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THE PERFORMANCE OF BISEXUAL IDENTITY AMONG
WOMEN IN "HETEROSEXUAL" RELATIONSHIPS

presented by

JULIE ELLEN HARTMAN

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BI OUTSIDE THE BEDROOM: THE PERFORMANCE OF BISEXUAL IDENTITY AMONG WOMEN IN "HETEROSEXUAL" RELATIONSHIPS

By

Julie Ellen Hartman

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Sociology

2008

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ABSTRACT

BI OUTSIDE THE BEDROOM: THE PERFORMANCE OF BISEXUAL IDENTITY AMONG WOMEN IN "HETEROSEXUAL" RELATIONSHIPS

By

Julie Ellen Hartman

Research examining sexual orientation identity (SOID) tends to assume a link between identity and sexual behavior. While this link can be observed in many contexts, sexual behavior is not the only element in the construction and maintenance of an identity based on sexual orientation. The purpose of this research project is to explore the ways bisexual identity is performed or made visible outside of explicit sexual behavior.

This project draws on concepts and perspectives from symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, feminist theory, and queer theory to explore the ways bisexual identities might be made visible outside of sexual behavior. A reliance upon dichotomous views of sex/gender/sexuality and the importance placed on the sex/gender of one's partner in determining sexuality make it difficult to understand bisexuality outside the bedroom – that is, bisexual identity outside of sexual activity with people of "both" sexes/genders, yet understanding the ways bisexual identity is created and maintained in the absence of "bisexual" sexual behavior can provide insights into identity, sexuality, and the sex/gender system.

Data for this project were obtained through four focus group interviews with fourteen bisexual-identified women who are in long-term monogamous relationships with men. These women are most often assumed to be heterosexual, and yet they actively work to divest of heterosexual privilege through displays of their bisexual identities, thus

bringing to light the importance of bisexuality as a political identity, and the ways such an identity can potentially work to disrupt dichotomous heteronormative assumptions about relationships, sexuality, and identities as well as the primacy of the perceived gender of one's partner in determining sexual identity.

The central research problem of the dissertation involves the ways bisexuality is displayed in the absence of sexual behavior and what motivates this display. Examples of the ways one can use identity performance to make themselves visible as bisexual women are discussed, as well as the ways queer and feminist political ideologies motivate these women to construct and display their bisexual identity. Understanding attempts to create bisexual displays within a dichotomous framework of sex/gender/sexuality leads to a deeper understanding of the ways bisexual identity can transgress and, perhaps through connections to larger social movements, transform these dichotomies. However, the invisibility of bisexuality within the dichotomous organization of sexuality creates particular problems for bisexual identity performance, and the limitations of individual performances within this dichotomous structure are discussed.

Bringing bisexuality into focus within sociology provides a more nuanced discussion of concepts like heterosexism, homophobia, genderism, sexism, monosexism, and indeed, the concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality themselves. Given the centrality of queer and feminist politics in the motivations these women experience to make their bisexuality visible, bisexuals in "heterosexual" relationships provide a unique lens through which to understand heteronormative and homonormative social structures, and the limited ways these structures may be reworked or challenged at the subjective level.

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First and foremost, I would like to thank the women who shared their experiences with me for this study. Without their participation this project would not have been possible, and I am greatly indebted to them for their trust and willingness to be involved with this research project.

I would also like to thank the members of my dissertation committee. My co-chairs, Dr. Maxine Baca Zinn and Dr. Clifford Broman, have been a great source of guidance and motivation and deserve special recognition here. Other committee members, past and present, have also given me so much guidance and support, and I thank them for that.

My gratitude also goes to all of the friends and colleagues that make up my "family of choice." They have provided more support and love for me throughout the years than I could have ever hoped for, and made it possible for me to believe in myself and succeed. Special recognition goes to the "Renegade Sociologists," Jessica, Karijn, Lori, Cathy, Elisha, Rachael, and Amy, without whom I don't think I could have made it through graduate school. They are truly an amazing group of scholarly women, and my appreciation for their support and guidance is immeasurable. I also give special thanks to Shannon, who has provided support and much-needed laughter throughout the years. Finally, I give thanks to my ex-partner, Eric, who has never shied away from vocalizing his belief in my abilities as a teacher and scholar.

