

2021

## Mapping the Lived Experiences of Bisexuals

Barbara Ann Hopkins  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Barbara A. Hopkins

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## Review Committee

Dr. Gary Burkholder, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty

Dr. Ethel Perry, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty

Dr. Jessica Tischner, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2021

Abstract

Mapping the Lived Experiences of Bisexuals

by

Barbara A. Hopkins

MS, Walden University, 2005

BS, University of Maryland University College, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

August 2021

## Abstract

Bisexuality is often met with binegativity, dismissal, and marginalization due to misconception of identity and behavior and its consideration as a transitional phase before the adoption of a monosexual identity. There is a lack of in-depth research regarding bisexuality apart from lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender/sexual studies; it is important to understand and differentiate bisexuality as a separate identity rather than a subset of heterosexual or homosexual identities. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of bisexuals through the lens of sexual configurations theory (SCT). SCT is a relatively new theory that has yet to enjoy broad empirical support; it theorizes sexuality as a social construct grounded in relativism. The theory and its mapping diagram allow for the possibility of a framework and visual depiction of bisexual lived experiences. Six people who identified as bisexual, who were recruited through listservs of professional organizations, and social organization networks, participated in in-depth interviews. The interviewees described their experiences with attractions and partners as whole gender/sex identities, relationships to gender/sex norms, genders, and personal attributes as having equal or greater importance than sex. Results indicate that the SCT diagram is a viable tool in understanding and describing lived experiences in a visual capacity. Implications for positive social change include providing knowledge that scholar-practitioners, mental health providers, and educators can use to support and affirm the bisexual identity and behaviors of clients. The research also lends further support to the SCT as an explanatory framework for sexuality.

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## Dedication

Barbara J. Hopkins, the reason for who I am and whom I inspire to be.

## Acknowledgments

Daubs: Thank you keeping me honest and having an unwavering belief in me.

retooP: Thank you for never letting me get so serious that I lost perspective.

GES: Thank you for being a constant support. I could not have made it this far without you. I will always love you more than I can ever express, my favorite ex-husband.

LBB: Thank you for calling me out on my BS and never letting my insecurities continue to take up rent in my head.

Matt: Thank you for being the happiest and most understanding person on Earth.

Shane: Thank you. You know what you did. I will forever be grateful.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Bisexuality as a sexual identity and behavior remains poorly understood in the current literature. The major recurring themes identified through systemic and literature reviews regarding bisexuality are (a) depression and suicidal thoughts, ideations, gestures, and completions (Israel, 2018; Plöderl & Tremblay, 2015; Rust, 2001); (b) identity and sexual behaviors as synonymous (Israel, 2018; Poupart, 2016); (c) social perceptions that bisexuality is a phase or trend (Israel, 2018; Rust, 2001); and (d) internalized binegativity due to cognitive dissonance (Israel, 2018; Plöderl & Tremblay, 2015). In regard to cognitive dissonance, internalized binegativity is the manifestation of the conflict between the negative cultural beliefs of bisexual attachments and the innate thoughts and feelings of the individual. This perspective is also in alignment with syndemic theory (Flanders et al., 2016), which postulates that when there are two or more comorbid conditions, they reinforce each other and thus create greater illness and higher risk behaviors. Flanders et al. (2016) described this condition as "...synergistic interaction... driven by oppressive social conditions, such as a sexual minority stigma" (p. 534). Maladaptive behaviors and internalized binegativity may also be due to the interchangeable use of the sexual orientation concept, defined by Rosario and Schrimshaw (2014) as a multidimensional construct consisting of sexual attraction, behaviors, identity, and romantic relationships. This concept implies that culture is the defining factor for sexual orientation. van Anders (2015) challenged this concept by theorizing sexuality as a social construct grounded in relativism--that is, the lived experiences of individuals. van Anders stated that "...a problematic aspect of current

usages of *sexual orientation* is that it is awkwardly and imprecisely marks a category and a subcategory” (p. 1179). van Anders added, “*sex + culture = gender* is an equation that seems to be the basis of thinking *sexual orientation + culture = sexual identity*” (p. 1178).

This critique reinforces that bisexuality needs to be studied in its own right (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2013; Elia et al., 2018; McLean, 2018). Yet, there is a lack of in-depth research and study regarding bisexuality apart from lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/sexual (LGBT) studies (Elia et al., 2018; Israel, 2018). Bostwick and Hequembourg (2013) advocated for studying bisexuality separate from lesbian and gay studies stating, “Such categories create a false equivalency between the experiences of gay and lesbian groups and bisexuals, which essentially erases the differing experiences within these groups” (p. 657). Arseneau et al. (2013) suggested that bisexuality may not have been studied in depth due to the limitations of existing assessment tools developed to understand the attitudes toward bisexuality. Most researchers who have studied sexuality have used Likert scales and closed-ended questions that do not consider the lived experiences of the individuals or community studied (van Anders, 2015).

Sexual configurations theory (SCT) provides an interdisciplinary framework for exploring the lived experiences of individuals who identify as bisexual in a more multifaceted manner. Research of bisexuals’ lived experiences using the SCT framework can lead to positive social change by providing knowledge that scholar-practitioners, mental health providers, and educators can use to support and affirm the bisexual identity and behaviors of clients. In this chapter, I provide an overview of my research on this topic. The chapter includes background information; the problem and purpose of the

study; the study's research questions (RQs); overviews of the theoretical framework and nature of the study; and discussion of the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

### **Background**

Bisexuality as an identity and orientation does not fit in the socially accepted or recognized dichotomous sexual orientations of heterosexuality and homosexuality, with binegativity sometimes a result of these negative outlooks. Belmonte and Holmes (2016) and Israel (2018) found that monosexual individuals and groups excluded and dismissed bisexual identity as phasic and trending behaviors. The researchers also found that these individuals marginalized and ostracized individuals who identify as bisexual. Research shows that such binegativity adversely affects bisexual individuals. Studies and meta-analyses indicate the themes as key findings: (a) depression and suicidal thoughts, ideations, gestures, and completions; (b) bisexuality identity and bisexual sexual behaviors as synonymous; (c) social perception that bisexual identity is phasis or a trend; and (d) internalized binegativity due to cognitive dissonance (Belmonte & Holmes, 2016; Israel, 2018)

In the early 2000s, Rust (2001) purported that one of the main reasons for binegativity is the lack of differentiation between bisexual romantic, partnered relationships and bisexual sexual behaviors. Rust found that bisexual individuals are often seen as deviants due to the interchangeable definition of bisexuality as an identity and bisexual sexual behaviors. More than a decade later, LaPointe (2017) also identified a misunderstanding between romantic relationships and sexual behaviors in

nonmonosexual communities. The researcher examined Canadian youth in a gay-straight alliance organization and how self-identified bisexual youth are perceived by teachers, classmates, and peers. Notably, bisexual behaviors, whether affective or sexual, were met with prejudice, invisibility, and misunderstanding. In respect to attitudes regarding nonmonosexual sexual identity and sexual behaviors, Paz Galupo et al. (2016) used data obtained from the demographic section of a larger online study to research how individuals in the LGBT community defined their sexual identities. Using an inductive coding method, Paz Galupo et al. identified four themes: (a) sexual identity labels, (b) levels or distinctions of attraction, (c) use of binary and nonbinary language, and (d) identity transcendence. Results indicate that disclosure of bisexual identity was met with more negativity than bisexual sexual behaviors.

Paz Galupo et al. (2014) identified three categories of sexual identity--monosexual, plurisexual, and asexual--and found that sexual behaviors are fluid, regardless of affective attachments. The researchers used a qualitative, intersectional approach to critique two scales used to identify sexual orientation and gender identity, the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid and the Kinsey Scale. The researchers then utilized inductive reasoning to ascertain how participants discussed their sexual identity “in the context of sexual orientation measurement” (p. 438). van Anders (2015) found that the results in the Paz Galupo et al. (2014) study yielded the same scores regardless of the identified sexuality due to the predefined parameters and variables.

Dunlap (2016) conducted a study of a larger scale research project on the stages of the coming out process in self-identified lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals



18 years of age and older. Participants were grouped into five generational cohorts: pre-Stonewall (before 1951), Stonewall (1951-1962), AIDS crisis (1963-1969), post AIDS crisis and millennial (1970-1988), and after 1988. Participants completed the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale (Mohr & Kendra, 2011), to ascertain sexual identity development, and the Milestones in Coming Out questionnaire. Results suggest that bisexual affective attachments are stable throughout age cohorts, whereas sexual behaviors are fluid. Dunlap also determined that the younger the LGB individual, the less time elapsed between self-identification to disclosure. Dunlap inferred that this phenomenon was due to greater societal acceptance and proposed that societal acceptance of LGB persons would decrease the time from self-awareness to disclosure to friends and family.

Scherrer et al. (2015) sought to understand attitudes by conducting a qualitative study on the coming out experiences of self-identified bisexual individuals. The researchers used two semistructured interviews by other researchers. Participants (men,  $n = 13$ , and women,  $n = 32$ ) were recruited from LGBT organizations. People of color were specifically sought due to low representation in previous studies. Results indicate that the participants employed strategies for disclosure as bisexual, nondisclosure, and coming out as gay or lesbian based on cultural expectations. Using the 2002/2003 National Survey of Family Growth, Gates (2011) reviewed the demographic characteristics of the LGBT population and ascertained differences between the concepts of sexual behaviors and affective attachments identification. Gates found that approximately 3.5% of adults in the United States identified as LBG and 0.3% as transgender, an estimated 17 million

LGBT individuals. Gates also identified that women were more likely to identify as bisexual.

Carrillo and Hoffman (2018), Moser (2016), and Amos and McCabe (2015) confirmed the need to reconceptualize the definitions of sexual orientations to reflect the elasticity of sexual desires and attachment relationships throughout an individual's lifetime. The most prominent theme noted from the researchers is the difference between sexual attraction to genitalia vice sexual attraction to the individual. Carrillo and Hoffman identified this trend as heteroflexibility, in which an individual's sexual arousal differs from an individual's relationship attractiveness (e.g., heterosexual men who enjoy occasional coital activity with men). From an unconventional perspective, Moser defined sexual orientation as more in the realm of fetishism, such as pedophilia, frotteurism, and BDSM (bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadism and masochism). Amos and McCabe (2015), alternatively, conceptualized sexual orientation as the degree of sexual attractiveness and arousal an individual has toward another, rather than the development and formation of emotional and psychological attachments. Carrillo and Hoffman, Moser, and Amos and McCabe relegate bisexuality as nothing more than physical sexual behaviors thus dismissing bisexuality as an identity and supporting binegativity and bierasure.

### **Problem Statement**

Resulting from the varying perspectives of sexual orientation individuals who identify as bisexual experience negativity and are marginalized as just a trend or a phase, or completely dismissed or erased as a viable and stable sexual orientation. Belmonte and

Holmes (2016) conducted a mixed-methods study on the experiences of lesbian and bisexual women in the contexts of sexual identity attitudes in the LGBT community. Results indicated that only 32% of participants felt positive about their affective attachments amongst similarly oriented persons and most negative in less culturally diverse settings. Other research shows that bisexual affective attachments and bisexual sexual behaviors are seen as phasic or a current trend (Dunlap, 2016; Rust 2001). To further support the negative effects of binegativity and internal binegativity, Plöderl and Tremblay (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of 199 articles noting individuals who identify as bisexual are more prone to mental and physical health issues than individuals who identify as monosexual supporting the physical and psychological effects of binegativity.

Absent from the reviewed studies is the lived experience perspective regarding LGBT experiences in general and bisexuality in particular. The scales and measurements utilized have set parameters and metrics, such as Likert scales and scored closed-ended questions (e.g., Kinsey et al., 1948; Klein, 1993 ). The SCT is a contemporary and alternative perspective of sexuality that affords participants the opportunity to map their lived experiences outside of the contingent norms by defining their own truth (van Anders, 2015; Schudson et al., 2017).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of individuals who identify as bisexual through the lens of the SCT. Exploring the distinction between bisexuality as an orientation and as an identity may help to mitigate

the negative attitudes toward and high-risk behaviors associated with bisexuality. I used the phenomenological qualitative approach in conjunction with SCT to gain insight of the lived experiences of individuals who identify as bisexual and how their experiences can be mapped.

### **Research Questions**

The RQs that were the focus of this study are

RQ1. What are the lived experiences of bisexual individuals analyzed through the lens of the sexual configurations theory?

RQ2. How do individuals who identify as bisexual differentiate between identity and behavior?

RQ3. Can the SCT diagram accurately map the lived experiences of individuals who identify as bisexual?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical base for this research study includes aspects of relativism, social constructivism, and essentialism. From an essentialist perspective, Freud's (1905/1962) theory of sexuality contends that all human beings are innately bisexual. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-95, as cited in Brooks, 2012) viewed bisexuality as hermaphroditic, meaning an individual may possess feminine or masculine genitalia (or both), engage in bisexual romantic relationships, or express bisexual sexual behaviors.

Freud's (1905/1962) and Ulrich's (1825-95, as cited in Brooks, 2012) theories have been useful to social science research and humanities scholarship. Yet, in the search for contemporary theories of the origins of bisexuality, the literature was lacking in the

inclusion of the lived experiences of bisexual individuals. van Anders (2015) developed the SCT, which is “a dynamic way to delineate diverse sexualities because it makes space for novel sexualities that are not yet embedded within it.” (p. 1189). While there is no particular sexuality that is set for the basis of the theory, the theory was born from the concept of intersectionality “in which people occupy a social location that is not the sum of its parts” (p. 1213) and neuroendocrinology. van Anders argued that the viability and stability of any sexual diversity is relative to the lived experiences of individuals from a social constructivist approach. Relatively, it is the truth of the individual based on cultural upbringing and lived experiences. I will discuss the SCT in further detail in Chapter 2.

### **Nature of the Study**

The nature of this study was qualitative. The qualitative approach is consistent with the exploration of bisexuality as an affective attachment and not just as sexual gratification or as a transitional phase to acceptance of homosexuality. Maintaining focus on sexual development is in alignment with the epistemological foundation of Freud’s (1905/1962) and van Ander’s (2015) theories of sexual orientation development. I conducted individual comprehensive interviews for several reasons. First, individuals who identify as bisexual identity in the context of affective attachments can learn they are not alone in their thoughts and feelings. Second, utilizing a web-based approach may allow individuals to engage in conversations while still maintaining anonymity. Finally, information and emerging themes from the results of the study can be utilized to design

social and support network to help reduce internalized binegativity and high-risk behaviors by providing a better understanding of bisexuality.

### **Definitions**

The SCT terms utilized throughout the study are provided in Table 1. The terms are from Schudson et al. (2017).

**Table 1***Sexual Configurations Theory Definitions*

Term	Definition	Examples of phenomena	Examples of labels
Gender	Social, cultural, and/or learned phenomena relating to femininity, masculinity, & gender diversity	Internal sense of self, beliefs about others, clothing intonation, behavior, presentation, legal structures, politics, policies, etc.	Butch, femme, trans, genderqueer, masculine, feminine, tomboy, genderfuck, cisgender, etc.
Sex	Bodily features relating to maleness, femaleness, and sex diversity. Evolved and/or adapted.	Internal sense of self, bodily features, genitals, body frames, voice etc.	Female, male, trans, transgender, cissexual, cisgender, intersex, etc.
Gender/Sex	Whole people & identities: aspects of women, men, and gender/sex-diverse people that involve both gender <i>and</i> sex	Internal sense of self, others' recognition of self, whole impression, social groups, etc.	Genderqueer, woman, man, trans woman, trans man, cis woman, cis man, intersex, etc.
Status	Sexual behaviors.	Penetrative sexuality, flirting, cuddling, kissing, commitment, etc.	Partnered, married, single-by-choice, multipartnered, not sexually active, WSW, MSM, etc.
Orientation	Sexual pulls or draws toward other people (or not).	Interests, attractions, desires, responses, fantasies, arousals, intimacies, loves, etc.	Heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, monosexual, male-oriented, female-oriented, etc.
Identity	The way one defines one's self, including to others.	Label, identification, community, positioning.	Asexual, polyamorous, heterosexual, queer, bisexual, kink-oriented, lesbian, gay, slut, etc.
Eroticism	Phenomena that are sexually tantalizing, arousing, pleasurable, etc.	Orgasm, genital pleasure, sexual arousal, fantasies, having sex, phone sex, sexting, sexual chemistry, etc.	

Nurturance	Phenomena that are tied to warm, loving feelings and closeness.	Support, affection, cuddling, emotional connection, hugs, etc.
------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------

*Note.* From *Sexual Configurations Theory Workbook*, by Z. C. Schudson, E. R. Dibble, & S. M. van Anders, n.d., van Anders Lab (<https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/van-anders-lab/sctworkbook.pdf>). Copyright 2015 by Dr. Sari van Anders. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix E).

### **Assumptions**

The principal assumptions of the study that are believed, but cannot be demonstrated and verified, are the honesty and candor of the participants. I assumed participants would be able to accurately recall their lived experiences. Accurately recalling lived experiences and honesty are prudent due to the fact SCT is grounded in social constructive relativism (van Anders, 2015). In addition, I assumed the participants would have English as their primary language, as the interview questions and interview questions were in English with an American subdialect. The inclusion of English as a primary language was done under the assumption that individuals would comprehend the nature of the study based on the description in the demographic screening questionnaire. Potential participants with English as a second language may have experienced challenges understanding the concept of the SCT definitions and diagram. There were no participants with English as a second language included in this study. I also assumed that I would be able to generate and build a rapport with each participant in a way that would allow the participant to feel comfortable disclosing personal information. Moreover, it



was assumed that the mapping of SCT diagram would be understood and correctly completed by participants with varying socioeconomic backgrounds.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Researchers studying culture categorize people based on societal concepts and beliefs rather than the lived experiences of people (van Anders, 2015). Bisexuality is the least common sexual orientation and is often met with binegativity from monosexual individuals and groups (Israel, 2018). Individuals who identify as bisexual are often marginalized, dismissed, omitted, or perceived as sexual deviants. Additionally, the study of bisexuality is often collapsed within LGBT studies. This study involved the lived experiences of individuals who identify as bisexual. The general intent of this study was to explore and map how individuals who identify as bisexual describe their bisexuality and what bisexuality means to them through their lived experiences by focusing on bisexuality in-depth, rather than collapsed into LGBT studies.

Participants were delimited based on the means of recruitment. I recruited from the listservs and membership of the American Psychological Association (APA) Division 44 (DIV44) Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity and Identity, Inc., a local LGBT organization. I made attempts to include a variety of male, female, and other identities

### **Limitations**

The principal limitations of the study are the complexity of the SCT, the mapping of the diagram, and SCT as a novel theory with minimal empirical support. Participants not having higher learning degrees may have required additional assistance with

comprehension. However, the study should provide insight into how useful this tool is for a broad cross-section of individuals. The terms used (e.g., “gender/sex,” “status,” and “orientation”) may have required extra time for participants to comprehend due to their unique in relation to the SCT. Furthermore, results of qualitative studies may not be generalized to the population (Charmaz & Henwood, 2017; Willig & Rogers, 2017).

### **Significance**

I focused on the differentiation of bisexuality as an identity and as an orientation through the lived experiences of individuals who identify as bisexuals. Such differentiation can help clarify how individuals identify as bisexual—that is, whether it is in the context of sexual behaviors or in the context of initiating and maintaining relationships beyond friendship and immediate sexual gratification. This exploration of the bisexual orientation through lived experiences, employing a SCT lens, is a step toward mitigating the marginalization, dismissal, and erasure of bisexual identity in both monosexual and nonmonosexual groups. Several researchers (Callis, 2016; Davids & Lindquist, 2018; Pereira et al., 2017; Rosario & Schrimshaw, 2014) have proposed “bisexuality” as the categorical name for individuals expressing affective attachments and sexual behaviors regardless of gender. Distinguishing the different facets of bisexuality may provide insight into the experiences of individuals who identify as bisexual and clarify the discernment of affective attachments from sexual attractions.

Results and insights from this research study may mitigate the vicissitude of binegativity (internal and external) by supporting the bisexual identity as viable and stable. The results may be used to educate scholar-practitioners, mental health providers,

and secondary education staff about the thought processes of those who identify as bisexual, which may result in more positive attitudes. Appreciation and support can lead to more defined and effective research studies and mental health treatments and modalities, as well as inclusion in sexual education courses for school-aged children. Israel (2018) stated that such work can "...shed light on the marginalization of bisexuality within psychology and society and offer a framework for increasing inclusion and affirmation of bisexuality" (p. 233).

### **Summary**

Dichotomous perspectives serve to invalidate bisexuality and individuals who identify as bisexuals (McLean, 2018). This is despite the possibility of bisexuality being biologically based and reflective of socialization or genetic dispositions. The pressures placed on individuals who identify to make a conscious choice of one of the accepted dichotomous sexual orientations may be a major contributing factor to the confusion, low self-esteem, and expressed suicidal ideation reported by bisexual individuals (Bohan, 1996; McLean, 2018).

I used the SCT (van Anders, 2015) in this study because it allows the scope of exploration and mapping to be delimited to the lived experience of one individual at a time and to be viewed as unique. Subsequently, the use of a phenomenological design allowed for the organization and interpretative analysis of the data. This information gained from this research study will provide pertinent knowledge regarding the bisexual community, which may prompt further research within this population.

In Chapter 2, I will focus on the contemporary, biological, and social theories and models regarding sexual orientations, specifically bisexuality. The SCT will be discussed thoroughly as well as the utility of the SCT diagram to identify commonalities within the bisexual community. SCT offers the possibility to describe bisexual lived experiences and identify commonalities to aid in appreciating bisexual thought processes and behaviors. In Chapter 3, I will provide a rationale for the research method and design and an overview of the methodology, including the processes for recruiting participants. Chapter 4 includes information on the participants and a discussion of the findings of the in-depth interviews. In Chapter 5, I integrate the literature review and findings of the study and discuss the study's implications for positive social change.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will focus on the need to explore sexuality, specifically bisexuality, from the perspective of lived experiences. Bisexuality is not a 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon; as such, it will be described from a historical standpoint and will include discussion of contemporary theories and measurement tools. Before reviewing the literature, I describe the literature search strategy and discuss the theoretical framework.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature search strategy consisted of researching the Walden University Library databases using the Boolean option for the terms *bisexuality*, *bisexual*, and *bisexual identity development*. I mined the reference lists from found articles for original and contemporary works until saturation was met. Saturation was met when the literature ceased to present newly discovered facts and statistics. Information regarding the sexual configurations theory was received directly from the author, Dr. Sari van Anders, and her research assistant Zach Schudson.

### **Theoretical Framework**

It was not until 1995 that theorizing bisexuality surfaced as an earnest academic field of inquiry (Hemmings, 1998). Angelides (2001) wrote that the concept of bisexuality did not come into existence until the opposition of heterosexual/homosexuality had been invented. In essence, bisexuality is the epistemic position between the heterosexual and homosexual poles, thus rendering bisexuality as a by-product of the dichotomous sexual orientations. Despite identifying bisexuality as a

third sexual orientation, Angelides (2001) purported that “to invoke and define any one of the terms hetero-, homo-, or bisexuality is to invoke and define the others by default” (p. 16). However, instead of bisexuality being a pivotal point in the spectrum of sexuality, bisexuality should stand alone and not be a culmination of hetero- and homosexuality. Of interest is the anthology presented by Angelides. The anthology provides theoretical engagements, construction of sexual identity, and the social and political positioning of sexuality but does not include the lived experiences of individuals who identify as bisexual.

