

Utah State University

DigitalCommons@USU

---

All Graduate Theses and Dissertations, Fall  
2023 to Present

Graduate Studies

---

12-2023

## Beyond 'Bisexual': Toward a New Conceptualization of Bi+ Experience

Brook Hutchinson

Utah State University, [brook.hutchinson@usu.edu](mailto:brook.hutchinson@usu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd2023>

 Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Hutchinson, Brook, "Beyond 'Bisexual': Toward a New Conceptualization of Bi+ Experience" (2023). *All Graduate Theses and Dissertations, Fall 2023 to Present*. 28.

<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd2023/28>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Theses and Dissertations, Fall 2023 to Present by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@usu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@usu.edu).



BEYOND 'BISEXUAL': TOWARD A NEW CONCEPTUALIZATION  
OF BI+ EXPERIENCE

by

Brook Hutchinson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Sociology

Approved:

---

Christy Glass, Ph.D.  
Major Professor

---

Guadalupe Marquez-Velarde, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Jennifer Givens, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

D. Richard Cutler, Ph.D.  
Vice Provost of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah

2023

Copyright © Brook Hutchinson 2023

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

Beyond 'Bisexual': Toward a New Conceptualization of Bi+ Experience

by

Brook Hutchinson, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2023

Major Professor: Dr. Christy Glass  
Department: Sociology

Scholars have begun to explore sexual identity development and the impact of sexuality binaries on well-being for bi+ individuals. However, extant research has not yet fully analyzed the experiences of bi+ individuals in heterosexual relationships, particularly those who have never experienced a non-heterosexual relationship. This community remains relatively invisible in research and theory on sexuality and within LGBTQIA+ communities. The unique experiences of these individuals can provide valuable insights to the field of bi+ research by furthering our understanding of sexual identity development and queer inclusion and by underscoring the need for more inclusive research, policy, and practice. The current study seeks to fill this gap through a case study of bi+ individuals in Utah. Relying on in-depth interviews with sixteen bi+ identified individuals, this study explores the experiences of bi+ individuals engaged in heterosexual relationships, including how these individuals define their sexuality and negotiate their identity. To develop a framework for this study, I also critique research methodologies that exclude this population. Key findings include the unique pathways to

identity development, a limited sense of belonging within queer heterosexual spaces, and the resulting double bind of sexuality invalidity and lack of place within queer communities. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of this project for more inclusive research on bi+ identities and more inclusive practices within queer communities.

(86 pages)

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

## Beyond 'Bisexual': Toward a New Conceptualization of Bi+ Experience

Brook Hutchinson

Scholars have begun to explore sexual identity development and the impact of sexuality binaries on well-being for bi+ individuals. However, extant research has not yet fully analyzed the experiences of bi+ individuals in heterosexual relationships, particularly those who have never experienced a non-heterosexual relationship. This community remains relatively invisible in research and theory on sexuality and within LGBTQIA+ communities. The unique experiences of these individuals can provide valuable insights to the field of bi+ research by furthering our understanding of sexual identity development and queer inclusion and by underscoring the need for more inclusive research, policy, and practice. The current study seeks to fill this gap through a case study of bi+ individuals in Utah. Relying on in-depth interviews with sixteen bi+ identified individuals, this study explores the experiences of bi+ individuals engaged in heterosexual relationships, including how these individuals define their sexuality and negotiate their identity. To develop a framework for this study, I also critique research methodologies that exclude this population. Key findings include the unique pathways to identity development, a limited sense of belonging within queer heterosexual spaces, and the resulting double bind of sexuality invalidity and lack of place within queer communities. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of this project for more

inclusive research on bi+ identities and more inclusive practices within queer communities.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research to all my participants for sharing their stories with me. Your experiences are not only valuable in furthering understanding of bi+ sexualities, but they are a source of validation for others. I hope your stories will encourage others in similar situations to find confidence in their sexualities, as well as show them that there are caring bi+ communities out there, even when they may feel out of place within LGBTQIA+ spaces.

Brook Hutchinson



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to start by thanking Dr. Christy Glass, who was both my graduate major professor and my mentor throughout my undergraduate degree. Not only did you support me in all areas of my degree, but you encouraged me to continue my passion for sociology, even when I struggled to find my place within academia. Thank you for everything!

To the rest of my committee, Dr. Guadalupe Marquez-Velarde and Dr. Jennifer Givens, thank you for your support and guidance throughout my time in the sociology department. In addition to lessons in sociology, you have furthered my passion for social justice, and I will carry these lessons through the rest of my career and life.

To Beth Bennett, thank you for your enduring support over the last few years. As both a mentor and friend, you encouraged me to have confidence in my academic abilities, and I cherish the memories we have together.

Finally, to Morgan, if it weren't for you, I would have never been able to complete my degree. Thank you for all your support and encouragement throughout this process, and thank you for showing your love in every step of the way.

Brook Hutchinson

## CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	iii
Public Abstract.....	v
Dedication.....	vii
Acknowledgments .....	viii
List of Tables .....	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	5
Identity and Vulnerability .....	5
Identity Development.....	6
Exclusion from Community.....	9
Experiences of Harassment.....	10
Current Methodological Approaches to the Study of Bisexuality .....	13
Outdated Definitions and Inclusion Criteria .....	14
Toward More Inclusive Bi+ Metrics.....	17
Conceptual Framework.....	20
Sexuality binary .....	20
Fluidity of Sexuality .....	21
Chapter 3: Methods and Analysis.....	23
Study Context.....	23
Methods Overview .....	23
Participants and Recruitment .....	24
Data Collection .....	28
Data Analysis .....	29
Positionality Statement .....	29
Ethics and Funding .....	31
Chapter 4: Findings.....	32

Identity Formation .....	32
Definitional Dilemmas: Sexual Identity Formation and Label Selection .....	33
Making Sense of Sexual Identity .....	38
Liminal Existence: Living in the In-Between .....	40
Discrimination in Queer Spaces.....	41
Discrimination in Heterosexual Spaces .....	44
Self-imposed Exclusion .....	46
Self-Protective Measures .....	47
‘Not Queer Enough’ .....	47
Straight-Passing .....	49
Double-Bind.....	51
Self-Exclusion from Community Resources and Support.....	52
Pressure to Defend .....	54
Chapter 5: Conclusion .....	56
Limitations .....	61
Future Research .....	61
Concluding Remarks.....	62
References.....	63

LIST OF TABLES

Page

Table 1. Summary Characteristics of Interview Respondents.....26

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Extant research has well-documented experiences of discrimination within LGBTQIA+ communities (e.g., Ivanovic, 2023) and the resulting mental and physical well-being outcomes (e.g., Kassing et al., 2021; Sutter & Perrin, 2016; Higa et al., 2014), particularly among gay men and lesbian women (van Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2018). Although they are steadily increasing (Persson & Pfaus, 2015), research examining the specific experiences of bisexual and other nonmonosexual groups is less common (Mclean, 2008). Even within bi+ specific research, the experiences of those who have not participated in non-heterosexual relationships remain understudied.

The current study seeks to expand research on bi+ individuals and communities by examining the experiences of bi+ individuals in committed heterosexual relationships who have never participated in what they would consider as a queer relationship (Bi+HNQ)<sup>1</sup>. This demographic was selected in order to study processes of identity development and engagement with queer and heterosexual communities for bi+ individuals, as their particular relationship experiences will yield valuable insights. Not only have these individuals never participated in queer relationships, but the committed nature of their current heterosexual relationships precludes participation in other queer relationships. Thus, sexual identity development and sense of belonging in queer communities may differ from other, more well-studied bi+ populations.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter, bi+ individuals in committed heterosexual relationships who have never participated in a queer relationship will be referred to as Bi+HNQ.

By centering the perspectives of bi+ identified individuals who have been excluded by most research on sexuality and sexual identity development, the current study makes the case for more inclusive research designs and sample eligibility criteria. Nearly all participants would either have been disqualified in most bi+ studies, or they would have self-selected out due to confusing identity labels and salient connotations of sexual behavior with sexual identity. Not only are the particular experiences of Bi+HNQ individuals an example of what is missed from non-inclusive criteria, but they highlight areas where queer communities can work to expand participation by and engagement with bi+ individuals.

The current study begins with a review of extant bi+ literature before moving to a critique of past and present research methodologies. Afterwards, conceptual frameworks and methods will be discussed. The findings are organized into three thematic sections: (1) identity development, (2) ‘existing in the in-between’ of queer and heterosexual spaces, and (3) ‘double binds’ created from this liminal existence. However, it is important to begin with a clear review of terminology, as much of the current study focuses on definitional differences in sexual identity development and label usage among queer individuals. The following sexual identities<sup>2</sup>, as defined by the Human Rights Campaign (2023), will be referred to throughout the paper:

- Asexual: Often called “ace” for short, asexual refers to a complete or partial lack of sexual attraction or lack of interest in sexual activity with others. Asexuality

---

<sup>2</sup> These terms are not necessarily agreed upon by all members of the queer community, as sexual identification is impacted by a multitude of cultural attitudes and situational factors (Manley et al., 2015), and those that choose to identify with certain labels over others may define their sexualities differently. These distinctions will be discussed later in the manuscript.

exists on a spectrum, and asexual people may experience no, little or conditional sexual attraction.

- Bisexual: Describes a person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one gender, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.
- Pansexual: Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

As an umbrella term, bi+ will be used throughout the study to refer to “anyone who is attracted romantically and/or sexually to more than one gender” (Bisexual Resource Center, 2022). This term is often used interchangeably with “nonmonosexual” and “plurisexual”. This term includes sexualities such as bisexual, pansexual, omnisexual, fluid, and polysexual<sup>3</sup>. Additional terms that will be mentioned include ‘queer’, and ‘queer relationship’:

- Queer<sup>4</sup>: Is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities (HRC, 2023).

---

<sup>3</sup> This term is not to be confused with polyamorous, which is defined as, “consensually being in/open to multiple loving relationships at the same time,” (LGBTQIA Resource Center, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> ‘Queer’ has historically been used as a slur to oppress sexual minorities, but it has more recently been reclaimed by many members of the LGBTQIA+ community, particularly younger individuals (HRC, 2023). While this manuscript will often use this term in reference to the umbrella sexuality and queer community broadly, it is important to recognize that not all members of the LGBTQIA+ community associate with it.

- Queer relationship: Describes a romantic or sexual relationship in which one or more partners identifies with a queer identity. It is important to note that the current study uses a self-identifying metric of participation in a queer relationship. Even though all participants identified as members of the LGBTQIA+ community, they did not describe themselves as having experienced a queer relationship. As such, they will be hereafter referred to as not having experienced queer relationships, either romantic or sexual.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Sexual identity development can impact an individuals' interaction with queer and heterosexual communities, as well as the resulting experiences of bias and harassment in those spheres. Most research does not document the specific experiences of Bi+HNQ individuals, raising questions about whether the experiences of this population parallel or depart from other bi+ individuals. The following literature review will cover bi+ research in the areas of identity development, exclusion from queer and heterosexual spaces, and experiences of harassment, noting gaps in our understanding of the challenges and experiences of Bi+HNQ individuals.

#### **Identity and Vulnerability**

Queer individuals face challenges related to identity development (e.g., Craig & McInroy, 2014; Dahl & Galliher, 2012), exclusion from heteronormative spaces (Valentine, 1993), experiences of discrimination and violence (e.g., Seelman et al., 2017), gender and sexual policing (e.g., Payne & Smith, 2016), and multiple forms of bias and harassment (e.g., McCabe et al., 2013). Like other sexual minorities, bi+ individuals are at an increased risk for bias and abuse, including sexual assault, harassment (Flanders et al., 2019a; Hequembourg et al., 2013) and discrimination (Smout & Benotsch, 2022; Lim & Hewitt, 2018). However, most previous research tends to aggregate the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals or to focus solely on lesbian and gay identities (van Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2018; Mclean, 2008). Focusing on the particular vulnerabilities

experienced by bi+ individuals furthers understanding of these topics by specifying the particular challenges this group faces.

### ***Identity Development***

Sexual identity development is a significant predictor of well-being within LGBTQIA+ populations. For queer individuals, acceptance of and positive connection to sexual identity are associated with the presence of supportive communities (Kertzner et al., 2010), positive mental and physical health (D'Augelli, 2002; Rosario et al., 2011), self-compassion and ability to make future career decisions (Jang et al., 2020), and stronger feelings of 'purpose of life' and life satisfaction (Collict et al., 2021). For bi+ folk in particular, social support networks are more likely among bi+ individuals that have a positive connection to their sexual identity (Jang et al., 2020).

Previous research has analyzed the development of a queer identity among LGBTQIA+ folk, often highlighting such milestones as recognition of attraction, label identification, coming-out, sexual activity aligned with the sexual identity, and group identification processes (Hall et al., 2021; Gonsiorek, 1995; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Moving beyond the milestone approach, other literature has examined the ways in which identity development may be more of an iterative process, as illustrated by Renn and Bilodeau's (2005) analysis of LGBTQIA+ student leaders. In this study, the authors concluded that connection to a sexual identity both presupposes engagement with queer communities while simultaneously being produced and modified by that engagement (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). For example, sexual identity formed as queer students interacted with their queer peers and expanded their understanding of both themselves

and others within the community. Additional factors affecting identity development include social support, experiences of stress (Rosario et al., 2008), and the presence of a conservative religious environment (Mahaffy, 1996; Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Dahl & Galliher, 2009).

