Narratives of Bisexual College Students: Impacts of Emerging Adulthood, Minority Stress, and Forming Community

by

Harley Stenzel

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Approved by

Brian E. McCabe, Ph.D., LP, Chair, Associate Professor of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling
Latifat O. Cabirou, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling
Marilyn A. Cornish, Ph. D., Professor and Director of Training of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling
Tiffany A. Brown, Ph. D., Associate Professor of Psychological Sciences
Chris Correia, Ph.D., Dep. Chair & Professor of Psychological Sciences

Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation's study was to understand the experiences of bisexual college students during emerging adulthood (ages 18-25 years). This study examined the interactions of bisexual students with other LGBTQ+ individuals, and how these experiences shaped their narratives surrounding themselves. A narrative inquiry approach (Josselson & Hammack, 2021) grounded in Queer (Yep et al., 2003) and Quare (Johnson, 2016) epistemologies was utilized to answer the following research questions: (1) How do bisexuals describe their identities changing or evolving from high school to college?, (2) How do bisexuals perceive interactions with other LGBTQ+ people?, and (3) How do bisexual people experience minority stress?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six different participants all identifying under the bisexual umbrella and within emerging adulthood. The data was analyzed using narrative analysis (Josselson & Hammack, 2021) and resulted in the following themes: Increased Engagement with Bisexual Identity Development in Emerging Adulthood, Pervasive Minority Stress Leads to Repetitive Decisions Around Disclosure, Intersectionality Impacts Identity Experiences, and Establishing LGBTQ+ Community is the Most Important Protective Factor, and the Most Complex. In addition to themes, individual narratives of each participant were included.

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List of Abbreviations

A4P	Athletes for Pride
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
LGB	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Plus (Identities Beyond Listed Categories)
PHD	Doctor of Philosophy
SAMHSA	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services
SCT	Self Categorization Theory
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SIT	Social Identity Theory
STAIRCaSE	Situation, Thought, Affect, Intention, Response, Consequence, Self-Evaluation
QPOC	Queer People of Color
UW	University of Wisconsin

Chapter 1

Introduction

Bisexuals make up the largest group of people within the LGBTQ+ community which consists of an array of identities and experiences (Anderson, 2021). The term *Bisexual* has historically indicated that a person experiences attraction to both sides of the gender binary (men and women), but more contemporary definitions indicate that bisexuality broadly means attraction to more than one gender and pushes back against rigid binary thinking about both gender and sexuality. Many bisexual (or bi) people describe their identity as having no inherent binary as implied by the term; bisexuality can be understood as an inclusive term which encompasses anyone with a plurisexual identity (i.e., a person is not heterosexual or homosexual, as defined by attraction to one gender identity; Flanders et al., 2017).

This dissertation uses the term "bisexual umbrella" which is an inclusive term for all identities that are polysexual, including bisexual, pansexual, omnisexual, fluid, queer, asexual, and more, along with those who do not wish to be labeled (Bisexual Resource Center, 2019). A beautiful aspect of the bisexual umbrella is that it captures and celebrates all the diverse ways that individuals under it may describe their identity. While terms like plurisexual, pansexual, and queer exist, many who opt to use the term bisexual report feeling a desire to use the term *bisexuality* because it was most likely to be understood by others (Rust, 2000). Others opt to not use the term bisexual because they find that it feels too limited, inaccurate, or because of its association with stigma against the group (Baumgardner, 2008). Still others reject categorizing bisexuality/pansexuality and push back against categorization or defining of any kind (Rust, 2000). Bisexuals' inherent diversity mandates an open and flexible understanding of identity, and it is crucial to not constrict bisexuals to one category or one 'correct' way of identifying.

Although bisexuality is a relatively new construct in comparison to sexual identities such as gay or lesbian (more about the history of this construct below), it is the largest group within the LGBTQ+ community. In the most recent U.S. Census (Anderson, 2021), 4% of adults identified as bisexual compared to 3% as gay or lesbian, and 2% as something else. Although terms such as pansexual or queer have been utilized to describe attraction to more than one gender including transgender folks and other gender diverse people, many within these identities utilize the term bisexuality as an overarching umbrella identity, i.e., people could choose to utilize the more specific terms pansexual (pan) or queer (Flanders et al., 2017).

Regardless of terminology, there is evidence that bisexual people have worse physiological and psychological health compared to heterosexual people, and in some instances compared to other gay/lesbian people. Bisexual women have higher smoking, alcohol use rates, BMI, and rates of heart disease than heterosexual women, and higher blood pressure and higher cholesterol levels than heterosexual and lesbian women (SAMHSA, 2020; World Heart Foundation, 2012; American Lung Association, 2010; VanKim et. al., 2010). Bisexuals have the highest rates of smoking compared to any subgroup to which data has been collected; smoking rates for this population are between 30-40% with a biggest difference being between bisexual women (39%) and heterosexual women (19%). There is also a difference in heavy episodic drinking (sometimes called binge drinking), with bisexual women having a rate of 24% and straight women having a rate of 8% (SAMHSA, 2020; American Lung Association 2010, VanKim et al., 2010). Bisexual adults are also significantly more likely to report experiencing intimate partner violence (47% prevalence) compared to heterosexual adults (17% prevalence; SAMHSA, 2020; VanKim et al., 2010).

Quality of life and available mental health support for bisexual adults is like or lower than that of lesbian women or gay men. Bisexual people navigate difficulties in mental health, with 8.8 million reporting having a mental illness. Of this number, 42% reporting going untreated (SAMHSA, 2020). Bisexuals experience significant rates of suicidal ideation with 3.9 million reporting having serious thoughts of suicide, 1.3 million planning, and 604,000 attempting suicide (SAMHSA, 2020). Additionally, bisexual adults report the lowest level of emotional well-being of any sexual orientation, for example 13% of bisexuals report being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their lives compared to 5% heterosexual adults (SAMHSA, 2020; Koh et al., 2006; VanKim et al., 2010). Bisexual men and women report higher levels of depression at a rate of about twice as much compared to heterosexuals (37% compared to 17%) (SAMHSA, 2020). Bisexual individuals have higher rates of self-harm, thoughts of suicide, and suicide attempts compared to heterosexuals, gay men, and lesbians (SAMHSA, 2020; Dobinson, 2007; VanKim et. al, 2010; King et al., 2006).

Disparities in health experienced by people who are LGBTQ+ may be due to experiences of discrimination, which can be understood in part with the *Sexual Minority Stress Model* developed for LGBTQ+ populations (Meyer, 2003) and by newer concepts that are unique to bisexual people. *Sexual minority stress* refers to the adverse physiological/psychological consequences that LGBTQ+ individuals experience because of their social minority position. People who hold a minority identity are likely to experience stress and conflict due to their differences from the dominant culture's social structures and norms do not reflect those of the minority groups. Additionally, acts of discrimination targeted towards the individual who holds the minority identity will increase levels of stress.

Although as noted above, bisexual people make up ~40% of the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) community, they face unique challenges including bias, negative stereotype, and group identity, leaving bisexual people feeling unrecognized and unsupported (Nielson et al., 2020). In addition to experiencing the constructs from the Sexual Minority Stress model (Meyer, 2003), bisexual people are uniquely subject to kinds of discrimination, such as bi-erasure and mono-sexism. *Bi-erasure* is the belief that bisexuality does not exist, and that bisexuality is either a steppingstone to fully accept one's gay identity or it is viewed as experimenting as a straight person (Flanders et al., 2017; Davila et al., 2018; Salaway et al., 2019). *Mono-sexism* is the idea that people are and/or should be only attracted to one gender identity and that it is wrong to be attracted to more than one (Gonzales et al., 2019). Stressors specific to bisexual people will be described in more detail in Chapter 2.

Bisexual people also have unique experiences with identity development. Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) are social psychology theories of intergroup relations, group processes, and the social self, and were originally developed to study cognitive and social belief aspects of racism, prejudice, and discrimination (Hogg et al., 1995; Tajfel 1959). Bisexual people are unique in that they often feel that they are a part of both heterosexual and gay/lesbian groups, but do not feel that they completely fit in with either. Often, bisexual people feel excluded and rejected from both communities (Flanders, 2016). The inability to describe bisexuality within one all-encompassing definition may lead to difficulty identifying traits and characteristics as a bisexual group member, which may lead to feelings of isolation, inability to find social support, and increased difficulty navigating identity development (Flanders, 2016). These are described in more detail in Chapter 2.

Emerging adulthood is the developmental stage between the ages of 18-25 years (Arnett, 2000), a new period of the life course which encapsulates the transitional period between adolescence and adulthood. The distinctive features of emerging adulthood include negotiating experiences of instability, feelings of transition, possibility, heightened self-focus, and identity exploration. Arnett (2000) describes emerging adulthood as a time in which young people are deciding who they are, what they want to do for work, for school, and who they want to love. It is a time of repeated large changes, such as going to college, moving, and engaging in new relationships. For some, it is a time period that can be strongly self-focused with individuals for the first time having true freedom to decide what they want to do, where they want to go, and who they want to be with as well as a time where they are first taking responsibility for themselves without yet completely taking on adulthood. Young people in emerging adulthood feel the time is full of possibilities and marked by a sense of optimism and that everything will work out. Emerging adulthood is described in more detail in chapter 2.

Emerging Adulthood is an important developmental stage for bisexual people for two reasons. First, in general, people in this stage struggle with substance use and mental health concerns, and second, people in this developmental period are often establishing identity around sexuality and relationships. This age group reports difficulties with substance use with 5.1 million reporting meeting criteria for a substance use disorder, and reports found that of this number 87% of them went untreated (SAMHSA, 2020). Bisexual folks are shown to have the highest rates of problems like heavy drinking, illicit drug use, prescription drug misuse, and cigarette use compared to all other age groups (Patrick et al, 2020). Sexual minority emerging adults have even higher rates of substance misuse and substance disorders compared to their heterosexual peers with findings reporting that they are 90% more likely to misuse substances

compared to their peers. Bisexual emerging adults were found to be the most at-risk group with the highest rates of substance misuse at a rate of 3.4 times more than their heterosexual peers. Bisexual emerging adult women in particular, are 4x more likely to misuse substances than their heterosexual counterparts (SAMHSA, 2020). With respect to sexual identity development, this stage is when people often form or solidify their identities. Emerging adulthood presents a unique developmental environment for sexual orientation and identity development (Morgan, 2012). By the end of emerging adulthood, almost all people will have identified a pattern of sexual attraction and identified sexual preferences (Calzo et al., 2011).

Previous research has shown interactions with other LGBTQ+ members is influential on identity development and sexual minority stress during emerging adulthood (Brown 2002; Flanders et al., 2017). College is a unique opportunity in which individuals can clearly form group membership in the form of various groups or clubs on campus as well as generally being exposed to a greater number of diverse individuals of the same age group of which they likely have not been exposed to prior to attending university (Glazzard et al., 2020). This provides an opportunity to explore experiences of group membership and group belongingness but also has implications of potential group membership rejection on emerging adults. College age individuals are at a unique position to be exposed to LGBTQ+ communities and programing through pre-established university groups which provide a unique opportunity to explore the narratives and stories of participants as they navigate their identity development with specific attention to access and exposure to LGBTQ+ groups (Glazzard et al., 2020).

The purpose of this dissertation's study was to understand the experiences of bisexual college students during emerging adulthood (ages 18-25 years). This sample was chosen purposefully because as noted previously, (1) people often make decisions about sexual identity

during emerging adulthood, (2) people have increased risks for several health disparity conditions, such as heavy drinking, in this life stage, and (3) people often experience large transitions in social settings during emerging adulthood. In particular, this study examined the interactions of bisexual students with other LGBTQ+ individuals, and how these experiences shaped their narratives surrounding themselves. I utilized a narrative inquiry approach (Josselson & Hammack, 2021) grounded in Queer (Yep et al., 2003) and Quare (Johnson, 2016) epistemologies. I conducted a semi-structured interview with 6 bisexual university students. The data was analyzed using narrative analysis (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). Methods used are further discussed in chapter 3. The research questions that guided this dissertation were:

1. How do bisexuals describe their identities changing or evolving from high school to college?
2. How do bisexuals perceive interactions with other LGBTQ+ people?
3. How do bisexual people experience minority stress?

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the literature and theory that helped shape this study of bisexual college student's narratives. The theories described above in this chapter are discussed in depth in Chapter 2. Specifically, Chapter 2 presents the historical discussions surrounding bisexuality, particularly the discussions centering bisexuality in academic contexts within the last 100 years. I expand on sexual minority stress and present the ways that bisexuals in specific are impacted utilizing Meyer (2003)'s model. I discuss aspects of identity including bisexual identity formation and will discuss the importance of group membership for bisexuals through social identity theory and self-categorization theory. Studying bisexual people is vital because they experience multiple health disparities noted above. Further, bisexual people's

experiences during emerging adulthood, and specifically the transition to college, is meaningful because this life stage is pivotal for development of identity, relationships, and sexual preferences, as well as being associated with increases in rates of substance use and mental disorders. This dissertation is a qualitative inquiry to understand the narratives about transitions and identity development of bisexual emerging adult college students. As shown in Chapter 2, this dissertation study adds to knowledge about the experiences and narratives of bisexual people during this important life stage. It employs a narrative inquiry approach (Josselson & Hammack, 2021) grounded in Queer (Yep et al., 2003) and Quare (Johnson, 2016) epistemologies to platform the narratives found in semi-structured interviews of 6 bi-umbrella college students.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the literature and theoretical constructs that informed my dissertation study. I begin with an overview of the historical discussions surrounding bisexuality and how the literature surrounding it has evolved over about the last 100 years. In particular, I discuss the ways that previous research has often sought to define the identity of bisexuality, and the discourse surrounding this. I then outline my main theoretical frameworks that guided my dissertation, specifically sexual minority stress theory and identity theories. Sexual minority stress theory provides an important structure to the understanding of marginalization of sexual minorities and has been expanded to outline the main experiences that bisexuals face as a result of marginalization. I wrap up by discussing theories of identity including a discussion of bisexual identity development. I highlight the importance of social identity theory, and self-categorization theory, and conclude with ways that both theories apply to the bisexual population. These frameworks are complemented with a brief discussion of Queer theory in Chapter 3. Queer theory provides guidance on my use of qualitive narrative inquiry. Queer theory was chosen because it discusses the structural discriminatory factors that bisexuals and other LGBTQ+ individuals face, including the problems with attempting to define the identity.

Historical Discussions Surrounding Bisexuality

In Western society the term *bisexual* was originally used to refer to stage of prenatal development before the emergence of male or female physiology (Taylor, 2018; MacDowall, 2009). However, in the early 1900's the term began to evolve in western culture. Ellis (1915) was one of the first to discuss the bisexual phenomenon similar to the modern view of sexual

orientation. Ellis (1915) suggested that being attracted to both women and men or "psychosexual hermaphroditism" was a result of an interruption to the normal process of development in which each person matures as either male or female with an attraction to the opposite sex.

Sigmond Freud (1920) added to the discussion of the phenomena of being attracted to both men and women as being a result of being intersex or having both male and female sexual organs. He believed that due to the absence of consistent male and female characteristics, an environment of dual attraction was born. Wilhelm Stekel (1920), a psychoanalyst, and student of Freud had contrasting views on the topic of bisexuality from Freud and many academics at the time (cited in Taylor, 2018). Stekel (1920) believed that bisexuality was not due to development but was a constant and continuous state of all humans. Further, Stekel suggested that all of those who hold monosexual attraction are repressing their natural state of bisexual attraction and experiencing a state of neurosis.

In the mid-twentieth century, Alfred Kinsey and colleagues (1948) published his book *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male,* which described the use and creation of The Kinsey Scale to measure sexual attraction on a spectrum, instead of only heterosexual and homosexual. The Kinsey Scale has sexual orientation on a spectrum ranging from zero (0) representing those with exclusively opposite sex (it should be noted that Kinsey used the word "sex" as synonymous for gender, while later work separates these terms) attraction to six (6) for those who experience exclusively same sex attraction (Kinsey et al., 1948). This allowed scientists to describe how many people fell between these two ends points and also highlighted the diverse experiences of those who fall within the 'bisexual" middle (Taylor 2018).

In the 1970s in the U.S., discussing sexual orientations that differed from heterosexuality increased in popular media, and more discussions of bisexuality popped up. Parallel to popular

media, researchers began to discuss bisexuality and Blumstein and Schwartz (1977) detailed the experiences of bisexuals and the vast differences that individuals can experience within the identity. They argued that bisexuals by their nature defied categorization and are characterized as diverse and fluid (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1999; Taylor, 2018). The difficulty in defining and understanding bisexuality would become a major roadblock to acceptance, prompting both negative attitudes towards bisexuals as well as bisexual people striving to accept and understand their own identity (Klein, 1999). This dilemma for defining bisexuality has persisted throughout the decades following the 1970s and continues to pose a challenge for both researchers and bisexual people today.

This decade also began the discourse surrounding the validity of the bisexual orientation and conversations surrounding if it is a steppingstone to accepting a gay or homosexual identity. US psychiatrist Fritz Klein (1978), in *The Bisexual Option*, made a firm stance that bisexuality is an orientation within itself. He argued that the diversity within the identity could be understood through four categories of bisexuality described by the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid: transitional; historical; sequential; and concurrent. *Transitional* refers to the process of coming out as gay or lesbian in which identifying as bisexual is a step along the process. *Historical* bisexuals are referred to as people who currently identify as either heterosexual or homosexual but have had sexual or romantic interactions with both men and women in the past. *Sequential* bisexuality refers to individuals who alternate between male and female partners and is marked by longer monogamous or monosexual phases. *Concurrent* refers to individuals who have co-existent same sex and opposite sex interactions within a smaller period of time. Klein pushed back against the Kinsey Scale, arguing there was a need to separate sexual experiences from

sexual desires; that is, they are two separate constructs and neither alone are enough to define sexual orientation (Klein, 1993).

Other scholars agreed that the Kinsey Scale was problematic, indicating that the continuum implied that bisexuals are half homosexual and half heterosexual and that their identity is comprised of a finite combination of the two (Storms, 1980). Storms (1980) presented a two-dimensional model in response which measures two axes of homoeroticism and heteroeroticism. *Homoeroticism* is attraction to the same gender; *heteroeroticism* is attraction to the opposite gender. An additional reason in which Kinsley's Scale was problematic was that it used the gender binary system and did not account for gender diverse individuals.

The U.S. HIV/AIDS (Human immunodeficiency virus infection and acquired immune deficiency syndrome) crisis of the 1980s increased stigma against bisexuals as there was widespread panic about the disease and villainization of those who may have it or spread it. Media quickly labeled AIDS and HIV as sexually transmitted diseases that are predominantly spread by gay individuals. Bisexuals, particularly bisexual men, found themselves in a unique dilemma as they were accused of lying and spreading the disease to heterosexual individuals after having sexual interactions with homosexual individuals (Rust, 2000). This marked an increase tension from heterosexuals to both bisexuals and broader LGBTQ+ individuals. The tension resulted in a highly political and tense fight for LBGTQ+ rights and furthered the divide between heterosexual and homosexual communities. As a result, many gay and lesbian individuals started to ostracize bisexuals for "blurring of homosexual and heterosexual distinctions" which threatened to undermine the advocacy and was received as a betrayal to the movement (Rust, 2000). The research published at the time followed similarly with one study

describing bisexuality as “merely a label one might use to save face, maintain status, or deny internal conflict” and argued that bisexuals did not exist (Altshuler, 1984; Rust 2000).

The 1990s marked a period where bisexuality fought to regain some positive narration in both the media and in scholarly literature. *Dual Attraction* (Weinberg et al., 1995) detailed research with bisexuals and helped form bisexual theory. The first model of bisexual identity formation as well as ‘types’ of bisexuals were identified using composite scores derived from the original Kinsey Scale using the dimensions sexual feelings, sexual behaviors, and romantic feelings. From this, the following five types were derived: pure type, mid type, heterosexual leaning type, homosexual leaning type, and varied type. *Pure type* refers to truly equal preference for both male and female partners across all three dimensions. This type was shown to be the rarest type of bisexuality with only 2% of bisexual males and 17% of bisexual females falling into this category. The *mid type* refers to an individual who indicated an equal preference on one dimension and an almost equal preference on the other two. This type was shown to be common with about one third of both male and female bisexuals. The heterosexual and homosexual leaning bisexuals are identified as those scoring towards the respective pole on all three dimensions. The *heterosexual leaning type* was the largest for bisexual men accounting for 45% of them compared to 20% of women. The *homosexual leaning type* accounted for 15% of both males and females. Lastly, the *varied type* includes bisexual individuals without any distinct pattern consistency or leanings. In this type, about 10% of bisexual men and women fell into it (Swan, 2018; Weinberg 1994). From this data, Weinberg argues that “the bi in bisexual, is, itself, a myth and agreed with Klein (1993) who stated, “there is no bisexual who necessarily reflects a 50/50-degree ratio between his or her male or female preference”.

This was one of the first times bisexuality began to be understood not as a binary but within an *open gender schema,* helping to conceptualize bisexual attraction at the individual level rather than broader gender binaries (Weinberg et al., 1994). This continued to propel the conversation and understanding that bisexuals are inherently diverse, hard to study, define, and sometimes comprehend. Hemmings (1995) described the paradox of bisexual theorizing and attempting to define bisexuality when the bisexual community wished to remain unlabeled. Further, trying to define bisexuality under existing constructs and structures of sexuality was not only impossible but ultimately harmful to the community due to the inherent impossibility to define the sexuality in a way that applied to every individual in the group (Hemmings, 1999). In agreement, Marjorie Garber (1995) published *Vice Versa,* a text on bisexuality, in which she described bisexuality as the epitome of sexual fluidity and pushed back against calling it a sexual orientation but framed it as the undoing of all orientations. However, this received criticism claiming that even this explanation of bisexuality is too all encompassing to explain the experience of all bisexuals and warned against trying to "define the undefinable." It was critiqued that theorists are trying to "have the last word" on bisexuality rather than joining the community's efforts to allow bisexuality to be defined by its connectedness and straight of alliances rather than its fluidity (Du Plessis, 1996).

The conflict surrounding bisexuality continued into 2000s, forming two major opinions on bisexuality: one that affirms, acknowledges, and accepts bisexuals as being healthy, aware, and valid. The other group feeling that bisexuality was non-existent, conflicted, and traitorous to other LGBTQ+ identities (Zinik, 2000). From this, two opposing models of bisexuality were formed: the flexible model and the conflict model. The *flexible model* describes bisexuals as "chameleons" that can move with ease between the homosexual and heterosexual worlds. The

conflict model describes bisexuals as confused "fence-sitters" who are marked by an inability to decide regarding their sexuality and that bisexuals are riddled with inner turmoil (Zinik, 2000).

At this time the concept of bierasure was proposed by Kenji Yoshino (2000). He proposed that bisexuals are invisible in western society because they have been systematically and deliberately erased. He additionally introduced the concept of 'epistemic contract' relating bisexual erasure is a result of monosexuals feeling that bisexuals are able to destabilize their identity and behavior and threaten the social norm of monogamy. The concepts surrounding bierasure as well as monosexuality are further discussed below.

Reiger and colleagues (2005) investigated genital and self-reported sexual arousal to male and female sexual stimuli with a group of 33 bisexual men. They found that overall, most of the participants did not show physical sexual arousal to both men and women, with a favor towards arousal to men only. However, the bisexual men self-reported arousal to both. This article which was then taken by the New York Times and published under the harmful title *Gay, Straight, or Lying* (Carey, 2005). While this evidence has since been disputed in replication studies (Denizet-Lewis, 2014; Rosenthal et al., 2011), it has been incredibly detrimental to bisexual men, with long lasting results. This increased the negative view of bisexual men which had been increasing since the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s.

In recent years, the discourse surrounding the bisexual identity has continued. Contemporary disagreements surrounding the identity involve how to define the term bisexual and the broadening of its meaning to include pansexual, polysexual, homoflexible, heteroflexible, biromantic, bisexual, bicurious, queer, and more as detailed in Shiri Eisner's (2013) text *Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution.* Individuals identifying as bisexual has been on the rise in the last ten years. This is perhaps due to this increase of identities widely accepted

under the bisexual umbrella, growing acceptance of the bisexual identity, or broader acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities as whole (Richters et al., 2014; de Visser et al., 2014).

There have been several additions to theoretical perspectives as it relates to bisexuality since 2010. Astle and colleagues (2025) utilized *cognitive schema theory* to explain both society's rejection of bisexuals as well as bisexuals' difficulty accepting their own identity. This is a result of each individual lack of a suitable cognitive schema which would allow them to make sense of the complicated identity. Callis (2014) described non-binary sexualities as applied to *the borderland theory* which was originally developed to discuss the experience of bi-racial individuals. She describes that bisexuals exist between the borders of homosexuality and heterosexuality in a borderland space characterized by the ability for the identity to change and dissolve.

Emerging Adulthood

In this dissertation I focus on experiences of bi-umbrella folks in emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is a developmental period that encompasses the transition to adulthood between the ages 18-27 (Arnett, 2000). I begin this section by exploring the five main features of emerging adulthood 1) identity exploration, 2) possibilities, 3) feeling in between, 4) self-focus, and 5) instability (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2004). Then I discuss the features of queer emerging adulthood: 1) community-supported independence, 2) close relationships/family kith, 3) personal preservation, and 4) strength to engage with heteronormative and cisnormative contexts (Wagaman, 2016). Finally, I explore the experience of transitioning to college as an LGBTQ+ student.

Features of Emerging Adulthood

Identity Exploration. During emerging adulthood, individuals develop an *identity* or a clarification of who they are and what they want out of life (Arnett, 2004). During this time period, people experience increased independence from their parents but often have not yet solidified enduring adult roles (Schulenberg et al., 2004). They experience relative freedom from life obligations while making decisions that have long-term implications (Gerstacker, 2010).

Identity exploration during this time period focuses on three common areas: love, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000). In relation to love, individuals are exploring sexual and romantic preferences (Garcia et al., 2012), as well as exploring questions such as "What kind of person am I, and what kind of person would suit me best as a partner through life?" Exploration surrounding work and professional identity occurs during this life stage and are focused on preparation for adult occupations. Individuals are seeking to learn more about themselves, what they are good at, what is satisfying, and what opportunities they have available to them as they explore different work options and educational paths (Arnett, 2004). Finally, changes in worldview are a central part of development during emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Perry, 1999). During this life stage, emerging adults question worldviews that they learned through childhood and adolescence. Often through experiences in higher education, emerging adults are exposed to a multitude of worldviews and cross- cultural experiences that allows them to have a more complex understanding of the world around them (Bowman, 2010).

Possibilities. Emerging adulthood is characterized by possibilities, optimism, and the potential for dramatically changing the direction of one's life. Emerging adults have often left their family of origin but are not committed to a new network of relationships and obligations (Arnett, 2004). At this stage, many aspirations seem viable due to the limited chances to test

feasibility of different dreams and goals (Arnett, 2015). When individuals reach adulthood, they likely will have experienced setbacks in various life domains that they may not have at this point, such as failed relationships, rejection from a training program, being fired from a job, and more (Reifman & Niehuis, 2022). Emerging adults view themselves as having a wide scope for making their own decisions and feel that they have a greater range of choices for how to live than ever before (Arnett, 2004). While many may feel pessimistic about the state of the world and future of society, they personally feel highly optimistic about ultimately achieving their own goals (Hornblower, 1997).

Feeling in Between. Emerging adulthood is characterized by people feeling that they are in an in-between period that is between the restrictions of adolescence and the responsibilities of adulthood (Arnett, 2004). There is often a sense of feeling both like and not like an adult and waiting to meet various markers of internal criteria surrounding what it means to be an adult. In a study done with emerging adults in the U.S., they identified three top criteria for adulthood: accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent. However, these criteria are gradual and ambiguous, emphasizing the experience of feeling in between during this time period.

Self-Focus. Individuals in emerging adulthood tend to have an increased focus on themselves to build skills, learn about themselves, and work toward self-sufficiency (Arnett, 2015). For the first time, many can make decisions both big and small for themselves such as what they want for dinner, do they want to change majors, do they want to switch roommates, and more (Arnett, 2004). Through focusing on themselves, some can spend time selecting life paths and choosing activities that they prefer (Luyckx, et al., 2011). The temporary focus on self,

that some individuals can experience, allows them to gain skills on daily living and allows them to focus on learning how to be a self-sufficient person. (Arnett, 2004).

Instability. Finally, the last feature of emerging adulthood is instability. The identity work and vast number of choices present during this time paired with losing the structure associated with adolescence, high school, and living at home create a sense of instability (Arnett, 2004). Emerging adults seek to find a plan or a route that they will use to move from adolescence into the responsibility associated with adulthood, but typically that plan is subject to multiple revisions and changes during their emerging adult years.

This period is full of significant life transitions that impact social networks, family support and autonomy, and role changes. Common transitions for this life span are high school graduation, transition to professional life among non-college attendees, freshman transition, senior transition, and life after college (Arnett, 2004). Due to the uncertainty and instability associated with them, transitions are associated with periods of self-doubt, immobilization, and denial (Brammer & Abrego, 1981).

Emerging Adulthood with LGBTQ+ Populations

As mentioned above, exploring sexuality and romantic interests is a main component of identity development in emerging adults (Arnett, 2000). In emerging adulthood, most individuals will identify a pattern of sexual attraction and will adopt an identity label (Calzo et al., 2011). In a study conducted by Hall and Colleagues (2021), it was shown that the typical sequence of identity development for LGBTQ+ folks is 1) attraction, 2) self-identification/sexual activity, 3) coming out, and 4) initiating a romantic relationship. It was found that bisexual participants experience the milestones of attraction and self-identification significantly later than gay and lesbian participants, occurring mostly in emerging adulthood. A unique facet of emerging

adulthood in LGBTQ+ populations that in addition to navigating the five facets of emerging adulthood, they struggle to find their place in a heteronormative world (Buttitta et al., 2024). In US culture, many understandings on what it means to transition into adulthood are centered around heteronormative distinctions such as marriage and family (Torkelson, 2012; Arnett, 2004). Not only do queer emerging adults face many legal and structural impediments to attaining traditional family and married life, many LGBTQ+ emerging adulthood paths do not center around such heteronormative models (Torklelson, 2012).

In a study done by Wagamen and colleagues (2016), it was found that queer emerging adults characterized their transition from youth to adulthood through four main facets: 1) community-supported independence, 2) close relationships/family kith, 3) personal preservation, and 4) strength to engage with heteronormative and cisnormative contexts. *Community-supported independence* refers to the importance of the presence of community which serves as a safety net when achieving independence due to queer emerging adults often experiencing marginalization and limited to nonexistent support from their families. This concept leads into the second facet of LGBTQ+ emerging adult development *close relationships/family kith*, which consists of the development of close relationships that function as chosen family. The facet *personal preservation* encompasses the awareness of trauma and learning strategies to manage the impact of trauma, both in the past and the ability to respond in the future. Lastly, *strength to engage with heteronormative and cisnormative contexts* refers to the development of a strong sense of self that includes a confidence in self-worth despite anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and the overall sociopolitical climate (Buttietta et al., 2024; Wagamen et al., 2016).

