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EXPLORING BISEXUAL-IDENTIFIED PERSONS EXPERIENCES OF BELONGING

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EXPLORING BISEXUAL-IDENTIFIED PERSONS EXPERIENCES OF BELONGING

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By
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Lexington, KY

Director: Dr. Sharon Rostosky, Professor of Counseling Psychology

Lexington, KY

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

EXPLORING BISEXUAL-IDENTIFIED PERSONS EXPERIENCES OF BELONGING

Belonging is a basic and fundamental human need (Baumeister, & Leary, 1995) that is associated with psychosocial health (Cohen, 2004). Unfortunately, community belonging is a challenge for those with a bisexual identity. Binegativity, minority stress, and the invisibility of bisexual-identities may interfere with attempts to develop a sense of community belonging (Bradford, 2004). Little systematic research has examined bisexual-identified people's perceptions and experiences of belonging to a community. This project addressed the question, "What are bisexual individuals' experiences of community belonging/social exclusion?" Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 12 bisexual-identified persons. Interview transcripts were analyzed using a constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006). Findings indicated that bisexual-identified persons encountered stigma and at times concealed their sexuality in order to create community belonging. However, risking authenticity, rather than concealing identity, seemed to help participants deal with stigma and develop more meaningful community belonging. Bisexual-identified persons who risk disclosing their identity and develop a sense of authenticity may increase their opportunities for community belonging. These findings are discussed in relation to their implications for counseling bisexual-identified persons and educating the communities in which they live.

David Pascale-Hague, M.S.

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Student's Signature

April 17, 2015

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Date

EXPLORING BISEXUAL-IDENTIFIED PERSONS EXPERIENCES OF BELONGING

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Chapter One: Introduction

Developing a bisexual identity and community belonging with other people is a complicated process in a society that privileges a binary gender and sexual identity hierarchy. Bisexual-identified persons experience the effects of stigma and stereotypes within society (Jorm, Korten, Rodgers, Jacomb, & Christenson, 2002). Stigma is described as a negative attitude or belief about an identity that devalues the importance of the identity or of a person who maintains a stigmatized identity (Goffman, 1963). Stigma contributes to minority stress, which is a common experience for sexual minority people (Meyer, 2003). Some negative stereotypes are also unique to bisexual-identified persons who may face marginalization in lesbian, gay, and heterosexual communities (Sarno & Wright, 2013). Prejudice impacts bisexual-identified persons both directly and indirectly, comes from a variety of sources, and has a multitude of negative psychosocial consequences (Herek, 2002; Robin et al., 2002) including symptoms of depression, anxiety, and internalized binegativity.

According to the belongingness hypothesis (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), although positive relationships with family and friends make up important factors in individual adjustment, those who do not maintain a sense of community belonging with similar others will likely experience increased stress and psychological distress. The psychological importance of community belonging is well documented in the psychological literature (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Given the importance of belonging and the limited research on the difficulties faced by bisexual-identified persons when attempting to develop community belonging, I designed a

qualitative investigation of the experiences of community belonging among bisexual-identified persons.

In this chapter, I begin with a review of models describing the development of a bisexual identity. I then review literature on the presence of binegativity within lesbian, gay, and heterosexual-identified communities as well as discuss the importance of intersecting identities. I cite relevant studies explaining the negative impact of binegativity upon individuals who maintain a bisexual identity and how these factors may influence their ability to develop a sense of belonging. I conclude with an overview of the literature on concealable stigma and how it may affect the lives of bisexual-identified persons.

Models of Bisexual Identity Development

Bisexual identity is a unique and discrete expression of emotional, romantic, and sexual attractions to same and different sex romantic partners which requires specific research and focus to be properly understood in social context (Weasel, 1996). Cass (1979) writes "the identities 'bisexual', 'heterosexual', and 'homosexual' are perceived as separate entities, having separate developmental processes, the components of which may be similar or different" (p. 255). Based upon the assumption that bisexual identity is a valid sexual identity, a review of developmental models was undertaken to provide a background for the present study. There are several sexual identity development models that include bisexuality as a stage within the development of lesbian and gay identities (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). For the purpose of this project, only sexual identity development models that focus specifically and exclusively on the experiences of individuals with a bisexual identity are reviewed.

Two published models (see Table 1) based upon qualitative research describe the development of a bisexual identity and the experiences of individuals who are attracted to same and different sex partners (Bradford, 2004; Weinberg, Williams & Pryor, 1994). Based upon qualitative interviews over a six-year period with 49 men and 44 women who self-identified as bisexual, Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor (1994) constructed the first published bisexual identity developmental model. Interviews first took place in 1983, again in 1984 and 1985, and a final follow-up interview in 1988.

The second model of bisexual identity development is based upon two overarching research questions (Bradford, 2004). How do bisexual-identified individuals experience cultural attitudes toward bisexuality? How do cultural attitudes and sense of community impact a bisexual person's sense of identity? In order to investigate these research questions, 20 participants, 10 men and 10 women who ranged in age from 22 to 54, were interviewed. Bradford's (2004) research used a qualitative design featuring semi-structured interviews and naturalistic inquiry.

According to these models, the development of a bisexual identity includes questioning heterosexual-identity, discovering bisexual identity, claiming a bisexual identity, and learning to manage binegativity, or the societally negative attitudes pertaining to a bisexual identity. For the purpose of this review, the findings and conclusions of the two models will be synthesized, critiqued, and presented as a summary of findings that informed the current study.

Questioning heterosexuality. When individuals first begin to experience sexual, emotional, and romantic attractions to both same and different sex individuals, they must deal with the social assumption of monosexuality, the belief that a person will be either

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lesbian/gay or heterosexual-identified (Bradford, 2004; Brown, 2002; Weinberg et al., 1994). This stage of bisexual identity development is a time when individuals who experience attractions to both same and different sex individuals must question their sexual identity as well as the applicability of social constructions of gender and sex (Bradford, 2004). Questioning monosexuality may promote discomfort and unease for the individual beginning to explore a bisexual identity.

Weinberg and colleagues (1994) as well as Bradford (2004) found that bisexual-identified persons typically identify as heterosexuals, although some individuals first identify as lesbian or gay. An individual who experiences attractions to both same and different sex partners may not at first consider the idea of claiming a bisexual identity. This may in part be due to the societal assumption of monosexuality, a lack of visible bisexual role models, and the stigma that exists regarding any sexuality other than heterosexual-identity (Weinberg et al., 1994). Initial confusion and questioning of a heterosexual-identity may be caused by experiencing emotional, romantic, or sexual attractions to a member of the same sex, or through a sexual encounter with a member of the same sex. Questioning the heterosexual identity is typically unsettling and anxiety-provoking, as bisexuals, like everyone, have been socialized into a view that sexuality exists as a binary construct (Weinberg et al., 1994).

Discovering bisexual identity. After the initial confusion and questioning of their heterosexual-identity, participants reported they experienced sexual and romantic attractions to same and different sex individuals for several years before beginning to consider a bisexual identity label for themselves (Bradford, 2004; Weinberg et al., 1994). Weinberg (1994) described the second stage of bisexual identity development as *finding*

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and applying the bisexual label. Bradford (2004) writes that after questioning

monosexual assumptions and identity, individuals will need to *invent an identity* due to

the assumptions of society that a person can only be lesbian, gay, or heterosexual-

identified and a lack of other bisexual-identified persons to support community

belonging.

Both Weinberg (1994) and Bradford (2004) note that it often takes a considerable

amount of time for individuals to claim a bisexual identity because of the difficulty

accepting that attractions to same-sex and different-sex partners can exist at the same

time. Bradford (2004) noted that many of the individuals she interviewed described their

initial uncertainty when experiencing attractions to both same and different sex

individuals. Individuals experiencing dual attractions to same and different sex partners

must consider that the assumptions they have been taught about monosexuality are false

and that sexuality can be a more dynamic process (Bradford, 2004).

Many individuals in this stage did not know about bisexual identity when they

first experienced emotional, romantic, and sexual attractions to same and different sex

partners. Some individuals needed to discover the term bisexual and come to view it as a

potential sexual identity (Weinberg et al., 1994). Once an individual accepted bisexuality

as a valid identity, he or she was able to use the bisexual label to understand his or her

desires (Bradford, 2004; Weinberg et al., 1994).

Rather than discovering a bisexual label, Bradford (2004) explains this process as

inventing a personal bisexual identity. *Inventing* a personal label requires individuals to

consider their personal attractions, current and past relationships, and how they believe

their sexuality would be best expressed (Bradford, 2004). Unlike Weinberg et al. (1994),

Bradford (2004) found that personal history and relationship status alter an individual's use of a bisexual identity label. *Inventing* a personal bisexual label requires individuals to consider their social relationships and how others in their communities view bisexual identities (Bradford, 2004).

Claiming a bisexual identity. Once an individual has discovered that bisexual identity is a valid identity and then claims that identity, he or she will typically attempt to become involved with the bisexual, lesbian, and gay communities (Weinberg et al., 1994). This point in bisexual identity development, described by Weinberg (1994) as *settling into the bisexual identity,* is realized when bisexual individuals are able to deepen their connections to supportive community groups and find others who maintain similar sexual identities. Relationship structure, that is being in a relationship with a same or different sex partner, may alter an individual's understanding of his or her bisexual identity and his or her attempts to connect with lesbian, gay, and bisexual community support (Bradford, 2004).

The experiences of men and women who maintain a bisexual identity may also differ due to societal gender expectations. Brown (2002) modified the Weinberg (1994) model in an effort to account for sex differences in the ways men and women may experience bisexual identity. Brown's work is a conceptual model, based upon a review of research demonstrating that men and women are subjected to differing social pressures and potential stigmas that likely shape bisexual identity development.

Brown maintains the first three stages of the Weinberg et al. (1994) model and only alters the fourth stage to more completely explain how male and female-identified bisexual persons face binegativity. Brown (2002) concludes that when men claiming a

bisexual-identity attempt to connect with supportive communities, they may fear being judged as less masculine than heterosexual-identified men. The fear of emasculation is a result of social pressures placed upon men in society to appear strong and dominant (Brown, 2002). Men who are not heterosexual-identified are regarded as deviant, because they do not conform to gender hegemony or heteronormativity. Bisexual men may be marginalized by gay men who do not accept bisexual identity as "real" or valid. (Brown, 2002). Women who experience bisexual attractions may experience anxiety when they are involved with lesbian and feminist groups (Brown, 2002). Brown argues that women who develop a bisexual identity will have difficulty rationalizing feminist beliefs while also "sleeping with the enemy" (i.e., men) (Brown, 2002). These factors may be reasons that those who claim a bisexual identity decide to avoid connections with lesbian and gay communities.

The models are based on numerous reports that bisexual-identified individuals experience difficulty establishing and maintaining supportive community. Weinberg et al. (1994), Brown (2002), and Bradford (2004) conclude that individuals who claim a bisexual identity face social pressures from both heterosexual-identified individuals as well as lesbians and gay men due to the societal assumptions of monosexuality present within society. Each model notes that discrimination in both communities may limit a person who identifies as bisexual from making connections to supportive community and establishment of a sense of belonging. Bisexuals reported they struggled to understand the meaning of their bisexual label when they were in monogamous relationships (Bradford, 2004). Bisexual-identified persons also reported that when they disclosed their bisexual identity to others, they frequently had to deal with individuals' beliefs that

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a person couldn't truly be attracted to same *and* different sex partners (Weinberg et al., 1994). As a result of these challenges, those who maintain a bisexual identity often experience *continued uncertainty* about their identity. Weinberg and colleagues' (1994) model then suggests that bisexual-identified persons do not ever accept their sexual identity, but exist in a continued state of doubt about maintaining a bisexual-identification. In this sense, the authors contend, bisexual-identified persons will always be torn between identifying as heterosexual, lesbian, or gay due to social pressure to maintain a binary sexual orientation (Knous, 2005).

Brown (2002) also acknowledges social challenges faced by bisexual-identified persons, but makes several alterations to the work of Weinberg et al. (1994). While Weinberg concluded bisexuals likely remain in a stage of *continued uncertainty,* Brown (2002) describes the final stage as bisexual *identity maintenance.* In this stage bisexual-identified persons regardless of the sex of their partners work to maintain their positive sexual identity in the face of social pressures, stigma, and invisibility. Brown articulates the continued challenge of maintaining a bisexual identity (rather than being uncertain of one's identity). This challenge for bisexual individuals is the result of pervasive negative stereotypes about sex, gender, and sexual identity (Brown, 2002).

Bradford (2004) uses different language to describe how negative stereotypes may impact those with a bisexual identity, but highlights similar findings. Bradford notes that those with a bisexual identity will typically work to educate others and *transform adversity*. This outwardly focused stage suggests that some individuals who claim a bisexual identity will focus on social and interpersonal advocacy to help others who are questioning their dual emotional, romantic, and sexual attractions. A majority of

Bradford's participants described times they attempted to educate lesbians, gay men, and heterosexual-identified persons about bisexual identity.