Angelides (2001) cited Garber’s comprehensive studies of bisexuality in various cultures utilizing the mobius model developed by William Stockton and Marjorie Herdes (SeaChange Resources, 2018). Angelides noted that the “nature of sexuality...is fluid not fixed, a narrative that changes over time rather than a fixed identity, however complex” (p. 66). Although not directly involved with sexuality studies, the mobius model is a useful guide for developing effective relationships. It offers a tool for identifying the characteristics of collaborative relationships in areas that include mutual understanding, deductive reasoning, common goals and values, strategic employment of skills and resources, assigned and perceived responsibility, and acknowledgement of contributions within working and social groups (SeaChange Resources, 2018).

In contrast, SCT (van Anders, 2015) focuses on the individual relationship and the complexities of the experience of the relationship within groups, environments, time, and space. It does so from the perspective of lived experiences of identity, orientation, and status based on the parameters of gender/sex (whole identities that include sex and

gender) and partner number. SCT challenges the societal understanding and alignment of sexual orientation using a sexual diversity lens. In essence, sexuality is not restricted to gendered and sexual orientation scripts, but rather can be fluid and multifaceted; this, it can be used to frame bisexual experience.

### **Literature Review to Key Variables and/or Concepts**

The veracity of bisexuality has long been in question despite the prevalence of references to bisexuality in the literature (Hemmings, 1998; Maliepaard, 2015). Angelides (2001) reported that “this apparent oversight by our all-consuming regime of sexuality is particularly puzzling in view...of the rather long history of research suggestive of the prevalence of bisexual practices in most human cultures” (p. 2). Human beings have engaged in bisexual behavior since the time of ancient Greece (Androutsos et al., 2008; Angelides, 2001; Boyle, 2006). In ancient Greece, young men were expected to enter into relationships with older men to be taught experience and wisdom before they became of age to take a wife (Angelides, 2001; Boyle, 2006). An older male (erastes) would woo a younger male (eromenos) with gifts; the younger male “would be trained in poetry, athletics, politics and other qualities he would need to become a productive citizen of Athens” (Boyle, 2006, p. 134). Boyle (2006) reported that even the Greek god Zeus had an affair with a Trojan prince, despite being renowned for his conquests of women. Sappho, from the island of Lesbos, often had romantic and sexual relations with women despite being married with children. Bisexuality in Greece was not unique, secretive, or immoral; rather, it was a natural part of life.

Rapp (2004) wrote of Margaret Mead's chronicles of bisexual practices in Bali, New Guinea, and coming of age sexual practices in Samoa. Freud (1905/1962) also addressed bisexuality, albeit coined as *amphigenic inverts*, contending that all human beings are innately bisexual. He thus advocated for the existence of bisexuality from biological as well as psychological perspectives. MacDowell (2009) credited Darwin's theory of bisexuality as "influential in establishing a Victorian framework in which bisexuality is associated with primitive, racialised, and indecent sexual conduct that is bestial, animalistic and thus not fully human" (p. 13).

Brooks (2012) explored Karl Heinrich Ulrichs's theory of bisexuality as hermaphroditic, meaning an individual may possess feminine or masculine genitalia (or both) and engage in bisexual affective attachments or express bisexual sexual behaviors. Ulrichs (1825-95, as cited in Brooks, 2012) suggested that all human beings were hermaphroditic in the early stages of fetal development. Ulrichs classified three sexual types for men and women: urning/urningin (same-sex desire), dioning/dioningin (women loving men/men loving women), and uranodioning (those who experience love for both sexes). Within these sexual types were subgroups. For example, mannlings were manly, weiblings were womanly, virilisirts were urnings/urningins who were married and living as dionings/dioningins due to societal pressures, and uraniasters were dionings/dioningins who "temporarily practiced Uranian love" (Brooks, 2012, p.183). Ulrichs also added a subgroup of *disjunctives* to Uranodionings to describe "those who feel love in a purely romanticized sense for young men" (Brooks, 2012, p. 183). Ulrich later described individuals who did not follow the societal norms of dioning/dioningin lifestyles as



hermaphrodites, regardless of morphology. Supporting the essentialist perspective, Heenen-Wolff (2011) identified bisexual affective attachments as an innate sexual identity manifested from unresolved oedipal and electra complexes during childhood. Israel (2018) also took an essentialist perspective that bisexuality is innate and not a choice.

### **Bisexuality Studies**

Bisexuals in the United States live in a culture that dichotomizes sexuality and, within the dichotomization, invalidates bisexual experiences and challenges identities (Israel, 2018; Plöderl & Tremblay, 2015; Rust, 2001; Taylor, 2018). Until 1973, homosexuality was defined by the American Psychiatric Association as a curable mental disorder, while bisexual behaviors were considered to be characteristic of a confused gay male, lesbian, or heterosexual individual (Bohan, 1996; Young-Bruehl, 2001). However, despite the removal of the original definition of homosexuality in 1973, the term *egodystonic homosexuality* was included in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* until 1987. This classification was oriented toward those who were experiencing sexual identity crises, including bisexuality (Bohan, 1996). *Egosystemic homosexuality* was the psychopathologic term used to describe an individual who expressed difficulty being sexually aroused or interested in heterosexual relations but who was disturbed by homosexual arousal and expressed a strong desire to alter his or her sexual orientation.

The mental duress experienced by bisexuals may not only be the manifestation of sexual confusion or gender identity but also of pressures placed upon individuals to live

within the standards of sexuality. These standards are set forth by a society that recognizes opposite-sex and same-sex behaviors as the only stable sexual orientations (Bohan, 1996; Elia et al., 2018). Dillon and Worthington (2003) and Habibi and Stueck (2018) found that professional counselors also regarded bisexuality as sexual confusion rather than a stable sexual orientation. Moreover, sexual orientation studies of same-sex and bisexual behaviors are predominantly focused on sexual activity, rather than emotional and psychological bonds (Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Schudson et al., 2017; van Anders, 2015). Mohr and Rochlen (1999) found in a review of the literature that bisexuality is not viewed as a stable sexual orientation, but rather as a deviation of societal norms regarding expected sexual behavior. The inability to classify bisexual behaviors into a unified sexual orientation category leads to confusion and denial of its existence (Angelides, 2001; Taylor, 2018).

Contributing to the denial and confusion of bisexuality is the lack of a unified definition (Hemmings, 1998). Hemmings (1998) cited Malcolm Bowie's definition of the bisexuality's three most common definitions as hermaphroditism, feminine and masculine psychological characteristics, and sexual attractions toward males and females.

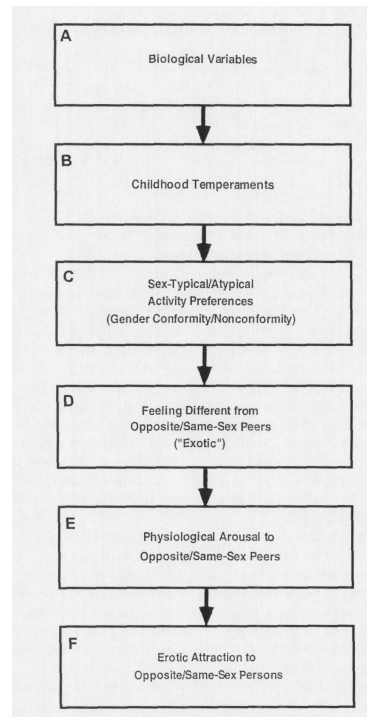
A commonly held viewpoint is that bisexuals are indifferent to the gender of their partner (Hemmings, 1998; Rust, 2001). Bisexuality is seen as pervasive, meaning "allowing for heterosexual and homosexual desires" (Hemmings, 1998, p. 17). It is this position of androgyny that promulgates the perception of bisexuality as focused more on behavior and less as an orientation. Hemmings (1998) purported that bisexuality is not seen as a viable orientation due to a lack of consistency in object-choice over time.

Hemmings (1998) theorized bisexuality as not separate nor distinct from heterosexuality and homosexuality due to its sharing and occupying gay, lesbian, and straight spaces and “is informative of the ways we understand, name and express desire” (p. 20). It is in this respect that theories of bisexuality can offer tenets for understanding and tolerating sexual identities that are not in harmony with the traditional dichotomous sexual orientation classifications of heterosexual and homosexual (Thompson & Morgan, 2008).

From a social constructivist perspective, Bem’s (1996) exotic becomes erotic (EBE) theory proposes that what is unknown or different (exotic) arouses sexual excitation (erotic). If a male child spends much of his childhood with females, he will come to view males as sexually arousing because males are relatively unfamiliar. A similar phenomenon appears when a male spends most of his childhood with males; he will find the female to be exotic. Bem proposed sexual orientation begins with biological variables (e.g., genes and prenatal hormones) and sequentially progresses to erotic and romantic attractions (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Exotic Becomes Erotic Model*



*Note.* From “Exotic Becomes Erotic: A developmental theory of sexual orientation,” by D. J. Bem, 1996, *Psychological Review*, 103(2), p. 321 (<https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.103.2.320>). Copyright 1996 by American Psychological Association, Inc.

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The EBE model contends that genes and prenatal hormones are the determinants of sexual orientation although temperament, aggressive levels, or activity levels have a greater effect. Temperament has a direct influence on the types of activities the child engages, such as male-typical activities (competitive sports, rough and tumble play, or female-typical activities (noncompetitive activities and socializing). Bem (1996) defined cisgender children who engaged in sex-typical activities with same-sex playmates as gender conforming, whereas the converse is referred to as gender nonconforming. EBE

theorizes when children “feel different from opposite-sex peers, perceiving them as dissimilar, unfamiliar, and exotic” (p. 321). The feelings of disparateness manifest into an autarkic sense of intense arousal which is transformed in later years into erotic and romantic attractions. It could be deduced that from the EBE perspective an individual who identifies as bisexual would not have had interactions with males or females during childhood. From a biological perspective, EBE does not account progression of sexual orientation development for sexual minorities, such as bisexuality; rather a variant of sexual identity as is “being erotically attracted to one sex and romantically attracted to the other” (p. 332).

### **Stage Models**

The EBE model is not the only stage model that theorizes sexual orientation identification as a process. Weinberg et al. (1994) proposed that individuals who identify as bisexual go through a four-stage process consisting of initial confusion, finding and applying the label, settling into the identity, and continued uncertainty (pp. 27-38). Brown (2002) expounded upon the Weinberg et al. (1994) theory by postulating the lived experiences of each stage are dependent upon the gender of the individual. In this respect, Brown utilized the term gender to indicate the individual’s biological sex. Males, according to Brown, begin with homosexual attractions and sexual behavior, experience denial, and then acceptance of a bisexual identity. Conversely, females are more tolerant of “nonnormative sexual behavior” (p. 78), and accept the identity of being a bisexual with less episodic denial.

In contrast, Bradford (2004) conducted a meta analysis of two large scale studies by Hoburg (2000) and Konik (1999) that investigated correlates and predictors of sexual orientation. Her findings suggested individuals go through a 4-stage process when identifying as a bisexual: questioning reality, inventing reality, maintaining reality, and transforming reality. Bradford described her stage model as:

In the first stage the denial, or invisibility, bisexuality in the culture results in the doubting one's own experience of both same-sex and other-sex attractions. Under pressure to self-define as either heterosexual or homosexual, bisexual people must come to trust their own reality, despite cultural influence, in order to transcend this stage. Those who are able to affirm the reality of both their attractions must then struggle excuse me must then structure their reality and give it meaning by creating definition for it. This involves rejection of those definitions offered by the culture that are based on current relationship status and partner gender. Developing identity, however, is only the beginning for bisexual people. Once they come to terms with who they are, they are met with the challenge of preserving their identity against continual lack of acknowledgement...For those who achieve an affirmed bisexual identity...the experience is character strengthening. Some *transform the adversity* of their experience into social action by continuing to participate in the community at large as by sexually identified individuals...They exhibit a sense of personal satisfaction. (p. 20)

Knous (2005) proposed that the identification of being a bisexual happens is a 3-stage process in which stigma management is present in each stage. Knous stated stigma

management, defined as normalizing and affirming behavior, is an important and necessary part of navigating the stages of identity formation. She identified the stages of identity formation as primary, secondary, and tertiary deviance. Primary deviance is the recognition of “either the first attraction to or sexual act with all sexes. After this experience, “the deviant identity is not yet formed and one’s identity remains intact” (p. 45). Secondary deviance is labeling the attractions and disclosure of sexuality, whereas tertiary deviance “involves a rebellion against social prejudice and participation in bisexual community-building, as well as being proudly out as bisexual within the wider gay and straight communities” (p. 48).

Gómez and Arenas (2019) proposed a 6 stage process in identifying as bisexual. Individuals experience (a) curiosity to experiment; (b) obstacles; (c) confusion in the development of bisexuality; (d) partial commodity with bisexual identity; (e) acknowledgment of bisexuality as a sexual orientation; and (f) “I just am like this”. Gómez and Arenas contended the process begins with sexual curiosity and sexual behavioral experimentation that can originally present itself at varying ages. Individuals are faced with challenges and obstacles of identifying with nonnormative feelings and behaviors and lack of support and understanding from family and friends. The researchers identified the third stage the one in which “individuals question what is happening in their lives as well as making comparisons with other people’s experiences that lead to a path of confusion about their identity” (p. 1673). It is during the third stage that individuals seek help and develop strategies for coping with their confusion. In the fourth stage, partial acceptance of sexuality is achieved. The fifth stage the individual

fully accepts bisexuality as their sexual orientation. And finally, the individuals accepts who they are.

It is these complexities that frame the focus of this research study. Much of the research conducted in the field of sexology collapses sexual minorities into a single group that is lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/transsexual (LGBT); LGBT is positioned as opposite to heterosexual. Most studies have focused on sexual behavior as the defining factor of sexuality (Horley & Clarke, 2016; Monro, 2018; van Anders, 2015). MacDowell (2009) reported that while there have been many publications regarding bisexuality, the focus has been primarily on responding to the *absence* of the history of bisexuality.

MacDowell stated:

As a result, contemporary accounts have generally sought to legitimate bisexuality as a sexual identity and an object of academic inquiry, through highlighting bisexuality's presence in history, the specificity of bisexual experience, and its existence as a viable form of sexual identification. This focus on reparative history and positive representations of bisexuality means that contemporary theory has often been reluctant to historicism the category of bisexuality itself (p. 4).

Bisexuality research is typically viewed from the lens of gay and lesbian studies (Hemmings, 1998; Monro, 2018; Rust, 2001). The lived experiences of bisexuals are often intertwined with the lived experiences of the gay and lesbian individuals, thus losing the nuance of the lived experiences of the bisexual community. The intertwining risks positions bisexuality as a transitional phase of sexual discovery reinforcing the



marginalization and invisibility of bisexuality. From a historical and contemporary perspective, bisexuality has been viewed and treated as a distinguishable passage from childhood to adulthood in many cultures (Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Hemmings, 1998; MacDowell, 2009).

van Anders (2015) noted several limitations in the scientific literature regarding sexual orientation. One such limitation is the use of the concept of sexual orientation to describe behavior and as an identity descriptor. In some research, sexual orientation is characterized by gender as the singular defining feature (Beasley, 2013); in other research, biological sex and sexual behaviors are the defining features (Brennan & Hegarty, 2012; Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Schudson et al., 2017). To further confound the issue the terms *gender* and *sex* are also used interchangeably. van Anders (2015) stated:

No studies, however, provide proof for sex over gender and also most none empirically assess gender in any way. This subsumption of gender into sex is problematic because it lacks scientific precision and external validity... Theories of sexual orientation rooted solely in sex are scientifically problematic because they fail to 'see' diverse sexualities that empirically exist (p 1180).

Prior (2018) stated "another definitional impediment is that an individual's sexual orientation often becomes dependent on the gender or sexual identity of the partner" (p. xi). Rosario and Schrimshaw (2014) defined sex as the biological features of male and female; that is, based on genitalia. Males display a penis and scrotum, whereas female physical characteristics are marked by a vagina and functioning mammary glands. The relational aspects of sexual orientation are identified as sexual identity, despite having

differing meanings. The sexual configurations theory postulated identity is the societal and political label, whereas orientation involves the interests and attractions assigned by the fields of psychology (van Anders, 2015).

The *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (VandenBos, 2007) contains a definition of sexual identity as “the individual’s internal identification with heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual preferences...an occasional synonym for *SEX IDENTITY* or *GENDER IDENTITY*” (p. 846). Swan (2018) argued the importance of identifying unified definitions of identity and gender, specifically for bisexuality, to clarify scientific inquiry of sexuality. In the words of van Anders (2015):

This ends up leaving sexual orientation to be constructed by scientists and sexual identity to be constructed by others...it ends up implicitly positioning sexual orientation as the core foundation (biology) upon which sexual identity (culture) is built in ways that exactly mirror how sex is seen as the impenetrable and unmovable base upon which gender is flimsily constructed (p. 1182).

### **Sexuality Theories and the Sexual Orientation Configuration Theory**

Within the past 20 years the interest in sexuality has increased in social, political, and education arenas (Monro, 2018). Monro (2018) stated that

The field is rich and diverse, including micro-studies situated in specific social contexts, accounts of practice in particular settings, organizational sexualities, transnational analysis, cultural approaches, and theoretical analysis. ...Theory continued to develop through the 1990s...Since the 1990s, sexualities studies has been characterized by increasing interdisciplinarity and by the emergence of sub-

disciplines (p. 1229).

Many of the theories of sexuality are bioevolutionary and share the commonalities of relying heavily on genetic, endocrinology, or other biological factors (Bem, 1996; Hemmings, 1998; Horley & Clarke, 2016). Regardless, it has been noted that sexuality and gender are central to an individual's identity (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2014; Thompson & Morgan, 2008). However, identifying a unified and synthesized definition of sexuality and gender has been problematic (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2014; Swan, 2018; Schudson et al., 2017; van Anders, 2015).

van Anders (2015) developed the SCT to provide a clearer and better understanding of partnered sexualities based on lived experiences – stories, thoughts, feelings. SCT refutes sexual orientation as the foundation of sexual identity and purports sexual identity (labels), sexual orientation (interests, attractions, fantasies), and sexual behaviors as three related but distinct phenomena. The sexual configurations theory is a comprehensive framework that conceptualizes gender/sex and companionships (partnered sexualities) from biological and cultural perspectives. The open SCT diagram is a research tool which affords the mapping of unlimited lived experiences by allowing the participant to record past, present, current, desired future interests, and identities (Schudson et al., 2017).

While other measures, such as the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (Klein, 1993) and the Kinsey Scale (Kinsey et al., 1948/1998), generally look at sexuality as an inflexible explanation, SCT allows for a personalized and descriptive exploration in the

understanding and development of an individuals' orientation, identity, and behavior.

Schudson et al. (2017) reported:

SCT separates the concepts of gender (aspects of appearance, behavior, presentation that relate to masculinity, femininity, and gender diversity), sex (sex-related body features; femaleness, maleness, and sex diversity), and gender/sex. These three distinct categories allow individuals to describe the personal significance of each using a "strength" scale. In this way, SCT allows for more holistic and value-free representations of individual gender/sex and preferences for sexual partner types (p. 5).

van Anders (2015) questioned whether the current concept of sexual orientation is dependent upon gender, desire, or sex. She defined gender as the "socialized, cultural features related to masculinity, femininity, and gender diversity" and sex as the "biological, evolved, physical features related to femaleness, maleness, and sex diversity" (p. 1177). van Anders questioned that if an individual is attracted to a person, what are the features that are found attractive? Is it the penis/vagina (sex) or the masculinity/femininity (gender) or both? How would one's sexual orientation be defined if the individual is attracted to effeminacy regardless of gender?

The SCT maps the complexities of sexuality in multiple dimensions, such as number of partners, gender/sex, and other components. "Sexual configuration is not another word for sexual orientation; it is a broader and more comprehensive framework for modeling and conceptualizing diverse sexualities" (van Anders, 2015, p. 1179). van Anders (2015) reasoned that without the lived experiences of individuals, categorizations

of sexual orientation based on a two-gender model lacks the scientific exploration of the diversity of sexuality. The determination of sexual orientation is based on societal beliefs, rather than considering the thoughts and feelings of the individual.

SCT employs the term *gender/sex* to describe “whole people/identities and/or aspects of women, men, and people that relate to identity and/or cannot really be sourced specifically to sex or gender” (van Anders, 2015, p. 1181). Gender/sex is not an orientation, rather it is how an individual defines themselves. SCT describes the experiences of individuals without the use of predefined parameters such as those used in the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (Klein, 1993) and the Kinsey Scale (Kinsey et al., 1948/1998). van Anders (2015) argued that individuals can be attracted to another’s sex (biological characteristics), gender (societal construct of masculinity and femininity), or a combination of the two. SCT explores the lived experiences of individuals in several areas: gender/sex eroticism, gender/sex nurturance, gender eroticism, sex eroticism, sex nurturance, partner number eroticism, partner number nurturance, individual gender/sex, individual gender, and individual sex.

Gender/sex orientation encompasses the concepts of love and lust as nurturance and eroticism. *Nurturance* is employed to denote heartfelt, caring, sympathetic connection without the intensity or obsessiveness found in the concept of love. *Lust* is replaced by eroticism to indicate psychological and physiological sexual responses rather than sexual desire and possessive wanting and yearning as in the concept of lust. Neither nurturance nor eroticism are specific to sexual/romantic relationships. They can characterize any relationship, whether toward an individual, species, self, foods, or

inanimate objects. Moreover, nurturance and eroticism are separate and distinct concepts which stand alone. Neither nurturance nor eroticism must be present for the other to exist.

Another parameter of SCT is *partner number*. Partner number is defined as the number of partners an individual has or might be interested in having (van Anders, 2015). SCT purports partner number is often omitted from measures, like the Klein Orientation Grid and Kinsey scales, which imply monoamory relationships and behaviors. Hauptert et al. (2017) found polyamorous behaviors and sexual activities has been found in to be an important aspect in relationships, regardless of identification with monoamory beliefs.

SCT also addresses the distinction between eroticism (arousal) and nurturance (supportive and warm loving feelings) and lust (lasciviousness) and love (idolization and infatuation). van Anders (2015) stated the eroticism and nurturance concepts “loosely reference ideas of love and lust but are intentionally broader and detach some of the specific connotations associated with them...eroticism and nurturance do not connote the same levels of intensity or commitment to a partner that lust and love do” (p. 1183).

Schudson’s et al. (2017) study lent empirical support to the usefulness of SCT diagrams in mapping the lived experiences of diverse partnered sexuality and gender/sex in sexual and gender minority communities. Sexual and gender minorities are defined as sexual identification which are outside of heterosexuality, such as gay, lesbian, bisexuality, asexuality, and polyamorous, among others. Gender minorities are defined as outside of male/female cisgender (gender identity that matches sex assigned at birth) (Ericsson, 2018), such as non-binary, transgender, etc. (Schudson et al., 2017; van Anders, 2015). Schudson et al. (2017) stated study participants appreciated the

comprehensiveness of the SCT diagrams in mapping their lived experiences. The findings of the Schudson et al. (2017) study supports SCT as a viable and new proceeding in the explorations of sexuality and gender/sex. SCT contends the concepts of gender, sex, and gender/sex, coupled with partnered sexuality, is poised to provide a more detailed description and exploration of lived experiences.

