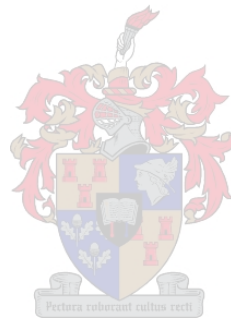


**“Let me live” -
Exploring a Group of Bisexual SA University Students'
Experiences in their Various Communities**

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Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Psychology in the Department of Psychology, Faculty of
Arts and Social Sciences, at Stellenbosch University

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April 2022

Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof, that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Date: April 2022

Abstract

An expanding body of international literature has identified dual-sourced binegativity from straight and gay/lesbian individuals as a risk factor for the mental health disparities among bisexual individuals, compared to straight and gay/lesbian individuals' experiences. Existing studies frequently attribute these disparities to bisexual specific minority stressors, including erasure, as well as invisibility and invalidation due to bisexual incomprehensibility.

In South Africa, there is a lack of research into bisexual individuals' experiences because data about bisexual individuals have frequently not been differentiated from gay men or lesbian women. My qualitative study aimed to address the knowledge gap by exploring self-identified bisexual university students' lived experiences of their bisexuality, including experiences of binegativity and support within their family and community environments, among their university peers, and within the queer community.

A group of 12 self-identified bi-individuals registered at a South African university, diverse in terms of their sex, race, religious background, and age, participated in this study. After receiving institutional permission and ethical clearance from the university's Research Ethics Committee, I conducted virtual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each participant. I managed the data using Atlas.ti and applied reflexive thematic analysis and an inductive approach to the qualitative data. I used a queer epistemological framework to conceptualise and understand the participants' experiences, and a queered social constructionist paradigm informed my methodological approach.

From the data, I generated five key themes: (1) isolation on the margins of normativity; (2) erasure through gendering; (3) playing with the closet; (4) barriers to bisexual identity development; and (5) unlearning binegativity. These themes evidenced how regimes of power/knowledge rooted in dominant norms and confirmed the prevalence of dual-binegativity that keep these participants in their proper straight or gay/lesbian place. This influences participants to internalise these norms and engage in self-policing. Consequently, revealing one's sexual orientation becomes a complex interplay of strategic outness and concealment according to contextual variables, as opposed to a one-time event.

Furthermore, continual exposure to dual-sourced binegativity is evidently internalised. Internalised binegativity affected participants' interaction with their environment and their perception of their sexual orientation. They reported how subscribing to dominant norms increased feelings of shame and self-hate, and led to them constantly self-monitoring,

regulating their behaviour and devaluing their own experiences. Cumulatively, external and internalised binegativity seemingly has an injurious effect on the participants' psychological well-being and sets in motion a ripple effect of marginalisation, loneliness, self-isolation and bisexual identity uncertainty.

Through reflection and introspection, participants understood the ignorance at the foundation of societies' sexualities knowledge, power/privilege dynamics of their various contexts, and the importance of grounding their truth in personal experience. Social support and self-education restored epistemic justice, establishing the base that makes this possible. This allowed the participants to start developing a bisexual affirming identity, enabling them to further *queer* and trouble dominant norms and establish a reverse discourse.

Based on the findings of this study, the need for more research with bisexual individuals as a group, as well as the need for more interventions to decrease internalised binegativity while increasing resilience are evident.

Keywords: Bisexuality, binegativity, biphobia, erasure, gendering, surveillance, strategic outness, situational identification, internalised binegativity, bi-affirming, university students, South Africa.

Opsomming

'n Toenemende versameling van internasionale literatuur het dubbele bron-binegatiwiteit vanaf heteroseksuele en gay/lesbiese individue as 'n risikofaktor geïdentifiseer vir die geestesgesondheidsverskille wat biseksuele individue, in vergelyking met heteroseksuele en gay/lesbiese individue, ervaar. Bestaande studies skryf hierdie ongelykhede dikwels toe aan biseksueel spesifieke minderheidsstressors as gevolg van biseksuele onverstaanbaarheid. Dit sluit uitwissing, onsigbaarheid en ongeldigmaking in.

In Suid-Afrika is daar 'n gebrek aan navorsing oor biseksuele individue se ervarings. Die rede is omdat daar nie 'n onderskeiding tussen die data van biseksuele individue en gay mans of lesbiese vroue is nie. Hierdie kwalitatiewe studie het beoog om dié kennisgaping aan te spreek deur self-geïdentifiseerde biseksuele universiteitstudente se geleefde ervarings van hul biseksualiteit te ondersoek, insluitend hul ervarings van binegatiwiteit en ondersteuning, binne hul familie- en gemeenskapsomgewings, tussen hul universiteitsmaats en binne die queer-gemeenskap.

'n Groep van 12 self-geïdentifiseerde biseksuele individue wat by 'n Suid-Afrikaanse universiteit geregistreer is, uiteenlopend in terme van hul geslag, ras, godsdienstige agtergrond en ouderdom, het aan hierdie studie deelgeneem. Nadat ek institusionele toestemming en etiese klaring van die universiteit se Navorsingsetiekkomitee ontvang het, het ek virtuele, in-diepte, semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met elke deelnemer gevoer. Ek het die data met Atlas.ti bestuur en refleksiewe tematiese analise en 'n induktiewe benadering tot die kwalitatiewe data toegepas. Ek het 'n queer teoretiese raamwerk gebruik om die deelnemers se ervarings te konseptualiseer en te verstaan, en in my metodologie het ek 'n queer sosiaal-konstruksionistiese paradigma gebruik.

Vanuit die data het ek vyf sleuteltemas gegenereer: (1) isolasie op die grense van normatiwiteit; (2) uitwissing deur geslagsvorming; (3) speel met die kas; (4) hindernisse tot biseksuele identiteitsontwikkeling; en (5) afkeer van binegatiwiteit. Hierdie temas verklaar hoe regimes van mag/kennis, wat in dominante norme gegrond is, die voorkoms van dubbele-binegatiwiteit bevestig en deelnemers op hul gepaste heteroseksuele of gay/lesbiese plek hou. Dit beïnvloed die deelnemers om hierdie norme te internaliseer en deel te neem aan selfpolisiëring. Gevolglik word uitkom, as biseksueel, 'n komplekse wisselwerking van

strategiese blootstelling en kamoeflering volgens kontekstuele veranderlikes, in teenstelling met 'n eenmalige gebeurtenis.

Verder word voortdurende blootstelling aan dubbele-binegatiwiteit klaarblyklik geïnternaliseer. Geïnternaliseerde binegatiwiteit beïnvloed deelnemers se interaksie met hul omgewing en hul persepsie van hul seksuele oriëntasie. Hulle het gerapporteer dat hul waarneming van dominante norme, gevoelens van skaamte en selfhaat verhoog het en daartoe gelei het dat hulle konstant hul gedrag reguleer het, 'n waardevermindering van hul eie ervarings ervaar het en self-monitoring toegepas het. Eksterne en geïnternaliseerde binegatiwiteit het 'n kumulatiewe nadelige uitwerking op deelnemers se sielkundige welstand, en lei tot 'n rimpeleffek van marginalisering, eensaamheid, selfisolasië en biseksuele identiteit onsekerheid.

Deur refleksie en introspeksie het deelnemers die onkunde in bestaande seksualiteitskennis, die mag/bevoorregte-dinamika van hul verskeie kontekste en die belangrikheid daarvan om hul waarheid in persoonlike ervaring te grond, verstaan. Sosiale ondersteuning en selfopvoeding het epistemiese geregtigheid herstel. Deelnemers is hierdeur bemaagtig om 'n bi-bevestigende identiteit te begin ontwikkel wat hulle in staat stel om dominante norme te ondermyn en 'n omgekeerde diskoers te vestig.

Gebaseer op die bevindinge van hierdie studie, is duidelik dat daar 'n behoefte aan meer navorsing met biseksuele individue as 'n groep, sowel as ingrypings om geïnternaliseerde binegatiwiteit te verminder, en terselfdertyd veerkragtigheid te verhoog, is.

Sleutelwoorde: Biseksualiteit, binegatiwiteit, bifobie, uitwissing, geslagsvorming, toesig, strategiese “outness”, omstandigheds-identifikasie, geïnternaliseerde binegatiwiteit, bi-bevestigend, universiteitstudente, Suid-Afrika

Statement Regarding Financial Assistance

The financial assistance of the Wilcocks Bursary 2020 towards this research is hereby gratefully acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Wilcocks Bursary.

Acknowledgements

To Dr Sherine van Wyk, my supervisor, thank you for your continual support and enthusiasm for my work. I am grateful for the guidance and insights you provided, which motivated and helped me throughout the research process. Your passion for research is inspiring, and the space you created to reflect and openly share ideas was appreciated.

To Professor Jason Bantjes, thank you for your continual support. Thank you for providing me with an opportunity to work as a research assistant and develop my passion for research.

To my family and friends, thank you for your unconditional support and believing in my abilities to complete this thesis.

To my fellow psychology masters students, thank you for your support and encouragement, for listening to my ideas and for sharing your insights.

Lastly, to the 12 individuals who participated in this study – a sincere thank you for openly sharing your stories and experiences with me. I truly enjoyed listening to you and learned a lot from each one of you. You each have my eternal gratitude.

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Glossary

Bifriendly	Describing people or spaces that are bisexual affirmative or allied
Bi-individual	Denotes a bisexual individual.
Binegativity / Biphobia	Refers to negative attitudes, prejudice, and discrimination from both heterosexual and homosexual individuals (Barker et al., 2012; Dodge et al., 2016).
Bi-orientation	Refers to a bisexual sexual orientation.
Bisexual / Bi	“The potential to be attracted, romantically and/or sexually, to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree” (Ochs, 2013, p.5).
Bispecific	An experience or matter specific to bisexual individuals.
Bi student	Denotes a bisexual student.
Bi-participants	Refers to the bisexual participants recruited for this study.
Erasure / Bi-erasure	Extensive “cultural de-legitimation of bisexuality as unintelligible and inauthentic” (Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017, p. 20).
Gender	A social construct generally assigning masculine or feminine traits or behaviours based on corresponding sex (i.e. man or woman) (Riggs & Treharne, 2017).
Heteronormativity	The assumption that attraction to the opposite sex is normal and preferred, while any attraction which deviates from this is considered “abnormal” (Lynch & Maree, 2013).
Heterosexism	Defined as negativity towards individuals who do not conform to heterosexuality (Barker et al., 2012).
Mononormativity	The definition of mononormativity has significantly evolved. According to Hayfield (2021, p. 10), “It can refer to cultural norms and values, which assume that everyone is, or should be, monosexual. Monosexual and mononormative understandings of identities and relationships closely link with binary understandings of sexuality. Heterosexuality and homosexuality are valid within a mononormative framework, whereas bisexuality (and pansexuality, asexuality, and plurisexualities) are invalid. Mononormativity has also been used to refer to cultural norms and values, which privilege

monogamous relationships as normal and natural. Mononormativity therefore serves to validate monosexual people and monogamy, and to vilify those who are attracted to more than one gender and/or engage in more than one relationship. Within the context of this study, Hayfield's (2021) former definition will be used.

Monosexism	"Refer to negativity towards people who do not comply with monosexuality (e.g., those who are attracted to more than one gender)" (Hayfield, 2021, p. 10).
Monosexual	Refers to persons who are attracted to only a single gender and are thus non-bisexual (i.e. lesbian women, gay men or straight individuals) (Hayfield, 2021).
Internalised binegativity	"Negative attitudes and beliefs about one's own bisexuality as a consequence of chronic exposure to binegative discrimination and prejudice" (Israel et al., 2019, p. 149).
Invalidation	Invalidation refers to the deligitimisation and denial of the existence of a bisexual individual's bisexual identity, due to the perceived threat (Hayfield, 2021).
Invisibility	Invisibility of bisexuality is the consequence of the cultural and social erasure of bisexuality, which results in social invisibility within hetero- and homosexual settings, and academic invisibility (Barker et al., 2012).
Sex	Biological categories (i.e. male, female or intersex) (Riggs & Treharne, 2017).
Sexuality	Social constructs, representing the nature of sexual desire, that primarily rely on cultural dominance (i.e. heterosexual and homosexual) (Riggs & Treharne, 2017).

Acronyms

General

- AIDS Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
- IB Internalised Binegativity
- LGBTQ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer
- LGB Lesbian, gay and bisexual

Organisations and Committees

- HSRC Human Sciences Research Council
- GLAAD US-based organisation GLAAD, formally the
Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation;
now branded simply as GLAAD.
- DESC Departmental Ethics Screening Committee
- REC Research Ethics Committee

Countries

- SA South Africa
- USA United States of America

Provinces

- EC Eastern Cape
- GAU Gauteng
- MPU Mpumalanga
- NC Northern Cape
- KZN KwaZulu Natal
- WC Western Cape

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Bisexuality is not limited by location, race or ethnicity, nor is it limited by gender; however, more women (approximately 33%) seem to identify as bisexual than men (approximately 19%) (Gates, 2011). These individuals are our sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, friends and spouses. However, bi-individuals are often rendered invisible in our families and communities. Several studies from the United States of America (USA) have shown that the bisexual population makes up the largest proportion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ/queer) communities (Bostwick & Dodge, 2019). Despite this, researchers acknowledge the invisibility of bisexuality in the literature and in society (Bostwick & Dodge, 2019; Choi et al., 2019). A bisexual individual, for this study, encompasses a person who identifies as bisexual and/or is attracted to more than a single gender (De Bruin & Arndt, 2011; Gleason et al., 2018). For pragmatic reasons, *bisexuality* and *bisexual* will include *pansexual*, a person who identifies as pansexual or is attracted to more than one gender, regardless of their sex (Levy & Harr, 2018). I will use “bi” interchangeably with bisexual. Further, gay will refer to both gay men and lesbian women, unless specified.

Today, sexual orientations are predominantly understood from a heteronormative or mononormative perspective. Heteronormativity refers to the assumption that attraction to the opposite sex is normal and preferred, while any attraction which deviates from this is considered “abnormal” (Lynch & Maree, 2013). Alternatively, mononormativity refers to the assumption that attraction to the same sex (homosexuality), as well as to the opposite sex (heterosexuality) is “normal” and preferred; mononormativity serves to validate monosexual people, and to vilify those who are attracted to more than one gender and/or engage in more than one relationship (Hayfield, 2021). The social mores of both hetero- and mononormativity give rise to *binegativity* or *biphobia* (used interchangeably), which refers to negative attitudes, prejudice, and discrimination from both heterosexual and homosexual individuals (Barker et al., 2012; Dodge et al., 2016). Binegativity includes both homophobia and discrimination unique to bi-individuals, namely the erasure, invisibility and invalidation of bisexuality (Hayfield, 2021; Yoshino, 2000). *Erasure* refers to the extensive “cultural de-legitimation of bisexuality as unintelligible and inauthentic” (Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017, p. 20). Erasure frequently results in the *invisibility* of bisexuality in several ways – through social invisibility

within hetero- and homosexual settings, and also academic invisibility (Barker et al., 2012). Alternatively, it may result in bisexual *invalidation* when it is visible (Hayfield, 2021).

Khuzwayo and Morison (2017) state that, as in most countries, erasure is common in South Africa (SA), where bi-individuals constitute approximately 42%, the biggest proportion, of the LGBTQ community (Sutherland, 2016). Local researchers have documented the impact of binegativity in SA (e.g., De Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Francis, 2017). Comprehending this phenomenon is important as Hayfield et al. (2018) suggest that binegativity is ingrained in bi-individuals' daily experiences, influencing the way they understand themselves and their interactions within their social contexts. In SA, approximately 0.6% of the population who self-identifies as bisexual is affected by this psychosocial problem (Sutherland, 2016).

Conceptualising Bisexuality

Unique experiences of bisexual individuals include, firstly, their capacity for attraction to individuals beyond the gender binary. Secondly, their inclination to be in a relationship with individuals with an alternate, monosexual identity. Monosexual refers to persons who are attracted to only a single gender and are thus non-bisexual (Francis, 2017; Gleason et al., 2018). Bisexual activist Robyn Ochs (2013) defines bisexuality as:

the potential to be attracted, romantically and/or sexually, to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree. (p. 5)

On the other hand, Kaestle and Ivory (2012) differentiate between a “behaviourally bisexual” individual, a person who has engaged in same sex behaviour, but does not self-identify as bisexual, and a “self-identified bisexual” individual – a person who identifies as bisexual as this reflects their own comprehension of their sexual orientation (Kaestle & Ivory, 2012). This distinction is important as studies have historically focused on behaviourally bisexual men, thus resulting in significant bias in sexualities research and increased stigma and discrimination towards bisexual individuals (Bostwick & Dodge, 2019). Consequently, I will focus on self-identified bisexual and pansexual people, using *bisexual* as an umbrella term in this study.

1.2 Research Rationale

Binegativity can affect bi-individuals' subjectivities and influence how they experience their environment, thus making it essential to understand both external and internalised binegativity. Worldwide, there is a growing concern regarding bi-individuals' experiences of binegativity due to its negative impact on their mental health outcomes. This has resulted in a steady increase in research over the last decade (Mereish et al., 2017). However, in SA there is a dearth in both, quantitative and qualitative studies exploring self-identified bi-individuals' experiences (Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017).

Interventions that address binegativity, while simultaneously increasing bipositivity, have the potential to act as a protective factor, offsetting the negative health disparities bi-individuals experience relative to their straight and gay counterparts (Israel et al., 2019; Mereish et al., 2017). For instance, Israel et al. (2019) contend that educating bi-individuals about normativity, socialisation, microaggressions and discrimination, as well as providing them with skills to cope with these stressors may help offset some health disparities. Such interventions are cost-effective as they can be implemented on a large scale. However, prior to developing and applying any intervention, it is essential to first comprehend the nature of binegativity, how it manifests and how it is experienced.

As a foundation for this investigation, an understanding of existing international and local research is imperative. I conducted a search of the literature on Google Scholar, the Ebscohost database, SAGE Journals Online and PsycArticles. Restricting the time period of publications to 2010-2020 on Google Scholar, I used the search string specification: "bisexual" OR "bisexuality" OR "binegativity" OR "biphobia". To refine the search, I added "erasure" OR "invisibility" OR "double discrimination" and added exclusion criteria, namely NOT "women who have sex with women" OR "men who have sex with men." From this search, 2,510 results were obtained. For the African and South African literature search, I used the same inclusion and exclusion criteria, with the addition of "Africa" OR "South Africa," yielding 1,140 articles. These results included all articles that mention South Africa anywhere in the article and are thus not necessarily South African publications. From this preliminary search, a problem highlighted by Bostwick and Dodge (2019) became evident, namely that many research journals and articles that supposedly focus on LGBTQ communities lack specific information about bisexuality. Consequently, I manually refined the search results to exclude all articles in which bisexual data were simply combined with LGBTQ participants. I

extended the search in the Ebscohost database, using the same inclusion and exclusion criteria for international articles. To narrow the search, I further specified that only peer-reviewed articles, written in English, should be included; this search yielded 260 articles. When restricting hits to South Africa, the search yielded 33 articles, which I checked manually. From these, I identified only six articles that are relevant to South Africa and my research objectives. I then extended my search to SAGE Journals online and PsycArticles, where I used similar search strategies and consolidated the reference list. This initial search yielded only five relevant studies conducted in SA, namely De Bruin & Arndt (2010, 2011), Francis (2017), Khuzwayo & Morison (2017) and Lynch & Maree (2013, 2018).

De Bruin and Arndt (2010) is the only quantitative study on the general student population's attitudes towards bi-individuals. Since my searches yielded no qualitative studies focusing on bisexual university students' experiences, I chose university students as my sampling frame. These individuals are in a transitional phase to a greater degree of independence and thus experience a greater degree of freedom in exploring their identity. Considering the lack of research on self-identifying bi-individuals in SA, the aim of this study was to explore bisexual university students' lived experiences of their various contexts, and how these contexts influence their intrapersonal relationship with their own bisexuality. Exploring these bi-students' subjective experiences of the potential challenges and protective factors could contribute to an understanding of bisexuality in a South African context. Given the scarcity of research in SA, the findings from this exploratory study could contribute towards the social knowledge of this often invisible sexuality and add to the small body of existing SA-based research. Findings will be shared with the university's transformation office, the equality unit, queer organisations and student counselling services to improve the support provided to students who identify as bisexual.

1.3 Research Questions and Aims

This study aims to address the aforementioned knowledge gap by means of an exploratory, qualitative study that considers self-identified bisexual university students' lived experiences of their bi-identities within their family and community environments, among their university peers and within the queer community. Thus my aim was to answer the following research questions:

1. What are bisexual students' lived experiences of their bi-identity within their family, among their university peers and among their heterosexual and queer communities?
2. What are bi-students' lived experiences of binegativity, if any, within their family, among their university peers and within their heterosexual and queer communities?
3. What is the level of support bisexual students experience when exposed to binegativity?

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

Following Chapter 1, this thesis consists of ten chapters. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework, used to make sense of my findings and to set the stage for the literature review in Chapter 3. The literature review provides an overview of scholarship on the domain of bisexuality. This includes literature on the obstacles bi-individuals face in various contexts, the social norms that lead to binegativity, and how bi-individuals adjust to these settings. Chapter 4 describes the methodology that I used in the research process. In chapters 5 to 9, I report and discuss the findings in five overarching themes, while drawing on existing research and theory. Chapter 5 describes the nature of biphobia and how it isolates bi-individuals; Chapter 6 demonstrates how bisexuality is erased through gendering; Chapter 7 illustrates how participants strategically use concealment, outness and the in-between to “play” with the closet; Chapter 8 elucidates the process of internalising binegativity and how that inhibits the natural unfolding of identity, and Chapter 9 describes the process of unlearning binegativity and moving towards a bi-affirmative identity. Chapter 10 provides a conclusion, a reflection on the study's strengths and limitations, as well as recommendations for interventions and future research.

Chapter 2: Queer Epistemic Framework

2.1 Introduction

In this study, I utilised a queer epistemic framework to conceptualise and comprehend the bi-participants' lived-experiences. Although, Riggs and Treharne (2017) contend that queer theory has received little attention in psychology as there is a lack of interdisciplinarity and the theory is perceived as very complex, this framework is relevant to this study because it offers a way to understand the negotiation of bi-identities in different contexts. Considering queer theory's scope, this section does not present an exhaustive overview of this framework, but rather a selection of core theoretical tenets that I consider pertinent to this study.

This thesis draws on queer theory and a framework of epistemic injustice because both are essential for unveiling the power/knowledge/resistance relations in the participants' lived experiences. The theorists most often associated with queer theory, Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick, and epistemic injustice, Miranda Fricker, based much of their work on Michel Foucault's (1978) *The History of Sexuality* in which he underscored the 'the power of scientific' discourse, or 'biopower' (Allen, 2017; Hall, 2017).

Below I provide a brief overview of queer theory, detailing its history, assumptions, and some of its general critiques. I then focus on Foucault, Butler and Sedgwick, and explore their contribution to queer epistemology. Throughout, I consider the critiques and commentary of bisexual theorists, who have reframed these foremost theorists' work regarding bisexuality. Subsequently, I will relay their theory back to the resulting forms of epistemic injustice or justice, as this will allow me to more effectively comprehend and explain the participants' experiences. I conclude the chapter with the applicability of a queer epistemological framework for this study.

2.2 Brief History and Overview of Queer Theory

Queer theory emerged from the activism and transformation of gay and lesbian studies and feminist studies in the 1960s. The AIDS pandemic profoundly impacted the queer theory in the 1980s as it centred gay rights as politically and socially imperative (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Queer theory then evolved in response to the particular historical context of the 1990s,

which saw an emergence of gay and lesbian “safe spaces” and sub-cultural pockets that failed to challenge dominant social norms. Within the academy, gay and lesbian studies were problematised for (1) framing lesbian and gay identities as static, fixed categories; (2) failing to highlight the socially constructed nature of sexuality, including LGBTQ identities; and, (3) the lack of thoughtful consideration of sexualities in relation to other vital social factors such as race, class and culture (Gurevich et al., 2009).

Queer activists and scholars assume that the binary categories of sex (male and female, as biological categories), gender (masculine and feminine, the traits or behaviours generally accompanying one of the two sexes) and sexuality (heterosexual and homosexual, representing the nature of sexual desire) are social constructs that primarily rely on cultural dominance and are thus considered oppressive (Riggs & Treharne, 2017). Consequently, it is of interest how categorisations such as “gay,” “feminine” and “male” are created and perpetuated by prevailing discourses that are used to construct notions of ‘normality’ through maintenance of rigid binary categories of sex/gender/sexuality. Queer theorists also highlight the power dynamics that arise organically within society once these classifications are regarded as normative and individuals are categorised accordingly (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020; Riggs & Treharne, 2017).

Normativity is frequently prefixed by hetero- (straight), mono- (gay or straight) or cis- (male and female), all of which queer theorists endeavour to dispute. Normativity assumes that because something is more prevalent or familiar to humanity, it is automatically more socially normative and thus morally more correct than its deviations (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Queer theory is assumed to be emancipating for individuals who do not fit precisely into the sex/gender/sexuality classification system, including individuals who only do so because of social policing and socialisation. Thus, *queer* represents an alliance of sex, gender and sexual identity minorities beneath a supposedly fluid collection of acronyms, LGBTQ (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020).

Hall (2017) states that two dominant assumptions that queer theory challenge are: (1) that sexuality is an innate, fixed and constant part of human nature, and (2) that sexual acts and identities are present before and autonomous from the necessity to identify and classify them. Pluckrose and Lindsay (2020) maintains that queer theorists achieve this by (1) making use of postmodern tenets to challenge the assumption that knowledge can be rooted in objective reality (resulting in a scepticism of biological truth), and (2) using postmodern political tenets

to suggest that self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating systems of unjust power exist within society. These tenets are used to recognise and reveal how discourse around these categories creates oppressive norms through socialisation. Consequently, sex/gender/sexuality categories are perceived as essentially artificial social constructs, perpetuated through discourse and not as a matter of biological truth. Queer theorists are thus social constructionists concerned with discourse and how power masquerading as knowledge penetrates every social plane, and establishes conventions of normality that result in epistemic injustice. With this comes a suspicion of science, which is not so much viewed as a producer of knowledge, but rather as a repressive exercise of power.

Hall (2017) posits that “thinking queerly about sexuality denaturalises sexual identities and acts and the presumed inevitability of connections between them” (p. 158). When used as a verb, *to queer* means to problematise binaries and dispute the stability of categories that appear to be static. *Queering* refers to the process of removing something from the category to which it is presently assigned and viewing it anew, without preconceptions, thus stripping norms from its conceptualisation. Queer theorists’ primary concerns include: (1) inspecting, querying, subverting and deconstructing anything considered ‘normal’ or innate; (2) recognising the power of language to create and impose categories onto others; and (3) purposefully blurring boundaries to reveal how superficial and oppressive they are (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). In summary, queering aims to emancipate individuals from normative pressures that either covertly or overtly produce political and cultural power (normativity), which subjugates and restricts non-conforming individuals.

Contrastingly, *to be queer* is a political statement that resists the socially constructed certainty of sex, gender, and sexuality. As a political project, queer theory is geared towards disrupting the assumption that each person must slot into the binary categories of sex or gender while simultaneously challenging the expectation that sex or gender are correlated with a prescribed sexuality (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Riggs and Treharne (2017) contend that any categorisation aims to legitimize the normative view, which in turn influences the production of knowledge and power that oppresses those that deviate from it. Thus, queer theorists’ political objective is to dispute what is socially normative and moral by defying these dualistic categorisations.

Pluckrose and Lindsay (2020) highlight some critique of queer theory's radical scepticism of biology, arguing that: (1) it hinders the accessibility of the theory as it is not grounded in scientific fact; (2) it ignores the fact that scientific legitimisation of sex, gender and sexuality categories increases societal acceptance because discourses around these topics no longer discriminate; (3) it disregards the proof that sexuality is a biological reality and not merely socially constructed; and (4) it ignores the undeniable fact that gender expressions are binary and significantly associated with sex. They further contend that this biology scepticism undermines the significant advancement made by LGBTQ activists in framing their attractions (romantic and sexual) as not only a lifestyle decision when a great deal of evidence shows that attraction is far more than choice. Queer theory's objective to deconstruct said categories frequently makes it irrelevant or alienating to many individuals within the LGBTQ community because it inhibits them from claiming their orientations as natural and potentially harms the legitimisation process of LGBTQ identities. Nevertheless, today most individuals accept that numerous assumptions about sex, gender, and sexuality are socially constructed, meaning that especially the roles associated with each category are relatively pliable.

In considering bisexuality and queer theory, Callis (2009) criticises the fact that seminal literature by Foucault, Butler and Sedgwick all circumvent bisexuality as a subject of analysis despite its opposition to dualistic, biological models of gender and sexuality. Callis contends that by adjusting the focus to include bi-subjectivities, this theory would be strengthened. In discussing these queer theoreticians' contributions below, I will simultaneously consider bisexual theoreticians' perspectives where applicable.

2.2.1 Foucault

Queer theory owes much of its foundational concept of the social construction of sexuality to Foucault because more than a decade before the theory's debut, he published his seminal work, *The History of Sexuality* (Riggs & Treharne, 2017). His work expounded the instability of identity politics and stipulated that discourse, generated by structures of 'knowledge-power', creates the individual (Callis, 2009). Foucault regards this central role of discourse in the social construction of knowledge as a "knowledge-power" production of what is natural and normal. His theory explains the repressive role of the biological sciences in legitimising knowledge used by the powerful to preserve their domination (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020)

Foucault (1978) conceptualised “biopower” as having “made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life” (p. 143). Pylypa (1998) describes Foucault’s notion of “biopower” as “the ways in which power manifests itself in the form of daily practices and routines through which individuals engage in self-surveillance and self-discipline, and thereby subjugate themselves” (p. 21). Furthermore, Foucault, (2001) posits that conformity is not realised through force and coercion, but rather through desire. Power frames the norm as moral while constructing notions of normal versus deviant; this establishes a desire to conform to normativity. Ultimately, power functions by producing knowledge, while this knowledge, in turn, stimulates a desire to conform. It is people’s yearning for conformity that willingly sustains their suppression through self-surveillance and self-disciplining. Self-monitoring is realised through the interrelated planes of discourse and practice because, (1) people feel obliged to self-regulate their bodies and actions in accordance with norms, and (2) people feel obligated to speak of what they “must” and “must not” do, and to “confess” any deviations (Foucault et al., 2001). Consequently, bio-power emphasises the subjugation of the body and highlights the ways in which individuals participate in this subjugation through habitual practices of continuous self-regulation of gender and sexuality.

Another major contribution by Foucault is the understanding that throughout Christian history, homosexuality in men has been framed as sinful. However, this has not always been the case. Foucault (1978) highlights the example of ancient Greece, where sex between adolescent boys and men was condoned until the boys were of marrying age and had to switch to a female partner. Foucault illustrated how the framing of homosexuality transitioned in the 19th century from something that people ‘do’ to ‘who a person is’ (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Foucault (1978) used his conception of bio-power to explain the “medicalisation” and “speciation” of homosexuality. Callis (2009) contends that Foucault’s theory of *medicalisation*, *speciation* and *reverse discourse* were central to the legitimacy of homosexuality and suggests that bisexuality never went through this process of scientific legitimisation. Callis further contends that Foucault’s processes can be utilised to analyse bisexuality meaningfully because historically, “bisexuality could be a stage or a primordial sexuality, but it was never used to describe a person” (pp. 224–225). Instead, homosexual medicalisation meant all individuals who participated in same sex activities were classified as homosexual, resulting in bi-unintelligibility. This provides a probable explanation for current assertions about the nonexistence of bisexuality. Callis (2009) points out that, unlike homosexuality, bisexuality was not written about in the 19th and first half of the 20th century.

Consequently, it was never framed as a separate “species” and no scientific “truth” could be ascribed to it.

However, Foucault (1978) re-conceptualized power as both, oppressive and productive. While power represses those considered deviant or unnatural, this repression results in the production of a “reverse discourse” when those considered deviant demand recognition and resist their oppression (Foucault, 1978). Hall (2017) explains that this re-conceptualisation has been highly influential in queer theory as it foregrounds avenues of resistance and subversion. Regarding bisexuality, however, no bisexual “reverse discourse” emerged because it was never a medically ratified classification used to label people (Callis, 2009). Additionally, Eadie (1999) warns that the medical illegitimacy of a bi-identity has resulted in misperceptions of what bisexuality is, even amongst bi-individuals, and suggests that the absence of a coherent bi-identity or norm that can be policed leads to a situation where “their expression of bisexuality is wanting” (p. 123).

It follows that no one can be characterised as “bisexual” because no action can be performed to be perceived as such. In this manner, Foucault’s discourse theory can clarify the absence of bi-identity salience.

2.2.2 Butler

Butlerian queer theory continues to have a profound influence on parts of the academy and society (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Butler (2010) focuses explicitly on the associations of sex, gender and sexuality. Due to Foucault’s influence, Butler theorised that expectations of gender and sexuality play out both consciously and unconsciously (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). The Butlerian assumption is that people’s actions are not predetermined by any inherent factors, but instead, people are socialised from birth by pervasive societal norms into particular scripts for corresponding categories. These categories are neither fixed nor stable, they are simply things people do.

Butler (2010) employed the concept of gender performativity to theorise how gender is socially constructed. Butler contends that gender has nothing to do with who an individual is; instead, it is a collection of things an individual *does*, a collection of normative expectations, manners, behaviours and actions according to which people perform their assigned gender roles.

Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as the cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence of identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (Butler, 2010, p. 185)

Performativity, as concept, does not refer to acting but instead to the power of language to erect and enforce categories, making them “real”, legitimate and steeped in social expectations. Such performance maintains the normative fantasies (i.e. being a “good” heterosexual) while simultaneously maintaining the norms (i.e. heterosexuality). Gendering occurs through social expectations that continually shape and fortify gender. Therefore, gender is learned through gendering, frequently unconsciously (Butler, 2010), and is based on a gender ideal rooted in the gender binary. Normative gender scripts and the pressures of socialisation connote that individuals cannot escape being taught how to “correctly” perform their gender, subsequently reinforcing gender as a social construct. *Discursive construction* is a related concept that refers to how knowledge is constructed, categorised and legitimised through how it is spoken about, allowing it to appear self-evident and ‘true’ (Butler, 2010; Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). For instance, the roles of “female” and “feminine” become legitimised through *gender performativity* as society superimposes the linguistic categories of “female” and “feminine” upon actions.

Butler (2010) insists that the task of queer activism and theory is to emancipate (through gender trouble) “the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality” (p. 200). Butler suggests that when we become aware that gender is performative, it becomes possible to re-appropriate such performances to subvert privileged norms. Subversion is achieved by questioning the foundational assumptions of performativity to reveal the illusory and oppressive nature of these social constructs in their present form. Thus, the potential for resisting, subverting, disrupting, and troubling socially constructed categories resides within the unintelligibility of performativity. This creates space for those who deviate from the norm. However, Callis (2009) contends that (within Western culture) gay and lesbian individuals’ efforts at subverting gender norms are seemingly thwarted due to notions of them being “cross-gendered.” This refers to the assumption that lesbians are masculine, and gays are

feminine, thus maintaining the “correct” gender-sexuality matching and allowing “gender trouble” to be dismissed.

Callis (2009) demonstrates how Butler’s theories regarding the interdependence of sex/gender/sexuality, *performativity* and *gender trouble* are bolstered when using a bisexual lens. Callis extends *gender performativity* to *sexual performativity*, suggesting that there are no acts that one can read as bisexual; they are always either homo- or heterosexual. Consequently, bisexuality cannot be performed. It resists the association between sex-object-choice and gender, and thus inherently initiates gender trouble. Considering Butler’s (2010) contention that to be considered “real”, gender and sexuality need to be performed, it is not surprising that bisexuality is frequently questioned.

Pluckrose and Lindsay (2020) point out that although the term “intersectionality” is associated with Kimberlé Crenshaw, Butler seemingly concurrently and independently referred to “intersections.” Butler (2010) spoke of the “intersections” of marginalised identities, contending that “gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out “gender” from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (pp. 4-5). Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) contend that such intersections have a cumulative effect and may result in “intersectional invisibility” (p. 377). Consequently, one cannot consider the experiences of bi-individuals without also considering these intersections.

2.2.3 Sedgwick

Sedgwick is another critical queer theorist concerned with deconstructing categories by revealing them to be illogical and illusory (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Foucault (1978) believed that homosexuality and heterosexuality were created through dominant discourses. Contrastingly, Sedgwick's (1990) theorised that all binary thinking originated from the homo-heterosexual binary, postulating that upon this initial binary rests all other social binaries. Sedgwick theorised that all binary, black-and-white thinking is false, and that by comprehending the dynamic and fluid nature of sexuality, such thinking can be undone. Sedgwick (1990) theory urges us to resist dualistic perceptions and to value *plurality* by resisting the impulse to resolve contradictions. *Plurality* refers to the simultaneous acquiescence of diverse perspectives, whether coherent or not, while resisting the need for

logic. Sedgwick considers *plurality* advantageous to activism, suggesting there is no need to resolve ideological variations within LGBTQ activism and scholarship. Instead, the movement could become more productive by integrating many ideas, even reciprocally inconsistent notions. Pluckrose and Lindsay (2020) contend that Sedgwick's theory aims to embrace and work with these contradictions and represents an expansion of the theory that allowed for queering matters beyond sex, gender and sexuality.

In *The Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick (1990) posits that no individual is ever truly out or in 'the closet' since specific individuals may know what their sexuality is, while others do not. The closet represents a means of simultaneously inhabiting opposing realities. Others get to know someone's identity through both, what is and what is not said (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Sedgwick (1990) recognised how, through the power of discourse, society constructs and perpetuates the closet in terms of conceptions of hetero- and homosexuality, the known versus unknown, explicit versus inexplicit associations, and other oppressive dualities. In summary, Sedgwick emphasizes the need to deconstruct power dynamics that are inherent in any duality.

2.3 Queer Epistemology and Epistemic Injustice

In this section, I first define epistemic injustice and its forms in order to illustrate how these apply to the bi-community. Secondly, I employ a queer epistemological framework, rooted in queer theory discussed above, to explain why these forms of epistemic injustices occur.

2.3.1 Epistemic Injustice

Fricker (2009) describes epistemic injustice as a "wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower" (p. 1). Epistemic injustice diminishes a person's ability to validate their own experiences and occurs within interpersonal interactions when a listener is unable to, or chooses not to, accept a speaker's social identity. Fricker explains that epistemic injustice takes on two forms: firstly, hermeneutical injustice, resulting from incomprehensibility to others or even to one's self, and secondly, testimonial injustice, which is when a speaker is discredited based on their social identity.

Hermeneutical Injustice

The prejudice that arises from epistemic injustice is ingrained within wider social systems, beliefs and norms, such as hetero- and mononormativity. These norms are based on flawed epistemological foundations, partly because society's method of creating and understanding knowledge is unsound and results in inequality (Fricker, 2009). Considering the impact of an epistemological foundation, Allen (2017) contends that Foucault offers:

... a richer and more complex conception of the intertwined discursive and institutional mechanisms by means of which collective hermeneutical resources are produced, codified, and organized into hierarchies. Foucault's genealogy of the emergence of disciplines in the 18th century provides a contextually and historically specific analysis of how particular knowledges are disqualified by being cast out of the domain of the true while others are organized into disciplines that are codified in social institutions such as the university, the media, and the educational system. Foucault's work also allows for a deeper understanding of the kind of structural epistemic injustice or identity prejudice that is at work in ... hermeneutical injustice. (p. 192)

In *The History of Sexuality*," Foucault's genealogical examination of regimes of power/knowledge offers a historical breakdown of the "politics of truth", specifically surrounding the sexualities discourse (Foucault, 1978; Hall, 2017). This is consistent with Gurevich et al.'s (2009) contention that queer theory's essential concern is to place sexualities discourse on an epistemological level, thus enabling analyses of the regimes of power/knowledge and how they order behaviour, desire, social relations and institutions. For Foucault (1978), 'power' is omnipresent, originating from everywhere, circulating throughout the entire social system, and using authoritative discourses to self-propagate. This power operates like a network permeating every layer of society, shaping its conception of truth, including how truth is spoken about (Allen, 2017). All individuals perpetually participate in these systems of power, establishing a structure that every person is socialised into (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Similarly, Butler (2010) explains the power of the heterosexuality matrix:

The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of "identities" cannot "exist"—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not "follow" from either sex or gender. ... Because certain kinds of "gender identities" fail to conform to

those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain. (p. 24)

Butler aptly described how heteronormativity stems from this flawed cultural matrix and its epistemological foundation through which gender is conceptualised and normalised, subsequently rendering some types of gender (or sexuality) unintelligible and incomprehensible. Norms of cultural intelligibility result in hermeneutical injustice, not only from dominant knowers, but also among minoritised knowers themselves, who may find it challenging to become self-comprehensible. In this way, as Fricker explains, “hermeneutical injustice can threaten the very development of the self” (p. 163).