Among bi+ folk, different developmental processes may be at work. For example, Harper and Swanson (2019) found that development can be more of an iterative process that varies throughout an individual's lifetime, and attraction can differ depending on others' gender identities or not at all. Additionally, identity label usage can be impacted by an individual's association with queer communities (Harper & Swanson, 2019) or in reference to the gender of their current partner (Brown, 2002; Weinberg et al., 1995). Other research has found that bi+ individuals may be less confident and accepting of their sexual identity, less likely to be out amongst their peers (Rosario et al., 2006), and more likely to avoid identifying as bisexual because of past sexual victimization (Morris & Balsam, 2003).

While positive sexual identity development is associated with positive well-being outcomes for bi+ individuals, very few studies have analyzed the particular experiences of bi+ individuals in heterosexual relationships. Thus, little is known regarding the pathways and outcomes related to a positive sexual identity among this population. Considering that individuals in the current study have never participated in what they would consider as a queer relationship, it is likely that they have not formed a positive sexual identity and may not benefit from the resources and supports associated with it. In particular, previous research neglects the confusion surrounding labels themselves. For queer individuals struggling with identity labels, the pathways to identity development

may differ in significant ways. Lesbians who use he/him pronouns serve as an illustrative example. The typical definition of lesbian is a woman who is attracted only to other women, so the idea of a he/him lesbian contradicts this narrative. Current discourse around this topic is contested, with differing opinions within the queer community. Some argue the concept is transphobic because it implies trans men are still women who are attracted to other women. However, others may express the use of both he/him pronouns and lesbian identities as inclusive of individuals outside of gender and sexuality binaries (Trinidad, n.d.). This example highlights at least one area where sexuality labels are contested, impacting the ways in which queer folk may view themselves and the labels they use. Similarly, typical definitions of gay and lesbian discourage use of these labels and encourage the use of a bi+ identity for nonbinary individuals because, unlike “gay” and “lesbian”, bi+ does not imply a requisite gender identity.

Past and present relationship experiences may also impact sexual identity development. For participants in this study, none have participated in what they would consider a queer relationship. As such, their connection to identity development differs from what is typically seen in bi+ research. In addition, all participants were in long-term committed relationships at the time of the interview. Since participants have not previously and do not anticipate participating in a non-heterosexual relationship in the future, the likelihood of questioning their sexual identity is higher than for other queer individuals.

### *Exclusion from Community*

Previous studies have documented the bias and harassment experienced by queer folk who are often excluded from heteronormative spaces (Weintrob et al., 2021; Steck & Perry, 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020). However, bi+ individuals experience a double bind in which they are excluded from both heteronormative *and* queer spaces. Ault (1996), through a study of bisexual women in the 1990s, found that bisexual individuals experience stigmatization from both heterosexual and lesbian communities, as their sexuality disrupts binary assumptions of sexual orientation and gender. Similarly, Crowley (2010) found that lesbian individuals' distrust and negative attitudes toward bisexual women were common in online LGBTQIA+ spaces. In another study, Callis (2013) found that "bisexuals often felt that they were treated as 'second class citizens' by gays and lesbians. They also did not feel as though they were completely accepted by the straight community, leaving them 'betwixt and between'" (Callis, 2013). Weier (2020) reported that bisexual participants experienced biphobia, such as being derogatorily called 'fence-sitters' for not choosing a side, not feeling included in queer spaces, or others assuming that they were gay/lesbian or straight, based on the gender identity of their current partner. Additionally, Welzer-Lang (2008) highlighted the biphobia present in French LGBTQIA+ conferences, where 45% of respondents expressed criticism of bisexuality and/or bisexuals. In Australia, McLean (2008) discussed the views of bisexuals themselves, finding that a third of respondents did not interact with the LGBTQIA+ community due to perceptions of biphobia.

Regardless of partner gender, bisexuals and other nonmonosexuals experience stigmatization from heterosexual communities as well. A survey conducted by Mulick

and Wright (2002) showed that, in comparison to queer participants, heterosexual participants scored higher on the Biphobia scale, likely due to homophobic and conservative beliefs. However, this study affirmed what other research has shown: like heterosexual participants, queer participants stigmatize bisexual individuals, resulting in “double discrimination” for many nonmonosexuals (Mulick & Wright, 2002).

As the literature suggests, lack of inclusion and experiences of discrimination in both queer and heterosexual spaces is prevalent for bi+ individuals. This exclusion has led many bisexuals to abandon queer spaces entirely (McLean, 2008) or attempt to fit in in both spaces. Another method used to mitigate stigmatization was found in Lingel’s (2009) study on the experiences of ‘passing’ among bisexual women. This study suggests women attempting to pass perform aspects of their sexuality differently depending on the sexual community they are in; they ‘passed’ as a lesbian in queer spaces and as straight in heterosexual spaces to avoid stigmatization and exclusion (Lingel, 2009).

This research suggests that community belonging is a particularly salient challenge for bi+ individuals and can moderate experiences of harassment and bias. However, previous research has not focused on experiences of belonging for Bi+HNQ individuals. Given the heterosexual nature of their intimate relationships, it is likely that they experience heightened exclusion from the LGBTQIA+ community, as they are not directly participating in queer relationships.

### ***Experiences of Harassment***

Minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) highlights how stigma and discrimination can create hostile environments for marginalized populations, including sexual

minorities, that can lead to negative mental health outcomes. Additional studies have found that bi+ individuals experience unique stigma and exclusion from both heterosexual and queer communities that contribute to negative health outcomes (e.g., Salim et al., 2019; Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014). In addition to the social consequences of a bisexual identity, a few studies have shown that bi+ individuals are at greater risk for harassment and negative health effects, particularly bi+ women. Bi+ individuals are at an increased risk for sexual victimization (Hequembourg et al., 2013), with some estimates showing up to 40% of bi+ women having experienced some form of sexual harassment within their lifetimes (Flanders et al., 2019a).

Harassment and sexual violence are due to harmful stereotypes of bi+ individuals, including that they are hypersexual, open to group sex, and automatically consent to sexual relations (Flanders et al., 2019). Experiences of monosexism in media and culture and biphobia among peers and institutions has additional negative impacts on the mental health of bi+ individuals (Ross et al., 2010). In fact, Flanders et al. (2015) found that bisexual women struggled to find accepting sexual partners, which negatively impacted their mental health. However, the authors found that these negative effects were mitigated by positive support networks, such as caring physicians, accepting partners, and inclusive friendship networks (Flanders et al., 2015).

Significantly, bi+ stigma can be found in both queer and heterosexual spaces, and bi+ individuals who have experienced stigma are more likely to report instances of sexual violence (Flanders et al., 2019a). Building on Meyer's (2003) minority stress theory, these studies highlight a "bisexual-specific minority stress" model (Molina et al., 2015) that shows the ways in which bi-negativity, experienced as lack of inclusion from both

LGBTQIA+ communities and heterosexual spaces, negatively impacts bi+ individuals and places them at greater risk for harassment and negative health outcomes.

Importantly, experiences of stigma may not be experienced in the same ways for all bi+ individuals. For instance, bi+ individuals in heterosexual relationships may not experience the same stigma as bi+ individuals in queer relationships. Further, such factors as religious and conservative cultural contexts may result in bi+ individuals seeking more socially acceptable relationships and outward expressions of sexual identity, at the detriment of their sexual, social, and mental health. This may also include decisions to delay or entirely avoid coming out, impacting the bias and harassment they are subjected to.

Taken together, extant research suggests that a complicated sexual identity development, combined with exclusion from supportive queer communities and increased risk of harassment creates a vulnerable context for Bi+HNQ individuals. Previous research documents the risk of exclusion from queer and heterosexual spaces that operate based on a sexuality binary (e.g., Weier, 2020), as well as harassment that is experienced by many bi+ people due to harmful stereotypes regarding their sexual behavior (e.g., Flanders et al., 2019a). However, what is not adequately understood is the additional challenges experienced by bi+ folk who have not experienced queer relationships, either romantic or sexual. As their experiences will likely yield unique insights to this field, it is imperative to understand their pathways to identity development and connection to queer communities.



## **Current Methodological Approaches to the Study of Bisexuality**

The current study analyzes barriers to identity development and queer community engagement for those who may feel particularly excluded due to their relationship status. The unique experiences of this understudied population underscore the need for more inclusive research methodologies. Past and present research methods would benefit from broader inclusion criteria that make explicit acknowledgement of the distinction between sexual behavior and sexual identity. Sexual orientation hinges on feelings of attraction and desire. While this may include sexual and romantic experiences, this is not a requirement. For bi+ folk who have not participated in non-heterosexual relationships, the tendency to conflate sexual identity and behavior in research and popular stereotypes may hinder both identity development and queer inclusion. By noting this distinction in research recruitment protocols, scholars would gain valuable insight into the experiences of a bi+ community that is significantly underexplored.

Previous research has documented the experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community broadly, as well as the specific experiences of bi+ identified individuals. However, much previous research has been limited in scope, and many bi+ individuals have been excluded due to differing conceptualizations and operational definitions of ‘bisexual’ and ‘bi+'. Beginning with a critical review of outdated research methodologies, this section will present a pathway toward more inclusive and representative study designs. Building on existing research, the current study seeks to provide an example of the insights that could be revealed through more inclusive research criteria. Not only do inclusive criteria illuminate the experiences and perspectives of those historically underrepresented in

social science research, but they provide valuable insights for furthering theory and research on identity development processes and the influence of the sexuality binary.

### ***Outdated Definitions and Inclusion Criteria***

In the past, most bi+ research relied on narrow inclusion metrics and simplistic definitions of bisexuality (e.g., Kinsey et al., 1948). Many of these studies defined bisexuality as having sexual attraction to both men and women, or as engaging in sexual activity with both men and women. These definitions rely on a gender binary and a sexual binary that have become increasingly challenged in research and practice (Galupo et al., 2014a) and neglect the diversity of genders and sexualities that fall within the bi+ category. In addition, most studies did not account for sexual attraction that did not align with sexual behavior, with virtually no studies seeking to include bi+ individuals who exhibited a sexual or romantic attraction but not sexual behavior toward more than one gender. This approach privileged a sexual definition of bi+ identities over a more nuanced understanding of bi+ attraction.

Since its creation in 1948, the Kinsey Scale, a metric of sexual orientation ranging from 0-6 and including an extra category 'x', has been extensively used in LGBTQIA+ research (Drucker, 2012; Dodge et al., 2008). The scale is as follows (Kinsey Institute, 2022):

- 0 | Exclusively heterosexual
- 1 | Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual
- 2 | Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual
- 3 | Equally heterosexual and homosexual
- 4 | Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual
- 5 | Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual
- 6 | Exclusively homosexual
- X | No socio-sexual contacts or reactions

At the time of its creation, this scale represented a significant advance in our understanding of the variety of sexual identities. Prior to Kinsey, sexuality was typically categorized as heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual. This scale developed more of a spectrum of sexuality and suggested that sexual behavior and attraction could change over time. At the time, this scale allowed researchers to include individuals who previously would have been excluded in research on sexuality, and it provided a broader range within which queer individuals could describe themselves and their sexualities.

However, this scale has since become outdated (Galupo et al., 2014b). Not only are there far more sexualities than those included within the scale, but the scale itself does not adequately capture the sexual identities of many queer folk today. First, this scale assumes a progression from one end of the spectrum to the other. The higher one scores in behavior toward one end of the spectrum, the lower they *must* be on the other end (Zietsch & Sidari, 2020). For bi+ individuals in particular, assumptions that one must be equally heterosexual and homosexual to count as bisexual negates the reality and lived experiences for many bi+ individuals. Second, sexual behavior is treated as synonymous with sexual identity. Yet for many bi+ individuals, including those in the current study, bi+ identity is based on a range of factors, including romantic and non-romantic attraction and behavior. Finally, the scale ignores the fluid nature of sexuality and the ways in which sexuality varies over time and in the moment (Manley et al., 2015).

While much of the recent literature on bisexuality has moved in a more inclusive direction, scholars continue to rely on narrow inclusion metrics that exclude or misrepresent diversity within the bi+ community. First, the Kinsey scale has not completely disappeared from sexuality research. In the past four most recent editions of

the *Journal of Bisexuality*, the leading outlet for scholarly research on bi+ identity, three studies relied on this scale, either as is or with minimal modifications (Snowden et al., 2023; Parsons, 2021; Solazzo et al., 2020). Second, some studies rely on survey data that ask individuals about their sexual “sides”, including questions such as, “how connected do you feel to your gay/lesbian side or straight side?” (e.g., Rosario et al., 2006). Again, this not only invalidates bi+ identities as sexualities independent from straight, gay, or lesbian, but it adds to the image of bisexuals as transitioning between sexualities or moving from one ‘side’ to the other (Weier, 2020; Callis, 2013; Ault, 1996), rather than holding attraction to multiple genders simultaneously.