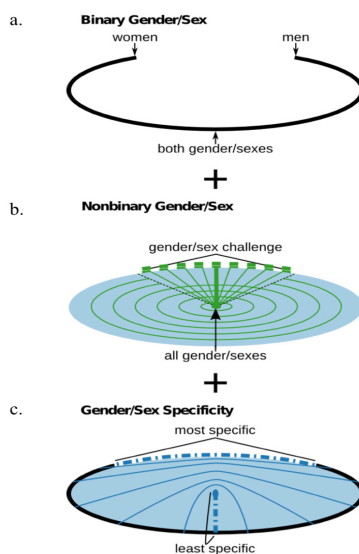
### ***Structure of Sexual Configurations Theory Diagrams***

The heuristic baseline of the diagrams asks the individual to define where they feel they are on the binary gender/sex scale (see Figure 2). Gender, in this respect, refers to characteristics related to masculinity, femininity, and gender diversity. This refers to socialized, cultural, or learned characteristics that may relate to the individual's culture, roles, beliefs, and how individuals express themselves through behaviors, clothing, and associations. Examples of identity labels related to gender include feminine, masculine, genderqueer, transgender, and butch. Sex is defined by the bodily characteristics associated with maleness and femaleness understood to be biological, physical, or innate, as well as the internal sense of the individual's beliefs of those characteristics. Examples of sex characteristics include the vulva, breasts, penis, body shape, facial hair, and pitch of an individual's voice. Examples of gendered identity labels related to sex include male, female, transgender, cissexual/cisgender (identifying with sex assigned at birth), or intersex (born with variations of sex anatomy that do not fit typical definitions for male or female bodies, such as a female born with gonads). SCT accounts for some characteristics not easily falling into either gender or sex. For example, one's entire identity might include both gender and sex characteristics; hence, the reasoning for term

gender/sex. Some identities related to gender/sex may be woman, man, trans man/woman, nonbinary cis man//woman, genderqueer, or intersex.

## Figure 2

### *Sexual Configurations Theory Diagram*



*Note.* From *Sexual Configurations Theory Interview Workbook*, by Z. C. Schudson, E. R. Dibble, & S. M. van Anders. van Anders Lab (<https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/van-anders-lab/sct.html>). Copyright 2017 by Dr. Sari van Anders. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix E).

This three-dimensional diagram denotes three specific areas of personal inquiry: binary gender/sex, nonbinary gender/sex, and gender/sex specificity (see Figure 2). The three levels are aspects of the same diagram. Individuals can map individual gender/sex (identity as male, female, nonbinary, etc.) lived experiences, as well as, partnered sexuality (attractions toward others psychologically, emotionally, physically, or a combination thereof).



The unidimensional gender/sex area is comprised of two levels: binary gender/sex and nonbinary gender/sex (see Figure 2, Parts a and b). The binary gender/sex area refers to the attractions to men and women or both. Although separated by a gap, this level is continuously denoting “people can be polar (only attracted to men or women) or somewhere in the intermediate space (attracted to both men and women; attracted mostly to women but little to men: attracted more to men but some to women; etc.)” (p. 1190). The first dimension of the SCT diagram is the binary ring. The binary ring component of each diagram represents normative understandings of gender/sex and partnered sexuality, with different binaries represented on each diagram. For example, the ends of the binary ring on each gender/sex sexuality diagram are labeled *women* and *men* to represent the normative gender/sex binary. Utilizing the SCT diagram to map self-identified gender/sex, such as female or male, the marking would be on or closest to the identified gender. If nonbinary is the identified gender/sex, the marking would be closest to or in the middle. If inquiring about partnered gender/sex (attractions), marking near the end of a binary ring would correspond with an interest in that binary option, such as “interested in women” or “interested in one partner” (van Anders, 2015). A person marking nonbinary in the gender/sex diagram would be claiming no male or female identity. Nonbinary partnered gender/sex denotes the romantic and sexual attractions to individuals who do not claim a male or female identity or masculine and feminine characteristic traits (see Figure 2, Part B); that is, androgynous persons.

SCT diagrams provide individuals with a visual map on which to locate their interests and identities relevant to partnered sexuality and individual gender/sex (see

Figure 2). Participants may mark the type and strength of an aspect of their sexuality or gender/sex on any number of relevant locations, including zero, with any marking of their choosing. The nonbinary gender/sex level comprises two areas – gender/sex challenge and all genders/sexes. The gender/sex challenge closes the gap by denoting attractions that exist outside of the gender/sex binary (see Figure 2, Part b). van Anders (2015) identified the gap closure as the gender/sex challenge and defines it as:

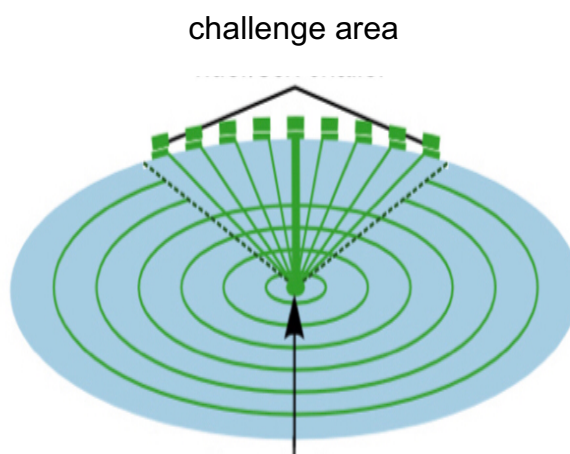
...attractions to individuals who are not identified (by selves and/or others) as normative men/women and who challenge, transcend, or destabilize binaristic gender/sex. Some examples might include those who are attracted to people who identify as genderqueer...gender/sexes that challenge, mess with, destabilize, and/or play with traditional genders and gender binaries in some way...For this reason, gender/sex challenge is separated from women and men by contingent norm boundaries (p. 1190).

Marking somewhere between the two binary options on the binary ring would represent an intermediate point such as “mostly interested one partner, with some interest in many,” or “equally interested in women and men.” SCT diagrams also have a *challenge area* that may be used to locate partnered sexuality or individual gender/sex that the individual perceives as challenging norms. An individual may use the challenge area to mark an interest in, for example, feminine men, nonbinary individuals, or open relationships. The challenge area is located between the ends of the binary ring and is separated from the binary ring with “contingent norm boundaries” to acknowledge that

social norms are subject to change across temporal and cultural contexts and may be understood and challenged by individuals in complex ways (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*SCT Challenge Area and Contingent Norm Boundaries Diagram*



*Note. Note.* From *Sexual Configurations Theory Interview Workbook*, by Z. C. Schudson, E. R. Dibble, & S. M. van Anders. van Anders Lab (<https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/van-anders-lab/sct.html>). Copyright 2017 by Dr. Sari van Anders. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix E).

The challenge area and the nonbinary area may overlap in some ways, but they can be distinguished by using the diagram's specificity markings, used to denote the level of specificity of a component of partnered sexuality or individual gender/sex. Utilizing the language of the originator of the SCT diagram, the *blue curved lines* represent specificity, meaning how strongly the feeling of belonging or relating to a characteristic

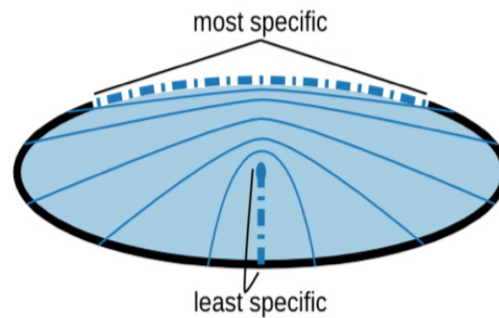
spectrum. The lines of isospecificity signify a spectrum from one end of a spectrum to the other (see Figure 4). van Anders (2015) noted:

Specificity is high for gender/sex challenge, where there is a specific attraction to people who challenge gender/sex in a specific nonbinary way. Specificity is low for all gender/sexes, where there is attraction to people of any gender sex.

Gender/sex challenge and all gender/sexes are thus opposite ends of the specificity continuum (p. 1190)

#### Figure 4

##### *Specificity Diagram*



*Note. Note.* From *Sexual Configurations Theory Interview Workbook*, by Z. C. Schudson, E. R. Dibble, & S. M. van Anders. van Anders Lab

(<https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/van-anders-lab/sct.html>). Copyright 2017 by Dr.

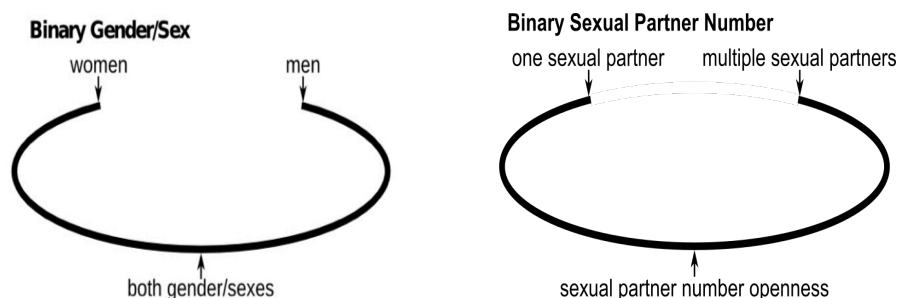
Sari van Anders. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix E).

The SCT diagram can be utilized to identify different areas of sexuality by simply changing the parameters. For example, if querying sexual attractions, the polar ends

could be named women and men or preferred number of sexual partners as one sexual partner and multiple sexual partners. On the partner number sexuality diagrams, “one partner” and “multiple partners” is listed at either end of each binary ring (see Figure 5).

### Figure 5

#### *Gender/Sex Binary and Partner Number Rings Diagrams*



*Note.* From *Sexual Configurations Theory Interview Workbook*, by Z. C. Schudson, E. R. Dibble, & S. M. van Anders. van Anders Lab (<https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/van-anders-lab/sct.html>). Copyright 2017 by Dr. Sari van Anders. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix E).

In addition to the binary ring and challenge area, SCT diagrams also have a nonbinary area to represent partnered sexuality and individual gender/sex that are outside of binary understandings of gender/sex and partner number. An example may be an individual who expresses an interest in nonbinary people, or partner number configurations that they understand in nonbinary terms. The diagrams’ challenge and nonbinary spaces leave room for sexual and gender majority individuals to express a

level of nuance in their partnered sexualities and individual gender/sexes that other existing measures often overlook.

Lastly, individuals may denote the *strength* of their location, or multiple locations, by marking anywhere between “0” to “100” on the percent strength scale for each diagram. A low marking on this scale might indicate that a parameter has little to no salience in one’s interests or status, whereas a high mark may be used for locations that are especially relevant or defining features of one’s partnered sexuality or individual gender/sex. The strength component allows individuals to convey which aspects of characteristics are most personally relevant, rather than building in the assumption that any or all aspects are present, primary, or equally important (see Figure 6).

### Figure 6

#### *SCT Strength Component*



*Note. Note.* From *Sexual Configurations Theory Interview Workbook*, by Z. C. Schudson, E. R. Dibble, & S. M. van Anders. van Anders Lab

(<https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/van-anders-lab/sct.html>). Copyright 2017 by Dr.

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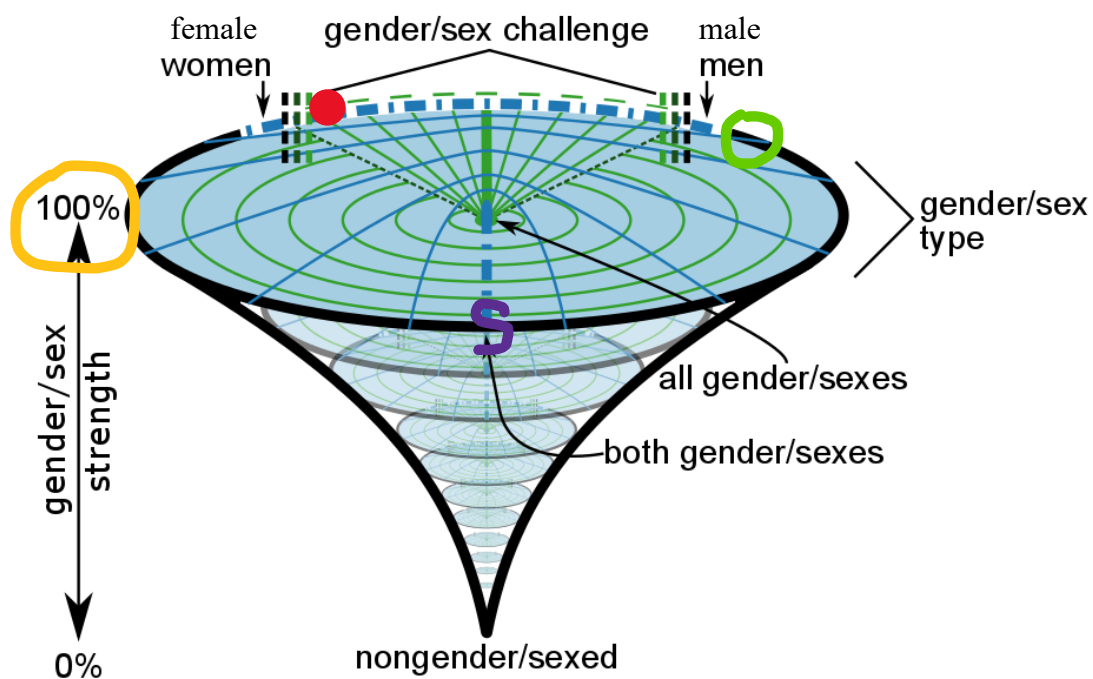
The varying diagrams are designed to show that gender/sex sexuality is built from the perspective of different dimensions of gender/sex eroticism, gender/sex nurturance, gender eroticism, gender nurturance, sex nurturance, and partner number eroticism, partner number nurturance, individual gender/sex, individual gender, and individual sex (see Figure 6). Note the diagrams can be separated to capture the lived experiences in several areas. The binary and nonbinary gender/sex aspects can also be utilized to capture gender/sex eroticism and gender/sex nurturance, such as partner number, and so forth. The significance lies in what the researcher is asking the individual to mark on the respective scale.

The diagram is intentionally not numerically scaled. This omission was to allow individuals to place a marker at the position they feel best describes their status and orientation using their own descriptive language. From the perspective of the SCT, there is no one way of being gendered or sexed that is more legitimate than another. Individuals may use more than one marker to best describe the self.

The character Barbara will be utilized to provide a visual example of a mapped gender/sex diagram to identify gender/sex identity and partnered gender/sex (see Figure 7). The current study will only focus on these two areas.

Figure 7

*Mapped Gender/Sex Identity Partnered Gender/Sex Diagram*



*Note. Note.* From *Sexual Configurations Theory Interview Workbook*, by Z. C. Schudson, E. R. Dibble, & S. M. van Anders. van Anders Lab

(<https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/van-anders-lab/sct.html>). Copyright 2017 by Dr.

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The interpretation of Figure 7 can be seen in Table 2.

## **Table 2**

*Barbara's SCT Interpretation of Self*

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- 1 To signify Barbara identifies as a cisgender female with masculine characteristics, the marking is located in the gender challenge area just to the right of the aspect women/female
- 2 Barbara's status (sexual behaviors) involves both cisgender men and women.
- 3 However, currently Barbara is in a monogamous relationship with a heterosexual cisgender male.
- 4 Despite being in a heterosexual relationship, Barbara maintains she is bisexual at all times, as indicated by the circling of 100% on the gender/sex strength scale.




---

### Summary

Whether or not bisexuality is biologically based, manifestations of socialization, or genetic dispositions, dichotomous perspectives invalidate individuals who identify as bisexual from being accepted by the heterosexual and homosexual communities. The pressures placed on individuals who identify to make a conscious choice of one of the accepted dichotomous sexual orientations may be a major contributing factor to the confusion, low self-esteem, and expressed suicidal ideation.

The sexual configurations theory challenges the term *sexual orientation* due to the phrase being used interchangeably as a term and a concept and inferring sex (biological features) as being the defining of aspect of sexuality (van Anders, 2015). SCT purports an individuals' sexuality is comprised of gender and sex (gender/sex) and partnered sexualities (characteristics found attractive/unattractive in others). Furthermore, SCT encompasses identity, status, orientation, challenges outside of what is considered *normal* (i.e., attractions to effeminate muscular women or men, bearded women, etc.), eroticism,

and nurturance in varying relationships based on an individuals' lived experiences. In this respect, there are no parametric responses.

Despite the limitation of the sexual orientation construct, the SCT retains the term *orientation* as “a set of interests without connotations of determinism or permanence” (p. 1182). It is from this standpoint that the sexual configurations theory is the preferred theory for mapping the lived experiences of individuals who identify as bisexual. Individuals can map their own experiences utilizing a common language and definitions. The sexual configurations theory and diagrams can be utilized to unify the bisexual community and other orientations by providing a common understanding of lived experiences. In addition, the common understanding may be instrumental in decreasing the stigmatism, dismissal, marginalization, and binegativity experienced by individuals who identify as bisexual.

Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology to be used, as well as the description of the recruitment and selection process of participants, research design and rationale, and bracketing and epoché, and data collection and analysis. The RQs, introduced in Chapter 1, will attempt to be answered utilizing the phenomenological approach. The overall interview questions will provide structure and elaboration of the lived experiences of individuals who identify as bisexual. Finally, discussion regarding how the SCT diagram will be utilized to map the lived experiences will be addressed.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

In Chapter 2, I provided an extensive literature review on studies and theories of sexuality, specifically bisexuality. The purpose of the study was to understand the lived experiences of those who identify as bisexual. To do so, I conducted phenomenological interviews and then requested that participants map their experiences using the SCT framework (van Anders, 2015). The process allows for a more efficient and effective method to ascertain whether SCT is a potentially more powerful parametric model and framework for understanding bisexuality through the lived experience of those who identify as bisexual. The SCT and diagrams were chosen because they use the words and experiences of the individual to gain a better understanding and insight into an individual's present status and orientation (van Anders, 2015). Thus, the methodology was qualitative and phenomenological.

This chapter will begin with discussion of the research setting, how recruitment was announced, and how participants were selected, as well as demographics. I will then introduce the interviewees. The introductions will be followed by a breakdown of the RQs and corresponding themes. The chapter includes a thorough account of how I captured and analyzed the lived experiences of participants. In addition, the rationale and design of the study, my positionality as the researcher, and trustworthiness are deliberated.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

RQ1. What are the lived experiences of bisexual individuals analyzed through the lens of the sexual configurations theory?

RQ2. How do individuals who identify as bisexual differentiate between identity and behavior?

RQ3. Can the sexual configurations theory diagrams accurately map the lived experiences of individuals who identify as bisexual?

There are several reasons as to why the qualitative approach was the most appropriate for this study. Qualitative research, unlike quantitative methodology, does not require absolutes; rather, is based on perspectives, experiences, and perceptions of individuals and groups (Erickson, 2011). Stenner et al. (2017) stated that qualitative methods allow for complex personal issues to be explored, examined, and understood. Additionally, the methodology used to collect data in qualitative research are extensive, and there are no standardized ways on how the data are required to be collected. For example, a researcher may use web-based surveys, face-to face interviews, computer assisted interactive methods, naturalistic observation, manipulated observations, case studies, or a combination thereof (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The qualitative approach also considers the researchers' positioning and the influence it may have on the data collection, interpretation, and end results (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Qualitative research methods allow for the fluidity of time, location, social and cultural values, and beliefs to shape and reshape phenomena (Erickson, 2011). From an epistemological viewpoint, qualitative research allows the researcher to observe, interview, and interact with study participants to gain a better understanding of how the

individual's knowledge and view of the world were constructed (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ontologically, the researcher can naturalistically observe how an individual or group shapes or reshapes their current and future reality; this is aligned with a constructivist paradigm. From an epistemological viewpoint, qualitative research allows the researcher to observe, interview, and interact with participants to gain a better understanding of how others construct knowledge and their views of the world. Ontologically, I was able to naturalistically observe how a participant shaped or reshaped their current and future reality, much in the realm of the constructivist paradigm.

Qualitative methodology consists of five approaches: ethnography, narrative, grounded theory, case study, and phenomenology (Willig & Rogers, 2017). Ethnography, rooted in cultural anthropology, requires researchers to immerse themselves into the culture of the studied individuals to gain an understanding of their challenges, beliefs, and motivations (Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2017). The researcher is a participant-observer. Researchers using the narrative approach weave together a sequence of events, usually from just one or two individuals to form a cohesive story (Hiles et al., 2017). They conduct in-depth interviews, read documents, and look for themes to illustrate the more significant life influences that created the story. The primary objective of the narrative approach is discovery on how something came to be. It is not to understand an individual or culture but rather the sequence of influences. Grounded theory is used to provide an explanation or theory of phenomena based on the data obtained, such as understanding how a target population performs or performed a task (Eatough & Smith, 2017). The goal of grounded theory is typically theory generation. The case study

involves in-depth observation of a single entity and usually mixed-methods approaches using multiple types of data sources. Succinctly, case studies describe the *why* of a phenomenon.

The methodology used in phenomenology differs from other qualitative approaches. The primary goal of phenomenology is to allow individuals to describe their lived experiences rather than to explain or quantify them (Giorgi, 2010). Phenomenology is solely concerned with the study of the experience from the perspective of the participant (Giorgi 2010, 2012). The phenomenological approach does not have predetermined conceptions or a hypothesis undergirding data analysis; rather, themes and commonalities are mined from the data. The use of surveys and questionnaires are generally not utilized due to the rigidity of close-ended questions. Open-ended questions allow the participants to answer however they choose. Phenomenology emphasizes subjectivity (Giorgi, 2010). The goal of phenomenological research methods is to maximize the depth of the information collected and therefore, less structured interviews are most effective (Giorgi, 2012). The quantitative approach would not be conducive with my study due the main focus not being on quantifying collected data; rather the main focus is on exploring lived experiences.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Bracketing is the acknowledgement of one's personal bias. Researchers use this tool to recognize and how their own lived experiences may influence their objectivity (Williams & Morrow, 2009). *Epoché* refers to the process employed to set aside and suspend judgments and assumptions in the context of data collection and analysis (Giorgi

et al., 2017; Husserl, 1906/7, trans. 2008). Thus, epoché requires bracketing. In the words of Husserl (1906/7, trans. 2008),

We speak of suspension of judgment. In this regard, however, it is to be added right away that, as we already stressed earlier, the main point is not whether the judgment is rescinded in earnest, really suspended in the ordinary sense, but only whether it is deactivated within the entire sphere of epistemological investigation and use not made afterward of what it declares to be true with respect to a transcendence. (p. 209)

Understanding bracketing and epoché is paramount for researchers have a clear understanding of how their own lived experiences, values, and morals may influence the direction of research and data collection. In this respect, researchers are able to implement measures and procedures to challenge their assumptions.

### **Researcher Position: Bracketing**

I believe bisexuality to be a viable and stable sexual orientation that is marginalized, often dismissed, and misunderstood by the general population. My belief that bisexuality is an identity and sexual orientation is based upon my own lived experiences. During my middle school years, a sex education instructor purported that bisexuality did not exist and was an “excuse to engage and experiment in deviant sexual behavior before choosing to be a homosexual or normal.” I felt dismissed and questioned by the instructor’s statement. The answer I received focused on “being a moral agent of

God,” which influenced my own research and education on the fluidity of human sexuality and identity.