As discussed earlier, Callis’ (2009) postulation is that bisexuality lacks legitimacy that apparently results in the incomprehensibility of bisexuality by others or even to bi-individuals themselves. This concurs with Fricker’s (2009) notion of hermeneutical injustice, which manifests when an individual is unable to understand what bisexuality is and dismisses or denies its existence and legitimacy. From this perspective, bi-individuals experience a diminished capacity to be socially comprehended subjects, they confront a barrier to develop authentic subjectivities (Fricker, 2009; Medina, 2017).

Dualistic notions of gender and sexuality lack the complexity to account for the intricacies of bi-individuals’ realities. This inadequate means of knowing often results in hermeneutical and testimonial harm, including self-inflicted epistemic harm, as individuals feel obligated to categorise their gender and desire in a specific manner.

Testimonial Injustice

Allen (2017) contends that testimonial injustice also has an impact on hermeneutical resources and notes how Foucault’s theory demonstrates this association. Allen (2017) states that:

Foucault’s genealogical analyses of power/knowledge regimes enable us to see how certain people are first classified into groups (the ill, the insane, the sexually deviant) and then disqualified as knowers by virtue of being members of such groups. These aspects of Foucault’s work thus afford a more complex genealogical understanding of the distribution and dispersal of hermeneutical resources throughout societies such as ours, and of the role of academic disciplines in those patterns of distribution. (p. 192)

Testimonial injustice manifests, for instance, when a bi-person states that they can commit to a single person, but their self-knowledge is discredited by the stereotype that all bi-individuals are promiscuous and hypersexual (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Gleason et al., 2018). Contemplating testimonial injustice, Hall (2017) makes the argument that “testimony is not optional” (p. 159) as he analyses the social obligation to disclose one’s sexuality. In the ensuing troubled epistemic-scape, the authority of sexual minorities and marginalised knowers is disputed. This is consistent with Sedgwick’s (1990) conceptualisation of the closet, including the notion that no individual is ever truly in or out of ‘the closet’. Speaking to this as a base of knowledge, Hall (2017) states:

A queer epistemological approach to testimonial injustice attends not only to the silencing of those deemed deviant, but also the epistemic violence perpetuated by the compulsion to occupy an identity category, to understand oneself as a certain kind of person because of one’s desires and actions. The imperative to know one’s own or others’ sexuality has given rise to numerous forms of surveillance, all geared toward revealing the truth of sexuality. Regardless of how one might understand oneself, every minute aspect of one’s behaviour, appearance, and interests are taken as signs of the truth of one’s sexuality. (p. 159)

Hall’s quote illustrates the testimonial injustice inherent in Butler’s (2010) concept of gender performativity, which Callis (2009) extends to sexuality and intelligibility that keeps people within comprehensible categories. As Riggs and Treharne (2017) contend, queer theory draws our attention to the ways intelligibility polices possibilities and an individual’s authority as a knower. Consequently, being positioned as gender- or sexuality-divergent means that these individuals experience the truth around their gender or sexuality as outside of their control. Thus, even when sexual minorities declare their truth, their disclosure is frequently followed by questions of authority, evidence, doubt and allegations of being mistaken in their self-knowledge. Queer epistemology alludes to the epistemic harm of mandatory disclosure of gender and sexuality, and the questioning of the speaker’s authority as representative of testimonial injustice (Hall, 2017).

Riggs and Treharne (2017) agree that deviation from normativity relates to unintelligibility that links Foucault’s regimes of power/knowledge and epistemic injustice. Using Foucault’s theory, Butler (2010) emphasised the injustice done to people by categorising and scripting them into binary categories that feel inauthentic to them and fail to accurately or effectively

convey their experience. Consequently, Butler suggests making the irregularities of rigid sex/gender/sexuality categories visible to reveal how preposterous they are. Butler recommends resistance and disruption, in this regard, to render oppressive categories meaningless.

2.3.2 Epistemic Justice

Considering epistemic justice in the relational space, Medina (2011) conceptualised resistance and reverse discourse spheres as sites of *epistemic friction*. Medina speaks to the importance of being attuned to these sites of epistemic friction between and within groups; suggesting that such attuning facilitates transformation by offsetting people's perceptions in a way that transmutes their comprehension of the world, others and themselves. However, Hall (2017) advances that sites of epistemic friction require increased *epistemic humility* as opposed to the accumulation of epistemic authority in response to denialism because increased epistemic justice does not necessarily follow from elevated self-comprehension. When epistemic humility is not available, these sites of friction are met with resistance, resulting in what Pohlhaus (2012) calls "wilful hermeneutic injustice" (p. 722), which refers to the dominant knowers' refusal to permit their readings of humanity to be swayed by marginally situated knowers' knowledge.

2.4 Summary and Relevance of a Queer Epistemological Framework for this Study

The objectives of this study were to explore a group of bisexual university students' experiences of their sexuality and how they negotiate their identities within their contexts. A queer epistemological framework is suitable for understanding these bisexual students' experiences; its focus on normativity, including the regimes of power/knowledge, facilitate our understanding of hetero- and mononormativity and its impact on the social status the students occupy in their context. In turn, this allows us to comprehend the consequences of binegativity and the accompanying epistemic harm and violence in our society. The queer epistemological framework helps us understand how an essential aspect of these bi-individuals' experiences can be erased and rendered invisible due to societal norms. It further helps us comprehend the impact of socialisation and its various sources, including the accompanying surveillance and self-surveillance of gender and sexuality, which speaks to how their contextual influences are internalised. This internalisation of societal norms has a

direct impact on behaviour in particular social settings. Last, but not least, a queer epistemological framework also helps us understand how the participants of this study resist and subvert gender and sexuality norms, thus allowing themselves (and us) to better understand identity queerly through a disposition of epistemic humility.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the existing literature on bi-individuals' experiences. First, I discuss the impact of homophobia on bi-individuals, followed by an explication of what we mean with erasure, invisibility and invalidation in the context of heteronormativity and mononormativity. As discussed in chapter 2, the ensuing epistemic injustice arises from unsound methods of producing and understanding knowledge. I then provide an overview of dual-binegativity; how it is established and how it results in proximal and distal minority group stressors that represent a significant risk factor. Thereafter, I consider the influence of binegativity on bi-individuals' sexual identity, including identity management approaches and protective factors used to resist stigma. Lastly, I explore current research on bi-individuals' experiences within the South African context.

3.1.1 Homophobia in Africa and South Africa, as it relates to Bi-individuals

This section only briefly touches on the topic of homophobia in Africa and South Africa, as a comprehensive discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis. When considering bi-individuals' experiences in Africa, it is essential to understand that they also experience homophobia (Mereish et al., 2017). A climate of hostility towards LGBTQ people persists in many African countries (Stobie, 2011) due to the "colonial laws [that] introduced penal codes, commonly known as sodomy laws that criminalized allegedly 'unnatural' sexual acts" (Matebeni & Pereira, 2014, p. 7). Although Africa has entered a post-colonial era, the existence and impact of such laws persist; out of the 53 African countries, homosexuality is still illegal in 37 countries, while in four of those countries homosexuality remains punishable by death (Amnesty International UK, 2018). Evidently, homosexuality is frequently perceived as un-African, and the language of tradition, culture and religion are used to resist gender and sexual multiplicity (Matebeni & Pereira, 2014). In this regard, Epprecht (2006) contests the idea that sexuality in Africa is exclusively heterosexual, suggesting that colonial anthropologists' accounts of homosexuality and bisexuality were intentionally minimized and suppressed. Thus, gender and sexuality were presented in a way that conformed to colonial beliefs and promoted colonial agendas. Many scholars have contributed historical and cross-

cultural research that elucidates the multiplicity of sexuality, including bisexuality, that preceded colonialization in Africa (Matebeni & Pereira, 2014; Stobie, 2011). Stobie (2011) states that, in general, bisexuality has received little attention on the continent. Estimates based on the Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC) South African survey, 1.2% of the population identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, of which 0.5% identify as bisexual (Sutherland, 2016). Hence, bisexual individuals constitute approximately 42% of the LGBTQ community in SA (Sutherland, 2016). Despite the prominence of bisexuality within the LGBTQ community, several local scholars acknowledge the invisibility of bisexuality in South African literature (Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017; Lynch & Maree, 2018; Stobie, 2011).

Although the rights of LGBTQ communities are enshrined in the South African Bill of Rights of 1994, heteronormative attitudes are still dominant in this context (Lynch & Maree, 2013; Stobie, 2011; Sutherland, 2016). In a recent South African survey, with a nationally representative sample (n=3000), the HSRC inferred that only 51% of South Africans believe that homosexuals should be entitled to the same human rights as everybody else (Sutherland, 2016). In the survey, 52% of the participants stated that homosexual people should be included in their tradition and culture, while 72% reported that same-sex sexual activity is immoral. These findings are indicative of the prevalence of heteronormativity in South Africa and explain why discrimination against individuals who engage in same-sex relations continues (Brown, 2015; Sandfort et al., 2015). Despite this, it is promising that the study also reports support, at a rate of 2:1, of the current Constitution that prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation (Sutherland, 2016).

3.2 Epistemic Injustice and the Erasure, Invalidation and Invisibility of Bisexuality

Bisexuality has a prolonged history of erasure and invisibility, in both the public sphere and within psychology scholarship. Barker et al. (2012) contends that this issue represents the most important concern of bisexuality research. This section explores this issue by considering how heteronormativity and mononormativity contribute to epistemic injustice and the subsequent erasure of bisexuality.

3.2.1 The Epistemic Injustice of Hetero-and Mononormativity

Given that people's subjectivities are constructed relative to heterosexuality, sexual minorities are often marginalised. Heteronormativity is maintained through cultural beliefs, privileges and rules that are enforced through reward, punishment and sanctions (Lynch & Maree, 2013). Individuals that do not meet the demands of compulsory heterosexuality are ostracized and excluded on the basis of being abnormal and illegitimate (Rich, 1980). In response to the dominance of heteronormativity, lesbian and gay authors strategically use binary thinking to present monosexuality as a compensatory view of sexual orientation (Barker et al., 2012; Roberts et al., 2015). Inadvertently, the emphasis on homosexual experiences has resulted in what Taub (2003) refers to as compulsory monosexuality (p. 45). Consequently, bi-subjectivities are constructed outside the bounds of mononormativity, positioning bi-individuals outside of what is considered normal once more (Roberts et al., 2015). Both frameworks set standards for what are socially valid and acceptable subjectivities; bi-subjectivities fall outside of these standards, which makes them prone to epistemic injustice. Within this context, Yoshino's (2000) and Bostwick and Hequembourg's (2014) studies confirmed bi-individuals' experiences of epistemic injustice.

3.2.2 Operational Definitions of Bisexuality

The operational definition of bisexuality has had a significant impact on relevant scholarship and the general public. This section focuses on the two dominant operational definitions of bisexuality used in research as well as the problems associated when preferring one definition over the other.

To date, the predominant operational definition of bisexuality has been a concrete behavioural one, limited to those who have engaged in same sex behaviour (Kaestle & Ivory, 2012). This definition has been used frequently from a biomedical perspective that was particularly evident in the 1980's during the AIDS pandemic, when the Centre of Disease Control and Prevention framed "closeted" bi-men as a bridge population, responsible for spreading AIDS to the heterosexual community (Bostwick & Dodge, 2019). Consequently sexual risk behaviour, as it relates to bi-men's health, has been the major focus in research, both locally and internationally (Bostwick & Dodge, 2019; Kaestle & Ivory, 2012). In a review of bisexuality in medical literature, Kaestle and Ivory (2012) found that one fifth of the articles

dealing with bisexuality specifically framed the bi-community as an infectious bridge population. The continued pathologizing of bisexuality and the focus on risk, rather than resilience, strengthens negative attitudes and stereotypes regarding bisexuality (Bostwick & Dodge, 2019; Kaestle & Ivory, 2012). The repercussions of this definition have been twofold; firstly, bisexuality has come to be understood as a threat, and secondly, self-defined bisexual men and women and their sexual identities are erased as bi-men are specifically only categorised according to their supposed risk (Bostwick & Dodge, 2019).

Alternatively, an operational definition based on self-identification reflects a person's feelings, beliefs and their comprehension of their sexual orientation (Kaestle & Ivory, 2012). Such a definition is significant as it legitimises bisexuality as a sexual orientation and identity. However, this definition is criticised for excluding people who are unwilling or not in a position to self-identify as bisexual (Kaestle & Ivory, 2012).

By combining these two definitions, bisexuality may be defined in a way that is inclusive of both self-identified as well as behaviourally bisexual individuals; in other words, individuals who self-identify as bisexual and/or are attracted to more than a single gender (Mereish et al., 2017; Monro et al., 2017). Thus, despite this study's focus on self-identified bi-individuals, I will use the latter operational definition in the rest of this review, as the behavioural definition has had such negative implications.

3.2.3 Erasure, Invisibility, Invalidation and Surplus Visibility

The behavioural definition of bisexuality used in research has introduced bias into bisexuality research. The following section explores the underlying beliefs that maintain the marginalisation of bisexuality and have resulted in such biased research. Yoshino (2000) explains "the erasure of bisexuality by positing that both self-identified heterosexuals and self-identified homosexuals have overlapping interests in the erasure of bisexuality that lead them into an 'epistemic contract' of bisexual erasure" (p. 353). Consequently, a disconnect exists between literature on sexuality in general and the more marginalised, smaller pool of literature on bisexuality (Hayfield, 2021; Monro et al., 2017). This is a consequence of the mononormative view that tends to dominate sexuality scholarship (De Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017). Through literature and research that either implicitly or explicitly aims to disprove the existence of bisexuality, a dichotomous framework often

manifests in research that “erases bisexuality as an epistemological category” (Barker et al., 2012, p. 379). Barker et al. (2012) argue that questioning the existence of bisexuality in this way should not be acceptable, given the growing body of research on bisexual peoples' identity, experiences, community and behaviour that substantiates the existence of bisexuality.

Mononormativity and its binary foundation has left bi-individuals in a rather precarious position in relation to LGBTQ politics (Nyanzi, 2014; Rimes et al., 2018). This is because the concept of bisexuality challenges the dichotomies and conceptual boundaries of homosexuality and heterosexuality. The either/or perspective served as a foundation for lesbian women and gay men's fight for recognition and rights (Barker et al., 2012; Monro et al., 2017). This perspective has resulted in lesbian and gay researchers disregarding bisexuality as a distinct category by either excluding bi-individuals from analyses or assimilating them with lesbian and gay participants (Helms & Waters, 2016; Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017). In a review of bisexuality by Kaestle and Ivory (2012), invisibility of bisexuality was confirmed as they found bi-participants' data were most often pooled with homosexual participants. Based on their analysis of 348 *PubMed* articles, Kaestle and Ivory found that less than 20% of the research studies analysed data from bisexual participants in isolation. Hence, crucial aspects of bisexuality are concealed, as sexual minorities tend to be presented in a monolithic manner, which marginalises bisexuality and exacerbates the challenges they face (Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017; Matebeni & Pereira, 2014).

Scholars contend that sexuality has been oversimplified with the imposition of artificial dichotomous categories onto sexuality, despite sexuality actually being more fluid and variable (Francis, 2017; Hayfield, 2021). Bisexual erasure and invisibility in research are potential contributors to the societal prejudice, stigma and discrimination many bi-individuals experience, especially because such research has promoted myths that bisexuality is a liminal phase to a permanent hetero- or homosexual identity (Barker et al., 2012). Nyanzi (2014) explains that for certain homosexual people in extremely homophobic contexts, bisexuality has often been used as a protective public persona. This has contributed to the extensive denial and neglect of bisexuality, erasing an important portion of queer African experiences and subjectivities (Nyanzi, 2014). To complicate this further, Ghabrial and Ross (2018) conducted a quantitative content analysis of bisexual people of colour and found that only 7% of the mental health outcomes for bisexual people of colour were reported separately from White participants. Consequently, Ghabrial and Ross emphasized the need to cease erasing a

significant portion of bi-individuals and called for more research into the complex intersection of identities.

3.2.4 Knowledge about Bisexuality

Studies report that public invisibility of bisexuality exists adjacent to stereotypes. Researchers hypothesise that stereotypes about bisexuality and bisexual individuals are not the result of acquired knowledge, but instead are grounded in everyday conceptualisations and assumptions about sexuality (Gleason et al., 2018; Hayfield et al., 2018; Zivony & Saguy, 2018). These studies suggest that the erasure and invisibility of bisexuality in popular culture and research exacerbates the unrestricted and unconsidered adoption of bi-stereotypes. This happens because the general population only suppresses negative stereotypes when they are aware that such stereotypes are offensive (Gleason et al., 2018; Zivony & Saguy, 2018). For instance, Hayfield (2021) contends that bisexuality is markedly invisible in the media and when it does feature, it is frequently invalidated. This misrepresentation and invisibility matters because media portrayals are frequently the only representation that straight people see of bisexuality, precisely because this community is predominantly culturally invisible (Hayfield, 2021). GLAAD's (2018) US-based analysis of sexuality in the media reports that bi and pan characters constitute only about 27% of recurring LGBTQ characters. These bi-characters displayed predominantly harmful tropes, depicted as lacking morals and being untrustworthy.

Francis (2017) provides a possible explanation of how stereotypes are exacerbated by referring to the "stigma of surplus visibility" (p. 208), which bi-individuals are subject to when they, as a minority group, do not remain invisible. *Surplus visibility* can manifest either when a selected individual's (e.g. a celebrity) supposed behaviour becomes a representation of all bisexual individuals, or through the majority's perception of a visible minority that is viewed as rowdy and outrageous (Francis, 2017). Francis suggests that no middle way exists and that bi-people must choose between surplus visibility or invisibility. Visibility ironically then entrenches stereotypes, encourage ignorance and assign blame. The consequence is that public perceptions of bisexuality are generally negative (Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017). Hayfield (2021) further suggests that bi-people must choose between invisibility or invalidation.

From the above discussion it seems that individuals in both, the dominant culture and queer subculture, tend to make assumptions about bisexuality from a flawed epistemological base. Hence, bi-subjectivities are often discredited, invalidated or rendered incomprehensible. Any visibility is often viewed through a prejudiced lens, which inevitably seeks evidence to substantiate existing assumptions and strengthens negative attitudes and stereotypes.

3.2.5 Categorisation

People infer someone's sexual orientation through numerous cues. Rule and Alaei (2016) identified four domains that function as sexual orientation indicators, namely: adornment, actions, speech and appearance. Consistent with the queer epistemological framework discussed in Chapter 2, Rule and Alaei (2016) contend that without conscious intent or awareness, perceivers encode sexual orientation onto every individual. Drawing on Butler (1990), Hayfield et al. (2012) argue that lesbian/gay sexual orientation indicators are mainly perceived through the heterosexual matrix. Thus, gay men are strongly associated with femininity and lesbian women with masculinity; such stereotypes are evident in research on judgements and perceptions (Clarke et al., 2012). Callis (2009) refers to this as the cross-gendered perspective. Consistent with these findings, Ding and Rule (2012) and Hayfield (2012) suggest that individuals can correctly classify straight and lesbian/gay individuals with a probability beyond chance; however, bi-individuals are constantly miscategorised, confirming that there are no appearance norms for bi-individuals.

Ding and Rule's (2012) findings further suggest that bi-individuals are perceived as considerably different from straight individuals, but not from lesbian/gay individuals. This supports the straight/non-straight binary of sexual orientation judgement. Thus, as Rule and Alaei (2016) suggest, society's assumption of someone's sexual orientation being either gay or straight has numerous adverse social repercussions. Motivation for categorisation based on minimal cues varies from finding a possible partner to establishing the grounds for prejudice (Rule & Alaei, 2016). Seemingly, the consequences for binary categorisations are not always ill intended, but result in the erasure of bisexuality.

3.3 Establishing the Causes of Binegativity: Considering Attitudes

This section considers several variables that influence attitudes towards bi-individuals, as well as the resulting stereotypes, stigma, oppression and discrimination that constitutes binegativity (biphobia).

3.3.1 Biographical Variables Associated with Attitudes towards Bisexuality

Considering LGBTQ stigmatisation and the resulting discrimination in South Africa, Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy (2015) and, De Bruin and Arndt (2010) contend that numerous variables shape individuals' attitudes, stereotypes and behaviours toward the LGBTQ community. Several international studies indicate that the attitudinal variance associated with different biographical variables includes sexual orientation, gender, being in contact with a bi-person, race, religion and geographical location (Helms & Waters, 2016; Knight et al., 2016; Levy & Harr, 2018; Lytle et al., 2017; Wandrey et al., 2015; Worthen, 2013). De Bruin and Arndt's (2010) quantitative study, is cited in the discussion below to provide some reference to the South African context for each variable.

Sexual-orientation: Findings suggest that heterosexuals are more prejudiced towards bisexuals than they are towards gay men or lesbian women (Lytle et al., 2017; Mereish et al., 2017). Additionally, although attitudes towards homosexuality have improved, no such change is evident for bisexuality (Gleason et al., 2018; Mereish et al., 2017). While Lytle et al. (2017) found homosexual individuals displayed a moderate tolerance towards the bi-community, yet stereotypes about the illegitimacy and instability of bi-identities persist.

Gender: Both local and international studies indicate that attitudes vary depending on whether the participant is a homosexual/heterosexual man or woman, and whether the person being rated is a bisexual man or woman (De Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Lytle et al., 2017). Results indicate that gender plays an important role when considering gay individuals' attitudes toward bi-individuals; results suggest that lesbian women rate bi-men as more stable, while bi-women are rated as more stable by gay men (Lytle et al., 2017). When considering heterosexual men, findings show that they hold more negative attitudes toward bisexual men than women, while this was not the case for heterosexual women (De Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Lytle et al., 2017). Helms and Waters (2016) on the other hand, found that attitudes towards bi-men were less favourable than attitudes towards lesbian women, gay men or bi-women.

Some researchers postulate that this may be the result of bisexuality representing a violation of heteronormative gender roles and thus being perceived as a threat to male privilege and power (De Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Helms & Waters, 2016; Lytle et al., 2017). Other researchers explain that bi-identified women are hypersexualised and objectified by heterosexual men and hence attitudes only appear to be more positive (Wandrey et al., 2015). DeCapua (2017) concurs that heterosexual men hypersexualise bi-women, evident in greater interest and appeals for threesomes, and more frequent inquiries about their sexual history. Further, Southern African activists and scholars report instances of corrective rape – forced sexual acts intended to “convert” bisexual or lesbian women to heterosexuality (Brown, 2015; Sandfort et al., 2015).

A sexual violence survey, conducted in the United States by Walters et al. (2010), found that the lifetime prevalence of intimate partner violence for bisexual men was 37% in contrast to 29% for heterosexual men. Similar statistics for women indicate that 61% of bisexual women being exposed to violence, in contrast to lesbian women at 43% and heterosexual women at 35%. More specifically, 46% of bi-women, compared to 17% of straight and 13% of lesbian women, have experienced rape by any perpetrator (Walters et al., 2010). These results allude to the dominance of hetero- and mononormative perspectives and confirm that bi-women experience the same, if not additional, prejudice and violence in comparison to lesbian women.

Due to binegativity, it is frequently difficult for bi-individuals to date and sustain romantic relationships. According to Gleason et al. (2018), this is particularly true for bi-men. Gleason et al. found that straight women rated bi-men as less romantically and sexually attractive, less masculine and less desirable to date and have sex with compared to heterosexual men. Conversely, straight men did not report these attitudes towards bi or straight women.

Societal gender norms and expectations also infiltrate queer spaces. Pereira (2021) suggests that others' perceptions of bi-men's masculinity is influenced by the position they usually assume during anal sex with a man, given the gendered associations with topping (insertive partner, associated with dominance, power and strength) and bottoming (receptive partner, perceived as submissive and passive). Moskowitz and Roloff (2017) contend that gay and bisexual men endorse three anal sex role preferences, namely: bottom, top and versatile (insertive or receptive partner). Linking with Callis' (2009) notion of cross-gendering, Moskowitz and Roloff (2017) argue that these roles are gendered, such that masculine men

are perceived as tops and feminine men as bottoms. This implies that gendered cues shape how individuals perceive others' sexual behaviour and desire, thus creating a prescriptive interpersonal script. Pereira highlights that there is a lack of research, which investigates self-identified bi-men's sexual preferences, especially their self-identification as bottom, top or versatile. Pereira observes that even in queer relationships these gendered roles require bi-men to manage their masculinity within a culture of hegemonic masculine norms, which exerts pressure to conform to traditional gender norms and positions them as subordinate. Furthermore, studies reviewed here are limited in that they only consider gender in binary terms. Nevertheless, gender plays a significant role in determining attitudes in monosexual communities.

Another important variable is contact with a bisexual individual. Lytle et al. (2017) applied Allport's *inter-group contact theory* to determine the effects of inter-group attitudes on binegativity. Their findings suggest that inter-group attitudes improve and that anxiety decreases when knowing a bisexual individual. De Bruin and Arndt's (2010) study among South African university students supports these findings. They report an approximate 6% variance towards a more positive attitude when being acquainted with a bi-person. Both studies support Allport's contact hypothesis, which holds that as binegativity is reduced, positive attitudes increase and negative stereotypes are disconfirmed (De Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Lytle et al., 2017). However, Lytle et al.'s (2017) study revealed certain exceptions due to sexual orientation and gender. For instance, high quality contact between heterosexual men and bi-individuals had no effect on attitudes towards bi-individuals, nor did it predict an increase in tolerance by gay and lesbian participants towards bi-individuals. Furthermore, quality contact did increase tolerance and perceived stability of female bisexuality, but not male bisexuality (Lytle et al., 2017). Such findings accentuate the significance of both, gender and sexual orientation as variables, and suggest important considerations for future interventions.

De Bruin and Arndt's (2010) SA study reported no significant statistical difference between Black and White students as far as their attitudes about bisexuality was concerned. On the other hand, in the USA, Dodge et al. (2016) found that race was a significant predictor of attitudes towards bi-people. They reported that Black participants reported more negative attitudes than did their White counterparts.

Religion: Although not bi-specific, Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy's (2015) results show that LGBTQ stigma and discrimination related to religion is prevalent at a rurally situated university in South Africa. Findings indicate that an array of labels are ascribed to LGBTQ-individuals, including “demon possessed” and “sinners.” Participants also reported attempts of conversion from LGBTQ to heterosexuality through religious interventions, derogatory language and rape, or the threat thereof (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015). These experiences are consistent with De Bruin and Arndt's (2010) study, which suggests that religion contributes substantially towards the development of negative attitudes and stereotypes about bisexuality. Further international research by Worthen (2013), and more recently Levy and Harr (2018), supports these findings. However, these studies are not satisfactory in their research design as gender was not included as a variable that could contribute to attitudes held by deeply religious participants (in this case Christians).

Rural/urban divide: Although no studies were found on the impact of geographical location on attitudes towards bi-sexual individuals, a study by Knight et al. (2016) considers the impact of the rural/urban divide on stigma. They suggest that compared to urban contexts, individuals in rural contexts tend to hold more negative attitudes towards the LGBTQ community. Knight et al. showed that self-monitoring, relative to one's minority sexual orientation, is dependent on whether that individual resides in an urban or rural setting, as urban settings are consistently more tolerant toward alternate life-styles. Knight et al. contend that in settings outside of urban contexts, the significance of developing and maintaining one's tendency to self-surveil may become particularly important to sexual minorities. This finding was substantiated by Khuzwayo and Morison's (2017) South African qualitative study of a bisexual woman's experiences.

Although the international studies referred to above are predominantly from the USA, results from these sources are relevant to bisexuality in the South African context only to some extent because of cultural differences. In addition, most of the cited research relied on predominantly White participants.

The majority of the participants in De Bruin and Arndt's (2010) study were Black, which makes it more representative of the South African context than the international studies; however, all participants were restricted to being university students. An advantage of De Bruin and Arndt's (2010, 2011) studies were, however, the adaptation of the psychometric instrument used to measure attitudes to ensure cross-cultural validity of the results obtained.

Several studies have been used to indicate the attitudinal variance associated with different biographical variables such as sexual orientation, gender, contact with a bi-person, race, religion and geographic location (e.g. De Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Helms & Waters, 2016; Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017; Levy & Harr, 2018; Lytle et al., 2017; Wandrey et al., 2015; Worthen, 2013). Collectively, these studies have indicated the importance of considering biographical variables when estimating the prevalence of negative attitudes towards specific bisexual communities.

3.3.2 Dual-Binegativity

Binegativity or *biphobia* refers to negative attitudes, prejudice and discrimination from both heterosexual and homosexual individuals toward bi-individuals (Hayfield, 2021). Binegativity is a deeply rooted part of bisexual peoples' everyday experience. It notably shapes how bi-individuals relate to their environment and view their own subjectivities (Hayfield et al., 2018). Hence, it is essential to understand binegativity if one seeks to understand bisexuality and its nuances.

Binegativity is not a variation of homophobia because of two major distinctions. First, it is unique in terms of content, and secondly, because it is high among both, straight and gay people, the prevalence and nature of binegativity is often referred to as *dual-sourced* (De Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Lytle et al., 2017). Regarding binegativity's unique content, bisexual individuals experience two distinct stereotypes. Firstly, bisexuality is regarded as unstable and an illegitimate sexual orientation. This manifests as stereotypes that bi-individuals are experimenting, in a liminal phase, confused, or in denial about being homosexual and are thus "cowards" (Gleason et al., 2018; Hayfield, 2021; Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017; Lytle et al., 2017). Secondly, bisexuals are stereotyped as being sexually irresponsible and consequently disloyal, hypersexual, incapable of monogamy or commitment, and an infectious bridge population (Gleason et al., 2018; Hayfield, 2021; Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017; Lytle et al., 2017). Francis (2017) regards these narratives as the "cost for transgressing the heterosexual norm" (p. 215). Although bisexuals are exposed to bi-specific minority stressors, Mereish et al. (2017) remind us that they also experience homophobia and heterosexism. Mereish et al. report that bisexual individuals are exposed to more victimization and violence than lesbian women, gay men or heterosexuals. This Robinson and Espelage (2011) confirmed in a USA-

survey, reporting that approximately 45% of bi-youth, compared to 30% of homosexual and 20% of straight youth, have experienced cyber-threat, harassment or bullying.

The dual-sourced nature of binegativity often results in a phenomenon commonly referred to as double discrimination (Barker et al., 2012; Mereish et al., 2017). De Bruin and Arndt's (2010) local study echoes these international findings. However, several researchers contest the notion of overt-discrimination, suggesting that hostility towards bi-individuals is expressed through microaggressions (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Flanders et al., 2016). Microaggressions refer to "the brief, common place, daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative ... slights and insults to the target person or group" (Flanders et al., 2016, p. 154). Examples of such microaggressions include the repudiation of bisexuality or dating exclusion by monosexuals (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Flanders et al., 2016). Hayfield et al. (2018) argue that these microaggressions are the consequence of the structural oppression of bi-individuals' everyday experiences, which often involve concealed and unexamined foundational assumptions that result in societal norms, values and prejudices at every level. This resonates with Bostwick and Hequembourg's (2014) findings of microaggressions and testimonial injustice towards bisexual women.

Dual-binegativity is unique to bi-individuals' experiences, and manifests through dual-microaggressions and/or overt double discrimination. Irrespective of what form binegativity takes, it shapes how bi-individuals view their own subjectivities and how they relate to their environment (Hayfield et al., 2018).

3.4 The Effects of Binegativity on Well Being

This section considers the effects of internal and external stressors, a consequence of the dual-binegativity discussed in the previous section. I then discuss the means by which bi-individuals cope with these stressors, considering individual characteristics as protective factors and identity management strategies to avoid discrimination. Finally, I briefly discuss the current literature on bi-specific interventions geared towards helping bi-people cope with these stressors.

3.4.1 Distal and Proximal Stressors

Applying the Minority Stress Model, Mereish et al. (2017) postulate that bi-individuals experience not only conventional stress, but also chronic distal (external) and proximal (internal) stressors due to bispecific stigma. They suggest that the impact of distal and proximal minority stressors on suicidality and mental distress is mediated by loneliness. Bisexuals are exposed to an increased risk for anxiety, depression, substance use and suicidality compared to monosexuals. These disparities extend to both physical and sexual health outcomes (Bostwick & Dodge, 2019; Choi et al., 2019; Mereish et al., 2017; Rimes et al., 2018).

In a study by Bostwick (2012) with self-identified bi-individuals, findings indicated that 37% of bi-men experience a mood disorder and 33% an anxiety disorder across their lifespan, compared to approximately 20% of heterosexuals for both. Further, 59% of bi-women reported experiencing a mood disorder and 58% an anxiety disorder, which was considerably higher than their heterosexual counterparts at 31% for both. Finally, findings from a study by Calderwood et al. (2018) suggest that more than a third of bi-men and almost half of bi-women have seriously considered or attempted taking their own lives. Although these statistics are not directly applicable to South Africa, several local researchers have documented the presence and similar experiences of binegativity (e.g. De Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Francis, 2017; Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017; Lynch & Maree, 2013; Stobie, 2011). To shed light on these disparities, I discuss the various components of the minority stress model and how these components interact.

Distal stressors include external dual-binegativity, exposure to anti-bisexual prejudice, microaggressions or double discrimination, as discussed in the previous section. Several studies indicate that distal stressors in isolation are significant contributors to the aforementioned disparities (Bostwick & Dodge, 2019; Dodge et al., 2016; Flanders et al., 2016; Mereish et al., 2017). *Proximal stressors* include internalized binegativity, which is associated with the negative effects of society's heterosexist or monosexist points of view on the development of a bisexual identity (Roberts et al., 2015). Binegativity is internalized when an individual unintentionally concurs with negative conceptualisations of bisexuality that develop into negative feelings and beliefs regarding their own bisexual orientation (Roberts et al., 2015). Eventually, internalized binegativity may result in other proximal stressors such as sexual identity conflict and uncertainty, sexual identity concealment and struggles with self-

esteem (Lytle et al., 2017; Mereish et al., 2017). Evidence indicates that a bi-individual is more likely to experience certain proximal stressors, such as concealment, in comparison to other sexual minorities (Mereish et al., 2017). Gates' (2010) findings suggest that bi-individuals are six times more likely than homosexuals to conceal their sexual orientation. This was substantiated by a survey conducted in the USA, that estimated that 77% of gay men and 71% of lesbian women have disclosed their sexual orientation to all the significant people in their lives, in contrast to only 28% of bi-individuals (Suh, 2013). Such concealment is a source of constant fear and anxiety about being “outed” and subsequently rejected, which results in proximal minority stresses and mental health concerns (Roberts et al., 2015). Consequently, bi-individuals are at greater risk of developing negative sexual identities compared to monosexual individuals (Lytle et al., 2017).

Research findings suggest that both proximal and distal minority stressors disrupt bi-individuals' interpersonal relationships and are associated with diminished social support and well-being, isolation and loneliness (Choi et al., 2019; Mereish et al., 2017; Roberts et al., 2015). Andre et al.'s (2014) research, which studied bi-youth's social experiences in the United States, revealed that 24% bi-youth, compared to 13% straight youth report are frequently excluded by peers for being different. Further, 29% bi-youth, in contrast to only 9% heterosexual youth, report verbal harassment (Andre et al., 2014).

A weighty contributing factor is the lack of communities that accommodate bisexuals and specifically concentrate on bisexuality. Contrary to Goffman's (1990) assumption that individuals who experience the same stigma are sympathetic towards others with similar experience, Orne (2013) points out that a range of labels exist that queer individuals use to describe identity. To Orne, the stigmatised are not as homogenized as Goffman suggests. In fact, findings indicate that bi-individuals experience less connectedness and do not tend to equate the queer community as a source of support for their well-being the way lesbian/gay individuals do (Flanders et al., 2016; Orne, 2013). Bi-individuals often report experiences of alienation from society due to the compounding effect of dual-binegativity (Choi et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2015). In addition, bi-individuals often do not feel a sense of belonging with similar others, they have a diminished capacity to acquire resources and support, and frequently develop their sexual identity in isolation (Choi et al., 2019; De Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Lytle et al., 2017; Mereish et al., 2017; Roberts et al., 2015). Research indicates that individuals who lack appropriate amounts of social support of their bisexual identity may find self-acceptance challenging (Roberts et al., 2015; Shilo & Savaya, 2011).

Dyar and London's (2018) results show that proximal (internal) stressors, such as internalised binegativity and sexual identity uncertainty increases as bi-individuals' exposure to bisexual stigmatisation increases. This, in turn, results in sexual identity uncertainty, internalised binegativity, depression and anxiety. This is in consonance with Israel et al. (2019) who contend that "negative attitudes and beliefs about one's own bisexuality can develop from chronic exposure to binegative discrimination and prejudice" (p. 149). Schick et al. (2012) alert to the fact that dual-binegativity may pressure individuals into adopting incongruent identities, which may interrupt identity development, resulting in cognitive dissonance and subsequent adverse mental health outcomes. In contrast to these researchers, Mereish et al. (2017) suggest that there is not a strong association between distal and proximal minority stressors, as is the case with other sexual minorities, implying that these minority stressors occur independently, yet may be experienced simultaneously. Other researchers' results support these findings and provide a possible explanation for how loneliness acts as a mediator for both proximal and distal stressors (Shilo & Savaya, 2011). Findings suggest an association between increased experiences of support from friends with an increase in public self-disclosure of bi-identity. Logically, private self-acceptance is associated with a supportive family (Shilo & Savaya, 2011). These findings shed light on how distal and proximal stressors may be targeted through interventions and that having the acceptance and support of both friends and family is critical to boosting positive public identification and self-acceptance as bisexual.

3.4.2 Bisexual Individuals' Attitudes in the face of Binegativity

Research indicates that not all bisexual individuals react to binegativity in the same way; however, findings suggest that regardless of their attitude, all participants demonstrate elevated levels of anticipation of binegativity (Choi et al., 2019). This suggests that the negative effects of binegativity on this population could be so pronounced that no reaction is experienced as a positive event (Flanders et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, a subgroup of the bi-population demonstrates resilience and positive attitudes towards their bi-identity (Bostwick & Dodge, 2019; Choi et al., 2019; Rostosky et al., 2018). Choi et al.'s (2019) findings illustrate the importance of comprehending divergent bi-identities and the difference this can make on mental health and resilience. Findings suggest that individuals may hold one of three distinct psychological orientations towards their own

bisexuality, namely affirmative, vigilant and ambivalent. The *affirmative* profile refers to positive evaluations of one's own bisexuality, while an individual with a *vigilant* profile is notably perturbed with people's response towards their bisexuality. Lastly, the *ambivalent* profile includes positive, but predominantly negative attitudes toward their own bisexuality.

Findings also suggest that vigilant bi-individuals have the least favourable mental health outcomes, while the affirmative profile has a protective function (Choi et al., 2019). This is indicative of the positive effects of having an affirmative attitude towards one's bisexual identity. Other researchers suggest that positive associations with a bi-identity may include finding and belonging to a community, authentic living, possessing a unique perspective on life, being an advocate, being self-reflective and experiencing the freedom to explore one's sexuality (Rostosky et al., 2010). Researchers agree that there is a lack of research that considers such positive, protective factors or attitudes (Bostwick & Dodge, 2019; Choi et al., 2019; Rostosky et al., 2010). Hence, further research is needed to confirm profile consistency across cultures and genders, given that 81% of the participants were White US citizens and 79% of the participants were female in Choi et al.'s study (2019).

This section has provided an overview of some attitudes that individuals may have towards their own sexual identity, and the risk or protective factors associated with their attitude. Despite this, it is important to be cognisant that each bi-individual is exposed to unique experiences of acceptance and rejection, which shape the relationship to their own sexuality.