University Transitions for LGBTQ+ Students. University presents a time of major transitions for emerging adults. For LGBTQ+ students, these transitions are complex, multiple,

and multi-dimensional (Glazzard et al., 2020). In a study done by Glazzard and Colleagues (2020), LGBTQ+ university student participants discussed experiencing multiple transitions while attending university including geographic transitions (moving away from home), social transitions (meeting and establishing friendships and relationships), academic transitions (coping with demands of academic study in higher education), and identity transitions (developing their identities as individuals who identified as LGBTQ+, developing a student identity, and transitioning to a professional identity). Students experienced heightened levels of stress as they navigated these different transitionary periods, which increased based on intersecting identities such as if the student is a first-generation college student (Cerezo & Ramirez, 2022). However, finding supportive peer networks is critical for this time, as it helps increase resilience and ability to encounter these developmental milestones effectively (Glazzard et al., 2020).

Queer students must be mindful of the choice of university which may be impacted by perception of tolerance and safety in that area (Taulke-Johnson, 2008) as well as distance from family depending on their acceptance of the student's identity (Taulke-Johnson, 2010). Institutions should focus on LGBTQ+ inclusion through curriculum inclusivity, protection against prejudice and discrimination, and ensuring faculty have LGBTQ+ equality training (Glazzard et al., 2020). Choices surrounding housing is also important to queer students, and there is a focus on finding safe and inclusive accommodations, especially important to trans and gender diverse individuals (Beemyn, 2005).

The transition out of college is another important aspect of LGBTQ+ emerging adulthood. In a study done by Silver et al. (2021), it was found that queer seniors in college had concerns surrounding entering the workforce, ambivalence surrounding leaving the university, concerns about navigating the coming out process after college, and concerns about locating

support. Students found that college was a unique time in which they experienced support and community surrounding their LGBTQ+ identities which was facilitated both by increased exposure to diverse groups as well as through LGBTQ+ affirming programming on campus. The loss of such supports results in increased anxiety and uncertainty about the future. Student affairs at this time should assist students in finding supports and community outside of campus, and work to instill confidence in their ability to connect with other queer folks' post-college. (Silver et al., 2021).

Bisexual Emerging Adulthood

Emerging Adulthood is an important developmental stage for bisexual people for two reasons. First, in general, people in this stage struggle with substance use and mental health concerns, and second, people in this developmental period are often establishing identity around sexuality and relationships. This age group reports difficulties with substance use with 5.1 million reporting meeting criteria for a substance use disorder, and reports found that of this number 87% of them went untreated (SAMHSA, 2020). Bisexual folks are shown to have the highest rates of problems like heavy drinking, illicit drug use, prescription drug misuse, and cigarette use compared to all other age groups (Patrick et al, 2020). Sexual minority emerging adults have even higher rates of substance misuse and substance disorders compared to their heterosexual peers with findings reporting that they are 90% more likely to misuse substances compared to their peers. Bisexual emerging adults were found to be the most at-risk group with the highest rates of substance misuse at a rate of 3.4 times more than their heterosexual peers. Bisexual emerging adult women in particular, are 4x more likely to misuse substances than their heterosexual counterparts (SAMHSA, 2020). With respect to sexual identity development, this stage is when people often form or solidify their identities. Emerging adulthood presents a unique

developmental environment for sexual orientation and identity development (Morgan, 2012). By the end of emerging adulthood, almost all people will have identified a pattern of sexual attraction and identified sexual preferences (Calzo et al., 2011).

Previous research has shown interactions with other LGBTQ+ members is influential on identity development and sexual minority stress during emerging adulthood (Brown 2002; Flanders et al., 2017). College is a unique opportunity in which individuals can clearly form group membership in the form of various groups or clubs on campus as well as generally being exposed to a greater number of diverse individuals of the same age group of which they likely have not been exposed to prior to attending university (Glazzard et al., 2020). This provides an opportunity to explore experiences of group membership and group belongingness but also has implications of potential group membership rejection on emerging adults. College age individuals are at a unique position to be exposed to LGBTQ+ communities and programing through pre-established university groups which provide a unique opportunity to explore the narratives and stories of participants as they navigate their identity development with specific attention to access and exposure to LGBTQ+ groups (Glazzard et al., 2020).

Theoretical Frameworks

In this dissertation I utilize Sexual Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003) and different theories of identity. This section outlines the importance of these theories and how they impact bisexuals. These theories allow me to discuss bisexuality in a way that honors the multifaceted nature of the identity and the experiences that bisexuals have. *Sexual minority stress theory* allows for a discussion surrounding the stress experienced by sexual minorities in general, including stigma, prejudice, identity concealment, and internalized homophobia, and stress that bisexuals experience from being a part of the LGBTQ+ community and the influence of

marginalization. I move to discuss different theories of identity including Social Identity Theory (SI) and Self Categorization Theory (SCT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). These present a way to understand how sexual minority stress theory can impact the group dynamics between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ groups providing an essential discussion on the impacts that group membership/group rejection has on bisexuals. I wrap up a discussion of identity with detailing various important aspects within bisexual identity development.

Sexual Minority Stress Theory

Sexual Minority Stress Theory was derived by Meyer (2003) from the broader minority stress literature which refers to the excess stress in which individuals who hold marginalized identities are exposed to because of their social position. In the minority stress model, *stress* refers to the rejection from social structures, norms, and institutions are shown to cause a host of negative consequences including adverse physiological and psychological health consequences. The underlying assumptions of original minority stress model were: minority stress is (a) unique, it is an additive to general stressors that are commonly experienced by all people, and people who experience it are required to do greater work at managing both of the stressors, (b) it is chronic, in that it is related to a pervasive and stable underlying social and cultural systems of power and oppression, (c) it is socially based, it stems from social institutions, norms, and structures beyond the individual (Meyer, 2003). For this dissertation, I will be utilizing the *sexual minority stress model*, a model developed by Meyer to capture minority stress specific to LGBTQ+ people.

The sexual minority stress theory proposes that the increased risk for negative health and psychological outcomes for lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals is due to the chronic stress related to bisexual stigma and discrimination (Meyer, 2003). Meyer's (2003) Sexual Minority

Stress theory conceptualizes four minority stressors experienced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals: 1) stigma, 2) prejudice, 3) concealment, and 4) internalized homophobia; each of which will be defined further below. These stressors can be broken down into *distal* (coming from outside perceptions and experiences) and *proximal* (relating to internal processes and self-perception) stressors. For example, a woman may be engaged in a romantic relationship with another woman but not identify as a lesbian, a distal stressor in this scenario may be the stress and prejudice she experiences in relation to others perceiving her as lesbian, while a proximal stressor in this scenario may be the stress she experiences due to her own pressure to identify or label herself as either straight, lesbian, bisexual, etc. (Meyer, 2003). The following sections contain a description of each facet of Meyer's sexual minority stress model as follows: stigma, prejudice, concealment, and internalized homophobia.

Before discussing specific constructs in the sexual minority stress model (Meyer, 2003), it is crucial to understand that bisexuals also may face *intraminority stress.* Intraminority stress refers to the stress specifically emanating from and within the LGBTQ+ community relating to their plurisexuality (Burton, et al., 2020). The intraminority stress theory describes the effects on the LGBTQ+ community's homogenous nature (in that there is a strong pressure for the group to be all the same) exacerbates status hierarchies within the community, which results in stress that does not occur to the same degree or of the same type as sexual minority stress from heterosexual individuals (Mahon et al., 2021).

Distal stressors for bisexual people include delegitimizing/erasure, experiences of stereotyping and twice rejection. Proximal stressors for bisexual people include identity uncertainty/concealment, and internalized mono-sexism/bi-negativity. In studies done with sexual minority men, intraminority stress was shown to predict internalizing mental health

symptoms at worse rate and level than traditional measures of sexual minority stress (Pachankis et al., 2020). The following sections contain a description of how each facet of Meyer's sexual minority stress model can be expanded for bisexuals as follows: 1. stigma; including delegitimization/erasure as well as bisexual stereotyping, 2. prejudice; including a discussion of twice rejection, 3. concealment; including a description of identity uncertainty, and finally 4. internalized homophobia; including both internalized monosexim and internalized binegativity.

Stigma. In this section, I describe Meyer's (2003) concept of stigma as well as describe in depth two specific types of stigma relevant to bisexuals: delegitimization/erasure and stereotyping. Meyer (2003) described stigma in terms of expectations of rejection and discrimination. Sexual minorities expect and anticipate negative regard from members of the dominant culture as well as violence and discrimination. The greater stigma an individual perceives, the greater the need for vigilance in interactions with individuals in the dominant culture (Meyer, 2003). For bisexuals, this includes *both* heterosexual individuals and gay/lesbian individuals.

There are four broad experiences of sexual minority stigma in general: *categorization threat* which involves the threat that a person will be categorized by others as a member of a group against their will, *distinctiveness threat* which is the opposite to categorization threat and details the denial of group membership, *threats to the value of social identity* which involves questioning the minority group's values such as competence and morality, and *threat to acceptance* which refers to negative feedback from one's ingroup membership and the consequent threat of rejection from the group (Brewer, 1991; Meyer, 2003). Group membership and identity categorization will be discussed in greater depth later in regard to social identity theory and self-categorization theory. While bisexual individuals experience the four areas of

sexual minority stigma, they also experience two distinct kinds of stigma to their group: delegitimization/erasure, and bisexual specific stereotypes.

A study with bisexual people explored sexual minority stress and stigma in interviews of 15 bisexual umbrella identifying emerging adults (17-25 years old), including transgender and gender diverse participants (Miller et al., 2022). Many bisexual emerging adults experienced multiple complex challenges on the interpersonal and intrapersonal levels that threatened wellbeing and had few protective factors. Interpersonal challenge stories were direct experiences of social stigma relating to their sexuality and gender including stigma from within the LGBTQ+ community often resulting in not being accepted as an in-group member. Intrapersonal stories of challenges were experiences of stereotypes and invisibility which result in self-stigma, mental health challenges, difficulty in meaningful and supportive social connection/group membership, and lack of knowledge about identity. On the intrapersonal level, supportive friends and family, community/group membership, knowledge, and personal resilience, including personal achievements, self-care, and personal acceptance, were protective.

Delegitimization/Erasure. The most consistent and common stressor reported by bisexual individuals is the combination of delegitimization of their identity and the co-occurrence of erasure of their identity. *Delegitimization* refers to the belief that bisexuality is not a legitimate sexual identity. Rather, people are shown to believe that bisexuality is a confused phase, an outright refusal to choose an identity, a behavior phenomenon of promiscuity rather than an identity, or a different term for polyamory (Maggi, 2021). These experiences of denial and dismissal of the bisexual identity have been supported through numerous qualitative studies which feature bisexual individuals recounting their experiences of delegitimization of their sexual identities. They frequently report times of being told that they "do not know what they

want," that they are "experimenting," that they need to "pick a side," that they are "half-gay half straight," and that bisexuality is temporary (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Bower, Gurevich, & Mathieson, 2007; Bradford, 2004; Callis, 2013; Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009).

Closely related to delegitimization, *Bi erasure* is the belief that bisexuality does not exist. This is largely due to the invisible nature of bisexuality. While many identities are inherently concealable and invisible from physical appearance alone, bisexual people face a unique problem from low visibility in general in society. A major cause of bierasure is that people feel that they can assume someone's sexuality based on the gender of their romantic partner (women who are with women are lesbian, women who are with men are heterosexual, etc.; Flanders et al.,2017; Davilia et al., 2018; Salaway et al., 2019). This thinking leads people to ignore the possibility of bisexuality and assume someone is either heterosexual or homosexual based on their partner's gender identity. Many people, even within the LGBTQ+ community, can have bi-erasure thoughts (Doan et al., 2018). Together, delegitimization and bierasure contribute to the common "choosing sides" belief, suggesting that bisexuals will eventually either decide to be gay or straight, but never just bisexual (Bradford, 2004). Bisexual people report feeling a form of pressure from outside social norms and their partner to change their identity to align with the structure of what their relationship appears to be, i.e., a bisexual man may feel pressured to identify as gay by his gay partner (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014). Further, erasure has been shown to exist on an institutional level with participants in a study by Flanders et al., (2016) reporting feeling erased and invisible within media and institutions, experiencing institutional level heteronormativity and mononormativity, and many witnessing various bisexual stereotypes at the institutional level.

A study by Feinstein and colleagues (2019), explored ways that bisexual people discuss their experiences of erasure. Included were 52 bisexual and other plurisexual (including pansexual and queer) cisgender women, cisgender men, transgender, and gender non-binary people between the ages of 18-55 years. When asked to discuss their experiences with identity invalidation or stigma and its impact, bisexuals discussed experiences of others not understanding or accepting their bisexuality, experiencing discrimination due to the gender of participants' romantic partners did not fit in with other's beliefs of what bisexuality is, others around them holding the belief that they and other bisexuals are confused about their sexuality, the belief that they and other bisexuals are 'faking' their bisexuality for attention, and finally discussed experiences of the rejection of their bisexuality for other's religious beliefs. Bi-erasure events were perceived to happen more frequently in the context of close relationships such as family members and friends. Participants described that these instances of invalidations resulted in feelings of anger/frustration and hurt/sadness. Many told stories of the ways that they struggle with feeling uncertain of their identity; for others these experiences caused them to feel protective of their bisexuality and resulted in them strengthening their perception of their bisexuality (i.e., identity enactment). Finally, the relationship impacts were all negative and resulted in struggles to trust others and distancing.

Bisexual Stereotyping. There are widely held stereotypes about the bisexual identity that are distinct from stereotypes about lesbian or gay people. Many beliefs surrounding bisexuals include believing that they are inherently promiscuous, hypersexual, incapable of being monogamous, and being more likely to be unfaithful in their relationships (Brewster & Moradi, 2010). Some of the common themes described from previous research is being told that bisexuals are "tainted, likely to cheat, or just experimenting" (Doan Van et al., 2019). These findings were

echoed and supported in other studies assessing gay/lesbian attitudes towards bisexuality (Feinstein et al., 2014; Friedman et al., 2014; Israel & Mohr, 2004). Some of the findings in these studies follow the stereotypes mentioned such as that bisexuals are seen as disloyal with gay/lesbian individuals reporting fears that a bisexual person will be dissatisfied from the same-sex relationship and will want to supplement it with opposite-sex encounters (Israel & Mohr, 2004). There were additional findings that bisexual people were reported as being seen as experimenting and that bisexuals will inevitably lose interest and leave their same-sex partner (Feinstein et al., 2014). In a study done by Hayfield et al., (2014), participants reported that others perceive bisexuality as a transitional stage between straight and gay and not valid within its own identity. They mentioned pressure to "make up their minds" between the identities straight or gay. They reported this results in feelings of invalidation, vulnerability, and dismissal. Although there are many overarching stereotypes about bisexual people, there are some distinct differences of stereotypes of bisexuals who identify as male or female. This discussion of differences based on the gender binary excludes the experiences of gender diverse individuals, however it is important to begin the discussion surrounding how gender identity impacts the bisexual experience.

Women who are bisexual tend to be more accepted by society compared to bisexual men, but considerably less approved of compared to heterosexual women (Nielson et al., 2020). This is because women are viewed sexually by broader society, and society tends to sexualize the female identity. Women being with other women is seen as pleasurable to others and is quickly viewed as being sexually open and explorative rather than as bisexual. A common example of this is the concept of performative bisexuality. Performative bisexuality is the idea that women can perform sexual or sexualized behavior for the purpose of pleasing the crowd or pleasing their

partner. These women can "perform" this way, and society will still retain their perceived identity as being heterosexual (Flanders et al., 2017). This also results in bisexual women being seen as being bisexual for attention and lending them to additionally fall into slut shaming stigma (Flanders et al., 2017). Performative bisexuality is another example of how the bisexual identity is written off as illegitimate.

Flanders and colleagues (2016) examined bisexual stigma, erasure, and stereotypes related to mental and sexual health in focus groups with 35 bi-umbrella women from 16 to 29 years old. Grounded theory analysis found themes such as feeling burdened by needing to prove their sexual identity. They experienced bi-phobia and stereotypes which created pressure for sexual or romantic behaviors to validate their bisexuality. Sometimes, they felt pressured to be in simultaneous relationships with more than one gender, and that a monogamous relationship meant picking a side (either heterosexual or gay/lesbian). Many felt not 'queer enough' and had difficulty navigating sexual encounters with lesbian women and excluded from LGBTQ health resources and information about safe sex practices.

Flanders and colleagues (2017) conducted an additional similar study about prejudice that bisexual women experience. This study investigated young bisexual women's perspectives of their sexual health in relation to health disparities. Participants were 35 self-identified women with a bisexual umbrella identity whom many were within emerging adulthood, between the ages of 16-29. Focus groups data were analyzed with grounded theory methodology. Bisexual women discussed how systemic beliefs related to their sexual health, experiences of binegativity, stereotypes, mono-normativity, heteronormativity, and cissexism all impact their sexual health. They experienced the most prejudice and binegativity due to common negative stereotypes such as bisexuals being a vector for STIs, that they're interested in having sex with everyone, and that

they are willing to engage in threesomes and group sex because they're bisexual women. They started to receive these harmful stereotypical messages as young as 12 years old. The women spoke about experiencing devaluation of having same gender partners through being told that sex between two women is not real as well as facing common beliefs and assumptions that they are heterosexual if they are with a man. The stereotypes were additionally within their healthcare experiences and were often in relation to assumed cissexism and devaluation of trans identities and experiences. In fact, the women reported that their healthcare providers were generally uninformed about sexual practices between same gender couples. Thus, they found it difficult to acquire sexual health resources and appropriate information to uphold their sexual health when engaging in same gender sexual interactions. On the interpersonal level, a common theme was the frequency of sexual violence, such as assaults, some of which began in early adolescence as young as age 14. This may be due to the stereotype that bisexuals are interested in having sex with everyone which makes it so others do not seek or respect their consent or lack thereof, which was worsened by inadequate education and preparation on how to navigate consent processes.

Men who are bisexual are often seen as being dishonest about their sexuality and as sexually irresponsible rather than being fetishized or seen as promiscuous as women are seen (Nielson et al., 2020). Although a bisexual woman is more likely to be seen as heterosexual and "experimenting," a bisexual man is more likely to be seen as homosexual and lying. Individuals reported that bisexual women who were in relationships with men are more likely to have a long term and stable relationship, while a bisexual man dating a woman was reported as less likely to be long term and stable and more likely to be a "product of deceit" (Zivony et al., 2014). Women specifically rated bisexual men as being untrustworthy romantic partners and pose both an

emotional threat to women and a physical threat to them due to perceived likelihood to have STI (Zivony et al., 2014). It has also been shown that bisexual men face more invisibility than bisexual women do, with little representation in the media (Zivony et al., 2014). Due to the lack of bisexual men in the media, often people have to resort to their own interpretations of what sexuality means and overgeneralize to other more prominent identities, i.e., gay men, in the media (Zivony et al., 2014). These factors create an environment where most people believe that bisexual men treat their bisexuality as a "steppingstone" to identifying as gay.

Williams and colleagues (2020) focused on the experiences of bisexual men with diverse gender and racial identities and their resulting prejudice/discrimination as well as their health and healthcare experiences. Participants were 24 cis and trans Black, Latinx, multiracial, Asian, and White bisexual umbrella identifying men ranging in ages from 19 to 61 years. They participated in interviews about their identities, health concerns, and healthcare experiences. Sexual health and mental health were top concerns. They often felt motivated by their bisexual identities to engage in health-promoting behaviors such as seeking regular STI-HIV testing and practicing safer sex, and that this largely was in response to bisexual stereotypes of being promiscuous. In contrast, bisexual identity negatively impacted their mental health due to experiencing various forms of sexual minority stress from both heterosexual and LGBTQ communities. Bisexual men with additional marginalized identities (e.g., trans folks) experienced additional mental health challenges due to the increased discrimination. Perceptions of masculinity was an important topic discussed and was particularly impactful to bisexual men of color who discussed feeling pressured to comply to heteronormative ideals of masculinity due to pressure and fear of rejection from their race-based in-group(s). When engaging in healthcare, they felt positive and found them affirming when providers were respectful, competent, and understanding. Negative

experiences included binegativity, stereotypes, assumptions, and the belief that they are likely to have HIV as a bisexual man.

Prejudice. In this section, I describe Meyer's (2003) concept of prejudice as well as describe the concept of twice rejection, a unique and impactful form of prejudice experienced by bisexual people. Meyer (2003) cited experiences of prejudice events to be one of the core stressors affecting sexual minorities (Garnets et al.,1990; Herek & Berrill, 1992; Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999; Kertzner, 1999). Studies have documented that sexual minorities are disproportionately exposed to prejudice events including discrimination and violence. In a study of LGBTQ+ adults in Sacramento, CA, about 1/5 of the women and ¼ of the men experienced some form of violence and victimization including sexual assault, physical assault, robbery, and property crime related to their sexual identity (Herek et al., 1999). People who are bisexual experience unique forms of prejudice or discrimination, such as twice-rejection which is sometimes called double discrimination (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Bradford, 2004; Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Callis, 2013; Doan Van et al., 2019; Ebin, 2012; Feinstein et al., 2014; Friedman et al., 2014; Paul et al., 2014).

Flanders and colleagues (2016) explored perceptions of discrimination/ marginalization of bisexual and plurisexual (i.e., bisexual umbrella) people (30 men, 49 women, and 7 genderqueer) between the ages of 18-30 years, or almost within the emerging adult age group. Participants were prompted to fill an online diary with reflections on positive and negative experiences of prejudice once a day for 28 days. A constructivist grounded theory approach found that bisexuals experienced prejudice on three levels: (1) intrapersonal or micro level referring to within one's own personal experience, (2) interpersonal or meso level referring to within one's social groups and social experiences, and (3) institutional or macro level referring to

systemic and society level experiences. In the diary entries, the intrapersonal level was the most prominent when experiencing prejudice.

Twice Rejection. refers to bi-phobic attitudes from both heterosexuals *and* gay/lesbian individuals. Within the LGBTQ+ community, many bisexual individuals report that they are not "queer" enough to fit in and be accepted (Flanders et al., 2017). Many bisexual individuals report feeling like a "minority within a minority" despite statistically and demographically this being false, but this persists as a widely held belief (Nielson et al., 2020). This is perhaps due to the strongly negative stereotypes that society holds against bisexual individuals, and the long-lasting fight for acceptance that predominantly gay and lesbian individuals have been striving for from the heterosexual community. Doan Van and colleagues (2019) published a study assessing perceived discrimination from both heterosexuals and gay/lesbian individuals. Bisexuals often reported receiving more discrimination, such as sexual harassment including asking/pressuring bisexuals to engage in sexual and fetishized acts such threesomes and group sex, from heterosexuals, but discrimination received from gay/lesbians, such as exclusion from LGBTQ+ events, support groups, and spaces, or being rejected by their gay/lesbian partners or romantic interests, resulted in a greater emotional toll. Flanders and colleagues (2015) found that the lack of bi-inclusive communities and groups results in bisexual individuals not feeling like they belong, often causing depression and anxiety. Additionally, intersectionality in identities increased the difficulty with finding communities, and with increasing numbers of intersecting identities (i.e., a bisexual person of color, or a bisexual person who is polyamorous) the harder it was to find safe and accepting community.

In a study, bisexual women were asked to how bisexuals experience social marginalization (Hayfield et al., 2014). Participants were 20 self-identified bisexual women ages 19 to 53 years,

who self-described as very out or mostly out. There were three main themes: (1) lack of bisexual belonging in lesbian, LGBTQ+, or heterosexual communities, (2) the dismissal of bisexuality, and (3) the sexualization of bisexuality. Theme one found that when the participants were within LGBTQ+ spaces, they often felt that there was no inclusion for bisexual or trans individuals and found themselves feeling frustrated and questioning why the "B" or the "T" is in "LGBTQ+ Community" if there is no community for them. They reported wanting to be categorized and accepted within lesbian, LGBTQ+, and heterosexual spaces but that they commonly do not feel welcomed or like they fit in. Some participants reported turning to either lesbian specific or broader LGBTQ+ spaces when they needed support but found themselves not accepted. Participants reported additional explicit exclusion from lesbian groups unless they did not acknowledge their attraction or involvement with men prompting a desire to cover aspects of their identity. The second theme explored a common experience of the participants feeling that their sexuality was dismissed and erased by both LGBTQ+ groups and wider culture prompting an experience of twice-rejection.

Concealment. In this section, I describe Meyer's (2003) concept of concealment and how that concept can be expanded for bisexual people through the concept of identity uncertainty. Concealment refers to the decision to hide an identity from others. Concealment falls into the proximal minority stressor category because it involves self-perceptions and appraisals of other's reactions to their identities. Concealment is a self-protective fear response to protect oneself from expected harm and discrimination from others (Meyer, 2003). While concealment is often protective and empowers the individual to strategically avoid the negative consequences of stigma, at times, it can unintentionally cause additional stress (Miller & Major, 2000). Sometimes, concealment can lead to suppressing thoughts about the identity which can

result in the individual experiencing intrusive thoughts surrounding their identity and thus resulting in psychological distress (Major & Gramzow, 1999). The cost of hiding one's stigma is described as the cognitive burden involved in constant preoccupation with suppressing and hiding. Smart and Wegner, 2000 described the complex cognitive process, both conscious and unconscious, that is necessary to maintain such level of secrecy as a "private hell."

For LGBTQ+ individuals, concealment of their identity is an important source of stress. Concealment is employed to avoid very real experiences of harm such as violence, discrimination such as losing one's job, etc., or out of internalized shame or guilt (Meyer, 2003). Concealment is found to be the most common coping strategy employed by LGBTQ+ folks. The desire to balance identity disclosure versus concealment tactics that both addresses fear of discrimination while also balancing the need for self-integrity is a common stressor. Concealment strategies range from passing, which involves attempting to be seen as a dominant identity such as heterosexual or cisgender; covering, which involves censoring aspects of oneself in an effort to conceal their identity; and finally, being either implicitly or explicitly out which involves various levels of identity disclosure to those around them (Meyer, 2003).

Watson (2016) interviewed 47 bisexual people between the ages of 19-67 (15 men, 15 women, and 17 sex/gender diverse persons) who used various terms to describe their sexuality including bisexual, queer, no labels, and more. One barrier to disclosing identity to family occurred when the family of origin resided in a different country than the participant, such as a lack of acceptance for bisexuals in the original culture, lack of language that adequately encompassed their identity, difficulty due to their gender identity in addition to their bisexual identity, and difficulty in deciding whether relatives should be considered as within their private sphere or their public sphere. Many struggled to navigate secrecy and silence with the family

members. A common feeling was a sense of having a "secret life" and feeling that their sexuality is private. Many utilized strategic outness with safe family members, while not disclosing their identity to other less safe members. Of those who were fully out, many had experiences of not being accepted and widely pushed to "choose a side" either gay or straight. Some opted to utilize the identity label 'gay' not confuse family members with the bisexual label. Many referred to their experiences after coming out as an "elephant in the room" where no one wanted to talk about it but could feel the invisible tension. Half of the participants reported positive reactions from family including solace, comfort, encouragement, and support. Some found that their families were not necessarily accepting but were still supportive. Overall, family disclosure borders the public and private realms for many bisexuals and which they navigate complex decisions surrounding disclosure involving careful strategies to avoid harm and gain support.

Scherrer and colleagues (2015) looked at bisexual disclosure experiences with family members. Participants included 45 bisexual individuals (13 men and 32 women, including one man who identified as transgender, 18-24 years of age) asked about self-presentation/identity disclosure strategies with friends and family and how their bisexuality shaped their social experiences. Participants identified as bisexual with varying language to describe their identities such as bi-queer, homosexual including bisexual, or pansexual. Three main themes were identified including the ways in which cultural representations of sexuality shape their disclosure experiences, how cultural constructions of bisexuality shapes their family member's responses to coming out, and finally how coming out is often embedded within their broader family system. Bisexual's family's cultural understandings of bisexuality shaped their strategies for disclosure. They would attempt to anticipate their family members' negative constructions of bisexuality as well as anticipate if their family members were aware of bisexual stereotypes. Participants often

opted to not come out to family members when the members were only aware of their different-gender relationships, and participants felt that they did not need to come out (i.e., if they remained in a different gender relationship rather than began a same gender relationship). Some came out to their family members but opted to come out as gay or lesbian rather than bisexual to appease family members' monosexual assumptions. Some opted to come out as gay or lesbian to avoid heteronormative expectations such as family members assuming there's a "chance they might be straight." When participants opted to come out as bisexual, it was often to help family members make sense of previous, current, and potential future relationships with partners of multiple genders. Some chose to come out as bisexual because they perceived it to be easier for family members to accept, largely due to the possibility of them being in a heteronormative relationship with someone of the opposite gender.

Bisexual people, who as noted experience twice rejection from both heterosexual and gay/lesbian groups, often find themselves in an increasingly difficult identity concealment dilemma; do they disclose their bisexual identity, conceal their bisexual identity while attempting to pass as heterosexual, or conceal their bisexual identity while attempting to pass as homosexual? The leading contributors to concealment in bisexuality is the experience of *identity uncertainty,* and the pressure to assimilate into either LGBTQ+ or heterosexual communities to avoid experiencing the negative consequences of biphobia from both heterosexual and gay/lesbian groups (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009; Mohr, Jackson, & Sheets, 2017).

Identity Uncertainty. Identity uncertainty is the experience for an individual to be unsure what their sexual identity is and be unsure how to properly label and define their identity (Dyar et al., 2014; Dyar, Feinstein, & London, 2015). Heterosexism and homophobia make identity uncertainty a common experience for many LGBTQ+ individuals, but bisexual individuals

experience the additional pressure the devaluation and erasure of the legitimacy of their identity. Bisexuals are shown to repeatedly be assumed to be either heterosexual or gay/lesbian depending on their partner's gender identity which perpetuates the identity uncertainty (Dyar, et al., 2015).