While conducting the literature review, I took careful steps to include data that did not fit neatly into my schema of sexuality. The steps taken were to review and include literature, theories, and models with opposing views, such as Ulrichs’s theory of bisexuality and Darwinism. In addition, I utilized my own lived experiences as the examples in mapping my identity and sexual orientation on a SCT diagram. I am a relative essentialist. Although my beliefs are rooted in essentialism, I also believe that my truth is not the same truth for others. I respect the lived experiences and truths of others relative to their own cultural beliefs and thought processes. Moreover, the purpose of utilizing myself in the SCT diagram example (see Figure. 2) was to engage in self-reflection and as a scientist accept the results that might challenge my beliefs that

- bisexuality is innate and affords the individuals to be attracted to the whole person
- the erogenous zones are an individuals’ personality, intelligence, and demeanor.
- bisexuals are not ashamed and do not hide the fact they are bisexual
- bisexuality is stable and does not wane throughout an individuals’ lifetime, regardless of current or past relationships

I assumed that most self-identified bisexuals share the same beliefs. Additionally, I was able to place myself in the role of the participant. This allowed me to think about objective question framing for phenomenological interviews and to understand how to better prepare the participants to complete the mapping exercise.



Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated that researchers should have a passion for their research topics and a cognitive awareness and understanding of how that passion can have positive and negative influences on the research study. Rubin and Rubin (2012) discussed the impact of active listening and building a rapport with participants can have a positive effect on the interview process. I am passionate about my research topic; moreover, I am an insider. I am very aware of my influence on the research study--both from a positive and negative point of view. A positive impact as an insider is that I could use my gender/sex and personal experiences as tools for connecting to and building rapport with participants. Additionally, I had access to professional associations as well as the local LGBT association to extend invitations to participate in this study. Conversely, as an insider who has experienced and continues to experience the negativity, marginalization, and dismissal associated with a bisexual identity, my personal negative experiences may have had a negative impact on how information was gathered, such as asking biased, double-barreled, and leading questions during interviews to influence the direction of the data.

The risk of interpreting my own bisexuality may influence how I interpret data. To guard against the risk personal interpretation, I had participants member check the obtained information. The use of member checking reinforced that participants were an active and integral asset in the interpretation of the data. Stenner et al. (2017, p. 233) stated, "The rationale for qualitative research is simple: the best way to find out about people is to talk to them."

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

Participants consisted of individuals 18 years of age and older who have had or engaged in bisexual romantic attachments or physical sexual behaviors and who, at the time of recruitment and participation, identified as bisexuals. U.S. citizens living abroad were not excluded from the data collection regardless of permanent residency to allow for diversity of U.S. citizens living and working in foreign environments. I used purposive convenience and snowball sampling to allow for greater diversity of participants (see recruitment announcement in Appendix E).

### **Instrumentation**

I used a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) to screen the participants chosen for the study. Some of information obtained was (a) gender and sex identification, (b) age, (c) ethnicity, and (d) regional residence. Participants were also asked for contact information and to choose their own pseudonym to maintain anonymity.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

#### ***Recruitment of Participants***

Upon approval of the Walden University Institutional Review Board (approval no. 09-17-19-0093415), I distributed the announcement for volunteer recruitment via listservs and membership rosters of professional and academic organizations, social networking pages, websites, and local and national lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual organizations. Purposive, random, convenience snowball sampling (see Appendix E) was also used. Recruitment occurred over 8 weeks. Interested

parties were directed to a survey hosted on a Survey Monkey to confirm their bisexual identity and volunteer participation, verify age of 18 years and older, and provide consent.

### ***Data Collection***

I collected data in three stages. The first stage comprised the interviews and transcription of interviews. The second stage involved participants' mapping their lived experiences onto the SCT gender/sex diagram obtained from SCT workbook (Schudson et al., 2017). The third stage incorporated me mapping the lived experiences of the participant onto the SCT diagram based on the interviews and transcripts.

Upon the completion of interviewing and member checking of transcripts, participants emailed their completed SCT gender/sex diagram to my dissertation chair. I was not privy to the results of the SCT diagrams until I had completed my mapping of the interviewees. Each mailed gender/sex diagram had an identification code that was matched to the participant's transcript. I compared each participant's mapped diagram to my mapped diagram of each interviewee. This method for completion of the SCT diagram was utilized to lend support to the SCT theory by allowing participants to map their lived experiences without my direct influence.

**The Interview.** Individual interviews were conducted regarding lived experiences. Interviews were conducted virtually utilizing programs with audio and video recording capabilities which can be used together or separately, depending on the comfort level of the participant. Demographics of the participants were addressed in the recruitment process. The decision to base interviews on participants with specific

characteristics and in varying locations was to allow for a snapshot of how confounding variables, such as religion, social political affiliations, social economic background, cisgender assignment, and ethnicity may have influenced their lived experiences. The interview questions (see Appendix C) were open-ended and encompassed the following topics:

1. identification of gender, sex, and sexual orientation
2. what bisexuality means to the participant
3. experiences with self-awareness, disclosure, and relationships
4. cultural values and beliefs
5. clarifying questions.

**Gender/Sex Diagram.** Upon completion of the interview, participants were asked to map how they identify themselves relative to their bisexuality, attraction characteristics, and primary status (sexual behaviors) and orientation (attractions), as shown in Appendix D. The participant was provided with verbal and written instruction on how to utilize the gender/sex diagram. Permission to utilize the instruction was granted via email by the one of originators (Schudson, personal communication dated January 09, 2019). The gender/sex diagram definitions were provided for clarification (see Table 1, Chapter 1).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Data analysis was conducted in stages. The first stage utilized a transcription service to transcribe the audio portions of the interviews. While this form aided in the protection of the privacy of the participant, it required the transcript to re-checked by me

to ensure accuracy. Participants were emailed a copy of the transcript for member checking and to ensure the information obtained was accurate and approved by the participant. Participants were instructed to make any changes, corrections, or modifications utilizing the Word document tracking feature. Upon member-checking approval, a text analysis tool was used to conduct the first cycle of coding utilizing the elemental methods of initial, in vivo, process, and value coding (Saldana, 2016).

The initial coding began during the interview process derived from the notes I journaled. The initial coding consisted of words, phrases, and concepts that were previously identified in the literature review and in alignment with the sexual configurations theory, such as, gender, sex, gender/sex, and orientation. Upon approval of the transcript, open and in vivo coding approaches were utilized to capture the keywords, phrases and the lived experiences that were common amongst the participants. Process coding was employed to capture common actions taken by the participants, such as disclosing, discovering, and accepting. Value coding was then used to capture the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the participant's upbringing and perspective. The transcripts were then uploaded in NVivo 12 for Macintosh for further analysis and data mining. The autocode feature was used to produce cases that separated my comments from the participants' responses. This allowed for transcripts to be data mined and analyzed for words and phrases that I may have excluded. The interviews were then coded again and compared to the manual coding to ensure consistency. Miles et al. (2020) contend coding manually and comparing it to computer assisted (or aided) qualitative data analysis

software (CAQDAS) is critical to exploring and understanding the first-person viewpoint. This process helped me to remain consistent in emphasizing key points during coding.

The second cycle of coding consisted of eclectic and pattern schemes for summarizing data and grouping like words, concepts, and phrases into sub-categories. A thesaurus was also utilized to group synonyms and antonyms to reduce redundancy of the same concept. In addition, the recordings were listened to numerous times to capture nuanced changes in voice inflection and volume. Saldaña (2010) stated that listening to audio recordings, while reading the transcripts, is pertinent “to gain intimate knowledge of content to extract significant quotes and to document emergent codes, themes, and concepts” (p.74).

Miles et al. (2020) contend patterns coding affords three apposite functions. First, such coding condenses large amounts of information into smaller units. Second, it affords the researcher the opportunity to narrow their focus and establish a cognitive network. Finally, “it lays the groundwork for cross-case analysis by surfacing common themes and directional processes” (p. 79). In conjunction with eclectic coding, a hybrid of the exploratory method, axial coding and emotional coding were also utilized to ascertain how the categories and sub-categories were interrelated.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Birt et al. (2016) stated that “trustworthiness of results is the bedrock of high-quality research” (p. 1802). The honesty and integrity of the interpretation of the data collected are scrutinized for credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. Conducting qualitative research requires the researcher to be not only the collector but

also the analyst of data. It is of the utmost importance that research data collection and analysis be put through rigorous checks to minimize researcher bias and increase the quality, trustworthiness, and credibility of the research outcomes.

Willig and Rogers (2017) contended that thematic analysis (TA) happens in 3 phases: familiarization of data, generating codes, and constructing themes.

Familiarization of data happens when the researcher immerses themselves in the collection of information. This may be accomplished in numerous ways – transcribing interviews, maintaining analytic memos and notes, and rereading data to become completely familiar. In transcribing the recorded interviews, the researcher becomes immersed in the data through focused and active listening, rewinding, and re-reading to ensure writings are precise and accurate. Throughout this process, the data were analyzed to generate precise descriptive words or semantic coding for specific words or passages. The importance of this process is to identify if there is a common language that can help unify the definition of bisexuality as an identity.

To validate and ensure trustworthiness of the data collection, participants were asked to review and check transcripts for accuracy. This method of fact checking engaged the participant to be an active participant of the research results and reconstruct their narrative through deleting extracts they felt no longer represented their experience (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking established the tenet of credibility in trustworthiness by viewing data from varying and possibly contradicting perspectives. This methodology supported certifying that the thematic analysis was indicative of the information

collected. I, and the participants, mapped their lived experiences on the SCT diagram separately.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Qualitative research requires the researcher to gain insight into the lived experiences of individuals through naturalistic observation and interactive engagement (Giorgi, 2012). This approach comes with unique, complex, and overlapping ethical challenges, such as the minimization of harm, protection of privacy, and respecting the participant's experiences as they share and map their lived experiences on to the SCT diagram.

With all research there is an element of risk; especially in qualitative research. Hammersley and Traianou (2014) identified some potential threats of harm as psychological harm in the form of emotional distress and decrease of self-confidence and damage to relationships with family, friends, and colleagues (e.g., the disclosure of romantic and sexual information). In this respect, it is important to respect the trust the participant has granted to the researcher by protecting the privacy of the participant.

Prudence dictated that I, as the researcher, remained reflective throughout the research study to maintain objectivity and professionalism (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For example, in my research regarding the differences between romantic attachments and sexual behaviors, participants or I could have crossed the boundary of professionalism due to the intimacy of the subject matter.

It was my ethical responsibility to ensure risks of harm were minimal, informed consents forms administered, and resources in place in the case the risks required further



intervention. It was paramount that I diligently protected the privacy and anonymity of the participants by being transparent and disclosing the limits of confidentiality which allowed the participant to make an informed decision regarding continued participation.

### **Summary**

The aforementioned approaches were sagacious to ensure credibility, validity, and trustworthiness. Researcher reflexivity and positionality are the two most important aspects of obtaining and maintaining quality data. It was paramount that I be able to recognize and be cognizant of how personal cultural values and beliefs could have influenced the collection and analysis of data. The information obtained from the bisexual lived experiences interviews and mapped SCT diagrams may lend to support the SCT theory and accuracy of the diagram, as well, identify a unified definition to better appreciate bisexuality.

Chapter 4 will discuss inquiry, assertions, propositions, and themes that emerged from analyzing the interviews of the participants through the sexual configurations theory lens. The analytic development will be discussed thoroughly to allow for peer reviewed replication of the process. Chapter 4 will also provide the comparison of the interviewees mapping of their lived experiences to my interpretative mapping of each interviewee.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of bisexuals through the SCT lens. In Chapter 4, I present the qualitative results of the interviews conducted with six individuals who self-identified as bisexual.

The RQs were

RQ1. What are the lived experiences of bisexual individuals from the perspective of individuals who identify as bisexual as interpreted through the lens of the SCT?

RQ2. How do individuals who identify as bisexual differentiate between identity and behavior?

RQ3. Can the SCT diagram accurately map the lived experiences of individuals who identify as bisexual?

The chapter begins with details on the research setting, demographics of the participants, and means of collecting data, followed by a discussion of data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results. Using interview data from participants on their lived experiences as bisexuals allowed me to identify themes that encapsulate aspects of bisexual identification and behaviors. The final step consisted of comparing my mapping of the participants' lived experiences to their mapping of the SCT diagram for consistency. In Chapter 5, I interpret the analyzed results.

### Setting

I interviewed the respondents via the Zoom virtual platform. The use of Zoom's audio recording feature allowed for in-depth analysis and the verbatim capturing of

terminology and phrasing used by the interviewees. Video recording was not used to protect the identity of the interviewee. I explored participants' lived experiences through semistructured interviews. Each participant completed the sexual configurations diagram to provide a visible representation of their identity and behaviors. The interviewees chose the location of their interview, and I conducted the interview in my home office to ensure confidentiality. The interviewees were asked at the beginning of the interview if they were alone or, if someone else was in the room, whether they felt comfortable with the presence of another entity.

Following the interviews, I used the Rev transcription service (<https://rev.com>) to provide a written script of each interview. Each interviewee was provided a copy of the transcript for content verification. Two of the participants provided corrections, and four participants verified the content to be true without corrections, modifications, deletions, or added content. The corrections consisted of spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors. There were no variations in data collection from the plan presented in Chapter 3. An unusual circumstance did present itself in the form of transgenderism and the identification of bisexuality after receiving gender reassignment, as well as bisexuality being identified secondary and tertiary after gender, sex, and gender identities. These issues will be discussed further in the Data Analysis section.

### **Demographics**

I used a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) to screen the participants chosen for the study. Although the results of a qualitative study cannot be used for generalization, the information gathered provided some understanding into how

participants from varying regions of the United States experienced their bisexuality. Two participants were from the West Coast; there was one each from the South, Northeast, Midwest, and Southeast.

Participants consisted of individuals 18 years of age and older who had or were currently engaged in bisexual romantic attachments or physical sexual behaviors and who, at the time of recruitment and participation, identified as a bisexual. I advertised recruitment announcements on listservs of professional organizations and academic institutions. Purposive convenience and snowball sampling were used to cast a wider net to allow for greater diversity of participants.

### **Data Collection**

Nineteen individuals responded to the recruitment for participants. I extended interview invitations to all 19 respondents. All potential respondents self-identified as bisexual, although gender/sex identity varied. Self-identified females comprised the largest group (42%,  $n = 8$ ), followed by cisgender females (21%,  $n = 4$ ), males (21%,  $n = 4$ ), transgender males (11%,  $n = 2$ ), and genderfluid individuals (5%,  $n = 1$ ). The respondents ranged in age from 25 to 52 years ( $M = 32$ ). Seventeen (89.47%) of the respondents identified as White and two (10.53%) identified as Black or African American. Respondents resided in the varied regions of the United States; they were not asked to identify the specific state. All interviewees held a graduate degree from an accredited university.

Ten individuals responded favorably to the interview invitation. I chose eight to be interviewed based upon demographics of age range, ethnicity, and self-identified

gender identity. Six individuals completed interviews. Two of the eight chosen were placed on the standby list in the case of attrition. In addition, in the event saturation had not been met, the recruitment of participants would have been extended.

### **Data Analysis**

Preliminary analysis began with the isolation of the primary tenets of the SCT, which include identity, status, and partnered relationships (van Anders, 2015). Identity is characterized by the societal concept of gender, individualized self-identification of gender, and sex assigned at birth. Statuses are characterized as sexual behaviors and activities regarding the self and toward others. I entered all of the interviewee responses in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and manually coded the SCT tenets, as well as the formation gender, sex, and gender/sex identification; initial, recurring, and present affective reactions and experiences; and disclosure experiences. I employed the query feature of NVivo 12 to isolate five-letter words and stems. The feature yielded 1,348 words. The words were then separated into collection of conceptual themes, such as action verbs and self-identification, as primary topics. I then parsed the topics into subsets that included affective action verbs (positive and negative), gender, sex, and orientation (intersectionality) and compared them to the my manual coding. The categories derived from the analysis were Fear of Negative Reactions, Shame of Being Bisexual, and Feelings of Liberation when distanced from immediate family. The definition of van Ander's gender/sex was commonly used by respondents when defining gender, sex, and orientation. For example, the participants repeatedly used the terms *gender* and *sex* interchangeably when describing their bisexual identity.

The third category of intersectionality emerged from the self-descriptions and self-identification of the interviewees. The interviewees expressed the complexities of identification in terms of socially labeled gender, race, cultural upbringing, self-identification and how the consistent negotiations regarding dominant conceptualizations of partnered sexuality or gender/sex shaped their self-definitions. I also noted that the self-identification of bisexuality were secondary and tertiary references when stating “who they are.”

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

I collected, transcribed, and analyzed data to ensure credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. I did not have access to the interviewees’ mappings until after I completed my mapping based on the interviews and transcripts. Interviewees sent their diagrams directly to my dissertation chair. After I completed my mapping of the participants, I also sent my results to my dissertation chair. Only after my dissertation chair received all completed mappings did I gain access to the results. In addition, to validate and ensure trustworthiness of the data collection, participants reviewed and checked the interview transcripts for accuracy. This method of fact checking engaged the participant to be an active participant of the research results and reconstruct their narrative through deleting extracts they felt no longer represented their experience (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking established the tenet of credibility and trustworthiness by viewing data from varying contradicting perspectives. This methodology supported certifying the thematic analysis as indicative of the information collected.

## Results

### Participant Descriptions

I invited participants to engage in conversation with respect to their lived experiences. Their experiences were analyzed from the perspective of the SCT lens. SCT attempts to encompass the diverse nuances of sexuality in all its diverseness, as well as “whole people/identities and or/aspects of women, men, and people that relate to identity and/or cannot really be sourced specifically to sex or gender” (van Anders, 2015, p. 1181). Discussion ranged from illuminating perspectives on gender, sex, and orientation to elucidating what bisexuality and identifying their sexuality means to them. All six interviewees described themselves and their sexuality in the same theoretical concepts as the SCT. The interviewees shared commonalities such as the views that sexuality, specifically bisexuality, being a combination of an innate attraction to the biological sexes and gender expression and the choice to identify with a socially constructed label. Perspectives of how they perceived themselves, perceived others, and interpreted the perception of others was a union of natural attractions, familial and social support systems expectations, and a fear of rejection. Following is a brief description of each participant that captures their worldview. Participants chose their own pseudonym, which is used as an identifier throughout the study.

#### ***CBLE (Pronouns He/His/Him)***

CBLE identifies as a White, cisgender bisexual male, in his early 50s. CBLE stated he recently disclosed his bisexuality to his spouse and a few close friends. He stated he was able to disclose due to being in a psychology academic environment:

I'm 52 now, and just beginning to feel comfortable disclosing that to some people and it's really been a healing experience for me...I was in ministry, conservative circles, and now I'm in psychology and it's much more to me...accepting. I think it is more of an accepting community that I am in right now, and my parents are both deceased...but it's still a period of growth for me, being able to accept and be acknowledged as a bisexual.

He recalled during his school-aged years his same-sex attractions and encounters that began in his middle school years. Although the same-sex attractions continued throughout his lifetime, the same-sex encounters did not. CBLE remembered the negative attitude and perceptions toward nonheterosexual behaviors, specifically regarding males, that turned into feelings of shame and self-loathing:

So although my attractions continued into high school and even into adulthood somewhat, for same-sex attractions, those encounters that I had were limited to my middle school years....I grew up in the early and mid-'80s...It was a less tolerant time for issues of sexuality. It was around the time, the onset of the AIDS epidemic happened, and when I had those encounters in middle school and even disclosed to a friend who I believed I was, that I believed I was gay. And word began to spread... I was bullied, called all sorts of names, laughed at, and I very quickly learned that that was something that I needed to keep to myself. It was something, to me, that was shameful. I never disclosed to parents or siblings, never disclosed to any other friends. And, basically, decided that even through some counseling



and things like that that I had, that that was a road that was going to be too difficult for me to walk.

It was not until midadulthood that he became aware of the term and concept of bisexuality. CBLE recalled that his high school sex education course only discussed heterosexual and homosexual orientations. It was during that time in CBLE's life that he identified as gay with some opposite sex attractions, stating "the presence of the same-sex attractions was what made me gay." CBLE is currently in a monogamous, heterosexual marriage, with an option to openly explore his bisexuality.

***CDBLE (Pronouns She/Her/Hers)***

CDBLE is an African/Black American, mid-20s, cisgender female who identifies as bisexual publicly, and pansexual personally. She defined bisexuality as an all-inclusive attraction to

people who are my gender and other genders...I definitely do also identify as bisexual, pansexual, and queer. But for the most part, I think I use bisexual and queer the most because...I don't really want to go into explaining pansexual...I literally do not have time for it.

She first identified with the label *bisexual* in her middle school years in a sexual education course. She stated, "Women and men is an option? Oh, okay. Yeah, that's the option. I pick that one." CDBLE first disclosed her bisexuality to her boyfriend in high school and a few close friends. She did not feel comfortable disclosing to the entirety of her circle of friends due to fear of not receiving positive and supportive reactions. It was not until she graduated from college, and began her current relationship, that she

disclosed her identity to her parents. Her parents' strong religious beliefs elicited fear of bringing shame to her family. CDBLE stated that she disclosed her identity because she fell in love with her current partner and is planning to marry her. To date, CDBLE's grandparents have not been informed of her bisexual identification at the behest of her mother.

Now, I'm in a long-term relationship with a woman....So I finally told my parents...because I was like, I'm not going to go through the whole thing where I don't talk about my relationship... They were definitely a little weird. In some cases, still a little weird. But they're working on it. My grandparents are living. I'm fairly certain that they don't know...My grandmother on my mom's side was Pentecostal and my mom's Baptist. I grew up kind of like nondenominational in the black church realm of things. So that's not as open and I knew there would be some sort of backlash.

CDBLE also discussed the binegativity, erasure, and dismissal she experienced in past and current relationships. Upon disclosing to a past boyfriend, she was met with the perception of being nonmonogamous and an expectation of encouraging and allowing another female to engage in coital activities by being asked, "So...do I get to watch?" Within a few weeks of being in her current relationship, her now fiancée asked if maintaining their relationship indicated that CDBLE would change her identification to lesbian. In the interview CDBLE reported

I know that early in the relationship with my current partner, she would just be like... "Do you think you're a lesbian now?" I'm like, "No. Still bisexual." So there

are definitely times early on where she'd be like, "Yeah, but aren't you a lesbian now because we've been together for so long?" And now at this point, people will be like to her, "So you're in a lesbian relationship," and she'll be like, "I mean, you could call it that, but my girlfriend's bisexual." So she's gone from me having to correct her to now she'll correct other people. Because I'm like, yes, still my identity that I'm bisexual, even though this will likely be... the longest relationship ever because we do intend to get married eventually.

CDBLE also expressed that the location of her employment and residency had an impact on her feelings of acceptance and personal safety. She noted acceptance was greater and quicker in larger, populated areas than in rural areas. Due to the long-term relationship and support from her current partner, CDBLE disclosed to her family (excluding grandparents) and friends via a Facebook post. CDBLE stated she was more prepared for negative reactions; however, was pleasantly surprised by most:

So I did the whole like, here's a Facebook announcement...My family's like, "We still love you." And my friends were like, "We've known this since like middle school....There were a variety of reactions. And then, one of my friends was like, "How come you didn't tell me?" And I was like, "Because you're religious AF." And she's like, "Well we're still friends." And I was like, "Yeah." And then I think one time I asked her to come to Pride with me and she's like, "Well I don't support that lifestyle." And I was like, "This is where this friendship ends so like, it's been real, bye." But yeah.

Despite the support she has received from family and some friends, CDBLE experienced and still experiences the fear of rejection and dismissal of her self-identified sexuality due to being an African/Black American. CDBLE stated the minority community is less accepting and more hostile toward difference. Regardless of the binegativity, CDBLE stated, “I think part of the bisexual experience for me...and being the intersectionality of being a black woman it's like cool.”