3.4.3 Coming Out as a means of Identity Management

Self-identification and disclosure (coming out) as bisexual is considered an essential step in sexual minority development (Roberts et al., 2015; Wandrey et al., 2015). However, coming out has its complexities as it occurs within a toxic milieu of hetero- and mononormativity, in which bisexual individuals experience immense social pressure to mis-identify with a monosexual orientation (Roberts et al., 2015). Given the prevalence of bi-erasure and invisibility, bisexuals are frequently assumed to be straight, gay or lesbian, in both queer and heterosexual communities. Coming out is thus required in both communities, and often several times (Mereish et al., 2017). A negative cycle might commence due to these social pressures. Bi-individuals may experience increased uncertainty regarding their different and same-gender attraction, consequently reinforcing monosexist conceptions of bisexuality as

illegitimate (Roberts et al., 2015). Hence, hesitation to disclose one's sexuality may result, which contributes to the *social invisibility* of bisexuality (Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017). Conversely, self-disclosure may create undesired exposure and possible discrimination (Roberts et al., 2015). Most bi-individuals thus have to confront a great deal of internalized binegativity prior to being capable of seeing themselves as bisexual and coming out (Hayfield et al., 2018).

Due to the assimilation of bi-individuals' data with gay/lesbian data, there is a lack of research about how bi-people experience and deal with stigma (Flanders et al., 2016). Maliepaard (2018) points out that in the past, coming out was idealised, creating an illusory dichotomy, which frames non-disclosure as "bad" and coming out as "good." However, this grossly simplifies coming out, as research suggests that bisexual individuals use an array of coming out strategies, including non-disclosure, which involves concealing one's identity and "passing" as either gay or straight. An alternative would be using *strategic outness* or disclosure as required, depending on the context, or complete rejection of any conventional labels. Lastly, indirect or "casual" disclosures can allow for a gauging of others' reactions or attitudes before coming out (Choi et al., 2019; Maliepaard, 2018; Orne, 2013).

Strategic outness requires varying degrees of self-monitoring and presentation management. Knight et al. (2016) define *self-monitoring* or *self-surveillance* as "an ubiquitous social psychological construct that captures the extent to which individuals regulate their self-presentation to match the expectation of others" (p. 1). Knight et al. contend that self-monitoring differs according to social and demographic contexts. They also found that self-surveillance was greatest among sexual minorities, especially in contexts with elevated amounts of stigma towards them. Rule and Alaei (2016) demonstrate that functioning can be impeded when one tries to mask one's sexuality, as continuously regulating sexual orientation signs and ensuring that none become visible is a major stress to bear.

Goffman (1990) postulated that disclosure equates to situations of complete acceptance, while concealment and fear with situations of hostility. Contemporary researchers' results support Goffmanian identity management strategies in the face of stigma, but only in extreme cases (Orne, 2013). Recent results seem to illustrate that strategic outness is used by sexual minorities in situations between the extreme poles of acceptance and hostility (Choi et al., 2019; Orne, 2013). These are situations characterised by stigmatisation, interrogation or questioning of one's bi-identity (Maliepaard, 2018; Orne, 2013). Orne (2013), using Du Bois'

(1903) notion of *double consciousness*, postulates that bi-individuals are able to see a situation through both, the eyes of the “normals” and the marginalised, which enables them to engage in strategic outness, empowering the marginalised to become stigma-resistant and manage their identity. Other researchers confirm strategic outness by noting that bisexuals engage in a process of coming out (Maliapaard, 2018) or make use of a variety of sexual identity labels (e.g. gay, lesbian, queer or pansexual), which they alternate according to the social context (Choi et al., 2019). An example of this would be when a bisexual man self-identifies as gay to avoid stigma or questioning of his sexuality in one setting, but identifies as bisexual or pansexual in settings he perceives as safe (Choi et al., 2019).

Watson (2014) theorizes that the family is located between the public and private domains of society; therefore, considering the social construction of “the family closet” is vital. Watson shows how bi-disclosure to one’s family is selective and based on an array of socio-cultural factors, including prevailing discourses surrounding gender and sexuality, religion and geographical location. Findings show that bi-individuals’ family closets are often only partially constructed as they engage in strategic outness to various family members, allowing it to be inhibiting and yet paradoxically protective. Consequently, interactions with fathers, mothers and siblings are often completely different (Watson, 2014).

Although other studies confirmed the use of strategic outness, they did not equate it to identity management, as done by Orne (2013). Orne’s qualitative study focused on members of the LGB community and did not focus on the experiences of bi-individuals specifically; however, bi-interviews were analysed and discussed separately. Although data about bi-participants did not reach saturation, the study did reveal an important avenue for future research projects, specifically a focus on bisexuals’ experiences of coming out in queer spaces and the non-traditional identity management strategies they use.

3.4.4 Intervention and Protective Factors

Dyar and London's (2018) results show that an increase in internalized binegativity is linked to a simultaneous decrease in strength of bi-identification and a subsequent increase in variations of identity management strategies, such as asserting a monosexual identity label. Variations in identification correlated with elevated symptoms of depression and anxiety, while increased concealment was associated with elevated anxiety. According to Israel et al.

(2019), the consequences of internalized binegativity include self-loathing, buying into debasing and harmful stereotypes, and making deleterious appraisals of other bi-people.

Dyar and London (2018) underscore that comprehending these internalised processes is central to addressing bi-individuals' distress in psychotherapy. Concomitantly, Israel et al. (2019) designed a bi-specific intervention targeting the bi-population's needs by focusing on (1) combating bi-stereotypes, (2) identifying and rejecting negative messaging, (3) reinforcing the rejection of harmful messaging, and (4) promoting bi-affirmations. Despite these bi-specific stressors, Israel et al. note that prior to their study intervention, none had previously been devoted to specifically decrease internalized binegativity.

3.5 South African Qualitative Research

South African based researchers concur that there is a dearth in both quantitative and qualitative studies with self-identified bi-individuals (Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017; Lynch & Maree, 2013). This is partly due to the tendency to predominantly apply a behavioural operational definition when studying men's bisexual practices. This has not only introduced bias into research, but has also neglected bisexual women. In this section, I discuss local qualitative studies that capture the experiences of South African individuals.

Francis' (2017) qualitative study accentuates the dominance of heteronormativity in teachers' narratives about sexuality in some South African schools, highlighting the resulting erasure and invisibility of bisexuality and the accompanying microaggressions. This echoes international research findings regarding microaggressions (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Flanders et al., 2017). However, the findings also emphasize students' responses to these heteronormative and heterosexist positions, as several students reported resisting these norms due to their personal understandings and experiences. This position of resistance derives from their perspective that their bisexual identity is stable and important to them, and that it is the biphobic who are "misunderstanding" and "confused" (Francis, 2017). These accounts illustrate and resonate with Choi et al.'s (2019) conception of an affirmative profile. Although this study had a small sample (n=5), most of the sample were black learners, and captured the experiences of a historically under-researched population.

Lynch and Maree (2013) similarly investigated the influence of heteronormativity within the South African context. They specifically considered the impact of traditional social norms

around heterosexual marriage on bi-women. They found that traditional discourses exude powerful pressures on how the participants' notions of relationships and families are constructed, regardless of the fact that they positioned themselves outside heteronormativity. Participants had several different reactions to these dominant relationship discourses, varying from idealisation to actively challenging them (Lynch & Maree, 2013). Despite these reactions, Lynch and Maree's (2013) findings suggest that heteronormativity prevents the bi-participants from integrating their sexuality into their experiences. Regardless of being single or in a same- or different-gender relationship, these discourses exerted a suppressive influence on the participants' subjectivities (Lynch & Maree, 2013). This confirms and illustrates Bostwick and Hequembourg's (2014) understanding of the potential effects of epistemic injustice, as dominant discourses have become internalised barriers that inhibit or diminish these women's freedom to develop authentic subjectivities.

Lynch and Maree (2018) further explored how bi-women, using the discursive resources available to them to resist and trouble hetero-gendered norms. Findings indicate that participants' narratives legitimised and normalised bisexuality through establishing new binaries due to their talk being rooted in heteronormativity, which undermined their ability to queer. This is consistent with queer theory and the impact of creating new subcultural categories (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Nevertheless, Lynch and Maree (2018) found that the participants opted for a "slow bending" of norms as opposed to explicit gender trouble.

Drawbacks of these two studies resulted from convenience and snowball sampling. Participants were from relatively privileged socio-economic backgrounds, living in urban areas and in both studies, the majority of participants were White (Lynch & Maree, 2013).

Khuzwayo and Morison's (2017) study, takes a step towards remedying this by applying an intersectional approach that considers how bisexuality intersects with aspects of race, gender, location and class. This study illustrates the importance of understanding various biographical variables and how they constitute the social environments of participants as previously explored in section 3.3.1. However, the study is limited, as findings are based on a single autobiographical narrative by Khuzwayo (one of the main authors). Nevertheless, the study provides a rich account of a Black self-identified bisexual woman's experience within the context of post-apartheid South Africa. As an exploratory study, it reveals several avenues for future research projects. Analysis of her interview shows how erasure occurs within her context through specific acts, namely *misrecognition* - people's failure to recognise

bisexuality, *non-recognition* - acts or comments that discredit her sexuality and *resistance* - which includes the norms that restrict her due to threats of physical or symbolic violence. Both misrecognition and non-recognition resonate with Bostwick and Hequembourg's (2014) argument of epistemic injustice. Misrecognition relates to the incomprehensibility of bisexuality while non-recognition relates to acts that invalidate and discredit a person's social identity (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Hayfield, 2021), and also represent daily experiences of microaggressions (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Flanders et al., 2016). Finally, resistance echoes experiences of overt double discrimination as previously affirmed by both local and international scholars (e.g. Barker, Yockney, et al., 2012; Bostwick & Dodge, 2019; De Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Dodge et al., 2016; Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017; Mereish et al., 2017). The study also highlights her use of *strategic outness* within her various social environments, which echoes Orne's (2013) findings. Equivalent studies that focus on self-identified men's experiences could not be found for the South African context.

3.6 Conclusion

In this literature review, I highlighted the significant impact that the operational definition of bisexuality has had on past research. I addressed the impact of erasure and the resulting invisibility and invalidation of bisexuality in sexualities research and in popular culture. These instances of erasure, invalidation and invisibility occur because societies' understanding of sexuality is rooted in hetero- and mononormativity. I also illustrated the consequences of epistemic injustice considering the ways erasure and invisibility exacerbate the unrestricted and unconsidered adoption of bi-stereotypes. Consequently, when the bisexual minority does make themselves visible they are subjected to surplus visibility and invalidation.

I further demonstrated the importance of considering various biographical variables when considering attitudes towards bi-individuals. This is important not only to understand varying degrees of binegativity, but also the different environments that specific bi-individuals are exposed to because of their own demographic profile. This highlights the importance for an intersectional approach to studying bisexuality in general. However, it was also established that binegativity is a deeply rooted part of all bi-individuals' daily experience, hence the review highlights how binegativity manifests as overt double discrimination or through subtle microaggressions. Irrespective of the nature of binegativity, researchers agree that proximal

and distal stressors result in, and consequently lead to, an increase of physical and mental health risk factors. Binegativity also impacts bi-individuals' sexual identity and requires that they manage their identities to resist stigma. Thus, although the rights of bi-individuals are enshrined in the South African Bill of Rights, dominant norms persist in limiting the optimal development and well-being of bi-individuals in SA.

According to several researchers, there has been a significant amount of quantitative research about behavioural bi-men, both locally and internationally (Bostwick & Dodge, 2019; Kaestle & Ivory, 2012; Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017; Lynch & Maree, 2013). The international qualitative studies considered in this paper are mainly from the USA that tend to gather data predominantly from White participants. This significantly restricts the credibility of the findings for the South African context. From the literature search, it is evident that there is a dearth in local qualitative studies that consider self-identified bi-individuals' experiences. My qualitative study aimed to address the knowledge gap by exploring self-identified bisexual university students' lived experiences of their bisexuality, including experiences of binegativity and support within their various communities, and to understand the factors that limit and support their well-being.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I first restate the aims and objectives of the study, as well as the research paradigm, from which I elicit my methodology. Subsequently, I provide a detailed description of the participants, the sampling strategy and procedures, data collection, management and process of analysis. Thereafter, I reflect on how I addressed aspects of trustworthiness and conclude with the ethical considerations of this study.

4.2 Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study was to explore South African bisexual university students' lived experiences of their bisexual identity, within their family and community environments, among their university peers and within the queer community. Hence, I endeavoured to answer the following research questions:

1. What are bisexual students' lived experiences of their bi-identity within their family, among their university peers and within their heterosexual and queer communities?
2. What are bisexual students' lived experiences of binegativity, if any, within their family, among their university peers and within their heterosexual and queer communities?
3. What is the level of support bisexual students experience when exposed to binegativity?

4.3 Qualitative Research Paradigm

4.3.1 Social Constructionism

Social constructionists repudiate the assumption that knowledge comprises an objective view of reality. Instead, they posit that our unique versions of reality are culturally and socially constructed between us. Thus, "truth" or "objective fact" are problematic concepts when knowledge is conceptualised as culturally and historically contingent. All knowledge is

assumed to be derived from a specific world view, advancing some people's interests as opposed to others' (Burr, 2015). According to Burr (2015), the four fundamental assumptions of social constructionism include:

(1) *A critical position relative to presumed knowledge.* Questioning the categories of "heterosexual" and "homosexual," for instance, as purely natural distinctions between people increases our awareness of the cloudiness of such categorisation, especially when we consider bisexuality and the normative prescriptions for binarised sexualities.

(2) *All ways of knowing are culturally and historically contingent and are products of these factors.* The ways we understand categories and notions of sexuality are culturally and historically specific, and thus relative.

(3) *Social processes sustain knowledge.* It is assumed that people's daily interactions are the means through which our collective variant of knowledge is constructed. Consequently, all social interactions are of interest to social constructionists, particularly language and how we construct categories through discourses.

(4) *Social action and knowledge are two sides of the same coin.* Every version of a construction is accompanied by a unique type of human action. Some patterns of social action are sustained, while others are excluded by constructions of the world. Consequently, as Burr (2015) contends, social constructions are "bound up with power relations because they have implications for what is permissible for different people to do, and how they may legitimately treat others" (p. 5). Thus, critical psychologists consider the individual within their social context and where they are positioned relative to inequality, power and difference, while providing alternate interpretations of psychological phenomena, including sexuality (Burr, 2015).

Power and privilege play a significant role in what is constructed. For instance, the power of *compulsory heterosexuality* (Rich, 1980) marginalises other forms of sexuality that were constructed as deviant (Foucault, 1978). Since norms around sexuality are constructed through discourse, it is the interaction between dominant discourses and the participants' *reverse discourse* (Foucault, 1978) that allows us to understand how the bi-participants of this study create meaning.

For this exploratory study, I used a qualitative research design, which allowed me to develop an extensive, in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences of being bisexual in the world (Josselson, 2013). Given my research questions, social constructionism helped me make sense of how the participants' experiences are influenced by other social actors and contexts. In summary, social constructionism is well suited to helping us understand how discourses/social narratives (class, race, gender, sexuality, ability) about how people should be in the world inadvertently influence the participants' lives and how they make meaning of the world.

4.3.2 Queering Methodology

Queer theorists contend that our reality can be known by studying power dynamics, control, oppression, freedom and societal structures (Alexander, 2018). Thus, research aims and objectives should be geared toward allowing the investigator to comprehend the specific circumstances, inequities, identities, power dynamics and hierarchies that disadvantage and exclude certain people (Alexander, 2018). Needless to say, knowledge should not be exclusively constructed by the powerful, but also by individuals whose experiences and voices have been suppressed. Given that non-conforming sexualities tend to be marginalised in a patriarchal, heteronormative SA context, I explored how the participants construct the meaning of their bi-identities within the reality of identity struggle and power dynamics that rest on privilege or oppression.

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest several ways in which critical queer theory can be used to queer an interpretivist-constructionist paradigm. These include: (1) The researcher should be conscious not to ostracise interviewees by respecting each participant and the research site (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research site, in my case, was virtual and I was invited into people's intimate spaces. One interviewee, for example, was hiding in what seemed to be a laundry room during the interview, while several others often stopped the interview process for fear of being overheard. In these instances, I was conscious not to judge my participants in any way. (2) Attention is given to who is conveying the narrative, including the multiple perspectives captured in the story (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By attentively transcribing and analysing the interviews, participants' narratives and their meanings are conveyed. (3) Throughout the research process, the researcher must be aware of the power difference, respecting diversity as opposed to following the convention of aggregating experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this regard, I implemented a sampling strategy that would ensure

diversity and was respectful of participants' identities. Further, I deliberately included a variety of stories from these participants, not only dominant accounts, thus ensuring a diversity of experiences in the findings and discussion. (4) A researcher should be conscious that knowledge is being co-constructed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Hence, for ethical purposes, I include a reflection on my subjective lens as a researcher and demonstrate awareness of my position of power, as well as my role as the custodian of information. (5) The need to appeal for societal transformation through any number of channels (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My intention is to share the findings of this study with the university's transformation office, the equality unit, queer organisations and student counselling services to improve the support received by students who identify as bisexual. I further intend to disseminate the findings by publishing a journal article.

In line with critical queer theory, I used these guidelines to answer the research questions and provide a measure of cultural criticism, but also to create an opening for knowing the world through a different lens.

4.4 Sampling

4.4.1 Participants and their Social Contexts

Twelve students, all registered at Stellenbosch University (SU) and aged 18 to 47, participated in this study. Six self-identified as bisexual (two female and four male), three as both bi and pan (two male and one female), and three self-identified as pan (three female), as per Table 4.1. Of the 12 participants, two identified as gender non-binary, and eight identified as cisgender men and women. It should be noted that throughout this thesis I will use the participants' preferred pronouns, as illustrated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Sex	Gender	Preferred pronouns	Sexual orientation	Age	Relationship status
Prashant	Male	Man	he / him	Bisexual	22	Single
Jenny	Female	Woman	she / her	Bisexual	21	Single
Brian	Male	Man	he/ him	Bisexual/ Pansexual	24	Partnered
Martin	Male	Man	he / him	Bisexual	19	Partnered
Estian	Male	Man	he/ him	Bisexual/ Pansexual	21	Partnered
Thandie	Female	Non-Binary	they / them	Pansexual	20	Single
Kefilwe	Female	Woman	she / her	Bisexual	19	Single
Vela	Female	Woman	she / her	Pansexual	21	Single
Yumna	Female	Non-Binary	they / them	Pansexual	20	Single
Bongani	Male	Man	he/ him	Bisexual	47	Single
Sifiso	Male	Man	he / him	Bisexual	18	Single
Lerato	Female	Woman	she / her	Bisexual/ Pansexual	25	Single

As illustrated in Table 4.2, the participants stem from various provinces of SA, with hometowns in both rural and urban settings. Further, they speak a variety of home languages. All participants were raised in religious households.

Table 4.2

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Race	Home Language	Religious background	Hometown location: Province	Hometown location:
Prashant	Indian	English	Hindu	KwaZulu Natal (KZN)	Urban
Jenny	White	English	Christian	Western Cape (WC)	Urban
Brian	Bi-racial	Afrikaans	Christian	Northern Cape (NC)	Urban
Martin	White	English	Christian	KwaZulu Natal (KZN)	Urban
Estian	White	Afrikaans	Christian	Western Cape (WC)	Urban
Thandie	Black	Zulu	African Christian	KwaZulu Natal (KZN)	Rural
Kefilwe	Black	Setswana	African Christian	Gauteng (GAU)	Urban
Vela	Black	Xhosa	African Christian	Eastern Cape (EC)	Rural
Yumna	Coloured	English	Islam / Muslim	Western Cape (WC)	Urban
Bongani	Black	Xhosa/ Sotho	African Christian & African spirituality	Eastern Cape (EC)	Rural
Sifiso	Black	Zulu	African Christian	Gauteng (GAU)	Urban
Lerato	Black	Zulu	African Christian	Mpumalanga (MPU)	Rural

As illustrated in Table 4.3, I recruited nine participants from the main campus in a peri-urban town, two from the satellite campus in an urban area. One participant was studying remotely and lived in a metropolitan area.

Table 4.3

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Degree Year	Campus	Member of a queer organisation
Prashant	Undergrad 4 th year	Main	No
Jenny	Undergrad 3 rd year	Main	Yes
Brian	Undergrad 4 th year	Main	No
Martin	Undergrad 1 st year	Main	No
Estian	Undergrad 3 rd year	Main	No
Thandie	Undergrad 3 rd year	Main	Yes
Kefilwe	Undergrad 2 nd year	Satellite	Yes
Vela	Undergrad 3 rd year	Main	No
Yumna	Undergrad 3 rd year	Main	No
Bongani	Postgrad	Remote	No
Sifiso	Undergrad 1 st year	Satellite	Yes
Lerato	Postgrad	Main	Yes

4.4.2 Sampling Strategy

Participants were recruited by employing non-probability sampling, namely, purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves the strategic selection of participants and ensures that the sample is relevant to the research question and central study phenomena (Bryman, 2016). Creswell and Poth (2018) note that various purposive sampling types may be combined as needed. For the current study, I used both *intensity* and *maximum variation* sampling. *Intensity sampling* refers to seeking cases that provide a great deal of rich information regarding the phenomenon but do not constitute extreme cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). *Maximum variation sampling* refers to a strategy whereby certain variables (such as race, age, sex and gender) are selected before recruitment and then purposefully selecting participants that differ significantly on these variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Gaining access to the bi-population presented me with particular difficulties in identifying and recruiting participants. Hartman (2011) notes that a significant hurdle to recruiting sexual minority individuals is that they may resist identification due to the risk of discrimination and stigma. These risks may be amplified through intersecting marginalisation. Hartman contends that convenience and snowball sampling tends to result in a biased sample with very similar minority experiences. Therefore, responding to Hartman's call for more diverse sampling in LGBTQ studies, which tend to rely too heavily on LGBTQ organisations and White samples, I employed several recruitment steps. First, through intensity sampling, I aimed to broaden the frame by including all bi and pan individuals enrolled at SU, thus not only focusing on those in the university's LGBTQ organisations. Second, to ensure that my findings reflect diverse perspectives and experiences of the same phenomenon, I used maximum variation sampling to maximise differences in the participants' demographic variables from the onset. Variables used to recruit participants included race, sex, gender, ethnicity, home language, class, religious background, age and year of study, region of origin within SA and engagement with LGBTQ organisations. To ensure the diversity of my sample, individuals interested in participating in the study were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D), which I used to purposively select a sample based on the mentioned variables.

4.4.3 Sampling Procedure

Upon obtaining approval from the Research Ethics Committee (REC) (See Appendix G) and SU institutional permission (See Appendix H), I invited students to participate in the study through a university-wide e-mail to which a flyer was attached (See Appendix A and B). The invitation explained the study, and what prospective participants could expect in the interview process. From an activist perspective, this also increased bi/pan awareness and legitimacy in the university because the entire student population became aware of this study and its objectives. Willing students provided me with their contact information, and I recruited those who met the inclusion criteria, ensuring my maximum variation sampling strategy.

4.4.4 Sample Size

As explained above, this study is rooted in a social constructionist perspective. From this view, “knowledge is considered partial, intermediate, and dependent of the situated view of the researcher,” which means that qualitative research that attempts to consist of a complete set of facts is not supported (Malterud et al., 2016). In qualitative research, one’s sample should not be too small. However, Malterud et al. question how realistic it is to recruit a sample that covers all the variations of a phenomenon. Instead of using saturation to guide the process of determining sample size, I thus applied Malterud et al.’s (2016) concept of *information power*. They suggest that a sample’s information power depends on (1) the study aim, (2) the quality of the interviews, (3) the specificity of the sample, (4) the use of existing theory, and (5) the type of analysis. Malterud et al. further state that a study with participants who have diverse experiences and are recruited through purposive sampling may find that 6-10 participants could offer sufficient information power. For an exploratory study such as this one, the aim was not to obtain a comprehensive account of every aspect of the studied phenomena. Instead, the intention was to contribute and challenge existing understandings. With this in mind, I continuously monitored these five factors of information power to determine the final sample of 12 participants.

4.5 Data Collection

4.5.1 The Virtual Setting for the Semi-structured Interview

I conducted virtual semi-structured interviews with each participant, using Zoom or any similar app with an audio-visual capability and audio recording function. Participants were asked to select a quiet, comfortable space during the interviews. This ensured that they would not be disturbed while also providing an ideal environment for audio recording (see data management below).

4.5.2 Virtual Semi-structured Interviews

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews, ideal for providing me with insight into participants' experiences and eliciting personalised responses (Bryman, 2016). I used an interview schedule (see Appendix E) to structure and guide the interviews. The interview schedule included a series of open-ended questions, which allowed respondents to disclose what they felt was relevant and allowed me to ask probing questions (Bryman, 2016). The interviews lasted between 90 to 120 minutes; they were conversational, flexible and fluid, allowing the participants' narratives to unfold organically.

I first established rapport with each participant to elicit a rich narrative. Rapport is fundamental to the interview process as it encourages participation in, and perseverance with, the interview process (Bryman, 2016). I also took additional steps in line with Glueck's (2013) recommendations to offset any barriers to establishing rapport in the virtual interviews, including: (1) sufficient bandwidth to enable real-time visual cues on high-resolution video so that I could convey empathy and show that I was listening, thus allowing the participants to "read" my emotional tone and responses; (2) being conscious of the camera position in order to minimize "eye-gaze distortions;" and (3) ensuring that the microphones on both ends were correctly placed and sensitive enough to ensure adequate real-time verbal communication.

As the interviewer, I did not sense that the virtual interview setting hindered the interview process. In fact, the "screen" may have helped participants feel more comfortable in sharing their experiences as all participants reported that they experienced the interview process as relaxed and meaningful.

Josselson (2013) contends that “the interviewer is the instrument and the procedure” (p. 12). In this respect, I aimed to understand my contribution to the co-construction of data within the interview space to the best of my ability, while also acknowledging any blind-spots (see reflexivity of the researcher below). Furthermore, the value and richness of an interview is contingent upon the interviewer’s ability to empathise and relate to the interviewee. Sharing a common identity with these participants allowed me to establish a safe space where they would not feel othered (see ethical considerations below). This commonality also helped participants trust me with their lived experiences. Despite these advantages, interviewing is an art and skill that can be learnt and improved (Josselson, 2013); hence my supervisor listened to my first two interviews and provided feedback on my interviewing style and process. This feedback enhanced my skills and helped me to think critically about my relationship with the interviewees.

4.5.3 Procedure

After implementing the maximum variation sampling strategy discussed above, I emailed the informed consent form to participants (see Appendix C). Participants were encouraged to ask questions before signing the form, thus indicating their understanding of what had been communicated to them, and returning the form prior to the start of the interview. Before commencing with the interview, I granted them another opportunity to ask questions about the study and informed them of their right to withdraw from the interview at any time without consequence. I began each interview by briefing the participant about the research aims and informed consent (see ethical considerations below). This introduction aided the process of establishing rapport.

I used the interview schedule to understand the participants’ experiences of bisexuality and binegativity (see Appendix E). The interview schedule was designed so that questions ranged from more general to more probing questions as the interview continued, thus helping me establish rapport with my participants (Bryman, 2016). Interviews with the research participants (data collection) continued until the information power was adequate (Malterud et al., 2016).

4.6 Data Management

I audio-recorded the interviews using the communication apps' recording function and a second recording device in case of technical issues. After completing each interview, I transcribed the recordings per Braun and Clarke's (2013) four recommendations. First, I transcribed interviews verbatim, including all verbal and non-verbal communication, such as words, sounds, laughter and pauses (see Appendix F). Second, I used transcription software to slow down the playback speed, pause and rewind. These features helped me decipher exactly what was said, allowing me to maintain the quality of the transcripts. Third, upon completing a transcript, I verified that I transcribed the data correctly by comparing it with the interview recording. This brought me closer to the data and supported the process of generating key themes while simultaneously becoming aware of differences and similarities in participants' accounts. Fourth, during the transcription process, I protected the anonymity of the participants by omitting all identifying information and using pseudonyms. While doing this, I ensured that the meaning of the text did not change. The transcripts were verified by my supervisor, who listened to the audio recordings and compared them to my transcripts. All transcriptions were digitally stored on my password-protected computer in my locked office, to which only I have full access.

Thereafter I uploaded the transcripts to Atlas.ti - a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software that does not analyse the data, but supports the process and saves time. This process consists of coding data segments, which then enable the program to organize them systematically (Friese, 2012). As per Friese's (2012) recommendation, I used Atlas.ti in conjunction with a qualitative data analysis technique discussed below.

4.7 Data Analysis

To analyse the data, I used *reflexive thematic analysis* that assumed an inductive approach, as the codes and themes are grounded in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2020). This bottom-up approach made sure that my analytic lens does not override participants' narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2012). However, Braun and Clarke (2020) emphasise "the importance of the researcher's subjectivity as analytic resource, and their reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation" (p. 3). Through reflexive thematic analysis, I generated and developed meaningful patterns (themes) from the data set. To arrive at these themes, I followed the six phases below, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2012, 2020) to analyse the data.

Although I present these phases in a linear fashion, arriving at the themes was an iterative process.

(1) *Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes*: I verified that I correctly transcribed the data by comparing the transcript with the recorded interviews. Thereafter, I read and re-read the transcripts to immerse myself in the data. To start thinking analytically about the data, I annotated the transcripts while reading them (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 2020).

(2) *Systematic data coding*: Braun and Clarke (2012) state that “codes are the building blocks of analysis” (p. 61). I used semantic and latent coding to label data segments relevant to the research question in a way that was close to the participants’ meanings.

(3) *Generating initial themes from coded and collated data*: In this phase, I reviewed the coded data and identified areas of similarity and overlap between the identified codes. This allowed me to cluster codes that share some unifying features in order to generate the themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 2020). The analytic process involved immersing myself in the data by “reading, reflecting, questioning, imagining, wondering, writing, retreating, returning” (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 5). I then generated five themes to describe patterns in the data in a meaningful and coherent way, while the relationship between themes conveyed a story about the data as a whole.

(4) *Developing and reviewing themes*: Braun and Clarke (2012) describe this phase as a “recursive process” (p. 65). In the case of this study, this meant performing a quality check by reviewing the themes relative to coded data and the entire data set.

(5) *Refining, defining and naming themes*: Directly addressing my research question, I clearly stated each theme’s specific and distinct characteristics, thus preventing significant overlap between themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 2020). In this stage, I created tables representing the various Themes, sub-themes and categories (see table 4.4).

(6) *Writing the report*: Producing the report was an iterative process. Typical for qualitative research, thus my process of analysis and writing was thoroughly intertwined. For the final report, I wrote a compelling narrative based on my data analysis. Each theme built on the previous one in a meaningful and logical way, conveying a coherent narrative about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 2020).

Thus, I used thematic analysis to systematically code and analyse my qualitative data, which then linked to the theoretical framework and conceptual issues identified in the literature review.

4.8 Increasing the Trustworthiness of the Study

As with most qualitative research studies, the quality of this exploratory study is determined by its trustworthiness. This is based on five concepts, , *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, *confirmability*, and *reflexivity* (Bless et al., 2013; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Credibility relates to the confidence that can be placed on whether the findings reflect the truth about reality (Bless et al., 2013). To ensure the credibility of the findings, I used an inductive approach to interpret the data. This is because describing real-life experiences of people through the lens of a theoretical framework would be presumptuous and prescriptive (Bless et al., 2013). I used *investigator triangulation*, to increase credibility as my transcripts, coding, analysis, and interpretations were verified by my supervisor. We further discussed different facets of the data analysis in our weekly supervision meetings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Transferability signifies the degree to which findings can be applied to different, yet similar contexts. Thick descriptions of behaviour and experiences in context ensure transferability (Bless et al., 2013; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Consequently, the sample and its context was adequately described, including the approach I used to interpret the results.

Dependability refers to how consistent the findings are over time (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Research findings should be replicable if the study was to be conducted under the same circumstances. To ensure dependability, I provide thorough descriptions of the research strategy that I executed (Bless et al., 2013).

Confirmability refers to the extent to which another researcher could verify the results of the qualitative data in a similar context (Bless et al., 2013). To ensure confirmability, I describe the research process in enough detail as to allow others to verify or elaborate on the study. Simultaneously, I provide a critical evaluation of my methodology (Bless et al., 2013). Korstjens and Moser (2018) contend that *dependability* and *confirmability* can be ensured through a comprehensive *audit trail*. My audit trail was ensured through the transparency of all my research steps.

Reflexivity involves critical self-reflection about myself as the researcher (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I ensured this by keeping a research diary, explaining my assumptions, conceptual lens and preconceptions, and how these affect the research through biases.

4.9 Reflexivity of the Researcher

Braun and Clarke (2012, 2013) contend that factors such as gender, race and class influence the dynamic relationship between interviewer and interviewee. As a social researcher, I am thus mindful of my social, political and cultural context and how my values, decisions, biases and methods could influence the knowledge I generate of the social world (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As such, it is important to introduce myself to you, the reader. I am a 32-year-old, White, self-identified queer, bisexual, cisgender man. I grew up in a middle-income, Afrikaans-speaking household. Although I was raised as a Christian, I am now agnostic.

In line with critical queer theory, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) speak about social researchers' positions as neither "insider" nor "outsider," relative to their sample; instead, they contend that every social researcher is positioned in the space between these dualities. Reflecting on my positionality in terms of insider/outsider, I did my best to walk the tightrope between the two in an ethical manner.

As a queer, bisexual-identifying individual, I was positioned as an insider. This came with certain advantages like having an instant connection with my participants, who could feel safe and open with me, allowing me to gain access to rich, thick data. Self-identifying as bisexual and queer allowed for a sense of ease when talking about queerness and allowed for some queer resonance. My experiences as a queer bisexual individual also sensitised me to queer issues and helped me "translate" topics my participants might not have known how to express fully. This opened the door for potential co-construction of some answers through the interviewer-interviewee interaction and allowed participants to correct my mistakes or misinterpretations. This overlap further enabled me to obtain rich narratives and eased the process of disclosure. Conversely, I had to be mindful of potential insider pitfalls. For instance, participants' narratives inevitably elicited my own experiences and memories. Consequently, my history potentially influenced my expectations and interpretations of their stories.

Despite this similarity with my participants, I was also an outsider as a White cisgender male. Throughout the research process, I needed to interpret narratives shared with me by people with socio-cultural backgrounds other than my own, as well as political implications of these backgrounds. The participants entrusted me with their experiences of bisexuality intersecting with, for instance, racism, sexism and classism. In these instances, I had to decide how to analyse the ensuing data as a White cisgender male who has no personal experience of these phenomena. To misinterpret, diminish or misrepresent these experiences would not only be negligent, but also tantamount to erasing or silencing aspects of their lives. Since this study indirectly addresses the effects of epistemic injustice, it was particularly important to me to maintain caution around my interpretation of experiences of which I have no subjective understanding.

To mitigate insider-outsider bias, I implemented the following strategies. First, I asked clarifying questions during the interviews and remained close to the data during analysis. Second, by using reflexivity throughout the research process, I remained aware of my emotional reactions and needs while always positioning the participants' experiences at the forefront of the research. Third, I relied on supervision and peer debriefings. My supervisor verified my interpretations, providing investigator triangulation by checking and comparing interpretations.

A noteworthy restriction was language. As the interviewer, I was only proficient in English and Afrikaans. Thus, I was only able to conduct interviews in these languages. Consequently, participants were not always able to share their narratives in their home language; however, as the primary language of instruction at the university is English, participants were able to express themselves adequately. Nevertheless, the subtleties of expressing oneself in one's home language may have been lost.

4.10 Ethical Considerations

A fundamental principle of social research is that participants must be shielded from harm because of their participation in a research project. Therefore, I observed all ethical considerations in my research to protect the safety and dignity of my participants (Bless et al., 2013).

Prior to the data collection process, the Departmental Ethics Screening Committee (DESC) of the Psychology Department approved my proposal before referring it to REC. Following REC approval (see Appendix G), I applied and received institutional permission from the Division for Institutional Research and Planning (see Appendix H). This process ensured that my research met the institution's ethical guidelines.

Following ethical approval, data collection could commence. Although I also had REC approval to conduct focus groups, given the Covid-19 restrictions I was unable to conduct these. Prior to the start of all my individual interviews, participants were asked to give their voluntary informed consent. This means that each research subject had the right to know that they were being researched, that they were informed about the nature of the research and that they may withdraw at any time without consequence (Silverman, 2016). To ensure that participants were aware of their rights, an informed consent form (see Appendix C) was emailed to them. This provided them with a digital copy for their record. In the email I invited participants to ask any questions they may have. All participants read, signed and returned the form to me before our interview, indicating their understanding. Before the interview commenced, participants were verbally briefed, providing them with a credible rationale for the research and the implications of their participation (Bryman, 2016). The informed consent that I obtained included permission to record the interviews.

During the interview, I remained aware of my positionality. Emphasising the interplay between sexuality and different identities, Barker et al. (2012) remind us as queer researchers, that we must never assume that others' experiences will reflect our own. Therefore, my positionality obligated me to practice ongoing reflexivity throughout the research process, as previously discussed, to make sure that my experiences were not being projected onto the participants.

Following Creswell and Poth (2018), I strove towards equality within the interview setting by remaining mindful of the power dynamics. I stayed vigilant of not othering participants in any way, as Butler (2010) states,

The language of appropriation, instrumentality, and distanciation germane to the epistemological mode also belong to a strategy of domination that pits the "I" against an "Other" and, once that separation is effected, creates an artificial set of questions about the knowability and recoverability of that Other. (p. 197)

Othering can be harmful when speaking about queerness. In the past, research about queer individuals has frequently resulted in othering. Subsequently, individuals were often marginalised within straight and queer communities. An example of this is the erasure and invisibility of bisexuality (Barker et al., 2012). Therefore, throughout the data collection process, participants were interviewed with care, empathy and the intention to foreground their voices without the imposition of assumptions.

Steps taken towards ensuring participants' confidentiality included using apps with end-to-end encryption of the audio/visual data during the virtual interviews. As mentioned before, I kept all data on my password-protected computer in a locked room to which only I had access. Therefore, only I have full access to the data.

From transcription to writing the final thesis document, I also took steps to protect respondents' anonymity (Bryman, 2016). Ensuring anonymity entails that respondents' data is not obviously and immediately associated with them in any way (Bless et al., 2013). Thus, pseudonyms were used and all identifying information was omitted during transcription. At the same time, I ensured that the meaning of the data remained unaltered.

Lastly, it was important to make appropriate provision in the event that any of my participants became distressed during or after the interviews. I provided all participants with Welgevallen Community Psychology Clinic's contact details (see Appendix C & I) and had their details on hand during the interviews (Bless et al., 2013). However, to my knowledge, no interviewees needed therapy after the interviews. Following each interview, I provided each participant an opportunity to reflect on the interview process and thanked them for their participation.

4.11 Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the methodological approach to this study and clarified how a *queered social constructionist* paradigm informed it. I described participants' demographic details, the sampling strategy and the interview procedures that I implemented before and during the 12 semi-structured interviews that I conducted. Following transcription and the initial data analysis, I used Atlas.ti in conjunction with the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2020) to systematically analyse and interpret the data in an iterative fashion, using an inductive approach. Finally, I described the strategies employed to maintain and increase trustworthiness, reflexivity and ethical considerations.

The results of the thematic analysis are captured in Table 4.4, showing the five themes, including sub-themes and categories that I extrapolated from the data. The following chapters discuss these findings: In Chapter 5, I discuss the nature and pressure of biphobia. Chapter 6 considers the role gender plays in determining bi-experiences. In Chapter 7, I discuss behavioural responses due to external and internal binegativity. Chapter 8 considers how these external experiences become internalized and start affecting participants' internal lives. Chapter 9 discusses the ways in which participants resist both external and internalized binegativity. Chapter 10 then synthesizes the findings and anticipates the contributions made to the understanding of bi-students at universities in SA.

For the sake of clarity, the participants' narratives are discussed under separate themes, sub-themes and categories. Despite each chapter being dedicated to a single theme, participants' dynamic experiences result in an overlapping and intertwining of themes, which creates a more vibrant tapestry that represents significant aspects of the participants' stories. I emphasize in several places during my findings that the effects of binegativity are cumulative and multiply into each other, and that compartmentalizing them thematically, in chapters, purely serves the purpose of clarity.