Other narrow inclusion metrics common in sexual research include experiences of sex with men and women, inaccurate distinctions between bisexual and pansexual identities, and misuses of sexual identity language. Beginning with sex requirements, any research utilizing the General Social Survey (GSS) pre-2008 would have only been able to code bi+ individuals as those that indicated they had had sex with both men and women, as self-identifying metrics were not added until 2008 (Schnabel, 2018). Not only does this metric ignore nonbinary genders, but it assigns sexual identities to individuals based on their sexual behaviors, once again conflating sexual identity with sexual behavior. This excludes Bi+HNQ individuals, and it also assigns sexual identities to individuals who may not identify as bi+ but who have had sex with partners of different genders.

Many studies also rely on inclusion criteria that conflate bisexual and pansexual identities. Within queer communities, individual reasons for identifying as bi or pan vary significantly (Galupo et al., 2017), with some individuals believing they are

interchangeable and some seeing pansexual as included under the umbrella of bisexual (HRC, 2023). Additionally, disagreements exist concerning who is included within these categories, with some individuals believing that ‘bisexual’ reinforces binary gender categories or does not account for transgender individuals and others disagreeing with this assumption (Berg, 2020). Regardless, definitional differences between and among queer communities exist regarding these identity labels, and it is important that researchers do not assign sexuality labels to participants without engaging with or acknowledging these nuances. Even studies that do allow respondents to self-identify risk misrepresenting reality when they extrapolate findings from participants to broadly reflect differences among bisexual and pansexual individuals.

Finally, research that misuses sexual identity language can be misleading. A few recent articles in the *Journal of Bisexuality* have allowed participants to self-identify their sexuality, but they have then coded anyone with a bi+ identity as “bisexual” (e.g., DeLucia & Smith, 2021). Though the researchers clarified that they were using bisexual as an umbrella term to account for a range of sexual identities, they assigned sexual identities to individuals that those individuals may not have identified with. Bi+, as an umbrella label, better accounts for the diversity of identities because it does not impose definitions and sexuality labels on respondents.

### ***Toward More Inclusive Bi+ Metrics***

Increasingly, research on bi+ identity and communities rely on self-identification measures that allow participants to select their own sexual identity (e.g., Flanders et al., 2020), with more studies also using a bi+ umbrella term rather than bisexual (e.g.,

Feinstein et al., 2020). These studies provide greater insight into the diversity within and among bi+ communities, and more inclusive metrics have moved the field in new and important directions. However, even some of these studies continue to conflate behavior with identity. A review of recent articles published in the *Journal of Bisexuality* found no articles that explicitly clarified the distinction between sexual behavior and sexual identity. As a result, bi+ research likely fails to include many individuals that may not see themselves as ‘real bisexuals’. In particular, participants who have never had non-heterosexual sexual or romantic engagements, like the population centered in the current study, may not feel ‘qualified’ to take part in such research, may opt out, or may not be accessible through typical recruitment channels that center on engagement with queer groups and organizations. While research focusing specifically on the sexual behavior of bi+ individuals may necessarily center individuals’ sexual activity, research on bi+ identity more generally will miss valuable insights by conflating sexual behavior with sexual identity. By explicitly distinguishing sexual activity or behavior from sexual identity, researchers are better able to achieve inclusive and representative research on the bi+ community.

The current study argues for expanding inclusion criteria in bi+ research so as to engage a broader bi+ population and to capture the diversity within and among this community. Notably, there are a few studies that have followed the approach outlined in this study. Feinstein et al. (2020) included an extensive list of bi+ identities to choose from in their study of motivations for concealing a bi+ sexual identity, and they explicitly defined bi+ as attraction to more than one gender. Cipriano et al. (2022), in their study of identity definitions used by plurisexual women, did not ask participants to select their

sexual identity nor to identify in any particular way. The participants simply needed to “have experienced attraction to more than one gender” (Cipriano et al., 2022). In their survey of self-stigma and sense of belonging, McInnis et al. (2022) included the following question, “Are you attracted to more than one gender?”, with only those who answered ‘yes’ being included in the study.

Each of these studies made an explicit mention of sexual identity as experiences of attraction, allowing for a diversity of bi+ individuals who may identify with different labels or none at all. This study builds upon and expands this approach, by bringing similar inclusion criteria to the study of bi+ individuals and communities. In particular, the current study disaggregates sexual behavior, past and present, from sexual identity, and to made this distinction clear to potential participants during recruitment. Only by including all bi+ individuals, including those who have and have not engaged in sexual or romantic intimate relationships with non-heterosexual partners, can we fully understand the lived experience, identify formation processes, and vulnerabilities facing the bi+ community.

Through its intentional study of bi+ individuals in heterosexual relationships who have never experienced non-heterosexual relationships, the current study illustrates the benefits of an expansive inclusion criteria for bi+ research. The demographic centered in this study also highlights the insights missed in previous research that conflates sexual behavior with sexual identity, and illuminates a range of experiences, perspectives, and challenges missed in most research on members of the bi+ community. Before turning to the methods and key findings, I now turn to the conceptual frameworks informing the current study.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework informing the current study includes concepts of the sexuality binary and sexual fluidity. Sexuality extends beyond binary categories and is experienced fluidly over time and across cultural contexts. Thus, these concepts are central to understanding the lived experiences of Bi+HNQ individuals.

### ***Sexuality binary***

Most current bi+ studies explore the concept of the sexuality binary<sup>5</sup> and the ways in which it is experienced by and reproduced among bi+ individuals. The sexuality binary is the idea that all individuals are either gay/lesbian or heterosexual, thereby erasing the experiences of anyone identifying as non-monosexual (Weier, 2020). This binary reflects a widespread ideology/classification system where individuals are coded as either straight or gay/lesbian, and general discourse on sexuality assumed and reinforced this dichotomy (Weier, 2020; Brewster & Moradi, 2010). Anyone who falls outside of this binary, including bi+ individuals, tends to be dismissed, erased, or ignored. Failure to conform to the binary can result in slurs and negative stereotypes that discourage bi+ individuals from expressing their sexualities (Weier, 2020; Lingel, 2009), as well as the exclusion of bi+ people from both queer and heterosexual spaces (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Ault, 1996). Similar to minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003), research on the sexuality binary highlights how stigma and discrimination create hostile environments for minorities, including sexual minorities, that can lead to negative mental health outcomes. Examples

---

<sup>5</sup> Similar research also refers to the sexuality binary as ‘compulsory binary’ (e.g., Allen, 2022).



of studies in this field of research include operation of sexuality binaries in educational settings and queer student alliances (Marshall, 2014), the impact of partner gender on personal appearance choices for bi+ folk (Daly et al., 2018), and media depictions of compulsory heterosexuality and promiscuity among bi+ individuals (Allen, 2022).

The current study centers on the concept of the sexuality binary. Previous research has examined this concept across various contexts (e.g., Allen, 2022; Daly et al., 2018; Marshall, 2014), but little is known about the factors involved in reinforcing the sexuality binary among bi+ individuals in heterosexual relationships, particularly those who have never experienced queer relationships. The current study focuses on the experiences of inclusion/exclusion within queer and heterosexual communities and how the sexuality binary impacts sexual identity development for bi+ individuals. By centering the perspectives and lived experiences of Bi+HNQ individuals, this study will expand our understanding of the sexuality binary and provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors that enable its reproduction.

### ***Fluidity of Sexuality***

Sexuality is not a binary, nor is it a fixed category or identity (Manley et al., 2015). For some, sexual and romantic feelings are consistent across one's lifetime, while for others, sexual identity varies over time. Cultural attitudes, situational factors, partner gender, definitional shifts, visibility in media and discourse, and many other contextual factors impact the way in which individuals perceive and define their sexual identities, resulting in fluid understandings of oneself (Manley et al., 2015). Additionally, one's own gender identity and performance impacts sexuality. While research and discourse

has historically conflated gender identity/performance with sexuality, such as labeling “feminine” men as gay, this is less often the case anymore. However, while gender and sexuality are separate categories, they are not always mutually exclusive. For non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals, labeling one’s sexuality can be difficult, as many available labels imply a gendered component. For example, lesbian is typically defined as a woman who is exclusively attracted to other women, and gay is defined as a man attracted to men. A non-binary individual may not feel comfortable using either term, so bi+ identities may be more suitable, even when individuals are attracted to only one gender. However, many in the queer community increasingly view labels such as lesbian as inclusive of non-binary folk, underscoring the role of social context on the evolving nature of sexual identity categories.

The fluid nature of sexuality reveals that sexual behavior does not always perfectly predict or align with sexual identity. A host of factors play a role, and it is important that research and discourse reflect these ever-evolving concepts. Utilizing this framework, the current study seeks to document participants' understanding of their sexualities across their lives, the factors that impacted their sexuality labels, and how factors such as religion, political climate, and interaction with queer communities impact their self-perception.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS AND ANALYSIS**

#### **Study Context**

As a case study, the current research project was conducted in Utah. Rather than including more study sites, I focused on Utah, as the religious and conservative context provided unique insights into the experiences of bi+ individuals in heterosexual relationships. Utah's population has a high proportion of LDS church members and is predominantly Republican (PEW, 2022), so it is likely that religion and conservative ideology influence the attitudes and beliefs regarding the LGBTQIA+ community among Utah residents. While the current study does not expand on this aspect, future research will focus on the intersection of religion and conservative ideologies on the experiences of bi+ individuals in heterosexual relationships.

#### **Methods Overview**

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of bi+ individuals in heterosexual relationships to better understand the diversity of experiences of bi+ individuals. The study relied on in-depth qualitative interviews with bi+ identified individuals. Interview questions focused on sexual identity formation, experiences in heterosexual relationships, influence of religion and conservative cultural climates on identity formation and the ability to express a queer identity, and instances of queer- and straight-passing. The following research questions guided data collection and analysis:

- 1) What are the experiences of bi+ individuals engaged in heterosexual relationships, and how do these experiences influence sexual identity development?
- 2) Does the sexuality binary and participation in heterosexual relationships create a sense of exclusion from queer and/or heterosexual spaces?

### **Participants and Recruitment**

Participants were recruited through a diversity of online locations, including advertisements on the Utah State University (USU) Inclusion Center listserv, the ‘Cougar Pride’ Instagram page for Brigham Young University, and Facebook posts by colleagues in rural communities. The content of the recruitment advertisements consisted of eligibility criteria, the purpose of the study, data collection procedures, and a link/QR code to an eligibility survey. Eligibility criteria included:

- At least 18 years of age;
- Resident of Utah;
- Bi+ identity (or simply attracted to more than one gender);
- Active participation in a heterosexual relationship; and
- Never participated in what they would consider as a queer relationship.

When participants clicked the link, they were taken to a Qualtrics survey that asked for contact information and confirmation of the eligibility criteria. Informed consent documents were supplied at the start of the survey. I then emailed all eligible respondents a request for an interview and schedule invitation using ‘Calendly’, where

they were given the option to input their phone number or receive a Zoom link. All interviews were conducted over phone or Zoom.

Once initial participants were recruited, snowball sampling was used to reach more participants. Each of the flyers included a statement encouraging people to send my contact information to anyone who would be interested in the study. In addition, each interview concluded by asking participants to share the recruitment flier with anyone who would be well-suited for the study. This method of sampling was used to encourage diversity in recruitment. Accessing this particular demographic presented a few challenges, as the religious and conservative context of the case study may have influenced participation in the above media sites, especially if participants were neither outwardly expressing a queer identity nor participating in queer communities. However, the use of snowball sampling and social media posts in non-queer specific locations accounted for this possibility. Among the participants, six were recruited through the USU Inclusion Center, one through a social media post by a colleague, two through the Cougar Pride Instagram page, three through referrals, and three who did not disclose this information, resulting in 16 total participants. Interviewing was deemed complete once saturation was reached and novel information was no longer found.

**Table 1.***Summary Characteristics of Interview Respondents*

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Age		
18-24	7	43.8
25-34	6	37.5
35-44	3	18.6
Sexual Identity		
Bisexual	9	56.3
Pansexual	1	6.3
Biromantic and asexual	2	12.5
Biromantic and demisexual	1	6.3
Queer	2	12.5
Bi+	1	6.3
Pronouns		
she/her	12	75
he/him	2	12.5
they/them	1	6.3
she/they	1	6.3
Racial Appearance		
white	11	68.8
unknown	5 (all via phone call)	31.3

While participants were not asked directly about their gender and racial identity, 12 of 16 participants were feminine presenting<sup>6</sup>, and most if not all participants had a white racial appearance<sup>7</sup>. A few factors that likely explain this lack of diversity.

<sup>6</sup> Participants were not asked about their gender identity; rather, they were asked about their pronouns for the purpose of quote attribution. Initially, this was done because gender identity did not seem pertinent to the research question. Upon seeing the prevalence of participants using she/her pronouns, it became clear that the majority of participants were feminine presenting. Because I recognize that gender identity cannot be assumed from pronoun use, I identify this as a limitation later in the manuscript.