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CHAPTER 1:

Bi Way of Introduction

Those who identify as bisexual encounter two major obstacles in the quest for visibility. First, a dichotomous structure of sexuality creates no space for those whose lives fall outside of two supposedly opposite, mutually exclusive, and mutually exhaustive categories of heterosexual and homosexual. Second, the assumption that one's sexual behavior determines their sexual identity, and therefore the gender of the object choice is the basis of one's sexual identity, leaves little room for bisexuals. If one is currently sexually active with someone of the "opposite" gender, s/he is heterosexual. If s/he is dating someone of the "same" gender, s/he is homosexual. The bisexual can only exist for a limited time when s/he is engaged in a "threesome." What of celibate or monogamous (serial or long-term) bisexuals? How is one bisexual outside of sexual behavior? To put it another way, how is one bisexual outside the bedroom?

The purpose of this research project is to explore the ways bisexual identity might be made visible outside of explicitly sexual behavior, or outside the bedroom. Given the current political climate and the general public perception that sexualities other than heterosexuality are *only* based on sexual acts, this research is critical in gaining a better understanding of the broader effects sexual orientation identity has on one's life beyond simply with whom one engages in sexual behavior.

To explore the ways one performs bisexual identity I will examine the ways bisexual women perform a bisexual identity when involved in long-term monogamous relationships (in or outside of legal marriage) with men. Given the pressures of homophobia, biphobia, heterosexism, and sexism, the experiences of women who choose

to maintain a bisexual identity when involved in a "heterosexual" relationship provide insights into both the nature of and resistance to the above mentioned phobias and "isms," as well as a concrete example of the disconnect between sexual identity and sexual behavior. Through the data collected from the experiences reported by bisexual women, I will describe the problems invisibility brings for bisexuals, some of the ways one can perform bisexual identity outside the bedroom, and discuss some of the non-sexual reasons for holding a bisexual identity.

Background of the Study

As mentioned above, bisexuals encounter two major difficulties in constructing and making visible their identities. The first is the way society constructs sexuality in dualistic terms of heterosexual and homosexual. The second obstacle is the perception that one's sexual identity can be determined by an examination of their sexual behavior. While a link certainly does exist between identity and behavior (and is further discussed in the next chapter) research has shown that other factors also from the basis of sexual identities. Here I provide a brief overview of these two main problems.

Dichotomous Sexuality

Sexuality in our society is constructed based on two categories – heterosexual and homosexual, which also rely on a dichotomous categorization of sex and gender. These categories are believed to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive, leaving no room in this categorization for those who may not fit into the "heterosexual" or "homosexual" category (Bradford 2004; Firestein 1996; Fox 1995). Despite studies, including the famous Kinsey studies, that have found the existence of many people who fall outside these two categories, the dualistic conceptualization of sexuality continues (Kinsey,

Pomeroy, and Martin 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, and Gebhard 1953; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, and Michaels 1994). Under the heterosexual matrix, all people must have a sexuality that fits into this either/or scheme (Butler 1990; Butler 1993a), yet bisexuals (as well as other identities) do not fit, and no alternate space or scheme has been constructed that would allow for a prolonged (rather than transitory for heterosexual to homosexual, or vice-versa) identity. Bisexuals are thus rendered invisible, often misidentified by others as one of the two categories available, heterosexual or homosexual, based on the assumptions of others. The "clues" used to categorize the bisexual as heterosexual or homosexual speak to the behavior/identity link, which I now discuss.

Identity/Behavior

Generally, in our society it is assumed that if one engages in sexual behavior with someone of the "opposite" sex s/he is heterosexual, and if one engages in sexual behavior with the "same" sex s/he is homosexual. Of course, studies of sexual identity have shown that there is a far more complicated relationship between sexual behavior and sexual identity (Almaguer 1993; Blumstein and Schwartz 1976; Diamond 2003; McConaghy and Armstrong 1983). White, blond, college girls may "go wild" and engage in sexual behavior with other young women but this doesn't mean that they identify as bisexual or lesbian, nor do men who have sex with men "on the down-low" consider themselves gay (Boykin 2004; King 2005; Plante 2006). Despite the real-life complications and exceptions to the rule, however, in our society the perceived gender of one's object choice is assumed to dictate her/his sexual identity. Bisexuals are assumed to be either heterosexual or homosexual based on who they are dating at any given moment, making