Further, the experience of bisexuality as invisible prompts bisexual people to repeatedly need to make decisions surrounding disclosing or concealing their sexual identity. In an effort to assimilate to either LGBTQ+ communities or the larger hetero-dominant society, bisexuals often decide to conceal or misrepresent their identity (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009; Mohr, Jackson, & Sheets, 2017). For example, Mohr, Jackson, & Sheets (2017) conducted a study assessing outness scores (the degree to which people have disclosed and openly discuss their sexual orientation in different spheres of their lives) and behaviors of bisexual people navigating this. They found that people who are most likely to come out purposefully misrepresent their identity as either gay or lesbian in an attempt to gain support and admission to the LGBTQ+ community. This finding is consistent with other studies who have found that when people come out as bisexual and attempt to interact with the broader LGBTQ+ community, they report increased exposure to discrimination (Feinstein & Dyer, 2017). This highlights that bisexual people commonly believe that if they want to receive the support and community associated with being a part of the LGBTQ+ community, they feel pressured to suppress their identities to avoid harm from within the group.

Labeling identity is a complex topic that occurs for bisexuals. Borver and colleagues (2001) interviewed 22 bisexual women between the ages of 19-41 about sexual identity and meaning. Discussions surrounding first theme include tensions with the term bisexual and the women having general resistance to categorization. Many disliked the binary that bisexual implies, which generally did not fit their experiences. Although there are other terms such as

queer, they feared that the label creates more invisibility for the bisexual identity and invalidates it. Other labels, such as pansexual, polysexual, hetero-flexible, can help to encompass the resistance to define sexuality within the binaries of gender and sexuality and function to retain bisexuality's fluidity and ambiguity.

Similarly, Cipriano and colleagues (2022) explored identity uncertainty, a subset of the concealment facet of the sexual minority stress model, and the differences within definitions of bisexuality. They also examined plurisexuality, or people attracted to more than one gender, as well as women's concerns surrounding gender inclusivity. Participants were 25 participants between the ages of 21 to 41 years old, all of whom identified as women (both cis and trans women) and with a bi-umbrella identity (bisexual, queer, pansexual, and more). Semi-structured interviews prompted discussions surrounding identity uncertainty, identity definitions, experiences of prejudice and discrimination, and personal connection to the broader LGBTQ+ community. Conversations emerged surrounding three overarching themes: (1) differences in how the bisexual and non-bisexual participants describe bisexuality, (2) concerns surrounding inclusivity and sexual identity labels, and (3) outcomes of inclusivity concerns among the plurisexual women. Theme one was centered around two main definitions of bisexuality, one that bisexuals are attracted to all or more than two genders, and the other that bisexuals are solely attracted to men and women. Theme two was centered on tension between the perceived inclusivity of the label "bisexual" compared to other identity labels such as "pansexual" or "queer." Theme three centered on the discussions surrounding inclusivity (or lack thereof) leading to concealing behaviors.

Internalized Homophobia. In this section, I describe Meyer's (2003) concept of internalized homophobia and apply this concept to the bisexual specific form internalized

monosexism/internalized binegativity. Meyer (2003) describes internalized homophobia to be the most proximal form of stress to sexual minorities. Internalized homophobia refers to a form of stress that is internal and insidious and is not dependent on overt outside negative events. LGBTQ+ individuals are harmed from directing negative social beliefs, stereotypes, prejudice beliefs, and more towards their self (Meyer, 2003). While bisexual people experience broad internalized homophobia, they additionally navigate internalized monosexism and internalized binegativity.

Internalized Monosexism/Internalized Bi-Negativity. Although internalized monosexism and internalized binegativity are similar in concept to the experiences of internalized heterosexism and internalized homophobia, the unique nature of the bisexual experiences leads to an increased likelihood to internalize the belief that bisexuality is illegitimate and amoral (Paul et al., 2014). The impact of internalized binegativity has been shown to increase anxiety as well as impact self-perception and worth in a negative way (Flanders et al., 2015). This is due to their unique experiences of delegitimization, erasure, and stereotyping their sexual identities from *both* heterosexuals and gay/lesbians. Another major belief that causes bisexual individuals to be discriminated against is *mono-sexism* and *bi-negativity.* Mono-sexism is the idea that people are and should be only attracted to one gender identity and that it is wrong to be attracted to more than one. Bi negativity is a collective term for negative attitudes held against bisexuality and/or bisexual people (Eliason, 2000). Mono-sexism beliefs and values leads people to believe that bisexual individuals are not monogamous and cannot be trusted (Gonzales et al., 2019). Individuals who do not follow monosexism are seen as wanting to have the "best of both worlds" without having to commit or choose a side (Dolan, 2013). Many individuals view plurisexual identities as emotionally or psychologically immature, internally conflicted, or unstable due to

the perceived complexity of their orientation (Dolan, 2013). These beliefs feed into the idea that bisexual and other plurisexual identities are inherently unfaithful and are "needing" multiple partners of more than one gender (Dolan, 2013). Although it seems like bisexual individuals would have a harder time engaging in romantic relationships due to this idea, they often are able to attain many sexual partners, but they are often sought out as sexual partners in a fetishized manner which leads them to be seen as sexual objects rather than complex whole people (Nielson et al, 2020).

Identity Theories

In this section I detail important aspects of identity in relation to bisexual people. Identity is broadly defined as a personally and socially meaningful sense of one's own goals, beliefs, values, and life roles (Erikson, 1968). Complex understandings of identity recognize the importance of defining identity at intrapersonal and interpersonal levels and that it consists of individual, relational, and collective identities within groups (Vignoles et al., 2011). Identity development is an important topic for all LGBTQ+ research, and particularly important for bisexual research to understand health disparities. This section has two parts. First, I define and discuss Social Identity Theory/Self-Categorization Theory in general. Second, I define and discuss several common bisexual identity developmental models, and then identity negotiation, identify negation, identity enactment, and the resulting behaviors of passing and covering in the context of bisexual identity.

Social Identity Theory/Self-Categorization Theory. To understand bisexual identity development, it is crucial to understand group formation. Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory can help explain group formation, how and why groups are made, as well as what happens when groups cannot be formed. They also provide important insight on the

experiences that bisexuals have with attempting to form groups. *Social Identity Theory* (*SIT;* Tajfel & Turner, 1986), also known as the social psychological theory of intergroup relations, group processes, and the social self, was originally developed to study cognitive and social belief aspects of racism, prejudice, and discrimination (Hogg et al., 1995; Tajfel 1959). The theory describes the process of social comparisons between groups, stating that people develop social identities and from this develop understanding that one belongs to certain groups of people or categories (Hogg et al., 1995). Essentially, a social category in which one belongs provides a definition of who a person is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category, which becomes a self-definition within the individual's self-concept.

For example, a bisexual person holds social categories within broader LGBTQ+ category, i.e., the bisexual category, as well as even more specific categories within the LGBTQ+ category, e.g., bisexuals who hold specific gender or ethnic/racial identities. Individuals belong to many different category memberships that vary in importance to their self-concept. These social categories become social identities within everyone (Hoggs et al., 1995). When social identity is salient, people are theorized to act as a member of their group and engage in prescribed normative group behavior rather than as an individual. One's perception of self and the group likely becomes increasingly stereotypical as each member tries to model characteristics of the group they belong to (Hogg et al., 1995). Social identities are not only descriptive and prescriptive to groups, but they are also evaluative. They help guide an evaluation of a social category and its members, relative to other relevant social categories. Due to this, it is important for people to self-evaluate their groups positively. Members are motivated to adopt behaviors that will achieve or maintain evaluations in favor for the group and thus self (Hoggs et al., 1995).

Self-Categorization Theory (SCT; Turner et al., 1987) elaborates on the operation of the categorization process as the cognitive basis of group behavior. The process of categorization intensifies the strength of both perceived similarities between individuals belonging to the same category or group and perceived differences of those belonging to a different category or group. This is known as the *categorization-accentuation process* (Hoggs et al., 1995). In both SIT and SCT individuals are continuously comparing themselves to the groups that they belong in. Group members want to perceive that they are *prototypical* and representative of what group they are in as a whole. The categorization-accentuation process and prototypicality are the two most important aspects of SCT. There are two main underlying socio-cognitive processes, categorization, and self-enhancement in SIT and SCT.

Categorization produces group-distinctive stereotypical and normative perceptions and actions which is used to assign people, including the self, to categories or groups. Group membership that one belongs to is referred to the *in-group*, while those who do not hold group-membership (or hold membership to an outside group) are referred to as *out-group.* Groups are believed to be competitive with each other and form a pseudo hierarchical status. People are motivated to maintain power and positive associations with their in-group which will sometimes result in competitive and discriminatory behaviors to relevant out-groups that may threaten their status (Hoggs et al., 1995). Relevant out group members are likely to be seen through a stereotyped lens, often utilizing stereotypes that devalue the outgroup.

SIT/SCT theorizes that the value of social group membership is derived from these comparisons with the attempt to perceive the in-group positively. At an individual basis, in-group members who provide value or are viewed positively from the group can also help make the in-group positively distinct from compared out-groups. This process refers to an *identity*

enhancing individual. Conversely, an *identity threatening* individual will harm or threaten the group's positive distinction. When this happens, the individual will be derogated from the group to protect the in-group's identity and positive social comparison (Flanders. 2016).

Self-enhancement is a process that guides this categorization to believe that in-group norms and stereotypes will favor the in-group to a satisfy individual's basic need to see themselves in a positive light in relation to others (Hoggs et al., 1995). These processes are paired with individual's *subjective belief structures* which refers to people's beliefs about the relationships between their own group and relevant outgroups. These beliefs are almost never accurate reflections of reality as they are formed through a subjective lens and ideological constructs. However, the structures inform the stability and legitimacy of the intergroup relationships and the possibility for *social mobility*. Social mobility refers to the potential for changing group membership, or for the group to move either up or down the perceived group hierarchy (Hoggs et al., 1995). Groups will threaten relevant out-groups if they believe that they either will lose status or potentially gain status from the threat.

Prototypicality refers to the degree of which the person represents or has the characteristics associated with the group. A highly prototypical group member will be representative of the groups as a whole, while a non-prototypical member will be an outlier from the group and will not represent the group. Being a prototypical group member strengthens the perception of belonging within the group, which is particularly important if the group membership derives a positive evaluation to the individual. Perceiving oneself as an outlier to these groups can be particularly harmful to self-esteem, affect, and challenge the individual's belief that they belong to the group. SCT also describes the ability for an individual to be defined at different categorical group levels depending on the relevant social context. Due to this, the

consequences of social comparison with either an in-group or out-group member will vary greatly and depend on the context of the social environment and the demands it places on categorization. Group membership categorization additionally will change if the environment places an emphasis on individualization or group membership.

It was initially believed that by creating a perception of being prototypical to the bisexual identity, bisexual individuals would report higher self-esteem and positive affect. However, Flanders (2016) showed the opposite effect, individuals who believed they were more prototypically bisexual reported marginally lower self-esteem and showed increased negative affect compared to those who believed that they were not prototypical to the bisexual identity. Female identifying bisexual people reported the most significant negative results when believing that they are prototypical (Flanders, 2016). Additionally, participants who were told that their personality did not match typical bisexual person, reported being more certain of their sexual identity compared to those who were told that their personality closely matched with other bisexual individuals. This shows that even perceiving that one is prototypical, or representative of the identity does not foster feelings of group and social belonging (Flanders, 2016).

The experience of group membership categorization for bisexuals also varies by gender identity. For example, Elder and colleagues (2015) studied sexual self-schemas and masculinity ideologies with 20 bisexual umbrella identifying men ranging in age from 21 to 48 years. Sexual self-schema refers to self-categorization and a cognitive generalization about sexual aspects of the self-comprised from past experiences, perceptions of group belongingness, and perceptions of group member prototypicality. Interviews and focus groups about how bisexual men deal with relationships with women and/or men suggested eight categories of sexual self -schemas: (1) overt sexualizing of women's bodies, (2) covert sexualizing of men's bodies, (3) physical

appearance is important to gay men, (4) the importance of emotional connection, (5) difficulty emotional connecting with men, (6) anxieties about long term relationships, (7) belief that others misperceive male bisexuality, and (8) finding the "right" person. The majority focused on a woman's physical attractiveness and viewed a woman's body as an instrument of sexual pleasure, which was used to bolster friendships with heterosexual male peers. This contrasted with sexualizing and fantasizing about men's body; none of them reported talking openly with gay or straight peers about it due to the fears about damaging rapport or being seen as promiscuous. Although it was not important to have an attractive partner, their own physical attractiveness was important to specifically gay men. Another theme was the importance of emotional connection with their romantic partners which was important for both positive and negative feelings. Although masculinity norms push them against this, they were willing to go against these norms due to their strong desire to connect emotionally and their bisexual identity made them more emotionally sensitive than either gay or heterosexual men. Some participants reported feeling pressured to ignore their attractions to men altogether. Some fearing choosing a partner out of this context would lead them to be unable to be monogamous due to not picking a partner for genuine love.

Taub (1999) explored bisexual women's beauty norms and how they change in relation to coming out and the gender of the women's partner. Beauty norms are an important group membership signifier and change due to the expectations and group prototypicality of heterosexual and lesbian groups. Participants were 74 bisexual women between the ages of 18-47 who completed qualitative surveys asking about the impact of coming out as bisexual, the gender of the partner, and the impact of women's experiences with beauty norms. Five categories of responses were found: (1) giving up beauty rituals, (2) increased acceptance of own appearance,

(3) adopting heterosexual norms, (4) adopting lesbian norms, and (5) feeling less pressure to conform to dominant appearance norms. The first theme was that after coming out as bisexual they stopped engaging in certain beauty rituals such as shaving body hair or wearing makeup due to wanting to appear queerer as an attempt to appear as a prototypical in-group member, as well as simply not caring as much. The second theme was they experienced an increase of self-acceptance about their appearance after coming out and that coming out caused them to apply different beauty standards to themselves in association with the new norms of their group category. Theme three was engaging in more traditionally feminine styles after coming out due to the freedom to explore more feminine aspects of themselves as compared to lesbians who face pressure to be masculine. Theme four was adopting more androgynous or butch appearances more in-line with lesbians after coming out and reported that this is largely due to wanting to appear as a prototypical part of the gay community with a desire to solidify in-group membership. Theme five was feeling less pressure to conform to beauty norms expected of women, although many did not alter their beauty behavior but rather conceptualized it different.

Similarly, Hayfrield and colleagues (2013) conducted interviews with 20 bisexual women between the ages of 19 and 53 about how they manage their body and appearance in relation to their sexuality and how it may their impact visibility. Three themes related to appearance were found: visible lesbians, invisible bisexuals, and (in)distinctly bisexual. First, participants reflected upon there being a 'lesbian look' which was described as way for lesbians to express their identity, assert their lesbian group membership, and differentiate themselves from other groups. This was more prominent when the lesbian women take on a more masculine style; butch women did not comply with heteronormative and feminine conventions of beauty and appearance. In addition to appearance, participants noted lesbians have a lesbian attitude, or

embodied identity, that is recognizable often through having an angry or 'don't mess with me' demeanor. All of this created the ability for there to be a "prototypical" lesbian, which makes group categorization and identification through appearance easier. By contrast, participants reported that there is not a distinct bisexual visual identity, nor prototypical look, and struggled to discuss bisexual looks. This refers to the lack of a defined bisexual group, the difficulty to assert bisexual group membership, and the lack of bisexual prototypicality; a bisexual look cannot be talked about because it does not exist. Despite no visible bisexual appearance, they searched for ways that their bisexuality could be recognized through dress and appearance, some through placing an in-between of a lesbian look and a heterosexual look, however, this perpetuates a notion that bisexuality represents the midpoint between homosexuality and heterosexuality.

Identity Negotiation. Social identity and social categorization result in ongoing processes of Identity Negotiation. Different group membership categories, social context, and settings impact daily behavior and choices that a person make to either establish or adapt their identity based on contextual needs. Identity negotiation is defined by Deaux and Ether (1998) as the "agentic identity work carried out in response to contextual demands." Identity negotiation is an ongoing process, best conceived as continual efforts directed at maintaining existing identities as well as adapting to changing circumstances" (p. 301). Agentic in this context refers to the way that someone may actively attempt to control the way that their identity is perceived and communicated to those around them. This will likely change and adapt depending on context and environment according to what groups of people they are around (Deux & Ether, 1998). These contexts can range from positive to threatening, and individuals will have to learn how to assess

and navigate along that spectrum especially if they hold a marginalized racial, ethnic, gender, class, or sexual identity (Frable, 1997).

The social identity that an individual has in relation to the groups around them depends on the relevant cultural understandings, stereotypes, media representations, and other assumptions. These assumptions and beliefs can place pressure on an individual through means of stigma and prejudice resulting in pressure for the individual to suppress or change their identity (Deaux & Ethier, 1998). Occasionally, individuals can be mislabeled due to these beliefs, which in particular is common for marginalized groups. In response, many individuals will seek out spaces in which they can present their identity and have it understood by those around them. Deaux and Ethier (1998) identified several strategies that people commonly used to negotiate their identity and are broken down into negation and enactment strategies. An individual will use a combination of the strategies depending on the relevant context in an attempt to respond to the social, psychological, or contextual demands. Further, there are strategies, such as passing and covering used by people who have marginalized identities to avoid discrimination.

Identity Negation. Identity Negation is a form of identity negotiation made up of strategies that are used when an individual wants to distance themselves from a social identity that they do not like (Deaux & Ethier, 1998). In the most extreme form of identity negation, one may choose to use *elimination* and eliminate the identity all together. Often, people who cannot abandon an identity may choose to employ a less extreme strategy. Frequently, people will choose to utilize *denial* of their identity, this often can look like rejecting an outside label placed upon the individual due to not identifying with it. Often visually marked identities such as age, race or gender are unable to be eliminated or denied. In these instances, people will often use

lowered identification as their main negation strategy. This strategy consists of the individual deemphasizing the importance of an identity without having to abandon an aspect or the entirety of the identity (Deaux & Ethier, 1998).

Identity Enactment. Identity enactment is an additional form of identity negotiation strategies that is marked by asserting or strengthening an existing identity (Deaux & Ethier, 1998). There are four identified identity enactment strategies: reaffirmation, remooring, intensified group contact, and social change. *Reaffirmation* is employed when an individual wants to reassert or recommunicate an identity they already hold, which can happen when identity becomes salient or when identity meaning shifts and an individual wants to communicate this to others. Sometimes, this happens when the social environment surrounding the individual does not hold previous awareness of the identity, or if they have negative beliefs surrounding the identity. *Remooring* is similar to reaffirming, but has a behavioral element rather than a cognitive, as an individual will try and accomplish the mentioned goals through actions as a means to gain outside support or understanding (Deaux & Ethier, 1998). Unlike the two mentioned above*, intensified group contact* does not always have the goal of exposing outgroup members to the individual's identity. It can be used as a tool for the individual themselves to feel that they are strengthening their identity with themselves and/or with their group. Intensified group contact has the ability to counter discrimination, enhance self-esteem, and can be protective against stigma (Deaux & Ethier, 1998). The *social change* strategy is marked by the goal of changing the beliefs that another holds about one's identity or to broadly change the social system and structure in a way that will support and recognize the identity (Deaux & Ethier, 1998). Most often, people who utilize this approach hold their identity salient or recognize the unchangeable nature of it. They have a goal of mitigating or eliminating

marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatization of their identity rather than attempting or wanting to change their identity itself (Deaux & Ethier, 1998).

Passing. Passing is a specific strategy that marginalized people employ to attempt to avoid discrimination by attempting to conceal identities as if they do not hold them with the goal of appearing as ingroup to a dominant identity. Passing is a similar concept to concealment mentioned above in Meyer's sexual minority stress theory. Passing can either be unconscious or deliberate but attempts to protect oneself from the negative reactions of society or the internalization of those reactions towards self (Linton, 2006). Passing for bisexuals can manifest as an intentional identity negation strategy or as an unconscious undesired result of bisexual erasure and internalized biphobia.

Often "passing" has a negative connotation to it centering around feelings of shame, harm, and deception, however, passing in terms of LGBTQ+ identities can be informed by the nonlinearity and multidimensionality of their experiences (Verni, 2009). Passing in the context of bisexuals can either be unconscious, intentional, or something that is unwanted by the bisexual person themselves but placed upon them by others. Intentional passing can promote safety for LGBTQ+ people protecting from harm and discrimination. Unconscious passing can be a result of internalized homophobia, monosexism, biphobia, heteronormativity, or anything that may make an individual unaware or unwilling to embody their identity. Lastly, in particular, bisexual people can often unintentionally pass as straight due to the invisibility and denial of their identity. This results in feelings of frustration and resentment as well as can pose a difficulty to find space and acceptance within the LGBTQ+ community (Verni, 2009).

Covering. Covering is similar to passing but less absolute and is marked by attempting not to conceal the entirety of their identity but to tone down aspects of their identity to better fit

in with dominant groups. This consists of toning down LGBTQ+ traits in order to better conform to heterosexual norms and assimilate to a heteronormative society (Yoshino, 2007). Yoshino 2007) proposed four axes along which a queer person covers. *Appearance* or the way an individual presents themselves to the world. *Affiliation* or the cultural or group identifications. *Activism* or the amount that one politicizes their identity. *Association* or the group members that one intentionally chooses to keep in their inner social circles which can comprise of romantic interests, friends, or colleagues. Covering behaviors depends on the group context or audience to the individual. Unlike passing which is an "on" or "off" mechanism, covering can be seen as a scale. A bisexual person may decide to go on a date in public with their partners but refrain from engaging in overt public displays of affection. The choice of how and when to cover should be at the agency of the bisexual or LGBTQ+ person, however, social norms, threat of discrimination or violence, and heterosexist society demands often make these choices for them (Yoshino, 2007).

Bisexual Identity Development

In this section I outline several models of bisexual identity development, discussing strengths and weaknesses of each. I include the following models: Weinberg (1994)'s stage model of bisexual identity development, Brown (2002)'s bisexual identity development model, Knous (2005)'s bi identity development model, Bleiberg (2005)'s layer cake model of bisexual identity development, Harper and Swanson (2019)'s nonsequential task model of bi/pan/polysexual identity development Collins (2000)'s model of biracial-bisexual identity development, and finally Chun and Singh (2010)'s bisexual youth of color intersecting identities model.

Stage Model of Bisexual Identity Development. Weinberg and colleagues (1994) developed one of the very first bisexual-specific identity development models, a stage-based model of bisexual identity development detailing stages that bisexual people navigate as a result of their identity. These stages are conceptualized as fixed, that each individual will sequentially go through each stage. The first stage surrounds confusion and consists of the individual experiencing attraction to the same gender and having anxiety surrounding the assumption that they may be gay or lesbian. During the second stage, the individual explores labels, explores romantic relationships with both sexes, but still feels doubt about their identity. During the third stage, individuals will begin to settle into the identity and accept themselves as bisexual. In this stage they may start to have contact with bisexual community members. Weinberg indicates that during this stage individuals may wonder if their identity is a phase and fear that getting involved in a monogamous relationship may interrupt their bisexual identity development process. The final stage consists of continued uncertainty where it is believed that bisexuals will face continuous periods of confusion and uncertainty due to the lack of bisexual representation, role models, and social validation (Weinberg et al., 1994). This bisexual identity model has not been widely used recently due to criticisms about the overarching message that bisexuals are confused about their identity, the perpetuation of harmful gender binaries, and the notion that one needs to have romantic experiences with both sexes to be considered bisexual (Flanders et al., 2016; Harper & Swanson, 2019; Knous, 2005). Still, this model was revolutionary, being one of the first detailing bisexual identity development and directly inspiring Brown (2002) and Knous (2005) to create their own models in response (Harper & Swanson, 2019).

Bisexual Identity Development Model. Brown (2002)'s theoretical adaptation of Weinberg's model was created to address some of the problems associated with it. Further,

Brown (2002) added a discussion surrounding the impact of gender on the different stages. Brown's (2002) model has the same initial the stages as the Weinberg (1994) model: initial confusion, finding and applying the bisexual label, and settling into the identity. Within these three stages, Brown (2002) added the importance of whether the individual has supportive community, i.e., if a bisexual individual has supportive community they may or may not have initial confusion of their identity. Bisexual men in this stage may experience conflict between their gender role and their sexual feelings causing a perception that their masculinity is threatened, resulting in increased anxiety and fears of rejection. Bisexual women in this stage may experience internal conflict with prospective female partners due to feeling that their continued interest in men distances them from lesbian and feminist values. For the second stage, the presence of a supportive community is essential for the individual to become aware of the bisexual label and take it on. Bisexual men may be reluctant to take on the bisexual label because of feelings of anxiety, stigma, and de-masculinization. Bisexual women may want to avoid taking on the bisexual label due to a potential lack of sexual involvement in other women and a decision to maintain the heterosexual label. In the third stage, an individual must have supportive community to sustain their sense of self and to adequately settle into their bisexual identity. Bisexual men in this stage may engage in more sexual activity as a way to emphasize their sexual identity. Bisexual women in this stage may increase romantic and emotional connection with other women as a means to solidify their identity (Brown, 2002). This model completely departed from Weinberg's model in the final stage which is referred to as identity maintenance. Once an individual reaches this stage, they may experience some confusion or questioning of their identity, but they are able to maintain their identity. This continued connection to identity is strengthened with a continued supportive community. However, it is noted that maintaining the

bisexual label and reaching this stage is difficult and unlikely. Bisexual women are unlikely to maintain the bisexual label due to not experiencing acceptance from social groups including a specific lack of social support and acceptance from lesbians. Bisexual men are only likely to maintain their bisexual label if they continuously act upon their attractions to both men and women and that "concomitant or serial relationships are associated with an enduring bisexual self-label" (Brown, 2002, p. 84).

Brown's (2002) model was important for its additions of the need for supportive community and the ways in which it opened up different gender-based experiences for bisexual people. Specifically, it opens up the conversation surrounding how important acceptance from other LGBTQ+ groups such as lesbian groups are on identity development for bisexuals. It also was impactful in the conceptualization of each stage having the potential to look different for each person depending on their experiences. However, there were several criticisms of this model, such as the language associated with the model perpetuating harmful stereotypes of bisexuality such as use of the gender binary, the need to be sexually involved with both men and women to be bisexual, and harmful stereotypes of bisexual men being promiscuous (Harper & Swanson, 2019; Fliponymous, 2014). It also strongly implies that the bisexual label is difficult to maintain, perpetuating narratives that bisexuality is a transitional identity to either fully heterosexual or homosexual. Lastly, this model has a limitation due to the research used to develop it being based on work with gay and lesbian individuals and does not include research or data from bisexual individuals. (Brown, 2002) The gender differences were taken directly from gay and lesbian data, further treating gay, lesbian, and bisexual groups as one monolithic identity (Harper & Swanson, 2019; Fliponymous, 2014).

Bi Identity Development Model. Knous (2005) utilized a sociopolitical theory of deviance to create their bi identity development model. This model consists of three instances of deviance away from what is considered normal in a society, marking a person's transition from holding a heterosexual identity to a bisexual identity. The first deviance occurs when a person experiences attraction or has their first sexual experience with someone of the same gender but still maintains their heterosexual identity. In the second deviance, the individual adopts the bi (i.e., bisexual) label, comes out, and participates more within the bisexual community. The third deviance involves the individual facing stigma against the bisexual identity, learning to navigate the stigma, and opting to participate more in LGBTQ+ and bisexual communities. Knous additionally notes that bi people have many labels alternative to the bisexual label and uses the word "bi" to honor the different labels (Knous, 2005). This distinction and acknowledgement of the different ways that plurisexual or bi-umbrella identifying individuals may label themselves is an advancement in bisexual identity model work. Another advancement that this model made was allowing for an individual to have the bisexual identity label without the condition of having sexual interactions with more than one gender. Although the model considered the different ways that bisexuals may identify, it has been criticized for creating a one-size-fits-all model and did not consider the different experiences within the identities (Harper & Swanson, 2019; Fliponymous, 2014). It also did not account for how intersectionality may impact the experiences of bisexual people and may also have perpetuated the idea that an individual starts out heterosexual and decides to become bisexual, a harmful piece of misinformation about both bisexual people and broader LGBTQ+ members. Finally, utilizing the term "deviance" frames bisexual identity in a negative light and perpetuates harmful stereotypes surrounding the identity (Bleiberg et al., Harper & Swanson, 2019; Fliponymous, 2014).

Layer Cake Model of Bisexual Identity Development. The Layer Cake Model of bisexual identity development conceptualizes bisexual identity development to happen in four layers, similar to stages. The initial layer consists of an individual who was socialized as and identifies as a heterosexual individual. Departing from this, the second layer consists of an individual who has experienced same sex/gender feelings of attraction. In the third layer the person continues to identify as heterosexual but also accepts that they have attractions to their same sex/gender. Finally, in the fourth layer an individual integrates their heterosexual identity with the identity of someone who experiences same gender/sex attraction and assumes a bisexual identity (Bleiberg et al., 2005). A strength of this model is that it accounts for the impacts of being raised within a heterosexual context as someone who is not heterosexual. However, the model still uses language that perpetuates the idea that someone is heterosexual and then becomes bisexual. In reality, many bisexuals initially identify as gay or lesbian, as well as straight (Bilodeu & Renn, 2005). The inclusion of having an assumed identity is critical for bisexual identity development due to the ways that bisexual people are treated as invisible and often assumed to be either gay or straight, and this model opened the door for the inclusion of such topics in future bisexual identity development models. This model faced additional criticism for being too simple and lacking a strong empirical basis, using a sample of only eight college students, and being created by four self-identified heterosexual individuals (Harper & Swanson, 2019). The language surrounding the final stage perpetuates the idea that bisexuality is a combination of heterosexual and homosexual identities, rather than an identity in its own right (Bleiberg et al., Harper & Swanson, 2019; Fliponymous, 2014).

Nonsequential Task Model of Bi/Pan/Polysexual Identity Development. Harper and Swanson (2019) attempted to take the limitations within the previous models and create a model

that advances the work in bisexual identity development. Their model, the nonsequential task model of bi/pan/polysexual identity development, is a nonsequential task model allowing for different trajectories and experiences within different individuals. Each task is not necessarily experienced by each individual, and they do not happen in any particular order. They also conceptualize each task as happening in interaction with other tasks, with sociopolitical context in the center impacting everything. This model contains five main tasks, or aspects, that make up a whole person. The first aspect is the process of finding and accepting a label to match one's experience. The rejection of labels is also included in this aspect. The second aspect surrounds intersecting identities and allows for other identities to develop alongside or with the bi-umbrella identity. The third aspect involves coming out, and the decision to share, or not share, identity information with others as well as navigating potential conflict as a result of coming out. The fourth aspect surrounds community, how one builds, develops, or maintains their identity within a group context as well as ways in which someone takes on social justice or political actions within groups. The last aspect involves managing the impact of oppression and stigma, with specific attention to the ways that intersectionality can increase experiences of oppression and stigma (Harper & Swanson, 2019). This model propelled the understandings of bisexual identity development forward through its flexibility and ability to be adapted to a multitude of different individuals' identities and experiences. It includes different labels other than bisexual in both the title and in the description of the process of finding a label, including ways in which one may not want to have a label. The inclusion of the impact of oppression and stigma on identity development is incredibly important in understanding the experiences of bi-umbrella people. This model is successful in depicting the complexity, depth of conceptualization, and diversity needed for modern conceptualizations of bi-umbrella identity development. Limitations of this

model include that has not been researched empirically to see if the model accurately depicts the experiences of individuals within this community (Harper & Swanson, 2019). The model is also broad and misses some nuances associated with intersecting identities, making it difficult to apply within practical contexts. The next models adapted the other models of bisexual identity development with an intersectional lens (Harper & Swanson, 2019).