<sup>7</sup> Participants were not asked about their racial identity, as it did not seem pertinent to the research question. Of the 11 participants interviewed over Zoom, all had a white racial appearance. While

Concerning gender identity, a few studies point to the greater salience of bi+ identities among women compared to men. Among heterosexual individuals, bi+ women are perceived more positively than bi+ men, and bi+ men are more likely to be stigmatized for breaking norms of masculinity (Eliason, 2000). As such, feminine-presenting individuals may have been more comfortable participating in the current study than men. Similarly, the lack of racial diversity may be due to a host of factors, such as my own racial appearance discouraging engagement by non-white individuals, as well as the recruitment locations. The current study was conducted in Utah, a relatively racially homogenous state (World Population Review, 2023), and my affiliation with Utah State University, which is a predominantly white institution, may have discouraged participation by racialized minority groups. As for the recruitment sites, research shows that not only are racialized minorities less likely to be out and visible as queer (Rosario et al., 2004; Han, 2007; Bowleg et al., 2009; Pastrana, 2016), but queer organizations and media sites often center white individuals and experiences (Logie & Rwigema, 2014; Flanders et al., 2019b). While some participants were recruited via snowball sampling, the majority were found through queer social media sites and listservs. As such, it may have been less likely that queer people of color had the opportunity to participate in the current study. The underrepresentation of diverse gender and racial identities is a limitation that will be acknowledged later in the manuscript.

---

I could not see the participants who were interviewed via phone call, I assume a lack of racial diversity in the sample. This limitation is addressed in the conclusion.

## **Data Collection**

Between June and September of 2022, interviews were conducted over Zoom (n=11) or phone (n=5). In-depth interviews were semi-structured and included questions about sexual identity development and attachment to labels, experiences in heterosexual relationships, interactions with queer communities (sense of belonging, instances of discrimination, desire to access resources and support groups, ideas to make them feel more included and supported in said communities), impact of religious and conservative context on identity development and expression, instances of both straight- and queer-passing (pressure to, examples, frequency), and advice they would give to others in similar situations.

At the start of each interview, participants were informed of confidentiality measures, the purpose of the study, and their ability to exit the interview/not answer questions at any point. Participants were given the option to choose their own pseudonym, otherwise they were assigned one from a predetermined list of gender-neutral names. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, giving participants the time and flexibility to expand on any topics that they desired.

Once each interview was completed, respondents were sent a follow-up email where they were supplied with a list of resources and a shareable recruitment flier. With consent, all interviews were recorded, either through Zoom or 'Rev Audio and Voice Recorder' for phone calls. These interviews were then initially transcribed verbatim through Otter.Ai. Each transcript was then reviewed for errors and to remove identifying information. After the follow-up email, contact information for each participant was deleted, and all files were renamed with pseudonyms. Participants were informed that



they could see the results of this study through either USU's dissertation and thesis directory or through additional posts on the initial recruitment sites.

### **Data Analysis**

After all interview data were collected, transcripts were initially coded using a line-by-line open-coding approach. Once coding saturation was reached, and no new codes were generated, relevant codes were combined into key themes. These key themes were analyzed through the conceptual frameworks, using an abductive approach. As described by Timmermans and Tavory (2012), abductive analysis outlines an iterative process where existing theory is used to inform the analysis process, but the researcher remains flexible in allowing the data to inform and produce new themes. Similar to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), abductive analysis encourages the researcher to remain open to exploring new and surprising themes that arise from the data. The key difference lies in the reliance on existing theory to inform data collection and analysis. This approach allowed for a research driven analysis that also centered the lived experiences and understandings reported by participants. Interviews were then re-coded for these themes using a line-by-line color-coding approach. All excerpts from each code were copied into a Google Sheets file for later review and ease in locating relevant quotes.

### **Positionality Statement**

Researcher positionality not only influences the data collection and interpretation but is crucial for understanding how the researcher interacts and establishes rapport with

participants. As such, it is important to note the ways in which my own identities and social position influenced the current study. I am a sociology graduate student, with a focus on social inequality as it pertains to gender and sexuality. As a bi+ and nonbinary individual, I was better able to establish rapport with participants and relate to many of their experiences with the sexuality binary and sense of non-belonging in queer spaces. Because a high number of survey respondents noted reluctance to engage with queer resources, my status as a bi+ individual in a heterosexual relationship aided in creating a safe environment where participants were able to express their lived experiences without feeling like the research did not apply to them. In addition, a central finding of this research was the invisibility that many bi+ folk experience, as they feel that they are part of a small minority if not the only one who has experienced their sexual identity trajectory. As someone in a similar position, I was able to reassure participants that they were not alone, and their experiences were needed for understanding the impact of the sexuality binary and lack of queer inclusion for others in their position. In addition, I am younger, which likely aided in creating a shared experience with the younger participant sample. Finally, I come from a lower socioeconomic background, which aided in my interpretation of many of the participants' desire to remain straight-passing at work. As someone with a similar socioeconomic background, I understand the reluctance to express a queer identity at work and risk job loss.

While my positionality was useful in facilitating the research process, there are aspects of my identity that may have limited my research efforts. My white racial identity may have discouraged queer folk of color from participating. Additionally, my age and

gender may have discouraged older and masculine presenting bi+ individuals from participating in the study.

There may be barriers and advantages to the current study attributed to my social and identity positions, but being aware of these positions from the beginning has allowed me to more rigorously analyze the data. Rather than ignore my biases and influences, it is important to note their impact and account for them in all aspects of the research process.

### **Ethics and Funding**

This study was approved by the Utah State University Institutional Review Board, with protocol #12836.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

Data analysis revealed three key themes: factors related to identity formation, existence in the in-between, and resulting double binds created through internalized sexuality invalidity, which will be discussed in that order. Key findings include definitional dilemmas and negative connections associated with sexual identity formation, as well as exclusion experienced by Bi+HNQ individuals from queer and heterosexual spaces. Finally, internalized sexuality invalidity resulted in both self-exclusion from queer resources and support, while encouraging participants to take the brunt of homophobia, risking negative mental health outcomes.

#### **Identity Formation**

Identity formation among queer folk has been extensively studied and has revealed the many pathways to and impacts of developing a positive sexual identity, including analyses of developmental milestones (Hall et al., 2021; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Gonsiorek, 1995), interactions with queer individuals and communities (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005), and impact of religious and political climate (Dahl & Galliher, 2009; Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Mahaffy, 1996). This first section builds on extant research to document the various ways in which bi+ individuals in heterosexual relationships develop and form positive connections to a sexual identity. Starting with the reasons individuals choose certain labels over others, the findings then present both the fluidity and self-doubt connected to sexual identity development among participants.

### *Definitional Dilemmas: Sexual Identity Formation and Label Selection*

Previous research and queer communities themselves have typically used strict definitions of sexual identities, with lesbian defined as women attracted to women, gay as men attracted to men, and bisexual as individuals attracted to both men and women. However, current queer communities and organizations are more likely to incorporate an extensive array of sexualities, with overlapping definitions. For example, in their study of sexuality conceptualization, Galupo et al. (2017) documented a multitude of reasons bi+ folk utilize particular labels over others, noting the similarities and differences among participants identifying with the same label. Scholars and activists may have moved toward more inclusive definitions of bi+ identities, but participants in the current study did not necessarily rely on these definitions, nor make as stark of contrasts between pansexual and bisexual identities as conventionally assumed. While all participants identified within the bi+ umbrella, they differed in the labels they selected to describe their sexuality and the reasonings for such labels.

Distinctions between bisexual and pansexual were discussed by participants, with many definitions offered. Some participants, like Spencer, described themselves as bisexual because they believed it was an inclusive term covering attraction to more than one gender, rather than just men and women:

From my understanding of bisexuality, that is a... an identification of being attracted to two or more genders, and pansexuality is, to my understanding, being attracted to any gender, and not having a preference for genders.

However, others saw “bisexual” as implying an inherent gender binary, excluding attractions to and relationships with nonbinary and genderqueer individuals. As such, they chose other labels, such as pansexual or bi+. Comments from Jordan and Jesse, respectively, illustrate this perspective:

When I heard the term bi+ instead of bi[sexual] I was like, oh yeah. Cause it's not just a binary. Yeah, not just men, women, but everything in between and outside.

I was also attracted to people who were less binarily obvious. And so I just ended up calling it queer cause like it - it covers everything.

Many participants, however, did not really see an important distinction between bisexual and pansexual, highlighting other reasons they chose to use one label over another. Many participants disclosed that the only reason they used the particular label they did was due to color or word preferences. Each of the bi+ identities have their own pride flags associated with them, and some participants found this to be the primary reason that they selected one identity over another. According to Josie:

This is going to be such a superficial reason, I'm actually probably more towards the pansexual end of the spectrum, but I'm embarrassed to admit this, purple [associated with the bisexual flag] is my favorite color.

Similar to color preference, some participants liked the sound of some labels over others. As Taylor said:

I like the label bisexual. And I've looked at and considered pansexual. In my opinion, it just seems like they're basically the same thing. And I just liked the word bi better. It's a silly reason to use it. But that's, that's basically like, why I made a decision on it.

One reason for identity label usage that came up often had to do with the salience of the labels and the social acceptability attached to them. Bisexual is a much more common word than pansexual, and more widely known than other identities such as omnisexual or polysexual. Similar to Hayfield and Křížová's (2021) findings, the ease of conveying a bi+ identity through the bisexual label pushed a few participants into using that word, even if they may have actually identified closer to the definitions used in other labels. The following comments illustrate this point:

I've used that one [bisexual] because I feel like it's easier to describe to people that aren't very familiar with the LGBTQIA+ community. – Rylee

I would say that I'm probably more like, probably poly[sexual], but I know that a lot of people confuse that with polyamory and I just don't want to have to explain that every time. So, I've just settled - like, people more or less understand what bisexual means at this point, so I've just kind of settled on bisexual, the most societally acceptable term for what I think my... sexuality is. – Charlie

I am demisexual bi-romantic or bisexual in spaces where it's easier to just say that. – Drew

Among the reasons mentioned above, the most unique reason from this group had to do with the sexual component involved with these definitions. While sexual behavior is not synonymous with sexual identity, several participants expressed displeasure with the terms bisexual or pansexual because they viewed these words as centered on sexual engagements over romantic ones. None of the participants had ever engaged in a sexual relationship that was not heterosexual. As such, a few of them felt that they were simply not allowed to claim a bisexual or pansexual identity.

The intersection of asexuality played a role for two participants. Similar to those who were discouraged by the sexual associations of bisexuality, being on the asexual

spectrum influenced these participants to use labels like ‘queer’ or ‘biromantic’ because these labels better captured their experiences.

I am really happy identifying as queer... rather than saying, so yeah, I'm like, I'm actually like, asexual and like, bi romantic so like, I don't- when we talk about these overly sexualized things, I don't necessarily relate to them as well. But it - just saying like... I'm queer... that works best for me. - Cade

It's a surprisingly complicated question for me. Yeah, I... if I had to land on something, I would probably do something like bi-romantic and demisexual, or even asexual. And that's why it's like complicated is because I'm definitely somewhere in that ace spectrum where it's like the romance and the sexuality portion are split. That's why it's so kind of difficult to figure out some days. - Morgan

Morgan also mentioned that not only did she not perceive herself as fitting within an identity label that used the word ‘sexual’, she did not want others to perceive this about her either. Like other participants, Morgan was aware of the negative stereotypes of bisexual individuals and was hesitant to adopt an identity label that might make her subject to false assumptions about her sexual behavior.

The inherent belief is if you say you're bisexual is that you're more promiscuous, and I'm not, being more in a gray [asexual] spectrum. And so I don't always identify as strongly as bisexual not necessarily because I'm disinterested in you know, relationships with a woman but because I don't want to be seen that way because I'm not.

Some of the other reasons for label usage included knowledge of terminology, evolving understandings of self, and experiences of otherness. Many participants expressed that they had either not heard of or did not engage with queer communities early on in their lives, so they did not have the language to explain their feelings of attraction. The lack of knowledge of and exposure to queer identities led many



participants to delay or avoid exploring their feelings for a long time, instead defaulting to a straight identity.

Definitely, like growing up- I wasn't taught anything about queer people at all. I didn't - like I wasn't even told that they exist, until I was probably [in] like middle and high school. - Rylee

Yeah, I don't even think I knew what bi or pan was until I believe I attended a panel, I think at USU. And there was a pansexual-identifying student on that panel. And I had no idea. I didn't know what that term meant. And that's potentially one of the only people I've ever met either that had that at the time. And so just having more visibility to the terminologies that exist. - Morgan

I didn't know about bisexuality until I like moved out and went to college. I hadn't even like really heard the term as like a valid thing... It took me a long time to realize, just because I think the voices that you are gay or straight were the loud ones. - Dylan

Consistent with research on sexual fluidity (Katz-Wise & Todd, 2022), many participants described how their label usage had changed over time, as they better understood themselves and increased exposure to others with similar experiences and attractions. While scholarship on sexual fluidity does not find that inherent feelings of sexual and romantic attraction differ significantly across the life course, it does suggest that situational factors, gender of partners, gender of self, and cultural definitions impact the ways in which individuals identify and define themselves (Manley et al., 2015). As participants explored their own sexuality, gained access to queer discourse, and were exposed to a broader array of sexual identity labels and definitions, their sexual identities and self-perceptions evolved, affecting their sexual identities.