Despite different language and category labels, there seems to be three important findings across these models of bisexual identity development. First, bisexual people reported that they had personally experienced binegativity from gay, lesbian, and heterosexual individuals and communities and know of other bisexual people who had faced similar discrimination (Bennet, 1992; Bradford, 2004; Burrill, 2002). Second, negative stereotypes (e.g., being promiscuous, hypersexualized, unable to be monogamous) for bisexual-identified persons are expressed during interactions with multiple communities, and are all too common experiences when developing and maintaining a bisexual identity. Third, binegativity may limit an individual's ability to develop community belonging, which is a fundamental human need.

Binegativity and Minority Stress

Binegativity, also referred to as biphobia, describes the negative attitudes, beliefs, and actions that devalue the experiences of bisexual-identified individuals (Bennet, 1992; Herek, 1991). Binegativity reflects the problematic social belief that bisexuality is not a valid or mature sexual identity. Binegativity occurs at an individual as well as a group level. Bisexual-identified persons may experience these prejudicial attitudes when interacting with individual lesbians, gay men, or heterosexual-identified persons, as well as within gay, lesbian, and heterosexual-identified social groups (Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010; Weiss, 2004). Binegativity may be expressed verbally or non-verbally, and may involve direct or vicarious experiences (Bennett, 1992; Brewster & Moradi, 2010). Examples of binegativity expressed verbally include asking an individual how he or she

can have a bisexual identity when in a monogamous relationship, or assuming that a bisexual female in a relationship with a female partner will eventually settle down with a male partner.

Binegativity is a form of psychological strain that is related to minority stress and internalized heterosexism (Meyer, 2003; Symanski, Kashubeck-West, & Meyer, 2008). Minority stress is the chronic stress of having a stigmatized identity and can lead to problems developing a positive sense of self and negative psychological symptoms such as depression and anxiety (see Meyer, 2003 for a review). Internalized heterosexism has been demonstrated to be a predictor of lesbian, gay and bisexual-identified persons' physical and psychological well-being (Symanski et al., 2008). Evidence has suggested that higher levels of internalized heterosexism are linked to higher levels of mental health concerns, such as depression, anxiety, lower self-esteem, lower levels of social support, and also physical health concerns (D'Augelli, Grossman, Hershberger, & O'Connell, 2001). While all sexual minority persons face minority stress and internalized heterosexism (Meyer, 2003; Symanski et al., 2008), bisexual-identified persons may face added minority stress from other sexual minority individuals who identify as lesbian or gay (Brewster & Moradi, 2010). Binegativity may amplify minority stress and related psychological distress . (Balsam & Mohr, 2007). Previous research has also examined the differing experiences of bisexual-identified women (N=300) in same-sex and opposite-sex relationships (Dyar, Feinstein, & London, 2014). Bisexual-identified women in same-sex relationships reported higher levels of uncertainty about their sexuality and more experiences of assumed lesbian identity. Bisexual-identified women in same-sex relationships reported being less "out" about their bisexual-identity than

bisexual-identified women with opposite-sex partners. Bisexual-identified women in

opposite-sex relationships also reported experiencing more binegativity from lesbians and

gay men in the form of exclusion and marginalization (Dyar et al., 2014). Finally,

bisexual-women who were in same-sex relationships reported lower depression than

bisexual-identified women who were in different -sex relationship and those that were

single. These findings suggest that the experiences of bisexual-identified persons vary

depending upon relationship status. Higher sexual identity uncertainty of bisexual

women in same-sex relationships was mediated by higher frequency of assumed lesbian

identity, while the higher depression of bisexual women in different-sex relationships was

mediated by higher frequency of experiences of binegative exclusion and rejection by

lesbians and gay men (Dyar et al., 2014).

In addition to minority stress and binegativity, bisexual-identified persons have

been found to experience more negative health outcomes when compared to

heterosexuals, lesbians, and gay men. A study conducted from 2001 until 2008 in the

Northeastern United States (N=67,359) determined that bisexual persons were more

likely to experience current sadness, suicidal thinking within the last year, and more

cardiovascular risks than their heterosexual counterparts (Conron, Mimiaga, & Landers,

2010). Furthermore bisexual-identified women were more likely to have experienced

interpersonal violence in their lifetimes that heterosexual and lesbian women (Conron,

Mimiaga, & Landers, 2010). Furthermore, Bostwick and colleagues (2010) determined

in an analysis of longitudinal health data (N=34,653) that bisexual-identified participants

were more likely to report mood and anxiety symptoms over their lifetimes and within

the last year when compared to other sexual minority persons within the sample. These

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findings were consistent in both male and female participants (Bostwick, Boyd, Hughes, & McCabe, 2010).

Bisexual-identified college females have also been found to report worse mental health symptoms when compared to lesbian and heterosexual females (Kerr, Santurri, & Peters, 2013). This study, conducted over three semesters (*N*=6,689), found that bisexual-identified women reported more anxiety, anger, depressive symptoms, self-injury, and suicidal ideation and attempts when compared to lesbians and heterosexual women.

Binegativity among heterosexual-identified persons. Research indicates that heterosexual-identified persons hold negative stereotypes and beliefs about bisexual-identified people including that they are hypersexual, immature, unable to commit to monogamous relationships, emotionally unstable, and likely to spread STIs and HIV (Farajaje'-Jones, 1995; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Rust, 2000; Weiss, 2004). Research has also demonstrated that heterosexuals may also maintain more negative attitudes about bisexual-identified persons than they do about lesbians and gay men (Herek, 2000). One study (*N*=1,335) asked heterosexual-identified individuals to rate their attitudes regarding stigmatized groups and found that a person who identifies as bisexual was viewed more negatively than all other social categories except intravenous drug users (Herek, 2002). These findings are consistent with the experiences reported in the developmental models by those who claim a bisexual identity. Furthermore, studies have indicated that heterosexual-identified persons' attitudes about bisexuality may differ if the bisexual-identified person is male or female. Generally speaking, heterosexual-identified males view female bisexual identity as acceptable as it is often eroticized, while males who

claim a bisexual identity are deemed to actually be gay and in denial about their sexuality (Yost & Thomas, 2012).

Binegativity among lesbians and gay men. Lesbians and gay men also endorse negative attitudes about bisexual identity (Callis, 2013). Bisexual-identified participants in the developmental models previously described reported that lesbians believed bisexual-identified women were "sleeping with the enemy," and that gay men often viewed bisexual-identified male individuals as repressed gay men (Weinberg et al., 1994). These findings appear to be supported by more current research on negative attitudes toward bisexuals among lesbian and gay groups.

For example, one published study drawing upon 17 months of qualitative fieldwork found that lesbian and gay individuals believed bisexual identity was an "illegitimate identity, for individuals "on their way to gay," or for those who just couldn't decide [regarding their sexuality]" (Callis, 2013, p. 88). These findings demonstrate that binegativity is not just imagined by bisexual-identified persons, but truly present in the attitudes of lesbians, gay men, and heterosexual-identified persons.

Previous studies have demonstrated a "chilly climate" for bisexual-identified women in lesbian communities (Rust, 1995). In survey research with lesbian women (*N*=390), 79% reported they believed a bisexual-identity was a phase, 65% reported bisexual-identified women want to pass as heterosexual to maintain privilege, and 74% reported a strong preference to avoid dating a bisexual-identified women (Rust, 1995). In a qualitative study examining bisexual-identified women's (*N*=12*)* experiences interacting with lesbians, participants reported they felt invisible and discriminated against within the lesbian community, and experienced tensions when interacting with

lesbians (Hartman, 2005). Each of these studies found that bisexual individuals experienced binegativity in lesbian and gay communities that led to feelings of marginalization and isolation from other sexual minority persons.

One variable that predicted lower binegativity among lesbians and gay men was age. When a convenience sample of lesbians and gay men (N=1,382) was surveyed regarding their feelings about bisexual-identified persons, younger participants reported less binegativity than older participants (Cox, Bimbi, & Parsons, 2013). Results of this survey research also indicated that negative attitudes were further moderated by number of contacts with bisexual-identified persons. As involvement with bisexual-identified persons increased, binegativity also increased (Cox et al., 2013).

Individuals' willingness to engage in romantic relationships with bisexual-identified persons also differs by sex and sexual identity. A recent study of heterosexual, lesbians, and gay men (N=801) found women were less willing than men to engage in relationships and sexual activity with bisexual-identified persons (Feinstein, Dyar, Bhatia, Latack, & Davila, 2014). Additionally heterosexual, lesbian, and gay participants reported they would be more willing to have short-term sexual relationships with bisexual identified individuals then they would be to engage in long-term romantic relationships (Feinstein et al., 2014).

Previously published work pertaining to lesbian and gay individuals perceptions of bisexual persons seems to overlook investigating lesbian and gay persons reactions to bisexual persons as a product of minority stress. Given the social landscape of marginalization and discrimination facing lesbians and gay men it may be possible that

reactions to bisexual-identified persons are a result of internalized minority stress (Meyer, 2003) and not based upon true animosity toward bisexual-identified persons.

Intersecting Identities

While an individual may claim a bisexual-identity, it is important to take into account that a variety of social identities may have an impact upon perceptions of community belonging and binegativity. It may be the case that individuals who maintain multiple marginalized or privileged identities may experience community belonging differently.   Identification with different communities has been found to contribute to psychological resources and community belonging (Constantine, 2002). Identities intersect and interact with one another on different levels for different people and privilege in one area may counteract marginalization in other areas (Frable, 1997). Intersectionality of identities has been found to be an important aspect of understanding individuals' lived experiences (Harley, Jolivette, McCormick, & Tice, 2002). Given previous findings regarding the importance of intersectionality, it may be possible that overlapping and intersecting identities may influence aspects of the lives of bisexual identified persons. Given differing social expectations placed on male and female persons (Brown, 2002) it may be particularly important to consider the differences in the experiences of bisexual-identified persons related to sex and gender.

Concealable Stigma

An additional factor that may perpetuate binegativity is the concealable nature of bisexual identity (Klein, 1979). A person's bisexual identity remains concealed unless that individual chooses to reveal the identity to others. The concealment of bisexuality may contribute to varying levels of social stigma. Social stigma devalues the importance

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of an individual or group (Goffman, 1963; Jones et al., 1984). Concealed stigma pertains

to a social or group identity that is invisible to the naked eye, and is discriminated against

within society (Goffman, 1963). The level of social stigma a person with a concealable

stigma will experience will depend upon his or her disclosure (Quinn, 2006).

The salience of a social stigma is altered by the visibility or possible concealment

of the identity (Jones et al., 1994). If an identity is invisible or unknown to others and is

also perceived to be disruptive, dangerous, and enduring, the likelihood increases that the

identity will take on a stigmatized status within a cultural group (Quinn, 2006). The fact

that bisexual identities are concealed unless the person reveals the identity may

perpetuate negative stereotypes, as there are few opportunities to dispel the social stigma.

Concealed stigma, such as the case with bisexual identity, makes it difficult for people

who share that identity to find each other and form socially supportive relationships

(Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). Rather than having visible bisexual-identified persons

available to dispel negative beliefs and assumptions, binegativity is maintained and

perpetuated. Many times, a person with a bisexual identity is assumed to be lesbian, gay,

or heterosexual-identified based upon their current relationship status. When a bisexual-

identified person's relationship partner's sex is different than that of the previous partner,

negative stereotypes are triggered and the bisexual-identified individual may be

negatively judged by others. When a bisexual person is in a relationship with a different-

sex partner, he or she is perceived to be heterosexual-identified and this may promote

discord or misunderstanding among lesbians and gay men who see bisexual-identified

persons exercising heterosexual privilege (Weinberg at al., 1994).

Relationship status, a factor that can conceal one's bisexual-identification, has been demonstrated to impact the experiences of bisexual-identified women (Dyar, Feinstein, & London, 2014). In a study examining potential differences in sexual identity, minority stress, and depressive symptoms of bisexual women ($N=106$), results suggested that bisexual-identified women in same-sex relationships reported more uncertainty about their sexual identity than bisexual-identified women in different-sex relationships. Even when women explicitly identified as bisexual, women in same-sex relationships were more often assumed to be lesbian compared to women in different-sex relationships (Dyar et al., 2014). The assumption that women in same-sex relationships were lesbian instead of bisexual is an example of binegativity. Experiences of assumed lesbian identity were found to fully mediate sexual identity uncertainty, demonstrating that sexual identity uncertainty in bisexual-identified women is a product of binegativity and minority stress (Dyar et al., 2014). Bisexual women in different-sex relationships reported fewer experiences of binegativity and more support from their male partners. This may be due in part to the negative stereotype that bisexual-identified women are hyper-sexual. Bisexual identity may be more acceptable to male partners in relationships with bisexual-identified women (Dyar et al., 2014).

Another stressor that may be related to the concealable nature of bisexuality is the potential for bisexuals to be exposed to negative messages and stereotyping not only in general social interactions, but also in interactions with lesbians and gay men (Ross et al., 2011). When a bisexual individual's identity is concealed based upon relationship status, or as a conscious personal decision, it is more likely that lesbians and gay men might speak negatively about bisexuals, as they are unaware someone with whom they interact

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has a bisexual identity. Thus, bisexual-identified people risk encountering binegativity and the resulting distress when among other sexual minority individuals. These negative stereotypes promote misunderstanding in the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) community (Ross et al., 2011).

