected USB device or computer.

Disposal of Data

With your permission, I would like to store your data for up to ten years in case of the possibility of future analysis in connection to an additional degree. If you consent to this, please check off the appropriate box at the end of this form. If you do not consent, the data will be destroyed after my thesis is defended. To dispose of the data from this study, all papers and photos will be shredded, digital audio recordings and relevant computer files will be erased.

Dissemination of Results

I hope results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: in a completed MA thesis, thesis defense, published articles, academic conferences and scholarly meetings, directly to the participants, to community organizations, and potentially media forms including newspaper, radio, TV, and internet.

You may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

I do / do not consent to my interview data being stored and possibly used for future analysis for a period of up to ten years.

I do / do not consent to have this interview audio recorded.

I do / do not consent to have my photo taken for reference purpose only.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix D: List of Available Support Services

List of Available Support Service

Bisexual Visibility: What do Bisexual Men Look Like?

Here is a list of registered psychologists and counselors available in Greater Victoria and Metro Vancouver that have been referred to me by the British Columbia Psychological Association (BCPA) through their website and telephone referral service. Feel free to contact the BCPA directly, if you wish to seek support from other individuals or services from their website at www.psychologists.bc.ca and/or contact them for a referral at (604) 730-0522 or toll free at 1-800-730-0522.

The counselors listed provide general support, psychotherapy, and counseling services to Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender individuals and specialize in the areas of men's issues, stress management, depression and anxiety related issues.

Counselors are available weekdays, evenings, and weekends through appointment. Payment and fees vary by counselor and are usually discussed during the initial interview with the counselor. You may contact the counselors to discuss these issues further.

Greater Victoria:

Name	Address	Phone
Dr. John Cook	4506 Chatterton Way Victoria	ph: 250 881-1206
Dr. Norah Trace	#200B - 3060 Cedar Hill Road Victoria	ph: 250 889-3742
Dr. Harry Craver	060 Gatewood Court Victoria	ph: 250 658-1519
Dr. Marianne Kimmitt	204-1005 Cook St. Victoria	ph: 250 882-7048

Metro Vancouver:

Name	Address	Phone
Ms. Myrna Driol	622 East 11th Ave. Vancouver	ph: 604 873-2839
Dr. Gary Saulnier	#406 - 1168 Hamilton St. Vancouver	ph: 604-761-7614
Dr. Elsie De Vita	509-402 West Pender Vancouver 223-1628 West 1st Avenue Vancouver	ph: 604-874-8528
Dr. Russell King	#400 - 601 West Broadway Vancouver 201A - 22838 Lougheed Hwy MapleRidge	ph: 604 351-5130 ph: 604-872-4426
Dr. Keith Lam	#101-1001 West Broadway Box 526 Van 2nd Floor 5050 Kingsway Burnaby	ph: 604 771-2232
Dr. Thomas Lipinski	303-2806 Kingsway Avenue Vancouver	ph: 778-772-7331

In addition to these private practices, the following counselling centres offer services for free or on a sliding scale:

UVic Counselling Services (for UVic students)

Website: <http://www.coun.uvic.ca/index.html>

Phone: (250) 721-8341

Citizen's Counseling Centre - Victoria

Website: <http://www.citizenscounselling.com/>

Phone: (250) 384-9934

Men's Trauma Centre – Victoria

Website: <http://www.menstrauma.com/>

Phone: (250) 381-MENS (6367)

E-mail: info@menstrauma.com

LGTB Support Centre – Vancouver

Website: <http://www.lgtbcentrevancouver.com/main.htm>

Phone: (604) 684-5307 daytimes or (604) 684-6869 nightly between 7:00 - 10:00 p.m.