Table 4.4

Summary of Themes, Sub-themes and Categories

Theme	Sub-theme:	Category:	
5. Isolation on the margins of normativity	5.1 Dual-sourced normative pressures	5.1.1 Pressure to maintain the heterosexual narrative	
		5.1.2 Monosexism and bi-erasure	
	5.2 Bi-incomprehensibility and binegativity	5.2.1 Misconceptions and misinformation	
		5.2.2 Denial and liminality	
		5.2.3 Abnormality and sexual recklessness	
	5.3 Social effects of binegativity	5.3.1 Feeling unheard and unseen	
		5.3.2 Lack of support	
	6. Erasure through gendering	6.1 Gendering	6.1.1 Socialised to be a “good” girl or boy
			6.1.2 Policing sex, gender and sexuality
6.2 Impact of assumed gender on bi-experiences		6.2.1 The hypersexualisation effect	
		6.2.2 Sex as a tool of conversion	
		6.2.3 Dating exclusion	
		6.2.4 Perceptions of male sex positions	
7. Playing with the Closet		7.1 Concealment/non-disclosure	7.1.1 Concealment and behaviour modification
			7.1.2 Cost of concealment
	7.2 Outness	7.2.1 Coming out verses nonchalant disclosure	
		7.2.2 Responses to coming out/disclosure	
	7.3 Situational identity	7.3.1 Strategic identification	
		7.3.2 Split-life isolation	

8. Barriers to bi-identity development	8.1 Internalized binegativity	8.1.1 Learnt inferiority 8.1.2 Ripple effects of internalized binegativity 8.1.3 Confusing back and forth process of self-acceptance
9. Unlearning binegativity: Towards a bi-affirmative identity	9.1 Protective factors 9.2 Bi-identity integration	9.1.1 Social support 9.1.2 Self-educating and vicarious learning 9.2.1 Troubling normativity 9.2.2 Enhancing bipositivity

Chapter 5: Isolation on the Margins of Normativity - "Let me live!"

In this Chapter, I discuss the participants' experiences of binegativity and how these prevent them from living their lives to the fullest. In Table 5.1, I present the thematic map for the chapter.

Table 5.1

Thematic Map: Isolation on the Margins of Normativity

Sub-theme	Category
5.1 Dual-sourced normative pressures	5.1.1 Pressure to maintain the heterosexual narrative
	5.1.2 Monosexism and bi-erasure
5.2 Bi-incomprehensibility and binegativity	5.2.1 Misconceptions and misinformation
	5.2.2 Denial and liminality
	5.2.3 Abnormality and sexual recklessness
5.3 Social effects of binegativity	5.3.1 Feeling unheard and unseen
	5.3.2 Lack of support

5.1 Dual-sourced Normative Pressures - "Getting it from both sides"

Dual-sourced normative pressure refers to hetero- and mononormativity experienced in the straight and queer community respectively. All participants spoke about heteronormative pressure within their culture, community, families and amongst their peers. Most participants also reported experiences of mononormative pressure within the queer community and that this dual-sourced pressure restricted their ability to live authentically. As Jenny exclaimed: "you're getting it [biphobia] from both sides, the queer side and the straight side. Let me live!" This sentiment is consistent with several researchers who note that the dual-sourced nature of biphobia gives rise to a phenomenon known as double discrimination (Bostwick & Dodge, 2019; Dodge et al., 2016). For clarity, I discuss pressure to maintain the heterosexual narrative, and monosexism and bi-erasure separately, but they should be thought of as exerting a cumulative pressure.

5.1.1. Pressures to Maintain the Heterosexual Narrative

The values and norms that prop up heteronormativity are largely maintained through dynamics of reward, punishment and sanctions (Lynch & Maree; 2013). Local and international researchers concur that religion contributes substantially towards negative attitudes and stereotypes about bisexuality (De Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Levy & Harr, 2018). Indeed, all participants were raised in religious households and reported that religion had a significant impact on their culture, community and family norms. In the African context, it is important to note that, like gender and sexual multiplicity, homosexuality is frequently perceived as un-African (Matebeni & Pereira, 2014). Discourse around social and moral corrosiveness fuels homophobia in the participants' daily lives. Sedgwick (1990) suggests that the intensity of this phobia correlates to the magnitude of the perceived threat posed to the prevailing cultural values and norms.

One time... we were at church... and the topic that the pastor was preaching about was homosexuality, how wrong it was, how lost and forsaken... homosexual people were, ... how bad, a negative influence they can have on other people. It was... so difficult for me to stay in that service. [...] I felt so, ughh, rejected... and the fact that most of the congregation was saying, "Yes, amen," made me feel even worse... I asked my dad what he thought about the service... and he just repeated what the pastor was saying... And it broke my heart... When we got home I ran to my room and cried myself to sleep. Ughh! I was hurt. (Sifiso)

The looming rejection and judgement by the religious community, even God and one's own family, often evoke feelings of shame and sadness. The threat of rejection results in silence and self-isolation, making it even more unlikely for the participant to seek out support. All participants stated that the pressure to keep the heterosexual life-narrative going has roots in the (grand)-parent generation. Yumna and Sifiso explained:

I have this memory... of standing in the kitchen with my grandmother and, I asked her, "So, ... how do we feel about gay people?"... Um. It... came to a point [in the conversation] where she was telling me about... what would normally happen way back in the old days... [within Islamic culture], to a person who did conform to queerness... - where they would be stoned actually... And she still believes that people should be stoned, ... um, for being gay... [...] I'm still like, "I don't want my family to stone me..." which is probably a big part of why I'm not out... I'm just really scared of being rejected... Um... It really did tell me, it's not safe right now... to come out. (Yumna)

My mother actually asked me in Zulu..., she was like, "Sifiso uyistabane?", "Are you gay?" I didn't know what she meant... I didn't know that word. I'd never heard it being used before... So now I'm extremely confused. I go and ask my father and he asked me

where I heard that word... I just said, "My mum asked me". Yoh, he became so upset and he came downstairs shouting at my mom saying, "What are you doing? Why are you asking my son that question?" (???) And then my dad came to me, he told me, "Sifiso forget about the word, it means nothing... Never mention that word ever again!" (Sifiso)

All participants reported similar experiences of their families perpetuating a culture of concealment that obscures queer visibility through a combination of reward, punishment, sanctions and threats. Watson (2014) refers to this silencing and erasing as “the family closet” – a space that enforces “compulsory heterosexuality” while prohibiting deviant attraction (Rich, 1980). By uttering *uyistabane* in a religious household, Sifiso’s mother transgressed what Yoshino (2000) refers to as the “code of silence of same sex desire” (p. 366). Similarly, Yumna’s question is met with threats of punishment. Sedgwick (1990) theorises the epistemic impact of framing same sex attraction as unspeakable in religious contexts as “that sin which should be neither named nor committed” (Sedgwick, pp. 202-203).

According to the HSRC the dominance of heteronormative attitudes persist in many South African communities, resulting in the prevalence of homophobia (Sutherland, 2016). Khuzwayo and Morison (2017) suggest that the expressions and perceptions of homophobia in SA change with geographic location. In the interviews, most participants reported similar trends, as Martin and Thandie shared:

With my father and grandparents..., I don't [disclose my bisexuality] they are homophobic and they make homophobic jokes. [...] I do worry sometimes for my safety in terms of... public displays of affection, um, in some places, obviously... Because obviously some people... take it upon themselves to act upon, um..., homophobia and biphobia. So... in public, in terms of [KZN]... where I don't think people are as accepting, um..., there is a little bit of fear. [...] Whereas... in [the WC] I've been completely open about it, ... judgment doesn't affect me. (Martin)

Literally I only know of two queer people in... KZN... where I live. [...] A whole lot more are in the closet... But... they don't want to admit, or... come out to people. Sooo... that's where I experience the most resistance, and the most stereotyping, because..., um, they don't want to understand that sexuality can be fluid, they are very firm in the belief that... you are attracted to... only the opposite gender. That's it. (Thandie)

In a similar vein, several participants reported that overt discrimination is more likely in some contexts, and microaggressions in others. Consistent with Knight et al.'s (2016) findings on the impact of geographical location on levels of discrimination, the rural/urban divide and participants’ province of residence appears to be pivotal.

In addition to religion and context, all participants mentioned that schooling played a significant role in instilling and maintaining heteronormativity.

I come from a very small town..., so we don't have conversations about queerness. [...] About anything outside of the norm... and outside of what is socially accepted. ... The teachers in my school were very conservative. For example, our Life-Orientation teachers who were supposed to... speak to us about things that we aren't necessarily exposed to at home... would stay away from having those conversations with us because of their conservative values. (Vela)

We had a lot of older teachers [...] and because they were older... they were like, quite homophobic... So, I couldn't go to the teachers and be like, "Oh, I need a safe space." [...] They [the teachers] would use slurs towards him [my gay friend] like homophobic slurs... and I was like, "Ooooh! Not gonna tell them." (Yumna)

The interviews suggested that queer sex education is either absent from the school curriculum or not implemented. Consistent with Francis' (2013) findings that educators' narratives are dominated by heteronormativity and bi-microaggressions, participants received sex education that focused solely on heterosexual sex, thus erasing queer sexualities. Further, several participants spoke about how teachers' conservative values failed to provide students with safe spaces to talk about their sexuality. This denies individuals the multiplicity of sexual experiences, practices and orientations (Stobie, 2011). Consequently, participants experienced implicit marginalisation, a lack of social support, bi-erasure and invisibility. Given the epistemic injustice embedded in the curriculum and teachers imposing their value systems, participants experienced a diminished capacity to be heard, understood and validated (Fricker, 2009). For example, Estian voiced:

I feel very strongly that... people's parents and society are putting a lot of pressure on people, making it very difficult for them, um, to just live their lives... It's [bisexuality is] not doing anyone any harm... Why are people so involved... and interested in other people's lives? [...] Why you trying to hate on other people's lives and make it difficult for them!... I don't get it!

Unsurprisingly, participants seemingly experience a profound sense of unfairness as they are restricted in self-actualizing relative to their sexuality. This results in anger, resentment, frustration, sadness and the desperate appeal "let me live!" Cumulatively, these pressures seemingly hinder their ability to engage in meaning-making or sharing, and create barriers to positively experiencing their own sexuality. From a Foucauldian (2001) perspective heterosexuality is framed as normal and thus moral; in these participants' lives it seemingly

gives some people a moral high ground from which they judge and repudiate deviants. In stark contrast to participants' home environments, several participants reported that university was "*the first place for some people where they can properly be themselves*" (Jenny). This corroborates the discussion on location being such a pivotal factor; university and university towns appear to be more progressive, as Vela and Jenny describe:

In coming to university... I'm exposed to a plethora of identities... different people... from different backgrounds. It was a very big culture shock [from my home in the Eastern Cape]. But also, I think I started feeling more at home here... than I did at home. (Vela)

Res [university residence] is maybe the first place for some people where they can properly be themselves, and maybe [they] haven't had any support before, and here they can meet with a whole lot of like-minded people, um, who share in a lot of their experiences ... that's very valuable support... University is a very good time to open your mind and you're exposed to so much more. (Jenny)

Apparently, the university represents an essential transitional space that feels more open, flexible and empathetic. It allows for a sense of connection with similar others. However, this sense of belonging and the personal growth and exploration of sexuality that is facilitated at university is frequently met with resistance in other contexts.

Someone posted, she used to be my best friend back in high school..., "You guys go to these universities and then come back here and tell us that you are bisexual or queer. Just... stop being unnecessary or pretentious." (Lerato)

Consistent with Khuzwayo and Morison (2017), this quote illustrates the normative divides across geographical location in SA. Most of the participants come from homes with more traditional and religious norms. When they return home after exploring their sexuality more openly, they are met with microaggressions, geared towards judging and shaming. Francis (2017) considers this the "the cost of transgressing the heterosexual norm" (p. 215).

5.1.2. Monosexism and Bi-erasure

In response to hegemonic heteronormativity, lesbian and gay activists strategically use binary thinking to present monosexuality as a compensatory view of sexual orientation (Roberts et al., 2015). Inadvertently, the emphasis on homosexual experiences has resulted in "compulsory monosexuality" (Taub, 2003, p. 45). In other words, when the heterosexual assumption that everyone is straight is shelved, it is supplanted by the monosexual

presupposition that everyone is straight or gay (Yoshino 2000). Mononormativity and its binary foundation have thus left bi-individuals in a rather precarious position with respect to LGBTQ politics (Barker et al., 2012). Lerato expressed her understanding in this regard:

As we [queer activists] were challenging heteronormativity, the first one is the opposite of heteronormativity which is homosexuality. [...] So now the in-between within that [sexuality] spectrum, it's very blurry... so you'd get the homosexuality in the conversation, but not much of what's in-between. (Lerato)

Lerato highlights how activists employ homosexuality to challenge heteronormativity. Her experience is consistent with Monro et al.'s (2017) contention that the concept of bisexuality challenges the dichotomies and conceptual boundaries of sexuality, which served as a foundation for gay individuals' fight for recognition and rights. Arguably, bisexuality is perceived as a threat and erased. This erasure within the queer community can be understood from a Foucauldian (2001) perspective, as power frames the subcultural-norm of being gay as moral, while constructing notions of normal versus deviant, thus bisexuality is perceived as deviant and immoral for supposedly undermining gay activism. The dominance of the gay agenda over the bi-agenda is evident in the media and pop-culture, exacerbating the unrestricted and unconsidered adoption of bi-stereotypes (Gleason et al., 2018). All participants reflected on the inaccuracy or lack of bi-representation.

There isn't a lot of content about bi and pan people. Um. The typical acronym is LGBT, despite being in the first four letters, we don't get a lot of... attention. And there is a lot of... in-group division within the larger queer community... Bi-representation in the media is not particularly big... it's kind of lousy... I really hope in the future there is more..., um, pop-culture representation, because so many people grow up... not being aware... that this is a sexuality and that it's a valid one... that you don't have to pick a side. [...] And quite often when there is a bi-character..., they're a 'token' bi-character, their bisexuality is... key to the plot-line..., it's very much about how they identify... rather than them as a whole person. [...] It would be nice to see bisexuality normalized in media. (Jenny)

Due to bi-invisibility, neither the queer, nor the straight community seem to understand that bi-invalidation is harmful. This is consistent with Zivony and Saguy's (2018) contention that society only suppresses negative stereotypes when there is awareness that such stereotypes are offensive. However, because of bi-erasure, public awareness of such stereotypes is erased too. Similarly, when I questioned Prashant about society's understanding of sexual orientation, he described it to me as *"there is still this missing middle."* Kefilwe and Bongani similarly stated:

I definitely don't think that society as a whole understands it, because even within the LGBT community there's still sort of a, "But are you gay? Or are you straight? Why you in the middle?" [...] Straight people... look at it as, "If you're interested in men, then you're gay," whether you also like girls or not, it doesn't matter "You are gay," so to them that is the cut-off line. (Kefilwe)

In most cases it's... gay, because they don't even... want to go to the bisexual thing. [...] The queer community are actually the ones that say there's no such thing, you are either gay or you are not. Queer people would... be like, "There's no such thing [as bisexual], you are just making excuses." And they then take those messages out and say, "No, this one is lying..." (Bongani)

Apparently, common discourses around sexuality customarily privilege the gay-straight binary within both, the straight and LGBTQ community. All participants expressed familiarity with microaggressions like the ones reported by Kefilwe and Bongani. Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) refer to this as cultural and political invisibility. In the extracts below, for instance, bi-issues are side-lined in favour of the gay agenda, which is more easily framed from a binary perspective and results in a lack of social support for subordinate bi-members.

I know there is a lot of... in-group division within the larger queer community [...] for some people being gay... is like on a higher tier than, say, being bisexual or pansexual. [...] Everything in-between [heterosexual and homosexual] is very much more spectrum like. Um. And sometimes it seems that carries less weight... because it's not committed to one thing... It's alienating to a lot of queer people who identify in-between either end. [...] I'm aware of that because I see it online, or things people say... Like with my [lesbian university] friend, who said, "You're not bi if you haven't experienced both sides." (Jenny)

A bunch of queer people were questioning [the validity of bisexuality] and doing exactly what I told you they did to me [categorising him as gay]. Um. And eventually the bi-people were like, "No, they are being persecuted [within the LGBTQ organisation]." Ya, in second year [at university]... It was quite a thing. (Prashant)

Despite the university's progressive norms mentioned in section 5.1, it is also apparent how mononormativity supersedes heteronormativity within the university context, as both cultural and political invisibility are evident. Several participants had similarly alienating experiences of in-group divisions and hierarchies within the queer community. In consonance with this, several South African researchers have warned that sexuality has been oversimplified (Francis, 2017; Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017), erasing what the participants refer to as the "spectrum," "middle" or "fluidity" of sexuality. Thus, in alignment with Roberts et al. (2015), compulsory monosexuality positions these participants outside of what is considered normal

once more. These accounts further illustrate how mononormativity is enforced through microaggressions, echoing Flanders et al.'s (2016) contention that hostility towards bi-individuals is primarily expressed through microaggressions.

Participants on different campuses of the university reported differing norms. Below, Sifiso and Kefilwe's experiences on the satellite campus, in an urban area, were different to Jenny and Prashant's experiences (mentioned above) on the main campus, in a peri-urban location. Their contradictory experiences suggest that culture can differ from one space to another even within a single university.

[The satellite campus] has been extremely... accepting and accommodative, more than I could have hoped.... I felt welcomed from the minute I arrived on campus... people were so kind... I thought that people were putting up a facade in the beginning, but... I later realized that's just who they are, that made me so happy... I have heard that the environment is definitely different on Main Campus. [...] There is definitely a lot more homophobia and queer hate on Main Campus. (Sifiso)

My personal opinion is that [the satellite campus LGBTQ organisation] is one of the best run societies on our campus... maybe even as far as the whole university. [...] They are in there because they care, and I really like it. (Kefilwe)

It appears that Sifiso and Kefilwe have had predominantly positive experiences at university and within their queer organisations. This suggests a shift towards normalising bisexuality. The active and inclusive queer organisation on the satellite campus (in contrast to Prashant's experience on main campus) may partially explain the shift away from dominant hetero- and mononormativity.

Although discussed separately, the participants' experiences of dual-sourced pressure are experienced simultaneously, but to varying degrees depending on the context. For the participants, this binegative pressure primarily manifested through microaggressions. Even when experienced vicariously, the tools of aggression used by social actors to police individuals in multiple contexts lead to a lack of accurate bi-knowledge and exacerbate epistemic injustices.

5.2. Bi-incomprehensibility and Biphobia - “People don't believe me and I can't explain it”

Bi-incomprehensibility refers to society's inability to comprehend bi-experiences due to hetero- and mononormativity. Apart from homophobia, participants experience two unique flaws in society's epistemic base of bi-knowledge, namely *denial and liminality* and *abnormality and sexual recklessness*. As a point of departure, I discuss the misconceptions and misinformation about bi-individuals that apparently maintains this incomprehensibility.

5.2.1 Misconceptions and Misinformation

Researchers hypothesize that the common “truth” about bisexuality and bi-individuals is not the result of acquired knowledge, but instead grounded on everyday conceptualizations, assumptions and stereotypes about sexuality (Hayfield, Campbell, & Reed, 2018; Zivony & Saguy, 2018). Consistent with this, the participants make sense of people's misconceptions by recognising that bi-knowledge is steeped in ignorance and that, from a queer perspective, “knowledge is not the opposite of ignorance” (Hall, 2017, p.160). For instance, Thandie and Vela said:

It's interesting... to hear what they've got to say. I mean some of it really does stem from a place of ignorance, and the fact that they... were never... taught to understand sexuality... (Thandie)

It's a lack of understanding of sexuality..., it's very binary... It's either gay or straight, and people don't understand that there might be an in-between..., there's a lack of understanding of the spectrum. (Vela)

These participants' understanding of bi-knowledge construction resonates with Hall's (2017) “appreciation of the ignorance at the core of knowledge about sexuality” (p.160). The interview extracts above illustrate how the participants try to make sense of misconceptions around bisexuality; notably, bi-knowledge is not based on actual bi-individuals' experiences, but rather on misguided beliefs and assumptions. The participants underscored the incongruence between societies' misconceptions about sexuality and their lived experiences, as Lerato did:

I just feel irritated..., and sometimes even disgusted by the... audacity, to be so sure about something you're not even experiencing. It's a matter of “how dare you?” and “you don't deserve to even be saying these things, because you have no idea of these experiences.” (Lerato)

This expression of frustration appears to be in response to a boundary violation. By asserting the “truth” of her bi-experience, in contrast to others’ naive assumptions about her orientation, Lerato is reasserting a boundary of self-knowledge and legitimacy (discussed in Chapter 9). The most prominent misconceptions, and those most vehemently opposed by participants, include beliefs of denial and liminality and abnormality and sexual recklessness.

5.2.2 Denial and Liminality

From the interviews, I inferred that the most fundamental biphobic experience is rooted in an epistemic base that denies the very existence of bisexuality by imposing the misconception that individuals can only be straight *or* gay.

I think a lot of people... have a notion about it [bisexuality], they are not quite aware of its nuances or the fact that it is a spectrum... some people are unaware that if you are a woman and then you date a man, that doesn't cancel out your bisexuality.

(Jenny)

The stereotype is that... they're not actually bisexual, you're actually just... gay, or just straight? In most cases, you're not bisexual, you're gay. (Bongani)

The influence of the straight/gay binary is evident in the microaggressions witnessed and experienced. Jenny and Bongani’s statements corroborate Hayfield’s (2021) findings that bi-identities are frequently invalidated and denounced as illegitimate. Closely associated with bi-denial is the view of bisexuality as liminal. In the extracts below, we see how bisexuality is regarded as a “phase,” a “pit-stop along the way,” an “exploration,” an “uncertainty” or “experimentation.”

They [bi-individuals] are confused, in a phase..., just exploring, and they're going to go back to being straight. It's mostly an uncertainty and a phase... Ugh, the other one... they were so hurt by men that they just want to be with women. (Lerato)

I did speak to my therapist, um, it was kind of weird..., I think his exact words were, "It is very weird to have a male bisexual... especially at your age, because normally..., um..., there's an age where they decide." [...] It was kind of weird having, um..., a therapist say, "You are an anomaly." So, I had to deal with that... sort of, um..., stigma. (Martin)

Lerato and Martin's experiences are affirmed by the findings of several researchers who documented the ill-conceived notion that bisexuality is a state of transition to a monosexual identity (Hayfield 2021; Lytle et al., 2017). In addition, notions of bi-uncertainty brand bi-individuals as less credible than gay/straight testifiers and knowers (Hall, 2017). This mirrors Khuzwayo and Morison's (2017) observation of resistance and non-recognition of bisexuality in the SA context.

Several participants referred to popular culture's tendency to promote bi-denial and liminality. Below, Prashant reflects on his limited ability to communicate his experience to others:

There's no real..., um..., how do I say, popular figure [in the media] that represents [...] what a true bisexual person is. So, society can be like, "Oh that's interesting" and see. So when you explain to someone, they're like, "Oh, so like that person?" Whereas when you're straight, you'd just say like anybody that's straight. Or if you were gay you'd say, "Oh like that boy." But there's no, ah..., [such bisexual] icon. (Prashant)

Here Prashant highlights the effects that a lack of common bi-references appears to have on his ability to effectively communicate the legitimacy of his sexuality. Medina (2017) hypothesises that this type of "denial" is not intentional, but arises due to the lack of collective hermeneutical resources, resulting in epistemic injustice. Similarly all participants reportedly found it challenging to talk about their bisexuality with others. Drawing on Foucault's (1976) discussion on the historical framing of homosexuality as a separate species, Callis (2009) posits that bi-individuals were never framed in a similar way and thus were never afforded the vigour of historical scientific "truth." Instead, bi-experiences were subsumed with homosexuality. The lack of "truth" credited to bisexuality at an epistemic level results in its consistent denial or conceptualization as liminal, all contributing to bi-erasure (Callis, 2009).

5.2.3 Abnormality and Sexual Recklessness

Bi-visibility is often viewed through a prejudiced lens of *surplus visibility*, which inevitably seeks evidence to substantiate existing assumptions and strengthens negative stereotypes (Francis, 2017). The participants reported that when people acknowledged their bisexual identities, it was often accompanied by negative assumptions about them. Sifiso and Brian's comments below foreground how binegativity can also entail the belief that bisexuality is a dysfunction with repercussions:

I tried to bring a slight hint of it, with one of our youth pastors [at church]... She tried to refer me. She said, "Okay, I think we might need to have a discussion with the pastor..." That hurt me, she insinuated something was wrong with me. That psychologically something was wrong... That really hurt..., but I was more angry than hurt at that time. (Sifiso)

He [my father] has to get over that... denial... that there should be an association with, let's call it a social deformity..., that there's something wrong with me for being gender non-conforming or... my sexuality or any of those things. That... there should be this repercussion..., that something else is going to be dysfunctional in my life because of it... And that's not true. (Brian)

The pathologizing of their sexuality is in line with Hayfield's (2021) finding that bisexual individuals are perceived to be psychologically disturbed. For the participants, this perception apparently creates a sense of shame, humiliation, hurt and betrayal. The fact that a dysfunctional future and harmful repercussions are expected make the participants feel misrepresented and misunderstood.

Another misperception most participants were exposed to is sexual recklessness. Well-documented by Hayfield (2018) and Gleason et al. (2018), this misperception manifests in projections of promiscuity, hypersexuality and greediness.

A lot of people see pansexuality as hypersexuality..., which is... very frustrating... for a lot of pansexual individuals... because of the fact that most of them aren't. They just... have this thing in their head that tells them that they don't care about who they love. Like you're not picky or you don't choose, you don't have preferences. Um. We do have preferences definitely! (Yumna)

Generally, gay [queer] sexuality, is boxed into promiscuity..., therefore, in this case when I said, "No, I'll look after your flat," immediately, it was like, "You want to use my place as a sex-pad and so on...." I find that's common. (Bongani)

Evidently, the participants experience judgements about their sexual behaviour and their character based on their sexual orientation. All the participants reported experiences that resonate with Bostwick and Hequembourg's (2014) findings that the belief in bisexual promiscuity is so pervasive that the trustworthiness of bi-testimony is brought into question.

I stopped using it [bisexual as a label], if I say that I'm bisexual, I find that people would say, "So you're not sure."... And that can convey into my professional career...: "he's [in this leadership position at] university, but he's indecisive." (Brian)

It appears that the social repercussion of not being perceived as a legitimate knower of his own bi-experience may undermine the participant's confidence about how they are perceived in other settings too. This exemplifies what Fricker (2009) termed *testimonial injustice*.

5.3 Social Effects of Binegativity - "Social Pariah"

Binegativity may arise from a base of ignorance, but it has real social consequences. Mereish et al. (2017) postulate that bi-individuals experience chronic external stressors due to bispecific stigma. In consequence, they are exposed to increased risk for anxiety, depression, substance use and suicidality compared to monosexuals (Bostwick & Dodge, 2019; Choi et al., 2019; Mereish et al., 2017; Rimes et al., 2018).

5.3.1 Feeling Unheard and Unseen

The participants' experience of testimonial injustice was most closely related to the sensation of feeling unheard and unseen. Participants are unable to adequately defend or explain themselves because their testimony is not recognized as proof, putting them in a position of futilely trying to defend themselves. Hall (2017) refers to this as a "fraught epistemic terrain" because bi-individuals' epistemic authority is persistently disputed, resulting in what Hayfield (2021) refers to as invalidation. Society seems to gaslight the participants to coerce them into questioning their own perceptions, experiences and meanings – a prime example of epistemic violence and injustice.

One friend of mine who's gay, she said, if I hadn't had any experience with a girl, then how do I know that I'm bi?... Which is bullshit! You don't have to bring out a receipt of your experiences to prove anything. (Jenny)

I used bi, it's a good... describing word for... it. But then it just got so confusing, over the years, like second, third, fourth year [of university], because no one really accepted it. Like: "Oh no, he's just gay." But you can't really explain it to people. [...] Everyone is just assuming, "Oh, he is just using it [bisexuality] as an excuse to eventually come out as gay." But it's not! Because I am sexually attracted to women. So it's like, why do I have to constantly justify? (Prashant)

People put you in a box as soon as they meet you... So, um, it falls on you to take yourself out of that box again... And then you sometimes have to argue and defend doing that." I guess I... couldn't really..... defend myself..., um, because I don't really have any evidence to prove, "I'm pan." (Yumna)

Evidently, the burden of proof of sexual orientation falls on the marginalized. The participants find themselves in a double bind, having to “prove” the legitimacy of their identity, but not having the epistemic authority to do so. This loss of authority could be viewed as the cost of transgressing the binary through which society comprehends bisexuality. Excerpts below further convey the participants’ experience of not having epistemic authority.

He's like, "Dude, are you sure you're not gay though?" And I'm like, "No, I'm not." He's like, "Are you sure?" I'm like, "Yes, I'm sure." He's like..., "Mmmh. Okay? I'll wait for you..." (laughs).... And I'm just like, "Wow." [...] At the time, when he first said it, I was actually quite upset, because I'm like, you're deciding for me. Why are you deciding for me? [...] But I understand where he's coming from. I myself, question myself about that point. (Sifiso)

If you say, "I'm bisexual, I like both men and women"... They say, "No, you're just a confused being." [...] From then, they'd attempt to push you to a point where you actually see yourself as more gay. [...] "Don't try to use a slightly affirming phrase like, bisexual." (Bongani)

The effects of testimonial injustice appear to induce frustration, confusion and a feeling of dishonesty. Roberts et al. (2015) refer to this as the social pressure to mis-identify as monosexual. Since all attempts to self-assert are shut down, the participants feel inept at professing their truth, which in turn evokes uncertainty about their sexuality. Roberts et al.’s (2015) findings suggest that these emotions unintentionally strengthen the stereotype of bi-uncertainty. In addition to testimonial injustice, notions of untrustworthiness and having questionable morals and values further amplify the effects of binegativity.

People think that bisexual people are the most promiscuous..., it is extremely problematic especially when it comes to... trying to develop a relationship with somebody, the fear that you might leave them for someone... Like if it's with a guy, they fear, "Oh no, you're gonna cheat on me with a girl or you're gonna leave me as soon as you find the perfect girl." Or if it is a girl, she's like, "Oh no, you're probably just going to cheat on me with a guy... on the side..., you might leave me for a guy..." And for me it's a thing of my sexuality... does not have an impact or effect on my values... or morals... If I am someone who is loyal, I am someone who is loyal, no matter who I'm with, no matter who I'm attracted to... Just because I'm attracted to both sexes does not mean... that I am an unfaithful person... That does get to me sometimes..., I will admit. Whenever I hear it, I'm just like, "Urg!... Do you not know me by now? We've gotten to this point where we talk about relationships, but now you saying, "Nah" because of this, like suddenly you don't know me well enough to know that I would not do that to you? Uhg! (Sifiso)

Sifiso's testimony exemplifies how self-knowledge is brought into question after revealing his bi-identity. Several participants reported similar situations that left them feeling rejected and discriminated. Collectively, these experiences of unintelligibility contribute to what Medina (2017) refers to as *hermeneutical death*. Individuals are not only undermined as communicators of their own experiences, but also "prevented from developing and exercising a voice" (Medina, 2017, p. 41). Such restrictions gaslight participants to the extent that they distrust themselves or attempt to persuade others of their perception to no avail. This increases psychological distress, experiences of social isolation and frequently prevents individuals from attaining psychological support as they remain unheard, unseen and invalidated.

5.3.2 Lack of Support

Bi-individuals often experience alienation due to the compounding effect of dual-binegativity (Choi et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2015). Research suggests that biphobia disrupts their interpersonal relationships making them more prone to isolation and loneliness (Mereish et al., 2017). A significant contributing factor to the lack of social support for bi-individuals is the absence of communities that are specifically geared towards bi-inclusivity. Contrary to gay individuals, bi-individuals usually do not equate the queer community as a source of support or connectedness (Flanders et al., 2016). Consistent with Shilo and Savaya's (2011) findings that the absence of family and peer support, as well as the fear of rejection, frequently results in mental distress. Most participants expanded on the effects of isolation. For example, Sifiso and Estian reported:

If you have... nobody..., as in like nobody around you that... you know of, or who you feel you have some type of bond or relationship with..., in any way, whether it's friendship, or even just acquaintance.... If you do not know anybody who is queer..., that might be like something that stops you [from developing a positive bi identity], because you feel alone. Like, it might be accepted in the outside world beyond your circle, beyond your borders, but if you were to bring it home..., if you yourself were to come out, then you feel like you might be rejected. (Sifiso)

Parents and society are putting a lot of pressure on people, making it very difficult for them to just live their lives. [...] It's not doing anyone any harm... Why are people so involved... and interested in other people's lives? [...] Just keep your mouth shut. I don't know why you trying to hate on other people's lives and make it difficult for them. (Estian)

Several researchers found that identifying as bisexual is associated with experiencing diminished support (Mereish et al., 2017; Roberts et al., 2015). The emotional distress, fear and frustration is evident in Sifiso and Estian's testimony. This is further complicated by participants' seeming desperation for acceptance. Analogous with Lytle et al. (2017), individuals who do not experience a sense of belonging within their environments frequently develop their sexual identity in isolation. As discussed in sub-theme 5.1, all participants spoke about feeling marginalized and ostracized by their families, peers and community due to their bi-identity. Estian and Sifiso related:

I had a big conversation with him [a queer friend] and he said, he came out to his mom and it wasn't well received. [...] She told him that she would kick him out of the house, if he didn't change. [...] Then in April of 2019..., he killed himself... [...] After that, things became hectic... for me..., because I felt like I hadn't done enough and... I was so angry that people and society could push someone, to do something like that, because they feel like, they're not good enough, just because they're different... Then it became very bad, [...] I went to a psychologist and psychiatrist, and I was institutionalized. That was hectic. (Estian)

I wanted to consult with my pastor or Sunday school teachers, but obviously, with the climate at church, I was afraid... that they would tell my parents and that would just make the whole situation worse... So I just kept it to myself..., I hated myself. (Sifiso)

Similar to these accounts, several participants shared feelings of self-hatred, sadness, deprivation and depression. This fully resonates with Mereish et al.'s (2017) findings that illustrate the link between loneliness and health disparities such as anxiety, depression, substance use and suicidality (Bostwick & Dodge, 2019; Hayfield, 2021).

5.4 Summary

In this chapter, I highlighted the aspects of binegativity and its foundation in misconceptions that give rise to epistemic injustice and bi-incomprehensibility. Please see Appendix K for additional participants' quotes to substantiate this theme. I also illustrated how experiences of dual-sourced binegativity alienate participants' from society. As a result, participants appear to experience a reduced capability for acquiring resources and support, and often develop their sexual identity in isolation.

Chapter 6: Erasure through Gendering – "You have to stick to your masculinity or femininity"

The previous chapter considered how several variables affect bi-individuals' experiences. In this chapter, I discuss participants' experiences of being gendered into the binary gender ideal, according to their biological sex. This gendering appears to include a default inference about sexual orientation. In Table 6.1, I present the two sub-themes: *gendering* and the *impact of gendered expectations*.

Table 6.1

Thematic Map: Erasure through Gendering

Sub-theme	Category
6.2 Gendering	6.1.1 Socialised to be a "good" girl or boy 6.1.2 Policing sex, gender and sexuality
6.2 Impact of gendered expectations	6.2.1 Hypersexualisation effect 6.2.2 Sex as a tool of conversion 6.2.3 Dating exclusion 6.2.4 Perceptions of bi-male sexual intercourse

6.1 Gendering - Under the gaze of "forensic scientists"

In the interviews, all participants reflected on being gendered. In this sub-theme, I first narrate their experiences of being socialised into their "good girl" or "good boy" roles, followed by a discussion on how gender was used to police sexuality.

6.1.1 Socialised to be a "good" Girl or Boy

Butler (2010) considers gender to be performative as opposed to an innate aspect of an individual. From birth, each individual's gender is assigned based on their genitalia-determined sex. Individuals are subsequently gendered and taught how to *do* their assigned gender correctly in terms of desire, enactments, gestures and acts. It follows that there is a

correct and incorrect way to *do* gender. Consistent with Butler, all participants reportedly experienced these societal expectations, including being taught the “shoulds and shouldn’ts” of their gender from a young age.

Growing up, my mother would say constantly, "Don't do that! A Boy doesn't do that Sifiso why are you acting like a girl?" [...] I used to stand in a certain way, yoh, it irritated my mother sooo much like, "Don't stand like that!"... That was the thing she reprimanded me about the most..., and me using my hands to talk - she hated that... I got to a point where I'd try and teach myself not to do that, I had to keep my hands in my pockets all the time and remind myself to keep my hands stable when speaking. [...] I also had to adjust my tone..., the way I spoke... It's had permanent effect. [...] It was an all-day everyday thing. (Sifiso)

I found [the Afrikaans] high school really horrible, because... I saw how horrible people can be... and how much people are influenced by what they think it means to be a man. ... Afrikaans boys are brought up in homes, where the father is the head of the household..., and the mother has no say. It creates this culture... where people are actually scared to live their lives and to be who they truly are, because they're trying to be... whatever everyone else wants them to be. (Estian)

Participants reportedly experienced continuous gendering and pressure to remain in their gendered place. Gender ideals were reinforced through reward and punishment while others persistently measured participants against their respective standards. An Sifiso’s reports, conformity became “an all-day, everyday thing.” When an individual measures themselves against others’ standards, only to find themselves falling short of the ideal, this failure might cause painful shame and a host of other negative emotive responses that inhibit the individual from living freely. With regards to masculine ideals, for instance, Bongani shared his culturally specific experiences as follows:

Coming from the Eastern Cape where traditional initiation is practiced, um, I again have gone against the grain. I come from a family where it was not enforced. Already that makes me someone who is... not doing the normal things. Now if I were then to... come out and say this [that I am bisexual], they would say, “maybe if he had gone through initiation, this wasn't going to be.” And then the level of respect... goes even further down... That [being bisexual] will make you even less of a man, - you’ve actually written yourself off from the manhood books. I wouldn't want to add, or give them ammunition to disrespect me even more.

Bongani fears the double stigma of being bi and not having completed the traditional male initiation, which entails ritual circumcision to mark his transition to manhood. Fear of further emasculation keeps him from coming out, as this would completely undermine his status as a man in his community. A number of factors accrue to distinguish his experience from the other participants: being older, coming from a rural village where rite of passage traditions are

practised, and being the only Xhosa/Sotho male participant. In line with Butler's (2010) notions of intersections, each participant's experience is uniquely influenced by "the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained" (p. 5). Thandie grew up in a similar rural context; however, due to cultural, gender and generational difference, she is in a better position to resist gendering.

I grew up around... boys. So I grew up doing what boys would typically be doing. Until... came age 10/11, and then I was told, "You need to behave more like a girl."... My first reaction is, "What the hell does a girl behave like? Is this not the norm?"... But then... you get told constantly, "You can't behave like this. You need to do this as a girl." So... those pressures, I think, were the reason why it took me so long to actually..., um, come out, because I was like, "Okay..., I'm literally going outside every norm I've ever been taught." Everything I've known, I'm literally going against it - so it took me a while to digest all of that and work through it and be like, "Okay, it is not mandatory. It is not what is set in stone. It doesn't have to be this way." Then after I had gotten over that, I was like, "Okay, chilled..., now we can think differently!" (Thandie)

Butler (2010) contends that it is important to resist the violence imposed by gender norms, particularly against individuals who present as gender non-conforming. Similar to Thandie, all participants reported resisting gender norms and expectations. My findings suggest that once the participants accepted the fallacy of the gender ideal, they subverted gender norms by imperfectly performing gender, which is discussed further in Chapter 9.

6.1.2 Policing Sex, Gender and Sexuality

This section considers the incomprehensibility of non-conforming gender expressions, how society's perceptions of sex, gender and sexual orientation are polarised into gender and orientation binaries. Foucault's (1978) conceptualisations of truth, power and surveillance, and how these interact to maintain an oppressive system are useful here. Foucault revealed the flaws in viewing sexuality as truth, suggesting that sexuality is not an innate, natural truth. Instead, he clarified how relations of power connect to sexuality and theorised that the fear of repressed sexuality drives the emerging system of surveillance that categorises everyone as either straight or gay.

If I had to show any form of feminine traits or interests it's immediately polarised to one side [gay]. It's like they can't accept that you can be two kinds of energies, have two energies in one person [gender non-conforming]. You have to stick to your masculinity or femininity, which I find super frustrating. (Prashant)

These binary assumptions and forms of policing result in bi-unintelligibility that contributes to bi-invisibility. Rule and Alaei (2016) show that individuals are inferred to be gay when they transgress gender norms and perceived as straight when they conform, but are never perceived to be bisexual. This explains why participants' testimonies were often discredited due to the gender binary rendering their bi-identities unfathomable. Below, Prashant eloquently captures his experience of being policed and reveals the power dynamics at play.

Based on what my friends would look at..., they would look at your hand gestures, the way you are standing, posture, the way you walk. [...] They're like forensic scientists or police. [...] They look at everything: the way you walk, the hair, the way you interacted with the other people. So, that's what made me aware of how they were always watching. Because I actually got to see first-hand from these people how they would watch, "Look at his gestures, look at his hand gestures, look how he is behaving." And I was like it's quite a far cry from seeing someone immediately as gay or whatever, like you don't know that person. But they felt they had... the God given authority to stamp someone. [...] They have more systems than the government, in terms of this kinda thing. [...] They are like the people at Checkers, stamping the foods, if they could do that all day, I feel that they would.