Model of Biracial-Bisexual Identity Development. This model was created for bisexual/pansexual people who are bi/multiracial (Collins, 2000). This model consists of four phases, or stages. *Phase one* consists of an individual questioning or experiencing confusion about their sexual orientation and racial identities. This stage is marked by specific confusion due the difficulty in self-categorizing into both bisexual/pansexual and racial groups based on visible identity factors given the invisible nature associated with both identity markers. *Phase two* consists of someone moving from accepting labels given to them by their environment to seeking out self-understanding and beginning to form their own identity labels. *Phase three* consists of individuals seeking out others or groups to help them understand aspects of their identity, for support in navigating their self-exploration journey, and support in rejecting identity labels placed onto them by others. *Phase four* consists of individuals who can reach full acceptance of their identity, move away from identity confusion, feel confident in shedding mislabels, and move into a space where all of their identities are supported.

Collins (2000) also identified important factors of bisexual/pansexual and bi/multiracial identity development including the importance of social groups such as family, peers, and environment and the ways in which these groups can support or hinder the individual traveling through the phases. The model emphasizes the ways in which both bisexual and biracial people are often forced into different roles and identity labels based on external influences, that these

roles and labels often change over an individual's life, and the necessity for forming a positive sense of identity for an individual to be able to self-select their own identity labels and roles. Being exposed to different cultures and identities helps bisexual/pansexual and bi/multiracial people move through the phases (Collins, 2000). This model is important as it was the first bi-umbrella model to include intersectionality, specifically designed for bi/pan identity development with bi/multiracial identity development. It also was the first model to introduce labels other than bisexual, e.g., pansexual. Other strengths of this model include the openness within the descriptor of each phase, allowing for a variety of experiences to fit under each of the phases. It also does not imply that bisexuals start out as heterosexual or imply that there are criteria that one must meet in order to be labeled bisexual (i.e., romantic interactions with multiple genders). Critiques of this model is that it is too simplified and does not fully account for the nuances of either bisexual or racial identity development. Additionally, it was developed empirically using a small sample of 15 biracial Japanese American men, limiting its generalization of findings to other gender, racial, and ethnic identities (King, 2011).

Bisexual Youth of Color Intersecting Identities Model. Chun and Singh (2010) created another bisexual identity model highlighting the importance of intersectionality. This model moved away from stage models and highlighted how identity development process can happen simultaneously and interactively. It also discussed the ways in which intersecting experiences of oppression and intersecting identities impacts bisexual identity development. The model discusses how bisexual youth of color identity development happens in the context of a sociopolitical macrosystem. That sociopolitical factors affect mental health through laws, customs, attitudes, and values of one's community. Within this overarching context, bisexual youth of color's identity development also consist of racial/ethnic identity development, bisexual

identity development, as well as facing bisexual specific identity stressors compared to other LGBTQ+ groups such as twice rejection, gender identity development, ability status, socioeconomic status, and religious/spiritual identity development (Chun & Singh, 2010). This model was an important addition to bisexual identity development for many reasons. First, this model allows for an individual to be viewed holistically. It creates space for a multitude of intersectional identities and the ways in which that impacts the experiences of bisexuals developing their identity. Second, the model allows for a non-linear identity development experience with conceptualization of the ways that multiple development processes happen simultaneously, and the importance of understanding the ways in which these processes overlap with each other. The main critique of this model is that its scope is so large that it is difficult to fully explain each developmental process, likely leaving out important aspects of both processes and their interactions. This makes it difficult to be practically applied to an individual at a high level of detail but rather helps conceptualize and understand bisexual youth of color identity development at a theoretical level. This model is suggested to be used for clinical training programs and be used for further research surrounding intersecting bisexual identities (Chun & Singh, 2010).

All of the models have some strengths, but also many limitations and criticism. Creating a model of bisexual identity development that accurately encompasses the experiences of bisexual identity development for a range of people, while remaining flexible enough to account for the inherent diversity within the identity as well as the diversity associated with intersectionality has proven to be a difficult task. It is essential to not perpetuate instances of binegativity within conversations of bisexual identity development through attempting to fit all bisexuals within one model, and by avoiding using models that perpetuate harmful stereotypes.

At this time, there does not seem to be a perfect model checking all of these boxes, so further research into bi-umbrella identity development is crucial.

Summary

Understanding identity development of bisexual people will be expanded by directly exploring the experiences of bisexual emerging adults, such as the transition towards individualism and autonomy, experimenting with new relationships, and forming deeper and more meaningful relationships. This developmental stage is a unique and a pivotal time for developing sexual identity, as well as preventing or reducing health disparities. The literature lacks representation of bisexual people's narratives surrounding their experiences with other LGBTQ+ individuals, and how this shapes their narratives and perceptions surrounding themselves and their identity. My dissertation sought to capture these narratives in a way that centers the effect of systematic oppressions while placing an importance on not defining or categorizing the identity or their experiences. The findings hope to enhance knowledge about the experience of being or becoming bisexual (or identifying within the bisexual umbrella) and potentially risks for health disparities. These findings may also lead to improved interventions.

The purpose of this dissertation's study was to understand the experiences of bisexual college students during emerging adulthood (ages 18-25 years). This sample was chosen purposefully because as noted previously, (1) people often make decisions about sexual identity during emerging adulthood, (2) people have increased risks for several health disparity conditions, such as heavy drinking, in this life stage, and (3) people often experience large transitions in social settings during emerging adulthood. In particular, this study examined the interactions of bisexual students with other LGBTQ+ individuals, and how these experiences

shaped their narratives surrounding themselves. The research questions that guided this dissertation were:

1. How do bisexuals describe their identities changing or evolving from high school to college?
2. How do bisexuals perceive interactions with other LGBTQ+ people?
3. How do bisexual people experience minority stress?

Chapter 3

Methods

This chapter is divided into three sections. First, I describe *Queer Theory*, the critical paradigm that has informed the values that will shape this study. I provide a brief overview of ontology and epistemology, and how Queer Theory is a framework for these methods. Second, I describe *Narrative Inquiry,* the qualitative method of this study. I explain the overarching themes of this approach, and my reasoning behind the decision to use narrative inquiry. Third, I describe my *research methods,* the research context, eligibility criteria, recruiting, data collection, data analysis plan, and trustworthiness strategies.

Queer Theory

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and being. *Epistemology* is how we find knowledge and how we can create it. The methodology is the blueprint for the study we use to tap into those (Bhattacharya, 2017). In other words, epistemology is the philosophical assumptions about what counts as knowledge (Jones et al., 2014). In qualitative research, epistemology shapes decisions that researchers make including theoretical perspective and methodology (Crotty, 1998). From these, researchers can utilize *paradigms* which are ways of understanding reality based on our ontology and epistemology. For this dissertation, I have decided to utilize Queer Theory with a Quare critical perspective as my paradigm.

Queer Theory is a collective of intellectual beliefs and theories of which challenge the social and political constructions of gender and sexualized identities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 278). Queer Theory seeks to challenge and dismantle categories, specifically within sexual identities. It embraces fluidity and the inability to be defined and allows researchers to conceptualize sexuality through challenging the stability of identity categories by focusing on

historical, social, and cultural constructions with intersecting identities such as race, class, gender, and more (de Lauretis, 1991; Yep et al., 2003).

Quare Theory seeks to add to Queer Theory by intentionally providing space for the voicing of experiences and inclusion of non-White bodies with specific attention to Black queer folks. While Queer Theory broaches the topic of race within queer spaces and experiences, Quare Theory expands upon these experiences and provides necessary nuance and detail that is not specifically described within the broader framework. To accomplish this, Johnson (2001), prioritizes the use of *little stories* or stories from individuals and groups whose knowledge and histories have been marginalized, excluded, subjugated, or forgotten in the telling of official narratives. These perspectives create space for critical expressions within different communities relative to their unique systems, to provide insight and inspire acts of social justice, and to create a space to name what is intuitively felt (Madison, 2005). Queer Theory through the perspective of Quare Theory honors the differences between the experiences of intersectional sexual minorities and creates a space to illuminate diverse narratives and articulation of lived experiences through telling these little stories.

Researchers using Queer Theory or Quare Theory as a paradigm take an intersectional approach and engage in critical reflexivity, regardless of their own identity or identities. That is, from an intersectional perspective, critical reflexivity is valuable whether scholars identify as LGBTQ+, as individuals of color, as a member of another marginalized group, or as part of a privileged group. Indeed, people experience combinations of marginalization and privilege depending on the social context (Johnson, 2016; Coleman 2021). Therefore, there is an ethical and moral imperative to continuously examine how researchers or scholars experience both privilege and marginalization. Examining power dynamics in context of the study and working

through these dynamics with research participants is critical (Johnson, 2016; Coleman 2021). Utilizing Queer/Quare Theory when conducting my research allows and honors *all* narratives regardless of (and in celebration of) all intersecting identities. It allows for a space to boldly and loudly allow for the telling of little stories of all bisexuals and allows for the needed flexibility and fluidity needed for a variety of narratives and truths to co-exist.

In this study, I used the term "bisexual umbrella" as an inclusive term for those who are plurisexual which includes those who identify as bisexual, pansexual, omnisexual, fluid, queer, along with those who do not wish to be labeled (Bisexual Resource Center, 2019). Students were able to self-identify their chosen label, or lack thereof. As highlighted in chapter two, it is difficult, impossible even, to firmly categorize and define bisexuality. The bisexual umbrella term was utilized to allow for multiple experiences and identities marked by plurisexuality to exist and be represented within the study. The term of *bisexuality* was upheld due to its recognizability, a common strategy in bisexuality research, e.g., Ross, Dobinson, and Eady (2010) indicated that "in acknowledgement of the fluidity of sexual identities, we opted to use a broad definition of bisexuality that included self-identification, sexual behavior, and sexual attraction" (p.501).

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative approach in which researchers can tell participants' stories as a way to make sense of the world and our relationship to it, ourselves, and others within it (Clandinin, 2007). Narrative inquiry posits that humans experience their lives in forms resembling stories, and as such the main aim of narrative research is to acquire stories to understand participants' construction and understandings of their experiences (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). Narrative inquiry is a type of qualitive research that honors lived experiences

for knowledge and understanding" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Often, narrative inquiry is marked by intersectionality and how identity standpoints impact privilege, marginalization, and vulnerability in life (Boylorn, 2012; Calafell, 2012). Narrative inquiry allowed for retrospective meaning making and is an appropriate methodology for a study centered on participants' perception and understanding of their experiences (Chase, 2010).

Narrative inquiry creates a space for the exploration of individual experiences while also considering the institutional factors that contextualize the experience, allowing for a deeper understanding of social structures and dynamics (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Narratives reveal a great deal about social structures because "stories are social artifacts, telling as much about society and culture as they do about a person or group" (Riessman, 2008, p. 105). This makes narratives a wonderful source of data for systems of power and individual experiences of meaning. Researchers employing narrative methodology must ensure that they are not perpetuating an essentialist view of the narratives in which only certain voices of privileged groups are given power (Scheurich, 1995). In particular, individuals engaging in sexuality research must not fall into the tendency to privilege binary notions of sexuality or gender (Diamond, 2008).

Researchers are also implored to understand context, which is ever present in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Understanding the context of which an individual is telling their story allows for a more nuanced understanding of narratives. These stories are:

> "Both enabled and constrained by a range of social resources and circumstances. These include the possibilities for self and reality construction that are intelligible within the narrator's community, local setting, organizational and social membership, and cultural and historical location" (Chase, 2010, p. 214).

Conceptualizing narrative inquiry as existing within a three-dimensional space allows researchers to think contextually. The three dimensions include, temporality, the personal and social, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). *Temporality* refers to events having a past, present as it appears to us, and an implied future. How one experiences and understands the past shapes current and future experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The *personal and social* dimension refers to how interactions and relationships shape experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Finally, *place* refers to situational context, in this case the campus environment.

Themes in Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is marked by researchers viewing individuals' stories as fundamental to the human experience (Clandinin, 2007). There are four themes identified by Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) that can help guide the understanding of narrative work. First, the relationship between the researcher and the participant is not claimed to be objective, rather it is relational and contextualized. Second, words and stories are viewed as data rather than numbers. Third, in narrative research the goal is not to be able to be generalized, but to understand the narratives of reality in a localized context. Last, narrative inquiry allowed for multiple ways of knowing due to its allowance of different views and experiences to be presented within the research.

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) describe narrative as both a methodology and a phenomenon of study in which "both the stories and the humans are continuously visible" (p. 7). This makes narrative inquiry an optimal methodology for my population of bisexuals, who have largely been made invisible (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Further, as shown in chapter 2, bisexual college students have been largely absent from scholarly discourse. Conceptualizing my study using narrative inquiry honored Queer and Quare Theory's importance on empowering individual, or little, stories. This fit well for specifically bisexual populations given the

undefinable nature of the group and the diversity within what each bisexual umbrella identifying individual feels that it means to be bisexual. Additionally, emphasizing each individual voice pushes back against continued erasure of the identity. Further, narrative inquiry allowed for conceptualization of these stories to exist within a three-dimensional space, allowing for researchers to be able to tell these stories with great depth and context. Utilizing temporality allowed for the narratives or stories to explain the evolution of identity and self across time, particularly fitting for focusing on how identity is impacted by emerging adulthood versus prior life stages. Highlighting the personal and the social encourages the discussion of social identity and group formation, a crucial topic within bisexual literature due to the historical prejudice and discrimination this group has faced. Finally, utilizing a specific place and the impact of place allowed me to discuss the ways in which participants were impacted by being students and created space for conversations surrounding the different experiences bisexuals had depending on their location.

Research Methods

Above I described the epistemology centering this study as well as the methodology I used to frame and guide my study on bisexual college students' narratives of identity experiences with attention to their experiences in LGBTQ+ groups and settings. In this section, I discuss the specific research methods that I used in this study including the research context, the sampling criteria and strategies, data collection and methods, and data analysis plan. I discuss my trustworthiness strategies as well as positionality. Lastly, I conclude with ethical considerations. Table 1 shows an overview of the main phases of this qualitive study.

Table 1.
Phases of Study Outline

Task	Steps	Responsible Staff
Recruitment	1. Sent letters to expert nominators. 2. Postered around campus. 3. Sent out interested participant letters to collect demographic data and gauge study eligibility. 4. Emailed selected participants with informed consent and to schedule interviews. 5. Reviewed needs for SONA recruiting. 6. Recruitment occurred until enough data was collected to answer research questions.	Primary Researcher
Interviews	1. Engaged in hour to hour and a half long semi-structured interviews according to interview guide. 2. Recorded interviews, save file to Box.	Primary Researcher
Analysis	1. Transcribed interviews. 2. Each collaboration group member completed steps of narrative analysis to generate initial codes on their own. 3. After generating individual codes, the collaboration group met to compare each of their generated list of codes, discuss discrepancies, and agree on one final set of codes. 4. Researcher utilized codes to form a set of themes. 5. Collaboration group met again to agree upon proposed set of themes.	Collaboration Group

Research Context

This study was conducted at Auburn University (4 participants), a large public university in the southern U.S. state of Alabama, as well as University of Wisconsin (UW) Madison (2 participants), a large public university in the northern United States. Public universities were selected to accommodate my chosen population of bisexual college students, and Auburn University and UW-Madison were selected due to my familiarity and experience with the sites, convenience to access participants, and the ability to be immersed within the field. Further, utilizing a couple specific locations allows for in-depth conversations surrounding the ways place, one of narrative inquiry's three dimensions, impacts participant's narratives. My familiarity and close proximity to the participants will provide a foundation for building rapport, allow me to engage within their spaces, and provide a sense of community with them which are all-important considerations for qualitative research (Gesne, 2016).

Auburn University had a few campus resources for LGBTQ+ students, Spectrum, which is a gay-straight alliance, QPOC (Queer People of Color at Auburn) which is a group for LTBQ+ people with intersecting identities, and A4P (Athletes for Pride) for LGBTQ+ student athletes. There were two broader LGBTQ+ groups and resources in the Auburn area including Pride on the Plains and PFLAG. There was not a specific group or programing associated with bisexual students at this university. UW Madison has several campus resources for LGBTQ+ students, their Gender and Sexuality Campus Center which hosts a variety of events targeted to different identities within the LGBTQ+ community, as well as has 12 different LGBTQ+ student organizations.

Eligibility Criteria

In this section I outline the sampling criteria and strategies for this narrative study. To have been eligible to participate, students must:

1. Self-identify under the bisexual umbrella (see below)
2. Be 18-25 years of age.
3. Consent to recording of the interviews for transcription and analysis.
4. Be proficient in English as to be able to successfully participate in interviews.

Recruiting Strategies

I began recruiting by working with the gatekeepers to the LGBTQ+ spaces on campus. This included contacting individuals in the Office of Inclusion and Diversity, Spectrum, QPOC, and A4P. Next, I shared an informational letter with them detailing information about the study, the sample criteria, as well as a poster to hang in their office. I asked them to share the information with individuals that they believe fit the criteria and had a desire to engage with the study.

I utilized several additional sampling strategies to attempt to reach bisexual students who may not be engaged within these campus LGBTQ+ spaces. I postered throughout campus as well as near specific targeted courses. I postered near Women's & Gender Studies courses due to research suggesting that this is a promising recruitment site because they provide LGBTQ+ course content that may not be available in other academic contexts (Murphy, 2011). My recruitment letter and flier were additionally emailed out to relevant parties on campus such as diversity and LGBTQ+ identity-based course instructors and asked to be distributed to their classes as well as advertised by students through the College of Education itself. Lastly, I postered at UW Madison's Gender and Sexuality Campus Center to find additional participants.

As participants were identified, they were be emailed with information on how to schedule their interviews.

Interested students completed a demographic form (See Appendix C.). This allowed me to ensure that participants meet the eligibility criteria mentioned. It also allowed the students to clarify their preferred identity labels prior to the interview process. I continued recruiting until I got a sample of 6 participants, 6-12 participants consistent with narrative inquiry methodology's goal of 6-12 (Kim, 2016); that is six was the minimum sample. Narrative inquiry requires that the researcher sample until they achieve sufficient perspective to explore the research question (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). Narrative analysis is a recursive process, meaning that cases are analyzed as they are obtained which allowed me to know when saturation was reached, and thus to stop recruitment.

Informed Consent or Participant Protections.

Students who were selected to participate filled out an informed consent document to be made aware of the participant protection measures that I put into place. This document was sent to students over email with their demographic form for them to sign. It also was presented to participants at the time of their interview. Participants were informed about confidentiality including ways in which the researchers will work to protect their confidentiality and ways in which confidentiality cannot be ensured. While their participation in the study could not be anonymous given the nature of qualitative interviews, measures were be taken to ensure that their privacy is protected in all areas of the study. The interviews were conducted utilizing Auburn's secure Zoom and were in a confidential and secure location. Materials containing participant information including demographic forms, videos and transcripts, and codes were kept on a secure password protected file. All identifiable information such as participant names

were changed to pseudonyms. Finally, they were informed about the ability to drop out of the study without any repercussions and that none of their data used in this instance. Participants received compensation of a $20 Amazon gift-card for participation in the study.

Data Collection/Interviews

To gather the participant's narratives, I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Using the narrative approach to guide the interviews allowed me to access each person's meaningful experiences. Participants were asked to tell stories about their experiences throughout their lives and in particular the transition to college (See Appendix F. for interview guide). They were asked to interpret these experiences and communicate meaning derived from them (Lieblich et al., 1998). Participants were not asked to remember events exactly as they happened, which allowed them agency to decide what was important in their narratives and gave them the opportunity to choose what to share and what to emphasize (Chase, 1995). This procedure allowed for the telling of narratives as reconstructed in context-specific ways, rather than verbatim factual accounts of experiences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Narrative interviews can be structured in a variety of ways both in numbers of interviews held with participants and the way that questions are asked during the interviews. Hollingsworth and Dybdahl (2007) suggested eight items that should always be included in narrative research regardless of the structure in order to elicit detailed and thick descriptions of narratives. These eight criteria can help guide the interview structure to allow multiple truths to exist, encourage different experiences and opinions to arise, and allow the researcher to examine and address the ways that narratives may not be objective during the process. My interviews utilized these guidelines which are as follows:

1. Develop trust. Listen non-judgmentally.

2. Initially, scaffold or structure conversations and set norms, if necessary.
3. Encourage talk about topics that are controversial and difficult.
4. Allow emergent purposes for the conversation to develop.
5. Value different discourse styles.
6. Specifically articulate the learning that occurs in conversation.
7. Examine the assumptions.
8. Pay attention to issues of power in the relationship.

The interviews were approximately one hour in length over Zoom. They were focused on collecting narratives connected to experiences the participants have had as bisexuals, the narratives they hold surrounding their identities, and how interactions with other LGBTQ+ people have shaped these narratives. Semi-structured interviews are the most appropriate method of data collection for this study as they allow for in-depth examination of experiences in a safe and confidential environment. I asked a series of pre-written open-ended questions that related to my research questions. These questions were designed to illicit open narratives focused on my topic (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). I focused on allowing the participants to have space to relay their stories. When prompting for more information or asking follow up questions, I ensured that I am using the participant's own language and prompt them in a curious but non-evaluative or judgmental manner (Holloway & Jefferson, 1997).

Collaboration Group

I utilized a collaboration group (made up of the primary researcher and one other individual) to analyze and interpret the material. The collaboration group consisted of me (the primary researcher/interviewer) and one other researcher (a PhD graduate student) to align with the suggested goal of increasing the number of people with differing identities present during the

analysis (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). The collaboration group assisted with the coding process and was responsible for checking and reflecting upon interpretation of the material. They were available to consult about findings and assisted with developing understandings throughout analysis and coding. Narrative researchers often work in collaboration with other researchers in tasks such as conducting interviews, consulting about findings and understandings, and reflecting on the primary researcher's interpretations of the material. Primary researchers decide at what level they would like their collaboration group to be involved. Narrative research is interpretive in nature, and having other collaborations allows for the interpretations of the data to be grounded in the actual text, rather than be overly influenced by one person's projection onto the data. It is beneficial for members of the collaboration group to inhabit distinct identities that help shape the engagement with the narrative data in different ways. It is also helpful to have at least one researcher who is a member of the research ingroup (i.e., a person identifying within the bisexual umbrella) as they are likely to be attuned to implicit group meanings that outgroup members may miss (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). Within this dissertation study, one of the two researchers on this collaborative team identified as bisexual.

Narrative Data Analysis

Narrative analysis is an umbrella term encompassing a family of methods that focus on stories (Reissman, 2008). When utilizing narrative analysis, the researcher either operates as a storyteller or as a story analyst. The *storyteller* standpoint utilizes a creative approach in which the researcher(s) produce an actual story to communicate the findings of their study, while the *story analyst* approach has the researcher communicating results in the form of an analytical account of the narratives (Smith, 2016). This dissertation utilizes a story analyst approach.

Narrative analysis does not seek to collect a uniform set of data across participants and allows for the potential for significant variability across narrative data collected from participants. Each narrative is conceptualized as sufficiently complete and allows for rigorous analysis within itself. In other words, narrative research does not intend to be generalizable to the population but instead highlights the particularities of individual lived stories. Rather than seeking to generalize about an experience, the goal of narrative analysis is to provide a description of a phenomenon or story (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). The process of narrative analysis involves several readings of the material, i.e., the transcriptions. Josselson & Hammack (2021) suggest five sequential readings of the narratives (See Table 2).

Throughout the process of the interviews and transcription, I kept a journal with me to note my thoughts, reactions, and initial interpretations. This journaling of a narrative record helped document the research process as well as provides a space for reflection, and increased credibility and trustworthiness (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). A researcher should attend to different aspects of the interview when analyzing the data derived from them. Leiblich et al. (1998) refer to these as the *three voices*. First, attention was given to the perspective and voice of the narrator in the interview and transcription. Second, the examination of materials must be conducted utilizing theory to provide tools for interpretation as well as a basis of understanding or making sense of the data. Third, the researcher worked to be reflexive and self-aware in interpretation of the narratives when drawing conclusions and deriving meaning. When analyzing narrative data, it was important to understand that narrative methods call for an analysis of *how* and *why* stories are told, not simply the context of the story. We asked why this story was constructed for this specific person, and what the purpose is (Riessman, 2008).

Narrative strategies will largely depend on researcher's and paradigmatic commitments. For this study, utilized narrative analysis as well as deconstruction, outlined in depth below.

TABLE 2.

Narrative Analysis Guide to Readings

Reading	Goal	Procedures
1.	Identify initial thematic content	Listen to the audio recording as you read the transcript and annotate your initial ideas. Journal general impressions and initial list of thematic content
2.	Identify the voices and discourses in which the narrative is in dialogue	Read the transcript with an eye toward the voice of others, including other relevant individuals, ideologies, cultural variables, or social factors. Add new impressions and thematic content to journal.
3.	Identify patterns in the narrative	Review prior annotations to identify larger patterns and meaning in the text. Add new impressions, patterns, and thematic content to journal.
4.	Identify links between the narrative and theory	Draw direct links from the narrative to relevant theories. Add new impressions, patterns, and thematic content to journal.
5.	Situate the narrative in relation to others collected in the study	Compare and contrast findings from individual narratives to others in the study. Note groupings of similar patterns and discrepancies in journal.

Narrative analysis involved multiple readings of transcripts to allow the analysist to identify a complex and full picture of each story, which allowed the researcher to get a better understanding for the parts, or themes, within it (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). Narrative analysis is holistic in the sense that meaning is fully analyzed and interpreted within each individual case (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). As noted above, the collaborative group and I followed the five outlined steps of narrative analysis (Table 2) when reviewing the transcripts, as well as utilized a narrative journal to document the process. The researcher and the collaboration group analyzed the transcripts individually, and when saturation was reached, we individually began to organize the codes into themes that worked to broadly capture shared experiences and stories, as well as differences between participants' experiences. After coming up with individual codes, we met as a group to discuss and agree upon one set of codes. The researcher then organized the codes into themes and met again with the collaboration group to discuss the proposed themes.

Utilizing deconstruction techniques, the collaboration group considered multiple options for interpretation and coding without perpetuating harmful binaries or privileging essentialist viewpoints. *Deconstruction* allows for analysis that "exposes, in a systemic way, multiple ways a text can be interpreted… [it] is able to reveal ideological assumptions in a way that is particularly sensitive to the suppressed interests of members of disempowered, marginalized groups." (Martin, 1990, p. 340). Deconstruction has been used as a method to interrupt binary assumptions and does so by showing that the notion of two distinct poles does not exist (Lather, 2007). This makes deconstruction particularly useful in studying bisexuality, as the term historically (and inaccurately) is viewed as following a rigid gender binary system, and as many

deny the existence of the identity in favor of a binary viewpoint on sexuality (i.e., either hetero or homosexual). Deconstructive analysis additionally assisted in examining silences, attending to contradictions, understanding metaphors, and considering societal taboos (Martin, 1990).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the ways to ensure high-quality research (Jones et al., 2014). In this section, I discuss the trustworthiness strategies that will be employed within the study including reflexivity and keeping a reflexivity journal, the use of a collaboration group, presentation of all cases including negative cases, and the use of thick description. I begin with exploring the *trustworthiness strategies* in greater detail. I then describe my reflexivity through my *positionality* to help ensure relational competence, a process in which the researcher attends to their own identities, positionality, and potential biases/assumptions that might come up throughout the research process (Jones et al., 2014). I lastly explore some *ethical considerations* that I am planning on keeping central throughout my engagement in the study and with my participants.

I included negative cases as a trustworthiness strategy. Including negative cases involves incorporating and honoring experiences and stories that may not align with theory, other's experiences, or my own expectations of what I would find (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allowed for a more nuanced and detailed account of bisexual stories and allowed for multiple experiences, meanings made, and stories of what it means to be a bisexual college student.

Last, I utilized thick description as a trustworthiness strategy. *Thick description* refers to the ways in which researchers immerse themselves in an experience, investigate circumstances in environmental contexts, and move towards using these for grander statements and themes (Tracy, 2019). Thick description calls for the researcher to use context when meaning making.

"The aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics." (Geertz, 1973 p. 28).

Positionality

Qualitative research is inherently subjective. As Preissle (2011) described the nature of qualitative research, "If we can no longer use detachment, distance and neutrality to achieve objectivity, we can at least document and track how what we study is influenced by who we are" (p. 691). Positionality is a form of researcher reflexivity in which the researcher(s) work to describe their own identities and experiences to both relate to participants and as an ethical obligation to disclose the ways in which their identities and experiences may shape the study. As I am writing this section, I am reflecting on the anxiety I have surrounding the process and the unavoidable vulnerability necessary of me to do so. It would be unfair, unhelpful, and unethical to ask my participants to share such difficult stories of their identities without sharing my own, even if it is scary.

I have attended two universities in my post-secondary education: University of Wisconsin Stevens Point for my undergraduate degree (a small public liberal arts school in rural Wisconsin) and Auburn University for my doctoral degree. These years of being a student have been instrumental in my own bisexual identity development. As a bisexual student, I too have experienced many instances of erasure, denial, and challenging of my identity. Many instances of which happened surrounding my interest and passion about LGBTQ+, specifically bisexual, research. Many of these interactions questioned my intentions for engaging in the research I do and communicated to me more or less that I should be careful not to speak for a population that I do not belong to. Consistently throughout my life and education, the possibility that I could be

bisexual seemed to not cross people's minds. Further, this communicated to me a taboo-ness to the topic of bisexuality. Does one really need to hold the identity to be able to speak on it or speak out for it?

My interest in this study stems from my experiences throughout my life. I remember the first time that I came out, disclosing to my family that I was bisexual during middle school. I remember being told that it was just a phase that teenagers go through, and that I will outgrow it and move on. Growing up in a small midwestern town, I (and my family) did not have regular exposure to LGBTQ+ individuals, and at that time there was not much LGBTQ+, especially bisexual, representation in the media. This likely caused me to firmly believe in this phase without question. Thankfully, I eventually began to question this and was able to accept my identity, and since have been able to enjoy open, supportive, and loving conversations with my family who also have accepted my bisexuality.