***CTJBLE (Pronouns He/His/Him)***

CTJBLE is a White, polyamorous, bisexual, transgender male in his mid-30s. He stated, “So the identity I take on is man, but my definition of man is not absent of femininity or absence of womanhood. It's just presence of manhood.” CTJBLE equated sexuality and gender expression as more than displayed behaviors. He stated the Swyer Syndrome may have an influence:

Someone can be born XY, but the Y is missing the SRY gene, and then someone actually will develop as female, even though they're XY. And then, also hormonal and hormonal receptor, because someone could be full of testosterone and it be XY, but if they're testosterone androgen receptors are not working properly, they'll still develop ambiguously or more femininely.

CTJBLE identified his bisexuality as the ability to not only love the biological sexes but to also love the varying genders and gender expressions. He believed it is this capability that affords the bisexual to live within and outside of the heterosexual and gay communities, while belonging to neither. CTJBLE stated, “I like this idea that living in two worlds, but not belonging in either...that's why I like the term bisexual.” He

explained other terms, such as pansexual, did not resonant with his personification or sexuality:

I understand the term pansexual, and I understand the term polysexual as well, around being attracted to all genders, but there's something about it that just also feels like in fighting and fragmenting and kind of getting into semantics about things. And I am a little bit, I don't want to say I'm older, because that makes me feel like I'm being ageist or something. I don't fit in. I'm on the older cusp of people that would identify as pansexual, because that tends to be a younger generation thing. And so I think that's a part of the other reason that I prefer the term bisexual. It's more known. There's less explaining to do. There is still some explaining, but it's different. So it feels just like a term that works better.

CTJBLE was raised in a non-traditional household by two mothers, his grandmother, and a nanny. CTJBLE stated, "I was raised by all women and by women that hated men..." His relationship with this father was not established until after the gender reassignment due to complications which prevented his father's presence during his childhood. He reports his coming out was a process and difficult. CTJBLE was met with varying degrees of passive-aggressive negativity from one of his mothers while he was also struggling with accepting the terms and concept of his identity. CTJBLE stated, "...any label that I pick is going to automatically be too reductionistic, because human experiences can't be explained by one word or one label. But it's kind of a best ditch effort. As an essentialist, CTJBLE integrates essentialism and social construct to label his identifications. CTJBLE stated, "I have the essentialistic component, and so that's kind of

what comes from inside me. Then there's the socially constructed component, so that's the label that I use to try and describe all of that.”

So, for me it's just the potential to be attracted to more than one sex or gender or gender expression. I think a lot of people, when they hear the word bisexual they think of both genders, and that it reinforces the binary...so it's kind of like when you're bisexual you live in both of those worlds, but also in neither. And when I'm in a relationship with a woman, I'm still bisexual. And if I'm in a relationship with a man, I'm still bisexual...I think of all my identities, it's interesting that I think the bisexual one is the least visible in some ways, because I'm a trans guy...the bisexual gets overshadowed...

Although, self-identified as bisexual, CTJBLE has dated and had long term relationships with individuals that were assigned female at birth and transgendered males who at the time of dating identified as female. CTJBLE has not, however, had a long-term relationship with a cisgender male. He believes the underlying reasons he has not been able engage in a long-term relationship with a man – transgender or cis – are attributed to internalized transphobia, misandry, fear of inadequacy, and being emasculated.

I think the other issue that I've had is that I was raised by all women and by women that hated men, and so part of my struggle with coming out as a guy was actually less about me being trans and more about what does it mean to be a man, because I was socialized that men have no emotions, that men are just basically dicks, that

they don't care about other people's feelings, they just take what they want, and that didn't feel congruent with me.

CTJBLE reported dating men in high school to “pass as normal.” Eventually, he came out as lesbian, then transgender, and finally bisexual. He stated, in retrospect, there was one male he did have feelings for during his early college years; however, disowned the feelings due to internalized biphobia, and disclosed as a lesbian. He stated:

I came out as a lesbian after him, and there's something where I disowned how much he meant to me, because I felt like I couldn't be allowed that. If I was going to join the lesbian community that meant that I had to be grossed out by all of my exes, and some of them I wasn't necessarily grossed out by... And there's something really sad about that for me around my own internalized biphobia that I had to reject him and that relationship and how important it was to me. And so it wasn't until I came out as a bisexual later that I was like, "Oh, yeah I was attracted to him... after I had top surgery and after I had bottom surgery, then I felt a freedom to be attracted to men. So, it opened that possibility up for me. Before that I think that having a female body and then trying to be with a man would've felt too incongruent, because it would've been too many comparisons.

He stated:

When I listen to those stories from bisexual versus pansexual people, I don't really hear that difference. I really hear it more in the sociopolitical cultural context of wanting to fight the binary and thinking that bisexual people are automatically transphobic, and that's really weird to me.

CTJBLE is currently in a polyamorous relationship with plans to wed his female nesting partner.

***DBLE (Pronouns She/Her/Hers)***

DBLE identifies as a White, monogamous, bisexual, cisgender female. DBLE defined her bisexuality as being “able to love who I want to love.” However, the journey to accepting her sexuality, in her early 50s, was wrought with confusion, dismissal, and erasure. DBLE believed her sexual identification was based on the biological sex of the individual she was currently dating. When dating women, she identified as lesbian and when dating men she identified as heterosexual. DBLE disclosed that in former marriages to men she would have sexual encounters with women however, had not yet identified as bisexual.

I didn't identify as bisexual at all. I just was like it was, again, some of the stereotypes that get placed on bisexuals is oh, they're greedy, so I internalized it, going I'm just insatiable. I knew I couldn't sleep with another man, not that I wanted to, but I didn't acknowledge I was bisexual, but I was having lots of little things with women, not gay women, curious women. It was my outlet to express that side of myself that I was actually repressing.

It was not until DBLE reached the age of 50 did she identify and accept herself as bisexual. Her discovery was made when she attended a lecture during an APA conference regarding microaggressions. DBLE stated, “I came out of there and I told my husband, I called him, I was like, "You're in a queer relationship. I'm not in a straight relationship." On October 11, 2019, National Coming Out Day, she utilized the Facebook Coming Out



feature to disclose to family and friends of her bisexual identity. Her expectation was to be met with the same reactions when she disclosed being lesbian 30 years ago.

Again, 30 years ago, when I realized I was in love with a woman and then we were together and then I just experienced so much oh, hate, hate, hate. I couldn't handle it. I was just like ooh, I couldn't handle it. This time around, I'm like oh, gosh, here it goes.. I was going oh, my gosh. Who am I to just not claim that and be that and be I'm in a much stronger place, be visible for those that maybe can't. I just thought I have the right to. I get to. It was super empowering and super scary...it was super empowering to claim it and own it because when you don't, I think you grieve. You grieve a little part of yourself that you're not allowing yourself to claim.

DBLE is contemplating polyamory to mitigate the “grieving” of not allowing herself to have sexual attractions due to being bisexual and female in an opposite-sex monogamous relationship.

### ***MBBLE (Pronouns She/Her/Hers)***

MBBLE identifies as a White, bisexual cisgender female, in her mid-20s. MBBLE defined her bisexuality as the attraction to the “whole person” rather than by the gender the person interest identifies. Although, self-identified as a bisexual, she finds the label to be restrictive. MBBLE believes sexual orientation is a set of behavior patterns.

Like why do I have to put a label on who I'm attracted to? Why do you need to call it a thing? For me, sexual orientation I guess is just a pattern in which you're attracted... straight people have a pattern of being attracted to opposite sex individuals, gay, lesbian people have a pattern of being attracted to same sex

individuals, versus bisexual people... there really isn't a pattern, it's just kind of you are who you are and I'm attracted to who I'm attracted to, and that is what makes it my sexual orientation.

MBBLE became aware of her attractions to both males and females during her high school years. She disclosed her attractions to her best friend but not to her family for fear of negative judgment and condemnation. She had witnessed the negativity experienced by one of her male friends who had come out. MBBLE stated her friend was “picked on without mercy” and was subjected to homophobic slurs and ridicule. The fear of being different and ostracized prompted MBBLE to attend undergraduate studies in a large city. It was in New York City, with fellow classmates, she was introduced to the “full spectrum of human sexuality” and met her current companion.

I grew up in a very small town where same sex attraction of any kind, whether it was gay, lesbian, or bisexual, wasn't accepted. There was a very heavy population of Mormon people. I have nothing against Mormon people, but I know that their religion is definitely not welcoming or accepting and I think almost bordering of condemning of same sex attraction. So when that's what I grew up around, it didn't seem like a safe thing to talk about with anybody.

In March 2019, MBBLE divulged to her family being a bisexual and engaged in a same-sex liaison. She attributed being secure in the certainty of her current relationship had given her the courage and confidence to disclose to her family. She stated her father and brother were accepting; however, her mother “struggled” with the non-disclosure of

the disclosure, as well as the “lifestyle choice”. MBBLE shared that her mother would often make “unhelpful comments” when discussing her same-sex relationship.

For her it was one, why didn't I tell her sooner? Like it was kind of like there was this thing that I was living that she didn't know about and like she thought we had a different relationship...And she also, like I said, I grew up in an area that was not very accepting and so knowing that I'm going to be on the receiving end of that hate, I think she's had a really hard time with it...she's having a really hard time coming to terms with homophobia and that kind of thing that I'm going to be subject of, and I don't she'd like that and she's having a hard time accepting. And that's like, in her words, like the life that I've chosen for myself is more difficult than she would've liked... My mom had a really hard time seeing us together for the first time...

MBBLE stated her mother is still hopeful MBBLE’s identification of bisexuality leaves room for a future heteronormative relationship.

***TBLE (Pronouns They/Theirs/Them)***

TBLE identifies as a White, nonbinary, gender fluid, bisexual individual, in their late 20s. They shared that their sexuality has been more salient than their gender. In high school, TBLE revealed they grew up in “a very like white heteronormative class society where it was like ... I had no one different than me. So I had to be straight...”.

So when I was in high school, I was really struggling with my sexuality...throughout college, all of my sexuality feelings kept coming up. But I really poured myself into guys to try to smother a lot of my feelings. And then

when I first started dating my first girlfriend in my senior of college, I was still in the closet ...I just had a lot of internalized homophobia...I'm not gay...I find guys attractive...didn't understand what was going on there was a lot of confusion. So I think the word bisexual just like always resonated with me in that sense where I feel both.

TBLE further explained they have a physical and sexual attraction to males however not attracted to males romantically, emotionally, or mentally. They defined their bisexuality as their identity and gender. Although they primarily date women, TBLE had also experienced negativity from the lesbian community due to identifying as bisexual and questioning their cisgender female identity. They stated "that's been challenging, especially dating girls who identify as lesbian and they can't date anybody who doesn't identify as a female". TBLE stated they have experienced and continue to experience binegativity within the lesbian and gay community

...when you're a bisexual person, people of the same sex think that you're going to start sleeping with someone of the opposite sex. And then when you're non-binary people are like, "I don't know what that means. You're just going to fuck a bunch of people." So for me it's been hard kind of handling both and then also understanding that bisexuality is really like the binary of men and women, but also feeling like I am not in the binary, so why limit myself to the binary, if that makes sense?

TBLE stated disclosing their bisexuality to family and friends was not difficult, due to their sibling previously disclosing their homosexuality. They state the main

struggle with which they contend is the feeling of their identity as invisible. TBLE described feeling like they are on an “ambiguous middle paradigm of sexuality.”

TBLE is currently in long-term same-sex relationship with a self-identified lesbian.

### **Themes**

From Research Question 1 regarding the lived experiences of bisexual individuals, the following themes emerged:

1. Bisexuality is a combination of nature and nurture.
2. Bisexuality may encompass all biological sexes and gender expressions.
3. Society pressures individuals to claim an identity for public acceptance and validation of the self.

From Research Question 2 regarding how individuals who identify as bisexual differentiate between identity and behavior, the following themes emerged:

1. Bisexual sexual identity differs from sexual attractions and behaviors.
2. Acceptance of a bisexual identity appears to be a linear process.

### ***Research Question 1, Theme 1: Bisexuality Is a Combination of Nature and Nurture***

I asked the interviewees about their experiences regarding the paradigm of bisexuality as a natural phenomenon, a manifestation of social influences, or a combination of both. CBLE who believes bisexuality is innate and experiential stated, “I believe it's probably something that I was born with largely, but it was also affected by my experiences, my early sexual experiences, my personality attributes and things like that could have contributed to it as well.” CTJBLE believes bisexuality, or any sexual

orientation is “an essentialistic [sic] part...it's a core self, essence, spirit, soul, whatever you want to call it.” CDBLE’s belief is that not only is sexual orientation a culmination of biology and social influence, so is gender expression. She stated:

So, I think it's something that you're born with, but at the same time, I think that people actually identifying as bisexual, I think there's definitely something like a social component to that in the sense that if you don't have the language, kind of, for bisexuality, you might not identify as bisexual.

CDBLE explained her belief by stating, “I don't think it's a choice. I think we're just attracted to who we're attracted to. And I think probably brain chemistry has some kind of role in that, but I don't necessarily think it's a choice.”

MBBLE and DBLE also contend that while the label of bisexuality may be a choice, the attraction to the biological sexes and varying genders are innately organic with minimal social influences. DBLE did not articulate whether she believed in the nature versus nurture paradigm regarding sexual orientation; however, she did state she believed bisexuality is “something a person is born with”. TBLE discussed how being raised in a “white heteronormative class society” influenced how they defined their sexuality. Their belief is sexuality is innate. However, how one interprets and broaches their sexuality is symbolic of their environment. Thus, their perception and expression of their bisexuality is a combination of nature and nurture:

I grew up in a very like white heteronormative class society...I had no one different than me. So I had to be straight...So when I was in high school, I was really struggling with my sexuality...throughout college, all of my sexuality feelings kept

coming up. But I really poured myself into guys to try to smother a lot of my feelings.

***Research Question 1, Theme 2: Bisexuality May Encompass All Biological Sexes and Gender Expressions***

The general concept of bisexuality denotes it is a binary sexual orientation with an attraction to males and females, regardless of whether the sex was assigned at birth or reassigned later in life. However, the interviewees defined and described bisexuality in different contexts. CBLE surmised the contributing attributes to identifying as bisexual are his natural attractions which led to his experiences, personality, and social definitions of gender, males and females. He stated bisexuality meant that he has had persistent experiences in which he has been attracted to male and female biological sexes but not necessarily all genders. Conversely, CDBLE defined bisexuality as an all-inclusive attraction to people. She stated she is attracted to people who are of her gender and other genders: “Just kind of...being attracted to anybody attractive.” CTJBLE identified with the new school definition of bisexuality as being attracted to all genders, as well as biological sexes.

TBLE contends they struggle with concept of bisexuality being binary. Their understanding of bisexuality is

really like the binary of men and women, but also feeling like I am not in the binary, so why limit myself to the binary...I felt like it resonated at a very early time in my life because I've always thought of it, but I was always very against any kind of like homosexuality of any sort. But then when I found bisexuality, I was

like, "Yes. That's what I am. I'm not gay. I'm not a lesbian, I'm Bi." And then when I started really exploring more gender, I was like, "Well, I think trans males are really attractive." I'm like, "There's some trans females that I could see being attractive." I'm like, "So that am I pan? Am I clear?" But I'm just like, "None of that really makes sense to me still. That doesn't feel like it resonates." So yeah, at this point in my life, I still just identify as Bi.

MBBLE shared the same convictions of feeling out of place when trying to understand her attractions to males and females and varying gender expressions.

MBBLE stated:

...I know that it implies a binary, but I don't particularly see it that way...it's just being more attracted to a person, and less to like a physical gender representation...It's more about personality, who someone is as a person, not necessarily their gender...

CTJBLE paraphrased the definition of bisexuality by Robyn Och (robynochs.com) which purports, "... it's the capacity to be attracted to more than one sex or gender, not necessarily to the same degree, not necessarily at the same time, and not necessarily in the same context." DBLE defined her bisexuality as being "able to love who I want to love...There's no restrictions on who I get to love or be attracted to or be physical with...Bisexuality to me is I'm attracted to more than one gender". She expressed that her sexual orientation is an important part of her identity that allows her to express who she is to the world and who she is attracted. DBLE's belief is that bisexuality is a culmination of physical and mental attractions, the societal expectations



of the concepts of masculinity and femininity, and the need to classify and label oneself to “describe all those nuances...I prefer the term bisexual. It's more known. There's less explaining to do.”

***Research Question 1, Theme 3: Society Pressures Individuals to Claim an Identity for Public Acceptance and Validate the Self***

Social pressure from families and peers to identify as having a monosexual orientation was found to be prevalent amongst the interviewees. The comparison of manual coding to the NVivo word search uncovered many of the negative affective wording centered around family and peer responding negatively to identification of bisexuality. CBLE stated, “I was bullied, called all sorts of names, laughed at, and I very quickly learned that that was something that I needed to keep to myself. It was something, to me, that was shameful.” CBLE also recalled the labeling of their sexual attractions was based on the societal concepts of partnered relationships. CBLE stated:

I believe as best I can recall that I experienced myself as gay, but suppressing my gayness. And probably for me, I probably defined "gay" as having same-sex attractions, but it's okay that I had opposite-sex attractions as well. That didn't really make me less gay. But the presence of the same-sex attractions was what made me gay. That's how I think that, as a young person, I experienced it.

DBLE expressed repressing their bisexuality due to the societal pressures of expected behaviors. They stated:

I've lived in marriages with men where I had many women relationships on the side and I didn't identify as bisexual at all. I just was like it was, again, some of the

stereotypes that get placed on bisexuals is oh, they're greedy, so I internalized it, going I'm just insatiable. I knew I couldn't sleep with another man, not that I wanted to, but I didn't acknowledge I was bisexual, but I was having lots of little things with women, not gay women, curious women. It was my outlet to express that side of myself that I was actually repressing.

MBBLE, who grew up in a predominantly Mormon community, struggled with the concept of religious condemnation for having same-sex attractions and identifying as bisexual. The cognitive dissonance led to repression and feelings of fearing for their personal safety. They stated,

I grew up in a very small town where same sex attraction of any kind, whether it was gay, lesbian, or bisexual, wasn't accepted. There was a very heavy population of Mormon people. I have nothing against Mormon people, but I know that their religion is definitely not welcoming or accepting and I think almost bordering of condemning of same sex attraction. So when that's what I grew up around, it didn't seem like a safe thing to talk about with anybody.

TBLE expressed having to label themselves has been counterproductive and minimizes their own experiences. The participant stated, “understanding that bisexuality is really like the binary of men and women, but also feeling like I am not in the binary, so why limit myself to the binary, if that makes sense?”

*Research Question 2, Theme 1: Bisexual Sexual Identity Differs from Sexual*

*Attractions and Behaviors*

The first theme uncovered regarding RQ2 was the distinction between attractions, behaviors, and identity. Attractions are defined affective and physical feelings toward others. Behaviors are defined as physical and sexual and romantic conduct with others or alone, whereas identity is defined as and an individual's personal and social affiliation. While there is a distinction between the attractions, behaviors, and identity, understanding how the three elements work together is important for self-discovery and acceptance. The interviewee DBLE stated:

I feel like it's a combination of your own identity, whether you call it ... It's just that to me, it's part of my identity, my sexual orientation, whether I am actively practicing it, participating in that kind of relationship, it's still a part of my identity that ... Sexual orientation to me is part of identity that is important to me that helps me just express who I am in the world. Also, sexual orientation is I feel like that's who I don't want to say define, but it helps me understand it's like who I'm attracted to. Yeah, it's who ... I'm just going like the transcript's going to be like blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. No, sexual orientation is who sexually I'm attracted to and it's part of my identity.

The bisexual identity and bisexual behaviors are often viewed as synonymous by the monosexual communities. The interviewees expressed a delineation between bisexual identity and bisexual behaviors. The interviewees described that how they view themselves as bisexuals and identify with bisexuality has little to no bearing on their

attractions to others. The identity is not solely based on biological sex or gender expression; rather, it is based on a complex conglomeration of dynamics, such as personality, environment, attractions, and assumptions. Moreover, identifying as bisexual did not necessarily mean the interviewee engaged in physical relationships with males, females, diverse, or non-binary individuals. All six of the interviewees defined their bisexuality in the same terms in the same context reflected in the sexual configurations theory. DBLE stated, “Our gender is how we feel...”; whereas MBBLE stated, “Whatever it is that you want to identify as that you feel encompasses how you feel on the inside, that, to me, is gender.” All interviewees shared a common definition that sex is biological, *gender identity* is how an individual feels about themselves, and it is *gender expression or behavior* as how they show themselves to the world. Regardless, of whether the terms are used interchangeably, differentiation between identity and behavior is an important factor in self-identification and the expression of self-identification. Notwithstanding, neither bisexual identity nor expression is indicative of bisexual attractions and behaviors toward others.

Bisexual attractions and behaviors are based on not just the biological sex of the individual to whom the person is attracted but also on the social construct of gender that reflects masculinity, femininity, and diversity of expressed behavior. CDBLE described his identification of being bisexual as being in alignment with the Spectrums model (Cathers, 2019), which defines sexual orientation which he describes as “an essentialistic part, so that's something that comes from within us. So it's a core self, essence, spirit, soul, whatever you want to call it.” He stated, “Sometimes, you will be more attracted to

one gender. There may even be times that you're not attracted to one gender at all. That's fine."

Regarding bisexual behaviors, the consensus of the interviewees is that bisexuality means an individual has the capacity to be attracted to multiple genders and sexes, even if not always equally. The romantic and sexual attractions are different components of overall attraction. An individual may be romantically monosexual though sexually bisexual. In the same respect, an individual may only date men, but still love women. There are multiple configurations of attraction and bisexuality. As stated by CTJBLE, "Just because you've been dating or married to a person of one gender for years, doesn't mean you are any less bisexual. It means you love and have decided to commit yourself to one person. That's all."

The interviewees expressed bisexuality as a fluid identity which affords attractions to change throughout a lifetime. As an identity the interviewees expressed bisexuality acknowledges the possibility of within-person shifts over age, context, and life phase, which is in alignment with the tenets of the sexual configurations theory. CTJBLE disclosed that his attractions have shifted over time from strictly engaging in romantic relationships with women to having a nurturing relationship with a cisgender male, to then back to dating only females and not cisgender males. DBLE and CDBLE stated that often whom they are currently dating is viewed as their current sexuality. CDBLE disclosed that when she was dating a female, she was viewed as a lesbian; however, when dating a male, she was viewed as heterosexual. The interviewees expressed the same concern that the tendency to classify and categorize identity based on

an individual's current dating partner lends to the marginalization and dismissal of bisexuality as an identity while fostering the notion bisexuality is a transitional behavior. This again, reinforces the issue of bisexual identity being synonymous with bisexual behaviors.

***Research Question 2, Theme 2: Acceptance of a Bisexual Identity Appears to Be a Linear Process***

The participants shared the commonality of how they came to the realization of being a bisexual. The interviewees recalled the experiences involved with coming to understand and accept their bisexual identities. The pathway of experiences that emerged from the voices of the interviewees are recognition of attractions toward others, labeling of attractions towards others, proximity and exploration, and the acceptance of bisexuality after partnered. Cognitive dissonance appears to emerge in each of the stages.