The word choice "forensic scientist" implies close scrutiny and looking for "evidence" of sexual orientation that is projected as "truth" and subsequently used to justify stamping and assigning individuals to fixed categories. All the participants spoke of similar experiences of surveillance, policing, and how restrictive and punitive this classification system is, which completely disregards their agency to self-identify. When Prashant says, "*They felt they had the God given authority to stamp someone*" and "*They have more systems than the government,*" he illustrates how authoritative, powerful and expansive these norms are. Solely based on assigned sex and external cues, the monosexist system brands individuals into the binary of gender and sexuality. The quotes below illustrate some of the common experiences of mis-categorisation based on observation of external cues, including behaviour, personality traits, appearance, friendship groups and association.

"Wai-wai-wai-wai-wait. What do you mean [you knew I was gay]?" And they're just like, "No, dude you just don't really participate... in those types of conversations, when we talk about girls." ... They're like, "Dude three of your closest friends are gay so I mean, come on!" (laughs) [...] They say, I talk too much, and I'm too present, I'm

too bubbly, I'm too energetic. I'm too nice. I smile too much." ... Some people have said, "It's your walk, because of the way you walk." (Sifiso)

In society we really... assume people's sexual orientation according to their aesthetic. And I would say because aesthetically, I'm not what people would assume a queer body looks like..., I still, to an extent, haven't gotten that negativity, that I think would come with someone who..., wears their identity... more on the outside... if that makes sense. (Vela)

Notably, there is an insistence on the visibility of sexual orientation. Hall (2017) explains how this willed visibility connects to surveillance:

The imperative to know one's own or others' sexuality has given rise to numerous forms of surveillance, all geared toward revealing the truth of sexuality. Regardless of how one might understand oneself, every minute aspect of one's behaviour, appearance, and interests are taken as signs of the truth of one's sexuality. Testimony is not optional. (p. 159)

In line with Hall's assertion, participants explained how their "truth" is consistently decided for them. When I asked Prashant, for example, how his queer friends' "jokes" invalidating his bi-identity made him feel, he said, "*Like you're a liar.*" Consequently, as described by Hall, this system of surveillance and categorisation results in *testimonial injustice*. From the evidence presented in this section, it appears that gender expression is central to how this classification works: (1) "feminine" characteristics in a male means they are gay, (2) "masculine" characteristics in a female means they are lesbian, and (3) "feminine" characteristics in a female and "masculine" characteristics in a male mean they are straight. Participants were seldomly, if ever, perceived to be bisexual. Butler (2010) theorised that due to the cultural matrix of intelligibility "certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist' ... those in which the practices of desire do not 'follow' from either sex or gender" (p. 24). Since bisexuality cannot exist in the dominant cultural matrix, the participants' identities are incomprehensible. According to Foucault (1978), however, systems of oppression promote resistance. Resistance to categorisation is evident throughout the participants' accounts. For example, Sifiso and Thandie said:

Before [coming out] [...] few thought that I was gay. But after me growing more into my own skin and becoming more comfortable... now people's automatic assumption is "Oh dude, you are sooo gay." And I'm just like, "No I'm not!" (Sifiso)

I went through both assumptions of being only lesbian and being only straight, but I've never had the assumption of bi or pan. [...] People tend to revert back to what they

know... when they are stereotyping... "This is what you're supposed to look like, so if you don't look like this, you're not that." [...] Most of the stereotypes are based on... "If you don't fit in this box, then you must be [in the other]." [...] They look at the outside person and they're like, "Oh, you look like you'd be lesbian." And I'm like, again, "How does a lesbian look like?"... And then they're like, "No, you look straight. You don't look like you're somebody who's attracted to girls." Again!... "How does somebody who's straight look like, I don't understand!" [...] I'm like "What does a bi person look like then? What does a pansexual person look like? What does an asexual person look like? What about all those other sexualities, what do they look like?" It's been very weird actually... They box you in because of how you look. (Thandie)

Purdie-Vaughn and Eichbach (2008) argue that cognitive shortcuts simplify our way of understanding other people and ourselves, resulting in the oversimplification of gender and sexuality, as well as flawed explanations of human behaviour and experience. Several participants reportedly spoke about subverting gender norms, either consciously or unconsciously, due to not conforming to schemas of gender and sexuality. Since dominant normative schemas are incompatible with participants' experiences, they perpetuate epistemic injustice. This injustice seemingly escalates when sexual identities intersect with other marginalised identities (Butler, 2010; Hall, 2017) as Brian related:

My father is white, and my mom is coloured. So there is this weird dichotomy, that I have [...] to choose where to be, but I didn't want to choose where to be. They've always projected a stigma onto me. Um. When I was invited, probably because of my light skinned privilege..., to a party where there was only white kids..., the people of colour went out of their way... to tell the other children that I am someone of a mixed race or mixed blood. (Exhale)... This is where... social uncleanliness [comes in] - they're treating me different as though I am an outcast, just based on my race, and now I'm displaying characteristics of an indecisive sexuality too. All these anomalies force one into certain directions. ... There were rumours in the residence, "Is he transgender?" Um. Looking at physical attributes only that completely threw them when I was continuing to wear make-up while I was dating a girl. (Brian)

Consistent with Francis (2017), Brian's biracial and bisexual identities seemingly position him somewhere in-between the binary of black-and-white and hetero- and homosexual. He also shared experiences of being gender non-conforming and how this positions him between male-and-female. Seemingly within a binary belief system Brian experiences an accumulation of stressors. He describes these intersecting, unequal power relations that create a multitude of pressures and stigmas as a feeling of "social uncleanliness." While it is beyond the scope of this study to adequately address the intersectionality mentioned by Brian, it is evident that Brian is not afforded an opportunity to frame his own experience. This is consistent with

Hall's (2017) and Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) observations on losing control of the narrative.

When considering participants' experiences within the wider queer community and organisations, several spoke about it being a supportive space, while some highlighted feeling marginalised there too. This is in tandem with Hayfield's (2021) findings that examine how new sub-cultural norms replace heterosexual norms and end up being equally prescriptive. Indeed, the queer community has in some instances established that which it once aimed to trouble – the policing of non-conforming individuals. Ostensibly, the queer community appears to erode its potential to trouble dominant societal norms as it produces its own. Bongani and Vela comment on this as follows:

The funny part is when we run workshops and talks amongst the LGBTQI community, we talk about stereotypes... We talk about how bad stereotypes are, the consequences of stereotypes and stereotyping people. And then we come back and we use the same stereotype and still attack each other and say, "No, I heard this one is like this..." We use the very same stereotypes amongst ourselves. (Bongani)

Especially on campus..., um, even going to safe space... "Everyone is dressed in a certain way, people are speaking a certain way..." I think sometimes people use the identity of queerness as a shield... to safeguard themselves. And because it's such a community, we also want to fit in that community. And so... you'll find people acting a certain way, dressing a certain way. And everything you go through in the heterosexual world, it's like that times 10 in the queer community. Because now... you find people who you fit in with - outside of heteronormativity, but then you're trying to fit in even more..., because you're all different, but almost in the same way. (Vela)

From the interviews, it became apparent how social surveillance penetrates every aspect of the participants' experiences, consequently influencing their behaviour and psychological well-being in several ways. They reported feeling anger, frustration, a loss of agency, hypervigilance and discomfort.

I don't generally notice if I'm being masculine or feminine. But the moment you are in that crowd [gay friends] you are aware of everything you do. The way you speak, the tone you speak. The way your hand gestures. Because they're busy, they're looking at all of that stuff. [...] If I am walking alone I still feel that burning sensation of being watched, fear of being critically evaluated. [...] I felt like I had a loss of control, of myself, when I was being judged, because immediately you are being segmented into different types... and you have no control over that. (Prashant)

It [being boxed] created lots of self-confidence issues, and social anxiety issues, lots of social anxiety issues... To try blend in, I would always feel like whenever I was in a

big social environment... I would just feel like, "Oh my fuck, everyone can see me, everyone's looking at me. Do I look normal? Why are you looking at me like that, do I look strange? What are you thinking?" Society is... cruel to the gay, bi and pansexual person. (Estian)

Several participants described their feelings of distress about being repeatedly boxed and categorized as gay, lesbian or straight despite asserting their bi-identity. Apparently, participants find themselves ruminating over people's perceptions, which is exhausting and lowers participants' self-esteem and confidence. These experiences are consistent with Choi et al.'s (2019) concept of *vigilant* and *ambivalent* identity profiles. External stressors further weaken the participants' ability to develop a protective attitude, and instead they seem to develop anxious and hypervigilant coping strategies. Shilo and Savaya's (2011) findings concur that external influences do determine attitudes. These negative psychological effects are consistent with the minority stress model and explain the psychological health disparities between bi-individuals and monosexuals (Mereish et al., 2017).

Seemingly, most participants report that avoidance is a common coping strategy. For example, Prashant described, "*I just wanted to melt into the ground, in the first three years of university. Back then, I just wished I was invisible, that I could just go about my own business.*" This desire to be invisible conveys a sense of desperation to escape the surveillance and categorisation that leaves participants feeling distressed, disempowered and burdened by hypervigilance. The closet offers protection in the form of invisibility and several participants report reverting back to the safety of the closet due to the psychological distress of being out (discussed further in chapter 7).

6.2 Impact of Gendered Expectations - "You need to pick a lane."

Expectations based on assigned sex (male/female) and others' perceptions of their gender (man/woman) were reported by all participants. Below, I discuss the similarities and differences between male and female bi-participants' experiences.

6.2.1. Hypersexualisation Effect

Helms and Waters (2016) found that attitudes towards bi-men are less favourable than attitudes towards lesbian women, gay men or bi-women. Consistent with this, four female participants reported that male bisexuality is less socially acceptable than female bisexuality. For instance, Kefilwe and Lerato reported:

Within the LGBT community there is still sort of a, "But are you gay? Or are you straight? Why you in the middle?" Especially if you're a guy, for girls it is a lot easier. We get sort of written off..., we sort of get like the pass because like, "Oh, you're girls, fine." And there's a lot more linked with sexuality for the girls, whereas with the boys, it's like, "You need to pick a lane." (Kefilwe)

Because they [men] have the sexual objectification of women in their heads without them even knowing that they do. They immediately find it [female bisexuality] sexy... But then with a guy [male bisexual] some of them feel threatened... which is so absurd, but they think they're gonna turn them gay or something (sniggers). [...] Religiously it was like... it's a "no go" [being homosexual]. But also, religiously the... noise [homophobia] that has been brought to my attention is mostly about gay people, and not much on the woman [lesbians] [...] So in church, I never even felt guilty about it [female bisexuality] because I thought, homosexuality is only men. (Lerato)

Religion seems to play a significant role in making female bisexuality more socially acceptable. Dominant religions view male same sex intercourse as sodomy, thus sinful, while female same sex intercourse is not condemned the same way. Apart from religion, sodomy laws have historically criminalised male same sex acts (Matebeni & Pereira, 2014). In addition, bi-males are also reportedly perceived as a threat to other men. Researchers postulate that attitudes towards bi-men may also be less favourable due to the perceived threat they pose to male privilege and power (Helms & Waters, 2016; Lytle et al., 2017).

Contrastingly, several female participants spoke about being propositioned to engage in a threesome, whereas no male participants reported such experience. This is consistent with Decapua (2017) and Wandrey et al.'s (2015) findings regarding straight men's persistent hypersexualisation and objectification of bi-women. This hypersexualisation may be closely associated with the perception that two women are not really having sex. Lerato reflected on this:

I have... questioned myself in terms of virginity, the way virginity is explained to us..., or the idea of it, is that, when you have sexual intercourse..., or penetration of some sort, then you lose your virginity... Where does it leave lesbians, for instance? [...] It's a personal perception..., but obviously culturally enforced [that sex is about phallic penetration]. [...] Comments like, "How do you get pleasure from a girl?" or "How do

you get pleasure if you're not having sexual intercourse with someone else's dick?" [...] Which is misinformation of what pleasure is to other people.

Seemingly, the notion of same sex female sex as “real sex” is challenged, which may contribute to favourable attitudes towards bi-women, especially taking religious perspectives into account. However, if these views contribute to female hypersexualisation from a male chauvinist perspective, these seemingly favourable perceptions are actually harmful.

6.2.2 Sex as a Tool of Conversion

From the interviews, I inferred that bi-denial and notions of bi-liminality may be associated with expectations that sex can convert bi-individuals to monosexuality. Several participants spoke about experiences of monosexism within their intimate partner relationships.

They think they can change you, can convert you. I've had guys say, "Ah, dude, I'll make you gay. Oh, my god, there's no way, you'll never think of another girl, ever again." [...] Or (laughs) there have been females that have been like, "After you're with me you will never want another male again." [...] I was with a girl once... and our relationship legit became about her trying to convert me. It didn't end well. And she was like, "I don't understand!"... She was so upset. And I was like, "But I told you this wasn't gonna work!" (Sifiso)

This one pathetic human (laughs) I was trying to help, um, them settle in res and for them to not feel so left out or whatever. And then they just got this very wrong idea. They said like they feel bored... and they just want to have sex with someone... and I'm just like, "Well, I'm definitely not in this space." But it was so random, and then he's like, "What about you?" And I was like, "Oh, no, I'm only interested in women." And then he is like, "Well that's only because you haven't been with a guy" [...] Yoh! Those people that just make you sick, and they think that they can change your sexuality because they have such a big ego, with small dicks. Sorry this is my anger coming out. (Lerato)

When Sifiso says, “Our relationship legit became about her trying to convert me,” he is alluding to how the focus of the relationship shifted. Similarly, Lerato’s experience of being told “Well, that's only because you haven't been with a guy,” attests to a situation in which their self-knowledge is disregarded or diminished. The notion of sex as a tool of conversion not only represents epistemic injustice and a microaggression, but importantly what Brown (2015) identifies as contributing to corrective rape in South Africa. Thandie describes both, microaggression and overt threats of corrective rape:

"You just need the right man." I'm like..., "The right what...?! Excuse you? Thanks..., no!" My sister..., has experienced the whole, "No you just need to get dicked right"

and I'm like, "What the fuck! Guys!" [...] "Y'all know that is rape right?"... Sooo that [in KZN] is where the most resistance is faced. (Thandie)

What Thandie addresses in this exchange comprises a hate crime based on sexual orientation and is emblematic of the threat to the entire female queer community (Brown, 2015; Sandfort et al., 2015). While both male and female participants experienced notions of conversion, female participants appear to experience it more frequently and overtly than males. Given the prevalence of female corrective rape in South Africa, female participants likely experience innuendos about conversion far more violently.

6.2.3. Dating Exclusion

Dating exclusion refers to not considering an individual a viable partner due to stigma surrounding bisexuality. As discussed in Chapter 5, the bi-stereotype of being sexually irresponsible often results in associations of disloyalty and the inability to commit (Gleason et al., 2018). Dating exclusion by monosexuals represents a microaggression that points to the structural oppression of bi-individuals' everyday experiences (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Flanders et al., 2016). From the interviews, no female participants reported such exclusion, which may be partially explained by the female hypersexualisation effect. Contrastingly, five male participants reported exposure to dating exclusion, primarily from women. This resonates with Gleason et al.'s (2018) finding that based on the identity label "bisexual," straight women appraise bi-men as less masculine, romantically and sexually less attractive, and less desirable to date and have sex with than heterosexual men. In contrast, gay men did not share these attitudes towards bi-men, nor were these negative attitudes demonstrated by straight men when comparing straight and bisexual women (Gleason et al., 2018). Seemingly, these factors contribute significantly to the patterns of exclusion evident in the male participants' experiences presented below.

I have experienced, this is mostly with a girl, where I'll be talking with a girl and we're getting along well, the minute they find out I'm bisexual, the tone of the whole conversation changes. Yho! Meaningful conversation basically ceases, the moment they find out. [...] I've experienced more hate from females than males... I haven't met myself many females who are knowledgeable about bisexuality actually... Finding one who is knowledgeable about the subject and who is understanding and everything is very rare. (Sifiso)

It's a difficult lifestyle [being a bisexual man]... I don't know any girls who would want to date a guy who previously dated... guys. There's clearly... something that you're not able to provide. [...] Therefore, they would not feel secure in that relationship. [...] I

think bisexuality is a very difficult thing in terms of relationships... In terms of... hookups and one night stands it's pretty easy. But, as soon as you start talking about relationships and feelings get involved, then I don't really see how... you can reconcile... being bisexual and... being in any sort of relationship with anyone and having them feel secure in a relationship like that. [...] I wouldn't ever be able to date... another girl without disclosing my past... to them... and I don't think that anyone would want to date someone like that, a girl at least wouldn't want to date someone like that [a bisexual man who has been in a long term same sex relationship]. (Estian)

This suggests that bi-male stereotypes commonly lead to dating exclusion by women because their bi-attraction is socially incomprehensible and fosters biphobia. The limitations of our collective societal schemas are further revealed when Estian says, “*I wouldn't ever be able to date another girl,*” indicating how these stereotypes are seemingly internalised, making it unfathomable to transgress them. Estian appears to enact the legitimacy and acceptability of such exclusion that derives from biphobia (see Chapter 8 for a discussion on internalisation). The effects of dating exclusion evidently alter how the participants view themselves and interact with the world. Male participants appear disheartened by these experiences and spoke about inhibiting their pursuit of women or reverting back into the closet to avoid exclusion.

My first girlfriend, in first year..., we really got close and everything. [...] And then she didn't like the fact that I wasn't like totally 100 percent... attracted to her. But, that's just how she saw it. [...] She was almost like turned off [when she found out I was bisexual]. That was one of the worst experiences ever, cause she was like..., "I'm not attracted to someone who is [bisexual]." After that experience it was completely off putting [to publicly self-identify as bisexual], I was like, "What's the point?" cause there's no one that understands that I know [who and how I am attracted to people]. (Prashant)

I've had two great relationships... out of a possible... eight..., my sexuality or past experiences didn't matter..., which is what made them so great, it was all about... our attraction to one another and... our conversations..., the different personality traits and characteristics that we liked about each other and how we maneuvered around and through those things that we weren't so fond of... which is what made them amazing. (Sifiso)

Most participants emphasised that their attraction was based on their partners' personality, characteristics and feeling connected, and was not centred around gender; however, they found it almost impossible to communicate this to their partners. In Sifiso's interview-extract above, we see how his bisexuality was normalised, allowing the focus to remain on the relationship and not on his sexual orientation.

6.2.4. Perceptions of Bi-male Sexual Intercourse

Pereira (2021) suggests that same sex male anal sex is gendered, such that masculine men are perceived as tops, while feminine men are perceived as bottoms. Considering the impact of the interpersonal script described in sub-section 6.1, Pereira (2021) suggests that perceptions of bi-men's masculinity are influenced by the position they assume during anal sex with a man. From this we infer that bi-men are required to maintain and manage their masculinity even within queer spaces according to the dominant culture of hegemonic masculine norms rooted in heterosexuality (Pereira, 2021). Below, I discuss the influence of this gendered interpersonal script on the male participants in this study. Most male participants reported the prevalent expectation that bi-males should be dominant and assume the "masculine" role in sexual intercourse. For example, Martin and Bongani explained:

The main stereotypes of top or bottom, which I think is..., um, a huge stereotype even in the... queer community. It's who's considered more masculine... who is considered more, um..., feminine, and that sort of thing... when you identify as a top or a bottom... So there is sort of stigma there. (Martin)

Queer people would... be like, "There's no such thing [as bisexuality], you are just making excuses." [...] So if now you're going to say, "Oh, no, I'm bisexual, but I play... a role that is seen more as a feminine role in a relationship they are like, "But you can't be. (laughs) Because if you are bisexual, then you are going to be a 'man' both sides [in straight and gay relationships]." [...] If you are bisexual or gay and you are a bottom it means you are more female, whereas if you're bisexual and maybe you are top at least you are more male, so it would be more acceptable. [...] Where for example people ask you, "So are you top or bottom?" Now you're scared to say "I'm bottom... or I'm versatile." So there are two things that some people don't like: bisexual and versatile... Because they say, "No, there's no such thing [as a versatile bisexual]. [...] It deprives people of experiencing fully their own sexuality and their own sensuality, and exploring themselves, and exploring their bodies... Because they are stuck in this "I'm male [role]." (Bongani)

From the above, participants seem to experience three assumptions as bi-males: (1) they must always be a "top," thus assuming the penetrator role during sexual intercourse; (2) they should not be a "bottom" as this connotes the penetrated role during sexual intercourse; (3) they should not be versatile (enjoy both "topping" and "bottoming"). This gendering of sexual positions speaks to the dominance and influence of heteronormativity and gendered roles even in the queer community.

Unlike the participants in Pereira's (2021) study, all male participants in this study described how their bisexuality was brought into question when they transgress these norms. Seemingly,

these assumptions compelled some bi-male participants to suppress their desires or to feel ashamed of bottoming or being versatile. Similarly, some bi-male participants expressed fear and shame about communicating their non-normative sexual desires within their relationships with women.

Imagine it... now you ask your girlfriend, "So, um..., I want to try bottoming tonight [with a strap-on]." And she's like, "Whaaat?"... Like I realized that it can bring about doubt, where she is like, "Okay, but are you sure you're bi then? Why do you want to bottom?" Because I feel people are not educated on that, people don't realize that people like different things just because someone wants to try something doesn't mean that they're not bisexual or they're not truly of the sexual identity that they say they are... Just because somebody wants you to wear a strap-on doesn't mean that they're not straight or bi anymore. [...] It has affected me, um, pursuing girls, because I am not going to lie, I do feel more judgment for that aspect, the fear of judgment from a female... has halted me from pursuing. (Sifiso)

Fear of judgement, rejection and shaming from women left some bi-males feeling inadequate and perverse for wanting to suggest “pegging” (a female partner performs anal sex on a male partner, using a strap-on dildo). This fear and accompanying insecurity evidently has an inhibiting effect. However, consistent with Callis’ (2009) theory of bi-individuals’ ability to resist social “cross-gendering,” these participants’ sexual practices seemingly have the potential to trouble heteronormative assumptions. Yet, this potential partially relies on their level of confidence in resisting dominant norms.

6.3 Summary

Above, I discussed gendering, gender expectations, and the resulting system of surveillance that categorises everyone into binaries of gender and sexuality. Please see Appendix K for additional participants’ quotes to substantiate this theme. In sub-theme 6.1, I highlighted how participants experienced the process of being gendered and policed from a young age. Sex and gender expressions are used as false evidence of people’s hetero/homosexuality. Society seemingly assumes the authority to categorise, question and evaluate others’ sex, gender and sexuality. This renders bisexuality socially unintelligible, making it almost impossible for bi-participants to communicate the truth of their lived experiences to others. Throughout this chapter, I elucidated experiences of epistemic injustice, including the adverse effects this has on participants’ well-being, while exacerbating experiences of loneliness and invisibility discussed in Chapter 5.

In sub-theme 6.2, I illustrated some of the similarities and differences between male and female participants and how assumptions about sex and gender influence the types of bi-experiences they had in their interpersonal relationships and within the queer community. I illustrated the extent to which binegativity infiltrates relationships, while also highlighting that bi-experiences are not uniform. Gendering and the societal association with sexual orientation confirmed the dominance of heteronormativity, not only in society overall, but also within the queer community.

Chapter 7: Playing with the Closet

- “*It does split my life*”

In this chapter, I discuss how dual binegativity shapes the way the participants relate to their environment, including what motivates coming out and concealment as they navigate hetero- or mononormative spaces. From the interviews, it is evident that coming out and concealment are not polar opposites; instead, they are often used strategically as contextually based patterns of behaviour (see table in Appendix J). Although I discuss *concealment*, *outness*, and *situational identification* separately, all participants reported using two or all three of these approaches. In Table 7.1, I present the sub-themes *concealment*, *outness* and *situational identity*.

Table 7.1

Sub-themes	Categories
7.1 Concealment	7.1.1 Concealment and behaviour modification 7.1.2 Cost of concealment
7.2 Outness	7.2.1 Responses to coming out
7.3 Situational identity	7.3.1 Between concealment and outness 7.3.2 Split-life isolation

Thematic Map: Playing with the Closet – “It does split my life”

7.1 Concealment - “Hiding”

This sub-theme addresses *concealment and behaviour modification* as well as the *cost of concealment*.

7.1.1 Concealment and Behaviour Modification

Bi-individuals conceal their identity in response to toxic hetero- or mononormative environments that exert immense social pressure to mis-identify with a monosexual orientation. This creates a negative cycle of concealment that inadvertently supports monosexist conceptions of bi-illegitimacy (Roberts et al., 2015). Simultaneously, self-

disclosure may create undesired exposure and possible discrimination (Francis, 2017). Cumulatively, these factors contribute to bi-individuals' hesitation to come out, reinforcing social bi-invisibility (Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017). In this study, all participants found the thought of coming out to be challenging for similar reasons, especially with respect to their religious, family and hometown environments.

I always... had the image that you hide your queerness. [...] Because both of my older siblings were in the closet, one is still in the closet. (Thandie)

I think the challenge with living in an environment you grew up with... is everyone is asking, "What's happening? Who is this?" [...] They think they have the license to ask questions... and you think you have the obligation to answer in a particular way... But to make yourself feel comfortable, especially for someone like me..., I want to shut people up..., you then do certain things so that [your community does not notice you are not heterosexual], "Okay, what else do you want [referring to social expectations]? Here is a wife, here are children. Here's this, here's this [referring to all his efforts to adhere to heteronormativity]." (Bongani)

Apparently, *compulsory heterosexuality* (Rich, 1980) establishes a norm of concealment, enforced through unspoken rules that instil shame and fear; however, concealment is also a protective response. Remindful of Watson's (2014) family closet of silence, most participants had not come out within their religious, family and home-town environments due to fear of backlash. Notably, all participants had fears around coming out within heteronormative families. Brian described "*the fear that she [my mother] will maybe not pay my varsity fees, [or] kick me out of the household,*" while Martin said, "*He [my father] has said he would disown me if I identified as gay or bi, so I've decided not to.*" Previously quoted in chapter 5, Yumna spoke of repercussions that range from violence to homelessness, "*And she still believes that people should be stoned... I'm just really scared of being rejected. It really did tell me it's not safe to come out... I don't want to get thrown out of the house.*"

Logically, fear and uncertainty about the consequences of coming out inhibit disclosure and promote concealment. This is in consonance with Orne's (2013) findings that underscore how in situations of overt hostility, bi-individuals manage their identity through strategic outness or concealment and passing.

Important to note is that mononormativity also promotes concealment. Vela spoke about her internal struggle between coming out versus concealment, and how she considers reverting to the closet after experiences of monosexism.

I question whether or not it's worth it to have this whole 'coming out' thing. Because when you come out, the reality sets in..., people might start treating you differently, people might start seeing you differently.... And especially for me, who doesn't fit the box that we've created for queer bodies, how is it gonna affect me? Are people going to take me seriously? Are people going to have hostile feelings towards me? [...] Am I going to continue going through this sort of coming out? Or am I just going to live my life as I have been? (Vela)

Seemingly, for several participants, coming out means facing the potential reality of marginalisation and epistemic injustice. These participants' premonitions are in consonance with Dyar and London's (2018) contention that un-identifying as bisexual may be linked to the individual's unconscious attempt at avoiding the adverse effects of biphobia on their self-image and psychological well-being. For instance, consider Kefilwe and Brian's reasoning for un-identifying:

I want to stand up for a political role in the future. [...] People who work in politics and stuff like that right now, happen to be people from an older generation, they're less likely to... be accepting of this [my bisexuality] and I don't want there to be a stigma around this. [...] What I want people to say is, "Oh, okay, whatever let's move on." But I feel like that's not going to be the case, I feel like there's going to be a discussion, and more than anything, I don't want to have to defend or explain why I am [bisexual] [...] And I fear that people won't respect me for it. (Kefilwe)

I'm not wanting to be stereotyped or put in a box. [...] That's why I stopped using it. If I say that I'm bisexual, I find that people would then say, "So you're not sure."... And that can convey into my professional career. [...] So now there comes this difficulty in being a strong leadership figure [...] But, if rumours go about that he's not sure what his sexual identity is, they will assimilate that, or associate that with being, um, on the fence in general, in life: "Indecisive..., can't make decisions..., uh, he doesn't know who he is..." (Brian)

Sedgwick's (1990) theory about the power of sexual identity labels in society aligns precisely with Kefilwe and Brian's concerns. These labels are "full of implications, however confusing, for even the ostensibly least sexual aspects of personal existence" (p. 2). This further resonates with France's (2017) discussion on *surplus visibility*, as bi-stereotypes appear to transfer to all other areas of these participants' lives. Thus, following Orne (2013), we see how Kefilwe and Brian use deflection to minimise questions about their sexual identity and to avoid negative reflections on their current and future work.

From another perspective, the participants are resisting epistemic injustice. Hall (2017) refers to societies' perpetual compulsion to assign sexual identity labels based on desire and actions. *Testimonial injustice* includes the process by which these labels impose truths on individuals

(Fricker, 2009). The label and its associations then define their personhood. Consequently, several participants resist labelling through concealment.

Prashant: *I don't generally notice if I'm being masculine or feminine. But the moment you are in that crowd [previous gay friends] you are aware of everything you do. [...] I felt like I had a loss of control, of myself, when I was being judged, because immediately you are being segmented into different types... and you have no control over that. Um. Which I managed to get back now that I am older. (Prashant)*

Philip: *So your friend group at the moment, you are out to them?*

Prashant: *No. My best friend kinda knows. [...] I like to have control over my narrative. Cause I felt so out of control in my undergrad years. Um... I want to get back as much control over my life as possible, before I start giving out information [about my sexual-orientation]. But I also feel like people... are not entitled to that information, if I don't feel [like coming out]. So I have no need to tell people just because they are family or something. Because, I believe it's my information, I will tell you if I think you are a worthy recipient of it.*

Prashant's testimony suggests that the motivation for bi-concealment does not only stem from fear of overt discrimination, but also from fear of being unheard, unseen, and being incomprehensible, and ultimately a fear of losing legitimacy and testimonial authority (Hall, 2017). Evidently, not "giving information" can also be a form of resistance. Like Prashant, several other participants resisted what Hall (2019) refers to as "the epistemic violence of compulsory testimony about one's sexuality" (p. 158). Instead, some participants disengaged, opted to guard their testimony, and confide only in "worthy recipients" who are able to hold their experiential truth. Thus, in consonance with Maliepaard (2018), non-disclosure cannot simply be framed as "bad." Concealment allows some participants to protect themselves, to resist forced confessions and to exert control over their narratives and truth, even if that truth is only known to themselves.

Self-monitoring for Behaviour Modification

Foucault (1990) theorised that sexuality became omnipresent in society when it was viewed as extensively affecting interests and behaviours from the subconscious. This belief propelled the generation of surveillance systems, geared towards classifying everything as proof of an individual's sexuality (Foucault, 1990). Drawing from Foucault, Sedgwick (1990) theorised that the consequence of this feared influence of sexual orientation was every individual adopting a practice of monitoring others and oneself for any sign of sexual deviance. Despite

not adhering to these norms, bi-individuals learn to self-surveil and self-regulate to avoid the consequences of transgressing them.

I used to stand in a certain way. Yoh, it irritated my mother sooo much, "Don't stand like that!" I think that was the thing that she reprimanded me about the most..., the way I stood, and me using my hands to talk. She hated that. (Sifiso)

I don't see it as hiding from him [my father], I just see myself going into a more masculine energy when I do visit him. (Martin)

These statements imply that participants learn to self-surveil and, to some extent, perform their “good boy” or “good girl” roles. To avoid being policed and censured, they modify their behaviour, speech and actions in order to collude with dominant contextual norms. These findings correspond with Knight et al. (2016) who found that self-monitoring and self-presentation management correlates to the amount of stigma within the social context. Although concealment can be protective and centre on superficial presentation, several participants reported a loss of authenticity when concealing, for example when engaging in self-surveillance and self-regulation in an attempt to please other people. For instance, Estian shared, “*I want to please my parents... I want to be a good Afrikaans boy, I need to be straight, I need to have a wife, I need to have kids.*” Similarly, Brian said, “*I don't want anybody to feel uncomfortable in my presence. So I would always compromise. [...] Like I said, the people pleasing.*” As Foucault (2001) notes, conformity is not realised through force and coercion alone, but also through desire.

7.1.2 Cost of Concealment

Research findings suggest that, compared to other sexual minorities, bi-individuals are more prone to concealment (Mereish et al., 2017). Concealment among bi-individuals is a significant and persistent source of stress, fear and anxiety about being “outed,” thus putting them at an increased risk for depression, substance misuse and suicidality compared to monosexuals (Bostwick & Dodge, 2019; Rimes et al., 2018). Furthermore, bi-individuals are at increased risk of developing negative sexual identities (Lytle et al., 2017).

All participants spoke about the cost of concealing their sexual orientation. Some examples of this cost include preventing people from knowing them, making them feel disingenuous and living with constant anxiety, paranoia, hypervigilance and self-monitoring due to fear of being outed. Indeed, concealment and masking expends extreme amounts of mental energy, while also

contributing to self-isolation and inhibition of personal growth. However, despite the cost of concealment, for most of the participants, it seems to be the safer option as they fear being rejected and losing the meaningful relationships they depend on. Several participants reflected on how concealment left them feeling uncertain and vulnerable, leading to chronic anxiety about inadvertently outing themselves. For instance, Estian and Brian related:

It [being boxed] created lots of self-confidence issues, and social anxiety issues, lots of social anxiety issues... to try blend in. I would always feel like [that] whenever I was in a big social environment. (Estian)

People pleasing comes from young school days... I would always compromise [myself], which is not always a healthy thing because... there was nothing that I was doing that is unethical. [...] But I find that it takes an extreme amount of mental energy to mask. (Brian)

Seemingly, self-regulation often results in chronic compulsive checking, associated with elevated levels of self-monitoring and rumination, as the individual over-analyses their own and others' behaviours and reactions. These cognitive processes lead to psychological distress and mental fatigue as participants need to continuously modulate their behaviour in several settings. Such hypervigilance and self-monitoring is typical of Choi et al.'s (2019) *vigilant* profile, a profile associated with significantly worse health outcomes than the *affirmative* or *ambivalent* profiles.

7.2 Outness - “Here’s my flag guys!”

Self-identification and disclosure, i.e. coming out, are considered essential steps in sexual minority development (Wandrey et al., 2015). Below, I discuss *responses to coming out*.

7.2.1 Responses to Coming Out

Coming Out to Family

From a queer epistemological perspective, Hall (2017) contends that the “epistemic authority of sexually minoritized people is contested” (p. 5) because society compels its members to reveal their sexual identity. According to Sedgwick (1990), society obligates each individual to be assigned a hetero/ homosexual identity. This omnipresent binarised sexualities matrix leaves no space for alternatives and results in testimonial injustice. It is within this milieu that

bi-individuals are not only pressured to come out, but also pressured into coming out in a socially comprehensible way, which again places bi-individuals in a double bind.

Responses to coming out ranged from negative to positive. Those participants who came out to family members in older generations (parents/grandparents) often experienced a negative or ambivalent response, while younger generations were more accepting.

When I told her [my mother] about my sexuality, it was more in the lines of, "Oh, my goodness, my dear child, I pray for you, this is sinful, and you will not be forgiven... This is the worst sin... you can ever commit." And then I said, "I don't think it's a sin..., I don't feel it's a sin and I don't feel its possession. It is something that has always been there. I didn't own it, um, earlier because I didn't understand it, because... it wasn't a thought, it was just a happening. So, I embrace it, and I will continue to embrace it, and I own it, and this is who I am, and that's okay with me, and there's nothing you can do about it." That was the first time that I told her... It was one of those conversations that evaporated. (Lerato)

I first came out as bi [and then as pan] ... I was like, "I'm bisexual," and then my mom was like, "Nah, you confused." And I was like, "Nah, I think you're the one who's confused, bye! Let's not delve into that..." Initially she didn't understand my attraction to girls, then I was like, "It's the same as my attraction to guys, it's just a different body form." [...] [Eventually] my mom was pretty understanding of it. My grams just pretended like it doesn't exist, she heard the "I like boys" part. [...] All my siblings are very supportive of it. So, it wasn't a horrible coming out experience. (Thandie)

It seems that when religious points of view project assumptions of sin and possession, it promotes feelings of shame. Negative experiences of coming out also include denial, gaslighting, questioning and the assumption that there is confusion or identity crisis. These experiences concur with Sedgwick's (1990) contention that "even when one announces the truth of one's sexuality by coming out, that announcement is often met with questions and it is not uncommon to be told that one is mistaken in what one thinks one knows about oneself" (p. 79). All of these experiences potentially promote self-doubt. Nevertheless, several participants self-advocate, take a stand against the status quo, engage in the power struggle, set boundaries regarding self-knowledge and also attempt to educate others (discussed further in Chapter 9). Lerato and Thandie demonstrate resilience and self-empowerment in the face of binegativity, retorting "*I think you're the one who's confused,*" as Thandie did. Francis' (2017) findings further expose where the confusion really lies – it is the biphobic who are confused.

Further, consistent with Khuzwayo and Morison's (2017) theme of resistance, these participants' experiences also illustrate Pohlhaus' (2012) theory of *wilful hermeneutical*

injustice (p. 722), as dominant hetero- or mononormative knowers refuse to let marginalised bi-individuals' knowledge challenge and inform their readings of the world. This represents a significant problem from a queer epistemological viewpoint because dualistic constructions of gender and sexuality inhibit dominant knowers from comprehending the multifarious realities and experiences of gender, desire and pleasure (Hall, 2017).

Notably, all three participants who were out to their entire family apparently had a bi-positive, self-empowered attitude and certainty about their bi-identities before coming out. Hall (2017) warns, however, that increased self-comprehension does not automatically result in increased epistemic justice. But as Lerato illustrates below, self-comprehension does more easily allow for insight into alternative perspectives.

One of the things that I learnt last year, was that I also need to give her [my mother] space to grieve the loss of the idea of what I would have been, or what she thought I would become. And it's very natural for her to have certain reactions, because it's almost like, "You just took something from me," which she has envisioned... and now taking that away also needs some healing. I think that's why I also had such an almost peaceful approach to it, and not like, anger at the world. It did affect me at some point, but it wasn't in a sense of, "Maybe I should just pretend to be straight." (Lerato)

Apparently, self-knowledge and the ability to step into her mother's perspective allows Lerato to maturely deal with a potentially heart-breaking response. Several participants showed a similar resilience that appears to stem from self-acceptance and perspective-taking ability, thus displaying queer individuals' capacity for what Orne (2013) terms *double consciousness*. In contrast to older generations, reactions from family members in the same generation were predominantly positive.

My sister was... indifferent about it, she's like "okay, and?" My cousin, oh my gosh, she was, wow! She was jumping, she was really happy. (laughs) She was like..., "Uh, finally!" (Sifiso)

I have cousins who identify the same as I do. [...] It's really great because we grew up living next to each other so our childhoods are very similar. So it is nice to have someone else who understands your context so well..., more than a friend would... it's pretty invaluable, and I am really grateful for it... It's a support I don't get anywhere else. (Jenny)

Consistent with Hayfield (2021) and Watson (2014), these participants' statements point to generationally shifting norms as queerness seemingly becomes more normalised, less suppressed and more supported.

Coming out to straight friends

Similarly, within friendship groups in the university setting, most participants reported that disclosure to straight individuals was primarily a neutral to positive experience, especially among female participants.

Because most of my friends are straight... and for them it..., I will say brought us closer when I was able to explain to them... that this is my identity, and this is what it means. They also took the time to do their own research on pansexuality, and I definitely think they got to understanding why that's the identity that I chose, why I'm wired the way I'm wired. [...] Because I've never been in a queer relationship before they didn't really understand to what extent... my sexual orientation is outside of heterosexuality. [...] I was able to explain to them, "In my eyes, the way I view my sexuality is even if I spend my whole life having only dated men..., the point is my attraction goes beyond gender." (Vela)

With the bisexual friends, it was just the thing of, "Ah, me too. What!" (Laughs)... And then..., um, with my main group of friends, all of them are straight, and actually most of them are very religious and they still were like, "Yeah, this is fine."... I love that response of "Whatever, I don't care." [...] They sort of categorize it under..., "It's just part of my quirky personality." [...] If anything they try to understand... and not in a way of, "I want to accept you so you need to explain this to me better so that I can accept you." It's more of a thing of, "We already accept you. This is not even a factor to us. Um, I'm just curious." (Kefilwe)

In line with Flanders et al.'s (2017) contention that bi-individuals categorise neutral responses as positive, most participants reported experiencing neutrality as positive. Within more progressive university settings, the influence of traditional heteronormative religious beliefs is seemingly also shifting and further easing disclosure. Coming out still seems to involve educating others, albeit younger dominant hetero- or mononormative knowers who appear more open to allowing bi-individuals' marginalised knowledge to inform their interpretation of the world, which is experienced as exceedingly positive (Pohlhaus, 2012). Consequently, everyday acts like having a discussion about sexuality as equals, being heard and not questioned, are moments of epistemic justice that are perceived positively.