My acceptance journey really happened throughout my emerging adulthood years while I attended university. I remember at some point during my sophomore year of college thinking "dang this is a really long phase!" and realizing that I may indeed hold the identity. I distinctly recall feeling like I was lying, faking, or pretending to be a part of the LGBTQ+ community, and wanting to hide my identity for fear of the rejection I felt I was sure to face. At this time, I had only been in romantic relationships with cis-male partners, and I felt that I did not "meet the qualifications" to be a part of the community (qualifications that I now know are not rooted in any truth). In seeking community with other LGBTQ+ students, I had a variety of experiences both positive and negative. While I did (and do) occasionally experience instances of rejection from the LGBTQ+ community from other non-bisexual individuals, I have had more instances of acceptance, support, and friendship. One of the most critical aspects of my identity development

has been surrounding myself and befriending other bisexuals. The community, love, support, and understanding I have found with other bisexual individuals increased my confidence in my identity as well as gave me the safety I needed to explore what it meant to be bisexual. This process of accepting myself and accepting my place within the LGBTQ+ community has lasted for years and continues to be difficult at times. From this, I have developed a deep passion for wanting to give bisexual students voices during this life stage and advocating for bisexuals to be unconditionally accepted within LGBTQ+ communities and spaces.

My experience with internalized bi-phobia and monosexism is deeply rooted despite years of intentionally working on accepting myself. Since accepting my identity, I have found myself advocating for bisexuals and educating my peers, family members, and friends about bisexuality and binegativity as much as I can. Due to the erasure and silence surrounding the bisexual identity, I have found that most people are unaware of the different ways that bisexuals define the identity and are largely unaware of the challenges that they/we face. Through this finding, my research interest arose, and I developed a passion in wanting to give bisexuals the voice to describe their stories and experiences in a way that honors them as truth without questioning the legitimacy of them, something that I desperately needed (and continue to need) in my own life.

Clandin and Connelly (2000) wrote, "narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical. Our research interests come out of our own experiences and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines" (p. 121). My identity and experiences had shaped my passion for this topic but also informed the assumptions I brought to the project. I recognize that while I share some identities with my research population in that I am a student and that I identify under the bisexual umbrella, my experiences and perceptions do not speak for the participants in the study,

or any other bisexual people. I was cautious to not assert my own experiences or assumptions on the participants and work against "the pull of framing [LGBTQ+] student development in a monolithic way" (Marine, 2011, p. 47). This was particularly important for me given the privileged identities that I hold such as my white racial and cisgender female identities. These identities and the power associated with them have caused me to not have to navigate the additional challenges that bisexuals without them may face, and required me to consistently check my own assumptions, potential oversights, and biases. Additionally, while I currently attend Auburn University, I am originally from Wisconsin and may be unaware of or unable to relate to regional differences such as culture, upbringing, and personal experiences associated with growing up and living in Alabama or other states participants were from. There are many experiences that individuals with various intersectional identities (racial, ethnicity, ability, religion, socio-economic status, gender identity, etc.) have that I was/am likely unaware of. Keeping this in mind, I continued working to acknowledge, confront, and challenge any internal biases that may have arose during my work on this dissertation. Strategies to accomplish this are listed below.

As I navigated this study, I continued to engage in difficult conversations surrounding sexuality, power, oppression, and intersectionality within research, teaching, and professional spaces. Through this, I have had an opportunity to continuously grapple with my own beliefs and assumptions to assist me while I worked through the process of this dissertation. I worked to continuously reflect on my experience, positionality, values, and beliefs over the course of this study in an effort to set aside my own preconceived expectations on the nature of bisexuality, identity, and inter/intragroup relationships. To aid in this process, I utilized a reflexivity journal throughout (Jones et al., 2014).

Additionally, I utilized my collaboration group throughout the research process. These trusted colleagues and researchers helped check my assumptions, analyses, and meanings drawn from the work. This helped me explore multiple interpretations as well as ensured that I was not placing my own meaning and experiences in wrongful ways. The collaboration group served as an opportunity for me to process and work through my own feelings and reactions related to the project (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A key focus of my project was to center myself in ethical research. Narrative inquiry should ask whether the research is meant to merely describe the world or change it (Clandinin, 2007). Researchers should move past simply doing no harm to actively trying to do good. Doing good in the context of research calls for the researcher to not further perpetuate marginalization or depowering of participants, and one should work with the participants toward social change (Jones et al., 2014). This entailed working with the participants rather than for someone else and being careful to toe a line between analyzing participant narratives and subjecting them to a scientific gaze (Fine, 1994).

Further, I was careful to ensure that my work did not confirm or reinforce oppressive narratives (Fine, 1994). Working with bisexuals, a historically pathologized and marginalized community, calls for particular mindfulness on this topic. I was careful to consider how my work may be received both within the bisexual community and outside of it and considered the ways that it might be misused or misinterpreted (Fine et al., 2003). When discussing findings that might perpetuate a stereotype or stigma, one must be mindful and intentional with the language used surrounding it, and the decision to include it at all (Fine, 1994).

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this dissertation's study was to understand the experiences of bisexual college students during emerging adulthood (ages 18-25 years). In particular, this study examined the interactions of bisexual students with other LGBTQ+ individuals, and how these experiences shaped their narratives surrounding themselves. The research questions that guided this dissertation were:

4. How do bisexuals describe their identities changing or evolving from high school to college?
5. How do bisexuals perceive interactions with other LGBTQ+ people?
6. How do bisexual people experience minority stress?

To answer these questions, I utilized a narrative inquiry approach (Josselson & Hammack, 2021) grounded in Queer (Yep et al., 2003) and Quare (Johnson, 2016) epistemologies. I conducted a semi-structured interview with 6 bisexual university students. The data was analyzed using narrative analysis (Josselson & Hammack, 2021).

This chapter provides an overview of findings including demographics, narratives, and themes. I first describe individual participant narratives to highlight the individual stories in line with narrative inquiry and Quare Theory's goal of preserving folks' "little stories" (Johnson, 2016; Jones & Abes, 2013). I then highlight four main themes that emerged from narrative analysis:

1. Increased Engagement with Bisexual Identity Development in Emerging Adulthood
2. Pervasive Minority Stress Leads to Repetitive Decisions Around Disclosure
3. Intersectionality Impacts Identity Experiences

4. Establishing LGBTQ+ Community is the Most Important Protective Factor, and the Most Complex.

Participant Narratives

Consistent with the goals of narrative inquiry, my findings begin with the individual narratives of each of the six participants. As seen in Table 3, participants represented a variety of identities which impacted their experiences and narratives. Most participants preferred the label bisexual or queer, 1/3 identified as male and 2/3 as female, and 5/6 identified as white with one Middle Eastern man. All of the participants were either seniors or sophomores in college and none of them reported being involved in LGBTQ+ clubs on campus. When asked about other important identities, some participants opted not to answer, while others reported a range of identities such as religious identities, geographic location based, and being a first-generation student. All participants were given pseudonyms and identifying information, such as locations, organizations, etc., was omitted in an effort to protect identities.

Table 3.

Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Age, years	Sexuality	Gender/ Pronouns	Race/ Ethnicity	Class Year	Other Important Identities
Paige	20	Bisexual	Female She/her	White	Sophomore	Southern
Kendra	22	Bisexual	Female She/her	White	Senior	N/A
Adam	23	Bisexual	Male He/him	White	Senior	First Generation College Student
Claire	19	Bisexual	Female She/her	White	Sophomore	N/A
Adam	22	Bisexual	Male He/him	Middle Eastern	Senior	2nd Generation Middle Eastern, Coptic Christian
Taylor	22	Bisexual/ Queer	Female She/her	White	Senior	Christian

Note. To preserve anonymity, all names are pseudonyms.

Narratives further highlighted the unique context that each participant comes from and highlights the complex differences within each person's experience. Many spoke to their decisions surrounding labeling themselves, and their complex relationship with the *bisexual* label. Folks discussed impact of family support (or lack thereof) on their experiences with unique stories about intersectionality and ways that identities that at times felt clashing. Many discussed the joy of finding other LGBTQ+ community and ways that that has provided huge amounts of support throughout their identity development process.

Paige

Paige identified as a bisexual white woman, who noted throughout her interview that she had been questioning if the identity label *bisexual* correctly fits her experience. "I have been going back and forth with my sexuality a bit as of lately," and remarking "I've been trying to like, decide if it's an attraction to men, or if it's like some kind of validation I get from society… but I still am comfortable with the label of bisexual as of right now." The possibility was brought

up to her by her girlfriend who previously identified as bisexual but currently identifies as lesbian. The pressure both internal and external to correctly label herself weighed heavily on Paige's mind stating "I've been bisexual for… years at this point, like possibly being a lesbian… I don't know. It's just like too much of a change for me right now."

Paige stated, "I feel like I've always known that I was like bisexual in a sense, like even at a such a young age as elementary school, but obviously I didn't really know what that was, especially where I grew up." Paige was raised in a large southern U.S. city which impacted her ability to disclose and explore her bisexual identity, "I was never comfortable to even discuss it with anyone, because the stigma," and attributed college as being a safe space allowing her to come out to a few friends and engage in her first same-gender relationship "I feel like once I got to college kind of that restriction kind of let go… it's kind of like a fresh start." Finding community on college helped promote this mindset "I knew there was a gay community [here], even though it's very small" and "spending time with people in that community… opening up to them… they were so helpful and so supportive and that really pushed me to go all in."

While she came out directly to her mom and sister, deciding which friends to tell was more difficult; "If they were close friends, then I just told them straight up… I guess I'm going to tell you I'm bi" and decided to post about her girlfriend on social media without any formal coming out, stating "at this point if [they] know [they] know, like whatever." This isn't without concern about negative responses from others, "the looks and like the possibility of people talking about it… I am scared of that or fearful of that." Indicating that people in her old sorority or folks from her old high school cause her the most concern and reflected upon various negative interactions she had on campus.

Paige spoke at length about finding it difficult to find community that truly understands her. While her best friend is bisexual and has been a helpful support for some aspects of her identity, "she has a boyfriend now… like she's not in a relationship with a girl so obviously it's different." Paige stated "most of the people I interact with… don't identify as bisexual… there's more people that identify as queer or lesbian" While her friendship with other LGBTQ+ folks has been overall positive, she has difficulty finding people that she can truly relate to and fears potential stigma from them; "when I talk to my friends who are lesbian or queer I mean we can't relate on a bunch of things… I just haven't found anyone else that I can relate to," and mentioned that "there's also a lot of stigma about bisexual girls… and I feel like I've heard most of these stereotypes the people who say [them] are people in the LGBTQ+ community." When asked how it was to have the opportunity to speak about her identity in the interview, she stated "honestly it felt good to talk about… I've never talked about it at least to this extent and I've never been asked these types of questions. It felt good to talk about it honestly and it didn't stress me out either, like it didn't stress me out like how I stress myself out about it so that was nice."

Kendra

During her interview, Kendra reported identifying as a bisexual white woman. She noted that at one time she used the label *queer* rather than *bisexual* due to the "negative light around bisexuality," such as "girls just experimenting." However, she stated that *queer* "never felt right for me," and "I was able to realize that just because people are saying [bisexuality] is bad you don't have to listen to that… there's nothing to be ashamed of."

Kendra started her story "I kind of had an inkling [that I may be bisexual] very young" and reflected upon having a childhood friend who identified as bisexual. When the friend disclosed her identity to Kendra, she "could see [herself] with that term" but reported that she

opted to “keep it in my back pocket… I’ll date mostly men, but I’ll still identify as bi.” After ending a long-term relationship with a man throughout high school that resulted in her “kind of forgetting” about her bisexuality, Kendra felt that “college is the time to explore [her] identity a little bit.”

Kendra spoke to her and her family’s salient religious beliefs, “I grew up… in the bible belt like very down south, and my parents were never against [being gay], but it was never really spoken about the same way that heterosexuality is.” She spoke at length about how her concern for maintaining both her and her family’s images, “I just want to keep my image as clean as possible and not cause any issues or cause any stirs within my family or people in the church.” This presented challenges both surrounding decisions to not come out but also resulted in Kendra struggling to not “separate the two [identities]” often feeling a sense of incompatibility between her religious upbringing and bisexual identities which are both meaningful and important to her.

The feeling of being “unsure which personality to show” shows up in other contexts of Kendra’s experience. Because she is only out to a few close friends, she describes herself as often masking her bisexual identity to present as straight. “I had to separate different aspects of my personality for who I was around, and that got really tiresome, I was kind of masking at certain points.” In contexts that she is around people that she is out to, or in spaces that it would be safe for her to be out, she disclosed feeling pressure to dress or present herself in a way that was recognizable as bisexual “I have friends that are part of the LGBTQ+ community and you can tell by the way they dress… and I feel like if someone were to look at me, they wouldn’t necessarily think that and I struggle with that a little bit.”

During college, Kendra established a community of other LGBTQ+ folks that acted as a critical support network for her and allowed her to experience moments of authenticity and

openness. “It felt really good… being able to just be open with myself again and be able to express myself… it was so freeing… I wish I would have had it sooner so that I could have expressed my identity a lot sooner.” She mentioned worrying about graduating and losing her community “in my bed at night sometimes all I can think of is I’m scared to lose this part of myself again because who am I going to surround myself with… back home.” While Kendra has concerns surrounding her ability to find safe community post college, when asked how it was to engage in the interview she noted “It was new and kind of inspiring to be able to talk about this and to talk about it so easy… maybe it will be easier in other spaces as well.”

Adam

Adam identified as a white man and noted that his identity as a first-generation college student was important in understanding his experiences. He noted using the bisexual label but described his identity as more fluid “I view sexuality as being fluid, and I don’t believe that like an innate one label can forever dictate someone’s being. I think being bisexual is something I guess I more identify rather than sticking to one label.”

Adam began exploring his bisexual identity in high school, which he disclosed early on to his parents who were accepting and supportive. He spoke about his parent’s experiences “my parents grew up in a large city, so they’ve been exposed to a lot of things that are not heteronormative” and noted “having the experiences of living in low-income communities has really built a sense of resiliency within my family.” These experiences allowed his parents to be open to his identity and instilled within Adam a value of thoughtfulness about others’ experiences and intersectional identities. He spoke to his privileges as a white cisgender man, acknowledging that his queer friends of color have different experiences than he does. He noted that for community spaces to feel welcoming and impactful for him, intersectionality must be

considered within the space "I think affinity spaces work best when they're collaborative… than those who break apart each section and lock them away in a corner… because you can be queer and Persian, you can be queer and Black, you can be queer and Jewish, and so on."

When deciding if he is going to come out to other people in his life, Adam prioritizes safety and opts for a more indirect approach: "I just don't really feel like it's necessary for me, or maybe it's like a gauge into my safety to not simply out myself in situations that wouldn't probably warrant the best results." He went on to note that people who know him can tell his identity by the things he posts online and feels comfortable allowing them to "make their own perceptions." However, he prides himself on his ability to always act authentically, even when it is not safe to disclose his identity; "even when… I wouldn't feel as comfortable within my identity… I feel like I still authentically act the same and portray the same in multiple settings."

Dating has presented some difficulties for Adam. These include experiencing harm from both prospective romantic interests and also harm from partner's family members; "I had a previous partner's parents reach out to my parents worried that like our son's going to hell." Further, as a male identified bisexual, Adam discussed experiencing unique discriminatory experiences such as individuals (including prospective romantic partners) assuming he is gay rather than bisexual and making statements such as "they don't want to date a bi man." He noted specifically "it was very difficult to speak with female-bodied individuals about that aspect of my life… I feel like it wasn't received as well as it was to maybe male-presenting people about my identity."

Taylor

During her interview, Taylor reported identifying as a queer/bisexual white woman with a background in the Christian church but describes herself as currently more spiritual. She also

noted that she is an artist "and that's like a big way that I like to show up in the world… I'm probably the most passionate about creating work that creates impact. Kind of looking at the world and examining how we can kind of take human centered approaches to address some of the inequity that is in our world."

Taylor has been in artistic spaces all her life that were made up of other queer folks and recalled "I think I've always been around and deeply loved people who were queer, which I feel like provided me a space that I felt comfortable being able to explore when I started to uncover my own queerness." Taylor did not begin fully exploring her own identity until college, but her artistic background was instrumental in helping her along the way. She recalled growing up in a household that was "deeply a part of the church community that was not externally homophobic, but there was not space for queerness there." She went on to explain that she has been working on unpacking some of the messages that she internalized. Her initial exploration of her identity was difficult for her due to family norms, "In my home life it was always just the assumption of straight being the norm and just never really any kind of openness…and being told… like the man that you marry or whatever from a very young age. And so, to me that was just what was expected which I think is part of what contributed to grappling with feeling imperfect… I felt like a deviation from what they would expect."

Taylor initially came out to her high school best friends and was met with "so much support and love… in a way it was an outpouring of love." She noted that each subsequent moment of coming out and being met with acceptance helped her validate and find comfort in her identity. While she appreciates and values connecting with other queer people, especially in her art circles, she spoke to questioning if she belongs there due to her straight passing relationship. "[I felt] this really deep uncertainty about not wanting to take up the space that

other queer people that I loved so deeply occupied." … and I think that's a place that I'm still growing and finding the courage to be a part of those communities in a full and present way." While she went on to describe how many of these fears are internal worries resulting from being straight passing, she has had prejudiced experiences from other queer folks which has made certain spaces feel unsafe to disclose her identity. Taylor has found many safe individuals to come out to including close friends, certain family members, and her boyfriend but is not yet ready to be out to everyone.

Claire

Claire identified as a bisexual white woman. She described that another important identity to her is that she is an athlete. When deciding which university she wanted to attend, visiting campus and noting if it felt safe or not played a large part in her decision especially because of the context that she grew up in; "I [lived] in a city that basically is in a very liberal county… and my high school there's a lot of different communities for [queer people] and it was very welcoming… I almost went to [another university], and when I went on my recruiting trip… someone on the teammate a homophobic joke… and I knew like oh I am not going to be welcomed here." While Claire indicated that she is not particularly active in queer specific spaces on campus, her involvement in athletics has formed a strong protective sense of community with both queer and heterosexual athletes.

Claire recalled that she began exploring her bisexual identity in high school, recalling "I had got like hit on by a girl, and I thought she was kind of attractive… but I was like that's not true" she went on to describe how fear of discrimination caused the initial hesitance around accepting her identity. A couple of years later, her desire to engage in a romantic relationship with a woman caused her to revisit her bisexual identity. Her family's acceptance of both the

relationship and her bisexual identity was critical, but what was most influential was her aunt, a lesbian woman. Her aunt became a role model for her and when asked how she was able to reach a place of acceptance of her own identity she stated "I think it was really watching my aunt and her wife, [they] wanted to get married so bad that they flew international… and she was kicked out of the [military] because she knew she was going to end up so unhappy if she were to do that (marry a man)." While Claire is not at a space where she feels ready to be publicly out because of the spotlight as a student athlete, she noted that the bravery that her aunt and other queer folks in her community inspires her.

Bi negativity was an important topic of discussion within her narrative "I think some people are grossed out by being attracted to the same gender, so it also weirds them out that we do both at once and have the option to switch." She discussed experiencing rejection most often when trying to date, recalling times when people, most often men, would ghost her after finding out her bisexual identity. While she did not experience the same rejection from women "I had never experienced that [rejection] from women before… I think they see it more of a flex that they pulled me," sometimes interactions with women leave her feeling sexualized and recalled "everyday it felt like a new girl within the community found out [I was bi] and they were trying to get my snap or DM and I was like just because I do like girls doesn't mean I automatically like you… it was more demanding and lusting over me."

Isaac

Isaac identified as a bisexual Middle Eastern male. When asked about other important identities he answered, "I am a second-generation Middle Eastern American, both my parents initially immigrated from [a North African/Middle Eastern nation], and I'm the first individual in my family to be born in the US… also within the Middle Eastern community, I'm a Coptic

Christian which is the minority within [country of origin]. So, it's almost a minority within a minority in a way." He additionally disclosed how important family is to him

Intersectionality plays an important, albeit complex, role in Isaac's experience. He notes; "I think the communities that I'm part of whether it's being Coptic Christian, whether it's being [Middle Eastern], whether it's being bisexual, kind of play a lot of roles amongst each other. Sometimes not cleanly. A lot of times, they tend to butt heads in a lot of unfortunate ways. But yeah, they are very salient… and you could not describe me without those." He went on to explore the ways in which his identities are each so protective, powerful, and important to him in various ways but also feel incompatible with his bisexual identity. He noted that collectivism is an important aspect of what it means to be Middle Eastern and "the needs of the community outweigh the needs of the individual… sometimes being different in that way tends to mean that not necessarily you're ostracized or shunned, but the Arabic word for it is Abe, which is like inappropriate essentially." One such consequence of this is Isaac's inability to disclose his identity to his family "I consider myself to be bisexual but not to my family because it's not necessarily something that I imagine would be taken positively."

Isaac reflected upon his journey with bisexual identity exploration noting that he came to acknowledge his identity as a bisexual man in Sophomore year of college. He noted questioning his identity in the latter half of high school, but it wasn't until he was in college and around LGBTQ+ affirming spaces that he was able to fully explore his sexual identity. Music and theater are passions for Isaac, and he felt that these spaces were particularly open and accepting on campus. The process of coming out for the first time was particularly special for Isaac, as he came out to his long-term girlfriend who within the same conversation also came out as bisexual to him; "I felt like this is a person that I wanted to be close and romantic with, and I needed them

to be okay with my actual identity, not the initial one that I was walking around with. And it was funny because when I told her, her response was "oh my god, me too!" and I was like amazing!" Their ability to understand and support each other in their identity and identity development gave Isaac the confidence and comfort to come out to more people in his life; "After coming out to an individual for the first time and having the response be A: positive and B: hilarious, it's one of those things where it's like "oh I want to do this more now."' When asked how it was to engage in the interview, Isaac stated "For me, being still very fresh in my bisexual experience, it was almost enlightening for me because I was answering questions that I hadn't even thought of, so I really enjoyed it."

Summary

I began this section by highlighting participant narratives to preserve their *little stories* (Johnson, 2016) and to highlight their unique context and experiences. These narratives begin to highlight commonalities across participants which are further expanded upon below through the discussion of themes that emerged from narrative analysis and their subthemes.

1. *Increased Engagement with Bisexual Identity Development in Emerging Adulthood Years*
    a. Let's Put That to the Side
    b. Exploration During College
    c. Internal Conflict
    d. Finding a Label

    Pervasive Minority Stress Leads to Repetitive Decisions Around Disclosure
    e. Not Out to Everyone
    f. Biphobic Experiences

g. Campus Safety

2. *Intersectionality Impacts Identity Experiences*
    a. Cultural Identities
    b. Gender Identities
3. *Establishing LGBTQ+ Community is the Most Important Protective Factor, and the Most Complex*
    a. LGBTQ+ Community is Protective
    b. Harmful Experiences from Other LGBTQ+ Members
    c. Wanted: Bisexuals
    d. LGBTQ+ Programming on Campus

Themes

Theme 1: Increased Engagement with Bisexual Identity Development in Emerging Adulthood Years

The first theme that emerged during narrative analysis revealed that much engagement with their bisexual identity development happened during emerging adulthood. The first subtheme (*Let's Put That to The Side*) of this being that many participants discussed intentionally delaying identity exploration, i.e., they were aware of their bisexuality in childhood/adolescence and intentionally waited to explore it until emerging adulthood. Another subtheme (*Exploration During College*) highlighting that many participants noted the university setting contributed to the exploration of identity during emerging adulthood. The last subtheme (*Internal Conflict)* highlighted identity uncertainty during emerging adulthood was a common subtheme discussed by participants. Finally, the process of exploring identity labels and finding one that feels

affirming (*Finding a Label*) was a critical aspect of bisexual identity development during emerging adulthood.

Let's Put That to The Side. Some participants reflected upon becoming aware of their bisexuality, or potential bisexuality, during childhood, but often did not act upon this awareness right away. Distinct from experiencing internal conflict by rejecting the identity, folks described consciously putting their identity on the backburner until they were older. Paige, for example, explained:

> I feel like a lot of people have this big realization, but I feel like I have always known something was up. That's not the right wording, but like that, like something was up. And I feel like I've known for so long, and I feel like middle school probably is when I was like oh like bisexuality is a thing or like being lesbian or gay is a thing. And so, then in my head, I was like yeah like I'm probably bisexual, like I know that, but I feel like I kind of just like put it to the side. So, I was like I can't unpack that in my life right now and I knew then that I was so young anyway that I was like is it even like would it even do anything for me to address that right now?

Kendra shared a similar story; "I kind of had an inkling very young. I had a neighbor who I was very good friends with, and she identified as bi, and I remember asking her about it. I was probably in like second or third grade… and I was like okay well I could see myself with this term, but I never acted upon it or anything." Kendra went on to describe that she explored more of her identity in middle school, but had a second similar *let's put that to the side* experience in high school:

> I got to high school, and I was like oh you know I'll keep it in my back pocket, you know, I'll date mostly men, but I'll still identify as bi. Then I got into a long, the long-term relationship and I just kind of like forgot about it in a sense.

The concept of feeling too young or not ready to address bisexuality was echoed additionally in Adam's experience, however presented in a different way. In his experience the potential for him to be queer was named for him by other folks in a way that felt harmful and stereotypical; "When other people were hinting at it, they were talking about the cadence of my voice, and I don't really know the feminine nature of what's probably not typical of a boy in (the southern state that I am from)… I was kind of like I didn't really mature or have thoughts of sexual desire at that time they were talking about that cause I was young too, so I don't think I was thinking about stuff like that just yet."

Exploration During College. Many participants discussed how college was the first time that they felt enough freedom and safety to explore their bi-umbrella identities. Paige indicated that for her, she was able to explore her identity in college because of newfound safety; "I was never comfortable to even like discuss it with anyone, just because, like the stigma…And I feel like once I got to college, that like, restriction, kind of like let go ever since I graduated high school." For Kendra, it more a sense of feeling an internal sense of readiness; "I was like, okay college is the time to explore your identity a little bit, and you've always kind of thought about this. So why not? Just, you know, go for it and see what happens."

Isaac and Taylor had stories surrounding how college was the first time that they had truly accepted and adopted their bisexual identities. Isaac recalled:

> So, I think I say sophomore year is when I came to acknowledge my identity as a bisexual man. I would say I had those feelings, or I had those experiences, or those

> questions arise as early as like high school, and you know that only continued into college. And around sophomore year was when you know I was really kind of like doing more research and I was kind of experimenting and exploring with it…I was like, "You know what? Eff it. I'm just going to make a lot of these choices and see what happens."

When he was asked what allowed him to experience that safety, Isaac attributed it to being close enough to his family that he felt a safety net, but far enough away that he could explore his identity away from them- a distance he jokingly referred to as his own personal "goldilocks zone":

> At (my current university), I had a lot of my personal protective factors back, right?... And because I had that safety net, I felt more empowered to kind of jump more and explore pieces… even if they were close by, they were far enough away that I could ask those questions without feeling bad about myself.

Taylor shared a similar story of feeling able to explore her identity during college largely due to the space she had away from home. She mentioned that college was the first time in which she could freely explore her identity. "I didn't kind of acknowledge or come into my own queerness, I think, at least publicly, but also in a way personally until I was in college. I think like many people you kind of then look back on your formative years and you're like that was always there, but maybe I didn't have the language or have the permission, like give myself permission to explore it until I was in college." Like Isaac, distance from family was a big contributing factor to her freedom to explore in college. "And I think a big part of what contributed to that experience was, I think, partially being away from home. Which I came from a very affirming, loving household. So, it's not like I grew up in a homophobic space, but we

were deeply part of a church community that was not externally homophobic, but there was not space for queerness there, if that makes sense. I didn't have those examples there."

Internal Conflict. Some participants shared stories of moments when they experienced internal conflict surrounding their bisexual identity which manifested as either questioning the identity or feeling reluctant to initially accept the identity. A commonly discussed subject was the impact of heteronormativity and questioning if attraction to a certain gender their authentic experience is or if it was an accurate reflection of their sexuality as well as experiencing other pressures about ways that their sexuality 'should' be according to dominant cultural standards.

For Isaac, he discussed questioning what his attraction to men meant to him and had some uncertainty exploring if what he was experiencing was romantic attraction or physical attraction:

> I've been in a couple of physical relationships with men, but never like a romantic relationship with men. And I would always question myself to be like, "Am I just in it for the physicality? Am I just in it for the experience? Or is there actually something more to it? Do I actually have a direct attraction to it?" And a lot of self-reflection and a lot of inward thinking to me kind of coming to the conclusion that I wouldn't have the feelings that I'm having if there wasn't something going on in there, right?

Paige indicated a similar question of her own attraction to men but specifically had concerns that her attraction may be rooted in heteronormativity and validation from society. She explained the following after discussing her first relationship with another woman:

> It makes me compare it to my previous relationships because before that I've only ever dated men… I've been trying to like, decide if it's like an attraction to men or if it's some kind of validation that I get from society, but like it feels good.

Taylor and Claire told stories of initial difficulty accepting their bisexual identity. Claire discussed her first crush on another woman and stated, “my sophomore year I was attracted to this girl, and I was like that’s not true like that’s not real.” Taylor gave her input on her own experience and told the following story about her own first crush on a woman and the impact on family norms and internalized belief systems:

> I think when I started that process of uncovering and really coming to discover my own identity, I had those questions all the time where I’d be like, “Is this really like, am I truly who I am? Is this whatever?” It took me a long time to come to that, I think, because I was so afraid of being that. I would feel like someone (Queer) would share a story or an experience and I would feel like that resonated so deeply. And then I was like “But that’s not me.” And then I would think to myself, I’m like “maybe it is me.” And I think overtime, I began to think about all the way back, like thinking about being a young person in dance class and I think about the girl in my dance class that I was like infatuated with and who I would go on her Instagram and obsessively look at her all the time because she was just like so beautiful and I think at the time, I just thought that I just admired her. I think for me, it was also a lot of unpacking and unlearning some of my own internalized bias against queer people as well became I think I grew up like a very high achieving eldest child who was seen as perfect in a lot of ways, and while I do not feel now as my current self, that being queer is not perfect in any way, but I think for many of my years growing up, I think that process of coming to know myself and that part of myself felt like a failure, which I was saying those words out loud. I don’t know if I’ve really said that out loud before. I’m getting a little bit emotional about that. But I

think that was a big part of my fear or maybe my resistance to explore that part of who I was earlier.

Finding A Label. Finding an accurate and affirming label is a big part of identity development for bi-umbrella folks and was discussed by all participants. Participants had a range of experiences with both their internal process of labeling but also with how others reacted to their labels. Some participants questioned if the label bisexual was an accurate representation of their sexuality and discussed feeling pressure to find the correct label, while another participant felt that the term bisexual maybe was too restrictive to accurately express the fluid nature of his identity. Some participants indicated having moments of uncertainty if they should/could call themselves bisexual or queer and had concerns about how other LGBTQ+ folks would respond. Others felt that calling themselves bisexual was affirming and just felt right.