I mean, I believe personally, that sexuality is a very fluid thing. So, I don't know if after researching more I will change that label. - Avery

Your sexuality and your gender and your attraction, whether that be romantic, or sexual, or both, or neither. It - It evolves, not just that it changes necessarily for people, but that your understanding of it evolves. - Cade

Finally, Jamie explained that her chosen label was formed around an experience of 'otherness', mentioning that the word 'queer' best captured her relationship experiences and attractions.

I think one of the things that I like about queer is that it kind of centers the otherness that I feel existing as a person, whereas bisexual doesn't quite encompass all of that I guess discomfort that comes from existing. Where-right, there's not really a place for me, which is why I'm in the closet. And so- yeah I kind of like the- the open-endedness of being queer.

### ***Making Sense of Sexual Identity***

In addition to describing the pathways to identity formation, participants also described their sense of their own sexuality and sexual identity.

While several participants expressed a positive connection to their sexual identity, most described a long and difficult process of achieving this positive outlook. However, more often participants described feelings of self-doubt and negativity surrounding their sexuality. While research on queer individuals has documented these challenges (Bradford, 2004), the same challenges among study participants is notable because of a lack of history of sexual or romantic relationships that they perceived as queer.

Not all participants expressed a negative perception of their sexual identity, but most of them felt that a 'bisexual' identity did not suit them, due to their relationship experiences. Several reported not feeling like they 'qualified' to be part of the bi+ community. As none of them had ever participated in a queer relationship, many of them

believed that they were not meeting some informal or unstated requirement to be bisexual. As Skyler said:

I have never dated someone who is like the same gender as me. And so that kind of diminishes like my qualifications, I guess. A lot of people say they're like, Well, you've only dated a guy like you've never dated a girl. So therefore, like, are you really bi?

Several participants talked about the periodic self-doubt they experienced, as they struggled with feeling like they were queer or actually straight with differing attractions.

Taylor sums up this shared feeling well:

How do I know I'm really bisexual? How do I know I'm really, really attracted to men. So yeah, that's definitely played a part in in like, my identity structure. There have been times where I'm just like, okay, maybe I'm not really, really into guys that much. And, and that's ebbed and flowed. There have been times where I've just been like, No, maybe not at all... Maybe I'm just straight and silly.

The experience of 'passing' as straight, meaning their outward appearance was often perceived by others as heterosexual (Gianoulis, 2015), contributed to their ambivalence about their own identity. Several mentioned that being in a heterosexual relationship and looking like they were straight often created self-doubt. While all participants identified as bi+, this confusion and self-doubt varied across different periods of their lives, limiting their adoption of a positive connection to their sexual identities. This reaffirms previous research that highlights the impact of partner gender on disclosures and acceptance of a bi+ identity (e.g., Maliepaard, 2018). As Cade expressed:

I feel like, am I gay or am I straight? I don't know where I belong. And it's mostly with the straight people because that's what people see on the outside.

Another confusing aspect for participants involved the intersection of asexuality and bisexuality. Only two participants identified on the asexual spectrum, but both expressed that a general lack of sexual attraction prevented them from identifying as bi+ in the past. As they were not sexually attracted to individuals of a different gender either, they assumed that romantic attraction to more than one gender was separate from sexuality, and they could still identify as straight.

More than anything, this confusion highlights the necessity of separating sexual behavior and sexual identity. Not only is this connection often assumed in academic research (e.g., Schnabel, 2018; Kinsey, 1948), but it has typically been reflected in public discourse around bi+ sexualities (van Meer & Pollmann, 2022). As a result, participants were unable to or were significantly delayed in forming a positive connection to their sexual identity.

### **Liminal Existence: Living in the In-Between**

Research on the sexuality binary highlights the pressure and stigma faced by bi+ individuals who do not fit within the binary categories of gay/lesbian and heterosexual (Weier, 2020; Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Ault, 1996). Living in-between and outside of this binary makes bi+ folk invisible and contributes to exclusion and discrimination in both queer and heterosexual spaces. Research finds that bi+ folk represent a disruption of the perceptions of queer and heterosexual people and activate stereotypes related to their sexual promiscuity, proclivity for infidelity, identity confusion, and many other

marginalizing assumptions (Weier, 2020). However, very little research accounts for the incongruence between sexual behavior and sexual identity. Study participants experienced differing pathways to and varied connections with a bi+ sexual identity, principally due to their lack of a queer relationship. Findings highlight the ways bi+ folk who have not participated in queer relationships may experience marginalization in queer communities and the ways homophobia impacts individuals in heterosexual communities.

This section explores the ways the sexuality binary shapes experiences of exclusion from LGBTQIA+ and heterosexual spaces. This section also highlights the self-imposed exclusion expressed by participants as they navigate their sexual identities in light of their relationship experiences.

### ***Discrimination in Queer Spaces***

Participants' interactions with LGBTQIA+ communities paralleled those in other sexuality binary research (e.g., Weier, 2020). Several participants reported experiences of biphobia, both in virtual and in-person interactions with queer communities and individuals. Biphobia refers to "prejudice, fear, or hatred directed toward bisexual people and can include making jokes or comments based on myths and stereotypes that seek to undermine the legitimacy of bisexual identity" (HRC, 2023).

Stereotypically, bi+ folk are labeled as just curious, experimenting, 'greedy', or sexually promiscuous, and these assumptions hinder positive interactions with queer communities. However, participants' marginalization is exacerbated by the tendency of others to not view them as queer at all. Their heterosexual relationships and lack of previous queer relationships work as a source of internal invalidation, as well as an area

targeted for queer erasure by other queer folk. This invalidation can be particularly damaging when it reinforces self-doubt and disbelief in one's own sexual identity. If others in the queer community don't believe you 'belong' in LGBTQIA+ spaces, it can be difficult to convince yourself otherwise. Several participants expressed this concern:

I know, I'm not fully accepted... And I think that's the part that like, sometimes kind of hurts and, and I know, like, a lot of people that I know, who are bisexual feel the same way of just not feeling like you are really accepted because people aren't quite, I don't know, they're like, 'Well, you're not quite, gay enough'. - Skyler

There's a lot of that, like, I don't know, what is the term I'm looking for... just not belief. It's just like people just a lot of times just don't believe you. And they're like, 'Well, yeah There are some real bisexuals, but you're probably not one of them'. - Skyler

[There are] definitely times when someone is gay, who's like, I don't understand being bi. And that's hard. Because normally you think the people that won't understand you are heterosexual people...which is-almost like hurts a little bit more. Because doubt from outside the community, it's okay to be like, I'm gonna just hold my head up high because they don't understand the community. But then when there are people inside the community, you're like, what, am I real? Am I validated?... Am I making this up? - Cade

I definitely felt that way early on and still sort of get that vibe from certain sections of the queer community, where it's like... Some people are very... They have very strong opinions about what defines certain labels, and if people don't qualify it's like, "how do you know you're bisexual if you've never had intercourse with a man" or something. It's like, I know I am. That's good enough for me. - Dylan

In addition to the invalidation and erasure participants experienced in queer spaces, a few participants expressed that the stigma against bi+ women as 'straight but curious' prevented them from wanting to claim a bi+ identity. Some participants encountered assumptions that bi+ women in heterosexual relationships were a danger to lesbian women because they would leave them when they 'went back to being straight'.

Not wanting to hurt others in the queer community, a few participants feared that acknowledging their bi+ identity would harm queer folk, and if they did ever choose to pursue a queer relationship, they would be seen as unreliable or even toxic. Put simply by Jesse,

I have seen things online that I'll admit, make me a little bit hesitant because you know, people talk about these girls who just, they're actually straight, they just want to, like, flirt around. And I'll admit that people saying things like that kind of does make me reluctant to say much, cause...I don't want to hurt other people.

In a few instances, other queer folk used participants' passing privilege as a means to invalidate their experiences of discrimination and to dismiss their desire to participate in queer spaces, as was expressed by Morgan:

I think I've talked to people about like difficulty, like finding housing and stuff like that as just like a non married couple, but then it would kind of derail into stuff like, well, you know, if you were in a lesbian couple, like a partnership it would be even harder or whatever. And it's like, well, that's not making me feel better right now. But thank you.

Importantly, most participants' experiences with queer communities were positive, and most discussed instances when the queer community was inclusive of them and other bi+ folk. Indeed, participants' experiences suggest that queer communities are more inclusive and less biphobic than has been described in previous research (e.g., Weier, 2020), and this points in a positive direction for queer inclusion. While generally positive, however, participants still described instances in which they experienced invalidation, erasure, or discrimination, and these experiences served as a barrier to their development of a positive sexual identity.

### *Discrimination in Heterosexual Spaces*

Bi+ specific research have highlighted the stereotypes applied to bi+ folk (Weier, 2020), the increased risks of sexual harassment and abuse (Flanders et al., 2019a; Hequembourg et al., 2013), and the ignorance of bi+ folk in media and discourse (McLean, 2008). While participants did experience these forms of marginalization, the addition of their heterosexual relationships presented unique obstacles and experiences. In particular, interviews revealed two key findings: straight-passing as a space for second-hand microaggressions and current partner gender as a source of invalidation.

In most instances, straight-passing privilege reduced experiences of bias and discrimination for participants. However, participants' experiences were varied and contextual. For participants who were outwardly queer presenting, some homophobic experiences were reported. However, a majority of participants were either not out, or they passed as straight and were not recognized as queer by most peers and colleagues. As such, they rarely experienced direct marginalization. This passing privilege came at a cost, however. Being seen as straight meant others felt less inclined to hide their opinions about queer folk, and many participants experienced second-hand discrimination from harmful comments.

Well, not being out I haven't had a lot of like, experiences with direct homophobia. But I have had some uncomfortable experiences where I've been like hanging out with friends who didn't - who I wasn't out to that made, like uncomfortable remarks about queer people or about bisexual people. And just made me feel really uncomfortable. - Rylee

I have the privilege of being able to walk into church with a partner and so no one thinks twice. But with that also comes the privilege of being privy to conversations where people assume I'm - I'm going to agree with them when they talk about the LGBTQ+ community. So it's- it's just a little double edged sword, you know? - Drew



Participation in a heterosexual relationship also contributed to expressions of disbelief regarding respondents' sexual identity. This sentiment came in many forms. Friends and family members often dismissed participants' sexualities or expressed relief that they were in committed heterosexual relationships, as there wasn't any 'risk' of them living openly as queer. As Skyler mentioned:

A lot of the times, they [family] don't really respect it. So I have a feeling they would probably just be like, 'Okay, well, you still like guys, so just, There you go. Just stay on that track. And it'll be fine.' I'm like, but that's erasing an entire other part of me.

While straight-passing protected some respondents from harm, these types of remarks invalidated their identities, and many participants expressed hurt at not being taken seriously or having a significant part of their identity invalidated by friends and family.

I will say, I do think that my family was a little bit more accepting of the facts because I did come out to them after- especially my parents, I came out after I was engaged to my fiance, so I felt like, I feel like for them, they don't really see me as like a full bisexual, like- like, 'Oh, yes, you could- you find women attractive and- and that's kind of the end of it but you're- you're getting married to a man, so it's fine'. - Casey

Participants in heterosexual relationships experienced exclusion from both queer and heterosexual spaces, with biphobic remarks and harmful assumptions coming from both communities. The lack of a queer relationship further barred participants from fully engaging with queer communities, as their bi+ identity was viewed as illegitimate. In addition, their straight-passing status acted as a shield from direct discrimination while simultaneously facilitating secondary microaggressions. For those outwardly visible as

bi+, their heterosexual relationships allowed peers and family members to diminish or outright dismiss participants' queer identities, further invalidating their identity and contributing to marginalization.

### ***Self-imposed Exclusion***

While many participants perceived exclusion from queer and straight communities, a majority viewed their exclusion and lack of belonging within queer communities as self-imposed, the result of internalized insecurity and doubt. Rather than pointing to a specific person or organization who excluded them, most participants felt that they simply did not belong in queer spaces. Principally, participants felt that they were 'not queer enough' to enter into queer spaces or engage with queer communities, as they did not feel that their relationship experiences fully qualified them as queer. As such, many of them felt that Pride events were not a space for them, and they should experience their queer sexuality on their own. Other reasons for this self-exclusion included fear of being seen as straight or an ally, and therefore not being taken seriously, or as a self-protective measure against anticipated dismissal or marginalization. In general, many participants felt a sense of otherness, as they did not feel fully comfortable in either heterosexual or queer spaces.

Most participants were unable to pinpoint the origin of their self-doubt. Whether it originated from stigmatizing comments made to peers or in online spaces, or general bi+ invisibility in media and queer events and organizations, participants had formed an internal sense that LGBTQIA+ spaces were not created or intended for them; therefore, they simply did not belong.

### *Self-Protective Measures*

Proactive prevention of dismissal and exclusion from queer spaces was identified as one reason participants distanced themselves from LGBTQIA+ communities and organizations. Whether this reluctance was due to lack of clear representation in media sources, stories they've heard from queer peers, or observations of biphobia in online spaces, many participants felt that entrance into queer spaces would result in harm. To prevent this, several participants kept their social circles small and limited engagement with queer events and organizations.