However, not all experiences of coming out to straight friends at university were positive as some, particularly male, participants reported. Prashant reflects on how one's entire life-narrative is "rewritten" when coming out.

You see, once you say..., that you may be this [bisexual], then people have a hindsight bias to everything you've done. So he did that... I remember being so completely upset... it was a gut-wrenching moment, because the thing I was trying to avoid... happened. Where... everything you've done gets called into question. That was quite a

hectic time. It was really... not a nice feeling... when someone else tells you... how... you are, when you know it's not. But you can't, you don't know the..... words to explain. [...] I believed him to be the most rational person out there, and he behaved like that. So, anybody else that you would have told, it would just blow their mind.
(Prashant)

It seems that sexual orientation becomes so significant that it overrides all prior knowledge of an individual. This is aligned with Sedgwick's (1990) notion that sexual identity is "full of implications, however confusing, for even the ostensibly least sexual aspects of personal existence" (p. 2). Congruous with this loss of narrative control and bi-men's experiences of dating exclusion by heterosexual women, as illustrated in Chapter 6, Prashant experienced rejection when he came out to his girlfriend.

That was one of the worst experiences ever, cause she was like..., "I'm not attracted to someone who is [bisexual]. [...] After that experience it was completely off putting [to publicly self-identify as bisexual], I was like, "What's the point?", cause there's no one that understands that I know [who and how I am attracted to people]. So eventually I was like, "No, I don't want to identify as anything. I'm just gonna go with the flow."
(Prashant)

Prashant's experience exemplifies testimonial injustice. He describes how his narrative and identity was rewritten out of his control, as his former girlfriend's view of him changed completely when he came out. Prashant's excerpt also illustrates wilful hermeneutical ignorance because societies' collective lack of knowledge resources renders him incomprehensible and the resistance to amending the base of knowledge maintains his unintelligibility (Pohlhaus, 2012). To protect himself from epistemic injustice and future discrimination that is rooted in mononormativity, Prashant reverts back to non-disclosure. Sifiso's experience in this regard was markedly different:

I've had two great relationships. ... my sexuality or past experiences didn't matter, which is what made them so great. ... They accepted me wholeheartedly, completely without question. They never felt fear or threatened by anything that I did, which I admire, because that has been so rare in my experiences. (Sifiso)

Sifiso's appreciation emphasises the desire for bi-normalisation and how experiences of neutrality appear positive in the face of dating exclusion (Flanders et al., 2017). Sifiso's admiration towards bipoisitive/neutral partners is seemingly directed towards their ability to conceptualise sexuality beyond the monosexual binary, as they do not revert to bi-stereotyping. What allows for epistemic justice is the absence of any power/knowledge struggles and that his self-knowledge is not undermined (Hall, 2017).

Coming Out in the Queer Community

Female participants appear to have predominantly positive experiences when coming out in the queer community while male participants have both positive and negative experiences.

Consider Jenny and Thandie's affirming experiences:

With people who identify, either the same as me, or in a similar way, um, when they found out they were like super supportive, and that was really nice, because that comes with a built in community. [...] I knew... if I did have any questions about it that was a safe space... to express them... Um, and everyone that was really affirming in whatever I was thinking, they were just here for me. (Jenny)

I came out to my friends..., but I think my whole coming out experience was easier than most... because at the time I finally decided to come out and I was comfortable with coming out. I was surrounded by so many queer individuals, that it wasn't a big deal. I had a bisexual best friend, I had a gay friend so when I came out, I was like, "Yo guys, so... what's up" and they were like, "What took you so long to realize?" And I was like, "Ouch. My chest..." (Thandie)

Jenny and Thandie speak about a sense of belonging with the queer community and they consider it an affirming and supportive space. Despite Thandie's perception of a predominantly positive response, their reaction, *"What took you so long to realize?"* points to sub-cultural norms within the queer community, where *out* is viewed as "good" and *not-out* as "bad." This analysis is supported by Maliepaard's (2018) findings that coming out is often perceived in this dualistic way. Most bi-male participants experienced coming out more negatively within the queer community.

I came-out to one of my oldest friends, we've been friends for 13 years now. [...] I told him and he was like, "Dude, I know..." (laughs) He's like, "Dude, are you sure you're not gay though?" And I'm like, "No, I'm not." He's like, "Are you sure?" I'm like, "Yes, I'm sure." He's like, "Mmmh. Okay? I'll wait for you." (laughs)... And I'm just like, "Wow." [...] And he told me, "Yeah, when you come out as gay, I'll also be there for you and supportive of you." (Sifiso)

Initially I came out to a queer friend..., who identified as gay. They were just like, "Oh ya, we kinda assumed." But, he would make these jokes... cause I was dating a girl at the time, like, "He's just experimenting, just give him time [to come out as gay]." (Prashant)

Consistent with De Bruin and Arndt's (2010) findings that bi-male stereotypes of experimentation, uncertainty and "being in a phase" persist within the queer community, Sifiso and Prashant's experiences with their queer friends showcase how testimonial injustice perpetuates male bi-erasure and invisibility. As discussed in Chapter 5, the doubting and

questioning of their testimony are primary symptoms of biphobia. Leaning on Foucault, Allen (2017) contends that where there are regimes of power/knowledge, there is epistemic injustice. The repeated questioning that participants are exposed to reveals (1) the power dynamic within the queer community and the hierarchy that impacts the production of knowledge and truth, and (2) recalls Pohlhaus's (2012) theory of wilful hermeneutical ignorance. Consequently, Mereish et al. (2017) argue that bi-identified people experience a disconnect from mainstream queer communities due to an increased frequency of binegativity. Findings here suggest that male participants feel more disconnected from the queer community than the majority of female participants.

Coming out as bisexual often produces what Medina (2013) refers to as a site of *epistemic friction*. From a queer perspective, these sites decentre individuals' perspectives that facilitate transformation of their conceptualisation of themselves, others and the world. Coming out can thus be perceived as an act of advocacy within straight and gay communities, as these sites have the potential to facilitate transformation when individuals are attuned to them. From the interviews, it became evident that participants' sex (male/female) had a major impact on their perceptions and experiences of coming out. Further, participants' bi-identity certainty has a great impact on their coming out experiences, predominantly due to their capacity to manage these sites of epistemic friction (see Chapter 9). However, some participants do not consider coming out to be an act of activism, even if it has the potential for this effect, they just want to live authentically.

7.3 Situational Identification – “Controlling the Narrative”

Contrary to how it is commonly conceptualized, coming out as bisexual is not a one-time event. Instead, bi-individuals are required to come out several times within both the straight and queer community (Maliepaard, 2018). This is what allows, or perhaps necessitates, that participants *play with the closet*: through self-monitoring, participants use the closet not only to conceal, but also to manage their identity within every interpersonal interaction (see table in Appendix J).

From the interviews, I inferred that participants engaged in situational identification in response to how binegative, bineutral or bipositive the context is. In this regard, I discuss *strategic identification* and *split-life isolation* below.

7.3.1 Between Concealment and Outness

As discussed in Chapter 6, bi-individuals are frequently assumed to be either straight or gay, which creates the societal dilemma of orientation assumption and bi-unintelligibility (Mereish et al., 2017). As no middle way exists, bi-individuals must choose between invisibility and *surplus visibility* (Francis, 2017). Francis (2017) views visibility as an opportunity to entrench stereotypes and encourage ignorance. Maliepaard (2018) and Orne (2013) show that bi-individuals employ a number of disclosure strategies in situations between the extreme poles of acceptance and hostility. For instance, in situations characterised by stigmatisation or interrogation of one's bi-identity, bi-individuals become stigma resistant by engaging in *strategic outness*, referring to a multitude of disclosure methods and strategies, allowing them to live more freely. The majority of participants in this study reflected on playing with the closet in strategic ways.

In a religious environment, if someone is very homophobic... or... I would assume that they had homophobic views..., I would not come out to them, or if I just feel uncomfortable, I'm like, "Okay, this is not the situation to tell someone that I do not conform." (Yumna)

I can only think of one or two friends, that I actually had to come out to, and say, "Oh, by the way, this is the situation with me..." [...] But, I have friends or acquaintances that... I'd still feel very uncomfortable coming out to... No, those are definitely the people you don't want to... come out to. (Bongani)

Eleven of the twelve participants in this study reportedly used concealment and outness strategically, primarily in response to their environment. This pattern of behaviour is consistent with Knight et al.'s (2016) findings of how sexual minorities' self-monitoring and presentation management practices change relative to contextual stigma exposure. This further suggests that neither bisexuality, nor disclosure/coming out are normalised in the majority of these participants' contexts. Thus, participants seem to anticipate sites of epistemic friction when coming out and continuously monitor their surroundings to determine how safe it is to engage in a power/knowledge struggle (Medina, 2011). Several cautious participants, like Yumna and Bongani above, only disclose to a trusted few individuals, while completely concealing their bi-identity in other settings. Consistent with Orne (2013), these participants use heterosexual identities, through *passing*, as a cover to avoid discrimination.

In terms of my mother's side, um..., it was just like, this is me, I know she's going to be cool with it [my bisexuality]... Um, and then in terms of my friends, I wasn't worried either, about [them] not accepting me..., because I'm very strong headed in that

instance, where I'm like, "Okay, if you don't like me, go away." [...] I've always been nonchalant about it... brought it up, or if it's a question, um, I've never hidden it from people, other than my father... He's never asked outright, "Are you gay or bi?" Or to my grandparents, they've never asked outright. [...] I have to be a lot more [behaviourally] restrained with my father and my grandparents. (Martin)

Similar to Martin, several participants reportedly used a nonchalant disclosure in some settings, but concealment in others. Martin's bi-positive attitude allows him to be out among friends, while asserting his boundaries, and although he is comfortable disclosing to one side of his family, contextual factors appear to compel him to conceal and manage his identity and behaviour with the other side by passing. Interestingly, participants use not only heterosexuality as cover, but also an array of other sexual orientation labels, including gay, lesbian, bi, pan and queer. This depends on social context.

I generally use queer, as opposed to pansexual. But..., when I want to be specific, I use the, um, term pansexual. (Vela)

When I came out to my parents... I... told them... I was gay, because... my dad, eh, we had a conversation a while before that, he's like, "Ya he understands gay people and straight people, but how can you be bisexual? How can you one day be... on this side and the next day on that side?"... So I never told them I'm bisexual, but I am. (Estian)

Strategic identification with an alternative sexual minority identity may be used to alleviate the pressures of compulsory monosexuality, thereby avoiding bi-stereotypes while still holding on to a sexual minority identification. This resonates with Orne's (2013) findings that, depending on their social contexts, bi-individuals use and alternate between a variety of sexual identity labels, presenting a more socially agreeable self when required. Further, consistent with Knight et al.'s (2016) findings, environments are not dichotomously hostile or accepting. Identities are thus managed according to participants' perceptions of the situation and their ability to manage discomfort within a specific context.

All participants were capable of viewing the world through the eyes of the "normals" and the marginalised, in line with Orne's (2013) contention that strategic outness allows the marginalised to become stigma resistant and manage their identity through perspective-taking. Thus, strategic identification allows these participants to gain or re-gain a sense of control over their own narratives and manage how people see and respond to them. However, Brian reported using labels in a deliberate attempt to resist normativities within a seemingly hostile environment.

I read something about an alumni student. [...] About all the prejudice he was experiencing with race and sexuality in Cape Town. So I thought, I would have to do something socially adaptive... because someone posted on Facebook about accommodation share. It was a white guy, Afrikaans, I could maybe suss out his predictive behaviour [response]: let's say I responded to this guy in English and maybe with flamboyant text or a voice note that sounds flamboyant... - [I would get] either no reply, just a blue tick or a response that does not sound too keen on having that... So I decided to have the complete opposite approach. I removed my profile picture, I responded in Afrikaans... and I changed my voice tone and all of that to create a perception... that they would be okay with... So they accepted me as a flatmate before seeing who I am... and... after signing the contract with the landlord, now they have to deal with..., on short notice, with who I am. (Brian)

Brian avoided exclusion as a potential flatmate by modifying his behaviour and concealing his appearance. This speaks to the compounding effects of intersections (Butler, 2010). Yet, he purposefully positioned himself in a situation of epistemic friction and hostility to consciously resist and challenge his flatmate's perceptions. Similar to Brian, most of the bi-participants select their strategy based on the information they gather about their environment by testing the waters. To determine if an environment is safe, participants gauge people's perceptions on bisexuality by appraising reactions, as Sifiso and Vela describe:

I act differently at home than I do on campus... But I am trying to be a bit more free here. But like small amounts so that I don't come on too strong to my parents..., and then they're just like, "Ah, shut that down. Put that back." So I am trying a little bit and... I'm gauging my parent's reactions to certain things, just to see [...] I asked him [my father] a question. Cuz I wanted to see how they would take it. I asked them, "What if... there was a boy? Like me? That thought the way I do, with parents, like you, who thought the way you do..., but the son was gay? What would the parents do? What do you think the parents would say? How would they act?" My mother just gave me this look that I will never forget. Oh my gosh. (Laughs). She was like, "Why are you asking this question?"... My father was like, "Urg, that's a difficult question."... He finally said, "Okay, I've thought about it and it won't be easy, (exhale) and the parents will not change their mind or the way they think... about the matter, because that's what they think is right... But they will accept the son because they love him." [...] So that's what also confused me, I'm like, "Okay, so they could say that. But is that only because there's a possibility that it's not me? Or... would they still be okay, if it was me?" (Sifiso)

I think they [my parents] have always been accepting people... I mean, they've got friends who are different races, genders, sexual orientations, but I obviously, I can't speak onto what their reaction would be for their child or for their immediate family. ... I think it's a different story when it's in your own home, under your own roof. (Vela)

Participants employ subtle, indirect disclosures and observations of others' reactions to gauge their attitudes or potential reactions prior to coming out. This resonates with Maliepaard's

(2018) contention that coming out is a process, not an event. However, Sedgwick (1990) theorised that various pressures are exerted by society on each individual to confess or declare the “truth” of their desire, even when they have not yet made any claim to a binary sexual identity. This power plays a productive role by extracting such confessions of sexuality, representing a form of testimonial injustice (Hall, 2017). Considering this coercion, bi-participants’ playfulness with the closet is understandable from a queer epistemological perspective. Using multiple non-binary labels (queer, pan or bi) as Vela, Jenny, Sifiso, Estian and Lerato do, points to queering and challenging the need to come out in order to declare a fixed and stable singular identity. In so doing, bi-participants are in fact taking a queer position by resisting fixed labels (Hall, 2017). Thus, strategic outness potentially reconceptualises identity as opposed to flatly rejecting it, and constitutes one approach to resisting and denaturalising dominant narratives around fixed identity categories.

Nevertheless, some participants seemingly remain trapped by the epistemic paradigm of the closet and experience the pressure to disclose, coupled with the pressure to disclose as monosexual. Nonetheless, being positioned beyond the binary apparently allows bi-individuals to play with the closet in ways that monosexuals cannot, thus queering the binary by strategically playing with confession and silence.

Long-term Coming Out

Several participants appear to view their concealment as a long-term coming out strategy, as opposed to hiding. This resonates with Maliepaard’s (2018) finding that bi-individuals engage in a *process* of coming out, not an event. All nine participants who were not out to their families engaged this strategy, motivated by the need to be more personally, emotionally and financially independent from their families in the event of backlash.

If I end up dating a girl before I finish my degree, I'm gonna have to tell my parents ... I don't want them to be left out, so I feel like it would force me to have the conversation earlier than I had planned, which was when I'm out of this house, and I'm living on my own. But..., it's the thing that honestly scares me. [...] I think it will be easier to deal with their reaction if I don't have to share a space with them.
(Kefilwe)

I am more... expressive when I'm far away from home than when I'm close to home, because I still have this fear. [...] I'm not gonna lie, that definitely had an influence on me going to [another town to study]. I wanted to... get away..., grow confident in my own skin so that even when they do find out one day, I'm not flooded with so much...

guilt and shame that I try to hide myself again. [...] I want to be fully comfortable within myself. (Sifiso)

From these comments, we can conclude that participants aspire to build confidence, credibility and legitimacy to feel more self-assured when coming out as bisexual. Such independence is apparently an important factor in mitigating the perceived impact of their families' potentially negative reactions. Several participants spoke about strategically choosing safer spaces to grow and develop their independence. Long-term coming out was also employed in romantic relationships by one of the participants.

I am currently seeing one of the girls in my class, I'm taking it extremely slowly, because, I am now more aware of what can come about because of my actions [coming out resulted in dating exclusion before]. [...] I am also taking it slowly because, I want her to get to know me as a person first... and then when I feel comfortable, when I have control of the narrative, I can sit down and be like, "This is how I feel" and that's obviously after a lot of time getting to know her a little better to be able to judge how she would react in that situation [me coming out]. (Prashant)

Past disappointment and heartbreak motivates Prashant to be more cautious about coming out in his romantic relationships. He thus employs a long-term coming out strategy to mitigate the impact of binegative stereotypes. Participants engaged in a long-term coming out strategy are basically attempting to avoid Hall's (2017) contention that sexuality creates an illusory truth about every aspect of their lives.

Leaning on Butler, Hall (2017) contends that, "the use of identity categories, while necessary, is always risky" (p. 161). They are risky because the act of coming out is a production of knowledge about the self, and one has little control over the trajectory of a category in discourse. One's professed sexual truth does not reflect the essence of a human being; instead, knowledge of sexuality produces that which it allegedly detects and describes. However, due to bi-incomprehensibility, coming out as bisexual often produces counter-normative knowledge and is consequently often met with opposition.

7.3.2 Split-life Isolation

Being out in one environment but not another, as most participants are, establishes a split-life (See Appendix J). For instance, most participants were not out at home, but were out at university; some were comfortable being out while at university, but anticipated un-identifying with bisexuality upon leaving the more progressive university environment and

transitioning into the work force; and others were out to one side of the family, but not the other, as illustrated below.

I have to hide myself [at home]. [...] In varsity, I actually made it a goal for myself to make sure that... I was my true self, I didn't hide anything from day one. Unlike how I did in high school, because I felt in high school, it kept a lot of people from really knowing me. So I didn't want that to happen again... in varsity. (Sifiso)

Right now on the university level, I think... it's fine [to be out as bisexual]... But... as soon as I'm done [with university], would I actually... tell them [people outside university]? If someone point blank asked me, would I tell them?... Honestly, I think the answer is no. (Kefilwe)

Before I've had girlfriends, I've been able to introduce them flat out [to my family]... - this is who I'm dating... I've always been very open..., with both my parents... I've never hidden any of that from my parents in terms of the female side. But when it comes to..., um, the male side... I had to be a lot more restrained with my father and my grandparents. But with my mother I'm exactly the same. (Martin)

Most participants reportedly split their lives along the divide of conservative versus progressive spaces. This behaviour modification is consistent with Orne (2013), who demonstrates that bi-individuals frequently use more than one sexual identity to protect themselves from binegativity as they move between spaces. Simultaneously, participants strategically seek out people and spaces where they can be themselves, tactically gaining support and acceptance. Considering this split, all participants spoke about the internal struggle that arises due to the tension between authenticity and concealment to self-protect. They report that concealment resulted in self-isolation, made them feel disingenuous, and prevented others from getting to know them.

My queerness has become so much a part of how I exist..., so say if my mom and I are watching a series and there's a really beautiful woman in ... I'll say, "Oh my god, I want to marry Keira Knightley," and then I have to think, "No wait hang on (laughs), can't be saying that." ... I realized... that my mom and I, we talk about queerness a lot more than we used to, um, which I think is dangerous territory... I've kind of figured out ... a balance. So when I can tell I'm talking more about women and talking down about men..., then I have to kind of calm it on the women's side, and say something nice about the boys..., so I can balance it. Sometimes it gets a little tiring and I feel like it's a bit disingenuous to myself. But it does seem like the safest option. (Jenny)

I do feel kind of uncomfortable... because you think people are looking and are wanting to see what are you contributing, what are you saying... about yourself. It makes it a little bit uncomfortable... Um, maybe [I feel] a little bit unwanted..., you feel you shouldn't have been there... You want people to see you as "normal," but you feel quite distant. (Bongani)

In addition to keeping people from getting to know the participants, concealment also seems to prevent participants from knowing all aspects of themselves. The splits in these participants' lives are self-erected barriers, meant to protect, but inadvertently they also result in self-isolation. On one hand, Jenny and Bongani speak to the importance of interpersonal relationships and support, but on the other, the fear of losing this support causes participants to close themselves off to some of this much desired connection. Sifiso and Jenny elaborated on this dilemma:

I am trying to... show a little bit of myself in certain ways, sometimes here and there... Because at the end of the day, I want my parents to know who I am..., I don't want to hide from them forever... I've always been the kid to tell his parents everything, and I mean everything. [...] So, me being the person who wants to tell my parents everything and not being able to tell them the most important thing is extremely difficult. (Sifiso)

It doesn't feel authentic, I would much rather talk about Keira Knightley than her male counterpart in a film... Um, I think having to hide any aspect of myself goes against my own ethos..., because I like to be very much myself. It has taken a long time to get to a place where I'm... so comfortable with being myself... Um. It feels.... like it's prohibiting... me progressing to knowing myself better, to being a more confident version of myself.... It's a little shitty, but it is the safer option for now. (Jenny)

Despite the potential adaptive nature of splitting their lives, participants were evidently not entirely free of the power assigned to sexual identity labels, which is in agreement with the power/knowledge/truth regimes Foucault (1990) theorises about. Some participants still positioned sexuality as omnipotent, allowing disclosure and concealment thereof to impact their identity development. In sum, a split in participants' external life causes an internal barrier as well, inhibiting personal growth. Estian went as far as saying:

I did try to conceal it. [...] But, yeah, I always knew [I was bi] but concealing, trying to fit in. ... You can lie to yourself..., even when you know the truth..., it's a very interesting thing actually. (Estian)

Estian's quote illustrates the power of the heterosexual matrix and how participants internalise this matrix to the point of repression (Butler, 2010). For some participants, concealment entails a degree of self-denial even though it is understandably a defence-mechanism against homophobic environments and potential self-hatred. Yumna, however, reminds us that concealment does not always lead to repression or self-denial:

I know how to conform to what they want me to be and I know how to... be the person they [my family] want me to be, so it's easy for me to do that... Which means whenever I need to, I can do that. But it doesn't remove the fact that I am pan and that I don't

actually conform. But that's okay because... I know who I am and that's enough.
(Yumna)

One perspective might perceive Yumna as oppressed, while another perspective would describe her as adaptive. Internally she resists norms, yet externally she feigns compliance. Since her religious family and community environment is hostile and homophobic, her non-disclosure is protective and thus adaptive. Yumna allows herself to be mis-identified and modifies her behaviour in an attempt to make this happen. Yet, she simultaneously appears very secure in the truth of her own experience. However, a split-life also needs to be constantly managed. Sifiso describes attempting to traverse two worlds in his home town, one in which he presents as straight and the other in which he wants to live his queerness.

I was so paranoid. I remember paying for my ['Love Simon' movie] ticket and I'm just waiting for the cashier to look at me funny, for me a male going to watch this queer movie. I was just waiting... but she did nothing, so I was like, "Alright." And I remember as I was going in, I was watching to make sure nobody saw me going into that specific movie. (laughs) (Sifiso)

As most participants spoke about managing others' perceptions to avoid discrimination, self-surveillance is central to the process of their split-life. Sifiso specifically highlights his behaviour relative to his identity as a male, thus pointing to the fact that his behaviour would not be observed as a "good" boy's behaviour. Instead, he transgresses gender and sexuality norms and suggests that hypervigilance, anxiety and mental distress increase when participants' split-lives start to overlap and everyday acts, like seeing a certain movie, are taken as evidence of deviation.

7.4 Summary

Above I illustrated that all participants resisted the illogical associations made with coming out and the illogical assumptions made about them as individuals. Please see Appendix K for additional participants' quotes to substantiate this theme. This epistemic injustice leads to frustration, especially with regards to how powerful conceptions of sexuality are. Evidently, these conceptions alter how others perceive every aspect of the participants' being, and sometimes even their self-perception. Hall (2017) states, "those who are deemed deviant know, the truth will lock you up" (p. 162). To avoid being completely locked up, most participants play with the closet—sometimes in, out, or somewhere in-between. This play is made possible by participants' perspective-taking ability, their internal surveillance system

and through behaviour modification. At times these factors act together, allowing participants to gear themselves towards self-protection. However, identity management appears to split participants' lives, which overall has a negative impact. Split lives seem to contribute to mental distress, fatigue, hypervigilance and restricted interpersonal relationships, ensuing in self-isolation.

In summary, the participants often elect to manage their identities. This is consistent with other researchers, who note that social context appears to be the most significant influence on how participants play with the closet (Knight et al., 2016; Maliepaard, 2018; Orne, 2013). Internal bi-attitudes, discussed in the following theme, appear to be the second most significant influence in this regard.

Chapter 8: Barriers to Bi-identity Development – “Society induced identity crisis”

In this Chapter, I present the participants’ narratives of internalised binegativity (IB), specifically the connection between IB and dual-sourced binegativity and policing. Table 8.1 presents the key discussion points in this regard - learnt inferiority, ripple effects of IB and the confusing back and forth process of self-acceptance.

Table 8.1

Thematic Map: Barriers to Bi-identity Development

Sub-themes	Categories
8.1 Internalized binegativity	8.1.1 Learnt inferiority 8.1.2 Ripple effects of internalized binegativity 8.1.3 Confusing back and forth process of self-acceptance

8.1. Internalised Binegativity - “Biphobic and homophobic towards myself”

Binegativity is internalised when an individual unintentionally concurs with negative conceptualisations of bisexuality, which develop into negative feelings and beliefs regarding their bi-orientation (Roberts et al., 2015). All participants reported such internalisation to varying degrees.

8.1.1 Learnt Inferiority

Research indicates that individuals who lack appropriate social support for their bi-identity find self-acceptance challenging, resulting in internal stressors (Roberts et al., 2015; Shilo & Savaya, 2011). Research has also shown that binegativity is a deeply rooted part of bi-peoples’ everyday experience, influencing how they relate to their environment and view their subjectivities (Hayfield, 2021). It was thus anticipated that most participants would speak about how societal norms had socialised them into viewing their bisexuality as inferior to monosexuality, a hierarchy seemingly established through bi-erasure and invisibility. From the interviews, the impact of bi-erasure was illuminated through hermeneutical injustice, the lack of collective resources of understanding, which may also limit bi-individuals’

comprehension of their own experiences at times. In this regard, and consistent with GLAAD's (2018) findings, most participants reflected on the deficit of bi-media representation and normalisation while growing up, which left them oblivious to bisexuality and its legitimacy.

Bi-representation in the media is not particularly big [...] so many people grow up not being aware... that this is a sexuality and that it's a valid one... that you don't have to pick a side. And I think that ignorance can fuel internalized homophobia, and it's a lot of stress... and damaging emotions that a lot of people... shouldn't have to face.

(Jenny)

There's definitely not a lot of bisexual or pan representation in the media. Which is... kind of sad... There are kids who feel bad..., the way I felt bad..., um, who need to know that... they're valid. (Yumna)

The participants' longing for normalisation and validation resonate with Zivony and Saguy's (2018) contention that the erasure and invisibility of bisexuality in popular culture exacerbates the unrestricted and unconsidered adoption of bi-stereotypes. For these participants, bi-invisibility in the media leaves them feeling alienated from what is considered normal, while also motivating them to ascribe to bi-stereotypes. Most participants identified realistic bi-representation in the media as central to establishing the legitimacy of bisexuality as an identity and attraction. Accurate bi-representation would allow for social conscientising and would challenge existing sexual identity power structures in society. Thus representing a form of epistemic justice and amplifying the credibility of bi-individuals as knowers of their own experiences in conversation with *dominant hearers* (Fricker, 2009).

In addition to media invisibility, pervasive biphobic views within religious communities also seem to foster a climate that encourages IB. All participants grew up in religious environments. Yumna and Sifiso elucidate how IB manifested in their lives:

Growing up in a conservative [religious] home definitely meant that I... was very biphobic and homophobic towards myself... I definitely was like, "you cannot be feeling the way you do, because, it's not right..." And obviously at the time, I couldn't help that I felt the way I did... Um, now obviously I know that it's normal, that it's not... like bad for me to feel the way I do. (Yumna)

Sifiso: *Religion is not a bad thing at all, but... when you're surrounded by people... who continually emphasise certain scriptures, and who continually say that anything outside the Bible is completely wrong, it's immoral..., "You will go to*

hell, you will burn forever and ever, if you do not follow the Bible..., strictly and directly.” If you're surrounded by people like that all the time, and you're never allowed to think in any other way..., it will definitely hinder the progression of your bi-identity and acceptance.

Philip: *And you said that caused a lot of self-hatred?*

Sifiso: *Ya, it did. [...] Whenever some type of same sex interaction would happen on TV, my parents would always have negative comments, saying how that's wrong, how it's demonic. Um, the people are possessed... It would be so weird, sometimes if I saw something like that happening on TV and I was with my parents, I would always just look at them to see what the reaction would be..., it was always bad, it was always negative. [...] Yoh, I remember one night I was crying on my bed, my father ... went on a rant because, I think I insinuated that it [same sex intimacy on TV] wasn't wrong. Both my parents just blew up and they ended up shouting about it even after I left the room. So, I just got to my room and I cried and I legit looked down at my chest and I prayed and I was begging for God to take the demon out of me... Agh..., I think that was my lowest point.*

Participants reported that it was seemingly inevitable that such views would affect their worldviews. Given that religious environments perpetuate the establishment of Watson's (2014) *family closet* and associated self-surveillance, it is not surprising that participants experienced both external and internal surveillance that led to conflicted experiences of sexual orientation and self-doubt. Drawing on Dyar and London's (2018) results, such exposure to biphobia can increase IB and bi-identity uncertainty. It follows that parents' and societal reactions to individuals' sexuality could hinder the natural unfolding of bi-individuals' sexuality. Shilo and Savaya (2011) emphasise the powerful impact of public and private acceptance on self-acceptance.

Most participants reported how the borders of mononormativity are continuously policed and how their peers' behaviour taught them what was regarded as normal and abnormal. For instance Sifiso's gay friend who asked him repeatedly, “*Dude, are you sure you're not gay though? [...] But I understand where he's coming from. I myself, question myself about that point.*” Similarly Prashant and Brian shared:

I thought that one has to come out of the closet and say that... you are gay or some sort of extreme. I thought stuff like... “Is it wrong to wear makeup? Is it wrong to be flamboyant?” (Brian)

You're either with them [his gay friends] fully, or against them or you were in denial, to them. [...] I felt like I was a liar, so you call into question everything... internally. It's quite a hectic time, cause it's a complete identity crisis. (Prashant)

Several participants articulated that internalising heterosexism and monosexism via exposure to binary thinking amounted to a harmful aspect of their self-view/identity development. This concurs with Hall's (2017) assertion that "the requirement to categorise one's erotic experiences in a particular way and, as a result, to understand one's self as having a particular sexuality constitutes an epistemic harm" (p. 160).

8.1.2 Ripple Effect of Internalized Binegativity

The adverse effects of heterosexism or monosexism on the formation of a healthy bi-identity are revealed through IB (Roberts et al., 2015). In the interviews, participants related how they engaged in IB through self-hating attitudes, buying into maladaptive, degrading stereotypes, and chronic self-policing resulting in self-doubt. Estian aptly describes, "*Society is... cruel to the gay, bi and pansexual person. But the gay, bi and pansexual person is also cruel to themselves.*" Indeed, all participants described how they started to view themselves differently due to familial and societal influences.

I felt wrong... I felt I was a big sin, and that I was definitely going to be punished for this... And I was constantly questioning... whether God loved me..., or, um, whether he would forgive me for what I had done..., or felt. [...] You feel like it's never gonna be okay... like it's gonna take all the repairing in the world to fix something that's not broken. (Yumna)

I definitely did start internalizing it, I started viewing myself... in the same way that my parents view the queer community, I hated myself. [...] Uhhhhh! I tried everything that I could think of to make myself straight... I..., I prayed every single morning and evening... until I cried, for me to become normal... Uhhhhh! I read the Bible over and over again thinking that maybe I could find an answer. (Sifiso)

Similar to Yumna and Sifiso, all participants spoke about having internalised binegativity and stereotypes of sin and abnormality, engaging in negative self-talk, self-hatred and an increased desperation to be straight. In the interviews, participants often spoke about wanting to please people, which is of course an indicator of the pressure to conform to dominant norms. This struggle can be understood from a Foucauldian (2001) perspective, as power frames the norm as moral, while constructing notions of normal versus deviant; this

establishes a desire to conform to, in this instance, heteronormativity. As Foucault notes, conformity is not realised through force and coercion, but rather through desire. From the quotes above, we see Sifiso speak of the desire “to become normal”, and Yumna’s desire to be loved by God, not feel wrong or sinful, and thus conform to heterosexuality. It also became evident in the interviews that this approval-seeking behaviour could, sustain elements of self-loathing:

I feel very strongly that... people's parents and society are putting a lot of pressure on people, making it very difficult for them, um, to just live their lives. [...] I want to please my parents... I want to be a good Afrikaans boy, I need to be straight, I need to have a wife, I need to have kids. [...] But you know what you want, and you know what you find attractive, but you don't want to have those feelings... I suffered from, and still do from severe depression... because of self-hatred. Like, "Why are you like this? Stop being like this. It's not normal. This is not the way it's supposed to be."... I've never received any negative commentary, nobody's ever said anything derogatory to me. I think I was my worst... bully growing up... (Estian)

I started doing things that were... characterized as more female things to do and I stopped doing the things that I was used to doing and things that I loved, because I was... trying so much to suppress my sexuality at that point. I was like, "It's wrong. I shouldn't be thinking this way." I was... trying to suppress it when I was still living under those norms. I was wildly attracted to females at that time. But then I was like, "I can't be attracted to females." I would go out and be partying... and then I'd see this girl and I'd be really attracted to her and like, "Fuck! Find a boy." I can try and suppress this, up until that point where I was like fuck this bullshit. I tried to suppress my sexuality so much. ... I tried to trick myself into believing if I ignore it, it's not there ... It doesn't exist. Out of sight out of mind. (Thandie)

Given the power of the internalized heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2010), Estian and Thandie’s self-talk in the above extracts reveals their internal tug-and-pull of not conforming to dominant gender norms, but also wanting to “convert” to heterosexuality. Self-policing leads to self-hate, precipitating a punitive, self-critical internal dialogue that negatively influences one’s emotional and psychological well-being. The patterns of suppression and self-conversion, commonly reported by the participants, are what Dyar and London (2018) described as the consequences of wilfully un-identifying as bisexual. Such suppression and denial fosters internal divisions alongside the “splits” of the participants’ external lives addressed in Chapter 7. While suppression can be viewed as a coping mechanism, it can also fuel self-hatred and thwart self-acceptance. The internal conflicts that arise from the tension between authenticity and suppression are consistent with Dyar and London's (2018) findings

that an intensification of IB is negatively associated with individuals' strength of bi-identification and positively associated with increased misidentification. Consistently, some participants spoke about how their internalised and subconscious biphobia tinted their way of looking at themselves and the world.

It [internalised biphobia] created lots of self-confidence issues, and ... social anxiety issues, lots of social anxiety issues. [...] I would always feel [that] like whenever I was in a big social environment ... I would just feel like, "Oh my fuck, everyone can see me, everyone's looking at me. Do I look normal? Why are you looking at me like that, do I look strange? What are you thinking?" Society is... cruel to the gay, bi and pansexual person. But the gay, bi and pansexual person is also cruel to themselves. (Estian)

In the back of my mind, I've always given into... the injustices or the prejudices that have been spread about who I truly am. I felt that I could never say something or do or act in a certain way um, to show dominance. (Brian)

I made excuses for, um, people who did that [made biphobic comments], who behaved in such a way. I would be quiet when they were being judgmental or stereotypical against other queer people..., I wouldn't speak out against it. (Thandie)

Internalisation seems to colour the lens through which participants viewed themselves and their environment. Most participants reported that they experienced social anxiety and lacked the confidence to be themselves. Apparently, binegativity, including erasure, invalidation and invisibility, contributes to an inferiority complex, feelings of ineptness and the need to suppress their bi-identity.

But I must say the experiences of that [biphobia], are a lot less than the acceptance, I get. Because most straight people and most queer people are like, "That's fine. You do you... You know yourself best." Um, but it's just these outliers... they speak to the internalized homophobia that I grew up with..., which is why they stand out, even though they are the outliers. (Jenny)

Jenny's testimony suggests that the participants even feel judged in contexts that are less biphobic. The implication here is that participants carry several binegative beliefs and meta-perceptions with them into all their environments. Increased hypervigilance and sensitivity to potential external binegativity may result in participants feeling unnecessarily fearful, afraid and intimidated at times. Evidently, when participants are raised within binegative environments, where binegativity is expected, they come to expect more hostility, which then becomes maladaptive.

8.1.3 Confusing Back and Forth Process of Acceptance

In this sub-theme, I present aspects of participants' identity development, specifically focusing on how IB hinders self-acceptance. Ochs (2013) contends that bi-individuals have “the potential to be attracted—romantically and/or sexually—to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree” (p. 5). Consistent with this, several participants described their unique experiences of awakening to their sexual identity and embarking on the personal process frequently referred to as *questioning*. Thandie described it as an “Oh shit moment,” and Yumna and Jenny said:

I have a very vivid memory of questioning, as a kid, “Oh, I think I may not actually only like guys or girls.” ... I just had to get to the point where I was like, “Listen..., it's going to change... and you're gonna feel different every day... and you're gonna feel weird the one day and it's gonna feel... different the next day, and that's okay, because everything is fluid,” and ... in the end it doesn't actually matter the only person that, it does matter to is to me. And I'm okay with it... so everybody else just needs to be okay with it. (Yumna)

It was a lot of back and forth, because this came out of the blue [at university]. [...] It was a very confusing time. [...] I realized what I feel for women, as I feel for men. And, I know that I definitely like men... and I feel the same for a woman, therefore I like them too. So it was fairly easy to go back to that and realize that... [what] I am identifying as, is in line [with my experience]. (Jenny)

Like Yumna, most participants became aware at a young age that they did not conform to heteronormativity. Four of the participants, however, reported that they only realised they were bi when they entered university. Consistent with Ochs (2013), some participants like Yumna experienced their attraction as fluid and changing, while others, like Jenny, experienced it as more stable; nevertheless, both are able to ground themselves in their subjective truth. Bi-participants' experiences of attraction appear to widen their view of the world, possibly pointing to increased psychological flexibility. For most participants, coming to terms with their sexual orientation was an emotionally tempestuous process, while others found the progression towards acceptance and self-identification to be far more logical.

I'm starting to accept it [the fluidity of bi attraction]. ... It's only as of this year that I'm kinda getting a better handle on it. (???) It's almost like you always want it to be a low tide or a high tide [wanting to be either straight or gay]. So it's like you try to keep it there, like fix it. But, and then the major confusion came about when it would

change, and then you would just be so flustered... "Why can't I just be one thing, or the other? Why does it have to keep moving?" (Prashant)

I would define it [bisexuality] as, "would I date a girl?" like would I actually go into a relationship, a proper relationship with a girl? And the transition from me saying, "No..., I don't identify," to me saying, "Yes, I do," came when the answer changed to that question, because before it was like, "No, I don't see this for myself," whereas now... it's like, "Yes, this is definitely something that's more than just, um, I find them attractive and I would have fun with them." It's become more something like, "Okay, yeah, I could see myself with a girlfriend." (Kefilwe)

The contrast between these participants' experiences may be explained by several factors, including location, gender and perceptions of legitimacy, experiences of rapid versus gentle fluidity and the level of IB.

(1) *Location*. Prashant and Kefilwe are not comfortable being out at home; however, Kefilwe is comfortable on the satellite campus that appears to be more progressive and supportive (see Chapter 5).