Binegativity may make the task of developing community belonging more challenging for bisexual-identified persons than it is for other individuals and groups. Bisexual-identified persons face binegativity from heterosexual-identified persons, as well as from lesbians and gay men. Bisexual-identified persons also have a concealable stigmatized identity that makes forming a strong sense of community belonging more challenging.

This chapter provided an overview of literature pertaining to the development of bisexual identity and the stigma associated with bisexual-identity in heterosexual, lesbian, and gay communities. Literature pertaining to binegativity, minority stress, and internalized heterosexism was reviewed. The impact of concealable stigma and relationship status was reviewed as it pertains to bisexual-identified persons and community belonging.

Table 1

Bisexual Identity Development Models

Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1994	Bradford, 2004
Initial Confusion	Questioning the Reality of Heterosexuality
Finding and Applying the Bisexual Label	Inventing Identity
Settling into the Bisexual Identity	Maintaining Identity
Continued Uncertainty	Transforming Adversity

Chapter Two: Theory and Research on Belonging

Theoretical Underpinnings

Belonging is a key factor in positive human development (Maslow, 1943). The psychological concept of belonging refers to the sense that one is valued, needed, and significant within a system or environment (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992). Belonging is the sense a person has that he or she is a meaningful part of a group (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996; Hagerty, & Patusky, 1995). Belonging impacts cognitions, emotions, and interpersonal relationships. The need to belong is an evolutionary, interpersonal, and social phenomenon (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Gere & MacDonald, 2010). When individuals have a sense of belonging in their family group, romantic relationships, and community, they are able to utilize psychological resources, coping strategies and social support that would otherwise be unavailable. Stable and meaningful relationships fulfill the basic human need to belong and connect with other humans. On the other hand, when a sense of belonging is absent, or an individual feels rejected, a number of emotional and psychological problems arise. Empirical research has demonstrated, as Maslow (1943, 1970) hypothesized, that when the sense of belonging is absent, depression and anxiety, as well as other maladjustments, can occur (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Based upon the theoretical importance of belonging for cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal health, it is reasonable to assume that community belonging is important to the psychological health and well-being of bisexual-identified men and women.

The belongingness hypothesis. Baumeister and Leary (1995) appear to be the first to systematically review published psychological literature in an effort to develop an

empirically supported theory of belongingness. This human need to belong is described in published literature as the belongingness hypothesis. According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), the need to belong is a fundamental human drive. The need for belonging is (a) observed in a wide variety of situations and relationships, (b) has affective consequences when denied, (c) directs cognitive processes, (d) yields ill effects when denied, (e) is universally observed across individuals and cultural groups, and (f) affects a wide variety of behaviors (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The authors reason that group cohesion allowed our ancestors to collectively hunt larger game for food, and to provide care and shelter for children. Baumeister and Leary (1995) believed that belongingness in a contemporary society serves as a psychological buffer against anxiety, stress, and aggression.

While Baumeister and Leary (1995) contend that the need to form and maintain at least a minimum amount of supportive and temporally stable relationships is a universal human drive, the authors allow for cultural and individual differences. The need to belong, according to Baumeister & Leary (1995) should be observed "in all human cultures, although naturally one would expect there to be individual differences in strength and intensity" (p. 499). Variations may also exist in the means through which individuals form and maintain their sense of belonging. Baumeister and Leary (1995) argued that belonging is a universal human need, but the presentation of belongingness and the satiation of the belongingness need would look different within varying social settings and between differing individuals.

Exclusion, and even the anticipation of exclusion, can trigger psychological changes in numerous areas of human life. The threat of exclusion can be recognized in

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cognitions, emotions, and interpersonal behaviors (Gere & MacDonald, 2010; Walton, Cohen, Cwir, & Spencer, 2011). The belongingness hypothesis argues that threats to belonging lead to increased cognitive effort to build interpersonal relationships. Furthermore this focus on relationship building is cognitively and even physically taxing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

These studies of social exclusion have predominantly drawn upon convenience samples of college students in carefully controlled laboratory settings (DeWall et al., 2011). Across studies, the major findings from laboratory experiments suggest that exclusion, and even the threat of exclusion, negatively affects cognitions, emotions, and interpersonal relationships. Numerous studies have demonstrated that when individuals feel excluded, they are less likely to engage in prosocial behaviors, less likely to experience positive emotions, less likely to work together with others who are in need of assistance, and less likely to persevere in the face of frustration (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005; Bowlby, 1977; Bucker, DeWall, Schmidt, & Maner, 2010; DeWall, Deckman, Pond, & Bonser, 2010; Pavey, Greitemeyer, & Sparks, 2011).

The belongingness hypothesis draws upon studies that experimentally manipulated belongingness and exclusion in laboratory settings. Baumeister and Leary's review of empirical literature advanced psychology's understanding of the human need to belong. That is, belongingness is a fundamental human need, which, when denied can compromise emotional and psychological functioning.

Self-determination theory. In addition to Baumeister's belongingness hypothesis, self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) is a theory of human motivation concerned with the development and functioning of personality within social

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contexts. Self-determination theory (SDT) is a second theory that provides a framework to conceptualize why belonging may have an important influence on a bisexual-identified person's sense of well-being. Self-determination theory maintains that when human beings believe their behaviors are volitional and self-determined, they will be able to engage in personal reflection and develop a sense of self that is more fulfilling. The theory revolves around the premise that individuals need to see themselves as *competent* (Harter, 1978), *related, and connected* to other individuals (Baumeister, & Leary, 1995; Reis, 1994), and they need to possess a sense of autonomy (DeCharms, 1968; Deci, 1975).

The satisfaction of these three needs is essential for optimal psychological functioning, human growth, and development. Relatedness is required for social development and personal well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Self-determination theory, similar to the previously reviewed belonging hypothesis, suggests that human beings need to connect and relate to others. Without relatedness, negative consequences will ensue in the domains of cognitions, emotions, and interpersonal relationships. Problems may include psychological concerns, such as depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Without a sense of relatedness to others, individuals may feel isolated and alone, worry about what others think of them, and struggle with their sense of self in relation to others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These theories provide an important framework for exploring bisexual-identified persons' experiences of belonging, relatedness, and connection within sexual minority communities and their perceptions of their sense of community belonging.

Impact of Belonging on Sexual Minorities

Previous research investigating the importance of belonging highlights the ways in which belonging and social exclusion alter an individual's cognitions, emotions, and interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Research has also demonstrated the importance of belonging for lesbians and gay men.

Previous studies have investigated the importance of belonging within the lives of sexual minority individuals. In a study investigating the impact of belonging on mental health, lesbians (N=178) who reported higher levels of group belonging with other lesbians reported fewer depressive symptoms than lesbians who had a lower sense of group belonging. Furthermore, lesbians in the sample who reported a sense of belonging with supportive allies also reported fewer depression symptoms (McLaren, 2009). This study suggests that for lesbians, a sense of belonging, whether with other lesbians or with straight allies, had fewer depression symptoms. A second study (McLaren, Jude, & McLachlan, 2008) found that for gay men (N=137), a sense of belonging with other gay men was associated with fewer depressive symptoms and increased well-being when compared to gay men who reported a lower sense of belonging.

A sense of belonging is an important element of psychological health for sexual minority youth. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth (N=99) who reported having a sense of belonging to other sexual minority youth through an affirmative LGB youth program reported fewer depressive symptoms than sexual minority youth with lower levels of community belonging (McCallum & McLaren, 2011). The results of this study indicate that a sense of belonging to a sexual-minority community is beneficial to the mental health of sexual minority youth.

Qualitative research has also suggested that a sense of belonging and forming a supportive community is one of the positive aspects of being a sexual minority person. In a qualitative study investigating the positive aspects of a lesbian or gay identity, participants (N=553) reported that belonging to a community of other sexual minority people was one of the positive aspects of being a lesbian or gay person. This theme emerged as the most frequent response of lesbians (N=350) and was the second most common of 11 themes emerging from the sample of lesbians and gay men as a whole (Riggle, Whitman, Olson, Rostosky, & Strong, 2008).

A single qualitative study investigating the positive aspects of a bisexual identity also found that a sense of belonging is important to bisexual-identified persons. When bisexual-identified participants (N=153) were asked to describe what is positive about maintaining a bisexual identity, participants reported a sense of belonging to a community of similar others was one of the main positive aspects of their identity (Rostosky, Riggle, Pascale-Hague, & McCants, 2010).

Studies examining how a sense of belonging can be protective in the lives of LGB people are consistent with the belongingness hypothesis (Baumeister & Leary 1995) and self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For sexual minority persons, a sense of belonging appears to be psychologically protective. A sense of belonging to a supportive community is one of the positive aspects of their identity (Riggle et al., 2008; Rostosky et al., 2010). Community belonging may be especially important in the lives of sexual minority persons, who face social stigma and prejudice based upon their sexuality (McCallum & McLaren, 2011). General community belonging and community belonging

with similar others may be important to the health and well-being of bisexual-identified people.

An exploration of the perceptions and experiences of community belonging in the lives of bisexual-identified individuals has not been located within published literature. Given the social context of monosexuality, binegativity, and the impact of concealable stigmatized identity, bisexual-identified people may have unique experiences, perceptions, and challenges in finding a sense of belonging. Given the importance of belonging, the exploration of these experiences will add important knowledge to what is currently available regarding the lives of bisexual-identified individuals. This knowledge will help inform psychoeducational and therapeutic practices.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this dissertation project is to explore the lived experiences of bisexual-identified people, focusing on their experiences of belonging to supportive communities. To understand the experiences of bisexual-identified men and women and their sense of belonging in various communities, this project used a qualitative design based on constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivist grounded theory was selected as the methodology for this project over other qualitative methods for several reasons. Constructivist grounded theory is fitting for this project given the nature of the research questions and the goal of understanding the lived experiences of participants without reliance on preconceptions and existing hypotheses. (Glaser, 1967). Furthermore little published research was available about the question of interest, whichrendered hypothesis testing premature. Previous models pertaining to the lives of bisexual-identified persons were found to be dated, and may not be relevant to the lives of bisexual-individuals at the present time. Constructivist grounded theory allows exploration of research questions in an open and adaptive framework (Charmaz, 2006), which was determined to be an acceptable and worthwhile format to explore the research questions of interest in this project.

In the following chapter, I describe the qualitative design of the study, including participants, recruitment, materials, procedures, and data analysis. All of these procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Kentucky. Special attention will be given to explaining the procedures for coding data that contributed to the development of the findings. Finally, I discuss the steps taken to improve the trustworthiness and verifiability of the findings.

Participants

Eligible participants in this project were at least 18 years of age and self-identified as a bisexual person. The study attempted to recruit bisexual persons with diverse social identities (gender, age, race, ethnicity) in order to explore a range of experiences. Participants did not need to have had same sex and different sex romantic relationships to take part in this project. Participants in this project were recruited regardless of current relationship status, thus they could be single, in same sex, or in different sex romantic relationships. Individuals were eligible to participate if they currently self-identified as a bisexual person.

The decision to recruit a diverse sample of bisexual-identified persons was rooted in previous research that has found that the development of a bisexual identity is a complex and personal process shaped by numerous factors. These factors include relationship status, personal history, as well as emotional, relational, and sexual attractions (Bradford, 2004; Weinberg et al., 1994).

Recruitment

Participants were recruited using an online announcement (see Appendix A). Recruitment announcements conveyed to participants that the purpose of this study was to explore bisexual-identified persons' sense of fitting in, as well as the social interactions and experiences bisexual people have had with lesbians and gay men. These announcements were disseminated online through websites and email lists geared toward bisexual-identified individuals.

Websites included Facebook groups, community group websites, and email listservs aimed at supporting bisexual individuals. Announcements were also sent out

through a Unitarian Universalist listserv, as they are known to be an affirmative religious organization that is welcoming to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) membership. A full list of listservs and social media groups used for recruitment is included in Appendix B.

Materials

Interview protocol. The interview protocol (Appendix C) focused on the development of a bisexual identity, interactions with lesbians and gay men, encounters with social stigma, and community belonging. The interview protocol was reviewed by members of the Psychosocial Research Initiative on Sexual Minorities (PRISM) research team and subsequently revised prior to use with participants. The revised interview protocol was piloted in December of 2012 with two bisexual-identified informants, one female and one male. Final revisions were made to the interview protocol in response to feedback from these informants.

Digital audio recorders. Two digital audio recorders were used for each in-person interview. One audio recording served as the primary recording and the second was retained as a backup copy until the interview was fully transcribed. Each recorder was stored in a locked filing cabinet in my personal office. After the transcription of each interview was complete, the audio files were erased.

Procedures

Selection of interview participants. Eighteen people responded to the online announcement. Participants were eligible to participate if they were a bisexual-identified person and were at least 18 years old. After an individual emailed me expressing interest

in the project, I contacted the person via email with additional information about the

project and provided an electronic copy of the informed consent document (Appendix D).