Kind of on purpose I've kept my circle pretty close and pretty tight. So it kind of is just a way of protecting myself. So I've never had anything negative but I definitely have walls up to prevent that. - Taylor

I have had people in the communities I've talked to who are bi and take their spouses of the opposite gender, or their partners of the opposite gender, with them to events [that] have had disparaging comments. And so I... felt a little uncomfortable going by myself when I didn't know anyone. And then I was also concerned about taking my spouse with me because of that...it's been something that has affected activities that I've considered or wanted to do as somebody who's just starting to come out. – Josie

### *'Not Queer Enough'*

While preventing discrimination was salient for many participants, most participants felt that their relationship experiences were not compatible with a “valid” bi+ identity and did not entitle them to participate in queer spaces. Due to feelings of insecurity surrounding their sexuality or lack of queer relationships, many participants felt that they were ‘imposters’ or ‘fakes’ among ‘real’ bi+ folk. Participants perceived that participation in sexual or romantic relationships with individuals from more than one

gender was an unspoken rite of passage into queerness, and they had not completed it.

The following participants express these concerns clearly:

Sometimes I even feel almost like an outsider or an intruder in the community. I try to remind myself that I'm not but yeah, sometimes you have that impostor syndrome feeling. - Jordan

I have never been to pride. I always wanted to go, but it was something that I always felt like- like again, I felt impostor syndrome about it, I didn't know if like, I would feel comfortable there or if I would just feel like I was a fake. - Charlie

I always kind of felt like I was like observing, which is weird because I definitely like am in- I mean, B is part of the LGBT. But yeah...where like I'm not in a relationship with a woman so I have never really felt- I don't know, as that it is always my community, though it is my community. - Morgan

The thing that is hard is I will go to these events, but I usually won't talk that much about myself. Because I'm worried that I will not be seen as the same part of the community because I'm like, less gay than someone else. - Cade

Even when participants were confident in their queer identity, many continued to self-exclude. Several felt that their experiences were not queer enough, and they had not gone through the hardships of being outwardly queer and thus were not deserving of queer resources and support. While queer communities serve as a source of pride and celebration, solidarity, and protection from oppression, most participants believed that because they were not outwardly visible as queer and had not experienced direct discrimination, they did not deserve to 'take the spot' of a more deserving queer individual. As Cade and Dylan expressed:

I might be this bi+ individual who is never in a committed relationship with a female. And so that's probably something that's a little bit weird is that feeling of like, not feeling like I'm fully like, all the way in the

community and that the community might not like me, because I'm not doing the hard things and going against the norm. - Cade

I don't need to engage in this space, because either like I'm not queer enough or I'm not struggling enough or I have enough privilege with like being straight passing, where it's like... that activity is not for me, because I'm not in a deep enough pit or discriminated against enough. - Dylan

For these participants, the lack of queer relationships affirmed their internalized invalidation and prevented them from participating in queer communities and events even when they desired to do so. As Skyler stated, *“I can be an ally and everything, but I cannot be a part of like the community... And it's because well, like we're taught all the time. Like, that's not allowed and stuff”*. Research has shown that feelings of illegitimacy and internalized binegativity may increase feelings of depression (Paul et al., 2014), further underscoring the potential impacts of not feeling ‘queer enough’.

### *Straight-Passing*

The fact that most participants were straight passing reinforced a sense of not belonging in LGBTQIA+ spaces. The straight appearance of their relationships limited participants’ desire to participate in queer communities, especially when they were with their partners. Some simply wished to avoid invalidation and skepticism, even indirectly. For others, the passing privilege they enjoyed made them feel as if Pride events were not for them, as their relationships were regularly seen as fitting within heteronormative expectations.

Being seen as just an ally within queer spaces was a strong deterrent for many participants. Feeling included and able to interact as oneself within LGBTQIA+ events and organizations is an important aspect of internal sexual validation, so to be seen as

anything other can be detrimental (Toh et al., 2023). Among participants who expressed this concern, the consensus was that attending as a heterosexual couple would either make others see them as outsiders or they themselves would feel out of place.

Sometimes, it does feel weird. Like, we've gone to pride together, and it doesn't always feel like there's a space for us necessarily as a straight passing couple, despite the fact that we're both queer. - Dylan

I'm like, am I even being like authentically a member of the LGBT community? Cause I'm in a heterosexual relationship and so how can I identify with this group of people that I feel like I have a connection to, but that might look down on me for just passing straight...It's hard to feel like you're as gay when you're bi because I guess to like, to some people, like you have an out, like, you don't really have to be gay, like you could just be straight and then not participate in the community. - Cade

Most participants mentioned the possibility of attending Pride events on their own, but they ultimately decided against such actions, as engagement with queer spaces for the first time can be intimidating, especially without the support of their significant others. This could result in outright self-exclusion from such spaces, or sometimes a pressure to portray themselves more outwardly as queer when in these spaces. This took such forms as dressing in more queer-coded attire or being more outspoken about their sexuality, illustrated by the following comments:

Yeah, and that's probably potentially just in my own head. But sometimes I feel like if I'm not very obviously, like gay or very obviously, well, like trans or something that like I look, I present very feminine. And I am I very much so look like a straight individual in my straight relationship. And so sometimes I feel like in order to like be accepted as not just like an ally or something, I like have to display some reasoning as to why I'm here, which is probably 100% in my own head, but I definitely feel that way. - Morgan

When we are in like spaces and stuff where there are like, a lot of like queer people and stuff. I'm like, yeah, like, I'm like, I'm like part of the

community. But if they see me with him, they're a lot less likely to actually think it's Real or they'll do what they do. And think what they think. And so sometimes, I think I tend to play it up a bit more to be like, No, look, it is real, like I, I'm not faking this. - Skyler

If I want people to like know like, “Okay, I’m not straight,” I will dress more like big earrings, that I have or very fun like...I have this big pair of mushroom earrings that are so cute, but, and like I love them, but I wear them more out of wanting to break out of that heterosexual relationship...I wanna represent who I am and sometimes in trying to do that in a heterosexual relationship I swing very far to one style or one behavior that I would feel would like represent me. But it's not really me, if that makes any sense? - Avery

Of course, not all participants expressed as strong of concerns over the supposed illegitimacy of their sexualities, but for nearly all those interviewed, the outward appearance of their relationships and the lack of experience with queer partnerships induced a sense of not belonging within LGBTQIA+ communities, and this sense was difficult to overcome.

As this section has shown, for bi+ individuals who have never experienced queer relationships, self-doubt and invalidation surrounding their sexual identity results in a feeling of in-betweenness, as participants feel neither straight nor ‘fully’ queer. Consistent with previous sexuality binary research (e.g., Weier, 2020; Brewster & Moradi, 2010), these findings highlight the otherness felt by bi+ individuals, as sexuality binaries work to create stigma and exclusion from both straight and queer spaces.

### **Double-Bind**

Existing in a liminal space between queer and heterosexual communities results in a sense of otherness for many bi+ individuals who have not experienced queer relationships. Not only are positive connections to sexual identity delayed or

underdeveloped, but a sense of inclusion within queer and heterosexual spaces is elusive. Thus, participants experienced a sense of liminality, which limited their access to support and services available to queer folk. This section explores the experience of a double bind, which refers to participants' belief that they should simultaneously self-exclude from queer spaces while also bearing the brunt of queer oppression. Due to the privilege associated with passing as heterosexual, participants felt responsible for defending the queer community and bearing the brunt of anti-queer hostility. Thus, participants felt responsible for shielding more vulnerable members of the queer community while also denying themselves access to the solidarity and support provided by queer organizations. These beliefs set participants up for harm, as they were more likely to put themselves in the path of discrimination while refusing redress in the form of queer support services and resources.

This section expands on participants' sense of queer outsidership and the ways their supposed 'lack of direct discrimination' illegitimated their inclusion within queer spaces. I then discuss the pressure participants felt to defend or out themselves in pursuit of shielding other queer folk from harassment and discrimination.

### ***Self-Exclusion from Community Resources and Support***

Previous research shows that participation in LGBTQIA+ organizations and events significantly increases positive connections to sexual identity (Higa et al., 2014). Connecting with others who share similar lived experiences provides significant support to marginalized individuals (Higa et al., 2014). For Bi+HNQ individuals, queer support could quell internal doubts by making others like them more visible. In fact, multiple



participants mentioned feeling like they were the only ones experiencing their struggles with identity and belonging, as they did not know of other bi+ folk who were in heterosexual relationships. Among those who were more confident about their sexuality, most had other Bi+HNQ people in their lives.

In addition to the invalidity discussed above, many participants expressed that they self-excluded from queer spaces because they were not discriminated against enough. Direct discrimination is not required to access support services and proudly express your sexuality, but participants expressed feelings of guilt about taking the spot of a more deserving queer individual. As Dylan and Jamie mention, they do not seek support because they do not need it as much as others do.

I don't engage a lot with like community pride groups, just because I feel like there are other people whose situation is more dire, and they need the benefit more than I do. - Dylan

I don't want to take the priority away from people who maybe need the support more. I mean I think about the risks that come to simply existing as a trans person. And, you know, my little bits of bullying, do not compare. - Jamie

Even though all participants expressed some level of harm due to homophobia, most felt that their experiences did not really count as oppression because they weren't experiencing what they believed to be true discrimination. While Jamie felt that she would like to participate in these communities, she held back due to this fear:

I don't know that I'd necessarily - would want to be like, my issues are more important, like, no, they're not necessarily like, right, there are people who are still like in legit danger in their communities, and you need to make the space for that, like, we got to triage, right? We got to prioritize and I might not be a priority, but I'd still love to be welcome.

While there should be certain spaces for those that experience trauma in different ways, this does not mean that individuals with straight-passing privilege should be excluded. Though much of this exclusion is self-imposed, it is also due to the invisibility of this population in many queer organizations, support services, and events. Feelings of guilt and self-exclusion worked to prevent participants from seeking support and community and from proudly expressing their sexualities, impacting positive sexual identity development. As the next section illustrates, these feelings set participants up for harm, as the pressure to defend queer communities without redressive support resulted in unacknowledged trauma.

### ***Pressure to Defend***

Not only does straight-passing privilege push participants away from participating in queer spaces, but it also induces self-imposed pressure to defend queer communities and increase their advocacy efforts. Because participants experienced privilege, they assumed that it should be used for good and anything short of that would be cowardly. For some participants, this pressure to advocate for the queer community translated into feeling pressure to come out sooner than they wanted to, as ‘hiding’ would be unhelpful for others in the community.

All of these things were happening that's- that are against the LGBTQ+ community. And I felt like I was maybe being a little- I don't want to say cowardly- I- I guess I do. I- I felt like I really wanted to connect and be part of that and not just kind of hide behind this to- for the sake of being secure or more secure, and so against some of the stuff that's happening nationally...I feel that's part of why I'm pushing myself to come out more than I have now...External circumstances have affected how I've chosen to express myself and whether or not to come out. - Josie

That's other people who are marginalized. But maybe since I'm in a heterosexual relationship and can pass, maybe it's, you know, policies and things that are happening [attacks on LGBTQIA+ community]. They're not hurting me as much. So I'm mostly an ally for other people like, and I get upset for them. And I don't ever really consider myself. When someone's talking bad about the community...or giving love to the community. I don't accept it as love for me. - Jordan

Allies to the queer community are often encouraged to take the brunt of homophobic and transphobic abuse and to defend communities that may not have the safety or energy to do so themselves (Stonewall, 2020; White, 2018). However, participants in this study *are not allies*. They *are* queer folk, part of the LGBTQIA+ community, and they should not be compelled to either place themselves in harm's way nor out themselves if they don't wish to/aren't ready or safe to do so.

In summary, issues of identity development and the resulting liminal existence between queer and heterosexual communities resulted in a double bind where many participants felt the need to exclude themselves from queer spaces and support groups while simultaneously outing themselves in the pursuit of shielding queer communities and individuals from attacks. This dynamic increased risk of harm for participants while closing off avenues for support, community, or redress.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the unique experiences of Bi+HNQ individuals regarding sexual identity development and exclusion from queer and heterosexual communities. Answering my research questions required that I depart from “bisexual” research that tends to conflate sexual identity with sexual behavior. In order to illuminate the perspectives and lived experience of Bi+HNQ individuals, I built on recent research that seeks to expand the boundaries of bi+ identities in order to better understand sexual identity formation among sexual minorities (e.g., Cipriano et al., 2022; Feinstein et al., 2020). My analysis relied on sixteen interviews with individuals who identify as bi+, are currently in committed heterosexual relationships, and have never participated in a queer relationship. Findings revealed unique challenges faced by this community, including definitional dilemmas in sexual identity development, liminal status within queer and heterosexual spaces, and the resultant double bind that pressured participants to self-exclude from queer support while simultaneously bearing the brunt of homophobia. There are several implications of these findings for theory, research, and practice.