Isaac and Claire both discussed how labeling themselves as bisexual immediately felt natural and positive to them. In Isaac's experience when he first started using the label: "I kind of said, "Okay, I'm going to say that I'm bisexual now and see how it feels." And I found that it felt better than not saying it. So that's kind of the place that I landed with, it was like, "This feels more natural than saying I'm straight," because that's not true." Kendra similarly recalled:

> I had met this girl in seventh grade, and we became very close, and she had said something to me that she was bisexual, and I was like, oh, my gosh! I remember my neighbor saying that term, and how I kind of identified with it. And so, I just kind of was like, oh yeah me too. And I kind of went with it from there. So, I was like… okay, you know, we're going to assign this term to ourselves, and we'll see how it goes. And it kind of felt very freeing. So that's kind of how I knew that like, okay, this is something that

like this is your identity and kind of went about from there. And that was very like I said freeing and just overall it was a good experience, it felt natural.

While Kendra had initially felt positively about using the label, she shared that in the past she questioned if it was the most accurate for her and grappled with the knowledge that calling herself bisexual subjected her to potentially biphobic reactions from folks. However, she ultimately opted to keep the label:

> Yeah, I for a minute there, I also kind of identified under the queer umbrella, just because I don't really know if the term bisexual fits me necessarily, I go about being like, maybe I am a lesbian, just because I don't necessarily have the same attraction to men…I was trying out the word, like queer, I'd rather have been under the umbrella term queer, than bisexual, just because there is kind of negative light around bisexuality, but the term never felt right for me…I keep coming back to bisexual and within the past year, I've like fully come to terms with like, okay this is what I am. This is full stop is you.

When asked what helped Kendra gain the confidence and assuredness to decide to keep the label, she noted that "allowing myself the space to question but still come back to my original identity and not being upset with myself" was key. She additionally noted that "breaking down stereotypes for myself and knowing that they're not true, and I'm not fitting into those stereotypes, and that's okay, I'm okay to be bisexual."

At the time of her interview, Paige similarly was questioning if the bisexual label fits her and discussed feeling heightened levels of stress and pressure to find a correct label from various sources both internal and external. "I've had times where I've been like, oh, I think I am a lesbian. But then I go back and forth, and I've definitely had a thing about like, am I feeling this pressure to identify or conform my identity almost to get some like relief to this pressure?" She

went on to describe how her girlfriend recommended that she read the Lesbian Manifesto due to her girlfriend previously identifying as bisexual but currently identifying as a lesbian which further increased her confusion:

> Then it's like, oh maybe I don't fit in with that lesbian label. But then, it's just confusing…. I don't like to think about it because it like stresses me out because I feel like I need to label this something which, like, I know isn't necessarily true. But like I want to label myself as something so I can make sense of it…And I feel like I've thought that I've been bisexual for so long at this point, like possibly being a lesbian like, I don't know. It's just like too much of a change for me right now…

Paige went on to grapple with what her discomfort using the label lesbian means. She described fearing that it comes from internalized homophobia:

> I think this is where, like the internalized homophobia comes in, because, like just like thinking myself as being a lesbian like it just feels weird to say… when I think about myself being one, it just like it's almost like an itchy feeling like it, just kind of like it makes me like squirm a little bit.

In Adam's experience, he views his sexuality and in many ways the label that he chooses to describe it as fluid. He additionally acknowledged the ways that folks can respond negatively to a bisexual identity label. "I definitely can recognize how a lot of gay, cisgender, men like can view queerness as internalized homophobia like exploring their identity further or saying a lot of people who like to date men but not a lot of women are like, oh, 'they're just calling themselves bi because they don't want to be gay' type of thing." He went on to describe how he views his sexuality as fluid and feels like the bisexual label fits best for now, but perhaps not forever. "I feel like my identity's fluid. I view sexually as being fluid. I don't believe that like an innate one

label can forever dictate someone's being, I think being bisexual is something I guess I more identify as then, rather than just sticking to one label."

Taylor discussed using the label bisexual as something that causes her to feel cautious and at times has concerns about the validity of using the label in certain spaces due to being in a straight passing relationship and not outwardly identifiable as queer:

> I do consider myself and identify as a bisexual person, I think I still tread with caution, and I share that information with people more freely. But I think I'm always very mindful. I think I'm always insecure to share because I think I'm afraid of taking up space because I know that while that is a part of my identity and my experience, I also have not faced a lot of the same obstacles or judgement that other people with the same identity have.

Theme 2: Pervasive Minority Stress Leads to Repetitive Decisions Around Disclosure

A major theme was that none of the participants would categorize themselves as being fully out to everyone in their lives nor to the public. The first subtheme (*Not Out to Everyone*) details how participants disclosed being very careful who they come out to due to safety concerns, and often only directly disclosed their identity to important and relevant people in their lives. The second subtheme (*Biphobic Experiences)* describes participants experiencing instances of biphobia and bierasure, decreasing overall feelings of safety. Last, participants discussed specific experiences on their campuses in the last subtheme (*Campus Safety*) and noted places where they felt the safest versus the least safe, which directly impacts identity negotiation decisions.

Not Out to Everyone. When asked about outness, who they are out to, and how they decide who to come out to, all participants indicated that they are not out to everyone. Fear of

discrimination was heavily discussed as a major factor for being selective with whom participants come out to. Many participants discussed directly disclosing their identity to a few close people but had a more hands off approach with others in their lives saying things like, "if you know you know." Others discussed taking a more hands on approach and detailed how they felt unsafe in the idea of certain people in their lives finding out about their identity accidentally or through other means.

Claire, for example, discussed how based on her friends, people could assume her identity, but that she does not disclose her identity directly unless it's to those who are close to her:

> I think it's well known within the athletic community. Like just with who I associate myself with… I have a lot of friends who identify outwardly within the community. So, I would say that most of them know and choose not to care… I don't think the people in my classes truly know… and I think I choose very wisely who I share that information with. Like only people that I know well enough and that will respect who I am.

Paige shared a similar sentiment, discussing how people may be aware of her identity based on her social media posts with her girlfriend and opted to only directly share her identity with those close to her.

> I feel like I didn't really make it known, like I didn't have a big coming out thing which I feel like most, not most, but a lot of people tend to do. But once I started dating my girlfriend, obviously I want to post on social media and stuff. And my thought was just like if I love this person then what's the big deal. So, at that point I was just like if you know you know. If they were close friends, I just told them straight up, I would be like hey I guess I'm going to tell you I'm bi… I feel like it's a big deal to come out. But, in

my mind it was just like I feel like I shouldn't even have to come out. I should just be like I'm this, cool, whatever, not a big deal.

Paige's frustration at feeling that she 'should come out' is something that Adam additionally mentioned during his interview additionally echoing 'if you know you know':

I came out to a few members of my family, but it was never a parade of like "I'm this" to so and so or to like everyone, because I don't know that just brings a taboo and then it was just easier to let people's assumptions grow until it became true for them. It's just uncomfortable…it's uncomfortable where I don't think we have progressed as a society to just like simply out yourself to strangers and feel full comfort yet. Or maybe others have that confidence and comfort to be able to do that. I mean, I envy that, but for me, I just don't really feel like it's necessary. Or maybe it's like a gauge into my safety to like not simply out myself in situations that wouldn't probably warrant the best results. I feel like I confide more into the people who have really close connections with me rather than strangers.

Kendra, Isaac, and Taylor heavily discussed feeling not ready to be out to everyone in their lives due to fearing negative reactions and safety concerns. Kendra noted:

I'm still not completely out to everybody like parents and such like that, but we are working to get there…That was very important to the people in our friend group was, you know, just kind of being open and having the space to be open, which I'm very grateful for. But to anyone else it was, you know it was kind of like… Hush! Hush! Don't tell anybody! I'm just trying to avoid difficult conversations. And the feeling of like safeness because, like the people that I've told so far is because I feel like safe, or I, you know I feel like their judgment, isn't you know, warranted against me. But other people, more

like family members and stuff like that is more just, more or less just trying to avoid any kind of resentment.

Taylor's experience was similar, and noted, "I still feel like I'm on growth with this to be honest." She opts to share her identity when it feels relevant, but does not typically share her identity when first meeting people, "I won't necessarily lead with the first introduction that this is who I am, but if we end up talking about relationships or identity, I will always choose to share that when it feels like it's connected to the experience." She went in to say that she is out to her mom and her sister but cannot remember if she disclosed her sexual identity to her father. When asked about her experience telling her family she stated "I think I really was uncomfortable about facing an interrogation about it because I think I carried some anxiety that if I brought it up in a big way, that they'd be like, "Oh, well, what does this mean for you and (your boyfriend)?" or whatever. Which I think I just was like uncomfortable with the sentiment of that."

Isaac's experience spoke to the intersectionality between his multiple identities and the way that they show up in different spaces;

> I have my identity that I am, that I hold and cherish with other individuals, you know like with my friends and with my found family and with my workers and people that I'm out to. And then I have my identity with my family who I'm not out to, right? And I think in the situations with my friends and stuff where you know people understand that I'm Arabic. I'm Middle Eastern. I'm Coptic Christian and that I'm bi.

He went on to note that his identities at times remain separate, "That seems to work well because they don't make it a problem, essentially. Fear is that if that were to come out to my family, then it makes it a little bit more difficult because then that becomes a talking point that they're not

ready for, right?" Isaac spoke to his decision-making process surrounding his decision to note come out to his family and what might be at stake if they would find out.

> I'm constantly making that decision every day of whether or not I share to my parents or my family or not because of that own slew of concerns, right? But when it comes to people outside of that sphere and you know my cultural sphere, whether it's my friends or coworkers or something like that in the future, it's going to be determined on how much I trust you with this information to not share it. Because all of the individuals that are aware of my identity are also under the agreement that they're not going to share it to my family, right? So that's a big piece for me is I need to make sure that if I want to share it to my family, it's going to be on my own terms, not someone else doing it by mistake.

Biphobic Experiences. Many participants disclosed experiencing instances of biphobia from others such as hearing harmful stereotypes, experiencing erasure of their identity, and experiencing social rejection. A common discussion was about the ways that the bisexual identity can be invalidated and denied through the steppingstone stereotype, the experimenting stereotype, or through the belief that bisexuality is only valid when in a same gender relationship. Paige shared in her experience:

> I feel like being in a relationship with a girl kind of makes people think oh, okay, she's actually bi, or people assume that I'm a lesbian now, which I'm just like, okay, whatever. But like, I've definitely heard so many conversations where people will talk about different bi girls and they're like she's not actually gay or stuff like that. And I'm like you don't know that. It upsets me a little bit. I know I've had to deal with that too, and if I knew someone said that about me, it'd make me upset.

Adam added his experience with bi-erasure and invalidation of his identity, "there's going to be conversations that constantly question your identity… They're constantly questions like, oh, are you?" Isaac's narrative spoke to a similar experience; "It's more like, "I don't know if I believe you," and then I kind of have to prove it… What do I have to give my bisexual identification number or something like that to them? … People would question me like, "Well, you don't count because you come off as straight anyway, so it doesn't matter." And I'm like, "What do you mean?"

Kendra shared things that she has experienced when trying to date as a bisexual woman and harmful stereotypes that she has been told.

> I heard a lot of things about bisexuality like, oh, you know, it's just people who can't make a choice or like oh, it's really cheaters and stuff like that… There are, you know, negative things, hookup culture kind of comes around and like, oh, you know, people want to experiment, and that's it. I just know that a lot of people that I've seen on campus or even on like social media, kind of use it as like and excuse like, oh, my boyfriend and I are looking for a third. You know that kind of stuff…It just puts us in a negative light and kind of just like sexualizes bisexuality, and it's, you know, it doesn't need to be.

Negative experiences while dating were also salient in Claire's narrative as most of her biphobic experiences happened with men she met while dating:

> I think some people are like, just kind of grossed out by being attracted to the same sex. So that also weirds them out that we do both at once, not at once, but have the option to switch. And I don't think especially for people that are homophobic, they like or want to acknowledge that I can also be attracted to a man but be attracted to a woman…. I dated this one guy a couple years ago, and he knew that I had dated a girl, and he kept, like he

> wouldn't acknowledge that I was bisexual. He would kind of say, oh, you're straight from me, so it doesn't matter now… I was always like, I feel like that you're kind of stripping that part of me away, because you don't want it to be true.

Campus Safety. Perceived/experienced safety in various spaces on campus was frequently present in the narratives of the participants, and they discussed both places that felt safe but also areas or groups on campus that feel risky for discrimination. Notably, Greek life was cited multiple times as feeling riskier for discrimination than other areas on campus. While safe places included places on campus that are specific the participant's unique interests such as athletics and the arts.

Paige and Kendra both indicated feeling unsafe around sororities and fraternities on campus. Paige disclosed "There's some girls from my old sorority I was holding my girlfriend's hand, and then they just like, looked at me and laughed, turned and said something to each other and stuff like that." She went on to describe that overall she is more alert to potential experiences of harm when she is on campus around Greek life in general; "Sororities and fraternities, for sure… those are the ones that were just better to avoid and nothing like has really happened yet, but it's just the fear of something's going to happen like the fear of something making me upset." However, she concludes that overall, she feels comfortable in public at her university, and it is only in specific instances that she feels nervous about reactions of others.

Kendra added on her own experience with Greek life stating broadly, "I guess this is just because I am, or I was, in Greek life. There are some spaces within Greek life that are not safe." Similarly to Paige, she felt that overall campus was safe, but that online spaces can create an overall feeling of an unsafe environment:

> I will say, like social media within campus kind of creates an unsafe space. I guess the most that I can kind of think of is like Yik Yak definitely. There have been some things said that are just kind of like, oh, that's not okay. And it is anonymous. So, like, you don't know any groups that they're a part of. And so that can create definitely some unsafe spaces on campus.

Isaac and Taylor both spoke at length to how their involvement in the arts on campus created a warm and safe environment for them that felt very protective. Isaac said in specific "In particular, in my [music] group … they are very accepting, very warm, loving, everything towards me with that. I also feel very accepted amongst my theater and choir friends because, again, the arts tend to be a lot more accepting with that." Isaac uniquely discussed the impact of campus leadership on safety describing what it was like working a university job:

> The only place that I imagine that kind of feeling a little more like, "Okay, I should probably just keep it to myself here," was like my campus job in the [on campus office] because I'm working with a lot of campus leadership there, you know some of the deans of students, some of the VPs, that kind of stuff. And there's fear there about my identity because those are also the people that write the rules that make it hard for us to do things that are positive. So that's where I felt more kind of held back. But everywhere else, I got by just fine.

Claire also experienced finding a positive and protective space on campus within her student group and spoke to how they feel protective against potential harm she may encounter in broader campus spaces "Most people on the team like know about (my bisexuality), and are very aware of it, and I know that my women's team and our men's team would like ride or die for me. So, if someone were to make fun of me, or were to help me and find out, like I know that

someone, or like a group of people, would say something." Campus safety played a big part of Claire's decision as to which school she wanted to attend. During her interview she disclosed information about a school that she opted not to attend:

> So, I almost went to (a large southern university) and I went on my recruiting trip there I was dating a girl at the time, and someone made a homophobic joke. Someone on the men's team had made a really homophobic joke, and like a bunch of the women left a couple of the recruits left, and I know like, oh, like, I am not going to be welcomed here, and I know I shut down, I was really quiet the rest of the trip…

Theme 3: Intersectionality Impacts Identity Experiences

Intersectionality played an important role in participant's stories. Many participants discussed how other identities outside of their bisexuality results in unique processes and experiences in that it would be impossible to accurately depict their positionality without taking them into account. The first subtheme (*Cultural Identities*) highlights participant's stories detailed cultural identities related to religion and race/ethnicity. Gender-based experiences make up the second subtheme (*Gender Identities*) with things like gender norms and bi-phobic experiences specific to gender frequently mentioned.

Cultural Identities. Cultural identity factors and experiences surrounding religion and race/ethnicity were central to many participant narratives. Participants discussed identity development with these cultural identities during emerging adulthood both in and of themselves and in impact with their bisexual identities. In relation to the ways that these identities intersected with bisexual identities, participants discussed grappling with conflict between identities and began exploring how they have come to make sense of that.

Religion was important to Kendra's narrative, and she began by discussing the impacts of growing up in a salient religious context:

> So, I grew up in the Bible Belt, like very down South. And my parents, I will say my parents were never like against (bisexuality), it was just never really like spoken about the same way that, like heterosexuality is and so I just was kind of like, well I didn't want to cause up any issues.

Kendra went on to attribute the internalization of 'not wanting to cause issues' as being largely influenced by her family's status within the church, "I was very esteemed in the church; my grandfather was a pastor there." Understanding the ways that her religious identity and bisexual identity fit together has been challenging for Kendra and she noted:

> It definitely has taken a lot, and it's still ongoing trying to kind of not separate the two you know, just being myself in general and not having to have one part be over here, and then the next part be over here. And I definitely did a very bad job of that growing up just because again, I wanted to make sure that my image was clean and just kind of wanted to make sure not to cause any issues, or cause any stirs within my family, or like people in the church and stuff like that.

College has provided a space for her to explore what her religious identity means to her, and for Kendra right now that means to hold her religious identity less saliently than before, "I will say I'm less religious than I was in the past and that I mean, that's for a number of reasons not just based off identity. But when I was more religious, I struggled a lot." Religion presented roadblocks for Kendra to truly feel like she could make her own decisions or discover herself without the influence of what her church deemed right or wrong:

> People telling you like, you know it's not what the Bible says, this isn't what God intended. And having to see for yourself you know exactly what that means to you and your relationship with God was definitely hard. It's still difficult, and I still struggle with it. I think I would struggle with it a lot more if I was less religious than I am now, but just because of other things, I've kind of pushed that aside and I will say, I think pushing that aside has kind of opened a door for me to be a little bit more expressive with my identity… I would like to have both coincide, but that's just work that I'll have to put in later.

Taylor shared her story with her religious journey and described the context in which she grew up in "I grew up in a Christian community, like Christian household. And that was a big part of who I was in my formative years, but it's less kind of central to who I am now. Like I still feel more spiritual, but it's not that relationship with that place is less a part of life now, but something I care about a lot." She noted that her family's religious identity has evolved over time, describing:

> My mom took my sister and I to very kind of like new age hippy churches that were very much more spiritual than religious. And we learned about the Bible and Jesus, but in this way that was like these are metaphors that help us to understand something bigger than any of us and was like rooted very much in meditation and prayer in a much more personal way. Yeah, and then in my early teens, like middle school age, we started attending a large evangelical Christian church. And my dad came along. And my dad joining us for church was a big shift in our family. And our whole family was very involved and launched a campus of this church in our community.

The church community that her family was involved in during her teen years was particularly influential in Taylor's identity development and relationship with sexuality as a whole:

> The church community that we were part of for a lot of my high school, middle school years was a community that was very anti-sexuality at all, period. Any kind of interaction with that part of your personhood was like deemed dangerous. And there was like very specific rhetoric of like "You need to put up your guard rails." And they used this analogy that your car that's driving around a cliff corner, and if you put the guardrail right on the edge of the cliff, if you run into it, you're going over. Where if you put the guardrail way back away from the cliff's edge, then even if you spill over, you'll still be safe kind of as this metaphor for abstinence and boundaries.

Taylor went on to describe how confusing and painful this experience was for her, "But then in general, as especially as a rule follower, like very obedient young person, I was scared shitless of sex in general with anyone… I just remember even my first experiences of sexuality at all; I was so scared of these feelings in general that I cried and cried and cried. Not even from not having sex, but just like having feelings of sexual desire for another person was like a lot for me."

Similar to Kendra, Taylor's emerging adulthood has consisted of identity development work with her religion, and college has offered her a place where she can have the space and freedom to question the messages that she received:

> I went to college and things happened in the world that really made me question the space I've been a part of because I saw what my community doing in the face of deep hurt. My community was so not what I believed and what they had taught me to believe.

During this time, bids for connection or answers from her church members were denied in a deeply painful way, “I had some really challenging conversations with people I looked up to where I basically was like, “What the fuck? How can we do nothing?” and I was kind of just like told to stop asking. And for a while, I really just walked away from all of it and was really disappointed and saw it all as like very manufactured.” However, for Taylor this painful experience gave her permission to take space from the church and begin to cultivate her own relationship with her spiritual beliefs in a way that feels increasingly positive and meaningful:

> And I think in the aftermath of that, I’ve returned to some of the relationship I had with that part of myself that I had as a young child where I do identify as a Christian still, but I do not necessarily identify with an organized denomination. I consider myself more of a spiritual person. And that is a lens through which I see the world.

Finally, I have included a bit of Isaac’s story and his experience being bisexual, Middle Eastern, and Coptic Christian. Isaac described the interaction between these identities and his bisexuality:

> Christianity as a whole, right, there tends to be some opinion about the LGBTQ community, which I experience often, especially being part of a rather like a conservative Orthodox faith, right? You know the word I’ve heard often used is that it’s very classic- it’s very old school. Yeah, thinking historically, it is actually technically one of the oldest religions in the world. It’s older than Catholicism. So, there’s a lot of history that goes into it. It’s very like based off of kind of like what was happening in the past, right? And you know a lot of the LGBTQ population wasn’t necessarily accepted within that. And that’s just kind of speaking in the religious sense, you know not even looking at cultural

> pieces you know being Middle Eastern, being bisexual and being part of the LGBTQ community as a whole is not necessarily something that's widely accepted in the Middle East currently as of now.

Creating a space where his identities can fit harmoniously together within himself has been an area of difficulty and growth for Isaac:

> Where when I was younger, a lot of the kind of practices or the beliefs that I hold you know sometimes as a Middle Eastern man or as a Coptic Christian man, I would just believe without asking questions. … being Coptic Christian, I was kind of struggling with my own beliefs and my identity where I was like almost thinking like, 'Am I broken? Am I bad?'

Isaac spoke to the concept of *Abe*, or what is inappropriate, in his culture, "I have these thoughts and feelings towards men when I shouldn't because that's *Abe*. You know, that's very inappropriate." He highlighted the ways that the identities sometimes feel as if they do not fit together, and the internalized pain that it has caused him. However, he also discusses the ways that he has allowed himself to create a relationship with his identities that allows for complexity:

> And I think a lot of what college was for all of my identities I was beginning to ask why, right? Why do we do this? Why do we believe this? Why do we respond in this way when this thing happens? And a lot of it has been kind of coming to terms with like, "Okay, this identity being bisexual is something that I really want to hold dear, and I want to keep myself." But then these identities here, whether it's Coptic Christian or being… Middle Eastern, it's not just agreed and don't think about it. If I'm to love my identities, I also need to be willing to challenge them.

The concept that loving your identities means challenging your identities is a central aspect of Isaac's identity development while in college, "That's something that I've been doing a lot more this year where I've gotten into quite a few moments with my parents about why we believe what we believe or why we act the way we act or why we respond the way we respond, right? Because a lot of them are realizing I don't agree with them." He concluded noting that this process is development and full of "ups and downs".

Gender Identities. Gender identity was also discussed frequently in participant narratives. This included both gender identity development and experiences during this time period, as well as the intersectionality between gender and bisexuality. Many participants told stories of gender-based discrimination experiences in relation to their bisexual identities. Another participant discussed experiencing unspoken pressure to follow gender-norms which causes increased stress.

Paige, Taylor, and Claire discussed their experiences as bisexual women highlighting specific gender-based stereotypes that they have experienced. Paige recalled; "There's also like a lot of stigma about bisexual girls like they're not actually bisexual, they really just like men, and they're only doing it for attention." Taylor added on that bisexuals are often seen as just being "Party girls" and that their bisexuality is invalidated because of that. Claire mentioned that she had different levels of acceptance of her bisexuality based on if she was dating a man or a woman:

> He didn't like that I had experience with a woman that like for some reason that grossed them out, or even though he has experience with a woman, but that's okay, because he's a man. I have never experienced that from a woman before I

think they see it as more of a flex that they pulled me rather than a man pulling me, at least in my couple of experiences.

Kendra spoke to her experience with her family and the pressure she feels around gender roles and the increased pressure and anxiety that she feels because of them:

My family has never pushed this, it's more like gotten in my head kind of anxiety thing, but my pretty much every female, my family has like gotten married in their early twenties and started a family, had kids, you know, gone from there, and so, knowing that I'm about to be the oldest or not oldest, but the oldest in the family to get married and in that age range where people do. Yeah, it's very scary. And then my best friend, like my childhood best friend, is getting married next year. And that was absolutely like what like' we're literally still children in my head.

Adam shared his experiences as a bisexual man and the unique difficulties that he has had. He spoke at length about difficulty dating as a bisexual man and often experiencing rejection from women.

I felt that men or queer men were more comfortable with the idea of being with a bi man rather than straight or queer women. And so, I think that was probably an adjustment to maybe having to hold conversations to women like oh, I can never date a bi man type of thing or that's just doesn't interest me. And it's like oh, like it was kind of like, not reality check, but like also reality check, like oh, like dang, I didn't think that was going to be like the biggest issue or not. I don't want to sound like that, that's not the biggest. But I didn't think that was going to be like a common thing. I would have to like face here when I was doing stuff like that. But I think it was really formative towards my identity as well as dating like an ex-partner who would always bring it up to people as in like a

negative aspect of me, like, oh, and he's bi and then having the conversation like, oh, well, he's not bi cause he's dating a man like well, that's not well, that's not how it works, but experiences like that have been really like formative to like my development.

He additionally discussed experiencing the stereotype that queer men have STDs; "I had a previous partner's parents reach out to my parents, worried that, like our son's going to hell. Are they going to get HIV and stuff like that." As well as recounted how often folks would assume that he was really gay and not bisexual; "A lot of people like that and sharing that they were like, oh like, I thought you were gay, like type of thing, negative, like oh like I can't be bi… there were times when I was like dating women and like middle school, but like that's not really a real relationship, but, like people would say like tell her like, oh, you're dating a gay boy."

Theme 4: Establishing LGBTQ+ Community is the Most Important Protective Factor, and the Most Complex

Close relationships and community with other LGBTQ+ individuals were described as one of the most positively influential and supportive experiences for participants' bisexual identity development (subtheme: *LGBTQ+ Community is Protective*). However, many participants also experienced harm from LGBTQ+ folks that felt worse and more negatively impactful than harm from heterosexual folks (subtheme: *Harmful Experiences from other LGBTQ+ Individuals)*. While many participants discussed that other LGBTQ+ folks cannot fully understand the bisexual experience, none of the participants indicated finding group community with other bisexuals and many reported that finding another bisexual is a difficult task (subtheme: *Wanted: Bisexuals*). When asked about involvement in LGBTQ+ programing on campus (subtheme: *LGBTQ+ Programming on Campus*), all participants discussed going to a few events but deciding to not be fully involved. Participants highlighted reasons for this such as

not feeling comfortable or welcome, concerns with safety, and overall feeling that the programming itself does not meet their needs or expectations.

LGBTQ+ Community is Protective. When discussing interactions with other LGBTQ+ folks, participants detailed ways that their connection and community with other queer folks has been instrumental in their identity development. Many discussed how this support allowed them to gain confidence, comfort in disclosure, increased overall happiness, and served as role models/mentors

Adam shared the ways that other queer people are important to him in his narrative, and how having people who can relate to him and his experiences is protective, "The ones have been really monumentally supportive of mine has been like the queer people who have grown up close up to me in (my home state) that have gone through the same experiences and maybe live similar lives, lifestyles, and live the same like experience as I have. That has been really monumental." Adam's face lit up as he described his friends and community, "I think they're just amazing people. I think they're very charismatic, empathetic, and with going through like similar situations, it's easier to like, confide and talk to people like them." He noted that largely his ability to explore his own identity has been due to the support and understanding of his friends.

Paige discussed how coming out to her best friend helped connect her to other queer folks:

> One of my best friends, I came out to her, and I knew she was going to be cool with it. We've been friends for so long, and she was like, Oh, my gosh! Like you've got to meet these people like this girl's queer, and this girl's a lesbian and like they're super cool like just come hang out with us, and you know I hung out with them, realized that they were pretty chill, and then we just got into like a really deep conversation about it, and I don't

> know just I don't know. I've never had someone to like to relate to about it and like before that, and I think that would like made me a lot more comfortable. …I just feel like more comfortable.

She went on to indicate that this initial positive reaction and connection to community propelled her forward into a space where she was increasingly confident to connect with other Queer folks, "I feel like I'm able to make more connections with people I thought I'd never connect with just because we can relate on so many different things now." This was particularly critical to her identity development because the unique ways that her LGBTQ+ friends allowed her to feel understood and seen in ways that her straight friends were not able to, "Most of my friends I normally hang out with, like they're straight, so they can't relate to me on like certain things, or like they can't talk about certain music or that cause you know, they just don't. They're just not into that community. And I feel like being in that community now, I'm also just like, genuinely happier because I have those relationships."

In her narrative, Taylor discussed the importance of being surrounded by LGBTQ+ community for most of her life, resulting in space and support to explore her own identities:

> I think I've always been around and deeply loved people who were queer, which I feel like provided me a space that I felt comfortable being able to explore when I started to uncover my own queerness, being able to feel like I was surrounded by people that I knew would be affirming of that experience, which I think and also just offering up many different examples of queerness and what it can look like. …getting to connect and be more connected in an intentional way with other queer people in my community and also being able to come to that place of sharing that part of my identity with them. And being

validated, I think, has also given me more confidence that I am a part of that community as much as I want to.

The impact of having LGBTQ+ family members as well as supportive friendships that can be looked up to and leaned on was highlighted in Claire's story. Claire's aunt and first girlfriend were impactful, "I think it was my aunt and my first girlfriend that helped me and one of my good friends that since that she loves to call herself like the gay representation of (my state's) swimming, and she is just shamelessly like out there." She went on to describe how she finds her confidence to be inspiring and helps her dispel her fears of potential repercussions. "I really don't put that side of me out on social media unless you follow my TikTok, but that's like a different story- I feel like that's more casual. It's all over her Instagram all over her Facebook and everything. And I think that kind of helps. Maybe like, okay, like, she still has friends like, it's going to be okay."

Kendra shared that despite being in a location where some may expect it to be more difficult to connect with other LGBTQ+ folks, she has been able to find islands of impactful community to help give her a break from masking her identity:

> I grew up in the South, so not the best place to be a part of the LGBTQ+ community, but I was lucky enough to have always find at least a part of the community to have friends in or just allies to be friends with in all the places that I've lived. So that helped a lot with my identity… being able to just be open with myself again and be able to express myself how I wanted and talk about the issues and any issues facing the LGBTQ+ community, or even just issues with identity within ourselves, was so freeing and being able to have that kind of outlet was very necessary. I wish that I would have had it sooner so that I could have expressed my identity a lot sooner or been more outward in college. It felt

> really very freeing to at the very least be open with the people I love and kind of have the life that I want to live here. It truly was like a weight off my shoulders like it just it felt so nice to be able to come home and not have to like, mask or like be tired from masking and being able to talk about these things and not have to like, you know, kind of walk on eggshells. And to, you know, be like, okay, I say the one wrong thing are they going to be like, oh my gosh! It's like really weird, like I don't support that lifestyle. So, it's been so nice. I have felt completely free.