Out of the original 18 individuals who expressed interest in the project, six people

did not follow up with me after I sent them more information and the informed consent

document. The remaining 12 individuals who contacted me indicating interest in the

project were willing to be interviewed. Interviews were scheduled and completed with

those 12 individuals between June and August 2013.

Interview. Options for conducting interviews included in-person, phone, and

online video conferencing. Each of these options was discussed by email with

participants at the time of the initial contact. After contacting participants and scheduling

the interview method, I met with each participant one-on-one to conduct the interview

using the interview protocol. Six interviews were conducted face-to-face, five were

conducted online through video chat, and one interview was conducted via phone.

At the beginning of each interview, I explained the purpose of the study, the

interview format, and the purpose of audio recording. I also answered any questions that

the participant had before beginning. Participants who completed face-to-face interviews

signed an informed consent document. Participants interviewed through phone or online

video chat provided a verbal consent in accordance with the IRB approved waiver of

signed informed consent.

The interview protocol served as a general guide for interviews. The interview

began with general questions about personal identities and social history. Participants

were asked about stereotypes they believe exist about bisexual-identified people. The

interview then moved to questions regarding experiences of community belonging, social

experiences with lesbians and gay men, and interpersonal and romantic relationships.

This interview protocol featured open-ended and probing questions that allowed

the individual to recollect both positive and negative experiences with various

communities and individuals. My work as interviewer was to facilitate exploration of

these experiences using a person-centered and interpersonally-focused interview style.

The adaptive, open style of questioning in each interview allowed me to respond and ask

follow-up questions to help participants fully describe their experiences.

Interview transcription. Following the completion of the interview, the audio

recording was transcribed verbatim in its entirety by a professional transcription service.

After the professional transcription, I listened to each interview and edited the transcript

for accuracy. During the course of editing the transcripts for accuracy, participants'

names were changed to pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. After the completion and

verification of the transcription, the audio recordings were deleted.

Data Analysis

Data analysis commenced after the first interview was complete and while other

interviews were still occurring. This simultaneous interview and coding process allowed

for the continual responsiveness of the researcher to emerging themes (Glesne, 2011).

This simultaneous interview and coding process was conducted so that subsequent

interviews could be tailored to take into account earlier discoveries. The simultaneous

and adaptive process utilized in this project is consistent with a constructivist paradigm

(Charmaz, 2006,2008; Glaser, 1967).

Initial coding. Data analysis in this project was an iterative and ongoing process. Initial coding served to establish a working list of general themes and topics that informed subsequent interviews (Charmaz, 2008). I began the process of reviewing transcripts line by line to determine the key concepts and relationships among the concepts. The purpose of this phase was to fracture the data into basic codes in an attempt to become fully immersed in the data. The purpose of initial open coding is to remain close to the data with an attempt to see participant action in each word, rather than applying a preexisting theory or category (Charmaz, 2006, 2008). Initial coding helps the researcher become familiar with the narratives of participants and refine later interviews. I completed initial coding using hard copies of the transcripts and notations made in the margins. Coding in this stage should be simple and precise (Charmaz, 2006; Stake, 2010). Initial coding consisted of a word or a short series of words written in the margin of the transcript that helped label the meaning of the participant's response.

Focused coding. Following the completion of 12 interviews and the initial coding process, I then proceeded to focused coding. The focused codes became more selective and conceptual, and the aim was to combine initial codes into meaningful themes that appeared across the course of an interview (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978). Focused coding worked to bring together the data that existed in small units from each interview into more meaningful codes that appeared to exist across several interviews. Initial codes from each transcript were condensed into a set of overarching focused codes that linked interviews together. These codes were compiled into lists, charts and handwritten notes, referencing the initial codes and participants that contributed to the creation of the focused codes. It was at this stage that an initial presentation of findings

was made to the PRISM research team during the Fall 2013 academic semester. Team members gave feedback to help organize the findings and clarify their meanings.

Member checks. Qualitative researchers aim to incorporate techniques and strategies that will help to improve the trustworthiness and verifiability of their findings (Carlson, 2010; Charmaz, 2006). With this goal in mind, member checks were conducted with willing participants after the focused coding stage. Member checks provided the opportunity for participants to provide feedback on the initial set of findings. These checks can also be an opportunity for participants to challenge the researchers about conceptualization of themes emerging from each interview (Doyle, 2007).

Participants received a summary version of the initial findings emerging from all interviews via email. Participants were offered the opportunity to reply to me by email or phone with their ideas and suggestions. Three participants responded that they were willing to give feedback. After reviewing the initial findings, no corrections or challenges were offered. The three participants concluded the summary of the findings was consistent with their experiences and perceptions.

Presentation of findings. The final step in the analysis process was to distill the focused codes into theoretical findings that present the content of the interviews and the overarching themes in a meaningful summary. In this stage of data analysis, the focused codes are condensed into categories that represent theoretical assumptions (Holton, 2007). To fully illustrate each theoretical finding I returned to the original transcripts and selected numerous quotes that illustrated each theme.

A further aim of this stage was to reach theoretical saturation. Saturation was attained when all themes fit within theoretical categories observed across multiple

interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I employed the process of constant comparison throughout the theoretical coding process. I compared and contrasted all the themes identified within participant interviews and across all participants to determine similarities and differences. This was accomplished by taking the original transcripts and comparing the themes back to the original open coding and interview data. This is known as comparing "themes to themes" and "themes to data" (Charmaz, 2006). Moving back to the original codes and transcripts strengthened the final theoretical coding process by providing a final quality assurance check that the findings are rooted in the lived experiences of the participants.

Summary

This chapter provided a broad review of the constructivist ground theory methodology utilized in this project. This qualitative methodology was used to explore the experiences of bisexual-identified persons sense of belonging within lesbian, gay, and heterosexual-identified communities given the fact that little published work has systematically explored this research question. A review of the materials, participant recruitment, and coding procedures was provided. The following chapter presents the results and provides quotations from participants to illustrate each theme that emerged in the analysis.

Chapter Four: Results

This chapter summarizes the results from this study. First, the demographic characteristics of the sample are described. Next, the findings are presented to illustrate how participants experienced belonging within various communities. The findings are presented and illustrated with quotes taken directly from the interviews to preserve the voices and lived experiences of the participants. Each participant is identified with a pseudonym to protect his or her confidentiality.

Participant Demographics

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 individuals. Five cisgendered male and seven cisgendered female bisexual-identified participants agreed to be interviewed. Participants ranged in age from 19-54 (M=32.91; $SD = 9.96$) and were diverse in education, geographic location, and relationship status (see Table 2). One participant identified as African American, one as biracial (Latina/Caucasian), and the remaining 10 participants self-identified as Caucasian.

Overview of Findings

Three themes emerged in the analysis. First, negative stereotypes about bisexual-identified persons affected their sense of belonging. Second, the act of disclosing or concealing their bisexual identity had an impact on participants' sense of community belonging. Third, participants experienced a better sense of community belonging when they were able to be authentic about their sexual identity. Authenticity helped participants overcome negative stereotypes and stigma and contributed to a sense of community belonging. When participants had a sense of authenticity, they formed deeper interpersonal relationships and felt more connected. A sense of authenticity also

sustained their commitment to social advocacy and other ways of making important

social contributions.

Negative Stereotypes and Stigma Affect Community Belonging

Participants reported difficulties in their interactions with family members,

colleagues, and other sexual minority persons, and in relationships with romantic

partners. These experiences limited participants' willingness to identify themselves as a

bisexual-identified person. Social situations in which they anticipated rejection made

them more cautious when interacting with others.

Richard, a 19 year old male participant, reported that he had experienced the

following difficulties within his family.

> My mother thinks that being bisexual means being selfish and promiscuous. She
> has this notion that if you can go for a man or a woman then you should just aim
> for one and going for either is selfish. She actually said "It's selfish to do that to
> your family, if your going to go for either one that is just selfish."

Jane, a 35 year old bisexual and biracial participant, reported that she always

thought her family would be accepting of her bisexuality. While her mother and

grandmother had shown understanding, she experienced negative reactions from

extended family members that marginalized her sexuality.

> You know, especially it was one of my uncles. He was like, "You just haven't
> found the right man yet," which is so frustrating. I was like "Really? You are not
> going to whip that one out on me." It's just invalidating.

Kat, a 25 year old female participant who is also the mother of a three year old

son, described the following when thinking about her own mother's reaction.

> I've had a lot of people ask me "Why? What made you this way? What happened
> to you?" A lot of questions about what made me this way. My mom is one of
> those people. She doesn't believe someone can be born that way. [She thinks]
> something made you [bisexual], either a traumatic event, or like something

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flipped a switch in your brain somehow. It's a conversation that I avoid with her. So it's really weird when people ask me, 'What made you that way?' And I'm like, living made me this way. It's like oxygen.

Difficulties for bisexual-identified participants were not just limited to family reactions. Participants reported that they encountered invalidating reactions from colleagues and peers. Monica, a 41 year old psychologist, described how a gay male colleague had responded when they discussed bisexual persons.

> I first was talking to a man who was the multicultural resource center director. He was the boss of the LGBT community coordinator. I was talking to him about, what do students in LGBT community need. He kept using the word queer, exclusively. I said, "Well, what about … I wonder about bi people?" His response to that question was, "Well, that's kind of an old-fashioned word." He just sort of brushed it off and moved on and kept talking about queer identity. I got the idea that at this school you should be queer or straight. There's no bi. I felt pretty rejected. I didn't come out to him after that. I just kind of let that go. That was one experience where I felt that the bi identity was basically rejected as old-fashioned.

While it is true that other sexual minority persons can experience prejudices and stigmatizing experiences when interacting with family and colleagues, the unique experience for bisexual-identified persons is that they also experienced these negative interactions when interacting with other sexual minority persons, such as lesbians and gay men. In the previous example, rather than finding support from a gay male colleague, Monica felt invalidated and rejected.

Kat described the following experiences when she told her lesbian friends she identifies as bisexual.

> My lesbian friends are just like, "Well, you are halfway there. Why don't you just go the rest of the way? You're on the right track so just push a little more." It's funny as someone who identifies as liking both of them, to just go like, "Uh, I like guys. I like girls." But they say "Go the rest of the way." And I'm like "Nope."

Male and female participants alike reported experiencing stigma and stereotypes from gay men and lesbians, but there appeared to be a sex difference in the specific stereotypes they encountered. Male participants described receiving messages that bisexuality was only a stage of sexual development or a cover for a gay identity. Women reported they heard statements expressing beliefs that bisexual-identified females are hypersexual and willing to have sex with many people.

Shawn, a 30 year old bisexual male described the following experience when he was discussing his bisexual identity with gay friends.

> I think some of it was even with close friends, specifically when I was in a same-gender relationship. [Gay friends] were like, "Oh, you can claim that bisexual thing all you want but you are really gay. Why don't you just stop that nonsense? Why don't you just be who you really are? Can't you see how happy you are with men?" Or they would say things like "I have done X, Y, and Z with you (referring to sex acts). Obviously you are not straight."

Men reported that they were challenged to prove their sexuality as "real." Shawn explained this challenge by recounting the following encounter.

> I have also had the experience when [gay men] are like, "Oh, I could be with a woman," all that kind of thing. Almost like devaluing my identity. "I could do that too. What makes you so special? Anybody can put their penis in someone else." That's just not what it's about. Knowing who I am has helped me not lash out at them.

Chris also reported pressure to prove his bisexual identity when he was with gay men, and even while he was being sexually intimate with male partners. During one sexual encounter the male partner commented, "You seem really into this. How bisexual are you right now?" Chris described being upset by the experience and was unable to feel safe with that partner again. When bisexual men felt marginalized and challenged by gay men, their sense of community belonging suffered. Based on their previous

experiences bisexual-identified male participants expected that gay men would challenge their bisexual identity instead of being accepting or supportive.

Female participants encountered negative assumptions pertaining to expectations that bisexual-identified women are hypersexual and indiscriminately date men or women. Female participants described that when they were interacting with some gay men they would be physically touched and groped in unacceptable ways. For participants, these experiences were overt demonstrations of the binegativity they faced when being out about their bisexuality in sexual minority communities. Lesley, Jane, and Kat each reported that gay men asked to touch their breasts and bodies when they heard they identified as bisexual. Jane described that a gay man had grabbed her breasts at a LGBT pride event. Jane reported that after this assault, she is less likely to go to gay clubs and pride events, and avoids interacting with lesbian and gay people. Lesley described the following interaction with gay men who wanted to feel her breasts and explained she believes it is due to fluidity in sexuality and the sexual objectification of bisexual females.

> My gay friend asked me, "Can I feel your breasts? Because I don't have women friends." I'm like, "Really? Or you're just taking this opportunity to feel some woman's boobs?" I think that we're all on a continuum. I think its fluid from one moment to the next. If somebody may be attracted to somebody else intellectually, or whatever, and they feel that intimacy or some little spark of desire, maybe you slide a little bit this way, a little bit back or whatever. At that moment he's probably a little hot for my tits, you know?

A unique experience reported by several participants was the perceived differences that occurred when they were in a group of people discussing bisexuality and when they were in a conversation with an individual person. In a group setting, participants were more likely to hear negative stereotypes and jokes about bisexual

identity, but when they were interacting in in one on one settings, the person with whom they were interacting seemed more interested in understanding bisexual identity and were more likely to offer support and compassion.