First, this study reveals that for many participants, the pathway to forming a bi+ identity varied by relationship context. While much of this has been reflected in previous research (Brown, 2002; Weinberg et al., 1995), the current study expands the field by highlighting the definitional differences and self-doubt experienced by bi+ individuals who have not previously participated in queer relationships. Murky distinctions between ‘bisexual’ and ‘pansexual’ labels, social acceptability, knowledge of some labels over

others, sexual implications tied to certain labels, color/word preferences, and the intersection of asexuality all impact individuals' connection with a bi+ sexual identity. Due to the salience of the sexuality binary, bi+ individuals have historically been stigmatized by both queer and straight individuals and communities (Weier, 2020), resulting in a feeling of in-betweenness. A sense of erasure or lack of legitimacy contributes to outright exclusion, derogatory comments and stereotypes, or invisibility in media and discourse. While the invisibility of bi+ individuals in both queer and straight spaces is declining, homophobic and bi-specific stereotypes remain relevant.

The current study advances research on sexual identity by accounting for the experiences of bi+ folk who have not experienced queer sexual or romantic relationships. Even though acceptance is increasing, the assumed link between sexual behavior and sexual identity hinders many aspects of sexual identity development. Harmful media tropes and invisibility create self-doubt and feelings of invalidity. Many participants expressed feeling like they 'did not qualify' as bi+, resulting in murky or even negative relationships with their sexual identities. For those who did feel confident in their sexual identity, this positive relationship was achieved only over time and tended to emerge for individuals who had social ties to others who were similarly situated. Due to this confusing and often negative identity development process, as well as the continued salience of biphobia, many participants felt othered in both queer and heterosexual spaces. Within queer spaces, this came in the form of self-exclusion from events, communities, and resources, as well as avoiding an outward association with their queer identity. Not feeling like they were real bi+ folk, many participants thought it was better

to take a step back, both out of internal invalidation and as a self-protective measure against anticipated bias and discrimination.

Within heterosexual spaces, the absence of queer relationships resulted in two key responses from others. For those who were out to others, their sexual identity was often dismissed or invalidated. While this prevented certain forms of outright rejection and discrimination from family and peers, it also hurt, as participants were unable to receive the support and validation they desired. For those that were not out, their invisibility allowed others to make disparaging remarks about the LGBTQIA+ community, and participants could not defend themselves and their community without outing themselves.

Participants were also harmed by a double-bind: participants felt that they were not discriminated enough to ‘take the spot’ of a more deserving queer individual and felt pressured to prematurely out themselves or take the brunt of discrimination as a way to use their straight-passing privilege to aid others in the queer community. Queer support and community is not finite, discrimination is not hierarchical, and all queer folk deserve to feel validated and supported. In addition, no one should feel obligated to either out themselves when they are not ready, nor put themselves in the path of harm. Self-exclusion from queer support and community combined with internalized pressure to confront homophobia and discrimination is a recipe for trauma, and participants in this study illustrate the risks of this dilemma. While queer communities and individuals may not actively exclude Bi+HNQ individuals, the internalized perceptions held by participants served as a significant constraint to community formation and engagement. This bind does not solely apply to bi+ folk in heterosexual relationships. Many sexualities and the intersections between and among them are less visible than others, and

inclusive messaging would likely further participation and engagement with LGBTQIA+ communities for many queer individuals. Queer folk, in all their forms, should be able to express a queer identity and participate in queer spaces. Increased visibility and active encouragement would increase community participation among Bi+HNQ individuals and others.

This study also highlights the importance of inclusive research and what is missed when bi+ research inclusion criteria does not distinguish sexual behavior and sexual identity. Even research that relies on self-identification and targets bi+ individuals may unintentionally exclude potential participants, including those in the current study who may self-exclude depending on how the research is framed. By expanding inclusion criteria, the current study underscores some of the methodological and conceptual challenges associated with conducting inclusive bi+ research. For example, research that imposes stark distinctions between pansexual and bisexual identities may not accurately reflect the range of experiences of bi+ individuals. A majority of participants would have self-selected out of research that uses bisexual terminology or that does not clarify a distinction between sexual behavior and sexual identity. Excluding Bi+HNQ participants limits our understanding of the range of experiences and perspectives among those in the bi+ community. A more inclusive approach relies on recruitment materials that address these issues, stating clearly that participants need not have had relationships with partners of more than one gender.

Additionally, this study has important implications for policy and practice. Inclusive messaging in queer organizations and media that highlight a broader array of bi+ experiences would likely aid in increasing participation for this demographic. Even if

these organizations and communities do not intentionally exclude, explicit encouragement to participate would help quell self-doubt. Messages expressing that all bi+ folk are welcomed, regardless of relationship experiences, would be useful. Using more inclusive labels and more diverse representation may even make individuals aware of possibilities they never considered. Without seeing others like yourself or finding labels or communities that reflect similar experiences and attractions, it can be difficult to understand one's sexual identity. Representation increases visibility, and visibility increases awareness, thereby opening up possibilities for identity development and community engagement.

Not only do all queer folk deserve to be included in queer communities and research, but collective voices are stronger when all are able to show up. Bi+ folk already make up the largest portion of the LGBTQIA+ community (Gates, 2011), and the true size of the bi+ community is likely underestimated. Encouraging individuals to identify as bi+ and participate in queer communities increases the power wielded by the LGBTQIA+ community. Research shows that knowing queer folk significantly decreases homophobia (Madžarević & Soto-Sanfiel, 2018), so it is important that more queer folk are able to embrace a queer identity without feeling self-doubt or erasure. This does not mean that individuals like participants in the current study should feel obligated to out themselves, but they should have the opportunity to do so without feeling like they are taking the spotlight away from others.



## **Limitations**

With this study, there are multiple limitations worth mentioning, principally concerning the representativeness of the sample. Concerning gender, most participants were feminine presenting. As such, this study does not fully explore the experiences of bi+ men in heterosexual relationships. Similarly, nearly all (if not all) participants had a white racial identity. As such, this sample did not highlight the intersection of race and gender identity and its effects on experiences with queer communities and sexual identity development. As the majority of bi+ research has focused on the experiences of white individuals (Abreu et al., 2022), it is important that future research seeks to understand and analyze the unique experiences of BIPOC bi+ individuals and communities. Finally, there were no participants over the age of forty-four, thus the experiences of older bi+ individuals remain underexplored. Further research in this direction should seek a more representative sample, including more diversity in gender, racial/ethnic identity, and age.

## **Future Research**

There are several avenues for future research that can build on the current study, including research that explores such concepts as support network impact and the influence of religious and conservative environments on identity connections and engagement in queer spaces. Additionally, large-scale surveys seeking to document how many individuals make up this particular demographic would yield valuable insights.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Not only has this research yielded valuable insights to the field of queer and bi+ specific research, but it has been personally beneficial. As a genderqueer bi+ person who had also never experienced a queer relationship, this project further validated my identity and helped me see how many others like myself there were. This has truly revealed to me the importance of representation and visibility, and I can only hope that this project, and others like it, resonate with and reassure similarly situated queer folk. I conclude with quotes from participants that underscore the value and importance of this project:

I do want to just say thank you so much for doing this. It's important, right? I mean I know you know that. You've told me about how you know that. But I really do appreciate that there are people like you who are doing this kind of work to make space for the rest of us. And that's just - right. We're all better together. - Jamie

Thanks. I think it's like a really important topic. And so I appreciate that someone is doing something about it. - Blake

## REFERENCES

- Abreu, R. L., Hernandez, M., Ramos, I., Badio, K. S., & Gonzalez, K. A. (2022). Latinx Bi+/Plurisexual Individuals' Disclosure of Sexual Orientation to Family and the Role of Latinx Cultural Values, Beliefs, and Traditions. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 23(1), 1-26.
- Allen, M. (2022). "In a Romantic Way, Not Just a Friend Way!": Exploring the Developmental Implications of Positive Depictions of Bisexuality in Alice Oseman's Heartstopper. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 23(2), 197-228.
- Ault, A. (1996). Ambiguous identity in an unambiguous sex/gender structure: The case of bisexual women. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 37(3), 449-463.
- Berg, A. (2020). *The evolution of the word 'bisexual' — and why it's still misunderstood*. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/evolution-word-bisexual-why-it-s-still-misunderstood-n1240832>
- Bisexual Resource Center. (2022). *Labels*. <https://biresource.org/labels/>.
- Bostwick, W., & Hequembourg, A. (2014). 'Just a little hint': Bisexual-specific microaggressions and their connection to epistemic injustices. *Culture, health & sexuality*, 16(5), 488-503.
- Bowleg, L., Burkholder, G., Teti, M., & Craig, M. L. (2009). The Complexities of Outness: Psychosocial Predictors of Coming Out to Others Among Black Lesbian and Bisexual Women. *Journal of LGBT Health Research* 4(4), 153-166.
- Bradford, M. (2004). The bisexual experience: Living in a dichotomous culture. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 4(1-2), 7-23.

- Brewster, M. E., & Moradi, B. (2010). Perceived experiences of anti-bisexual prejudice: Instrument development and evaluation. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 57*(4), 451–468.
- Brown, T. (2002). A proposed model of bisexual identity development that elaborates on experiential differences of women and men. *Journal of Bisexuality, 2*(4), 67-91.
- Callis, A. S. (2013). The black sheep of the pink flock: Labels, stigma, and bisexual identity. *Journal of Bisexuality, 13*(1), 82-105.
- Cipriano, A. E., Nguyen, D., & Holland, K. J. (2022). “Bisexuality isn’t exclusionary”: A qualitative examination of bisexual definitions and gender inclusivity concerns among plurisexual women. *Journal of Bisexuality, 22*(4), 557-579.
- Collict, D., Pfund, G. N., Rodriguez de los Reyes, G. O., & Hill, P. L. (2021). Identity formation among gay men, lesbian women, bisexual and heterosexual samples: Associations with purpose in life, life satisfaction, pathways to purpose and implications for positive sexual minority identity. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 22*, 2125-2142.
- Craig, S. L., & McInroy, L. (2014). You can form a part of yourself online: The influence of new media on identity development and coming out for LGBTQ youth. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health, 18*(1), 95-109.
- Crowley, M. S. (2010). Experiences of young bisexual women in lesbian/bisexual groups on MySpace. *Journal of Bisexuality, 10*(4), 388-403.
- Dahl, A. L., & Galliher, R. V. (2009). LGBQQ young adult experiences of religious and sexual identity integration. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling, 3*(2), 92-112.

- Dahl, A., & Galliher, R. V. (2012). The interplay of sexual and religious identity development in LGBTQ adolescents and young adults: A qualitative inquiry. *Identity, 12*(3), 217-246.
- Daly, S. J., King, N., & Yeadon-Lee, T. (2018). 'Femme it up or dress it down': Appearance and bisexual women in monogamous relationships. *Journal of Bisexuality, 18*(3), 257-277.
- D'augelli, A. R. (2002). Mental health problems among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths ages 14 to 21. *Clinical child psychology and psychiatry, 7*(3), 433-456.
- DeLucia, R., & Smith, N. G. (2021). The impact of provider biphobia and microaffirmations on bisexual individuals' treatment-seeking intentions. *Journal of Bisexuality, 21*(2), 145-166.
- Dodge, B., Reece, M., & Gebhard, P. H. (2008). Kinsey and beyond: Past, present, and future considerations for research on male bisexuality. *Journal of Bisexuality, 8*(3-4), 175-189.
- Drucker, D. J. (2012). Marking sexuality from 0–6: The Kinsey scale in online culture. *Sexuality & Culture, 16*, 241-262.
- Eliason, M. (2000). Bi-negativity: The stigma facing bisexual men. *Journal of Bisexuality, 1*(2-3), 137-154.
- Feinstein, B. A., Xavier Hall, C. D., Dyar, C., & Davila, J. (2020). Motivations for sexual identity concealment and their associations with mental health among bisexual, pansexual, queer, and fluid (bi+) individuals. *Journal of Bisexuality, 20*(3), 324-341.

- Flanders, C. E., Gos, G., Dobinson, C., & Logie, C. H. (2015). Understanding young bisexual women's sexual, reproductive and mental health through syndemic theory. *Canadian Journal of Public Health, 106*, 533-538.
- Flanders, C. E., Anderson, R. E., Tarasoff, L. A., & Robinson, M. (2019). Bisexual Stigma, Sexual Violence, and Sexual Health among Bisexual and Other Plurisexual Women: A Cross-Sectional Survey Study. *The Journal of Sex Research, 56*(9), 1115-27.
- Flanders, C. E., Shuler, S. A., Desnoyers, S. A., & VanKim, N. A. (2019). Relationships Between Social Support, Identity, Anxiety, and Depression Among Young Bisexual People of Color. *Journal of Bisexuality, 19*(2), 253-275.
- Flanders, C. E., Anderson, R. E., & Tarasoff, L. A. (2020). Young bisexual people's experiences of sexual violence: A mixed-methods study. *Journal of bisexuality, 20*(2), 202-232.
- Galupo, M. P., Davis, K. S., Gryniewicz, A. L., & Mitchell, R. C. (2014). Conceptualization of sexual orientation identity among sexual minorities: Patterns across sexual and gender identity. *Journal of Bisexuality, 14*(3-4), 433-456.
- Galupo, M. P., Mitchell, R. C., Gryniewicz, A. L., & Davis, K. S. (2014). Sexual minority reflections on the Kinsey Scale and the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid: Conceptualization and measurement. *Journal of Bisexuality, 14*(3-4), 404-432.
- Galupo, M. P., Ramirez, J. L., & Pulice-Farrow, L. (2017). "Regardless of their gender": Descriptions of sexual identity among bisexual, pansexual, and queer identified individuals. *Journal of Bisexuality, 17*(1), 108-124.