Harmful Experiences from other LGBTQ+ Individuals. Although all participants discussed how community with LGBTQ+ individuals was important to their identity development experience, many also discussed times in which they have experienced harm. Many indicated that experiences rejection or experiences of biphobia from LGBTQ+ folks was more impactful/hurtful than from cis/het folks. Adam, for example, highlighted this in his narrative:

> I feel like you give a lot of queer people the benefit of the doubt at first because, like, Wait, aren't you like a part of community like, why are you being hateful to me? It really does feel like a personal attack when people do stuff like that, when they're a member of the community… When cis people or yeah, when those people are being hateful, they're being hateful to like you and the entire community. When I feel like queer people are being hateful, I think they're just like being hateful to you. And I think that's what really hurts the most, because they're not really attacking everything you stand for, and all your community and all these people and stuff like that. They're attacking just like you. So, I think that's what really like hurts the most when you think of it like that, because they're like actively questioning like your identity and like making you feel like less.

Kendra added on in her story about ways that her identity had been invalidated and questioned by someone who identified as gay:

> He was just always kind of like you know I don't really understand like bisexuality, and like, you know you've only or you're constantly like dating men so like you're probably straight. And then I was like, well no, I have a crush on this girl, or you know, I want to date this girl, and he's just like yeah, but you're probably still straight just like kind of you know, like questioning. And like that happens to everybody. And I was like, no, it's definitely like that's definitely my identity.

Paige shared similar experiences in her narrative and discussed the impact of experiencing rejection from folks and how that caused her to question the validity of her own identity:

> Yeah, I also remember one time on my mom's family she has a bunch of family friends that are gay, lesbian, whatever, and I came out like I told one of her really good friends about it and he's gay, and he was like, are you sure? He kept questioning and I was like, oh I'm sure I wouldn't tell you if I wasn't sure. Which like I understand, I've only ever talked about boys to these people my entire life. But I'm also like I mean, I wouldn't tell you if I wasn't sure.

As others mentioned, she indicated that harm from the LGBTQ+ community was more detrimental compared to coming from heterosexual folks.

> I feel like I've heard, like most of those like stereotypes, the people that say them are people in the LGBTQ+ community, too, which, like that also just throws me off a little bit. So, I'm like you're supposed to get it…It definitely hits a little deeper. I would say worse, cause like I've had maybe a couple of my straight friends say things to me, but I

> actually think it's funny. For some reason when someone who identifies as gay says it, I'm like be for real. I don't know, I'm just kind of like you should know better like I just don't think that that's funny. That definitely makes me more hesitant to want to open up those topics to those people, for sure.

These comments resulted in identity insecurity, "I feel like getting questions like that, or those sly comments of the stereotypes from people in the LGBTQ+ community it kind of makes me question it because I'm like if these people don't think I'm bisexual then like, maybe I'm not."

Wanted: Bisexuals. A commonly discussed experience among participants was the importance of connecting with other bisexual folks. Many participants discussed feeling as though the bisexual identity faces unique challenges and experiences that other LGBTQ+ identities do not, and that it would be helpful to be able to form community with them. However, it can be hard to connect with other bisexual folks or even to find them. Additionally, it is important to find bisexual folks who have similar experiences based on gender identity of their current partner.

Taylor described how impactful it was for her partner to be a bisexual man, and how he was able to support her through her coming out process and subsequent identity development.

> I think a big part of my coming out process really started with the relationship that I'm in now that I'm still a part of, and that person was the first person that I came out to who is also bisexual. That has been like a really beautiful experience to be able to have a partner whose experience is not the same but aligned in a lot of ways. And we've been able to share that experience, which I have found to be, I think, comforting in a lot of ways to me

When asked about seeking community with other bisexual folks, she indicated that it is not something that she goes out of her way to find, "I think I wouldn't say I have intentionally

sought out community with other bisexual people, but I am really delighted and feel really excited when I find other bisexual people in my community." For Taylor, her romantic relationship provides the perfect amount of support and understanding, "And I think having a partner who shares that experience has just been like really, yeah, just something that I really cherish about our relationship because I think we both kind of celebrate that in one another." She went on to describe that her relationship is particularly affirming and protective because she holds some anxiety and reservations about her belongingness in forming community with other bisexual folks, "I do still carry just insecurity, I guess, like with other bisexual people. And so, I'm grateful that I do have someone who I am so close with and feel so safe to be wholly who I am."

Adam explained that he would like to find people who would fully understand his identity and has difficulty finding other bisexual folks in his area

> I think it's been hard to find a lot of like bisexuals if we're being honest. From a lot of my experiences like my roommate was one, and I met a few people, but like a lot of people weren't, or they would just I don't know. It is difficult to find people who understand, in a sense like your identity, because some people believe the fallacy of like, oh, you're just gay, or I can't be with a bi person and stuff like that. But yeah, it is kind of hard to find that middle person where they like understand your identity as valid and true and just respect that, have gone through the same thing. So, like there's it's kind of hard to meet like the like other bisexual men or other bisexual women that are like, oh yeah, I get it.

Like others, Paige discussed longing for someone who can fully understand and relate to her bisexual identity. Paige's best friend is bisexual and used to be a strong support for her.

However, due to Paige having a girlfriend and her friend having a boyfriend, Paige feels that their experiences now differ from each other,

> Now that I'm in a relationship with a girl like I have less questions, obviously, or like things we'd share with each other and she also has a boyfriend now so it's kind of like it's just different now, like she's not in a relationship with the girl obviously, it's different. And since, not saying since she has a boyfriend but like that definitely plays a factor in it like she's just not as involved as I think she would be if she didn't have a boyfriend. I feel like we'd be more on the same page even if she started dating like a girl, for example, like I still feel like we'd be more on the same page if that was the case.

Outside of this friendship, the majority of Paige's in group identify as queer or lesbian, and she noted that overall, it is hard to find other people who are bisexual. While her friends are supportive, she hopes to find someone who could relate on a more specific level to her experiences:

> I definitely wish I had more friends that did identify as (bisexual), just because I feel like, even when I talk to my friends who identify as a lesbian or queer like I mean, we can relate on a bunch of things, but we can't relate on like specific things. I just haven't found anyone else that I can relate to on or I feel like it's hard for me to talk about my identity with people who identify as something else under LGBTQ+ and just it's not like that they don't get it, but I'm just like, I know you're not bisexual too so like you can't fully understand like you kind of can, but it's just it's not the same. And I do think if I had a friendship like that, I think would just be nice to be able to have a conversation with someone who gets where I'm coming from.

LGBTQ+ Programming on Campus. When asked about connecting to campus led LGBTQ+ groups, many participants indicated that they attend a few events but do not feel comfortable to formally join. This was due to a few mentioned reasons such as not feeling welcome or that the spaces are meant for them, not having access at their universities, and not believing that the spaces are helpful. Participants also detailed things that would make the spaces more inviting or accessible to them.

In her interview, Taylor discussed how she feels hesitant to join any clubs on campus due to feeling unsure if she belongs:

> I would say I think it kind of comes back to some of that point about thinking about what spaces are meant for me. I would attend events and would happily support, but I think in terms of joining the kind of core group or being a part of the roster was something that I haven't necessarily done very much. And I think it comes back to that, is this a space that is meant for me? And I really support what they do, and I will cheer them on, and I'll be like I think I almost come off as just like a really supportive ally while when I'm there- I do feel like happy to attend their events and be in those spaces. But when it comes to then actually making this step to be a part of it in a more intentional way, it feels more intimidating to me.

When asked what would make her feel more comfortable to join spaces, she noted that she would enjoy spaces that felt more inclusive of and representative of all LGBTQ+ identities:

> I feel like something that maybe would make it feel more inviting for me would be just more examples of different kinds of queer identities across the spectrum of what they can look like because I feel like I just didn't see a lot of other people in those spaces that had my same experience.

She went on to say that the lack of representation is largely what makes her concerned about potential exclusion, group rejection, or being seen as harmful herself for entering a space not meant for her; “I think that is part of what made me feel like if it did try I would be met with judgement or that it would be perceived as hurtful to them and their experience, which was just like the last thing I wanted to do.”

Paige similarly discussed going to events on campus but not being fully involved. In her experience, it was due to not being fully out and feeling that it would out her identity in an unsafe way to be seen publicly on campus with the group:

> So, I don’t even know pride was a thing until I started dating my girlfriend. And now I probably go in there like three days a week, which if you would have told me that last year I’ve been like, yeah right. But I wouldn’t say I’m like very involved in the community. I do like to go to pride, but I don’t like I’m definitely not as involved as other people. But I think a part of that too is also like so many people from my high school go here, and I think that like I know so many like when I say involved like in like the clubs or like going to like pride events, a lot of people just like sit out on the concourse and the table so like, everyone knows what it is and like that’s just like too big of a move for me to like just like sit out there and for everyone to see. If that makes sense.

Isaac spoke to multiple barriers to connecting with LGBTQ+ programing including lack of availability/visibility of the groups on campus, “There are a couple of LGBTQ+ groups that are attended, but not necessarily anything like huge. It’s not necessarily broadcast to the university population to attend, right? So, you kind of have to find it. You really have to dig to look for it to find your bubbles, your populations,” as well as the difficulty fitting time into his busy college schedule. He mentioned that the clubs and spaces can be difficult to find and that in

his experience at two different universities, resources and ease of access varied due to amount of programs offered and university policy/ sociopolitical influences surrounding groups:

> (My previous university) definitely had way more resources and clubs and stuff available to them. There's definitely less at (my current university), (my previous university) was almost like throwing them at us, they're like, "Here, we have all this. We have this club, this club, this club." And it almost became too much. Yeah and (my current university), you have to look for it. So, I would say definitely could be better, you know putting it kindly. A lot of these school-sanctioned groups and events always kind of carried with them their own caveats or asterisks or rules you have to follow that really kind of sometimes with silence groups, sometimes would prevent groups from really kind of connecting in that way. The clubs would have to get really creative to do things that are really connective, essentially, because there's a set guideline that the school would require them to follow, and they would make it a lot tougher to do so. So, in that way, it would just be the groups naturally myself. Yeah, then you're also having to navigate institutional politics and institutional red tape, which can be really harmful.

In Adam's experience, finding Queer spaces in general is a barrier, "The problem is funny, because it's like, what Queer space is there [here]?" For him, most of his community with LGBTQ+ folks has been through his personal friendships, and not through organized groups or clubs. He feels that his university's built in spaces are not prioritized or readily available "The idea of like a place, or like a "community" [here] that I'd be really interested and find in one day, but they're under a rock… If you go into the [campus building], where [the LGBTQ+ campus space] is, it's a closet. It's like literally a supply closet." Increasing political pressure that threatens diverse spaces on campus is a huge concern for Adam, "And unfortunately, as it is, I

haven't really got the experience to see that diversity is really valued and respected here, that we are given spaces like that and especially with the new legislation that will come into effect… I worry that next semester probably won't see, or if it will continue, it would be under a different name, of course. But how is that affirmant?"

When asked about what Queer space on campus would be most effective, Adam passionately discussed the importance of having a variety of spaces/programing targeting multiple levels of group belongingness. He believes that having bi-umbrella specific programing is important, "If they had program specific to our community, it would probably be a lot easier to connect with others, or even like, if there was a space that was like accessible, or like more inviting." He additionally stressed the importance of having overarching programing that targeted larger or multiple identity groups:

> I think affinity spaces work best when they're collaborative. It's hard to have an affinity space that's like locked in a corner. And I think some schools potentially are doing more harm by having, like a lot of their marginalized groups locked away than have it more collaborative and invite in. And I think spaces that are like more cultural and diversity centers are excelling within programmatic and like retention pieces than those who break apart each section and like lock them away in their specific corner, because you can be queer and Persian, you can be queer and black, you can be queer and Jewish like so and so, and I think it really is beneficial when you have experiences from all points of view.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight and share the narratives of the six participants who engaged in this dissertation by talking about their stories. The presentation of individual narratives allowed me to highlight unique individual *little stories* within the bisexual

community. I explored the shared experiences throughout my discussion of themes and subthemes that emerged from narrative analysis.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study aimed to platform bisexual stories to further understand the bisexual identity development experiences of emerging adult college students. To my knowledge, this is the first qualitative study to bring together sexual minority stress, social support/group belongingness, and identity development during the critical phase of emerging adulthood with a sample of bi-umbrella college students. Utilizing a narrative qualitative approach allowed for a story of transition over time including discussions of changes in both self and interactions with others. Importantly, this method helped to prioritize entering bisexual voices and stories, directly working against the tendency for their voices to be erased, denied, stereotyped, become harmfully categorized within rigid models, or to get lost within broader discussions of LGBTQ+ groups.

This study expanded understanding by directly exploring people's experiences with both the bisexual identity and the emerging adult life phase. I utilized narrative analysis an in effort to platform participant voices and bisexual stories, which illuminated four themes: Increased Engagement with Bisexual Identity Development in Emerging Adulthood Years, Pervasive Minority Stress Leads to Repetitive Decisions Around Disclosure, Establishing LGBTQ+ Community is the Most Important Protective Factor- and the Most Complex, and Intersectionality Greatly Impacts Identity Experiences.

In this chapter I describe the results in relation to the three research questions that guided this study and existing literature/theory. Next, I provide an exploration of limitations and strengths of the study. Then, I discuss implications of the dissertation in practice, research, and education as well as suggested directions for future research and concluding thoughts.

Research Questions

This section explores the findings in relation to the three research questions that guided this study as well as in relation to existing literature. The following research questions were used to guide this dissertation:

1. How do bisexuals describe their identities changing or evolving from high school to college?
2. How do bisexuals perceive interactions with other LGBTQ+ people?
3. How do Bisexual people experience minority stress?

Exploration of participants' narratives allowed for four main themes to emerge from narrative analysis and that informed understanding of each research question. First, participants narratives indicated an increased engagement with bisexual identity development while in emerging adulthood compared to any previous developmental stage. The second theme that emerged was those pervasive experiences of minority stress led participants to make continuous decisions surrounding and when, where, and how they wanted to disclose their bisexual identity. The third theme highlighted how intersecting identities vastly impacts identity experiences and development during this time. The fourth theme focused on the complex relationship that participants had with forming LGBTQ+ community.

Question 1: How do bisexuals describe their identities changing or evolving from high school to college?

The first theme that emerged revealed that much of the participants engagement with their bisexual identity development happened in their emerging adulthood years. This is aligned with Calzo and colleagues' (2011) work indicating that most of identity development (if not all) for bisexuals happens during emerging adulthood. Hall and colleagues (2021) found that the

typical sequence for identity development for emerging adult bisexuals is attraction, followed by self-identification, coming out, and finally initiating a romantic relationship. This typical sequence did not reflect the participants in this sample, as it lacked naming the deferral period found between self-identification and coming out. Additionally, while many participants did come out to *some people* before their first same-gender romantic relationship, none of the participants came out to everyone prior to the romantic relationship. These differences are likely explained by the inherent instability associated with emerging adulthood that was also found in narratives along with bisexual identity development during this time. Further, an additional step related to self-exploration that encompasses both the deferment period as well as the identity conflict typically experienced should be added and explored in future studies. The current findings suggest that a theoretically rigid sequence is too strict to work for a complex group of people like bisexuals, but the sequence could be re-framed as parts of a puzzle that can be completed or experienced in differing orders.

This puzzle frame is more similar to the Nonsequential Task Model of Bi/Pan/Polysexual Identity Development (Harper & Swanson, 2019). Their model, the nonsequential task model of bi/pan/polysexual identity development, is a nonsequential task model allowing for different trajectories and experiences within different individuals. Each task is not necessarily experienced by each individual, and they do not happen in any particular order. Findings in this dissertation highlight that bi individuals not only navigate identity development milestones at different times, not all participants experience the same identity steps. The Nonsequential Task Model contains five main tasks, or aspects, that make up a whole person. The first aspect is the process of finding and accepting a label to match one's experience, the rejection of labels is also included in this aspect (Harper & Swanson, 2019). Some participants such as Paige, Taylor and Adam spent

a lot of time exploring identity labels, while Isaac and Claire found the bisexual label immediately affirming, providing an example of how tasks vary between person to person. The second aspect surrounds intersecting identities and allows for other identities to develop alongside or with the bi-umbrella identity (Harper & Swanson, 2019). While all participants have intersecting identities that impact their experiences, the makeup of these identities and the ways they interact differ from person to person. The third aspect involves coming out, and the decision to share, or not share, identity information with others as well as navigating potential conflict because of coming out, something uniquely explored and experienced between all participants (Harper & Swanson, 2019). Lastly, the fourth aspect surrounds community, how one builds, develops, or maintains their identity within a group context as well as ways in which someone takes on social justice or political actions within groups (Harper & Swanson, 2019). Experiences within this varied greatly between participants, with both desires for community and the ways they engage in community differing between them. For example, Isaac is content with a small Queer community, largely consisting of his bisexual girlfriend, and finds community within the arts, while Paige has a larger community with other Queer folks, predominantly her lesbian identifying friends. Uniquely, Adam discussed heavily the importance of social justice within his exploration of community, emphasizing the variability among participants.

This model propelled the understandings of bisexual identity development forward through its flexibility and ability to be adapted to a multitude of different individuals' identities and experiences. It includes different labels other than bisexual in both the title and in the description of the process of finding a label, including ways in which one may not want to have a label. The inclusion of the impact of oppression and stigma on identity development is incredibly important in understanding the experiences of bi-umbrella people. This model is successful in

depicting the complexity, depth of conceptualization, and diversity needed for modern conceptualizations of bi-umbrella identity development. Limitations of this model include that has not been researched empirically to see if the model accurately depicts the experiences of individuals within this community (Harper & Swanson, 2019). The model is also broad and misses some nuances associated with intersecting identities, making it difficult to apply within practical contexts. The next models adapted the other models of bisexual identity development with an intersectional lens (Harper & Swanson, 2019).

Multiple features of Arnett's (2000) emerging adulthood theory fit with narratives found in this dissertation. Emerging adulthood is marked by negotiating experiences of instability, feeling in between, possibilities, heightened self-focus, and identity exploration. Narratives emphasized experiences of instability, possibilities, heightened self-focus, and identity exploration. However, narratives did not emphasize experiences of feeling in between, highlighting the need to continue to do research with bisexual populations surrounding these features. Instability *and* possibilities can be seen as participants discussed their experiences with transitions, new opportunities, and changes, namely from high school to college and as they anticipate what life will look like post-graduation. For example, participants discussed the transition to college presenting them with more choices to engage with their LGBTQ+ identity, and in turn additionally anticipate the loss of these choices upon graduation and leaving the university. While some of these experiences increase stress and worry, fitting more with instability, some felt hopeful and exciting fitting with possibilities. Participants' narratives highlighted experiences of identity exploration through discussions of identity focused experience such as labeling decisions, stories of initial denial of the bisexual identity, conscious identity deferment, as well as navigating decisions surrounding disclosure. Identity development

additionally occurred in relation to other identities that they hold (discussed further below). These identity exploration experiences additionally highlight periods of heightened self-focus, as narratives discussed exploring who they are outside of previously salient family structure; for example, decisions surrounding whether to continue engaging in religious practices highlights heightened self-focus.

Multiple features of Wagamen and colleagues (2016)'s queer emerging adulthood also fit with narratives found in this study. Queer emerging adulthood is marked by community-supported independence, close relationships/family kith, personal preservation, and strength to engage with heteronormative and cisnormative contexts. Narratives specifically highlighted experiences related to community-supported independence and personal preservation but did not focus on close relationships/family kith and strength to engage with heteronormative and cisnormative contexts as directly. Narratives surrounding finding community-supported independence were highlighted throughout. Participants disclosed how important it was to find supportive community who understood and accepted their identity outside of their family system, something specifically important to bisexuals as many participants were not fully out to family members. The lack of safety to be fully out to family as well as other experiences of sexual minority stress such as the prejudice/discrimination narratives included, highlights participants seeking to develop personal preservation during emerging adulthood. While close relationships/family kith are like forming community supported independence, participants did not directly discuss the desire to create found family or seek to create community that is as close as, or in replacement of, their biological family. Continuing to explore bisexual identity specific experiences with queer emerging adulthood is crucial to discover if bisexuals do not experience the same features of this developmental stage compared to other LGBTQ+ groups, if they

experience them differently, or perhaps are experienced at a later developmental stage due to their deferment of identity development until emerging adulthood. Next, I describe the subthemes utilized to further answer this question.

Many participants indicated a substantial time gap between initial awareness of bisexual identity, often happening in childhood or adolescence, and acting upon their awareness which occurred within, and during the transition to, emerging adulthood (through behaviors such as self-exploration, dating, and coming out). That is, the students knew they were bisexual, but consciously deferred, or put to the side, acting on this knowledge until they were adults. Identity development was intentionally delayed for a variety of reasons differing between participants. The desire to promote safety and avoid biphobic experiences has been shown to result in the identity negation technique lowered identification (Deaux & Ethier, 1998) as well as through passing behaviors (Verni, 2009).

The deferral pattern fits with Arnett (2000)'s emerging adulthood features identity exploration, possibility, and self-focus. Emerging adulthood encompasses the experience of leaving the nest and having distance from family, including experiences of unsupportive family/high school peers that had made *identity exploration* prior to this very difficult or unsafe. For the first time, participants felt safety and newfound *possibilities* to explore their identities and *self-focus* such as ability to make their own decisions outside of their family's watchful gaze, increased access to diverse friend groups, ability to make dating decisions that align with identity, and more. Additionally, narratives disclosed participants' high school community as unsafe and participants did not have the ability to foster community-supported independence until college, a key feature of Wagamen and colleagues (2016) queer emerging adulthood,

further supporting the barriers bisexuals have in exploring their identity prior to emerging adulthood, despite having earlier awareness of it.

Internal conflict/identity uncertainty, aspects of identity exploration, were frequently discussed as part of participants' bisexual identity development process during emerging adulthood. Instances of identity uncertainty are common with the bisexual population due to heteronormativity, homophobia, and devaluation and erasure of the bisexual identity (Dyar et al., 2015), all highlighted as reasons for internal conflict within participants' narratives. This experience is in line with Knous (2005)'s research in bisexual identity development, naming that facing stigma both external and internalized, and learning to navigate it is a critical step in bisexual identity development.

As supported by previous literature, such as Harper and Swanson's (2019) identity development work, the process of finding and accepting an identity label that matches participants' experience is a critical feature of the developmental process. During participant's experiences with bisexual identity development in emerging adulthood, they all discussed stories related to finding and adopting a label. Experiences with this varied between participants, with some finding the label immediately positive and supportive, others feeling that it may not be accurate, and some feeling like it does the best job at describing an identity that is inherently hard to describe.

Question 2: How do bisexuals perceive interactions with other LGBTQ+ People?

When answering this question, a theme that emerged was that close relationships and community with other LGBTQ+ individuals was reported as being one of the most positively influential and supportive experiences within bisexual identity development, however, was complicated to establish. Narratives held stories both of positive and supportive experiences with

other LGBTQ+ individuals, as well as harmful experiences of rejection and biphobia. Specifically with interactions with other bisexual people, participants' narratives indicated a desire to connect with other bisexual folks, but a difficulty finding them. Subthemes that were used to further answer this question are discussed below.

On the positive side, results of this dissertation found that all participants' narratives held stories of meaningful friendships and relationships with other LGBTQ+ members. While the quantity of described relationships ranged from one or two queer friends to broader groups, all participants disclosed important community with LGBTQ+ folks and the subsequent comfort they felt to explore their identity, fitting in with Brown (2002)'s developmental model states that finding supportive LGBTQ+ community is a critical early step for bisexual identity development. Hogg and colleagues (1995) highlighted the importance of finding a group that one belongs to, and how it is critical to developing an individual's self-concept. Further, Wagamen and colleagues (2016) indicated that supportive community is one of the key facets of queer emerging adulthood identity development. Narratives found reported that positive interactions with other LGBTQ+ people increased personal resilience and personal acceptance, supported by Miller et al., (2022)'s work. Identity negotiation enactment highlights a strategy that folks engage in intensified group contact with other LGBTQ+ members they strengthen both their identity within themselves and within the group (Deaux & Either, 1998), two impacts that were mentioned by multiple participants.

However, on the negative side, participants' narratives indicated that their interactions with LGBTQ+ folks also led to harm and experiences of *bi-phobia*. Further, the *intraminority stress* was more impactful and at times more pervasive compared to harm or stigma from heterosexual folks. The effects of Intraminority stress, or experiences resulting in sexual minority

stress that comes from other LGBTQ+ members, is consistent with Burton and colleagues' (2020) work and supported by narratives in this dissertation. Narratives featured stories of harmful interactions with LGBTQ+ folks, experiences of bi-phobia, and fears of not belonging within LGBTQ+ spaces (discussed further below; Flanders, 2016). Commonly, participants disclosed messaging that they were not queer enough or did not meet established criteria to call themselves LGBTQ+, highlighting intraminority stress experiences of delegitimization and erasure (Meyer, 2003). Resulting experience of twice rejection and experiencing bierasure/biphobia from LGBTQ+ members was additionally supported by Hayfield et al., (2015)'s work. Further research on how to increase safety for bisexuals when connecting with other LGBTQ+ members is an important future direction.

Results found that most participants discussed wanting to find other bisexuals to form community with, but that they had a hard time finding them. Despite bisexuals making up 40% of the entire LGBTQ+ community (SAMHSA, 2020), a challenge to this is pervasive bi-invisibility, or the belief that bisexuality isn't real, the lack of representation of bisexuals, and the lack of a prototypical representation of what a bisexual person looks like (Verni, 2009). Participants indicated that while they longed for bisexual community, they were unable to find it and instead connected more broadly to the LGBTQ+ community. Even individuals who have existing bisexual community, such as the two individuals with bisexual romantic partners, they discussed feeling uncertain how to find and connect with other bisexuals. An additional reason why some participants indicated that they have barriers connecting with other bisexuals relates to identity uncertainty, in line with work by Flanders and colleagues (2016) in which bisexuals often question their ability to call themselves bi-sexual due to internalized biphobia/bierasure.

Fitting with research indicating barriers connecting with LGBTQ+ community, despite all participants directly discussing how important LGBTQ+ community was to them, it was not expected to find that none of the participants indicated they were engaged with LGBTQ+ programing on campus. While literature suggested there would be barriers such as in Hayfield and colleagues' (2015) work highlighting a lack perceived bisexual belonging in LGBTQ+ spaces, it also notes how protective and important LGBTQ+ community is to bisexual identity development and the importance of finding peer support networks in college (Glazzard et al., 2020). These findings highlight the importance of creating inclusive spaces as well as the deep-rooted experience of twice rejection and not feeling 'queer enough' to fit (Flanders et al., 2017) in such as demonstrated through Adam's narrative:

> When I feel like queer people are being hateful, I think they're just like being hateful to you. And I think that's what really hurts the most, because they're not really attacking everything you stand for, and all your community and all these people and stuff like that. They're attacking just like you. So, I think that's what really like hurts the most when you think of it like that, because they're like actively questioning like your identity and like making you feel like less.

Likely, impacts of political structure and removal/renaming of diversity spaces on campus impacted results as well small sample size, the geographical location of participants who were in more rural and religiously salient areas. Further, while research indicated that finding supportive LGBTQ+ community is a critical part of identity development (Hogg et al., 1995; Brown, 2002; Wagamen et al., 2016; Glazzard et al., 2020), many narratives discussed importance of campus community based on areas of interest such as athletics and the arts highlighting a need for future research to explore the impacts of community for bisexuals based

on differing aspects of identity. One such example is Claire's experience within athletics, highlighting how a non-LGBTQ+ community is protective and affirming of her identity:

> Most people on the team like know about (my bisexuality), and are very aware of it, and I know that my women's team and our men's team would like ride or die for me. So, if someone were to make fun of me, or were to help me and find out, like I know that someone, or like a group of people, would say something.

Question 3: How do Bisexual People Experience Minority Stress?

When answering this question two themes emerged as relevant, which will be explained further below. The first theme that emerged when answering this question was that due to pervasive experiences of minority stress, participants made repetitive decisions surrounding identity disclosure. Participants highlighted stories of minority stress that included experiences of distal and proximal stressors through the following components of sexual minority stress theory: stigma, prejudice, concealment, and internalized homophobia (Meyer, 2003; Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Bradford, 2004; Callis, 2013; Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009). All components of minority stress theory were touched on in narratives, supporting the use of the theory with bisexual populations. *Experiences of prejudice* were discussed above in the discussion surrounding twice rejection from other LGBTQ+ individuals and not being accepted into LGBTQ+ communities discussed above (Flanders et al., 2017). Below I highlight the other components of minority stress theory that emerged in the narratives: stigma, concealment, and internalized homophobia.

Narratives strongly indicated that participants are experiencing sexual minority stress on a regular basis and most often are navigating instances related to *stigma*, supporting Meyer's (2003) theoretical work. All participants noted either experiencing or expecting to experience

rejection and discrimination due to their identity with fears of delegitimization/erasure and stereotyping being the most prominent. Participants were often told that their bisexuality is temporary, and they really are either gay or straight (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Bradford, 2004; Callis, 2013; Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009). They additionally were subjected to stereotypes such as being sexualized, being untrustworthy, and just experimenting (Brewster & Moradi, 2010). One such example of experiencing stigma is from Paige's narrative in which she discusses delegitimization/erasure of her bi identity:

> I feel like being in a relationship with a girl kind of makes people think oh, okay, she's actually bi, or people assume that I'm a lesbian now, which I'm just like, okay, whatever. But like, I've definitely heard so many conversations where people will talk about different bi girls and they're like she's not actually gay or stuff like that. And I'm like you don't know that. It upsets me a little bit. I know I've had to deal with that too, and if I knew someone said that about me, it'd make me upset.

While participants all reported levels of sexual minority stress and experiences of biphobia, they did not discuss experiencing health disparities that existing literature suggests.

Concealment was a focus of all narratives as both a way to protect against potential discrimination but additionally due to identity uncertainty and feeling unsure how to label and define their identity (discussed above), both important aspects of concealment in sexual minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003). Participant's levels of outness and use of *concealment* varied from some being out to very few people to others being out to larger groups of people in their lives. None of the participants were out to everyone. Existing literature supports this finding, Flanders et al.'s (2016) research indicates that bisexuals face difficulty when deciding to conceal or disclose identity to people in their lives, especially bisexuals in straight passing relationships.