Jane described this experience succinctly when she reported that in a "party atmosphere" she would hear more stereotypical jokes about bisexuality, but when she was in a small group or one on one with gay men and lesbians, there would be more supportive dialogue about her bisexual identity. She reported the following example:

> I've talked to many of my gay friends who have said, "Really I am more bi or pan," but they don't own that, or they don't claim that in public. They don't call themselves that. I appreciate the power to use your own label. But I also understand that some people's labels are very flexible.
>
> Now that I'm thinking back on it, I'm thinking of all the men that in quieter settings have told me that they are more bi or pan. So many guys have done that. But they don't do it in front of groups of other men.

The difference between public and private conversations suggests a group culture that stigmatizes bisexual-identified persons. Individuals, however, seemed to be more accepting of bisexual-identified persons. Possibly, when in group settings, these individuals feel pressure to conform to and confirm negative stereotypes about bisexual-identified people. This may be due in part to the ingrained stereotypes that have been directed at bisexual-identified persons, including negative and false beliefs that bisexual-identified persons' are unsure of their sexuality, promiscuous, and hypersexualized. Gay men and lesbians may also fear voicing an opinion that differs from what they perceive to be the majority opinion of their community. Speaking up in group settings in support of bisexual-identified persons puts at risk an individual's own sense of belonging and acceptance within the group; thus, lesbians and gay men remain silent even though they may be personally accepting of bisexual-identified persons. In turn, this results in

bisexual-identified persons experiencing alienation and invalidation rather than connection and a sense of belonging with other sexual minority persons.

Participants experienced trouble forming and maintaining romantic relationships due to their bisexual identification. These difficulties limited participants' meaningful emotional connections that otherwise would have provided a sense of belonging and interpersonal safety. These difficulties were of two types. First, participants reported that gay men, lesbians, and heterosexual-identified people did not want to date bisexual-identified persons.

Celeste, a 21 year old African American female reported that some lesbian women had doubted her ability to commit to one relationship. At times she was questioned regarding her ability to be in a monogamous relationship.

> These lesbian women would say "so you're on the fence right now, so you're a fence rider; so you're not serious?" Then this is another thing too, they always think that you are not going to be serious about the relationship that you're having with them. Just because of the simple fact that they know that you like men, too. They are like, "Can I have a serious long-term relationship with you? How do I know for a fact that you're just not going to up and leave to go be with a man? Or how can I trust you around men if you like men too?" I'm like, how do you trust me around other lesbians? That's the main thing that they are always talking about.

Jenny, a 28 year old white female put it more directly when recounting her experiences trying to date lesbian women. She stated that in her experience "Lesbians, they don't really even want to touch you if a penis has been around you or near you or in you." Furthermore, Jenny had experienced aggression from lesbian women at bars.

> Yeah. I was at the club once and this girl was hitting on me and I really didn't know how she found out I was bisexual, well she pushed me, because she was just like, I don't know why she decided she needed to do that, but whatever. I didn't find her attractive at all anyway. I have had violence with some people, especially lesbians when I would say that I was bisexual. I don't know why. They thought I was disgusting.

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Secondly, participants described that even when in a relationship, bisexuality sometimes became a problem for their partner. Chris noted that his current male partner becomes upset when he hears him talk with women.

> I was camping on the weekend alone and this woman with a kid came up to me, and they were asking me about my research and everything. Well, I didn't really pick up on the fact that she was hitting on me. She asked for my phone number or my email. So, I told my boyfriend about it later, and he was pissed. He was, just, "Why would you do that?" And I'm, like well, we were just talking two days ago about this guy who has the hots for you at the gym and you were going to ask him to be your roommate. And now you're upset with me for giving a woman who I'm probably never going to see again contact information?' And he's just really threatened by it. Because his fear is that I'm going to switch teams back. It's this perception that it's either/or. He's just waiting for the day that I come up to him and say, "Well, hey, this is great, but I got to go get some vagina now so I'll see you later."

Molly described that her male partner still has questions about her bisexual identity.

> He really surprised me because we've been together now for seven, eight years. We got married in 2011. Part of my challenge with getting married is the privilege that came with it. I was really resistant to marriage for a long time … After we had been married, somebody said something about being straight, and I said, "No. I'm bi." Later that night, my partner said, "What did you mean you're bi?" I went, "Well, we've talked about this since we've first got together." It's like, wait, but we're married now. I was like, okay, deep breath. Pause. Let's talk about this. It was a really interesting conversation in terms of in his mind, somehow now I was straight.

Shawn also reported that he and his female fiancé have had numerous conversations about what his sexual identity means for their relationship. One experience was especially difficult.

> Some of it is that I feel as though I just have a larger base of knowledge [about LGBT issues] so that if we are talking about stuff I don't want her to feel like I am lecturing her about different things. I am just trying to expose her to more stuff over time. Again, I don't want her to feel like an outsider. I know when we went to the local gay club she was very overwhelmed and had a very negative reaction. We had a really long night of crying and all this other stuff, and dealing

with, and going through the issues of having someone of a very different identity than she's used too.

Difficulties forming and maintaining romantic relationships emerged as another area where bisexual-identified persons encountered difficulties developing a sense of belonging and safety. These relationship problems appeared to exist because of the stereotypes associated with bisexual identities. It seems that gay men, lesbians, and heterosexual-identified individuals have internalized negative social messages that bisexual-identified persons make poor sexual and romantic partners and cannot be trusted. Romantic relationships are a primary location for belonging and interpersonal support. Romantic partners can also be a source of emotional strength in difficult times. Bisexual-identified persons may face unique stressors in these areas because of stigma and negative stereotypes. The difficulties bisexual-identified persons described in romantic relationships emerge as another barrier to building a sense of belonging.

It is important to note that participants perceived that the climate for bisexual identity was improving. Even when individuals had been through experiences of negative stereotypes and stigma, they still were able to acknowledge that acceptance for bisexual-identified persons may be improving. Molly, who is 35 years old, has even sensed a difference in people her own age.

> It seems to be more generational, but when I'm with people my own age, they don't bat an eye. They accept it without a problem. It's pretty exclusively within the queer community with people that are in their mid 50s to 60s. [They say] "well, no, no, no, no." I couldn't actually be bi because I'm with a male. I must be straight.

Richard, who is 19 years old, said people his age were more open to fluid sexualities, in part because they had been exposed to more liberal media representations of LGBTQ persons.

As far as people my age, give or take a few years, we watched a lot of really socially liberal TV. I think that sort of built a mindset of it doesn't really matter, it doesn't matter what your sexual orientation is or that sort of thing, as long as you're happy.

Despite reporting negative stereotypes and experiences, participants also made references to positive cultural changes occurring that may, in the end, improve community belonging for bisexual-identified persons.

Disclosure and Concealment Affect Community Belonging

Participants described a conflict between concealing their identity due to the risk of experiencing the effects of stigma and still wanting to be open about their sexual identity. To improve their sense of belonging within sexual minority community, bisexual-identified participants would at times conceal their sexuality. Shawn reported that when he is speaking or giving a presentation, he will passively conceal his identity. He gave the following example.

I just let the audience assume I am gay, or otherwise my credibility will be reduced if they know I am bisexual or with a female partner. They will wonder "Who is this guy engaged to a women talking to us about LGBT equality?"

Concealing their bisexual identity was uncomfortable for individuals who did not feel they were being authentic. Individuals wanted to build relationships based on honesty in order to feel connected to other sexual minority persons. Participants felt they had limited opportunities to build community belonging and that is why concealment sometimes seemed necessary.

Steven, a 27 year old male, who is in a long-term relationship with a male partner, reported that sometimes he simply lets others assume he is a gay identified man. He conceals his bisexual identity because, "Frankly, who wants to spend 30 minutes trying to

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explain bisexual identity to someone." In effect, being out as a bisexual person would result in too much difficulty and is not always worth the pressure.

Bisexual-identified persons were uncomfortable with being stigmatized, but also uncomfortable concealing their identity. Participants reported a desire to be out about their bisexual identity not just for their own benefit, but also to promote positive changes for others who identify as bisexual. Participants were selective about when and where they would disclose their bisexual identity, as they were often unsure of the consequences that might ensue.

Molly described having to make choices about when to reveal the sex of her partner and how she had tried to cope with her fears of rejection.

> One of those things was the idea of "I'm always going to use gender-neutral language. I'm never going to reveal the gender of my partner." It was like, "wait a minute. That's ridiculous, too." Then, refusing to do that and being willing to use gender language, it's been an odd shift. It's like somehow I have to validate myself depending on the audience. I went through a period … and I think I'm pretty much over it now, but a few years ago, I went through a period where in that same conversation, I'd bring up past relationships with different genders just to bring up somehow that makes me more valid. That's crap.

Concealing a bisexual identity is a problematic coping strategy that takes energy and results in emotional stress for bisexual persons. The act of concealment makes bisexual persons self-conscious about their disclosures and presentation. Having to question if and when to come out as bisexual is a stressor that affects individuals' sense of belonging and connection with others.

Authenticity Contributes to Community Belonging.

Developing a sense of belonging required participants to come to a place of wanting to be an authentic person despite the negative stereotypes that exist about bisexual-identified persons. For participants in this study, being an authentic person

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meant being out about bisexual identity in spite of stigma and their fears of rejection. Despite the social stigma, identifying as bisexual was a personal identity worth claiming publically.

A sense of personal authenticity was a key component in establishing meaningful social connections. Monica thoughtfully expressed the following.

> Before I came out I felt as though I wasn't being true to myself. Like, I wasn't living with integrity, which is really important to me. I really try to live what I believe and be honest about who I am and have my actions match my identity and what my values are. I felt as if there was one part of me that was just in a closet, essentially. That was a stressor for me, to not be out. Part of it is internal, to honor myself.

The desire for community and belonging led to seeking others who identified as LGBTQ. Participants decided being out as a bisexual person was an important aspect of living as an authentic person. Participants couldn't be truly themselves without claiming their bisexual identity. Participants stated that their drive for community and belonging emerged from a desire to be authentic and to be surrounded by others who also identified as sexual minorities. Richard, spoke about his partiality for friendships with other LGBTQ people.

> I certainly identify with the queer community, and there are a lot of people in my social life who are not straight. It's probably a majority by now. It's not like how I meet people all the time, but I happen to meet people and then find out later that they happen to be queer…I wind up relating to queer people better.

The connection between authenticity and community belonging seemed to differ by the level of educational attainment. Participants in the sample who were more highly educated were more "out" about their sexual identity, and reported more opportunities to interact with supportive community, and specifically with LGB community. Those in the

sample who had college degrees were more likely to report having found a community that was understanding of bisexual identity and welcoming to non-binary sexuality.

Molly, who has a college degree and had spent a majority of her adult life in a city with a large university, contrasted the difference between her life in that town with her experience living in a more rural environment.

> In [the college town], it felt really easy. I felt really connected. Part of it was within my first two weeks of moving to town, they had a help line that they had needed volunteers for, so I was instantly … I was like, oh. Well, I'm a social work student. That works out really well for me. I was instantly involved, and very few of my friends identified as straight, and so was instantly involved in this community where we help start a local GLSEN chapter. When I moved to the smaller town, that was a very different. It was really just the gay club really. The club scene, gross…whole different environment.

Monica, who holds a doctoral degree, stated that in professional circles "experiences have been positive, nothing negative." Similarly, Lesley, Jane, Chris, Ben, and Shawn, all of whom have advanced degrees, reported that they have support in their professional lives and live in environments where they were around people who are accepting of LGBTQ identities. While a college degree did not completely insulate these participants from the effects of stigma, those with more education seems to have more opportunities to be around others whom they believed would be more accepting of their bisexual-identity.

Jenny, who had not attended college and works in a service industry job, reported fewer experiences with supportive community. Jenny reported more experiences of trying to connect with LGBTQ persons at clubs and bars, which frequently weren't environments that she felt were supportive of her authentic bisexual identity.

Participants did believe that being out as a bisexual person could bring about positive changes and improve community belonging not only for themselves but also for

other bisexual-identified persons. Shawn summarized his belief about using his bisexual

identity as a way to change negative stereotypes and be a positive role model for others.

> I just like to be what I call the "flagship." If no one knows anyone who is bisexual they won't know it can be a positive identity. And it's in the way that I define it, because I know that, I feel like everyone's bisexuality is a little different. I can explain what it is to me. I feel like it's a positive identity; I feel like it's something and say this is something you can have normal positive healthy relationships and still have this identity. I think it's been overall positive, but I think a lot of it is because I've made it that way. I've had that effect on a few people, and that's my goal. They now are open to the fact that this does exist, and there are people that have healthy long-term relationships with men and women and that we exist and that it's not just a phase or it's not just something masquerading as something else.