- Gates, G. J. (2011, April). *How Many People are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender?* UCLA School of Law Williams Institute.  
<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/how-many-people-lgbt/>
- Gianoulis, T. (2015). *Passing*. GLBTQ. [http://www.glbqtarchive.com/ssh/passing\\_S.pdf](http://www.glbqtarchive.com/ssh/passing_S.pdf)
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative inquiry*. Aldin, Chicago.
- Gonsiorek, J. C. (1995). Gay male identities: Concepts and issues. In D'Augelli, A. R., & Patterson, C. J. (eds) *Lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities over the lifespan: Psychological perspectives* (pp. 24-47). Oxford University Press.
- Hall, W. J., Dawes, H. C., & Plocek, N. (2021). Sexual orientation identity development milestones among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer people: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in psychology*, *12*(753954), 1-19.
- Han, C. (2007). They don't want to cruise your type: Gay men of color and the racial politics of exclusion. *Social Identities*, *13*(1), 51-67.
- Harper, A. J., & Swanson, R. (2019). Nonsequential Task model of bi/pan/polysexual identity development. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *19*(3), 337-360.
- Hayfield, N., & Křížová, K. (2021). It's like bisexuality, but it isn't: Pansexual and panromantic people's understandings of their identities and experiences of becoming educated about gender and sexuality. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *21*(2), 167-193.
- Hequembourg, A. L., Livingston, J. A., & Parks, K. A. (2013). Sexual victimization and associated risks among lesbian and bisexual women. *Violence against women*, *19*(5), 634-657.

- Higa, D., Hoppe, M. J., Lindhorst, T., Mincer, S., Beadnell, B., Morrison, D. M., Wells, E. A., Todd, A., & Mountz, S. (2014). Negative and positive factors associated with the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth. *Youth & society, 46*(5), 663-687.
- Human Rights Campaign. (2023, May 31). *Glossary of Terms*.  
<https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>.
- Ivanovic, A. (2023). Career Advancement Barriers Faced by LGBTQ Employees: An Exploration of Discrimination, Bias, and Inclusion in the Workplace. *Reviews of Contemporary Business Analytics, 6*(1), 43–56.
- Jang, H., Woo, H., & Lee, I. (2020). Effects of self-compassion and social support on lesbian, gay, and bisexual college students' positive identity and career decision-making. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 98*(4), 402-411.
- Kassing, F., Casanova, T., Griffin, J. A., Wood, E., & Stepleman, L. M. (2021). The effects of polyvictimization on mental and physical health outcomes in an LGBTQ sample. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 34*(1), 161-171.
- Katz-Wise, S. L., & Todd, K. P. (2022). The current state of sexual fluidity research. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 101497*.
- Kertzner, R. M., Meyer, I. H., Frost, D. M., & Stirratt, M. J. (2010). Social and psychological well-being in lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals: The effects of race, gender, age, and sexual identity. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 79*(4), 500-510.
- Kinsey, A., Pomeroy, W.B., & Martin, C.E. (1948). *Sexual behavior in the human male*. Philadelphia, PA: Saunders.



Kinsey Institute. (2022). *The Kinsey Scale*. Indiana University.

<https://kinseyinstitute.org/research/publications/kinsey-scale.php>.

Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., Truong, N. L., & Zongrone, A. D. (2020). The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools. *Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)*, New York, NY.

Lim, G., & Hewitt, B. (2018). Discrimination at the intersections: Experiences of community and belonging in nonmonosexual persons of color. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 18(3), 318-352.

Lingel, J. (2009). Adjusting the borders: Bisexual passing and queer theory. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 9(3-4), 381-405.

LGBTQIA Resource Center. (2022). *LGBTQIA Resource Center Glossary*. UC Davis.  
<https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/glossary>.

Logie, C. H., & Rwigema, M. J. (2014). "The normative idea of queer is a white person": Understanding perceptions of white privilege among lesbian, bisexual, and queer women of color in Toronto, Canada. *Journal of lesbian studies*, 18(2), 174-191.

Madžarević, G., & Soto-Sanfiel, M. T. (2018). Positive representation of gay characters in movies for reducing homophobia. *Sexuality & Culture*, 22(3), 909-930.

Mahaffy, K. A. (1996). Cognitive Dissonance and Its Resolution: A Study of Lesbian Christians. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 35(4), 392-402.

Maliepaard, E. (2018). Disclosing bisexuality or coming out? Two different realities for bisexual people in the Netherlands. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 18(2), 145-167.

- Manley, M. H., Diamond, L. M., & van Anders, S. M. (2015). Polyamory, monoamory, and sexual fluidity: A longitudinal study of identity and sexual trajectories. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, 2*(2), 168-180.
- Marshall, D. (2014). Queer Contingencies: Bifurcation and the Sexuality of Schooling. *Journal of Bisexuality, 14*(1), 126-145.
- McCabe, P. C., Dragowski, E. A., & Rubinson, F. (2013). What is homophobic bias anyway? Defining and recognizing microaggressions and harassment of LGBTQ youth. *Journal of School Violence, 12*(1), 7-26.
- McCarn, S. R., & Fassinger, R. E. (1996). Revisioning sexual minority identity formation: A new model of lesbian identity and its implications for counseling and research. *The counseling psychologist, 24*(3), 508-534.
- McInnis, M. K., Gauvin, S. E., Blair, K. L., & Pukall, C. F. (2022). Where Does the “B” Belong?: Anti-Bisexual Experiences, Self-Stigma, and Bisexual Individuals’ Sense of Belonging. *Journal of Bisexuality, 22*(3), 355-384.
- McLean, K. (2008). Inside, outside, nowhere: Bisexual men and women in the gay and lesbian community. *Journal of Bisexuality, 8*(1-2), 63-80.
- Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological bulletin, 129*(5), 674-697.
- Molina, Y., Marquez, J. H., Logan, D. E., Leeson, C. J., Balsam, K. F., & Kaysen, D. L. (2015). Current intimate relationship status, depression, and alcohol use among bisexual women: The mediating roles of bisexual-specific minority stressors. *Sex roles, 73*, 43-57.

- Morris, J. F., & Balsam, K. F. (2003). Lesbian and bisexual women's experiences of victimization: Mental health, revictimization, and sexual identity development. *Journal of Lesbian Studies, 7*(4), 67-85.
- Mulick, P. S., & Wright Jr, L. W. (2002). Examining the existence of biphobia in the heterosexual and homosexual populations. *Journal of Bisexuality, 2*(4), 45-64.
- Parsons, L. E. (2021). Bisexuality and Health Care. *Journal of bisexuality, 21*(1), 42-56.
- Pastrana, A. J. (2016). It takes a family: An examination of outness among Black LGBT people in the United States. *Journal of Family Issues, 37*(6), 765-788.
- Paul, R., Smith, N. G., Mohr, J. J., & Ross, L. E. (2014). Measuring dimensions of bisexual identity: Initial development of the Bisexual Identity Inventory. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, 1*(4), 452-460.
- Payne, E., & Smith, M. J. (2016). Gender Policing. In: Rodriguez, N., Martino, W., Ingrey, J., & Brockenbrough, E. (eds) *Critical Concepts in Queer Studies and Education* (pp. 127-136). Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Persson, T. J., & Pfaus, J. G. (2015). Bisexuality and mental health: Future research directions. *Journal of Bisexuality, 15*(1), 82-98.
- Pew Research Center. (2022). *Religious Landscape Study: Adults in Utah*.  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/state/utah/>.
- Renn, K. A., & Bilodeau, B. (2005). Queer student leaders: An exploratory case study of identity development and LGBT student involvement at a Midwestern research university. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education, 2*(4), 49-71.
- Rosario, M., Schrimshaw, E. W., & Hunter, J. (2004). Ethnic/racial differences in the coming-out process of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths: a comparison of sexual

- identity development over time. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 10*(3), 215-228.
- Rosario, M., Schrimshaw, E. W., Hunter, J., & Braun, L. (2006). Sexual identity development among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths: Consistency and change over time. *Journal of sex research, 43*(1), 46-58.
- Rosario, M., Schrimshaw, E. W., & Hunter, J. (2008). Predicting different patterns of sexual identity development over time among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths: A cluster analytic approach. *American journal of community psychology, 42*, 266-282.
- Rosario, M., Schrimshaw, E. W., & Hunter, J. (2011). Different patterns of sexual identity development over time: Implications for the psychological adjustment of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths. *Journal of sex research, 48*(1), 3-15.
- Ross, L. E., Dobinson, C., & Eady, A. (2010). Perceived determinants of mental health for bisexual people: A qualitative examination. *American journal of public health, 100*(3), 496-502.
- Salim, S., Robinson, M., & Flanders, C. E. (2019). Bisexual women's experiences of microaggressions and microaffirmations and their relation to mental health. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, 6*(3), 336-346.
- Schnabel, L. (2018). Sexual orientation and social attitudes. *Socius, 4*, 1-18.
- Schuck, K. D., & Liddle, B. J. (2001). Religious conflicts experienced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy, 5*(2), 63-82.
- Seelman, K. L., Woodford, M. R., & Nicolazzo, Z. (2017). Victimization and microaggressions targeting LGBTQ college students: Gender identity as a

- moderator of psychological distress. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 26(1-2), 112-125.
- Smout, S. A., & Benotsch, E. G. (2022). Experiences of Discrimination, Mental Health, and Substance Use among Bisexual Young Adults. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 22(4), 539-556.
- Snowden, R. J., Gray, N. S., Rollings, J., & Uzzell, K. S. (2023). Automatic attention to sexual images of men and women in androphilic, ambiphilic, and gynephilic women. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 23(2), 1-16.
- Solazzo, A. L., Tabaac, A. R., Gordon, A. R., Rosario, M., Austin, S. B., & Charlton, B. M. (2020). The prospective association of internalized sexual prejudice during adolescence with binge drinking, smoking, and disordered weight control behaviors in adulthood. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 20(4), 383-399.
- Steck, A. K., & Perry, D. (2018). Challenging heteronormativity: Creating a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTQ students. *Journal of school violence*, 17(2), 227-243.
- Stonewall. (2020, October 1). *10 ways to be an ally to Black LGBT people*.  
<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/10-ways-be-ally-black-lgbt-people>
- Sutter, M., & Perrin, P. B. (2016). Discrimination, mental health, and suicidal ideation among LGBTQ people of color. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 63(1), 98-105.
- Timmermans, S., & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis. *Sociological theory*, 30(3), 167-186.
- Toh, G. W., Koh, W. L., Ho, J., Chia, J., Maulod, A., Tirtajana, I., Yang, P., & Lee, M. (2023). Experiences of conflict, non-acceptance and discrimination are associated

with poor mental well-being amongst LGBTQ-identified individuals in Singapore. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 42(5), 625-655.

Trinidad, S. M. (n.d.) *Utilizing Gendered Terms When Existing Outside the Binary*. Sam & Devorah Foundation for Transgender Youth.

<https://www.samdevorah.org/voices/2021/5/13/utilizing-gendered-terms-when-existing-outside-the-binary-by-sacha-matthew-trinidad>.

Valentine, G. (1993). (Hetero) sexing space: lesbian perceptions and experiences of everyday spaces. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 11(4), 395-413.

van Eeden-Moorefield, B., Few-Demo, A. L., Benson, K., Bible, J., & Lummer, S. (2018). A content analysis of LGBT research in top family journals 2000-2015. *Journal of Family Issues*, 39(5), 1374-1395.

van Meer, M. M., & Pollmann, M. M. H. (2022). Media representations of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals on Dutch television and people's stereotypes and attitudes about LGBs. *Sexuality & Culture*, 26(2), 640-664.

Weier, J. (2020). (Re) producing the sexuality binary: on bisexual experiences in US gay and heterosexual spaces. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 27(9), 1308-1325.

Weinberg, M. S., Williams, C. J., & Pryor, D. W. (1995). *Dual attraction: Understanding bisexuality*. Oxford University Press.

Weintrob, A., Hansell, L., Zebracki, M., Barnard, Y., & Lucas, K. (2021). Queer mobilities: critical LGBTQ perspectives of public transport spaces. *Mobilities*, 16(5), 775-791.

Welzer-Lang, D. (2008). Speaking out loud about bisexuality: Biphobia in the gay and lesbian community. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 8(1-2), 81-95.

White, B. (2018, June 6). *Why LGBT Allies Are Critical*. National Institutes of Health.  
<https://www.edi.nih.gov/blog/communities/why-lgbt-allies-are-critical>

World Population Review. (2023). *Utah Population 2023*.

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/states/utah-population>.

Zietsch, B. P., & Sidari, M. J. (2020). The Kinsey scale is ill-suited to most sexuality research because it does not measure a single construct. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(44), 27080.