Further, concealing was shown to be the most common protective strategy that bisexuals use to avoid stigma (Miller & Major, 2000) which was strongly supported within narratives such as within Kendra's narrative:

> I'm still not completely out to everybody like parents and such like that, but we are working to get there…That was very important to the people in our friend group was, you know, just kind of being open and having the space to be open, which I'm very grateful for. But to anyone else it was, you know it was kind of like… Hush! Hush! Don't tell anybody! I'm just trying to avoid difficult conversations. And the feeling of like safeness because, like the people that I've told so far is because I feel like safe,

Other participants opted for a covering approach, which was highlighted as a strategy in Yoshino's (2007) work in which some may opt to engage in activities that may assert identity on a scale, such as going on a date with a same gender partner but not holding hands.

Lastly, *internalized homophobia* was touched on in some narratives but was the least present, or the least overtly discussed, of the four components of minority stress theory. Taylor, for example, discussed initial feelings that her bisexuality was an imperfection and a deviance from what was expected of her, while Paige discussed feeling that her bisexual friend may not understand the bisexual experience do to having a boyfriend as well as both Paige and Isaac struggled with validating their attraction to both men and women. More intentional interview questions and prompts surrounding internalized homophobia/biphobia would have assisted in further exploring these experiences and should be included in future research.

Participants reported varying levels of safety on campus with many of them discussing feeling overall safe, but not disclosing or asserting their bisexual identities everywhere, again supporting Miller and Major's (2000) work on the self-protection of concealment. Multiple

participants discussed Greek Life as being unsafe on campus, which was not discussed in reviewed literature and is an important area to continue research/discussion.

Although there is substantial evidence of concerns of bisexual emerging adults (SAMHSA, 2020), no participants discussed significant emotional distress, substance use concerns, health impacts, or experiences of intimate partner violence. It is possible that these were not present in narratives because no participants experienced these. On the other hand, it is possible that the lack of this content was because specific questions about these were not included in the interview, rather participants were asked open ended questions such as "and how did that impact you?" Interviews about identities are inherently sensitive and vulnerable, and it is additionally likely that the safety to discuss such content may not have been established in the short time of the interview.

The second theme that emerged in answering this question surrounds the influence of intersectionality, or the impact of various identity factors (race, gender, religion, etc.) on participant experiences, and the ways that intersectionality can increase experiences of oppression and stigma (Harper & Swanson, 2019). As to be expected and fitting with Scherrer and colleagues' (2015) work, identity experiences including experiences of minority stress and disclosure experiences were greatly impacted by cultural identities including religious identities and ethnic identities. Differences between experiences based on gender were additionally found and were most prominently discussed through experiences of differing stereotypes while dating as a male identified versus a female identified person (Hayfield et al., 2014, Williams et al., 2020; Zivony et al., 2014; Flanders et al., 2017). These findings are further explored below.

Many participants discussed impacts of cultural identities such as religious and racial/ethnic identities as a central part of their experience and critical in understanding their

bisexual identity. Chun and Singh (2010) note that identity development happens within the context of the sociopolitical macrosystem and are impacted by customs, attitudes, laws, and values of everyone's community. Further, development across identities happens simultaneously and in a non-linear way. Community through different aspects of identity was important to participants, as supported through existing research (Miller et al., 2022). As well as being protective, intersectional identities often increased risk of minority stress due to increased experiences of marginalization. Occasionally conflict exists between identities and due to cultural beliefs, sexual minority stress may be increased due to decreased acceptance or representation of queer identities (Watson, 2016). Most commonly, participants' narratives held conflict between religious and bisexual identities, such as within Isaac's narrative, but were also found in Kendra and Taylor's as well:

> I have my identity that I am, that I hold and cherish with other individuals, you know like with my friends and with my found family and with my workers and people that I'm out to. And then I have my identity with my family who I'm not out to, right? And I think in the situations with my friends and stuff where you know people understand that I'm Arabic. I'm Middle Eastern. I'm Coptic Christian and that I'm bi.

Work by Scherrer and colleagues (2015) fits with this as it highlights the difficulties in disclosing bisexuality to family members due to cultural representations of what it means to be queer or bisexual, which resulted in different strategies employed and differing levels out outness between participants from differing cultural backgrounds.

In line with previous literature, participants disclosed unique gender-based experiences related to identity development and minority stress. Gender based stereotypes were experienced

and noted within narratives such as bisexual women being sexualized (Flanders et al., 2017) found within Paige and Taylor's narratives, with Taylor describing bisexual girls being seen as *Party girls* and Paige noting that bi women are seen as, "only doing it for attention." Another example of gender-based experiences highlighted within narratives was that that bisexual men are often seen as being dishonest through being secretly gay rather than bisexual/ having an increased likelihood of carrying STIs (Williams et al., 2020). An example of this was within Adam's narrative, "I had a previous partner's parents reach out to my parents, worried that, like our son's going to hell. Are they going to get HIV and stuff like that." These experiences increased minority stress, impacted ability to form safe community, and decreased ability to have positive experiences while dating (Flanders et al., 2017).

Strengths and Limitations

Here I highlight several limitations of this dissertation that should be considered when interpreting its findings. While there are limitations, there are additionally strengths which are highlighted below.

Limitations

The first major limitation of this study was the inherent limitations associated with study construction and sampling. First, the use of narrative inquiry resulted in the findings focusing on individual stories rather than generalizable themes or constructs applicable to a broad range of the bisexual population. On sampling, the use of the term bi-umbrella on recruitment material likely contributed to the lack of participants holding an identity label other than bisexual or queer, this left out folks who do not use the bisexual label who may have felt that the study was not for them. While modern definitions of bisexuality include trans and gender diverse identities, some believe the term bisexual or bi-umbrella communicates the use of a binary in the definition

of the identity (only being attracted to cisgender men and cisgender women), potentially making some uncomfortable to participate and identify under that category. Second, utilizing university students as my sample limits experiences and does not capture narratives of bi-umbrella folks who did not attend university.

Another limitation was the timing of the dissertation that occurred as pressures to decrease access to certain campus resources surrounding identity-based spaces likely impacted narratives and presented a challenge to connect with community for recruitment purposes, drastically increasing the difficulty in finding participants. Although identity-based groups, such as QPOC (Queer People of Color), a student group at Auburn University, were contacted to increase representation of diverse identities changes in policy presented a barrier in receiving a response. At the beginning of recruitment, Alabama passed Senate Bill 129 prohibiting DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) spaces on public universities (alison.legislature.state.al.us/files/pdf/SearchableInstruments/2024RS/SB129-enr.pdf). Further, recruitment coincided with the 2024 presidential election which resulted in subsequent threats to DEI on campuses on a national level, as demonstrated through the "Dear Colleague" letter in which the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights gave federally-funded schools 14 days to end race-based programs (Wood, 2025). The sociopolitical climate around identity-based services, and increase of discrimination against LGBTQ+ folks, namely trans and gender diverse individuals, additionally likely impacted students' perceived safety of participating, and is a likely reason for this dissertation's participants predominantly holding cisgender identities, another limitation. My status as a doctoral student and researcher likely impacted comfort that participants had in disclosing vulnerable information potentially limiting the depth of information gathered due to potential assumptions that I am a representative of the university.

Additionally, the decision to sample at two universities to increase number of participants made it additionally difficult to fully explore the impact of place/environment, limiting the ability to situate narratives and derive meaning from the context of the participant. Overall, the small sample size and the limited representation of diverse and intersectional identities limited the interpretations of results based on Quare Theory (Johnson, 2016). This may have been reflective of the predominantly white student bodies of each university; UW Madison's total student body is 56% white according to the 2024-2025 data digest and Auburn University's total student body is 79% white according to the 2024 Office of Institutional Research census. Increasing representation of diverse racial/ethnic, religious, SES, geographical location, ability, gender, and more would enrich narratives highlighted. Recommendations for sampling changes in further research are listed below.

A potential limitation of the coding process was the small collaboration group, i.e., a team with only one other researcher, potentially increasing present bias in coding and analysis of narratives. Further, due to the largely independent nature of dissertations, the nature of qualitative research, as well as the writer engaging in *me-search*, it is expected that my voice and positionality impacted results of the study despite best efforts to minimize this impact through trustworthiness strategies. Some potential impacts of sharing a bisexual identity with participants may include participants assuming that I understand their experiences and thus limiting the depth of information shared. Similarly, I may have also assumed at times that I understood what they were saying and missed out on opportunities to ask to follow up questions. Inherently in open-ended interviews, the researchers own bias in experiences and expectations for results impacts which pieces of information are focused on for follow up questions and which pieces are not. Although using journaling and keeping tabs on my own experiences doing the interviews, it

would be impossible to avoid this completely. Additionally, due to my own use of the bisexual label (compared to other labels) and my identities as a cisgender white woman, folks with other experiences or identities may have been less comfortable to disclose stories that either differ or potentially conflict with my own identity presentation and choices in labeling/defining my identities. Overall, identity experiences are so encompassing and broad that this dissertation could not begin to scratch the surface of many different experiences that bi-umbrella folks have. More work is always needed to continue enriching the literature with depth of information.

Strengths

This study found novel information surrounding bisexual's experiences of emerging adulthood university students, which has been largely lacking in existing work. Further, it highlighted the complexity in bisexual experiences and sought to not categorize it allowing multiple truths to exist at once (such as the simultaneous protective and harmful nature of LGBTQ+ interactions). Although the small sample size of this study is common for narrative inquiry, it may limit generalization or representation of a large population of people. However, a strength of this study is platforming and placing importance on individual stories and life experiences, which is something critical for an invisible identity. It allowed people to discuss what was important to them without pushing a specific narrative or asking too tailored of questions. Additionally, although the small sample size was also predominantly white, it expanded upon experiences of bisexuals who hold diverse religious and cultural identities as well as differing experiences of gender. Participants were able to discuss intersectionality and development of identity beyond bisexuality due to grounding myself in the broad experiences of emerging adulthood and asking open ended questions allowing for participants to expand upon

other identities. Further, while the researcher's bisexual identity may have introduced bias, participants also noted that they felt comfortable due to the shared identity and experiences.

Implications and Recommendations

This dissertation offers numerous implications for research, practice, and education. In this section I discuss considerations for future research including suggestions for recruitment/sampling, increasing representation of diverse identities, and continued topics to explore. Next, I present implications related to practice including work with emerging adults and bi-umbrella folks. Last, I offer considerations for improvements in education such as the need for representative and inclusive spaces as well as the importance of visibility and prioritizing Queer spaces.

Recommendations for Future Research

This dissertation offers multiple directions for future research. First, it is recommended that researchers not rely solely, or strongly, on recruitment through existing LGBTQ+ spaces on campus to connect with bisexual folks. As found in this research, many bisexuals are not connected to LGBTQ+ programing on campus and increasing sociopolitical pressures to minimize diverse spaces on campus, recruitment here will likely become increasingly difficult. Postering across campus and sending recruitment emails to relevant groups and course instructors on campus was the most successful recruitment method utilized in this dissertation. Many participants discussed active engagement in other clubs and campus spaces such as in the arts as well as athletics, as such future researchers may see success from broadening their scope of recruitment to include diverse interests and experiences outside of the LGBTQ+ identity.

Additional research is needed to gather stories of identities that were not present, or minimally present, in this study such as increased inclusion of Queer People of Color, ability

status, gender diversity, SES, experiences of bisexuals who are not in university, as well as increased inclusion of plurisexual folks who do not use the bisexual label, are all in need of further exploration. To accomplish this, I recommend future studies to not centralize LGBTQ+ identities when deciding where to recruit and rather recruit at places that centralize underrepresented identities such as student groups for first generation students, students of color, trans and gender diverse students, etc. Utilizing a Community Based Participatory Research approach would help researchers connect with communities in a meaningful, as it provides a framework to equitably involve community members, researchers and other stakeholders in the research process, placing an importance on their diverse contributions (e.g., Collins, et al., 2019). In this perspective, building trust does not focus on formal meetings and procedures, instead centers consistently "showing up" for the community and in support of their activities. For example, a researcher could attend, or volunteer to help facilitate, LGBTQ+ group events. Additionally, it would be beneficial to recruit at basic places near campus such as restaurants and other social spots to increase visibility of study to potential participants. It may also be helpful to have or create a website that offers information about the researcher as well as provides information about the study and its goals, to increase safety and legitimacy for potential participants.

Intersectionality and the inclusion of multiple identities is critical in future work with bi-umbrella students, as it is undeniable that intersectionality was meaningful in participants' stories of their bisexuality. Participants highlighted the importance of continuing to explore the intersections of bisexuality, religion, culture, and gender. Further, future studies should not exclusively focus on representing as many intersecting identities as possible but additionally should prioritize a depth of results for specific intersections such as diving into the specific

stories of Black bisexuals or trans bisexuals. It is possible that the high number of white participants in this study reflected the study body of the two predominantly white universities, so I recommend future researchers consider how to reach students from universities with more diverse students, for example recruiting at HBCU or Hispanic-serving institutions.

Finally, I revisit relevant topics highlighted in discussions above that should continue to be explored in future research. Identity development for bisexuals should continue to be explored in relationship to bisexual identity models, emerging adulthood models, and queer emerging adulthood models. Models (e.g., Hall et al., 2021) often do not include the deferment period between self-identification and coming out, an area that is important to further explore in future research. Additionally, future work should move away from models with strict steps in identity development that are too rigid strict to work for a complex group of people and should work to use a puzzle like model with flexibility in steps and timing such as explored in Harper & Swanson's Nonsequential Task Model (2019). In relation to emerging adulthood for bisexuality, future work should explore Arnett's (2000) theory of emerging adulthood's feature: feeling in between, as the tension between feeling like an adolescent and not yet feeling like an adult was not discussed in these narratives. Similarly, for Wagamen et al.'s (2016) work on facets of queer emerging adulthood, future research should explore the facets close relationships/family kith and strength to engage with heteronormative and cisnormative contexts with bisexual emerging adults as they were not emphasized in the present narratives.

Second, community formation for bisexuals should continue to be explored in relation to with other LGBTQ+ folks, other bisexuals, and with other identity groups. Current research highlights the complexity of bisexuals forming community with other LGBTQ+ and other bisexual folks (e.g., Glazzard et al., 2020; Flanders, 2016; Meyer, 2003), it lacks conversations

on how to increase safety and acceptance in forming the community. Further, while research indicated that finding supportive LGBTQ+ community is a critical part of identity development (Hogg et al., 1995; Brown, 2002; Wagamen et al., 2016; Glazzard et al., 2020), many narratives discussed importance of campus community based on areas of interest such as athletics and the arts highlighting a need for future research to explore the impacts of community for bisexuals based on differing aspects of identity. Experiences of sexual minority stress, namely internalized homophobia and biphobia (Meyer, 2003) were discussed in this study, but not expanded upon, and should be explored directly with more specific questions about minority stress in future projects.

Implications for Practice

Even though participants did not discuss therapeutic experiences directly, results from participants' narratives highlight several important areas of implications for clinical practice. Emerging adulthood presents a time of change and challenge, and is marked by multiple aspects of identity development, instability, and transition. The need for social support and connection was present across stories of participants and social support has been identified as an important protective factor in mental health intervention is (Lane, 2014). Kendra's experience with LGBTQ+ affirming community highlights the importance of social support and connections,

> It felt really very freeing to at the very least be open with the people I love and kind of have the life that I want to live here. It truly was like a weight off my shoulders like it just it felt so nice to be able to come home and not have to like, mask or like be tired from masking and being able to talk about these things and not have to like, you know, kind of walk on eggshells. And to, you know, be like, okay, I say the one wrong thing are they

going to be like, oh my gosh! It's like really weird, like I don't support that lifestyle. So, it's been so nice. I have felt completely free.

One important avenue for practice with bisexual clients that can build or improve social connection while respecting intersectional identities of emerging adulthood may be group intervention. As an example, Tuthill (2023) developed a group therapy intervention for LGBTQ+ young adults focused on building connection and reducing isolation. This intervention arose from bisexual students' common experiences of disconnection from the LGBTQ+ community, and the desire to form healthy supportive connection. This intervention included six sessions of group therapy with different focuses of exploring experiences building community for each session. Session 1 focused on orientation to the group including guidelines confidentiality, group expectations, and an overview of what the group will focus on. Session 2 explored what it means to be connected and what contributes to connection. Session 3 focused on exploring barriers to connection as well as brainstorming solutions. In Session 4, participants discussed experiences navigating unwelcoming spaces. Session 5 consisted of exploring the meaning of community to and healthy relationships. Finally, Session 6 served as a wrap up in which they discussed their group experiences. This group intervention had promising results in a pilot test with a sample of eight participants: large reductions in depression symptoms and loneliness (Cohen's *ds* = 1.23, .99, respectively), and medium sized strengthening in sense of LGBTQ+ community and social isolation (*ds* = .59, .69, respectively).

While this intervention was encouraging for assisting LGBTQ+ young adults form community, none of the eight participants identified as bisexual, highlighting an important area of continued exploration to ensure models like this work with bisexual clients. Based on the narratives of students in this study, I can suggest several important factors that should be

considered when adapting this program (or others like it) to meet the needs of bisexual students. The complexity of bisexual identity development could be expanded in several sessions such as dealing with potential barriers to connection or navigating unwelcome spaces. The impacts of twice rejection and the formation of LGBTQ+ community are important to weave throughout all sessions to meet the needs of bisexuals in a psychoeducational group intervention. Another important consideration for running this kind of intervention is understanding that bisexuals often develop their sexual identity later than other identities (e.g., Calzo et al., 2011), which may impact readiness to be out to large groups of people and thus clinicians should have sensitivity about who to include and how to advertise these groups.

In general finding community is a critical aspect for clinical work with emerging adulthood and often important for broader LGBTQ+ identities, but clinicians working with bisexuals must understand the complexity of involvement with LGBTQ+ community (Watson et al., 2018). Due to experiences of twice rejection, clients may not feel safe or comfortable with LGBTQ+ groups. It is important for clinicians to be aware of the needs and concerns of their individual clients as well as opportunities (or lack thereof) for affirming, and representative LGBTQ+ programs/ supports before encouraging community engagement (e.g., Boswick & Hequembourg, 2014).

In narratives surrounding navigating identity development, many participants disclosed navigating internal conflict surrounding their bisexual identity which manifested as either questioning their bisexual identity or reluctance accepting the identity. For example, Taylor indicated having difficulty accepting bisexual identity due to internalized stigma that she held:

> In my home life it was always just the assumption of straight being the norm and just never really any kind of openness…and being told… like the man that you

> marry or whatever from a very young age. And so, to me that was just what was expected which I think is part of what contributed to grappling with feeling imperfect… I felt like a deviation from what they would expect.

There are interventions that may provide a helpful avenue in which individuals can cope with and reduce internalized stigma based on Meyer's (2003) model of sexual minority stress. Although adapting interventions designed originally for other groups can be useful, so are interventions that have been developed for and tested with bisexual adults. One example is RISE (Releasing Internalized Stigma for Empowerment; Lin & Isreal, 2012), which offers a set of interventions designed to reduce internalized stigma for LGBTQ+ populations, as well as has been tested for effectiveness with specifically bisexual adults (Lin et al., 2019). Narratives from this dissertation show that bisexuals are commonly exposed to a variety of negative stereotypes and messages about bisexuality, emphasizing the importance of a targeted intervention such as RISE. Further, many participants discussed a desire to form community and receive support from other bisexuals, supporting this interventions use of supportive messaging both from and to other bisexuals.

Specifically in the RISE model (Lin & Isreal, 2012), four modules are utilized to identify and challenge negative believes and stereotypes by exposure to affirming media as well as offering support to a hypothetical individual experiencing minority stress. Module 1 has participants gauging the validity of bisexual stereotypes and then presents evidence that challenged the stereotypes. Module 2 includes reading a list of negative messages bisexuals commonly receive followed by a discussion of which messages they themselves had received and which ones they had been able to reject. Module 3 requires participants to watch a video of a bisexual person discussing their own journey with navigating bisexual sigma, and how they

subsequently came to accept themselves, as well as writing a supportive letter to a hypothetical person who was struggling to accept their bisexuality. The last module (Module 4) has participants read positive statements about being bisexual as well as watch a slideshow with similar positive statements paired with upbeat music. This model is promising for working with bisexual students; a study with 641 bisexual adults (Lin et al., 2019), the RISE intervention has shown a small reduction of internalized stigma (Cohen's d = .24). Including supportive messaging from other LGBTQ+ identities about bisexuality may increase impact of this intervention, as many narratives disclosed that negatively held beliefs about bisexuals from other LGBTQ+ individuals as strongly impactful.

In addition to interventions, training programs for clinicians working with bisexual clients should include several important factors such as education on the experiences of LGBTQ+ folks, plurisexual folks, and having familiarity with Sexual Minority Stress and biphobic/bierasure experiences (Chaudoir et al., 2017). Consistent experiences of bi-phobia and bi-negativity experienced by participants emphasizes the need for clinicians to examine their own positionality and any internalized binegativity that they may hold to ensure they do not inadvertently cause harm (Mohr et al., 2013). It is important that clinicians have an understanding of the diversity associated with the bisexual identity as found in the varying experiences and identity development trajectories found in narratives. It is critical that they do not unintentionally perpetuate biphobia through harmfully attempting to or inadvertently pushing clients to define or categorize their identities, as definitions and experiences of what it means to be bisexual were found to vary between participants. As found in the experiences of intersecting identities and impact on narratives, there also be an awareness of the impact of intersectionality on clients' experiences as well as the impact of holding multiple marginalized identities and the

increased risk of harm (Chang et al., 2017). Clinicians should additionally be aware of current legislation, institutional discrimination, and sociopolitical factors that impact Queer folks and their experiences.

To train clinicians working with clients who experience sexual minority stress, programs could utilize a model that employs sexual minority stress theory to inform interventions within practica or diversity courses. One example of this is the Adaption Model for therapeutic interventions with LGBTQ+ individuals (Pachankis et al., 2023). This model includes six principles, as well as a guide to conceptualizing sexual minority stress cases called the STAIRCaSE model. Principle 1 highlights how symptoms of depression and anxiety are normal responses to minority stress. Principle 2 acknowledges how early and ongoing minority stress can result in clients internalizing powerful and negative lessons about themselves. Principle 3 seeks to empower queer clients in coping with unfair consequences of minority stress. Principle 4 helps clients build supportive and authentic relationships. Principle 5 seeks to highlight clients' individual and unique strengths. Principle 6 focuses on understanding intersectional identities as both source of stress and resilience.

The STAIRCaSE model seeks to highlight different aspects of psychological experiences that are impacted by minority stress to assist clinicians in conceptualizing their own client's unique experience. The STAIRCaSE model includes exploring Situation, Thought, Affect, Intention, Response, Consequence, and Self-Evaluation (Pachankis et al., 2023). *Situation* refers to the need to understand the context in which the client's experience is surrounded by, which is emphasized by the need to assess for contexts marked by minority stress- something experienced commonly by LGBTQ+ clients and highlighted within narratives in this dissertation. *Thought* refers to cognitive, or thought, process (e.g. obsessions, fears, ruminations) and content (e.g.

internalized stigma, hopelessness), and how experiences of minority stress heavily impact cognitive experiences often leading clients to experience internalized shame also experienced by participants in this study such as within Taylor's narrative. *Affect* refers to emotions, with queer clients who experience pervasive minority stress often experiencing frequent invalidation of emotional experiences or the need to suppress emotional reactions, something experienced by all participants as they discuss the times in which they must conceal their bi identities. The *intention* aspect refers to motivations, wants, needs, and desires which minority stress and the need to conceal identity vastly limiting individuals' ability to engage with their motivations due to safety constraints. *Response* refers to client's behaviors, with minority stress often causing folks to cope using maladaptive behaviors such as self-harm and substance use, experiences not explored within this dissertation but important to continue researching. *Consequences* refer to the outcomes of client's behaviors and responses, often with sexual minority stress causing individuals to engage in avoidant behaviors in an effort to increase safety and comfort, something discussed in narratives when participants were asked about concealment and outness strategies that improved safety but limited access to forming community. Finally, *self-evaluation* refers to how the client views themselves, with minority stress sometimes creating feelings of shame, decreased belief in self-efficacy due to avoidant behaviors, and potential internalized stigma (Pachankis et al., 2023).

Implications for University Programming

Participants' narratives indicated multiple ways in which they felt that their university's programing did not meet their needs, as well as offered suggestions for improvement. The first step to creating affirming and effective spaces/programing on campus is to listen to student voices and needs. A main barrier for participants in not joining LGBTQ+ spaces was feeling that

bisexual identities were not represented and spaces didn't feel inclusive. Taylor indicated fearing that the spaces were not meant for her, "I would say I think it kind of comes back to some of that point about thinking about what spaces are meant for me. I would attend events and would happily support, but I think in terms of joining the kind of core group or being a part of the roster was something that I haven't necessarily done very much. And I think it comes back to that, is this a space that is meant for me? Targeting and increasing representation for specific identities within the LGBTQ+ community would increase the likelihood that she would utilize services/programs:

> I feel like something that maybe would make it feel more inviting for me would be just more examples of different kinds of queer identities across the spectrum of what they can look like because I feel like I just didn't see a lot of other people in those spaces that had my same experience.

Programming and support services should clearly indicate different Queer identities by name, not simply rely on using the word *Queer* or *LGBTQ+*. Narratives indicated uncertainty if LGBTQ+ spaces were for them, and listing specifically the identities that are welcome by name would emphasize their ability to engage in that programming. Another option is to utilize imagery to communicate welcoming different identities such as including different flags representing different identities within the LGBTQ+ community. Further, targeting the unique needs and experiences of different identities would increase not only representation and inclusivity, but would help meet the unique needs of different LGBTQ+ groups. For example, queer spaces on campus could hold different identity specific events around fostering community and educating on common experiences of that identity/ providing resources. The importance of bi-specific programming was indicated in Adam's narrative; "If they had program specific to our

community, it would probably be a lot easier to connect with others."

Inclusivity and representation extend beyond LGBTQ+/bi-umbrella identities and including spaces that are collaborative and intersectional in nature. This was emphasized by Adam, who mentioned:

> I think affinity spaces work best when they're collaborative. It's hard to have an affinity space that's like locked in a corner. And I think some schools potentially are doing more harm by having, like a lot of their marginalized groups locked away than have it more collaborative and invite in. And I think spaces that are like more cultural and diversity centers are excelling within programmatic and like retention pieces than those who break apart each section and like lock them away in their specific corner, because you can be queer and Persian, you can be queer and black, you can be queer and Jewish like so and so, and I think it really is beneficial when you have experiences from all points of view.

Universities should offer a mix of services and programs that are targeted to specific identities as well as include ones that incorporate broader identity groups. Program developers and relevant campus leaders should communicate with different queer groups on campus to gather information surrounding student needs in this area that target intersections of Queer identity such as religion, race/ethnicity, cultural groups, gender identities, and more as well as including other aspects of student identities such as Queer or bisexual athletes or artists or specific majors. For example, UW Madison has Badger Pride for LGBTQ+ athletes, Multicultural Club Q for queer BIPOC folks, Out for Business for LGBTQ+ students in the business school, and more. Universities should also create larger programming in which different identity groups can collaborate, communicate, and form community such as doing a collaborative event with an

LGBTQ+ group as well as a group for students of color. As Adam put it, locking marginalized groups away in a corner often does more harm than good.

Isaac highlighted the need for programming to be visible to students and to ensure that they are properly marketed and communicated; "There are a couple of LGBTQ+ groups that are attended, but not necessarily anything like huge. It's not necessarily broadcast to the university population to attend, right? So, you kind of have to find it." Similarly, Adam discussed having a hard time finding Queer spaces on campus and felt that it was not prioritized:

> The idea of like a place, or like a "community" [here] that I'd be really interested and find in one day, but they're under a rock… If you go into the [campus building], where [the LGBTQ+ campus space] is, it's a closet. It's like literally a supply closet.

Adam went on to discuss how recent political pressure and subsequent threats to diverse spaces on campus further causes him to feel unvalued and not affirmed:

> And unfortunately, as it is, I haven't really got the experience to see that diversity is really valued and respected here, that we are given spaces like that and especially with the new legislation that will come into effect… I worry that next semester probably won't see, or if it will continue, it would be under a different name, of course. But how is that affirmant?

Isaac additionally spoke to experiences of his university's rules and guidelines impacting the ability to form impactful groups "A lot of these school-sanctioned groups and events always kind of carried…rules you have to follow that…sometimes would prevent groups from really kind of connecting in that way. The clubs would have to get really creative to do things that are really connective." Universities should clearly demonstrate their value and commitment to

creating safe, supportive, and affirming spaces for bi-umbrella and other Queer identities. A welcoming and accessible physical space on campus is important to create feelings of community and belonging. Programming and supports should be clearly communicated and marketed to students, rather than students needing to search and find the information themselves. Further, university policy surrounding programing and any changes to programming should be clearly and accessibly communicated to students.

Current sociopolitical influences present increased barriers for universities, community members, staff, and students to create programs and spaces on campus as suggested by the narratives of students in this study. This makes advocating for their inclusion and protection increasingly important. Although students in clinical training programs have varied experiences with advocacy, there are models to guide advocacy efforts. For example, from a clinician perspective, advocacy can be done on both a client/social justice level and on a professional level (Bayne et al., 2024). On a client/social justice level, clinicians become aware of how sociopolitical power structures impact the mental health/wellbeing of clients and communities and seeks to minimize or eliminate power structures or barriers through empowering marginalized voices and supporting them in becoming self-advocates (Bayne et al., 2024). On a professional level, counselors seek to utilize their skills to advance the profession through education and emphasizing the importance of meeting the needs of individuals and communities, for example challenging federal/state laws that make it difficult for folks to get access to mental health services (Bayne et al., 2024). For these efforts to be successful, those with privileged voices must emphasize how critical it is for students that we continue to prioritize and protect LGBTQ+ supports on campuses and utilize research that highlights and platforms student's voices and experiences.

Summary

This study platformed bisexual college student's stories to further understand the bisexual identity development experiences of emerging adult college students. The results illuminated bisexual voices, which are often not included with LGBTQ+ research, to understand identity development, impacts of sexual minority stress, and experiences forming community. Findings suggested the importance of universities having increased availability of targeted supports for bisexual students as they navigate the emerging adult period of development, as well as the importance of continued advocacy efforts. The narratives suggested several recommendations for future qualitative research studies with bisexual students, such as further work exploring bisexuality with intersecting identities or flexible nonsequential models of bisexual identity development. Important clinical implications emerging from these narratives include the importance of developing interventions specifically for bisexual students or for larger LGBTQ+ people that include their unique experiences, to reduce or prevent commonly experienced difficulties, such as the experience of internalized stigma and barriers in finding social connections within the LGBTQ+ community and other spaces.

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Appendices available on request.