Based upon these interviews, bisexual persons worked to make positive changes

for other bisexual persons, felt more connected to important issues, and felt a greater

sense of community belonging. The act of contributing to social change helped

participants feel that their experiences of stigma and negative stereotyping could be

transformed into positive actions. For these participants challenging stigma and

stereotypes helped them feel more visible within society. This active participation makes

it more difficult for others to stigmatize bisexual-identified persons. Bisexual persons

become real and identifiable individuals instead of being an easily stigmatized invisible

group. Visibility helps gay men, lesbians, and heterosexual-identified persons understand

that bisexual identity can exist as a positive and stable identity. Contributing to social

change helped bisexual-identified persons feel more connected to others and form

meaningful relationships.

Summary of Findings

This chapter provided an overview of the results. Emergent themes were

explained in detail and direct quotes were used to highlight each theme. The findings

from this project illustrate that bisexual-identified persons develop a sense of belonging

through personal and public methods. The elements of this process are interdependent

and cannot be separated from one another. Bisexual persons come to a better sense of

belonging when they personally work to come to terms with the negative stereotypes and

stigma that exists about their identity. At first, bisexual persons may conceal their

identity, but this is not an ultimately effective strategy for developing a sense of

belonging. Discomfort with concealment may challenge bisexual-identified persons to be

more open about their sexual identity in order to be more authentic in their relationships.

A greater sense of authenticity also helps bisexual-identified persons work to challenge

stigma and negative stereotypes. Developing a sense of authenticity about one's bisexual

identity also aids in creating a stronger sense of community belonging. Challenging

stereotypes and speaking up to make positive changes for other bisexual-identified

persons enhances bisexual-identified persons sense of belonging. The act of challenging

stereotypes by expressing their authentic identity helps bisexual-identified persons

become visible members of the larger community and gain a sense of connection and

community belonging.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Education	Relationship Status	Other
Richard	19	Male	Caucasian	High School – Currently a college sophomore	Single, has dated men and women in the past	
Steven	27	Male	Caucasian	Bachelors degree	9 year relationship with a male partner, monogamous	
Shawn	30	Male	Caucasian	Master's degree	Engaged to a female partner, previous relationships with men and women	
Jane	35	Female	Latina	Master's degree	Single, has dated men in the past	
Lesley	54	Female	Caucasian	Master's degree	Divorced from husband of 18 years	Mother of one son
Kat	25	Female	Caucasian	Some college	Single	Three year old son
Celeste	21	Female	African American	High School – Currently a college junior	Engaged to a male	Pregnant with first child
Monica	41	Female	Caucasian	PhD	Married to a male	
Jenny	28	Female	Caucasian	High School	Single	Three year old son
Molly	35	Female	Caucasian	Bachelor's degree	Married to a male partner	
Ben	42	Male	Caucasian	Some college	Single, has had relationships with male and female partners	
Chris	38	Male	Caucasian	Master's degree	Divorced after 11 year marriage, currently dating a man	13 year old step-son, 2 year old daughter

Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter provides a summary and discussion of the findings from this project. First, the three main findings of this study are linked to existing literature regarding the experiences of bisexual-identified persons and the importance of community belonging. Second, the strengths and limitations of the current project are discussed, along with directions for future research. Finally, I discuss implications for practitioners who work with bisexual-identified persons and the communities in which they live.

Experiences of Binegativity

Participants experienced negative stereotypes and stigma discussed in other published studies of bisexual-identified persons (Bradford, 2004; Callis, 2013; Cox et al., 2013; Dyar et al., 2014). Experiencing negative stereotypes occurs indirectly when bisexual-identified persons hear disparaging remarks about bisexual people but the remarks are not directed specifically at them as a person. These messages are prevalent in popular culture, sexual minority communities, media, and interpersonal relationships (Meyer, 2010). Similar to other findings, bisexual-identified persons in this study were subjected to many negative stereotypes when (a) others talked about bisexual people "really being gay and in denial," (b) expected bisexual people to end up in opposite sex relationships, and (c) over-sexualized female bisexuality (Bradford, 2004; Hartman, 2005; Herek, 2002. Bisexual-identified persons who are not out must often manage these stressors alone.

In this study, negative stereotypes were also experienced directly. For example, these experiences occurred when participants came out to a friend or group and heard messages or reactions doubting the authenticity of their sexual identity. Direct negative

stereotypes were also experienced when romantic partners doubted the bisexual-identified participants' commitment and monogamy.

No matter where or when these negative experiences of prejudice occur, they can contribute to bisexual-identified persons' internalized binegativity (Herek, 2000; Kleese, 2011) and minority stress (Meyer, 2003). These experiences can make bisexual-identified persons feel unsafe in both heterosexual and sexual minority communities and may lead to concealment of their bisexual identity. These findings are consistent with previous research conducted on bisexual-identified persons (Fox, 1996; Israel, & Mohr, 2004; Kleese, 2011; Knous, 2005)

Binegativity is expressed even in romantic relationships where individuals would expect to be trusted and accepted. When negative stereotypes pertaining to bisexual-identified persons are invoked within romantic relationships, a lack of trust and other difficulties for the couple may emerge. The findings from this study suggest that bisexual-identified people can encounter negative stereotypes whether their partner is lesbian-, gay-, or heterosexual-identified. These negative attitudes in partners led to feelings of disconnection and alienation in the participants.

Bisexual-identified persons may have one of several reactions when these negative stereotypes are encountered in interpersonal and romantic relationships. Bisexual-identified persons may continue to conceal their sexuality in order to reduce stigma and avoid rejection. The findings of the study seem to indicate that when bisexual-identified individuals first encounter difficulties establishing relationships and a sense of belonging with others, they may choose to conceal their sexuality. This concealment may serve as a strategy for avoiding possible rejection, but also seemed to

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contribute to social isolation, which is the opposite of social belonging. Participants

sometimes allowed others to perceive them as gay or lesbian instead of coming out as

bisexual-identified. For instance, some participants reported that they did not correct

others' assumptions about their identity that seemed to be based upon the perceived

gender or sex of their partner.

If the bisexual-identified person was single or dating a same-sex partner, the

common assumption that he or she was gay or lesbian allowed the individual to pass as a

member of the sexual minority community, at least for a time. Similarly, if the person

was in a relationship with a different-sex partner, he or she was assumed to be

heterosexual-identified and was able to pass without others discerning their bisexual

identity. Participants discussed their discomfort with being perceived as lesbian, gay, or

heterosexual. In these instances, being misidentified as something other than a bisexual-

identified person made participants feel they were not being genuine and were not really

"known" by others. Participants recognized that concealment did not allow them

opportunities to educate others and challenge negative stereotypes about bisexual-

identified persons.

On one hand, it is important to acknowledge that concealment may be an adaptive

strategy for bisexual persons that assists with the management of binegativity given the

larger social context that stereotypes bisexual identity as unstable, promiscuous, and

immature (Burleson, 2005; Fox, 1996), however, participants realized that concealment

of their bisexual identity affected their relationships and left them with an uncomfortable

feeling that they were deceiving others. This strategy did not appear to be a satisfactory

long-term solution for participants. Living with a concealable stigmatized identity, in this

case, a bisexual identity, can be personally taxing on the individual but can also provide a potential escape from constantly experiencing social stigma (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). It is important to recognize that bisexual persons use concealment and disclosure as a tool to manage social stigma. These acts of concealment and disclosure may help protect bisexual individuals emotionally and psychologically from binegativity (Fox, 1996) and minority stress (Meyer, 2003) but also entail some costs.

Bisexual persons' use of concealment as a tool for managing stigma and possible rejection does not appear in the previous models of bisexual identity development. While the Bradford (2004) and Weinberg (1994) models include discovering a bisexual identity and creating identity, they did not discuss the effect of personal experiences on bisexual identity development, or using concealment as a means through which to manage binegativity.

While concealment may offer protection from binegativity, it may interfere with developing community belonging. When bisexual-identified persons conceal their sexual identity, they experience discomfort and question how and when to come out to others as a bisexual-identified person (Ochs, 2005; Orndorff, 1999). When people do not disclose their bisexual-identity, they are still likely to be exposed to negative messages about bisexuality from lesbians, gay men, and heterosexual-identified persons (e.g., Bradford, 2004; Ochs, 1996). While concealment is an attempt to control direct experiences of stigma and possible rejection targeted at the individual, it does not reduce exposure to negative messages. Participants described hearing negative remarks about bisexual-identity within friendships, families, and romantic relationships. The concealment of a bisexual-identity also limits bisexual persons from being able to scan social situations and

know who else in the community may identify as bisexual, limiting the creation of a visible and supportive bisexual community. Consistent with Weinberg's (1994) model, participants in the current study described incidents of disclosure that subjected them to accusations from lesbians and gay men that they wanted to maintain heterosexual privilege. Disclosure of a bisexual identity entails risks of rejection, which is a minority stress factor. However, concealing one's identity or passing as lesbian, gay, or heterosexual-identified can be a psychologically taxing process that can have negative psychosocial consequences for the bisexual-identified person.

Vicarious and direct experiences of negative stereotypes and binegativity lead to concealment of bisexual identity within sexual minority communities and make it easier for stigma and stereotypes to persist. Without visible bisexual persons, stereotypes about bisexual persons remain unchallenged. Binegativity limits the sense of safety and community belonging, and the ensuing concealment perpetuates the cycle. Stigma leads to concealment, and the concealment of bisexual identity perpetuates stigma and negative stereotypes directed at bisexual-identified persons.

Concealment of one's bisexual identity, and allowing people to assume one is lesbian, gay, or heterosexual-identified is antithetical to expressing an authentic identity. Participants in this study sensed that concealing their identity did not promote a sense of community belonging and meaningful relationships. Participants reported difficulty finding other bisexual-identified persons and discomfort with passing as lesbian, gay, or straight. As bisexual-identified persons risk being authentic and more "out" regarding their sexual identity, they also become more resilient to the stress of negative stereotypes and stigma they encounter. For example, participants discussed having conversations

with their romantic partners to help them understand bisexual-identity. Others discussed

being more "out" about their bisexual-identity so they could challenge stigma.

Participants saw these steps as positive ways to resist and challenge negative stereotypes.

Authenticity and Disclosure

As the process of developing community belonging unfolds, bisexual-identified

persons may attain the sense that being open about their sexual identity is an important

part of being authentic, or "being who they really are." Concealment becomes a less

desirable mode through which to try to develop community belonging. The desire for

authenticity develops as the individual challenges negative social stereotypes about

bisexual-identified persons. Bisexual individuals come to a point of wanting to make

their sexual identity known to others despite the risks. The belongingness hypothesis and

self-determination theory suggest that human beings desire relationships founded on

mutual trust and the sense of belonging in a community of similar others (Baumeister &

Leary 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). It would seem that these ideas hold true in the lives of

study participants. Participants in this study did not want to be concealed within lesbian,

gay, and heterosexual community, but desired to be known and accepted for who they

were. Community belonging with others who were like them required that they be

authentically themselves.

Participants in this study reported that expressing their authentic identities was

empowering. Specifically, when they took the risk to disclose their bisexual-identity,

participants felt they were more capable of supporting social change and making a

difference for other bisexual-identified persons. Previous work examining the positive

aspects of maintaining a bisexual-identity also suggests that being an advocate and ally is

important and meaningful role for bisexual-identified persons (Rostosky et al., 2010).

Participants reported feeling that when they were open about their identity they were

challenging negative stereotypes that previously caused them to conceal their bisexual-

identity. Participants also indicated when they were more authentic they had a better

sense of community they could trust and rely upon. This finding is consistent with self-

determination theory and the belongingness hypothesis, stating that individuals need the

sense they are related and connected to others in meaningful ways (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Participants came to understand that, even though negative stigma and stereotypes

exist about bisexual identity, these are not true about them. As participants took the risk

to disclose, they experienced more authenticity and a meaningful sense of community

belonging. A sense of being authentic has been suggested as a positive aspect of

maintaining a bisexual-identity (Rostosky et al., 2010). In coming out as a bisexual-

identitied person, participants in this study were able to speak authentically about the

negative impact of stereotypes and stigma and counteract the prevalent messages about

bisexuality that exist within society. Bisexual-identified participants in this study shared

instances of coming out to co-workers, friends, family, romantic partners, and within

sexual minority communities. Being authentic can empower individuals to speak up

about stigma, and also builds internal strength that is emotionally and psychologically

protective against future encounters with stigma and stereotypes (Herek, 2003).

Through speaking up against stigma and stereotypes, bisexual-identified persons

take a sense of ownership that their sexual identity is not a joke, but is worthy of dignity

and respect. This increased visibility helps bisexual-identified persons feel that they are

making positive social changes for others who may be identified as bisexual but unable or

afraid to speak out for themselves. Similar to other accounts describing the experiences

of bisexual-identified persons (Hutchins & Kaahumanu, 1991) bisexual-identified

persons who are more visible may also sense that they are improving the social climate

for other people who identify as bisexual so that others will not have to face the same

stigma and stereotypes they encountered in the past.