(2) *Gender and perceptions of legitimacy*. Gender appears to play a significant role as Kefilwe seems freer to experiment and explore her attraction without shame (see Chapter 6).

(3) *Experiences of rapid versus gentle fluidity*. While some participants experience a fluidity of attraction, Prashant evidently experiences this fluidity as a rapid change that is confusing and unsettling.

(4) *Level of IB*. Prashant seemingly struggles with internalised monosexism, thus hampering his self-acceptance.

Dyar and London's (2018) research sheds light on how these factors interrelate. They contend that the link between binegative internalisation and simultaneous variation in the strength of bi-identification, as well as subsequent identification with monosexual labels, arises due to cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance seemingly ensues from the irreconcilability of bi-individuals' positive self-regard and internalised negative beliefs about their bi-identity. This dissonance Prashant related above, Martin and Lerato also described:

There are still a lot of people who can't identify with their true self..., having to stay in the closet..., not only for fear of acceptance, but fear of not understanding themselves... They believe that, from an old thought sort of [way], that there's no way this will work. [...] It's hard to feel for people who are trapped in... that thought process, because they normally are the most homophobic people, in my experience.

Um, people who cannot be true to themselves..., so they try and take it out on the community. (Martin)

There's also a lot of young people who are trying to find their space on earth, and then they also associate with these religious beliefs, but then they have this identity that they have to... hide or suppress, because it is sinful. (Lerato)

Most participants are aware of the internal struggles that arise between authenticity and social norms. Thus, when participants choose to identify as bisexual they also assume the implicit immorality of this identity (Foucault et al., 2001). This cognitive dissonance combined with internalised notions of bi-instability and bi-illegitimacy contribute to suppression as bi-individuals decrease the strength of their bi-identification and simultaneously increase their tendency to misidentify as straight or gay (Dyar & London, 2018). Thus, IB is associated with participants' self-conversion behaviours and thoughts, contributing to identity crisis. All participants narrated such experiences as part of their journey of developing a bi-identity.

It was a very difficult situation because... you... couldn't be you..., it's like, you had to stick to something so specific and completely ignore the other part of you. Um. It's... extremely confusing... people are using behaviours to be like, "this is stereotypically straight..." / "oh this is stereotypically queer," but then what happens when you have both? ... But ya, it's confusing, extremely confusing, very confusing. (Prashant)

I myself, question myself about that point [bisexuality]. I mean, there was a point where I thought I was gay. (Sifiso)

I've definitely told myself that [my pansexuality is a phase], ... "It's just something you're going through for now. It will change again." (Yumna)

Identity development is seemingly hindered by participants' uncertainty about their own experiences. Additionally, due to epistemic injustice, participants' social context continually conveys doubt and questions the legitimacy of bisexuality. Foucault, (2001) posits power functions by producing knowledge, while this knowledge, in turn, stimulates a desire to conform. Consequently, knowledge rooted in heteronormativity or mononormativity creates a desire in participants to conform if not to the heterosexual ideal, then at least to a compensatory homosexual identity. This production of knowledge and associated self-monitoring also arises due to new sub-cultural norms within the queer community, resulting in negative self-talk, contributing to identity uncertainty as many participants seem to question themselves, "Am I queer?"

I've always been hyper-aware of those... views that people hold... that's why it took me so long to figure out what my identity was because ... "I don't dress like this, I'm not into this type of music, I don't look like this, and so maybe I really am not queer." Which is a very problematic thought process to go through... because of what I've been exposed to by society. [...] From young, we are almost indoctrinated by the media, to view... certain identities in a certain way. And it's difficult when you don't fall into those categories... and you don't fit that box to realize... that you do actually still fit that identity even though you don't look like what ... people might expect you to look... Especially on campus... even going to safe space: everyone is dressed in a certain way, people are speaking a certain way... Sometimes people use the identity of queerness as a shield, to almost safeguard themselves. And because it's such a community, we want to fit in that community. And so you'll find people acting a certain way, dressing a certain way, and everything you go through in the heterosexual world, it's like that times 10 in the queer community.... You're trying to fit in even more, because you're all different, but almost in the same way. [...] It definitely made me question myself, I'm not gonna lie, I thought, "Are you even pansexual?" ... I have to have that conversation with myself, and think all of that through. (Vela)

One of the things that I have noticed is that when I expose myself to that material [queer media and literature], I try to assimilate an identity with it, to make myself or to behave and speak a certain language, which is not very helpful. Because now, I am almost, um, saying that being this type of sexuality should be behaving in this way, and that is something that I don't want to do but I did struggle with that idea of like, "Am I actually enough of it [bisexual], am I expressing it enough? Am I believable about it?" [...] It's also your... own self-perception of what it should be like and... trying to be logical about it rather than just experiencing it. [...] In a sense you have a certain expectation of how... a bisexual person should be, which you try to be. But then it actually hinders your true experience, because now you are reaching for something that is someone else's expression, and not yours. (Lerato)

What these statements emphasise is how mononormative media played a central role in informing the participants about sexuality and how to perceive it in themselves and others. In this sense, social norms tell participants who they are; however, because self-perceptions do not align with social expectations, participants seem to experience immense pressure and identity confusion. Further, the above statements suggest that participants feel pressured to live their bi-identity in a socially comprehensible way and subsequently start self-monitoring in line with sub-cultural norms. This resonates with Butler's (2010) assertion about the risks of identity labels and connects back to the theme of strategic identification in Chapter 7. The fact that experiences of sub-cultural norms within the queer community appear to create doubts and uncertainty for the participants implies that LGBTQ norms are also internalised

and result in yet another dimension of self-surveillance. This elucidates the power dynamics within the queer community once more and illustrates how powerful external cues and notions of appearance are in identifying and knowing the truth of others' and apparently even one's own sexuality. The obligations participants experienced, the "must's" and "must not's", of the queer community, is in consonance with Foucault's (2001) notion of self-subjugation through self-surveillance and self-disciplining. Further, Eadie (1999) theorised that "the absence of a coherent bi-identity or norm that can be policed leads to a situation where "their expression of bisexuality is wanting" (p. 123). It follows that participants cannot be characterised as "bisexual" because no action can be performed to be perceived as such. Participant narratives revealed the internal struggle that arises due to the contradictory desires between authenticity, conformity and the inability to display their bi-identity. In line with Dyar and London (2018), the self-doubt this instils hinders bi-identity development and acceptance.

8.2 Summary

Binegativity is rooted in bi-peoples' everyday experiences when it has become internalised (please see Appendix K for additional participants' quotes to substantiate this theme). Above, I illuminate the process through which participants unintentionally concur with negative conceptualisations of bisexuality. Evidently, this internalized binegativity (IB) results in a ripple effect of negative feelings and beliefs concerning their own bi-orientation. Due to this internalisation, the participants seemingly carry binegativity into every context, thus shaping how they relate to their environment and view their own subjectivities. In such way, IB fundamentally influences their identity development, which is already a turbulent process in most cases due to society's insistence on a stable heterosexual/monosexual identity. The next chapter will discuss the ways in which the participants challenge and resist dominant narratives of sexuality, and resist, queer and challenge IB.

Chapter 9: Unlearning Binegativity: Towards a Bi-affirmative Identity – "Now we can think differently!"

In the previous chapter, I discussed the participants' reflections on the influence of societal norms and binegativity when internalised. In this chapter, I discuss their experiences of unlearning and uprooting internalized binegativity (IB). In Table 9.1, I present the thematic map for this chapter.

Table 9.1

Thematic Map: Unlearning Binegativity: Towards a Bi-affirmative Identity

Sub-themes	Categories
9.1 Protective factors	9.1.1 Social support 9.1.2 Self-education and vicarious learning
9.2 Bi-identity integration	9.2.1 Troubling normativity 9.2.2 Enhancing bipositivity

9.1 Protective Factors – “Surround myself with more positive energy”

Below the sub-theme of protective factors, I discuss two categories: *social support* and *self-education and vicarious learning*.

9.1.1 Social Support

Research indicates that individuals who lack social support of their bi-identity may experience increased IB and struggle to self-accept (Hayfield, 2021; Roberts et al., 2015). Mereish et al. (2017) show how loneliness mediates both, internal and external binegativity while Shilo and Savaya's (2011) findings suggest that support of one's queer identity from friends and family is vital to decreasing the impact of external and internal binegativity. For this reason, I now turn to a discussion of the participants' social support structures and the ways in which they strategically fulfil their need for support. Sources of support include progressive university settings, the queer community and friends, queer allies and significant friendships, and, in some instances, family.

For several participants, the transition to university represented a fresh start within a progressive queer-positive atmosphere, allowing them to embody their bi-identity. As Jenny described, university is “*maybe the first place for some people where they can properly be themselves.*” Similarly, Martin and Vela related:

When I went to [university], um, I surrounded myself with positive people. ... My roommate was really accepting, um, and I never had the chance to test whether she was accepting about it, I was like, “This is my new normal, this is my new life. So, I'm gonna identify and live my life to the fullest.” (Martin)

I really got to understanding that I'm actually surrounded by people who don't know a lot of what's going on in the world. ... That scary realization is what led me to deciding that I need to go to university outside this province, so that I can start being surrounded by people who are more progressive, and who understand the goings on of society a bit better and who have an interest in doing that research and finding out those things. (Vela)

The combination of a more progressive setting, coupled with the new start, away from conservative childhood-homes, allowed several participants to live more authentically than before. However, not all participants found university spaces equally supportive (recall Chapters 5 and 6). University queer organisations and residences play a supportive role for some of the participants as they welcome queer students, encourage engagements between various groups, promote inclusivity, increase awareness and educate allies.

Their [the satellite campus' queer organizations'] advertising is, first of all, very great. They have events, when it's Pride... they organize bus trips to make sure that all of us can get there. [...] They have their own Pride event on campus, where there's a Pride March and there is a Pride Week. And in that week, they even organize talks, they have doctors who are in the field and are also queer identifying, and they give all this information. They also have, um, many functions and safe spaces events. (Kefilwe)

The ones [workshops] that we would organize in res, um, on sexual..., or, um, gender identity..., we would have a speaker who would give the theoretical work around what these identities are, and, um, the history, and then there'd be a Q&A session, or there would be discussion points [...] It's unfortunate because you don't always get the people who practically need to be in these spaces..., you find the people who are already learning about this and less of the people who are very fixated on the specific views that are... homophobic. [...] But they've been very helpful for me to cultivate, um, my thinking and to challenge my own thinking around... sexual identities. (Lerato)

Apparently, such events help bi-individuals develop their approach to thinking about their identities by providing realistic, counter-normative information that de-stigmatises queerness, produces a reverse discourse and allows for connection with similar others. In addition, these spaces support the cultivation of a critical mind-set that teaches participants *to queer* (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). All these aspects of queer organizations have an overall effect of decreasing IB.

In terms of interpersonal relationships, it was evident that participants strategically chose whom they sought support from. Like Martin, who said, “*I surrounded myself with positive people,*” other participants also mentioned choosing queer friends, communities and allies with the capacity to affirm.

A lot of my friends are LGBTQ+ ..., um, and all the things that I'm interested in reflects on my feeds..., so it becomes a constant conversation... The friends that I have identify with the community too, so it makes it... easy when I talk to my friends about these things. (Lerato)

It [the queer community] has been very supportive and positive. I have yet to experience a negative emotion from the queer community. ... Even when I had doubts about my own sexuality, they're like, "No, um, it's normal to go through this, you just need to introspect and be sure of yourself, don't allow other people to make you doubt what you know to be true." (Thandie)

The majority of participants had queer support structures outside their home environments. In meaningful discussions with their friends, the participants enjoy being experts of their own experiences. Several participants reported having similarly constructive conversations within their allied friendships.

I choose my friends very wisely.... Um, people who know me, know that I'm a progressive person, I really am passionate about social justice. And so the friends that I have chosen are people who also have views like that... So sexual orientation, race, all those different things, um, I don't think have ever been an issue with my friendship groups and when there has been an issue I have addressed them or I have just taken a step back from those people... Um, obviously, no one is perfect, but I do try and have a lot of conversations with my friends about these things. (Vela)

Some of the discussions that I've had with them [my straight friends] are one of the things that helped me... make that shift from being like, "No, it's just something that I do", to me saying, "Okay, fine, I really do identify with this [bisexual]." [...] They try to understand... and..., um, not even in a way of, "I want to accept you so you need to

explain this to me better so that I can accept you.” It's more of, "We already accept you. This is not even a factor to us.” (Kefilwe)

It was evident that most participants opted to strategically select straight friends with similar value systems regarding social justice, equality and progressive thinking. Participants described their friends to be people with an ability to listen, support and hold a safe space for their bi-friend's self-exploration and, at the very least, attempt to understand their experience. Within these heterosexual friendships, a safe space is thus created for *epistemic friction* (Medina, 2011), where norms can be queered without experiencing backlash or resistance.

It [social support] really helps with my self-acceptance, my self-esteem. It made me more open to letting people in, or open to letting people know more about me and see me... and [it] has made me more comfortable... to go out and meet people, to have different types of conversations with people... It's really had an impact on my friendships with other people... It has made me more comfortable... with wanting to be a leader..., and I think, it's made me feel like I won't be shunned, if I decide to take up any mantle... And I know that even if I am..., I have people I can go to who will help me get through it..., who will support me no matter what. (Sifiso)

Several participants spoke about the value of support as a defence against binegativity. Apparently, reliable support seems to provide participants with the secure base they require to be themselves. The certainty of acceptance, even when ostracised by others, allows them to be more open, comfortable and confident to take social risks. In addition to increasing opportunities for belonging, support appears to aid all participants in the process of increasing self-acceptance and boosting self-esteem. This is consistent with Rostosky et al.'s (2010) findings of the positive aspects of bi-identity.

9.1.2 Self-educating and Vicarious Learning

The interviews confirmed that bi-positive exposure allows for self-education and that bi-affirming media exposure allows participants to vicariously learn about their sexuality, including its legitimacy. Here, *vicarious learning* refers to the way the bi-participants were able to learn from other bisexual individuals' narratives and experiences of self-acceptance. Using these resources, most participants reported that unlearning biphobia was critical. Lerato and Sifiso, for example, reported that questioning and unlearning norms made them aware of their assumptions and perceptions of normality.

There are some assumptions in me that need a bit of, um, dismantling and my own thinking that needs some challenging, which I tried to do with a lot of... informing myself... and trying to question. But one of the key things..., that I tried to do is to not accept what I see just as it is, but be mindful of other possibilities..., that I may not be informed about. (Lerato)

I'm really getting to a place of true self-acceptance... I started educating myself, five years ago on everything about the LGBT+ community, the history, what each letter really means... and so forth. And just developing a real love for the LGBT+ community..., because for the longest time... it was only around queer people where I felt truly... accepted, truly loved. (Sifiso)

Accessing information and exposing themselves to diverse experiences seemingly helped with self-exploration and acceptance. Most participants reported that affirmative bi-media representation encouraged them to explore sexuality from within conservative spaces without coming out. However, as previously discussed, media is a double-edged sword because it promotes invisibility of bi-representation at the same time as it allows participants to explore queer culture and learn to queer internalised norms. From a social support perspective, media also appears to connect one with similar others, decreasing social isolation while creating a sense of belonging.

I relied heavily on YouTube... to realize that no, I'm not the only one..., there are other people out there that feel this way... Um, and YouTube really helped a lot..., um, coming to terms with the idea..., "Oh, you're not going crazy." [...] Looking at a lot of content on social media, [seeing] the freeness they have and the freeness of them accepting who they are... There's a whole ton of coming out videos on YouTube and watching that does give you confidence in terms of taking the... big leap to tell your friends and your family. (Martin)

What has helped me really in self-acceptance has been seeing in social media and on TV, even hearing on the radio, that there are queer people out there who are really being successful even in today's world and even under the worst circumstances, they can still come out on top and that has given me a lot of hope. [...] And to be quite honest, it's the only way I've been able to cope being at home [during the Covid-19 lock-down]. (Sifiso)

Several participants reported that vicariously learning from others' experiences increased their ability to dispel the idea that bisexuality is dysfunctional or that sexuality and gender are static. This concurs with Lin et al. (2019) who found that bi-individuals can learn to reject binegative messaging more effectively when they hear stories that are similar to their own with respect to constructively dealing with social stigma or embracing one's sexual

orientation. All participants spoke about purposefully seeking out bi-positive media to maintain a bi-affirming attitude. Israel et al.'s (2019) findings show that indirect exposure to bi-affirming narratives decreases internalised stigma. The participants' testimonies in this regard also resonate with Allen's (2017) contention that the inclusion of marginalised knowledge in media allows for a reverse discourse to become more included in the domain of the true.

9.2 Bi-identity Integration - "Uprooting: Let's do things differently"

Like binegativity, bpositivity is also internalised from external contexts and sources. My findings suggest that participants use their support systems and information resources to nurture their resistance to external and internal binegativity. Through a discussion of *troubling normativity* and *enhancing bpositivity*, I highlight the psychological strategies in this sub-theme that participants use to unlearn IB, integrate their bi-identities and become more bi-affirming.

9.2.1 Troubling Normativity

Queer theory considers how normativity can be resisted, troubled, subjugated and queered through talk, behaviour and action (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Drawing on Butler's theory, Callis (2009) contends that the incomprehensibility of bisexuality characteristically queers gender and sexuality norms. Most participants' gender and sexual orientation performativity contradicts the cultural matrix by resisting binary norms. Brian and Lerato reported their experiences of troubling normativity:

People say I'm more gay than heterosexual because of that feminine association. [...] And there were rumours in the residence [at university], "Is he transgender?" ... Looking at physical attributes only... That completely threw them, when I was continuing to wear make-up..., things of that... nature while I was dating a girl. They couldn't figure that out... So challenging basically the stereotypes. (Brian)

Even with grown men..., I actually deliberately do it [trouble sexuality], even though I know that they are married, um, just to say that, um, well in case you are also interested in men, which is laughable to them..., but I know that it triggers something in them to question. [...] They [heterosexuals] have all these ideas, which they dream up, or they encourage each other about which just makes sense to them. So I use it [my bisexuality] to challenge them, to be the odd one in a conversation using it in a sense of, "I know, and identify with [bisexuality], and what you are saying is not my experience." (Lerato)

Most participants chose to queer associations of gender and sexuality by troubling normativity and denaturalising dominant discourses through a conscious re-appropriation of performativity. This subverts dominant norms from a position of unintelligibility while resisting cross-gendering (Callis, 2009). Consistent with Butler (2010), this amounts to practicing the awareness that identity is not the unavoidable result of appearance, talk or behaviour. From a queer epistemological perspective, participants thus recognise that knowledge and ignorance are not always in opposition (Hall, 2017). Through the production of a powerful *reverse discourse*, participants trouble gender and sexuality, and seemingly enhance perceptions of their fluidity (Foucault, 1978).

Interestingly, Lerato and Brian's response above also exemplifies Orne's (2013) findings about some participants consciously choosing to disclose their orientations within situations where a hostile reaction is expected, but that is safe enough to disclose and offer a reverse discourse. Nevertheless, perceived safety seemed to play a significant role in subversion, as the consequences of resistance were not uniform among participants.

Not caring what everyone thinks, through boundary setting and no longer fearing the consequences of being outed, constitute another important step towards resisting normativities. Jenny asserted, "*I'm happy to stand up for myself.*" Thandie and Lerato similarly spoke of their readiness to set and defend boundaries:

Unless you're... someone who is in my life directly, but other than that it [biphobia] does not affect me that much. Once I had that in mind, it was so easy to start placing those boundaries. [Before] I could not start checking people... because I was like, "Yo, what if they start treating me differently." But then after being comfortable with my sexuality..., and being comfortable with the fact that not everybody's gonna like me..., or my sexuality, I was just like, "Check yourself before you speak..." Um. You can't do one, two and three in my presence. After that it was easier to just set the boundaries... I don't adjust for nobody. Fuck that shit! (Thandie)

"I embrace it [my sexuality], and I will continue to embrace it, and I own it, and this is who I am, and that's okay with me, and there's nothing you [my mother] can do about it." [...] "I'm grown now, and I'm forming my own ideas of the world, and becoming my own person, using the building blocks from my childhood, but what I'm discovering for myself is - some of the things do not align with what you've taught me. There's nothing you can do about it..., you've done a good job raising me... And now I'm becoming my own person, and I'm owning my own ideas and values... and this is who I am." I just told her that this is the sexuality I identify with, these are my thoughts on religion. "I will always respect you for the person you are and the way

you view things, and I would appreciate the same respect..., we don't have to agree, but know that this is where I'm at.” (Lerato)

These extracts illustrate how fiercely self-accepting participants can be. Taking ownership of their world view and value-system seems to make it more likely for participants to hold others accountable despite the consequences of a hostile context. This resists hermeneutical marginalization because they anchor their knowledge base in their own experience, thus asserting their own truth (Medina, 2011). From this vantage point, participants are in a unique position to conscientise others because they are situated in-between gay and straight identities, echoing Rostosky et al. (2010) who contend that bi-individuals are able to hold an awareness of their own and others' perceptions of sexuality.

Although university spaces can be progressive, some participants find themselves having to advocate and educate. Several participants spoke about having to educate others about how their intersecting marginalised identities compound.

People in spaces outside of my immediate friend group, I find myself educating them on a lot of different things. I think especially as a black woman, I find that the onus and the intellectual burden falls on my shoulders quite a bit in a lot of spaces, to educate people on racial, gender, sexuality and class issues..., on a lot of different things. I always feel as though I'm stepping into the role of educator. (Vela)

This is consistent with Butler's (2010) assertion that “gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (p. 4). Despite its importance, a focus on intersections is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is important to note how Vela implies that society seemingly assumes that she, as a result of her intersectional identities, *must* carry the responsibility and burden of educating others, as opposed to them educating themselves. Further, I want to focus on the complexity of fostering an ally consciousness. It is not only complex because of intersections, but also because of the incomprehensibility of bisexuality.

I do often try to explain things in a way where they would understand... Um, and if they don't, I mean, that's not really on me because I did my best..., um, to explain things... And... if they don't, um, they can either accept it and move on... or they can push me in a way where I don't enjoy the discussion, the interaction, um, and I can just..., um stop talking to them. [...] I think there are... definitely things that, um, will always be difficult for people to understand... how people can identify as more than one sexuality, if they so please, or as more than one gender, if they so please. (Yumna)

Like Yumna and Vela above, several participants elected to educate others and awaken them to alternative truths around gender and sexuality. While such situations of educating others can easily become sites of queer epistemic friction (Medina, 2011), where participants encounter wilful hermeneutical injustice (Pohlhaus, 2012), such situations can also lead to the conscientization of allies. Most participants shared that educating the biphobic is difficult and often unproductive, but having the courage to speak up and being able to set required boundaries can still feel productive. This is because where there is epistemic friction there is also an opportunity for epistemic justice, especially when individuals have the epistemic humility to learn and alter their normative base of knowledge (Hall, 2017).

9.2.2 Enhancing Bipositivity

Hayfield et al. (2018) maintain that most bi-individuals have to confront a great deal of IB prior to being capable of seeing themselves as bisexual and coming out. Related to this, Rostosky et al. (2010) argue that adaptively coping with stigma involves consciously generating an affirming view, establishing positive relations and creating meaning. Consistent with these authors' contentions, I illustrate how IB is an obstacle to developing a bi-affirmative attitude. Let's consider Thandie and Lerato's statements in this regard:

The biggest challenge of developing a positive pan identity is..... trying to get rid of all the [biphobic] internalization that you were taught before [while growing-up] about how it's wrong and all that stuff... That is the major problem, because after you get over that... most things come easier... with your pan identity... (Thandie)

I understood in my YouTube psychology, what was happening in terms of my rooted beliefs [IB], fighting with my new beliefs, and it's just a core conflict. And that uprooting process is very difficult, when it is your whole life's way of living, and here I come and simply be like, "No girl, let's do things differently."... And then there's a whole war going on in my head. (Lerato)

Seemingly, participants' ability to challenge and resist internal hetero- or monosexual dialogues facilitates the process of bi-integration. When participants speak about "uprooting," "get rid of all the internalisation," and "core conflicts," they are referring to the process of challenging IB. Participants learn to challenge the assumption that such statements ever had an internal origin and instead identify the external sources of these messages. This is in consonance with Israel et al.'s (2019) finding that by identifying and rejecting binegative messaging, bi-individuals may cease confusing IB with inner truths about sexuality or

themselves. However, conscientization of normativity is a process, as Sifiso and Jenny related:

It really has been a journey of self-discovery. [...] Whether I will be 100% comfortable in my identity, I am not sure about... I feel like religion and the opinions and views of other people have had such an impact on me throughout my whole life that it's going to be extremely difficult to... let it all go... Yeah, it's gonna be difficult... It has been difficult... (Sifiso)

I do feel this way for... different groups and... that is valid... because I've experienced them. [...] And it [bisexuality] feels right in me... To consider myself straight feels very uncomfortable within me. Um. I have to... reaffirm that for myself and work through that thought process, like..., "This is why I identify the way I do... and that's fine..." [...] Going back to the fact that I feel the same with girls as I do with guys..., you don't have to... bring out a receipt of your experiences with anyone to prove anything. [...] I keep on having to be like, "It's okay not to subscribe to that. Um. Whatever I want for myself... is fine and it's valid." [...] [But] it's a constant process... and there are always layers [of IB] that you hadn't expected. And I think, as my experience with men and women expands, there's always something that I encounter, that I hadn't expected, but it's getting a lot easier to unlearn that, each year it gets easier to deal with. (Jenny)

Most participants reportedly came to focus on their personal truth rooted in experience, as opposed to accepting normative truths. Their grasp of socialisation, probably due to their university training and bi-positive media consumption, apparently increased how effectively they were able to uproot IB. This is further cemented in Israel et al.'s (2019) findings regarding the importance of grasping the process of socialisation.

It's a lot more freeing to be yourself than it is trying to hide behind someone that you've created. [...] But it's true, it honestly is true, you do feel euphoric when you..., ah, tell people, it is sort of getting a load off of your chest that you can identify as this [bisexual], in the open. (Martin)

I'm very firm in my sexual identity now. I'm very comfortable in it now. It did take me like two years before I was finally comfortable in my sexual identity... I no longer have qualms with it. I no longer feel the need to justify my sexual identity to people. (Thandie)

As the experts of their own lives, participants learn to locate truth within their experiences and tap into a position of power by testifying about their own life, as opposed to arguing with

other people about its legitimacy. However, all participants were in different stages of reverting back to normativity as their default and building confidence in their personal truth.

At different rates, the continuous process of introspection and growing self-awareness transforms participants' binegative internal dialogue towards a self-affirming internal dialogue. Regardless of everyone's individual pace, self-validation evidently increases resilience to binegativity. Much the same as Choi et al.'s (2019) findings regarding bi-individuals with an affirmative profile, participants reportedly experienced increased resilience.

I was like, "I'm bisexual," and then my mom was like, "Nah, you confused." And I was like, "Nah, I think you're the one who's confused, bye." [...] Some of them [family members] are just plain homophobic, and I'm just like, "T'ch and this is where you get ignored." (Thandie)

I really don't care for anyone else's opinion if they are gonna be a bitch about my life and things that I can't control... So I like to assume that everyone that I converse with... isn't queerphobic and then if I bring it up and they are uncomfortable, then sucks to be them, then they must just deal with it. Because their discomfort is not my problem... (Jenny)

In Jenny's and Thandie's statements, we see an ability to shift responsibility for prejudice and discrimination to the individuals doing the stereotyping. There is an understanding that it is not their task to ease others' discomfort or misunderstanding of their sexuality. This dismissal of testimonial injustice is significant and parallels Francis' (2017) finding that when biphobia is reframed as the biphobic's issue and ignorance, it allows the bi-individual to move beyond conformity.

As IB decreases, participants seem to experience a shift in perception. For instance, Jenny reports giving people the benefit of doubt by assuming they are *not* queerphobic, which, in turn, allows her to experience increased bipositivity and authenticity. Rostosky et al. (2018) point out that this speaks to increased resilience. I infer that this is possible because it decreases the perception of others' surveillance while also allowing her to ease her own self-surveillance.

Through introspection, participants experience a growing awareness of the internal struggle between what they desire versus what they feel they are allowed to desire. These

contradictions seem to promote a *queering* of IB, which requires epistemic humility because something that was once perceived as mandatory is now challenged.

Those [hetero- and mononormative] pressures were the reason why it took me so long to actually..., um, come out, because I was like, "I'm literally going outside every norm I've ever been taught. Everything I've known. I'm literally going against it." It took me a while to... digest all of that and work through it..., like, "Okay..., it is not mandatory. It is not what is set in stone. It doesn't have to be this way." (Thandie)

Sometimes I think, it'd be much easier to... spend the rest of my life with a man just because... it'd be a lot more convenient. [...] Ultimately it's going to come down to who I want to spend the rest of my life with... Um. But that's the thought that often pops up and I have to check it and be like, "That's the compulsory heterosexuality talking..." Just because I'm hearing it in my head doesn't mean it's valid... So I think it's very deeply ingrained... (Jenny)

Another aspect of the hetero- and mononormative pressures that Thandie and Jenny speak of concerns the misconception that sexual orientation is within the individual's control. Self-acceptance and resilience entails an understanding of bisexuality not being a choice. For example, Jenny said, *"I really don't care for anyone else's opinion if they are gonna be a bitch about my life and things that I can't control."* Other participants also described that they wished for bi-normalization and a position from which they can assert that orientation is not a choice. Yumna, for example, mentions that she has to purposefully remind herself of this fact.

I've gone through most of it [the internal hate]. I do try to surround myself with... more positive energy and feelings towards my sexuality, especially because I have no control over it. I try to remind myself of that a lot. (Yumna)

Similar to Yumna, several participants spoke about normalising bisexuality, which is in harmony with Pluckrose and Lindsay(2020), who note that the queer community predominantly conceptualizes their own sexuality as being a matter of nature and not of choice. Although Pluckrose and Lindsay are critical of queer theory for resisting such normalisation, Jenny and Yumna importantly add some nuance to this:

Currently, the label of bisexual fits me, it feels right. But if that should change with experience, then it does... My thing is if labelling yourself empowers you then go with that, and the bi label suits me at the moment, and I use it all the time. (Jenny)

I just had to get to the point where I was like, "Listen, um, it's [my gender and sexuality are] going to change and you're gonna feel different every day" [...] because

everything is fluid... and I'm okay with it so everybody else just needs to be okay with it. (Yumna)

Several participants acknowledged the political power of identity labels, yet acknowledged how they potentially work against the fluidity of their sexual identity (Riggs & Treharne, 2017). The participants' accounts affirm Hall's (2017) contention that "queer self-knowledge is a hard-won critical perspective" (p. 161). However, it would seem that bi-individuals are uniquely positioned to assume what Hall (2017) considers a queer position of epistemic humility, as they more comfortably risk self-certainty when they do not fit neatly within binary identity categories. This seemingly allows the bi-participants to see in shades of grey, as opposed to binary terms, and facilitates a shift towards internalising bpositivity.

9.3 Summary

In this chapter I discussed participants' journey towards a bi-affirming identity (please see Appendix K for additional participants' quotes to substantiate this theme). I discussed the positive and protective experiences that participants depend on, including social support and self-education. In terms of social support, I considered the role of institutions, organisations, communities, friends, and the strategies participants use to gain support and opportunities for epistemic justice. The self-education component illustrates the importance of experience, but more importantly, vicarious experience through media access and self-informing that can reach participants even within conservative environments.

The second sub-theme highlighted participants' process of integrating their bi-identities, including how they used the protective factors to achieve this. I discussed participants' approaches to troubling dominating normativities. Queering their own default assumptions about gender and sexuality had the effect of participants no longer personalizing or internalizing others' confusion and ignorance of sexuality and gender. Participants' ability to place themselves outside the hetero- and mononormative dichotomy allows most participants to assume a "position of queering" through which they perceive the underlying processes, power dynamics and constructions of knowledge. However, not all participants are equally skilled at queering, which seems to be a skill central to building an internal, secure base of resistance.

In sum, when participants acknowledge that they are the experts of their own lives, they illustrate how they locate truth within their experiences instead of arguing with other people

about the legitimacy of their sexual orientation. This aids the process of unlearning IB. Cumulatively, these factors all contribute to participants becoming empowered to develop a bi-affirming attitude. Nevertheless, participants reported feeling unsure if they would ever be able to completely unlearn IB. The majority of participants felt that letting go of IB was a difficult process, one that involves resolving, processing and unlearning layers upon layers of internalised hate.

Chapter 10: Conclusions and Recommendations

This qualitative study aimed to explore a group of 12 bisexual university students' lived experiences of their bi-identities and how they negotiate their positions and identities in multiple settings. In this chapter, I present an overview of the study's main findings, highlight some implications for practice, consider the possible strengths and limitations of the study, and finally conclude with some recommendations for future research.

10.1 General Overview

Consistent with current research, the bi-individuals in this study suggest that dual-binegativity is ingrained in their daily experiences, influencing the way they understand their subjectivities and experience their environment. The study's findings are in consonance with existing theory and literature on the impact of hetero- and mononormativity on various communities' understanding of gender and sexuality. This study echoes the available literature on how mainstream media, religion, schooling and conservative family and peer group values teach individuals to negatively perceive their sexuality. While the findings suggest that the influence of heteronormativity is considerably lower in a university setting, mononormativity still exerts a significant influence.

The findings illustrate how binary thinking inhibited participants' identity development as they remained incomprehensible to others and at times to themselves. Further, consistent with existing literature and a queer epistemological framework, the matrix of comprehensible sexuality also affects the participants in the sense that they are not considered to be legitimate knowers of their own experiences. Participants reported experiencing dual-sourced epistemic injustice in ways that resulted in feeling isolated and lacking a sense of belonging.

Participants experienced a reduced capability to acquire resources and support, and developed their sexual identity in isolation. The participants reported that several factors, including race, class, religion, location and age, influenced the intelligibility of their sexuality. Gender was specifically highlighted as significant, seemingly due to the associations between gender and sexuality.

Consistent with the literature and queer theory that foregrounds the significance of performativity, this study further illustrates how social actors in the participants' contexts

stringently surveil and police their talk, gestures and acts to keep them in their “good boy” or “good girl” place, using both overt discrimination, but predominantly microaggressions to censure transgressions. Participants reported how gendering, and the resulting system of surveillance that appears to categorise everyone into binaries of gender and sexuality strongly influenced them. In line with existing theory, this study illustrated how hetero- and mononormative power functions by producing knowledge about gender and sexuality, including what is normal and deviant, allowing the “normals” to police bisexual deviants. In turn, this knowledge, stimulates a desire in participants to conform to either of these dominant norms. All the participants reflected on how they internalized social expectations and how they taught themselves to self-surveil and self-regulate in their attempts to occupy their “proper place.”

This study further shows how assumptions about sex and gender are used to infer people’s hetero- or homosexuality, thus rendering bisexuality socially unintelligible and making it impossible for bi-participants to communicate the truth of their experiences. Due to society’s differing schemas, the discrimination and microaggressions that male and female participants experience are often distinct. Yet, the findings do provide a unique perspective on bi-males’ relationships and sex lives, and the influence of heteronormativity on queer relationships; this apparently has not been studied previously, thus highlighting the need to study male and female experiences separately.

Echoing previous research, the findings also suggest that performativity influences how participants relate to their contexts, including their strategic use of identification as a coping strategy. However, this strategic, situational use of identification presents a double bind – while inauthenticity and concealment to avoid discrimination might be counter-productive to their well-being and relationships, coming out can be equally, if not more, harmful. This study is thus consistent with research that questions the dichotomy of coming out as good and concealment as bad. In line with this, some participants questioned the legitimacy of the closet and the notion of having to come out, while most opted to “play with the closet.”

All participants resisted the illogical perception of sexuality determining every aspect of their lives. To manage this imbalance of power/knowledge, most participants opt for contextual behaviour modification, made possible by the participants’ perspective-taking ability and internal surveillance system. Findings suggest that strategic situational identification splits participants’ lives, adversely affecting several aspects of their lives, and contributing to

mental distress, fatigue, hypervigilance and restricted interpersonal relationships. Cumulatively, dual-binegativity and its ensuing effects of erasure, invalidation and invisibility result in lack of support, social isolation, self-monitoring and loneliness.

Apart from contextual factors, internal bi-attitudes appear to be a close second when it comes to participants' motivations for identity management. Consistent with existing literature and theory, binegativity apparently does further harm when individuals internalise dominant norms and unintentionally concur with negative conceptualisations of bisexuality. Findings show that internalised binegativity (IB) contributes towards negative feelings and beliefs concerning their own bi-orientation, which the participants carry with them into every context. Resonating with existing literature, IB seemingly influences identity development and shapes how participants relate to their contexts and view their own subjectivities.

Considering protective factors, participants reported that social support and self-education had a particularly positive and protective influence. Due to dominant normativities, they reported being particularly selective in choosing their friends and community, be they straight or queer. Considering the self-education component, the importance of queer experience and exposure was highlighted. Vicarious experience through sources such as the media seem especially important as it allows an accessibility even within conservative environments. Given the lack of bi-studies that focus on protective factors, this is a unique finding of this study. Seemingly, these protective factors help the participants ground themselves in their subjective truths, which allows them to uproot IB. As far as bi-identity integration is concerned, the participants were in various stages of identifying the external source of internalised bi-negative messaging, and subsequently challenging the assumption that it has an internal origin.

The establishment of a support base seemed to be a complex and dynamic process for the participants. They implemented several strategies before coming out and selecting support. No participants reported the existence of bispecific support groups/organisations, which is likely due to the invisibility of bisexuality. Seemingly, participants use their support base and bi-affirming media to bolster the process of bi-identity integration. Cumulatively, these factors contribute to them becoming empowered to develop a bi-affirming attitude, apparently allowing them to acknowledge that they are the experts of their own lives. Truth then becomes rooted in their experiences, thus arguing with other people about the bi-legitimacy becomes obsolete. This appears to aid the process of unlearning IB.

While most participants still allowed themselves to be policed, some more than others, two participants vehemently opposed the traditional gender and sexuality associations. They responded to social surveillance by completely dismissing it as the biphobic's problem.

Consistent with the literature, this study seemingly demonstrates how important bi-individuals' awareness of socialisation is in supporting their reflectivity, allowing them to think more about subjective truth as opposed to supposedly objective truth with regards to sexuality. All participants reported ascribing to heteronormativity in their childhoods, but when they transitioned to a more independent and progressive space, such as university, it stimulated their reflexivity.

10.2 Implications for Practice

Findings of this study suggest that the participants are negatively affected by hetero- and mononormativity within various contexts that expose them to binegativity. These norms are then internalised and manifest as IB. This represents a barrier to self-identification and establishing meaningful relationships. This study, alongside existing literature, offers substantial support for the negative effects of dual-sourced binegativity, gendering and IB. Yet, researchers have not adequately addressed the practical implications of these findings. Although wide-scale interventions are required to address dual-binegativity, I offer some recommendations based on insights acquired from this research.

Encouraging Epistemic Justice: Establishing Spaces to be Heard

Although participants perceived the transition from home to university contexts as a fresh start, not all university environments are bi-friendly. Bi-participants still experience binegativity on university campuses and in queer organisations, and often do not experience a sense of belonging within the queer community. Simultaneously, they experience a lack of testimonial authority due to the internal politics of the LGBTQ communities and their associated organisations. Consequently, it is vital that queer organisations are informed about the legitimacy of bisexuality and the effects of bi-erasure and invalidation.

Broadly, queer organisations should be educated on being more inclusive by allowing individuals to speak from their own experiential, subjective truth, as opposed to having to conform to new sub-cultural norms that again marginalise some queer bodies. This would allow for the continuous queering of norms. Not being prescriptive or making assumptions

about others' gender or sexuality based on their appearance, actions or talk would promote a multiplicity of gender and sexuality as opposed to restraining it. Although LGBTQ organisations and support structures should be more inclusive, there is also a need for bi-specific spaces to encourage a sense of community. This would counteract the experience of isolation and loneliness many bi-individuals experience.

Educate Bi-individuals on Socialisation and Dominant Normativities

Apparently, in order to dismantle the systems of social surveillance and self-policing, bi-individuals need to understand the implications of their socialisation and internalised binegativity. Some participants report this happening naturally once they transition to university. However, students should be supported to understand that their IB does not have an internal source, but rather that it is the consequence of socialisation. This informs participants that choosing not to conform or self-police is an acceptable choice that simultaneously increases their ability to tolerate the discomfort of others attempting to police them.