***Recognition***

The first stage of bisexual identity development, unveiled through the words of the interviewees, was the recognition of attractions toward others and accompanying disarray of feelings. The interviewees discussed being conflicted with their attractions and childhood upbringing, which created distress and conflict around who they are and who they are *supposed* to be. Some of the interviewees recounted that at an early age they knew their sexual and romantic attractions were different from others. A majority of the interviewees denied the attractions and encounters that were contrasted with the morals and values of their cultural background and what was considered acceptable behavior by their school-aged peers. CBLE recalled having "...persistent experiences in my life

where I've been attracted to both biological males and females". He understood he was attracted to the opposite sex; however, he was very confused and did not understand the same type of attraction to the same sex. He stated, "I even had a sex ed course in high school. We didn't even cover issues like that." CBLE equated his attractions to "gayness" rather than bisexuality because it was the same-sex attractions that made him gay. CBLE remembered:

I believe as best I can recall that I experienced myself as gay, but suppressing my gayness. And probably for me, I probably defined "gay" as having same-sex attractions, but it's okay that I had opposite-sex attractions as well. That didn't really make me less gay. But the presence of the same-sex attractions was what made me gay. That's how I think that, as a young person, I experienced it.

CBLE also recalled quelling his same-sex encounters to his middle school years due to the era of the AIDS pandemic and experiencing ridicule by his peers. He stated:

...my same-sex attractions and same-sex encounters were in middle school, and were limited to that time period. So although my attractions continued into high school and even into adulthood somewhat, for same-sex attractions, those encounters that I had were limited to my middle school years. I grew up in the early and mid-'80s as far as middle school, high school goes. It was a less tolerant time for issues of sexuality. It was around the time, the onset of the AIDS epidemic happened.

CBLE had confided in an individual he considered a friend whom he stated had betrayed him and revealed his same-sex attractions to others. CBLE remembered being ridiculed, bullied, and harassed to the point of feeling fear and shame.

I was bullied, called all sorts of names, laughed at, and I very quickly learned that that was something that I needed to keep to myself. It was something, to me, that was shameful. I never disclosed to parents or siblings, never disclosed to any other friends. And basically decided that even through some counseling and things like that that I had, that that was a road that was going to be too difficult for me to walk.

CBLE remembered being confused and tormented because his same-sex attractions were against his religious upbringing. He stated, "I was so confused and so tormented and prayed every week in church that God would take these desires away from me." CBLE recalled that although he had "decided that even through some counseling and things like that that I had, that that was a road that was going to be too difficult for me to walk" and tried to suppress his attractions.

CTJBLE, the only transgender participant, knew at an early age he was attracted to males and females and was psychologically a male. He was not only experiencing incongruency about his attractions but also his gender and being what his mothers despised. He repressed his feelings and attractions to males which extended to his college years:

...part of my struggle with coming out as a guy was actually less about me being trans and more about what does it mean to be a man, because I was socialized that



men have no emotions, that men are just basically dicks, that they don't care about other people's feelings, they just take what they want, and that didn't feel congruent with me...before I was out as a lesbian I did date men, but I picked men that I wasn't attracted to and wasn't interested in, but I think it was I was trying to pass as normal, whatever that means.

As the only child of a lesbian couple and an assigned female at birth, his same-sex attractions were celebrated and accepted by his mothers; however, his opposite-sex attractions were frowned upon. To confound the issue, he also *felt* he was a boy and not a girl which added to his confusion regarding his sexuality. CTJBLE stated, “It's been an interesting process for me, because I think some of that is actually less related to sexuality and more related to my own feelings of gender”.

CDBLE also realized at an early age she was attracted to boys and girls; however, she thought “everyone felt that way because we didn’t talk about sex in my household”. It wasn’t until she could understand the preachings of the pulpit, that she started to become confused. CDBLE stated, “I didn’t feel like an abomination.” In her high school years, CDBLE dreamt of engaging in sexual activities with a female: “I know I definitely had a second time in high school where it was like... I think I actually had a sex dream about a girl and I was like... that was weird.” Nevertheless, she did not act upon her attractions to the same-sex until her late high school years due to the fear of reprisal from her parents and church community. CDBLE remembered:

I don't want to explain this to people and then part of me wasn't sure how people would react. When I ended up breaking up with one of my high school boyfriends,

I ended up experimenting with one of my female friends in high school. And then, kind of just like from there I was like, okay this is definitely a thing that I am into.

She stated, "I grew up kind of like nondenominational in the black church realm of things. So that's not as open and I knew there would be some sort of backlash."

MBBLE stated she knew she felt different. However, she could not pinpoint what she was feeling and was not receptive to the feeling. MBBLE rationalized the same-sex feelings to admiration of athletic ability of her teammates and rivalries.

Yeah. I think in high school, I would say I knew that something was different. I don't know if I would've labeled it as like an opposite sex attraction at that point. I think it was more, something's a little bit different...Kind of thing didn't come til I guess like normal adolescence, of like concern about that. But yeah, I guess if anything, it would just be like that stereotypical tomboy, athlete kind of personality that I had...it was like, "Something's different. And I don't want to be different because different kind of gets cast to the side and ostracized.

DBLE repressed her same-sex attractions for fear of losing the love of her father. She stated she was "too chicken to actually claim being gay...you want to hide in the heterosexual world". She did not come to understand her sexuality until her late teens/early twenties. Nonetheless, she struggled and experienced cognitive dissonance with the feelings.

I was 19, 20 when I started feeling attracted towards a woman, but I didn't know that it was a sexual attraction at the time, so at 20 was when I was going, but it was still too much for my mind. It was so much for my mind to take in. I had so many

judgements. It's wrong. It's wrong. It's wrong. I was getting that feedback from everybody else, so it was there, but I was just like ooh, like I couldn't ... Yeah, so it was hard to enjoy. It was because it was so wrong in my mind.

DBLE further iterated that during her late teens she experienced ridicule and homophobic behaviors when she was “outed” for dating a person of the same-sex:

Again, I hid it. It was just more like people found out I was dating a girl and then if I said something like, "Well, I'm kind of dating a girl," I never claimed it. Then again I never claimed it. It was just more like everybody just knew and then so if we were out and about, it was just like I said. It's like being homophobic, like the guys in the locker room were afraid to be in the locker room with another gay guy. You know what I mean? It's just like that. It's just kind of homophobic, really.

Similarly, TBLE felt attractions to the same-sex at an early age and did not understand why they felt more than friendship for their female friends in the same manner they felt for some of their male friends with whom they wanted to have relationships. They equated the feelings to strong friendship rather than romantic sentiment because same-sex attractions were not supported in their household.

While each of the interviewees knew or had a *feeling* they were experiencing sexuality differently from their parents, friends, and peers, they equated the feelings as to being or doing wrong. In addition, they had yet been introduced a descriptive term that would help define their attractions to the male and female sex.

### ***Labeling***

CBLE did not encounter the term *bisexual* until adulthood. He stated, "I can't put my finger on a point where I began to use the word "*bisexual*." Sometime in my mid-adulthood...I didn't have the language for it early on."

Even during marriages with men, DBLE recalled experiencing cognitive dissonance when labeling herself as a bisexual due to the negative societal perceptions and behaviors she experienced.

I've lived in marriages with men where I had many women relationships on the side and I didn't identify as bisexual at all. I just was like it was, again, some of the stereotypes that get placed on bisexuals is oh, they're greedy, so I internalized it, going I'm just insatiable. I knew I couldn't sleep with another man, not that I wanted to, but I didn't acknowledge I was bisexual, but I was having lots of little things with women, not gay women, curious women. It was my outlet to express that side of myself that I was actually repressing...Well, it was an unhappy relationship at the time, where I'm in a satisfying relationship now, but that's just it, though. It is closeted...I wasn't ready to claim that identity. I wanted to fit in. I wanted to be normal. When I was dating a woman, I experienced a lot of discrimination, lot of hate. I was like that could just stay in the closet and so I didn't want to claim that. I just wanted to fit in and be normal, so I could have all these things, but I could just claim I'm straight. I could live that to avoid discrimination.

DBLE did not identify as bisexual until she was 49 years of age after attending an APA conference panel on sexuality.

I'll say it was when I was 49. That's when I was going oh, I'm bisexual because even when at 45 I was dating a woman and she's like, "You're a lesbian." I'm like but I don't identify as a lesbian. That just doesn't feel right when I say, "I'm a lesbian." That doesn't feel right because I've been in love with men and I love men, too. I've been in lots of relationships with men. You know what I mean?

...it's only been in the last year going to the APA conference, I came out of a meeting, like a binary, whatever meeting because it was like oh, I'm lesbian when I'm dating women and I'm heterosexual when I'm with men. I'm actually married now. I came out of there and I told my husband, I called him, I was like, "You're in a queer relationship. I'm not in a straight relationship." It finally dawned on me oh, I get to have my orientation no matter who I'm dating. It's just been this really revolutionary year of coming to that kind of understanding.

CDBLE accepted the label of bisexual in her middle school years after being introduced to the term during a sexual education class. She stated:

I don't remember if it was seventh or eighth grade. Whatever grade you get the first... I know it was in middle school and I know it was like... when you get the first full-on, in-depth sexual health class or whatever. And then I think somebody brought up threesomes and I was just like... Women and men is an option? Oh, okay. Yeah, that's the option. I pick that one. I think I was just like, oh yeah.

CTJBLE, the only transgender interviewee, stated, "I think the other issue that I've had is that I was raised by all women and by women that hated men." CTJBLE hid and denied his bisexuality for fear of backlash from his mothers and came out as a lesbian. He stated that although he accepts the bisexual label, it is not an exhaustive description of attractions.

Whereas identity, for me, is kind of what label do I try and use to describe all those nuances? And any label that I pick is going to automatically be too reductionistic, because human experiences can't be explained by one word or one label. But it's kind of a best ditch effort.

MBBLE tried to steer away from labels. They stated, "It took me a really long time to label myself like as bisexual, because I personally don't think that it should like... Like why do I have to put a label on who I'm attracted to? Why do you need to call it a thing?". They continued:

...there's been like labels like pansexual thrown around and bisexual and I guess I never really like...The label like pansexuality, it doesn't seem to jive with me, like I said, I'm not really big into the whole like... Why do we need to create labels for like everything under the sun? So I think for me it was just like, "Bisexuality's a thing, this is something that I've heard of before, and I'm realizing that I'm attracted to just people in general, and so this is the thing that I think that I'm going to call this," for lack of a better way to explain that.

MBBLE recalled it wasn't until her college years she identified and accepted the label of bisexual. They stated, "Okay. Yeah. So you are attracted to women. But okay,

yes, you're also attracted to men. So what does that kind of mean?" And I don't think I really put like a meaning or a label to it until college.”

TBLE gave an explanation of how they and others had misused identifying as bisexual until they reached a level of comfortability with who they are:

I think that some people do hide behind the label of being bisexual to protect themselves in certain circumstances, on particularly thinking about families, and giving parents the hope that they're not completely gay. I think that that is a protective factor that people hide behind bisexuality for...I feel some people go into being Bi first like, "Okay, I'm questioning." But they hold on to the Bi term. And then once they're like, "Okay, yeah, no, I don't want guys anymore in that way." And then they're like, "Okay, I guess I'm a lesbian now." And then they'll change their term. And that kind of minimizes the validity of bisexual individuals.

### ***Proximity and Exploration***

The third stage of the bisexual identity development was the freedom to explore their sexuality when they relocated to attend college. It must be noted all the interviewees are college or university graduates. All the interviewees chose to attend college away from their hometown. CDBLE stated:

And then I think in college, I came out to my friend group and I told most of my friends and I don't think I told my family until...I was out of college, so probably only a few years ago.

Upon further reflection of her life, CDBLE recalled, “I don't think I ever sought out anyone based on sexual orientation, which now sounds weird, but yeah, I just have

kind of been in a relationship with someone...” Regardless, she experienced cognitive dissonance and fear due to her upbringing, being a Black American, and being outside of societal norms:

I probably experienced that whole wheel of emotion at some point related to sexuality. But there are definitely times I was like, oh I'm scared of what people will say. And there have been a few times where I'm slightly concerned about my safety, but it's never been from anyone that I personally knew. It's more like from strangers...Black people are definitely so far behind with anything LGBT related, I'd say compared to...Well, no. I'm just going to say people of color in general are farther behind I think. Because typically, I feel like people are like, "Oh sexuality. Oh the LGBT community. That's a white people thing." I feel like the black community in general doesn't really talk about it. It's kind of just like...there's men on the DL and there's Wanda Sykes maybe.

CTJBLE admitted to internalized biphobia because he felt uncomfortable with his attractions to men prior to his gender reassignment. He stated while he was experimenting and exploring his sexuality, he ostracized a friend, which he regrets.

And there's something really sad about that for me around my own internalized biphobia that I had to reject him and that relationship and how important it was to me. And so it wasn't until I came out as a bisexual later that I was like, "Oh, yeah I was attracted to him." So where I started to get in touch my attraction to men, because my attraction to women was a non issue. It was an issue in other ways, but was I aware of it from an early age? Yes...And then through that and through drag



that's where I started discovering that I was actually much more comfortable as a man. And then through that I was able to accept my attraction to men that I had originally disowned...because in my breaking up with him and my disowning of what I felt for him, he felt really rejected. And we had been friends for two or three years before we dated. So he was a really meaningful person in my life, and in my disowning my own masculinity and my own bisexuality, I disowned him. And so not only did I lose him as boyfriend, I lost him as a friend.

MBBLE explored her sexuality when she and her best friend moved way to attend college. She recalled that in her junior/senior year, she started to accept her bisexuality. However, she still experienced cognitive dissonance and struggled with revealing her sexuality for fear of reprisal. She remembered, "It was one of those things where I'm like, "I'm going to wait til it's serious 'til I say anything to anybody, because this isn't going to be accepted," essentially."

TBLE denied, yet explored, their sexuality while in college. It was not until their 4<sup>th</sup> year of graduate school that they came to accept their bisexuality.

And then throughout college, all of my sexuality feelings kept coming up. But I really poured myself into guys to try to smother a lot of my feelings. And then when I first started dating my first girlfriend in my senior of college, I was still in the closet and I was dating someone on my soccer team, so that was challenging. But I just had a lot of internalized homophobia and I was very much like, "I'm trying to understand, I'm not gay, I'm not a lesbian. I don't identify with those words. And I also do find guys attractive and I still was interested in men." So I

didn't understand what was going on there was a lot of confusion. So I think the word bisexual just like always resonated with me in that sense where I feel both.

### ***Partnerships and Disclosure***

The interviewees shared a commonality of being in a long-term partnership allowed them to be more comfortable and confident with who they are. The intensity of the relationship created the resolve to embrace and accept their bisexuality and disclosing to family and friends. MBBLE disclosed to her best friend, who is now her long-term partner. MBBLE stated she was very uncomfortable discussing her sexuality with her family and others due to the societal pressures to be heterosexual.

I grew up in a very small town where same sex attraction of any kind, whether it was gay, lesbian, or bisexual, wasn't accepted. There was a very heavy population of Mormon people. I have nothing against Mormon people, but I know that their religion is definitely not welcoming or accepting and I think almost bordering of condemning of same sex attraction. So when that's what I grew up around, it didn't seem like a safe thing to talk about with anybody. But my best friend, we both moved away, I knew that she was going to accept me for who I was no matter what. And so she just felt like the comfortable bet.

MBBLE stated she did not have a *grand gestured* disclosure of her bisexuality; nor did she hide it. Moreover, it was just in the past few years she informed her family.

And so no, I don't think I've ever been, like looking back, rejected for the label of bisexuality if that makes sense...I did not disclose to them [*referring to family*] until rather recently actually. When I was in a same sex relationship that was

getting increasingly more serious, and it was, I didn't like hiding. It wasn't a good feeling. I had concerns about them, but they do know now, yes.

CDBLE remembered when she decided to disclose her bisexuality to her family and friends and the thought process that ensued:

They're religious, but they're on the more open end of...I don't know...My grandparents are living. I'm fairly certain that they don't know, but also like... there's some dementia going on so it's like, "Better for you to just die not understanding, that's fine."...But at the same time, I'm an only child, so I was like...This probably sounds bad, but I was like, "I know my parents aren't going to disown me because somebody has to take care of them when they're old."

She further iterated:

So I finally told my parents when I think I started this relationship because I was like, I'm not going to go through the whole thing where I don't talk about my relationship. I have other things that are happening that are more important that I need to use that brain energy for, so they will get over it and maybe be a little weird and they'll be fine...So I did the whole like, here's a Facebook announcement, which was super funny because I had friends and family. My family's like, "We still love you."

CBLE stated, "I'm 52 now, and just beginning to feel comfortable disclosing that to some people and it's really been a healing experience for me. Like I said, I was in theology for a while. I was in ministry, conservative circles". Looking back, CBLE stated:

Seeing the path that my life took, but also confronted at the same time with the number of other possibilities that it could have taken, it just kind of gives me a perspective that's ... How do I describe it? It's sad at one point, but also it's kind of nice. It's kind of like that little boy inside of me that was so confused and so tormented and who prayed every week in church that God would take these desires away from me, it is healing for that...my parents are both deceased, so there's really no future for me to disclose to them, but it's still a period of growth for me, being able to accept and be acknowledged as a bisexual.

CBLE currently describes himself as a bisexual; however, he does not maintain the same level and intensity of same-sex attractions:

I'm not as attracted to my gender peers, my same-age gender peers today as I was when I was growing up. Middle school, high school, even college. When I encounter my bisexuality today, I would say kind of along the Kinsey scale, I lean heterosexual in my orientation, my attractions. And only somewhat now homosexual...I want to become more comfortable. I'm still in a process of healing from that, and so this is part of, for me, is my journey of healing...

CTJBLE, on a parallel path, also felt the freedom express after moving out of the home of his mothers to disclose their bisexual identity after undergoing gender reassignment surgery.

And so it wasn't until I was in my body and felt good then, that that opened it up. And so I think that's why the order was lesbian, because then I was just getting in touch with masculinity, and I was a butch lesbian. And then through that and

through drag that's where I started discovering that I was actually much more comfortable as a man. And then through that I was able to accept my attraction to men that I had originally disowned.

CTJBLE also recognized that although his bisexuality is often overshadowed by his other identities, it is an integral part of who he is.

I think of all my identities, it's interesting that I think the bisexual one is the least visible in some ways, because I'm a trans guy so that's pretty visible, because I have to correct people's gender pronouns, because I don't pass. Polyamorous, I think people notice when I have multiple partners, then I'm talking about them. Whereas the bisexual, I think in some respects because the other two are not as known, somehow the bisexual gets overshadowed. If that makes sense...I do disclose right away all three, because if someone's not going to be open minded, and if someone's going to have issues with me being bisexual or me being polyamorous or me being a trans, then I'm not interested. Can there be feelings about it? Sure, but if it's an issue, then it's a no go.

Regardless of the confidence he has with who he is, he did experience cognitive dissonance due to being raised by women who displayed very little respect and like for males.

I was raised by all women and by women that hated men, and so part of my struggle with coming out as a guy was actually less about me being trans and more about what does it mean to be a man, because I was socialized that men have no

emotions, that men are just basically dicks, that they don't care about other people's feelings, they just take what they want, and that didn't feel congruent with me.

CDBLE stated she did not immediately disclose to her family due to her mother being Baptist and her grandparents Pentecostal. The teachings of both religions denounced same-sex attractions. CDBLE was conflicted due to the possibility of reprisal. It was in college CDBLE came out to her friends and after graduation to her parents after being in a long-term, committed relationship with her current fiancée:

And then I think in college, I came out to my friend group and I told most of my friends and I don't think I told my family until... I was out of college, so probably only a few years ago...So I finally told my parents when I think I started this relationship because I was like, I'm not going to go through the whole thing where I don't talk about my relationship. I have other things that are happening that are more important that I need to use that brain energy for, so they will get over it and maybe be a little weird and they'll be fine.

DBLE realized her bisexuality at a later stage in life and utilized social media to disclose her discovery. It was only after being married to her current husband ,and reading her college instructor's paper on microaggressions against bisexuals, she became more comfortable with her sexual orientation/identity.

Even on National Coming Out Day a year ago, not this one, but the before, it's like I have no purpose to come out to anybody because it's just my own life, but I did come out on social media just to bring more visibility to it because everybody knows that me just I kind of disappear when I'm dating women and then I'm back

in my cultural group when I'm dating men because that was more supported and so it was just like I'm like screw it. I'm just going to be me...Claiming it and owning it and living it is just there's such a healing.

DBLE is still working on identifying as bisexual and being in a monogamous marriage to her current husband. She stated, "I love and respect my husband, but I have a sexual attraction to women, but I don't allow myself to feel that or I'm not in the position to. I'm not experiencing that, so I do grieve. I grieve a little bit, so I'm still working on that, too." I explored whether her relationship her parents influenced her understanding and perspectives regarding sexuality. She stated:

It would definitely be more my dad. They were divorced from the time I was two. My mom had schizophrenia, bipolar. She had lots of mental illness. Now, she was, I mean, she was very sexual, which even actually imprinted sex is bad little bit in my mind just because of her issues, so no, no, she would've been fine, but definitely my dad, definitely my dad because my dad is very sexist, definitely feels very negative towards women. Just be happy with what you get kind of a thing and you're lucky that you have ... I mean, like that, so to me, it's just like oh, I'm just lucky to be here in the world, let alone claim the sexuality.

MBBLE did disclose her sexuality to her family after confirming her long-term relationship had progressed from friendship to stronger emotive awareness.

Yeah. I did not disclose to them (referring to family) until rather recently actually. When I was in a same sex relationship that was getting increasingly more serious, and it was, I didn't like hiding. It wasn't a good feeling. I had concerns about them,

but they do know now, yes...My dad and my brother were very like, "We don't care. We love who you are."...I think my mom has had a very hard time with it...she also is very much the type of like, she wants me to grow up and get married, and to have kids, and that ideal life, that very heteronormative life that she had as like an ideal for me in her mind was kind of shattered...I grew up in an area that was not very accepting and so knowing that I'm going to be on the receiving end of that hate, I think she's had a really hard time with it.

When asked how they felt about their acceptance and disclosure, MBBLE stated: I think for me, it was like clarity of like, "Oh, Jesus. We've settled on something. Thank God, the confusion can be over." I think it was empowering in a sense, but also very anxiety provoking and like, "What does this mean for the rest of my life? And what does this mean for my friends and my family relationships, and how are they going to take this?" But I do think for me, it was like once I figured out that this is okay, there are other people who feel the same way that I do, I'm not a unicorn, that there was a clarity to it, and a comfortability to it that I think I hadn't had in the past.

TBLE disclosed to their family after committing to their current girlfriend, whom they met in college.

So when I came out, it was my senior year of college and I came out to my sister-in-law first because she's the closest one that I'm closest to. And I came out as Bi. I was like, "I have a girlfriend, but I still like guys, guys aren't off the table yet, I'm just trying to explore." And my sister-in-law is like, "Do whatever you want, I love



you and I support you." And then when I came out to my mom, it was really funny, she was taking me shopping and she's like, "We can get dresses so you could impress all these guys in school."

### **Cognitive Dissonance**

Bisexuality is an innate characteristic much in the same realm as hair color, color of eyes, personality, and sex assigned at birth. An individual can temporarily change their physical and psychological representation; however the facts of the innate characteristics remain the same. Identifying as a bisexual is a process that is often viewed as a transitional phase. Common among the interviewees was the process by which they experienced naming their sexuality. Even when the interviewees were explicitly engaged in bisexual sexual behaviors and activities, they had denied their identity as bisexual and erased their activities as bisexual. Although the bi-erasure appeared to be harmless, it resulted in misrepresentation to their partners and themselves that subconsciously contributed to bi-invisibility and biphobia. CTJBLE placed greater emphasis on identifying as transgender than identifying as bisexual:

It's been an interesting process for me, because I think some of that is actually less related to sexuality and more related to my own feelings of gender... Was after my surgery, after I had top surgery and after I had bottom surgery, then I felt a freedom to be attracted to men. So it opened that possibility up for me. Before that I think that having a female body and then trying to be with a man would've felt too incongruent, because it would've been too many comparisons... I think I also, around my bisexuality, is that I've only dated and had long term relationships with

people that were assigned female at birth...And so it wasn't until I was in my body and felt good then, that that opened it up.