Community Belonging and Well-being

The results of this study suggest that bisexual-identified participants who live

with a sense of authenticity experienced community belonging with other sexual minority

persons and romantic partners. One expression of authenticity that can enhance

belonging is becoming active in social change efforts. Participants in this study took

opportunities to educate both sexual minority and heterosexual-identified persons about

bisexual-identity. When they acted with authenticity and challenged negative stereotypes

they reported feeling more connected to other sexual minority persons. Participants

perceived that being out in lesbian and gay communities helped them feel connected to

others and accepted as their authentic selves. Participants valued being the "flagship" so

others could see bisexual-identified persons are important members of the sexual

minority community. Previous qualitative studies have noted that working for social

change is a positive aspect of maintaining a bisexual self-identification (Rostosky et al.,

2010). Earlier work has suggested that a positive aspect of a bisexual identity is learning

to become an advocate and activist for both bisexual identity and also other marginalized

groups (Rostosky et al., 2010). Individuals can use their expression of authenticity to

combat negative stereotypes and to join others in making positive social changes.

The findings from this study suggest that a sense of authenticity elicited emotional and psychological strength, helping participants manage negative stereotypes and stigma that may have initially caused them to conceal their sexual identity. This personal sense of authenticity helped participants develop a sense of belonging in multiple communities. As participants gained a sense of self-acceptance and authenticity, lesbians, gay men and heterosexual-identified persons sometimes responded with more support. With more support from sexual minority communities and heterosexual communities, these bisexual-identified persons had an improved sense of community belonging.

Participants in this study developed community belonging when they used their past negative experiences as challenges to live authentically, moving them beyond the place where concealing their identity was an acceptable coping strategy. Building this personal sense of authenticity was the factor that helped bisexual persons form meaningful relationships with other sexual minority persons. Unfortunately, the ability to live authentically and challenge stereotypes is not equally available to all those who identify as bisexual. Living authentically as an "out" bisexual person appears to be less risky for those who are privileged.

Impact of Privilege

Even when bisexual-identified persons desire to be authentic about their sexual identity, they may not live in communities that are open to them. The difficulty faced by some bisexual-identified persons is that they occupy social contexts where negative stereotypes about bisexual-identified persons are more deeply rooted and more difficult to change.

The results of this project suggest that in environments where there is limited support for identities outside binary sexualities, those who claim a bisexual-identity may forgo coming out as bisexual and instead pass as lesbian, gay or heterosexual to fit in with the community expectations. This self-concealment may help avoid some of the consequences of stigma (Callis, 2013), but not the impact of minority stress (Meyer, 2003). As noted by the participants in this study, self-concealment did not prevent participants from being exposed to binegativity and negative stereotypes. Self-concealment was often accompanied by feelings of inauthenticity. Living with more authenticity may feel too risky, however. Simply being out as a bisexual-identified person and challenging stereotypes may not be enough to bring about community belonging and inclusion in areas where there is already limited support for sexual minorities. The greater the degree to which individuals are exposed to stigma and negative stereotypes regarding bisexuality, the more challenging it may be for them to move beyond concealment and into a sense of authenticity.

In affirmative environments, bisexual-identified participants experienced less negative stereotyping and stigma, making it easier to express their authentic identity. These affirmative environments are more likely to be available in more liberal work environments including higher education settings and more urban areas. When a bisexual person lives in a prejudiced social environment, authenticity may feel too risky. Bisexual-identified persons in these contexts may avoid other sexual minority individuals, assuming that all they will encounter is marginalization. For example, some participants in this study reported that they no longer attend Pride events and avoid bars and clubs where they would be around other sexual minority people because those had

been social events where, in the past, they experienced negative stereotypes and stigma. Participants who worked in more liberal contexts, such as universities had more exposure to diverse sexualities and routinely engaged with more open-minded persons, which helped them develop a sense of community belonging.

Additionally, it seemed that participants who lived in privileged communities had access to more sexual minority persons who identify as other than gay or lesbian. Role models who live authentically and express different sexual identities can show bisexual-identified persons how to move beyond concealment. A community that welcomes diverse sexualities may be more welcoming and inclusive of bisexual-identified persons. These communities may be more willing to challenge stigma and stereotypes about bisexual-identified persons.

Problems arise, though, when bisexual-identified individuals lack access to supportive communities where diverse sexual identities are expressed and honored (Kleese, 2011). In these types of situations, bisexual-identified persons may continue to conceal their identity. In this study, participants who did not have access to affirmative communities often sought out relationships within lesbian and gay groups but continued to experience vicarious and direct binegativity. It may be that environments focused on the needs of lesbian and gay individuals do not provide bisexual-identified people with the types of personal interactions that lead to the positive development of authentic relationships. Participants in this project, for example, reported that lesbians and gay men assumed that they were lesbian or gay. Similar to other findings, bisexual-identified persons in this study had to decide whether or not to reveal their identity and risk exposure to binegativity (Sarno & Wright, 2013).

One additional finding emerging from the study pertained to differences in male and female descriptions of their lived experiences. Similar to other research pertaining to bisexual-identified persons, men described being challenged by gay men and romantic partners about their bisexual-identity. Male participants perceived that, at times, gay men challenged them and doubted their bisexual-identity. Women had more experiences of being sexualized by men, which participants perceived as a negative experience with romantic partners. These findings support the idea that an individual's bisexual-identity and his or her gender or sexuality are intersecting identities. These intersecting identities create unique experiences for men and women. It seems we cannot examine bisexual-identity without exploring the differences that still exist within culture for male and female persons who identify as bisexual.

Identity salience may also be an aspect of an individual's bisexual-identification that impacts their experiences of community belonging. The participants in this project each maintained a level of identity salience for their bisexual-identification, which may have made them more attuned to binegativity among lesbians, gay men, and heterosexual people. Identity salience, understood as the degree to which an individual finds their identity to be an important part of who they are as a person may be an important aspect bisexual-identified persons

In summary, the findings of this study suggest that bisexual-identified persons develop a sense of community belonging when they reach a point where concealment is not a satisfying strategy for building a sense of community belonging. The environment must be conducive to locating others who will support their authenticity. Participants experienced community belonging when authenticity and social acceptance coincided.

Privileges such as education, diverse and inclusive religious communities, and diverse sexual minority communities may add to the likelihood that bisexual-identified persons develop a sense of community belonging. The process of bisexual-identified persons attaining a sense of authenticity and community belonging appears to be tied to other privileges, such as age, education, affluence, and race and aspects as each of these can serve as intersecting privileged and marginalized identities. These findings are consistent with previous work identifying that intersecting identities have direct impacts on individuals psychological health and should be taken into account when attempting to understand lived personal experiences (Constantine, 2002). Gender may also play an important part in bisexual-identified persons experiences of community belonging as men and women experience differing stigma and stereotypes when they maintain a bisexual-identification. Developing a feeling of authenticity for one's bisexual identity and a sense of community belonging in interpersonal relationships mutually influence each other in a positive way. Developing this sense of belonging though may also vary due to other intersecting identities, which warrant further exploration in additional research to better understand the experiences of bisexual-identified persons.

Strengths of the Present Study

This study sought to understand the lived experiences of bisexual-identified persons. This study recruited diverse male and female bisexual-identified persons from a variety of educational levels, geographic locations and ages. Furthermore, the use of a constructivist qualitative methodology that privileges the voices of bisexual-identified individuals is particularly relevant because of the lack of research on bisexual identity and belonging.

Another strength of this study is the ability to frame bisexual-identified persons within a complex network of other sexual minority and heterosexual-identified persons. Participants' voices and experiences lend understanding to the impact that stigma has upon not just belonging within other sexuality minority communities, but also in romantic relationships and families. Taking into account each of these contexts helps explain how a sense of belonging is fundamentally important and also how authenticity aids in the development of a sense of belonging.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Limitations of this project include the fact that recruitment occurred online through networks and supportive online communities for bisexual-identified persons. It seems possible that given the avenues of recruitment, individuals with higher levels of internalized binegativity and minority stress would likely not have received the announcement or would not have responded. Individuals who did participate already identified as bisexual and were living with varying feelings of authenticity when they were interviewed for this project. While participants did not focus on internalized binegativity, previous research has suggested internalized binegativity may become a barrier to claiming a bisexual-identification (Herek, 2003; Knous, 2005). Future research may further explore internalized binegativity and its potential impact on community belonging.

A final limitation is that all of the participants identified as cisgender. This factor should be carefully considered when discussing the transferability of the findings. There may be limited transferability of the findings to those who are bisexual-identified and

transgender. Participants were also predominately Caucasian, which limits the transferability of the findings to racial and ethnic minority persons.

The findings from this project suggest several avenues for future research. Given the findings in this project that romantic relationships are, at times, an area of difficulty for bisexual-identified persons, future research may benefit from interviewing couples in which one partner is bisexual-identified and the other maintains a different sexual identity. A study of couples could further examine dyadic issues in mixed orientation couples. Examining the relationships of mixed-orientation couples would also help researchers understand the ways that romantic partners assist or hinder a bisexual-identified persons sense of belonging. Future research should aim to talk with lesbians, gay men, and heterosexual-identified persons who have dated or been in romantic relationships with bisexual-identified persons in an effort to gather information and understanding of their personal points of view. Additional research could also further explain how gender and sexual orientation of partners may have an effect on willingness to engage in sexual and romantic relationships with bisexual-identified persons, which has been explored in other projects (Feinstein et al, 2014).

The results of this project suggest that living with a sense of authenticity assists in having a greater sense of belonging with supportive community. A quantitative study investigating bisexual-identified individuals degree of authenticity and its impact on community belonging would serve to aid additional support to the qualitative findings of this project. Furthermore research examining the impact of various privilege statuses, such as education, socio-economic status, and ethnicity could help uncover the degree to

which each factor helps or hinders bisexual-identified persons living with a sense of authenticity and developing a sense of belonging.

Future research should also focus on locating bisexual-identified individuals outside of online communities and affirmative social groups. Including more individuals of varying educational attainment, geographic locations, and ethnicities will serve to broaden the conversation regarding authenticity and privilege. Recruiting participants to a future project who can discuss developing authenticity despite limitations of privilege will aid to the current findings. Survey research may investigate how bisexual-identified individuals with limited social privileges develop a sense of authenticity and community belonging. These future directions for qualitative and quantitative research should aim to include more bisexual-individuals with higher levels of internalized binegativity and minority stress, to better explore the how individuals with various experiences come to form a sense of community belonging.

One additional area for future research would be to further understand those bisexual-identified persons who remain concealed and avoid disclosing their identity to others. A qualitative project investigating situations when bisexual-identified persons chose to remain concealed rather than disclose their sexual identity would further academic understanding of the experiences of bisexual-identified persons and could also help practitioners tailor interventions that improve the lives of bisexual-identified persons at the community and societal level.

Implications for Practice

When working with bisexual-identified persons, it is important to acknowledge binegativity and negative stereotypes that exist within society (Burleson, 2005).

Acknowledging stigma validates the difficulties faced by bisexual-identified persons who have attempted to build community belonging but may have faced less than positive outcomes for their efforts. As a therapist invites clients to share the stigmatizing experiences they face, the therapist and client will be more likely to build a positive rapport and form stronger therapeutic alliance. On the other hand, it is important to avoid assumptions that all bisexual-identified persons have faced stigma or overt negative stereotypes.

The findings of this study illustrate that the experiences of bisexual-identified persons will vary based upon multiple social identities and factors. For example, working with an older bisexual-identified person who has obtained a professional degree, or who lives in a major urban area may be markedly different than working with a young bisexual-identified person who is attending a community college in a rural area. These identity intersections are key for the therapist to understand in working with bisexual-identified persons. No one script or story describes the lives of all bisexual-identified persons and how they have come to understand their identity and the effects on their sense of belonging. Each bisexual-identified client is unique.

Age appears to play a significant role in the experiences of bisexual-identified persons and their sense of belonging with supportive community. Younger individuals, those who are college age may not experience negative stereotypes in the same ways as older bisexual-identified persons. This may be due in part to their social identities or generational changes that have emerged over the last several decades. This finding is consistent with recently published research indicating that younger gay and lesbian individuals report fewer negative attitudes toward bisexual people than older gay and

lesbian people and that younger gay and lesbian people are more likely to associate interpersonally and romantically with bisexual-identified persons (Cox et al., 2013).

Assuming that all bisexual-identified persons have experienced negative interactions with lesbians, gay men, families, and romantic partners is problematic. These assumptions would likely leave the bisexual-identified client feeling misunderstood. Therapists should ask bisexual-identified clients about the personal meanings of bisexual identity in their own lives, relationship status, and experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Beginning to understand these variables can occur during initial consultation with clients. Therapists should ask the client about his or her own experiences and understanding of their bisexual-identity. Empowering clients to tell their story can help therapists understand the unique experiences of bisexual-identified clients and also help clients know they can speak about any experience in the therapy room. Opening a dialogue with clients at the start of therapy helps clients feel valued and can help therapists avoid pitfalls of thinking all bisexual-identified clients will report similar experiences. Therapists should aim to allow bisexual-identified clients a time and space to tell their own stories and experiences of binegativity.

Therapists can take an active role in session to understand how binegativity has impacted a client's bisexual-identity. They can empower clients to make meaning of their negative experiences and transform adversity. Therapists can work to educate clients about binegativity and help bisexual-identified clients understand that their experiences of binegativity and even difficulties developing community belonging are more prevalent in the bisexual community than the client may realize.