it impossible to have a stable bisexual identity. Bisexuals who choose to be in monogamous relationships are thus defined based on who they've chosen as a partner, creating even more invisibility for this group. While heterosexuals and gays/lesbians in monogamous relationships are generally still thought of as having the same sexual identity they had previously, the bisexual person often loses his/her identity with monogamy. In my own previous work, one of my participants discussed her upcoming marriage and how ridiculous it was to her that others had told her she was no longer bisexual since she was getting married. As she pointed out, married or partnered heterosexuals and homosexuals are still heterosexual and homosexuals, so why should it be any different for her? Technically, she said, she would be a "Bobsexual" (Bob being a pseudonym for her fiancé) since she would only be engaging in sexual behavior with one person, and to her using that identity label made more sense than now calling herself "heterosexual" (Hartman 2005). Since sexual behavior is not the only basis for sexual identity, how do we make sexual identities visible outside of sexual behaviors? That is the question this project has set out to answer.

First, however, I would like to discuss a general caveat of my use of the word "bisexual" in this study. The word bisexual has been criticized for holding up the very dichotomy that makes no room for it through the use of the word "bi" to signify that bisexuals are attracted to both men and women, creating the false impression that there are two (and only two) categories of people made up of clearly defined "men" and "women." It is not my intention to make this assumption. The word "bisexual" is problematic, and this is not lost on scholars of bisexuality or on many bisexually-identified individuals. The term "bisexual" does, however, provide a common short-hand

that is recognized by most people (even if the existence of bisexuals is debated, there is a general sense of what the word means) and thus it is useful here. Many people who might pick the "bisexual" box if asked if they are heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual prefer other terms to describe their sexual identity that do not imply an in-between status, such as pansexual or pansensual, but the problem is that often these alternatives are not intelligible to larger society (Rust 1992). Bisexual, despite being an inaccurate description that implies a bipolar theoretical orientation of sexuality, is a word that is generally understood, and is therefore still useful for individuals constructing identities, scholars conducting studies on this population of people, and mobilizing for social and political change.

Statement of the Problem

The invisibility of and lack of understanding about bisexual identities outside of sexual behaviors ignores the ways bisexual identities exist outside the private world of the bedroom and can challenge the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm that is the foundation of heteronormative society. This project aims to examine the ways that performing bisexuality at the micro level (through everyday attempts to make visible a subjective self-identity) and the reasons for these performances may call into question the sexual hierarchy of heteronormativity that exists at the macro-structural level in the social organization of sexuality. It should be noted, however, that this project is an exploratory study, and, as I will discuss in the following chapters, the dichotomous categorization of sexuality that renders bisexuality invisible creates difficulties in connecting the data I have collected here on individual attempts at visibility to the disruption of macro-structural forces that organize sexuality, such at heteronormativity and homonormativity.

The first problem addressed in this project explores the ways bisexual identities are rendered invisible and bisexuals are often misidentified by others as either straight or gay/lesbian. The bisexual person is assumed to be either heterosexual or homosexual unless s/he makes an attempt to distinguish her/himself as a bisexual. While these attempts may or may not always be appropriately interpreted by the audience, nonetheless they are everyday attempts to make bisexuality visible.

The second problem explores the specifics of these attempts to make visible bisexuality, through what I call a "bisexual display." In this project I will show that through the use of gender displays and other visual and verbal cues, bisexuals engage with cultural assumptions about straight and gay/lesbian styles and appearances to try to create a unique bisexual style based on hybridity.

The third problem investigates why the self-identified bisexual women in this study make these attempts to make visible their identities, especially given that they have the potential to "pass" as heterosexual given their relationships with men. Instead of a desire to "pass," however, in this study I will show that bisexuals often have a desire to be visible *as bisexuals* as a way to challenge or divest themselves of heterosexual privilege and call into questions assumptions based on the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm of heteronormative society. It is through examining this third issue that we can better understand the non-sexual foundations of sexual identities.

Delimitations of this Study

There are many ways one might define bisexuality and individuals who identify as bisexual may engage in a variety of behaviors and relationship styles. Some bisexuals are monogamous, some nonmonogomous. Some might partner with one person at a time,

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others engage in polyamorous relationships. Some might identify as bisexual without having ever engaged in a relationship with someone of the same sex (or of the opposite sex for that matter). Because there are so many ways of being bisexual, for this study I rely on self-identification.