Only MBBLE classified bisexual as their primary identity followed by ethnicity and sex assigned at birth by stating "I am a bisexual, white woman."

Bi invisibility and bi erasure may also be prevalent in the bisexual community. The interviewees identified themselves as gay, denied same-sex attractions, or identified it as experimenting with heterosexual or homosexual partners before the acceptance of bisexuality. DBLE stated her sexual identification was based upon whom she was currently dating. Although she was in a heterosexual marriage who enjoyed spending time with women outside of her marriage. DBLE stated:

I've lived in marriages with men where I had many women relationships on the side and I didn't identify as bisexual at all. I just was like it was, again, some of the stereotypes that get placed on bisexuals is oh, they're greedy, so I internalized it, going I'm just insatiable. I knew I couldn't sleep with another man, not that I wanted to, but I didn't acknowledge I was bisexual, but I was having lots of little things with women, not gay women, curious women. It was my outlet to express that side of myself that I was actually repressing. Now I'm married to a man, but I actually claim and own my bisexuality. I'm not living it, so it's like it's the exact opposite.

CBLE also identified as heterosexual and was in a heterosexual marriage despite having engaged in and enjoyed same-sex partnerships and sexual activities:

I believe as best I can recall that I experienced myself as gay, but suppressing my gayness. And probably for me, I probably defined "gay" as having same-sex attractions, but it's okay that I had opposite-sex attractions as well. That didn't really make me less gay. But the presence of the same-sex attractions was what made me gay. That's how I think that, as a young person, I experienced it... When I encounter my bisexuality today, I would say kind of along the Kinsey scale, I lean heterosexual in my orientation, my attractions. And only somewhat now homosexual.

CTJBLE expressed this sentiment by stating:

And there's something really sad about that for me around my own internalized biphobia that I had to reject him and that relationship and how important it was to me. And so it wasn't until I came out as a bisexual later that I was like, "Oh, yeah I was attracted to him." So where I started to get in touch my attraction to men, because my attraction to women was a non issue.

### **Participants' Mapping of Their Lived Experience on the Sexual Configurations**

#### **Diagram**

To ascertain the validity of the sexual configurations theory for participants who identify as bisexual, the interviewees mapped their experiences on the sexual configurations diagram (see Appendix D). I also mapped the interviewees based on her interpretation of the transcripts. The interviewees were asked to indicate their gender/sex with an orange circle, status with a purple triangle, eroticism with a blue star, nurturance with a red heart, and security in their identity with a gray cross. The interviewees'

completed maps were sent directly to my dissertation committee chair and were unseen by me until I had mapped the experiences based on participant interviews.

### ***CBLE***

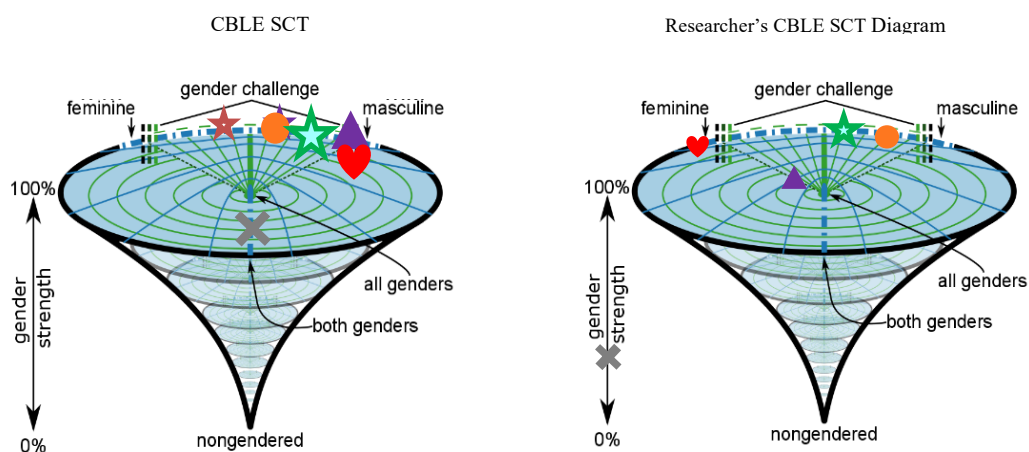
CBLE (pronouns *he/him/his*) identified as a cisgender, bisexual male, presenting as more effeminate than masculine. He is married to a cisgender female; however, he often fantasizes about a former male partner when CBLE and his spouse are coupling. Regardless, he states he leans toward heterosexuality albeit describing his ideal person as having an “effeminate face, blonde hair, blue eyes, about five foot five or seven, and would have male genitalia”. He also expressed being attracted to clean, smooth skinned bodies. CBLE stated he is secure in his identity as bisexual despite not revealing his bisexuality to spouse, family, or colleagues.

A comparison of CBLE’s visual depiction of himself and my interpretation of CBLE based on the interview presented significant differed perspectives. The mapping of eroticism and gendersex were marked similarly. Both CBLE and I mapped his gendersex or internal sense of self (orange circle) as a male presenting with feminine attributes, while CBLE emphasized greater feminine characteristics. Eroticness or sexual arousal and fantasies (blue star with green outline) were mapped in similar locations on the SCT diagram. Status or sexual behaviors (purple triangle) and nurturance or partnered relationship (red heart) were polar opposites. I mapped CBLE’s nurturance to be more feminine due to being partnered with a cisgender female; whereas he indicated nurturance to be in the more masculine realm. Both CBLE and the I mapped security in gender identity (gray X) as weak in strength. It is noted CBLE mapped security in gender

identity on the diagram and not the strength bar as instructed. Moreover, CBLE utilized the explanatory diagram and not the cleaned version designed for interviewees; hence the burgundy star.

## Figure 8

### *CBLE and Researcher SCT Diagram Comparison*



*Note.* From *Sexual Configurations Theory Interview Workbook*, by Z. C. Schudson, E. R. Dibble, & S. M. van Anders. van Anders Lab (<https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/van-anders-lab/sct.html>). Copyright 2017 by Dr. Sari van Anders. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix E).

### ***CDBLE***

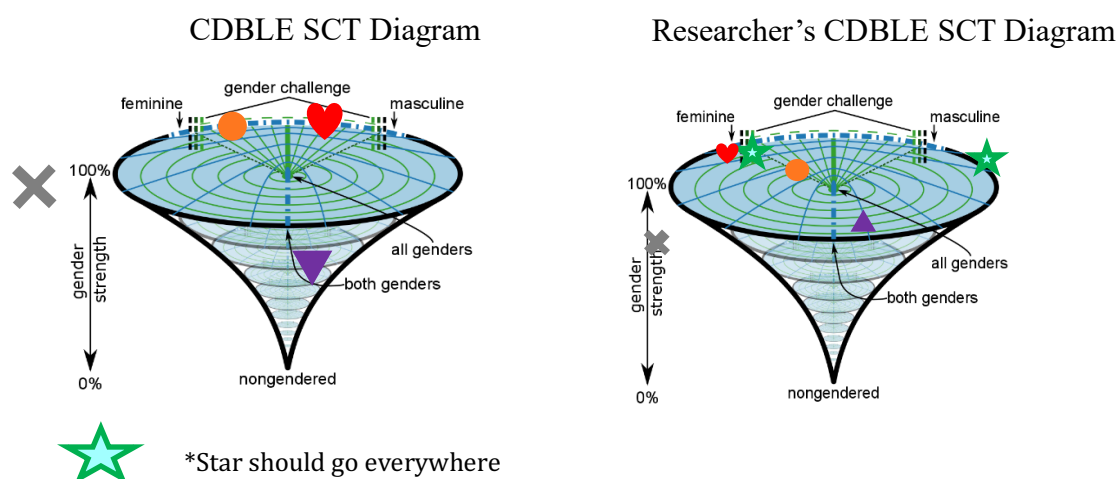
CDBLE (pronouns *she/her/hers*) identifies as a Black feminine female who likes to get dressed up. She has engaged in affective behaviors as well as purely physical sexual activities with both males and females. CDBLE stated she is attracted to masculine presenting males and feminine presenting females. She is currently partnered in a long-

term relationship with a woman and is confident in identifying as bisexual. However, she does not always feel safe when in public with her girlfriend.

A comparison of CDBLE's visual depiction of herself and my interpretation of CDBLE based on the interview presented significant differed perspectives in the areas of gendersex or internal sense of self (orange circle), nurturance (red heart), and security of gendersex identification (gray X). The most significant difference was the mapping of gendersex or internal sense of self (orange circle). CDBLE mapped herself as feminine with some masculine traits whereas I mapped her as feminine with very little masculine traits. Similarities were found in status or sexual behaviors (purple triangle) and eroticism or sexual arousal and fantasies (blue star with green outline). CDBLE mapped the diagram utilizing the model as three dimensional rather than two dimensional as represented by the majority of interviewees.

### Figure 9

#### *CDBLE and Researcher SCT Diagram Comparison*



*Note.* From *Sexual Configurations Theory Interview Workbook*, by Z. C. Schudson, E. R. Dibble, & S. M. van Anders. van Anders Lab (<https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/van-anders-lab/sct.html>). Copyright 2017 by Dr. Sari van Anders. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix E).

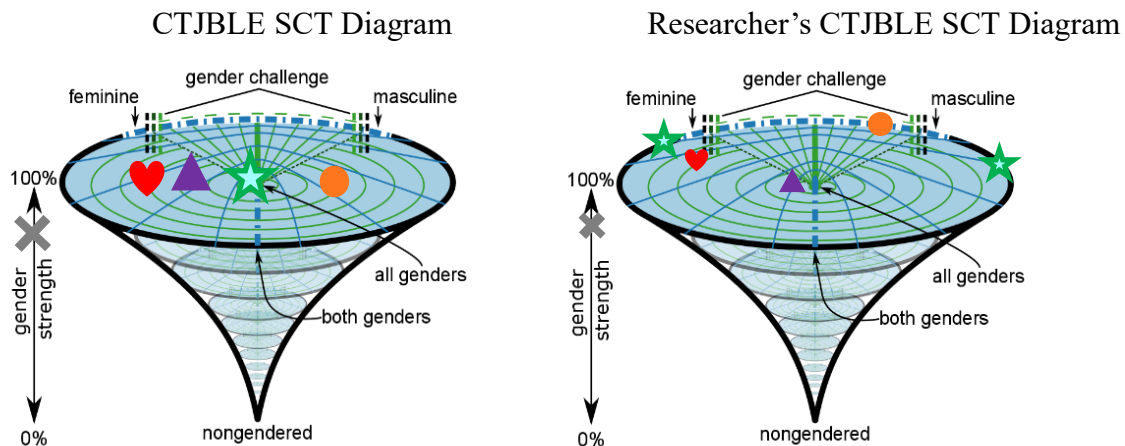
### ***CTJBLE***

CTJBLE (pronouns *he/him/his*) identified as a transgender, bisexual male, presenting more on the dominant masculine side. Preceding gender reassignment, he was attracted to males expressing masculine traits. After gender reassignment, he became more attracted to females who presented femininity and retained his attraction to males who are not cisgender. CTJBLE is polyamorous and referred to being in more than one relationship but only identified the gender/sex of their female nesting partner. He expressed he does not “live a stealth” life and is secure in his identity as a male.

A comparison of CTJBLE’s visual depiction of himself and my interpretation of CTJBLE based on the interview presented significant differed perspectives in the areas of gendersex or internal sense of self (orange circle) and eroticism or sexual arousal and fantasies (blue star with green outline). The most significant difference was the area of gendersex or internal sense of self (orange circle). CTJBLE mapped himself as masculine whereas I mapped him as masculine with some feminine attributes. Similarities were found in nurturance or partnered relationships (red heart), status or sexual behaviors (purple triangle), and security of gendersex identification (gray X). It is noted CTJBLE mapped the diagram utilizing the model as 2 dimensional.

### **Figure 10**

*CTJBLE and Researcher SCT Diagram Comparison*



*Note.* From *Sexual Configurations Theory Interview Workbook*, by Z. C. Schudson, E. R. Dibble, & S. M. van Anders. van Anders Lab (<https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/van-anders-lab/sct.html>). Copyright 2017 by Dr. Sari van Anders. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix E).

***DBLE***

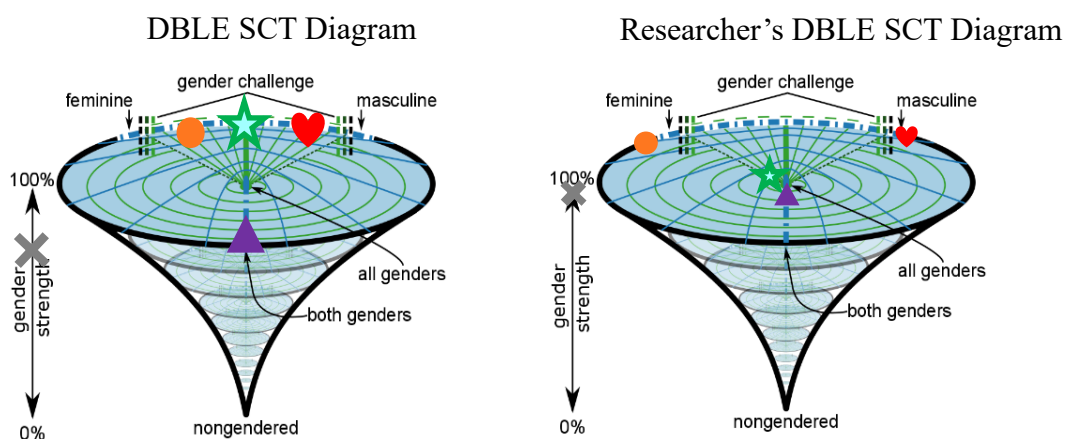
DBLE (pronouns *she/her/hers*) identified as a cisgender, bisexual female who came into her identity as bisexual in her 50s during a human sexuality class. She specified she had engaged in female companionship in her past but did not equate the affection and physical activity to being bisexual. DBLE stated that in her previous marriage she often engaged in sexual activity with women but viewed that as experimenting and “just having a little bit of fun”. She is currently in a monogamous marriage to a cisgender male who is her “rock”. She stated she has disclosed her bisexuality to her husband, family, and friends. DBLE stated she is “out and proud”.



A comparison of DBLE's visual depiction of herself and my interpretation of DBLE based on the interview presented significant differed perspectives in the areas of gendersex or internal sense of self (orange circle), nurturance (red heart), and security of gendersex identification (gray X). The most significant difference was the mapping of gendersex or internal sense of self (orange circle). DBLE mapped herself as feminine with some masculine traits whereas I mapped her as feminine with very little masculine traits. Similarities were found in status or sexual behaviors (purple triangle) and eroticism or sexual arousal and fantasies (blue star with green outline). It is noted DBLE mapped the diagram utilizing the model as three dimensional rather than two dimensional as represented by the majority of the interviewees.

### Figure 11

#### *DBLE and Reseacher SCT Diagram Comparison*



*Note.* From *Sexual Configurations Theory Interview Workbook*, by Z. C. Schudson, E. R. Dibble, & S. M. van Anders. van Anders Lab (<https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/van->

[anders-lab/sct.html](http://anders-lab/sct.html)). Copyright 2017 by Dr. Sari van Anders. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix E).

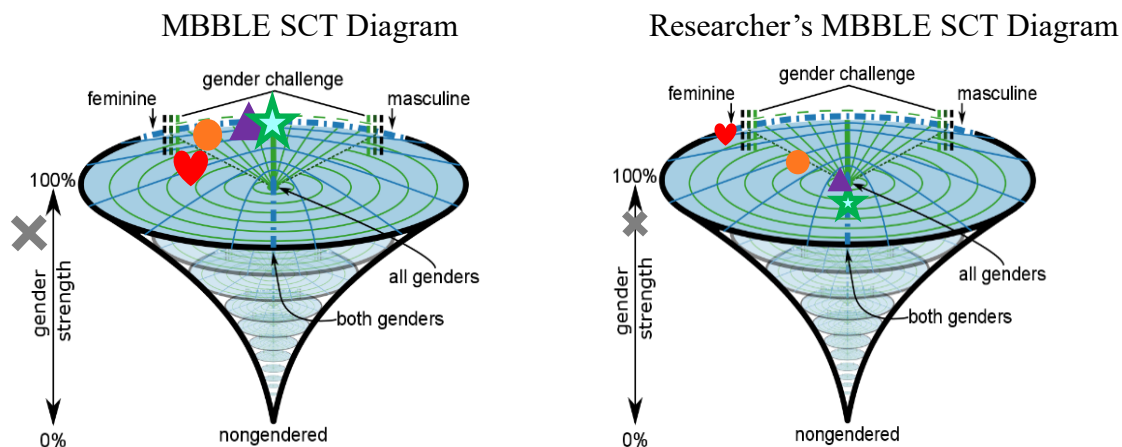
### ***MBBLE***

MBBLE (pronouns *she/her/hers*) identified as cisgender, bisexual female and presents as more feminine. She stated she did not struggle with identifying as bisexual. She struggled with having same-sex attractions, but she came to terms with this when she met her current partner. MBBLE stated the gender or sex of an individual is not as important as their personality. She is currently in a monogamous long-term relationship with a self-identified lesbian.

A comparison of MBBLE's visual depiction of herself and my interpretation of MBBLE based on the interview presented significant differed perspectives in the areas of gendersex or internal sense of self (orange circle), status or sexual behaviors (purple triangle), eroticism or sexual arousal and fantasies (blue star with green outline), and nurturance (red heart). The most significant difference was the mapping of gendersex or internal sense of self (orange circle). MBBLE mapped herself as feminine with some masculine traits whereas I mapped her as feminine with very little masculine traits. Similarity was found only in the area of security of gendersex identification (gray X). It is noted MBBLE mapped the diagram utilizing the model as two dimensional.

### **Figure 12**

*MBBLE and Reseacher SCT Diagram Comparison*



*Note.* From *Sexual Configurations Theory Interview Workbook*, by Z. C. Schudson, E. R. Dibble, & S. M. van Anders. van Anders Lab (<https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/van-anders-lab/sct.html>). Copyright 2017 by Dr. Sari van Anders. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix E).

### ***TBLE***

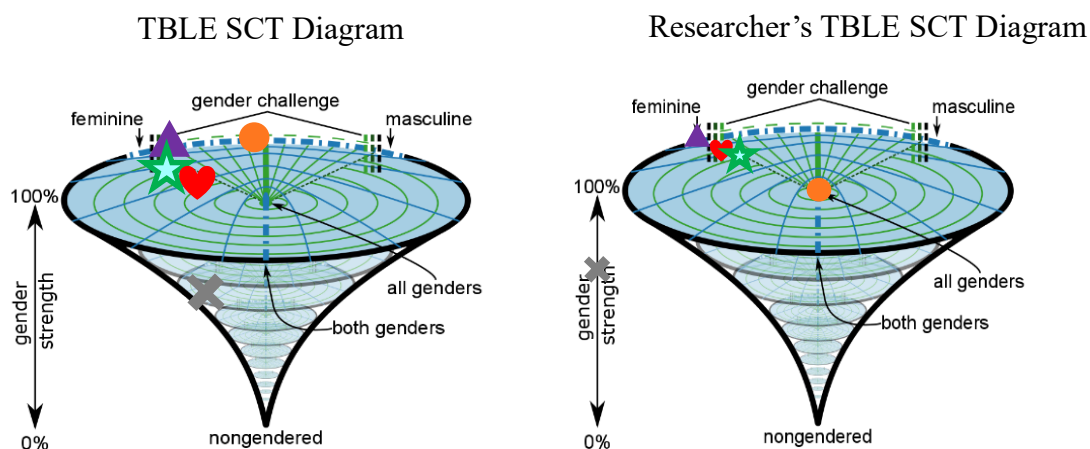
TBLE (pronouns *they/theirs/them*) identified as a “non-binary, particularly gender fluid, bisexual individual”. They specified their sexual identity as more prevalent than their gender expression. TBLE stated they struggled accepting their same-sex attraction and was confused by their remaining attraction to the opposite sex. In college, they were introduced to the term bisexual and adopted the identity. TBLE adopted non-binary due to “looking like a girl and sometimes a boy but not acting like either”. TBLE stated they are attracted to both males and females but has no interest in being romantically or emotionally involved with males. They are not currently in a long-term relationship and

are partnered with a female. TBLE stated they are inclined to have relationships with feminine females.

A comparison of TBLE's visual depiction of themselves and the researcher's interpretation of TBLE based on the interview presented significant differed perspectives in the area of gendersex or internal sense of self (orange circle). TBLE mapped themselves as in the gender challenge area as all genders, whereas I mapped them outside of the gender challenge as all genders. Similarity was found in the areas of status or sexual behaviors (purple triangle), eroticism or sexual arousal and fantasies (blue star with green outline), nurturance (red heart), and security of gendersex identification (gray X). It is noted TBLE mapped the diagram utilizing the model as two dimensional.

### Figure 13

#### *TBLE and Reseacher SCT Diagram Comparison*



*Note.* From *Sexual Configurations Theory Interview Workbook*, by Z. C. Schudson, E. R. Dibble, & S. M. van Anders. van Anders Lab (<https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/van->

[anders-lab/sct.html](http://anders-lab/sct.html)). Copyright 2017 by Dr. Sari van Anders. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix E).

### **Summary**

The interviewees described their experiences with attractions and partners as whole gender/sex identities, relationships to gender/sex norms, genders, and personal attributes as having equal or greater importance than sex. A majority of the interviewees found that moving away from immediate family and childhood communities afforded them the opportunity to explore their bisexuality. However, the interviewees also stated when in same-gender relationships they were more likely to experience uncertainty about their sexual orientation due to identity erasure by others, and their partner, who presumed they were lesbian, gay, or heterosexual. They also found that bisexual women in different-gender relationships experienced more depression than those in same-gender relationships due to a sense of exclusion from the LGB community. Moreover, it was noted interviewees identified bisexuality as a secondary or tertiary identify after gender, sex, and race.

From the commonalities of experiences a linear process of discovery, identifying, and accepting bisexual as an identity. Chapter 5 will examine these results in the context of the larger literature on bisexuality and the sexual configurations theory, as well as stage models of bisexual development and identity.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of individuals who identify as bisexual through the lens of the SCT. The language and descriptions of bisexual experiences of the interviewees are in alignment with the tenets of the SCT. van Anders (2015) posited that the SCT provides theoretical and methodological tools for describing, understanding and studying gender/sex and sexual diversity (p. 1189). The SCT also posits that sexuality is often confused with sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is often viewed as binary whereas sexuality is dynamic and fluid (van Anders, 2015). The SCT and diagram affords individuals who identify as bisexual the opportunity to express their experiences, thus giving them a voice.

Bisexual individuals face unique challenges related to dating and relationship, and these unique challenges are largely rooted in stigmas of being sexually irresponsible, in denial of their homosexuality (Mohr & Rochlen, 1999), and bisexuality not being a legitimate and stable orientation (Brewster & Moradi, 2010). The themes associated with identifying as a bisexual included the coming out process and the risk associated with disclosure to family and friends. The interviewees shared an expectation of fear of losing, and being ostracized by, their familial connections and long-term friendships. These experiences are generally in alignment with research discussed in Chapter 2.