Professionals working with bisexual-identified persons should also examine their own internalized binegativity. Maintaining internalized negative stereotypes about bisexual-identified persons will harm the therapeutic working alliance and likely further discriminate against bisexual-identified clients. Helping professionals who have not examined their own internalized negative stereotypes pertaining to bisexual identity run the risk of recreating harmful experiences in the therapy setting and hurting bisexual-identified persons. This personal work of examining internalized binegativity can come in the form of reading current research pertaining to bisexual-identity or seeking out professional development in these areas.

Promoting authenticity in the therapy session may help bisexual clients have a corrective emotional experience (Yalom & Vinogradov, 1993). As a therapist assists a bisexual-identified client in creating and nurturing a sense of authenticity, the therapist can help the client develop and practice reframing negative self-views. For example, therapists could help clients reframe experiences of stigma and negative stereotypes by attributing them to the cultural landscape of negativity rather than a personal failing. In reframing their stories, bisexual-identified clients can externalize their experiences and come to have a more positive sense of their identity. The space for bisexual-identified clients to experience authenticity in the therapy session may be particularly significant for clients who maintain a bisexual identity and lack privileged identities such as educational attainment, supportive religious communities, and socio-economic security. The therapy relationship may be one of the few spaces in their lives when they feel supported and valued.

Therapists and other helping professionals can work with mixed-orientation couples to assist bisexual-identified clients and their partners. This therapeutic work can assist bisexual-identified persons in developing a sense of authenticity in their relationships and can also help partners work through their internalized binegativity that may otherwise be unquestioned. Therapists should work to facilitate dialogue between partners to help each member understand how bisexual-identity impacts their relationship. Therapists can also help partners to understand binegativity impacts their relationship and help challenge internalized binegativity that may be present within either partner. These may be brought about in therapy through providing readings about binegativity, having both partners recount experiences when a partner's bisexual-identity seemed to have an impact on the relationship. Therapists can also help partners find ways to communicate about the differences in their sexuality so they can better understand and support each other's needs.

As therapists increase their own understanding of communities and groups supportive of bisexual-identified persons they will be able to better serve clients. Professionals can assist bisexual-identified clients in connecting with online communities and social groups that are inclusive of bisexual identity. These connections can assist bisexual-identified clients in finding available resources and can serve to increase the number of spaces where they can be authentic and build a sense of belonging with affirmative others. Additionally, in areas with limited social supports for bisexual-identified persons, therapists can create support groups for bisexual-identified persons. Beyond working with groups for bisexual-identified persons, professionals can also work to educate communities about bisexual identity, helping to diminish negative stereotypes.

Therapists can work proactively with lesbian and gay community organizations to challenge binegativity. Additionally, therapists who are running support groups with LGB communities can work to include bisexual-identified clients in these groups and help to develop understanding across sexual identity lines. Therapists who are working with LGB individuals or groups should also pay attention to developing inclusive branding and advertising for their services so bisexual-identified clients know they are welcome to attend.

Bisexual-identified persons experience stigma and negative stereotypes when interacting with heterosexual people, lesbians, and gay men. The stigma bisexual-identified persons face makes creating a sense of community belonging more challenging. At times, bisexual-identified persons may conceal their sexuality in order to avoid negative experiences. Coming out as a bisexual-identified person and working to challenging negative stereotypes helps a bisexual-identified person improve resilience and may also help create a better sense of community belonging. Psychologists can also assist in helping to dispel negative stereotypes and stigmas for bisexual-identification. Providing affirmative therapy, community outreach programs, and interventions at multiple levels helps reduce negative stereotypes and stigmas associated with a bisexual-identification within society. These interventions can happen in the therapy room and as therapists serve as leaders within heterosexual, lesbian, and gay community spaces. Reducing stigma and negative stereotypes for bisexual-identified persons will assist in creating more inclusive, supportive, and psychologically health environments for all people.

Appendix A

Online Recruitment Text

A new research project at the University of Kentucky is investigating the experiences of bisexual-identified individuals. If you are 18 or older and identify as bisexual you may be eligible for this project.

This study is investigating the personal experiences of bisexual-identified persons in regard to their experiences of fitting in or feeling excluded because of their sexuality.

This study is based upon interviews with participants. Interviews may take place in person of online through skype or another video conference program. It is expected that interviews will typically last about 60-90 minutes. During the interview you will be asked about personal experiences.

To take part in this study or to find out more information please contact the researcher at the phone number or email address below.

Contact: David Pascale-Hague, M.S., Ed.S

david.pascalehague@gmail.com

Appendix B

Online groups and email lists used for recruitment

- Facebook groups and emails lists

  - Bisexual Bloggers Community Page

  - BiBlogs Support Group

  - Bisexual Community Support

  - Bisexual Organizing Project

  - University of Kentucky OUTSource Facebook page

  - University of Kentucky LGBTQ Task Force email list

  - Unitarian Universalist Sexual Educator Email list

- National and state bisexual organizations

  - BiNet USA

  - Bisexual Resource Center, Boston MA

  - Columbus Bi Network, Columbus OH

  - Bisexual Alliance of St. Louis

  - LA Bisexual Taskforce, Los Angeles CA

  - Bi Any Name, San Diego CA

  - Bisexual Network of Austin

Interview Protocol

Opening Questions

How did you find out about my project?

Tell me a little bit about yourself. What are some of your hobbies?

Where is your family from?

Where did you grow up?

What is your profession/vocation?

What are the important things that make you unique? Prompt for spirituality/religion, education, and other social identities as needed.

Bisexual Identity

What are the words or phrases you use to describe your own sexual identity?

Are those the words you use publically to describe your sexual identity?
  If no, what are the words you use publically?
  Tell me a few reasons you use different words publically.

What is it like for you to be a bisexual person?
What is good about being bisexual? What is tough about being bisexual?

Has identifying as bisexual changed your view of the world around you? How so?

What does being bisexual mean to you?

Community Belonging

How do you define community?

Where do you have a sense of community?

Are there communities or people that you believe bisexual people have a hard time connecting with?

Where are some of the places you have a difficult time finding a sense of community with others?

How do you people react when you tell them you identify as bisexual?

Tell me about the best reaction you have ever had from someone else when you told him or her about your sexual identity? Can you tell me about a negative experience as well?

What could lesbians and gay men do to help bisexuals feel more at home in LGB community?

Do you have a community of other bisexual people?
　　If Yes - How would you describe it?
　　　　What is it like to interact with other people who identify as bisexual?
　　　　Is that different or the same from the way you feel when interacting with lesbians and gay men?
　　If No – What do you think are some of the reasons you don't have a supportive community of bisexual people?

Stereotypes

Do you think there are stereotypes about bisexual people?

What do you think are some of the stereotypes?

Are the stereotypes different for bisexual women and bisexual men? How so?

Have you experienced some of these stereotypes directly? Indirectly?

Interpersonal Relationships

　　Are their specific people who have helped you in understanding your sexual identity?
　　　　Who are they?
　　　　How have they helped you?

Romantic Relationships

Tell me about your past relationships.
　　Have you had same sex partners?
　　Have you had other-sex partners?

Does being with a same or different sex partner change the way you feel you fit in with lesbians/gay men? How so?

Does your relationship status change the way you interact with heterosexual people?

What if the person you are dating identifies as lesbian/gay/straight? Tell me about how that makes things different for you?

Closing Questions

What is the best part of being a bisexual person?
What are the strengths of having a bisexual identity?

Informed Consent

Exploring Bisexually Identified Individuals' Experiences of Belonging

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about bisexually identified individuals' experiences of belonging. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you identify as bisexual and are at least 18 years old. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 15 people to do so.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is David Pascale-Hague, M.S, Ed.S., of University of Kentucky Department of Counseling Psychology. David is a doctoral candidate in counseling psychology and is being supervised in this project by Dr. Sharon Rostosky.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of bisexually identified persons when interacting in social environments and groups. Specifically, we are interested in personal experiences related to one's bisexual identity that contributes to having a sense of fitting in or feeling left out

By doing this study, we hope to learn more about how experiences of belonging and experiences of exclusion impact the lives of people who identify as bisexual.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

The only reasons you should not participate in this project are if you are do not identify as bisexual, under the age of 18, or do not wish to talk about your personal experiences.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

A personal interview will be conducted at a mutually agreed upon location suitable for the participant and the researcher. The interview may occur in person or online through a secure video conference (such as Skype or Adobe Connect). The interview will likely take 1-2 hours. At any time you may decide to discontinue participation.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

You will be asked to discuss experiences related your bisexual identity and experiences of fitting in or being left out when interacting with lesbians, gay men, heterosexuals, as well as with other bisexually identified persons. This interview will be scheduled at a day and time of your convenience. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

After participating in this study, you may be more aware of how your sexual identity developed over time and how your interactions with others have impacted your sense of belonging.

Your willingness to take part, may, in the future, help society as a whole better understand this research topic.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

We will make every effort to keep confidential all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private., We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is.

Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by the principle researcher or another trained transcriptionist. All materials, including the audio recorder will be locked in a secure cabinet and office when not in use. After the interview is transcribed the audio recording of your interview will be permanently deleted.

We will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court, or to tell authorities if you report information about a child being abused or if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else. Also, we may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Kentucky.

CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to withdraw you from the study. This may occur if you are not able to follow the directions given to you or if it is found that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you. As your participation is voluntary there are no consequences for leaving the study early.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

There is a possibility that the data collected from you may be shared with other investigators in the future. If that is the case the data will not contain information that can identify you unless you give your consent or the UK Institutional Review Board (IRB) approves the research. The IRB is a committee that reviews ethical issues, according to federal, state and local regulations on research with human subjects, to make sure the study complies with these before approval of a research study is issued.

Do you give your permission to be contacted in the future by David regarding your willingness to participate in future research studies about bisexual identity?

☐ Yes ☐ No _____Initials

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, David Pascale Hague at david.pascalehague@gmail.com OR 856-381-5076. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

_____   _____
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study   Date

_____
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____   _____
Name of (authorized) person obtaining informed consent   Date

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Vita

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PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS

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Campus Counselor
Transylvania University Counseling Center
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June 2013- Aug 2013
Supervision of Master's Level Students
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January 2011- May 2012
Practicum Student Therapist
University of Kentucky Counseling Center
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PEER REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

Riggle, E. D. B., Rostosky, S. S., McCants, L. E., & **Pascale-Hague, D.** (2011). The positive aspects of transgender self-identity. Psychology & Sexuality, 2, 147-158.

Rostosky, S. S., Riggle, E. D. B., **Pascale-Hague, D.**, & McCants, L. E. (2010). The positive aspects of a bisexual self-identification. Psychology & Sexuality, 1, 131-144

PRESENTATIONS

Misserocchi, K, Minieri, A, & **Pascale-Hague, D.** (August, 2012). *Client Feedback in Training and Supervision: Building a Bridge between Evidence-based and Social Justice Practice.* Poster presented at the Division 17 Student Poster Session at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Orlando, Florida.

Pascale-Hague, D., Rostosky, S. S., & Riggle, E. D. B. (August, 2012). *Does Relationship Status and the Sex of One's Partner Impact Depressive Symptoms, Stress, and Stigma Consciousness in Bisexual Adults?* Poster presented at the Division 17 Student Poster Session at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Orlando, Florida.

Pascale-Hague, D., Black, W., McCants, W., Odom, R., Gonzalez, K., Aaron, A., & Russell, G. (August, 2012). *Developing LGBT Allies: Ongoing Research and Intervention.* A roundtable discussion presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Orlando, Florida.

Pascale-Hague, D., Zaglul, H., & Wilson, J. F. (April, 2012). *Giving Bad News: Examining both the Doctor and Patient Experience.* Poster presentation at the Southeastern Group on Education Affairs, Regional Conference, Lexington KY.

Piercey, R. R., **Pascale-Hague, D.**, Nash, P. (April, 2012) *Using Electronic Portfolios to Facilitate Student Reflection and Preceptor Feedback in Medical and Dental Courses.* Poster presentation at the Southeastern Group on Education Affairs, Regional Conference, Lexington KY.

Piercey, R. R., **Pascale-Hague, D.**, Wilson, J. F. (April, 2012) *Incorporating the Medical Humanities Into the First Year Curriculum: Assessing Students' Written Reflections.* Poster presentation at the Southeastern Group on Education Affairs, Regional Conference, Lexington KY.

Piercey, R. R., Young, A., **Pascale-Hague, D.**, & Wilson, J. F. (April, 2013). *Flipping the classroom: Using technology to create interactive epidemiology and biostatistics modules.* Poster presentation at the Southeastern Group on Education Affairs, Regional Conference, Savannah, GA.

Rostosky, S. S., & **Pascale-Hague, D.** (February, 2010) *The Best of Both Worlds: Examining Sexual Fluidity in Adolescence.* Symposium presentation at the Society for Research on Adolescence, National Conference. Philadelphia, PA

HONORS AND AWARDS

The Beth Korfhage, PhD Endowed Fellowship in Educational and Counseling Psychology Fellowship (2013) Awarded in support of dissertation research for an Educational or Counseling Psychology student at the University of Kentucky conducting research on LGBT issues and concerns.