Seemingly, interventions should not only assist individuals in unlearning binegativity, but also help them to unlearn the cultural matrix that assumes and perpetuates the sex/gender/sexuality chain of dualistic assumptions. In this regard, the school curriculum and psycho-education for children is extremely important, alongside the realistic representation of bi-individuals in the media. This has the potential to decrease dualistic thinking and normalise alternate sexualities such as bisexuality, while simultaneously normalising the fluidity of sexual orientation. In addition, this would help bi-individuals understand their own social incomprehensibility and help decrease feelings of powerlessness, while also aiding the process of self-exploration and acceptance.

Vicarious Learning and Support

Several participants spoke about how inspiring and encouraging bi-narratives were in supporting their self-development and identity formation. This emphasises the potential healing effects of establishing bi-support groups as part of the university's student counselling services. Generally speaking, such a group would provide bi-individuals with an opportunity to share various bisexual narratives in a non-judgemental space while allowing for vicarious learning. This could enhance self-awareness and the development of a reverse discourse, rooted in experience. Allowing individuals to share their experiences with other bi-individuals

who understand and can validate them could create opportunities for meaningfully relating to others. This may bolster the process of establishing a supportive bisexual base, while stories of self-exploration and getting to a place of self-acceptance would be extremely valuable. The findings suggest that such narratives could decrease internalised negativity, increase courage to live authentically and also increase resilience against the pressures to conform.

10.3 Strengths and Limitations

During the completion of this research study, I identified certain limitations. First, due to the operational definition that focused specifically on bi-identified people, those who are unwilling or are not in a position to self-identify as bisexual were excluded. Further, the manner of recruitment meant participants had to voluntarily make themselves available to be interviewed. Consequently, one can assume that those who volunteered already had a certain degree of self-assurance in being able to speak about their experiences. Conversely, individuals who opted not to volunteer potentially felt disempowered and too marginalized to have the confidence to speak, thus making it impossible to record their valuable voices.

Secondly, as the study instrument, I could have introduced bias into the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes through the “interviewer effect,” because I played an active role in the richness of the data (Josselson, 2013). Participants may have related to me in a particular way because I am a White Afrikaans-speaking queer, bisexual male. Although I consider my shared sexual orientation to have been an advantage of this study, an alternative interviewer would likely elicit an alternative narrative. Regarding data analysis, multiple perspectives could have resulted in alternate interpretations. Thus, I am aware that I possibly have not exhausted all the themes that could be inferred from these narratives. To increase the trustworthiness, I provided a section on reflexivity of the researcher (see Chapter 4) and my weekly supervision meetings contained some of my biases. Due to time limitations, there was no member-checking, allowing participants an opportunity to validate the preliminary themes I inferred for accuracy and resonance, which would have further increased trustworthiness (Bless et al., 2013). A further limitation is that data collection occurred at a single tertiary university. Consequently, these students’ experiences are not universal, and likely differ from one institution to another.

Despite its limitations, this study also has certain strengths. From my search of the databases, the dearth of bi-literature, specifically in SA, represents a major gap in research that this study

starts to address. This appears to be the first qualitative study to explore university students' experiences in SA. However, the lack of South African studies around bisexuality, including the contextual problems and protective factors within their contexts, presented an obstacle to compare and contrast findings. Nevertheless, the study provided insight into how external binegativity is internalised and influences how the participants relate to their contexts. Further, the study considers participants' transition to university, how their subjectivities continue to be influenced by IB, and how this is either enforced or challenged in this new environment. Findings highlight the significance of unlearning these dominant norms and the importance of bi-affirmative media and support in this process. Hence, this study contributes to an understanding of the participants' bi-positive, -neutral and -negative experiences, which as several qualitative studies have shown, impacts their mental health and well-being.

Another strength of this study was my participant recruitment strategy. I broadened my sampling frame to include all bi- and pan-individuals enrolled at a SA university, instead of only focusing on those in the university's LGBTQ organisations, thus responding to Hartman's (2011) call for more diverse sampling in LGBTQ studies. Secondly, through maximum variation sampling, I ensured that my findings reflect diverse perspectives and experiences of the same phenomenon. The virtual interviews presented both, limitations and strengths. Limitations pertained to privacy issues when participants stayed at home. However, the online platform allowed participants the safety and comfort to be in their own space. As Glueck (2013) recommends, I took steps to ensure the establishment of rapport despite the virtual setting. To facilitate rapport, I employed various methods that elicited thick descriptions, for example by asking reflexive and probing questions, and, importantly, by adopting the stance of epistemic humility.

10.4 Recommendations for Further Research

The social sciences should do more research about bisexuality and bisexual experiences.

Below, I make some recommendations for further research based on questions that emerged during the research process. To counter intersectional invisibility, future studies should consider an in-depth exploration of how bisexuality intersects with other identities.

Forthcoming studies could benefit from exploring the experiences of bi-males and bi-females separately, given that several differences surfaced in this study based on this variable. Third, although this study specifically focused on the differences between the sexes, more attention

needs to be given to bisexual non-binary individuals' experiences. Fourth, this study revealed a research gap with its unique findings regarding bi-male sexual intercourse. It would also be prudent for a bi-female to do a study on how bi-females experience sexual intimacy. It is possible that I missed some of the significant nuances due to being of the opposite sex. From the literature, it became evident that the focus is currently focused on external binegativity and its impact; fewer on internalised binegativity and even less on what participants perceive to be the positive attributes of bisexuality. Further, more interventions need to be designed to assist bi-individuals in working through their own IB. Finally, future studies should consider the experiences of bisexual and pansexual identifying individuals' independently.

In conclusion, my study focused on a diverse group of 12 university students' subjective experiences within a single South African university. Their narratives provide an in-depth insight into the dynamics of binegativity in SA, including the regimes of power/knowledge that maintain their experiences of epistemic injustice. Conversely, their narratives also revealed a reverse discourse and other social bi-protective factors that contribute to epistemic justice. Throughout this thesis, I demonstrated the tension generated by the dualistic social constructions of gender and sexuality, often resulting in experiences of erasure, invisibility and invalidation, due to social incomprehensibility. Participants emphasised the ignorance at the foundation of sexualities knowledge; this awareness allowed them to perceive the power and privilege at play in their various contexts, and also afforded them a perspective that enabled a troubling of dominant norms. However, challenges arose for participants who were unable to perceive the power and influence of these societal norms, as buying into normative gender and sexuality norms increased feelings of shame and self-hate. External support and bi-affirming media, coupled with internal resistance to socialisation appeared to aid these participants in becoming more bi-affirmative.

This study highlighted the need to queer sexualities knowledge from a bisexual perspective. Responding to the most immediate needs, understandings gained about bi-experiences can be useful in designing interventions to support bisexual students' well-being through bi-affirmative support. By extension, these understandings should also inform the need for bi-affirming representation in local media and overall discourse about sexuality more generally.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Mail Invitation to Participate in the Study

Dear fellow students,

I would like to invite you to participate in my Master's psychology research project. I am interested in understanding bisexual and pansexual individuals' experiences and would like to create an opportunity for bisexual and pansexual students to tell their stories. There are so few studies about bisexuality and pansexuality in South Africa; thus sharing your perspective and story would be invaluable.

I will be conducting virtual interviews via video calls, using Skype. Rest assured that my interview with you will be confidential and your anonymity will be guaranteed, in other words, all identifying information will be omitted from the data for your protection.

To participate, please contact me via e-mail at bistudy2020@gmail.com

I look forward to hearing from you and please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any further questions.

Many thanks

Philip

[Click here](#) to participate.

Appendix B: Invitation Flyer

volunteers needed for a
study on bisexual or pansexual
individuals' experiences

tell
your bi or
pan story
in a safe
space

anonymity and
confidentiality
considered

a research study at
Stellenbosch
University

virtual interviews
conducted using
zoom, skype or any
similar app that
provides
end-to-end
encryption.

are you eligible?
- identify as bisexual and pansexual
- over 18-years-old
- be a registered student at Stellenbosch University

to participate, please contact me via e-mail at
bistudy2020@gmail.com

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form



UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are invited to take part in a study conducted by **Philip Slabbert**, from the **Department of Psychology** at Stellenbosch University (SU). You were approached as a possible participant because you meet the participant criteria, namely that you self-identify as bisexual, are over 18 years old and that you are a student at SU, who is fluent in either English or Afrikaans.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to explore bisexual students' experiences of their bisexual identity within their family units and communities, including their peer groups, fellow students and/or within the queer community. Participants in this study will be asked to participate in an individual interview, as well as a group interview. Participants' narratives will be analysed to explore what forms stigma and discrimination takes, what the effects of this social phenomena are on bisexual individuals and what support is available to students when they experience binegativity/biphobia.

2. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in at least one individual virtual interview, as well as a once-off virtual group interview, using Zoom, Skype or Whatsapp. Before the start of the individual interview, each participant will be asked to complete an electronic form with a few demographic questions. Interviews will be guided by an interview schedule; the topic of the interviews will be about bisexuality and bisexual individuals' experiences, which includes negative attitudes, stereotypes, stigma and discrimination towards bisexual individuals, as well as experiences of support and acceptance. However, participants are free to answer questions in their own unique way; therefore the topic may deviate to other aspects of bisexuality. Anonymised findings from the individual interviews will then be presented in a virtual group interview, giving all participants a chance to discuss the findings and share their experiences, in a safe, mediated space. The study will

be conducted with consideration of anonymity and confidentiality (as discussed below under protection of your information, confidentiality and identity).

All interviews will be virtual, using apps that ensure end-to-end encryption of all audio/visual data. Participants will thus be asked to participate in the interviews from a private, quiet, secure room. Each interview is estimated to last approximately 90 minutes. Interview dates and times will be determined with participants' schedules in mind.

3. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Should any of the participants experience any discomfort and require psychological help during or after the interview, I will refer them to Welgevallen Community Psychology Clinic. Hence, appropriate provision will be made available to manage any negative consequences, should they occur. I will also follow up with participants who experience distress to ensure they sought support.

Welgevallen Community Psychology Clinic: (contact details)

Address: Welgevallen Community Psychology Clinic

Welgevallen House

Suidwal Street

Stellenbosch

Phone: 021 808 2696

Email: WCPC@sun.ac.za

4. POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO THE SOCIETY

Participants may benefit personally as they are afforded a safe non-judgemental space to share their lived experiences of their bisexual identity in various social environments. Due to stigmatisation and discrimination, many bisexual students may not have had the opportunity to share the story of their bisexual identity development before, which may offer students the direct benefit of being heard and hold some psychological benefit.

In the group interview, participants will also be exposed to other bisexual individuals and have an opportunity to share their experiences with similar others in a safe, mediated space and *vice versa*. This creates a space of mutual understanding and social support many bisexual

individuals rarely experience, due to stigma and discrimination. Consequently, bisexual students may gain a sense of togetherness, thus decreasing experiences of social isolation.

Findings from this study will be shared with the SU transformation office, the SU equality unit, Queerus and student counselling services at SU to improve the experiences and support received by individuals who identify as bisexual.

Given the seeming dearth in research in South Africa focusing on bisexual individuals, this study will contribute towards the social knowledge of this often-invisible sexuality and add to the small body of existing South African based research. By contributing to a local understanding of bisexuality and biphobia/biphobia, accurate knowledge has the potential to increase awareness, understanding and acceptance of bisexuality.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

As a participant, you will not receive any monetary remuneration for your participation.

6. PROTECTION OF YOUR INFORMATION, CONFIDENTIALITY AND IDENTITY

Any information, you as a participant, share with me during this study and that could possibly identify you as a participant will be protected. All information related to this research study will be confidential and completely anonymous. Consequently, all interviews will be virtual using apps that ensure end-to-end encryption of all audio/visual data. All data will be stored on my password protected computer in a locked room and on my supervisor's password protected computer in a locked office for a period of 5 years. Thus only the primary investigator, Philip Slabbert, and his supervisor, Dr Sherine van Wyk, will have full access to this information. It should be noted that in the virtual focus group interview, the confidentiality of respondents cannot be guaranteed, to mitigate the risk of exposure all focus group participants will sign a non-disclosure agreement. Both the virtual individual and group interview will be audio-recorded, using the respective app's recording function. Participants will not be given the opportunity to edit the recordings; however, the virtual group interview is an opportunity to review my interpretation of the recordings.

Steps will be taken from the onset to protect the anonymity of respondents, from transcription, through to the final thesis document. Segments of participants' responses may be included in

my final thesis document at SU; however, a pseudonym will be used where appropriate, and all identifying information omitted to protect your information, confidentiality and identity. Please note that information collected in the course of this study may potentially be used for further publications and/or used for other purposes in the future. However, no identifying information will be included.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. If you agree to take part in this study, you may withdraw at any time without any consequence. However, given the small sample of this study, participants who choose to participate will not be able to opt-out of their information being used in the research.

8. RESEARCHERS' CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact **Philip Slabbert** at pn.slabbert@gmail.com, and/or the supervisor **Dr Sherine van Wyk** at sbvwyk@sun.ac.za.

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT
--

As the participant, I confirm that:

- I have read the above information and it is written in a language that I am comfortable with.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been answered.
- All issues related to privacy, confidentiality and use of the information I provide, have been explained.

By signing below, I _____ (name of participant) agree to take part in this research study, as conducted by **Philip Slabbert**.

Signature of Participant

Date

DECLARATION BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
--

As the **principal investigator**, I hereby declare that the information contained in this document has been thoroughly explained to the participant. I also declare that the participant has been encouraged (and has been given ample time) to ask any questions. In addition, I would like to select the following option:

	The conversation with the participant was conducted in a language in which the participant is fluent.
	The conversation with the participant was conducted with the assistance of a translator (who has signed a non-disclosure agreement), and this “Consent Form” is available to the participant in a language in which the participant is fluent.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix D: Biographical Questionnaire

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Please complete the following biographical form.

1. Pronouns:
2. Sex:
3. Sexual orientation:
4. Age:
5. Home language:
6. Home Town and Suburb:
7. Current Town and Suburb of Residence:
8. Religious background:
9. Current religious belief:
10. Interests:
.....
11. Your highest level of education:
12. Parents' highest level of education:
 - a. Mother:
 - b. Father:
 - c. Guardian:
13. Are you a member of any LGBTQ+ organizations or social clubs?
If yes, please provide some details:
.....

Thank you.

Appendix E: Interview Schedule

- How do you identify in terms of your sexual orientation?
- What do you define this sexual identity label?
- When did you become aware of your sexual orientation?
- Have you disclosed your sexual orientation to anyone?
 - At what age and who was the first person you disclosed your sexuality to, and why?
 - Describe, what have been some of your other experiences of coming out in various settings?
 - Can you describe how you felt before coming out?
- Are there some settings in which you choose not to disclose your sexuality? What are the reasons for this?
- How do you feel when an acquaintance assumes what your sexuality is?
- Do you often feel the need to educate other people about your sexuality?
- What have been your experiences within the LGBTQ community?
- How does your sexual orientation influence your friendships?
- How does or has your sexual orientation influenced your family relationships?
- How does your sexual orientation influence your romantic relationships?
- How do you feel about your sexual identity?
- Have you had negative experiences as a result of your sexual orientation?
- When experiencing people's negative attitudes, feelings and emotions, what support is available to you in various settings/ communities?

Appendix F: Transcription Symbols

...	Indicates short pauses
(???)	Participants' talk inaudible
<u>Underlined</u>	Indicates the participant's emphasis
[...]	Section cut from the transcript

Appendix G: Permission to Conduct Research: Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee



NOTICE OF APPROVAL

REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form

3 August 2020

Project number: 14616

Project Title: Exploring Bisexual Stellenbosch University Students' Lived Experiences of their Bisexual Identity in various Communities

Dear Mr Philip Slabbert

Your response to stipulations submitted on 28 May 2020 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (REC: SBE).

Please note below expiration date of this approved submission:

Ethics approval period:

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
23 April 2020	22 April 2021

SUSPENSION OF PHYSICAL CONTACT RESEARCH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown measures, all research activities requiring physical contact or being in undue physical proximity to human participants has been suspended by Stellenbosch University. Please refer to a [formal statement](#) issued by the REC: SBE on 20 March for more information on this.

This suspension will remain in force until such time as the social distancing requirements are relaxed by the national authorities to such an extent that in-person data collection from participants will be allowed. This will be confirmed by a new statement from the REC: SBE on the university's dedicated [Covid-19 webpage](#).

Until such time online or virtual data collection activities, individual or group interviews conducted via online meeting or web conferencing tools, such as Skype or Microsoft Teams are strongly encouraged in all SU research environments.

If you are required to amend your research methods due to this suspension, please submit an amendment to the REC: SBE as soon as possible. The instructions on how to submit an amendment to the REC can be found on this webpage: [\[instructions\]](#), or you can contact the REC Helpdesk for instructions on how to submit an amendment: applyethics@sun.ac.za.

GENERAL REC COMMENTS PERTAINING TO THIS PROJECT:

INVESTIGATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: SBE, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your SU project number (14616) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

You are required to submit a progress report to the REC: SBE before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

Once you have completed your research, you are required to submit a final report to the REC: SBE for review.

Included Documents:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Letter of support_counselling	Letter	24/02/2020	1
Default	Masters student DESC feedback report form	25/02/2020	1
Recruitment material	Invitation e-mail	25/03/2020	1
Recruitment material	Flyer	30/03/2020	1
Data collection tool	Interview Schedule-18May2020	18/05/2020	2
Proof of permission	Institutional Permission_Standard Agreement 1728	18/05/2020	1
Default	REC Response Letter	18/05/2020	1
Informed Consent Form	Informed Consent Form_28May2020	28/05/2020	3
Research Protocol/Proposal	PN Slabbert_MA Proposal_28May2020	28/05/2020	3
Default	REC Response Letter_28May2020	28/05/2020	2

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at cgraham@sun.ac.za.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioral and Education Research

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032.
The Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research complies with the SA National Health Act No.61 2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes (2nd Ed.) 2015. Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

Principal Investigator Responsibilities

Protection of Human Research Participants

As soon as Research Ethics Committee approval is confirmed by the REC, the principal investigator (PI) is responsible for the following:

Conducting the Research: The PI is responsible for making sure that the research is conducted according to the REC-approved research protocol. The PI is jointly responsible for the conduct of co-investigators and any research staff involved with this research. The PI must ensure that the research is conducted according to the recognised standards of their research field/discipline and according to the principles and standards of ethical research and responsible research conduct.

Participant Enrolment: The PI may not recruit or enrol participants unless the protocol for recruitment is approved by the REC. Recruitment and data collection activities must cease after the expiration date of REC approval. All recruitment materials must be approved by the REC prior to their use.

Informed Consent: The PI is responsible for obtaining and documenting affirmative informed consent using **only** the REC-approved consent documents/process, and for ensuring that no participants are involved in research prior to obtaining their affirmative informed consent. The PI must give all participants copies of the signed informed consent documents, where required. The PI must keep the originals in a secured, REC-approved location for at least five (5) years after the research is complete.

Continuing Review: The REC must review and approve all REC-approved research proposals at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk but not less than once per year. There is **no grace period**. Prior to the date on which the REC approval of the research expires, it is **the PI's responsibility to submit the progress report in a timely fashion to ensure a lapse in REC approval does not occur**. Once REC approval of your research lapses, all research activities must cease, and contact must be made with the REC immediately.

Amendments and Changes: Any planned changes to any aspect of the research (such as research design, procedures, participant population, informed consent document, instruments, surveys or recruiting material, etc.), must be submitted to the REC for review and approval before implementation. Amendments may not be initiated without first obtaining written REC approval. The **only exception** is when it is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants and the REC should be immediately informed of this necessity.

Adverse or Unanticipated Events: Any serious adverse events, participant complaints, and all unanticipated problems that involve risks to participants or others, as well as any research-related injuries, occurring at this institution or at other performance sites must be reported to the REC within **five (5) days** of discovery of the incident. The PI must also report any instances of serious or continuing problems, or non-compliance with the RECs requirements for protecting human research participants.

Research Record Keeping: The PI must keep the following research-related records, at a minimum, in a secure location for a minimum of five years: the REC approved research proposal and all amendments; all informed consent documents; recruiting materials; continuing review reports; adverse or unanticipated events; and all correspondence and approvals from the REC.

Provision of Counselling or emergency support: When a dedicated counsellor or a psychologist provides support to a participant without prior REC review and approval, to the extent permitted by law, such activities will not be recognised as research nor the data used in support of research. Such cases should be indicated in the progress report or final report.

Final reports: When the research is completed (no further participant enrolment, interactions or interventions), the PI must submit a Final Report to the REC to close the study.

On-Site Evaluations, Inspections, or Audits: If the researcher is notified that the research will be reviewed or audited by the sponsor or any other external agency or any internal group, the PI must inform the REC immediately of the impending audit/evaluation.

Appendix H: Permission to Conduct Research: Stellenbosch University Institutional Permission



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INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION:

AGREEMENT ON USE OF PERSONAL INFORMATION IN RESEARCH

Name of Researcher: Philip Slabbert

Name of Research Project: Exploring Bisexual Stellenbosch University Students' Lived Experiences of their Bisexual Identity in various Communities

Service Desk ID: IRPSD-1728

Date of Issue: 13 May 2020

The researcher has received institutional permission to proceed with this project as stipulated in the institutional permission application and within the conditions set out in this agreement.

Appendix I: Letter from Welgevallen Community Psychology Clinic



WELGEVALLEN COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY CLINIC

Department of Psychology, Stellenbosch University

Tel: 021 808 2696 Email: wpcpc@sun.ac.za Web: www.sun.ac.za/wpcpc

19/02/2020

RE: Free Psychological Services

The Welgevallen Community Psychology Clinic (WCPC) is a clinic offering free psychological services. The clinicians delivering the service at WCPC are student psychologists in training, all working under the supervision of registered independent practicing Clinical/Counselling Psychologists.

This letter serves as confirmation that the clinic services are available to provide support to any research participants who may experience psychological distress during or due to participation in the research being conducted by Philip Slabbert.

The abovementioned research student is conducting his Masters research under the supervision of Dr Sherine van Wyk from the Department of Psychology at Stellenbosch University. His research title is: Exploring Bisexual Stellenbosch University Students' Lived Experiences of their Bisexual Identity.

The aforementioned researcher agrees to provide the clinic details to all research participants to ensure that they are aware of the support available and are thus able to access the necessary support should the need arise.

At this stage the clinic cannot provide the HPCSA registration numbers of the 8 student psychologists who would be providing the service at WCPC in 2020, as they will only be issued their HPCSA student psychologist registration numbers once applied for at the HPCSA upon commencement of their training in 2020.

Please do contact me for further information

Megan Snow

Clinical Psychologist
Clinic Manager
Welgevallen Community Psychology Clinic

Appendix J: Table for Chapter 7 - “Playing with the Closet”

Table for Chapter 7

“Playing with the Closet:” Concealment, Outness and the In-between.

	Thandie	Yumna	Lerato	Vela	Kefilwe	Jenny	Bongani	Estian	Martin	Sifiso	Prashant	Brian
Concealment / Non-disclosure												
Conceals by “passing” as heterosexual with family		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Concealment causing hypervigilance and distress		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Engages in behaviour modification	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Outness / Disclosure												
Out to whole family	✓		✓									✓
Comfortable being out in all settings	✓		✓									✓
Strategic Outness / Concealment												
Uses alternative queer sexual identity labels		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓
Prefers no label											✓	✓
Out to progressive half of the family only									✓			
Only out to family in the same generation						✓				✓		
Out to close friend/s	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Comfortable disclosing to any university peers	✓		✓			✓			✓	✓		
Comfortable disclosing to “safe” university peers	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓

Appendix K: Additional Participants' Quotes for each Theme

Chapter 5: Additional Quotes for Isolation on the Margins of Normativity

5.1 Dual-sourced normative pressures

5.1.1 Pressure to Maintain the Heterosexual Narrative

All the things that are seen sinful and horrible... in the church is just like, "It's just demonic and satanic... and not Godly."... It's [being gay is] very much not appreciated..., and, um, they explicitly say that it's unacceptable and it's wrong... which I find, uhf, it's problematic because..., it's homophobia. (Lerato)

He's [my brother has] been like blatantly homophobic. [...] We would be talking about queerness... in general or a queer person, um, and he would... say something like, "Oh queer people should be killed... or queer people are... wrong." Or something like that. (Yumna)

Aaai (exhale). It's not fair. Why does heterosexuality have to be the norm! Uuuuhhhhg! But it's the world we live in. (Sifiso)

5.1.2 Monosexism and Bi-erasure

I asked how do her parents see it [bisexuality], cause she asked how my parents do... um, and she said, "Ya no they don't really believe in it..." And then I said, "Okay." Um, and then she goes, "And I don't either." Uh. which was really awkward because I was on a bus ride with her for an hour and there was a lot of back and forth about religion, because she is super religious. [...] Um, and then after a while I just said, "It is not my job to educate you, but you clearly do not know a lot about this and I encourage you to go research more." (Jenny)

He [my uncle] asked "Who is that in your profile picture?" And I said, "It's my partner." And he is like, "Oh as in your friend?" I said, "No! It's my partner, it's my life" ... The thing is I find that they sometimes push for this narrative of, I should say that it's, out-right, it's a boyfriend... They have to compute it like that. I don't know why, but um... Yeah, so I just say it's my partner. (Brian)

5.2 Bi-incomprehensibility and Binegativity

5.2.1 Misconceptions and Misinformation

My parents, I feel like they do (exhale), I feel like they do think it's [sexual orientation is] a choice. (Sifiso)

They have all these ideas, which they, I don't know, dream up, or they encourage each other about which just makes sense to them [the biphobic]. (Lerato)

5.2.2 Denial and Liminality

"You either one or the other" [gay or straight]. Or... then people want to know that, "Ya you can be bisexual..., but you obviously have a preference for one more so over the other one..." And I think that it stems from their internal, logical reasoning skill. (sniggers) (Brian)

And the big problem is a lot of people think it's like a stepping stone... that "It's just you on your way to saying, um, coming out as gay." Or they say, "you're just unsure. It's just a phase, that you're just experimenting, you're gonna become straight again at some point or you're gonna go straight [Sifiso]." Or..., um, "You just don't know what you want..." (Sifiso)

5.2.3 Abnormality and sexual recklessness

When I was still very much on social media trying to... figure out anything that was not cis-hetero. Um, anything that was not cis-hetero was very much overly-sexualized. So it was all based on, "Okay..., they are always having sex." It was very weird that was the image that was thrown at you so like the first image that you found out about, um, anything that's not cis-hetero was..., "They are constantly banging," You're like, "What the fuck! Isn't there more to this than just fucking all the time?" So that's how the media has negatively impacted anything, that's not cis-hetero..., that was like the main fault I found in media.... It is very hyper-sexualized. [...] But I'm like, "There's more to this, it is emotional and stuff." (Thandie)

I think initially, they thought that I would be a threat to them [straight male roommates]..., um, that I would... hit on them... Because there's this perception that, any queer, any queer guy would... be promiscuous... and doesn't have preferences or doesn't have taste. (Brian)

5.3 Social effects of binegativity

5.3.1 Feeling unheard and unseen

I've never experienced such like, (laughs) blatant denial, not denial, but like blatant queerphobia or biphobia um, to my face. ... This was like right-out to me as a person that really threw me off, it hurt a lot more than I thought it would. Um, the more I thought about it for a while, it sort of got worse. ... I think, it's just because she misunderstood the whole experience, the whole concept of your sexual orientation not being something you can choose. And that misunderstanding ... clashed so much with the certainty that I have. (Jenny)

They [gay friends] also make me doubt my bisexuality sometimes, because they, if you start saying something else about a woman, they say, "Mmmh are you sure?" Taunts, like, "Are you sure you can perform?" and that type of thing (laughs). (Bongani)

We were watching the news and my father was commenting how China is getting better in terms of Corona and South Africa isn't, and he wonders why and my mother then said that it's because there aren't any gays or bisexuals or transgenders in China, but South Africa is full of them. ... I was surprised. ... I didn't expect that comment from her. And then, I told my mom, I was like, "Ma, Ma, you can't say that." ... And my mother, she's just like, "Hai no, it's their fault. Mhuh, mhuh." And I'm just, I was just, I was perplexed. I don't, I don't think I can say that I was hurt, because it's kind of something I expect by now, I guess. (Sifiso)

5.3.2 Lack of support

They bullied us, like severely, like, this is not okay, like they said some horrible things, um, about us. So, you know, there's this feeling of, social uncleanliness. (Brian)

Can't go anywhere near a church... eh, can't go anywhere near a community service..., there's just places that you don't go anywhere near..., if, uh..., you don't... want to go through a lot of emotional turmoil..., because they will bash you, trust and believe you will be bashed. (Thandie)

I had to not study in the study centre. I would like study in [the study centre] a lot... and eventually it got to such a time, I couldn't even focus. Like, you know, when you know someone is looking at you? You can feel someone is looking at you? Um... They [a group of gay individuals] would look and turn back and then someone else would look, and then they would start sniggering... and like you are studying now, but like you can't focus when you know someone is looking at you. It's almost like you are schizo... It's like a horrible thing... They made my spaces of normality uncomfortable. (Prashant)

Chapter 6: Additional Quotes for Erasure through Gendering

6.1 Gendering

6.1.1 Socialised to be a “good” girl or boy

They accepted me as a flatmate before seeing who I am and... now they have to deal with who I am. There were poster boards in the man-cave. Man cave rules, 1 – 10: Real men don't talk about their feelings... They only drink beer, they don't drink red wine. Men do this XYZ. There will be no watching of chick flicks - never. Stuff like that.
(Brian)

6.1.2 Policing Sex, Gender and Sexuality

It's extremely confusing, because people are using behaviours to be like, “this is stereotypically straight”/“oh this is stereotypically queer,” but then what happens when you have both? So you have these two [groups of] people [gay and straight community] trying to define you [as gay or straight]... And if you hung-out with one of them [queer friends], immediately it was assumed, “Oh he’s gay” and then if you hang-out with the straight people it was immediately assumed “Oh, his not [gay].”
(Prashant)

Once you are stamped, that is where you stick to your particular stereotype, you stay in your lane... Ya..... That's why.... Its very difficult. I'm not coming here with an empty bias [...] I know from first-hand..., from at least six of them, watching how they... would... tear apart people. (Prashant)

Inside any queer community really, there's this... prejudice of people needing to conform to something, and a lot of people even inside the queer community have..., um, kind of been asked to conform to something..., and when they do something different..., it's like, “Why aren't you... conforming to this thing that you said you were gonna conform too?” (Yumna)

6.2 Impact of Gendered Expectations

6.2.1. Hypersexualisation Effect

There's the whole three-some thing, that we're [bisexual women] just good from that... Uh, then there's the hook-up, like bisexuality in females is linked to party culture, so girls, especially in the songs we hear: “I kissed a girl and I liked it,” you know, it's just like a thing of... “Yeah, it's just something we do, man, this is so fun.” ... It's not taken seriously. [...] Honestly, I don't mind that it is not taken seriously, because it's not, it doesn't really hinder or affect my life so much right now. (Kefilwe)

6.2.2 Sex as a Tool of Conversion

We dated for a while and then when we broke up, she said... she'd feel very offended if I started dating guys again. And I was like, "But..., I'm pan, so I date, either or, I date anyone actually. So, I don't understand why you would feel offended if I started dating guys again." (Thandie)

6.2.3 Dating Exclusion

Philip: *What stereotypes do you find hinder you in developing a positive self-image?*

Bongani: *Um..., I think the main one is being seen as less of..., or being seen as, um, undesirable in the sense that, you have chosen a different sexual orientation. Um. It makes it... difficult.*

6.2.4 Perceptions of Bi-male Sexual Intercourse

If you're bisexual... and you bottom, then you're actually just gay... or... other times..., if you're bisexual you either automatically assumed to be a top. And then if you don't have a dominating personality... then you actually just... a feminine guy who is trying his luck... (exhale) There's actually quite a few... Uhhh, it's very upsetting. [...] If you're versatile and you're bisexual, I feel like that's... very..., um..., people are very doubtful of that... (Laughs). People think that you, cannot be bisexual and versatile. [...] "If you are versatile with a guy, then... you're gay. (Sifiso)

Chapter 7: Additional Quotes for Playing with the Closet

7.1 Concealment

7.1.1 Concealment and Behaviour Modification

Concealment/Non-disclosure

I understand in terms of the generational gap..., but there's a lot of young people who are trying to find their space on earth, and then they also associate to these religious beliefs, but then they have this identity they have to hide or suppress, because it is sinful. (Lerato)

It's a big deal to some people, especially people in the older generation... So..., based on how... I see them look at anything to do with queerness, anything in LGBT..., based on the attitude and the way that they look down on those people, the way they disregard them and just view them as lesser than. I fear that I'll be grouped into that as well. (Kefilwe)

Self-monitoring for Behaviour Modification

I think it's [my exposure to biphobia has] become less... prevalent now with my adaptive behaviour, it's almost like an automated response that happens when I'm in a certain crowd or certain group of people I naturally try to make it less obvious or create less room or opportunity for them to... display these prejudice behaviours. (Brian)

I worked hard at that [modifying my behaviour], because it wasn't a thing I had to, conceal by changing the way I spoke and walked just at home..., it was at school as well. So it was an all-day everyday thing. (Sifiso)

7.1.2 Cost of Concealment

The challenge of trying to make sure that you don't give off anything that will make you look suspicious, it is also quite a challenge managing that [a heterosexual presentation]. (Bongani)

7.2 Outness

7.2.1 Responses to Coming Out

It was weird when I first came out to my friends at school, so all my close friends, and then obviously the word spreads. Um. Um. There was one who did not believe me and, and still did not believe me, until I showed up, um, three weeks ago with a boyfriend at a party. (Martin)

What I can say that I was happy about is that nobody started treating me differently. People were actually more respectful, accommodative and I don't want to say tolerant, but, but ya I guess. [...] Some people started treating me better and others still the same. Nobody started treating me worse, so I was happy about that. There wasn't a negative reaction at all, even though I hadn't for myself, formally come out [he was outed]. (Sifiso)

7.3 Between Concealment and Outness

7.3.1 Strategic Identification

I'm not out to them [my parents] yet. [...] In high school there were a few people who knew [I was bi]. [...] In varsity, I actually made it a goal for myself to make sure that... I was my true self, I didn't hide anything from day one. (Sifiso)

I'm completely out to, um, my sister and my mother. Whereas I'm not out to my father and his, um, wife. (Martin)

Long-term Coming Out

No, [I'm not out to my family]. Indian household. Only when I am 100 percent, ok with myself will I then be able to explain. Um. Some people are just lost causes, especially grandparents. ... To be honest, I'm totally waiting to be 100 percent financially independent. ... I try to avoid risk as much as possible. ... I want to be in a position where I am my own individual. Cause [otherwise] they would just be like, "Oh, it's a phase." So I want to know, "This is my life!" Um. I need to show them as a working professional, not as a student. So I think it's more me getting more credentials behind myself, so I will be able to back up what I say. (Prashant)

7.3.2 Split-life Isolation

I'm quite close with my mom..., so it's difficult, especially when, I do like a woman, and that person makes me really happy, but I can't share that with her. And sometimes that gets really frustrating. But most of the time, it's easy because I'm in [the university town], and I can be myself there, completely. I have friends who support that, so I don't have that much of a need at home... But it is quite a big part of myself. So it does split my life. (Jenny)

It's hard to advocate: "yes" to come out, because you don't know each individual's situation... There's an internal decision that needs to be made on the part of the individual saying, um, "What are the pros and cons?" Which is horrible, you should just be able to be yourself... But, in my experience I had to weigh the pros and cons... Coming out and being my true self..., or being this sort of alternate personality..., and knowing I'll never be able to introduce my boyfriend to my father... So there are sort of relationship aspects that you miss if you don't come out and so you won't experience everything to the fullest extent, which might be your choice and that's fine. (Martin)

I just kind of became tired, and I just said [to myself], "I've had enough now... I've been lying to everyone, I'm sick of lying to people, I'm sick of living this double life." (Estian)

Chapter 8: Additional Quotes for Barriers to Bi-identity Development

8.1 Internalized Binegativity

8.1.1 Learnt Inferiority

I think a lot of people could be living better lives, could know and understand their sexuality better if they were exposed to more identities [through the media]. (Vela)

I've had a lot of anger towards my religion, mostly in terms of sexuality actually, sexuality... the way women are being portrayed, and the indoctrination... the psychological damage that I have been going through, is very unfair. (Lerato)

8.1.2 Ripple Effect of Internalized Binegativity

I'm thinking too much in terms of what's comfortable in terms of how I will be seen... and what would make me comfortable in the community..., in the society..., in the family. (Bongani)

I tried to convince him [a queer boy] that he... could change [his sexual orientation]. I told him how [I converted myself] I tried giving him advice on what I did. And he said, "It's not something you can just turn on and off."... I was like, "No it's fine, he might not be able to do it, but I did it"... It didn't last, (laughs) my straight period did not last long at all... I fought myself so much. (Sifiso)

8.1.3 Confusing Back and Forth Process of Self-acceptance

I think I'm definitely growing more comfortable in it [my sexual orientation]. Um..., and... I'm more open to being open about it... Um, I think even this interview for me, it was my first time speaking about it openly to someone, even someone outside of my friend group. Um, it's not something I've taken the time to..., um, sort of inhabit as my identity... I definitely think this time during lockdown especially, has really given me time to think about it, and really start growing comfortable in it. (Vela)

Chapter 9: Additional Quotes for Towards a Bi-affirmative Identity

9.1 Protective Factors

9.1.1 Social Support

I am happy and grateful that I've been able to get to the point that I have now... That's honestly all thanks to the people I've had in my life. (Sifiso)

Ninety percent, if not more of my friends are either, are either gay or bisexual... It's one set of people that make me feel comfortable, that it's okay. [...] Um, but they do, they also make me doubt my bisexuality sometimes. [...] But generally I'm more comfortable with them and they make me feel, you know, we support each other, or make each other feel comfortable, about who we are. (Bongani)

Like the only way to properly like deal with that [negative feedback from society] is to make sure that it doesn't have a negative effect on you..., is to find support somewhere... from a friend or family member if you can, or from programs on TV... that are pro bisexuality, pro LGBT, you know, something that gives you hope. (Sifiso)

9.1.2 Self-educating and Vicarious Learning

I'm starting to accept it [the fluidity of bi attraction]. It's only as of this year that I'm kinda getting a better handle on it... The series coming out these days, um, there seems to be a lot more fluidity, on Netflix series and stuff like that... And also the whole femininity/masculinity - like now they are showing that a male can have both feminine and masculine energy. It's not fixed. (Prashant)

I see people who are, who are out, and I think, "Oh, wow." I appreciate who they are... Like with a friend... who's getting married... Um, initially he wasn't out and he was caught out by his sister, who then told his mother. ... The mother then said, "Come to me, talk to me." And the mother said, "Look you are my child." ... It freed him and, um, later on he met someone who was also coming from a family that accepted him and so on, and so on. And now they are a point where both families are happy and are supporting them. And I look at them and I'm like, "Wow!" There's a part of me which is still scared, like, "No, I don't want to [come out]" because it, the fear of being out, hinders me more than the motivation I see... "This is nice," but the fear says, "Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah!" (Bongani)

9.2 Bi-identity Integration

9.2.1 Troubling Normativity

I don't want it to be like a big deal, you know, I feel like there's a lot of aspects to who I am, and this is just one of them. So I definitely don't want it [my sexual orientation] to be something that's a moniker for me. And I don't want it to be synonymous with who I am. (Kefilwe)

In terms of my friends, I wasn't worried about, um, [them] not accepting me, because um, I'm very strong headed... where I'm like, "Okay, if you don't like me, go away." So, I never struggled with things in terms of coming out [to them]. (Martine)

9.2.2 Enhancing Bi-Positivity

I wouldn't like to use any of those terms. I'm not being like facetious. I'm not wanting to be stereotyped or put in a box. I find that one has to look at intimate relationship holistically and not just from an angle or perspective... That's why I stopped using it. (Brian)

Um, something I really strive for is to be authentic to myself as often as I can, um, so I think knowing myself better has given a sense of pride, both in my sexuality and also in myself. Um..., so I think the confidence that has come from that, um, has really been great. (Jenny)

Philip: Do you still have internalized thoughts, like putting yourself down, not being normal and things like that, does it still affect you now?

Estian: No it doesn't affect me now... You get to a point where it's like, either you're going to be happy and live your life, or you're going to pretend to be happy, to make other people happy. So, once you make that decision and you come out to tell your story, um... It was like such a relief and like, especially because it was positively received by my parents and my extended family, and my friends. So I think that made it a lot easier. So I don't really feel all of that hatred towards myself anymore.