Researchers have also documented negative attitudes toward bisexual individuals among gay men and lesbian women (Carrillo & Hoffman, 2018; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999); however, these attitudes have rarely occurred within the bisexual community (Callis, 2013; Elia et al., 2018). A common theme among these negative attitudes is the notion

that bisexual people are not suitable romantic or sexual partners (Brewster & Moradi, 2010). For instance, bisexual individuals are stereotyped as being confused about their sexual orientation or promiscuous and unfaithful in relationships. Past researchers (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Carrillo & Hoffman, 2018; Flanders et al., 2016; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999) have uncovered that bisexual individuals are viewed as less likely to be monogamous than heterosexual individuals and more likely to give a sexually transmitted disease to a partner than heterosexual gay or lesbian individuals. Other researchers have found that people rated bisexual men as being as more confused, less trustworthy, less inclined toward monogamous relationships, and less able to maintain a long-term relationship compared to heterosexual and gay men (Belmonte & Holmes, 2016; Hauptert et al., 2017; Lapointe, 2017).

Many of the aforementioned research focused on the attitudes regarding bisexuality from individuals and communities that do not identify as bisexual. This study focused on the attitudes and perspectives from the viewpoint of those who identify as bisexual and how societal pressures influence their behaviors, intrapersonal insights, and the mental health.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The findings of this phenomenological study confirm the results of many of the studies discussed in Chapter 2. The shared lived experiences of the interviewees lend credibility to the invisibility of bisexuality (Beasley, 2013; Rust, 2001, 2005), the societal belief that bisexuality is a transitional phase to acceptance of heterosexuality or homosexuality (Israel, 2018; Plöderl & Tremblay, 2015; Taylor, 2018; Young-Bruehl,

2001); and the dismissal of individuals who identify as bisexual by both heterosexual and homosexual communities (MacDowell, 2009; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999; Rust, 2001, 2005). The interviewees shared that the sex of the individual or individuals they were in a relationship with was perceived as their sexuality, i.e., a female in a relationship with a female meant the bisexual *chose* lesbianism as their sexuality. Furthermore, the cognitive dissonance experienced by the interviewees addressed the findings in the aforementioned studies of depression, fear, shame, and, in one case, biphobia.

I asked participants to share their experiences about discovering and identifying as bisexual and how their concept of bisexuality shaped their perspective. In the majority of responses, the participants utilized “bisexual” and “bisexuality” interchangeably as a sexual orientation, rather than as sexuality by identifying their attractions to other genders based on own respective gender. Consistent with SCT, the interviewees did not conceptualize their sexuality as a reflection of the biological sex or gender expression to which they were attracted; rather, the attraction was to the person as a whole (van Anders, 2015).

Four of the six participants were in agreement that identifying bisexuality includes attractions to all sexes, cisgender or reassigned, and specific nuances of gender expression. Their focus was more on the person as a whole rather than a sum of parts. Two of the four participants’ responses were focused on the biological sexes of male and female. I noted that two participants who focused mainly on the binary sexes are both in their early 50s. This phenomena may be due to the time an era in which their self-



discovery occurred. The terms *bisexual* and *bisexuality* were not commonly used or accepted in the 1970s and were attached to fear of AIDs in the 1980s (Interchange, 2017).

Participants also stated that the pressure to choose a sexual identity is expected. All of the participants except for the two in their 50s described their sexuality as dynamic and fluid and outside of societal norms. The SCT allows for an individual to not have to choose or pick or decide how to label their sexuality. The SCT allows an individual to represent how they define themselves without any preexisting parameters (van Anders, 2015). The fluidity reflected in the SCT is designed to afford individuals the ability to visually express their physical, romantic, and partnered relationships in their own terms (van Anders, 2015).

All participants held the belief that bisexuality is a combination of nature and nurture and defined by influences from their respective environments. This is a common assumption among multiple theories of sexual orientation (Gómez & Arenas, 2019; Rust, 2001, 2005; van Anders, 2015). All participants expressed fear and shame of accepting bisexuality as an identity. The participants recalled fear of being ostracized by their parents, peers, and friends. The participants used the term *bisexuality* to encompass identity, attractions, and behaviors.

The SCT posits that sexuality is multifaceted and fluid (van Anders, 2015). The prominent issue regarding sexuality is that the term is used interchangeably to describe sexual behavior, identity, and attraction (van Anders, 2017). Bisexuality is also a social term and concept often used interchangeably as a sexual orientation and a sexuality that may lead to varying definitions of bisexuality. Findings indicate that the sexual

configuration lens allows people who identify as bisexual to visably articulate their experiences. The diagram, while complicated, provides a visual depiction of how an individual who identifies as bisexual views their whole person. SCT expands the view of sexuality from just gender to a multitude of aspects such as physical attributes, age or experience, levels of sexual attractions, type of sexual attraction, and desired number of partnered relationships (i.e., monogamy, polyamory, or solitary).

The findings of the present study also suggest that the bisexuality identity involves a process of unfolding that happens in stages: (a) recognition of attractions; (b) labeling of attractions toward others; (c) distanced proximity from family and childhood communities leads to sexuality exploration; and (d) disclosure to family and support networks, which is contingent upon engagement in intense affective long-term relationships. The linear process discovered in my study is congruent with other contemporary studies which will be discussed more in-depth in the next section. From this point forward, the name of the linear process that unfolded in this will be called the Hopkins Stage Model.

### **Findings in Relation to Models of Sexual Orientation**

Several models reviewed in Chapter 2 differ significantly from the focus and implications of the SCT. It would be remiss to not discuss the models in comparison to the SCT and how the SCT has expounded upon these models and measures of sexuality and sexual orientation. The Kinsey Homosexual-Heterosexual Rating Scale and the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid are two of the most widely recognized sexual orientation measurements in regard to bisexuality (Rust, 2001, 2005; van Anders, 2015). The Kinsey

scale was one of the first measurement tools to bring bisexuality into the public mainstream and was used to discredit the perspective that sexual orientation was the same as sexuality (Kinsey et al., 1952; Rust, 2001, 2005). The scale helped shift a dichotomous view of sexual orientation to one of varying conceptualizations of sexuality (Kinsey et al., 1948; Kinsey et al., 1952; Rust, 2001, 2005; van Anders, 2015). Utilizing a 7-point Likert scale, the researcher, not the participant, rates the participant on a point between being exclusively homosexual and exclusively heterosexual. Participants were rated on behavior rather than self identification, and scale items were primarily based on sexual behaviors.

The linear development process that emerged in my study is comparable, in one aspect and distinctly separate in other aspects, to the stage models by Weinberg et al. (1994), Brown (2002), Bradford (2004), Knous (2005), and Gómez and Arenas (2019). The Hopkins stage model presented a linear developmental pathway that emerged in the identification and acceptance of bisexuality as an identity with the stages being recognition, labeling, proximity and exploration, and partnership and disclosure. All of the reviewed stage models, including that in this study, designate naming or labeling of behaviors and feelings as the second stage in the path of discovery and acceptance. This phenomena may be a manifestation of the epistemological need to categorize and label the self before ontological identification. Ferrier (1856/2006) stated that in order for a person to understand who they are, they must assign labels and categories before rationalizing an identification. By using the phenomenological approach, I was able to

view the pathway of how a participant came to define their bisexual sexual identity from recognition to acceptance.

Recognition of attractions to males and females during the first stage is consistent with the model of Knous (2005). Weinberg et al. (1994) and Brown (2002) identified confusion as the initial stage, while Bradford (2004) identified denial as the initial stage. Gómez and Arenas (2019) proposed experimenting behaviors as the initial stage. There is consistency among all models in that individuals who identify as bisexual struggle with negative stigma assigned to bisexuality by monosexual communities. Differences occur in how attractions to gender expression are described in the models.

Weinberg et al. (1994), Brown (2002), Bradford (2004), Knous (2005), and Gómez and Arenas (2019) did not develop their stage models through first person interactions; rather, they used secondary and tertiary means. In contrast, I derived the linear pathway in this study from a first-person phenomenological approach. As the only researcher in my study, I was afforded the opportunity to see body language via the Zoom platform, hear and review voice inflections through audio recordings, and probe responses with clarifying open-ended questions. Utilizing the tenets of the SCT, I designed the interview questions to encourage the participants to engage in conversation regarding their perspective of bisexuality and how they recognized and accepted bisexuality as an identity which included attractions to cisgender and gender-reassigned sexes as well as attractions to gender expressions. The study's linear pathway adds to the existing literature on the philosophy of being and how familial and societal pressures

influence the manner and circumstance in which an individual accepts the bisexual identity.

The SCT and diagram do not require linear constrictions because they place emphasis on gender expression in conjunction with biological or reassigned sex. Moreover, the participant maps their own perspective and a circular 3-D diagram, which allows the participant to define themselves in parts, rather than as a whole. However, there are limitations. A prime example is the comparison of the sexual configuration diagrams. The comparison of the diagrams showed how perspectives and interpretations can differ between two or more persons. This may be due to what is salient to the individual mapping their lived experiences and what appears to be most salient to those interpreting the written or spoken word.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One limitation is that the SCT and diagram are designed for highly educated persons. Although all of the interviewees held higher learning degrees, they experienced difficulty understanding the process of mapping. Comprehension of the SCT and use of the diagram were impediments during the study. Participants frequently requested assistance in understanding the terminology and concepts of gender/sex and status. During the interviews, questions were asked by each of the interviewees as to how and where to place markings. The three-dimensional format is complicated, and individuals who may not have higher learning degrees may experience additional challenges with comprehending the concepts and language utilized to describe and differentiate gender, sex, and behaviors. My academic experience may at least partly contribute to why my

mapping of the interviewees differed significantly from their own mapping of themselves.

Interpretation of language in the SCT was a major limitation in the study. How a participant defined and interpreted concepts of masculinity, femininity, and ambiguity differed with each participant, and the terms *gender* and *sex* were used interchangeably to indicate biological or reassigned sex. The same held true for what were identified as masculine and feminine traits. Finding a common language and conveying the SCT concepts was challenging. This may account for the reason the self-definitions and visually depictions of the participants themselves differed from my depiction of each participant.

Another limitation of this study was the number of participants. The small sample and phenomenological approach did not allow for generalization to the bisexual community. Despite the complexities, the SCT diagram did afford me the ability to determine where my own bias was activated. More saliently, the mapping of the interviewees' experiences demonstrates how individuals bring their own biases into any interaction and can, at times, fail to appreciate the complexity of their own interpretations of their experience.

### **Recommendations**

From a scientific standpoint, the SCT is better suited to describe and track behaviors, thought processes, and self-identification of clients in therapeutic and counseling sessions. Moreover, the SCT diagram is a useful tool in helping clients and family members better understand the thought processes of individuals whom may be

struggling with their identity. This can allow the individual to provide a visual depiction of where they are and who they are becoming by mapping their lived experiences at different stages of counseling. In addition, simplifying the diagram to a two-dimensional representation may help individuals have a clearer understanding on how to use the tool. Despite the complications, further research should be conducted on the utility of the SCT and diagram in helping individuals who identify as bisexual and also experience various disorders such as depression and suicidal ideations. In addition, SCT is a useful tool in helping the individual understand their perspective on how they differentiate between bisexual behaviors and bisexual identity.

### **Implications**

This study allowed a small group of individuals to share their experiences of recognizing and coming to accept their version of what it means to identify as bisexual. The lessons learned from this study can be explored by the mental health community to assist clients in understanding themselves as well as clinicians whose subconscious biases can impede effective counseling. Mental health counselors and therapists may be able to view a depiction of how clients view themselves and utilize the information to engage in a dialogue. Moreover, the use of the Hopkins bisexual stage model in conjunction with the SCT diagram may allow the client to be an active participant in their therapy and counseling sessions. It may allow the client's voice and introspection to be heard.

Furthermore, the stage model can be integrated with existing models to create a framework for workshops and trainings designed to help families and other support systems understand the process and experiences of societal pressures experienced by

those who identify as bisexual. From an educational standpoint, the inclusion of the bisexual stage model is apropos in identifying bisexuality as a stable and viable sexual orientation, as was noted in my study's stage model. It can be an educational tool for introducing bisexuality as a standalone sexual orientation and identity. The Hopkins bisexual stage model is unique in the it fact identifies a linear pathway the interviewees shared in recognizing, identifying, and accepting their bisexual identity, lending to the viability, stability, and idiosyncratic nuances of bisexuality. The the present study provides a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of those who identify as bisexuals from their perspective. The utilization of the stage model, in conjunction with visual representation of those who identify as bisexual, is instrumental their addressing mental health issues by supporting and affirming normalization of and support bisexual identity and behaviors.

### **Conclusion**

Individuals who identify as bisexual face unique challenges related to dating and relationship, and these challenges are loosely are are largely rooted in stigma. The language and descriptions of bisexual experiences of the interviewees are in alignment with the tenets of the sexual configurations theory. The SCT theory and diagram, in conjunction with the Hopkins bisexual stage model, are useful tools for validating the lived experiences and the lives of those who identify as bisexual in several areas of internal sense of self, the difference between sexual behaviors and identity, and unique nuances by in allowing those who identify as bisexual to express and enjoy their in ways that are congruent with their values.





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## Appendix A: Recruitment Announcement

**Recruitment Announcement****Mapping the Lived Experiences of Those Who identify As Bisexuals**

Hello. My name is Barbara Hopkins. As a doctoral student at Walden University and member of the bisexual community, I am conducting a research study on the lived experiences of those who identify as bisexuals. I have read and researched the academia side of bisexuality. I want to hear about real life experiences and what identifying as bisexual means to you. The purpose of this study is to explore bisexuality by mapping the lived experiences of individuals who identify as bisexual. There is no monetary incentive for participation.

**You may be eligible to participate in this study if:**

- You are 18 years of age or older
- Identify as bisexual

**If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:**

- Consent to be a participant in the study
- Complete an online demographic questionnaire (approximately 5 minutes)
- Participate in approximately a 60-minute audio-recorded interview
- Map your lived experiences (approximately 10-15 minutes immediately following the interview)
- Email the completed mapped experiences to my dissertation chair, Dr. Gary Burkholder at [gary.burkholder@mail.waldenu.edu](mailto:gary.burkholder@mail.waldenu.edu)
- Review the transcribed audio-recording for accuracy

To determine your eligibility in the study, you will be asked to click on the following link for brief demographic screening: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Mapbah> or utilizing the QCode below.



If you have any questions, you may contact me directly or my faculty advisor Dr. Gary Burkholder.

The approval number for this study is **09-17-19-0093415** which expires on **16 September 2020**.

Thank you,

Barbara A. Hopkins, M.S.  
Health Psychology Doctoral Candidate

## Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire

## Online Survey Demographic Questionnaire

**Mapping The Lived Experiences of Those Who Identify As Bisexuals****Article I. Question Title**

\*1. I consent to be a part of this study.

Yes

No

**Article II. Question Title**

\*2. Are you bisexual? (If you answered yes, please continue. If you answered no, thank you for your interest. Only those who identify as bisexual will be interviewed.)

Yes

No

**Article III. Question Title**

\*3. Are you 18 years of age or older?

Yes

No

**Article IV. Question Title**

\*4. What is your age?

**Article V. Question Title**

\*5. What is your Ethnicity?

White

Black or African American

Hispanic or Latino

Asian or Asian American

American Indian or Alaska Native

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

Other

**Article VI. Question Title**

\*6. With what sex do you identify? (i.e., male, female, non-binary, transgender, etc.)

**Article VII. Question Title**

\*7. In what region do you live (i.e., Northeast, West Coast, Midwest, etc.)?

**Article VIII. Question Title**

\*8. If you are selected to be interviewed, what is your contact information?

Email Address

Phone Number

**Article IX. Question Title**

\*9. Your contact information will not be disclosed. To maintain anonymity, how would you like to be addressed? (*i.e., nickname such as Rocketman, etc.*)

DONE. THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.



## Appendix C: Interview Questions

### Interview Questions

The interview questions will be open-ended consisting of:

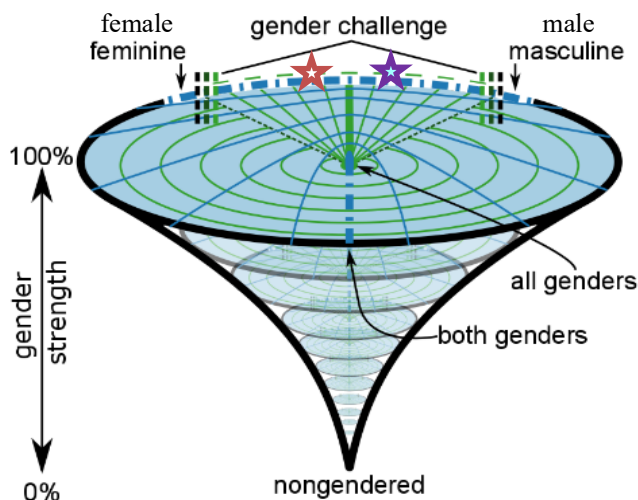
1. Identification of gender, sex, and sexual orientation
  - a. How do you (the participant) define sexual orientation?
  - b. How do you (the participant) define gender?
  - c. How do you (the participant) define sex?
  - d. How do you define bisexuality?
  - e. Do you believe bisexuality is innate?
  - f. Do you believe bisexuality is a choice?
  
2. Lived Experiences
  - a. What does it mean to you (the participant) to be bisexual?
  - b. What type of relationships have you (the participant) had with others (long term, defined as 6 consecutive months or more; short term (6 non-consecutive months or less; or intermittent)?
  - c. What do you find attractive in a romantic relationship?
  - d. What do you find unattractive in a romantic relationship?
  - e. What do you find attractive in a sexual relationship?
  - f. What do you find unattractive in a sexual relationship?
  - g. What have been some positive experiences of being bisexual in a romantic or sexual relationship?
  - h. What have been some negative experiences of being bisexual in a romantic or sexual relationship?
  - i. At what age did you discover your bisexuality?
    - i. How did you feel about your discovery?
  - j. Have you disclosed your bisexuality?
    - i. To whom, did you disclose?
  
3. Clarifying Questions
  - a. Help me understand, how would that look?
  - b. Would you please give me an example of what you mean?

Appendix D: Sexual Configurations Theory Diagram With Instructions

Sexual Configurations Diagram

Term	Definition	Examples of Phenomena	Examples of Labels
<b>Gender</b>	Social, cultural, and/or learned phenomena relating to femininity, masculinity, & gender diversity.	Internal sense of self, beliefs about others, clothing, intonation, behavior, presentation, legal structures, politics, policies, etc.	Butch, femme, trans, genderqueer, masculine, feminine, tomboy, genderfuck, cisgender, etc.
<b>Sex</b>	Bodily features relating to maleness, femaleness, and sex diversity. Evolved and/or adapted.	Internal sense of self, bodily features, genitals, body frames, voice, etc.	Female, male, trans, transgender, cissexual, cisgender, intersex, etc.
<b>Gender/Sex</b>	Whole people & identities; aspects of women, men, and gender/sex-diverse people that involve both gender <i>and</i> sex.	Internal sense of self, others' recognitions of self, whole impression, social groups, etc.	Genderqueer, woman, man, trans woman, trans man, cis woman, cis man, intersex, etc.
<b>Status</b>	Sexual behaviors.	Penetrative sexuality, flirting, cuddling, kissing, commitment, etc.	Partnered, married, single-by-choice, multipartnered, not sexually active, WSW, MSM, etc.
<b>Orientation</b>	Sexual pulls or draws towards other people (or not).	Interests, attractions, desires, responses, fantasies, arousals, intimacies, loves, etc.	Heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, monosexual, male-oriented, female-oriented, etc.
<b>Identity</b>	The way one defines one's self, including to others.	Label, identification, community, positioning	Asexual, polyamorous, heterosexual, queer, bisexual, kink-oriented, lesbian, gay, slut, etc.
<b>Eroticism</b>	Phenomena that are sexually tantalizing, arousing, pleasurable, etc.	Orgasm, genital pleasure, sexual arousal, fantasies, having sex, phone sex, sexting, sexual chemistry, etc.	
<b>Nurturance</b>	Phenomena that are tied to warm, loving feelings and closeness.	Support, affection, cuddling, emotional connection, hugs, etc.	






**Gender Challenge:** *The gender challenge area is for characteristics that are not considered part of the cultured norm, such as, masculine females ★ feminine males ☆, etc.*



The instructions are purposely placed on a separate page to allow side by side viewing of instructions, definitions, and diagram. All answers are correct because they are YOUR lived experiences.

### **Instructions**

Please read each instruction and use the marking in the right column to mark the diagram on the first page. Mapping Instructions (please use markings in the right column). Please free to copy and paste the markings.

	Marking
1. Based on the definition of gender/sex, please mark your gender/sex.	
2. Based on the definition of status, please mark your status.	
3. Based on the definition of eroticism, please mark what arouses you, i.e., masculine females, masculine males, etc.). Please see example above	
4. Based on the definition of nurturance, please mark current partnered relationship. Partner refers to girlfriend, boyfriend, significant other, or romantic interest.	
5. How secure are you in your gender/sex identity? Please mark the gender strength scale.	

Please email the completed diagram with the subject **SCT STUDY DIAGRAM** to:  
Dr. Gary Burkholder.

*Thank you for your participation.*

Appendix E: Permissions

Exotic Becomes Erotic Reproduction

**From:** Daryl J. Bem  
**Date:** Sunday, April 21, 2019 at 5:42 AM  
**To:** Barbara Hopkins  
**Subject:** Re: PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE EBE MODEL TEMPORAL SEQUENCE

Dear Ms. Hopkins,

You have my permission to include my EBE figure in your proposal and dissertation. But to be safe, you should send your request to the American Psychological Association, which published the original 1996 article in *Psychological Review* ("*Exotic becomes erotic: A developmental theory of sexual orientation*") The Association is the "official" owner of the article.

There is probably a description of how to do this in the front of each issue of the Journal. You can mention in your request that I have given you my written permission to reproduce the Figure and to quote/modify the accompanying description of it. You could include this e-mail in your request.

Daryl J. Bem  
Emeritus Professor of Psychology

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**From:** Daryl J. Bem  
**Date:** Monday, April 22, 2019 at 1:43 PM  
**To:** Barbara Hopkins  
**Subject:** Re: PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE EBE MODEL TEMPORAL SEQUENCE

Dear Ms. Hopkins,

In reviewing your request and my earlier reply (attached below), I now think that obtaining permission from the APA at this juncture is not really necessary. Such considerations really don't come into play until you are submitting a manuscript for publication.

For purposes of writing a dissertation proposal, it would be sufficient simply to provide a citation to my original article and to state that I have given you permission to reproduce the temporal sequence figure and to discuss its detailed description.

If and when you plan to write up your dissertation as an article for journal publication, that would be the time to seek formal permission from the APA.

I wish you the best in your research.

Daryl J. Bem  
Emeritus Professor of Psychology

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### Sexual Configurations Theory Permissions

Blanket permissions granted via the van Anders Lab  
(<https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/van-anders-lab/sct.html>)

*Here is a very basic workbook for you to use for your own sexual and gender/sex configurations, in your research, your teaching, your art, or otherwise! It should be printable in greyscale or color, and usable in color by people who have color-blindness.*

[You can click here to download! Cite as Schudson, Z.S., Dibble, E.R., & van Anders, S.M. \(2017\). Sexual configurations theory interview workbook. Retrieved from https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/van-anders-lab/sct.html.](https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/van-anders-lab/sct.html)