This study attempts to examine the non-sexual behaviors and reasons for holding a bisexual identity, and therefore bisexuals who presumably are not looking for sexual partners were the focus of the study, specifically bisexual-identified women who are in long-term monogamous relationships with men. Bisexuals have been criticized for having a desire to "pass" and hold onto heterosexual privilege (Armstrong 1995; George 1993; Rust 1995; Rust 2000), so this population was chosen specifically because all the women in the sample had the option to "pass" or even cease to self-identify as bisexual if they so desired. They did not. It should be noted that not all self-identified bisexuals would continue to identify as bisexual under these circumstances, and not all bisexuals might make attempts to present a bisexual display, or have a desire to disrupt heteronormative assumptions.

It should also be noted that sexuality is closely tied with gender, as the use of gender displays in the displays of bisexuality I discuss in Chapter 6 indicate. Just as sexuality and gender intersect and intertwine, so too do race and class intersect with gender and sexuality. Although attempts were made to recruit a more diverse sample, in the end the sample was largely composed of white, well-educated, middle class women. Future research must take further measures to recruit minority and lower/working class bisexuals, as well as men (who, for a variety of reasons, seem less likely to identify as bisexual once engaged in long-term monogamous relationship with women) since the

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ways bisexuality is displayed, and the reasons it is made visible, are likely to differ among men and women who face multiple oppressions based on class and race. In addition, the costs of giving up the ability to "pass" and gain heterosexual privilege are unequally distributed (Rust 1996a). For those who have access to a variety of race, class, or gender privileges, such costs may not be as severe and thus well-educated white middle class women might have a greater ability to openly identify as bisexual rather than "pass," and future research projects should explore this issue in greater detail.

This study draws several theoretical concepts from symbolic interactionist, social constructionist, feminist, and queer scholarship to create a theoretical framework for studying the performance of bisexual identities. The goals and cautions of feminist methodologies framed my data collection, and I used focus groups as a way to both lessen the power dynamics between researcher/subject as well as allowing space for people in this rather "hidden" population to come together. Repeatedly, the women who participated discussed how much they appreciated and enjoyed the opportunity to meet and discuss these issues with other women who were in a similar situation as themselves, and, although such a thing may seem small, it is these opportunities to "give back" that are central to feminist research projects such as this one.

Ultimately this study hopes to fill a gap between an emerging bisexual studies and feminist sociology. As a review of feminist scholarship on sexuality in Chapter 2 will explore in detail, discussions of bisexuality are largely lacking in feminist sociology, although feminism is often a core concept of discussion in bisexual studies. This study works to bridge that gap and bring bisexuality to the table in feminist sociology's discussions of gender and sexuality.

Significance of the Study

In this project I will show that bisexuals could occupy a unique position to challenge heteronormative assumptions about sexuality by calling into question the dualistic sex/gender/sexuality paradigm that organizes society. Bringing bisexuality to the table of feminist sociology provides a more nuanced discussion of sex, gender, and sexuality and the ways these concepts are dichotomous within the social construction of sexuality by society, leaving little room for the visibility of those who do not fit these dichotomous categories. This study also further challenges the assumption that one's sexual orientation identity can be assumed based on the gender of one's sexual object choice, and examines the important role that holding ideas favorable to feminist and queer political movements serves in bisexual self-identification.

This study also furthers our understandings about sexual identities. There is a complex relationship between behavior and identity, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, and by focusing on the ways sexual identities might be anchored in more than just sexual behaviors we can begin to understand how other (non-sexual) behaviors might bridge the gap of inconsistency observed between behavior and sexual identities.

Through this project I will also examine the ways gender and sexuality are mutually constructed. As Miller argues, West and Fenstermaker stop short of recognizing how gender and sexuality are accomplished simultaneously rather than in isolation. As Miller states, "...it is essential to recognize that sexuality is not accomplished in isolation from one's perceived gender, race, or social class." (Miller 2006 p. 6). As I discuss in Chapter 4, due to the dominant binary categorization of sexual identities, bisexual identities are almost always rendered invisible. Thus, one's perceived sexuality is *never*

bisexuality, and so Miller's concept of "doing bisexuality" is less useful in analyzing how a bisexual can attempt to make their identity visible to others. For the time being, one cannot "do bisexuality" because the audience will always mistake it for heterosexuality or homosexuality. Instead, I argue that using Lorber's concept of "gender display" (Lorber 1999) offers insights into the ways gender and sexuality rely on each other for making identity visible, and I offer the concept of "bisexual display" to describe the ways the women in my study use a variety of markers (including various gender displays) to make their identity visible. Although their identity displays are still misappropriated, the concept of bisexual display, I argue, relies more on the actions of the social actor rather than the reception or recognition of the audience.

Finally, this project asks questions about the social organization of society based on a dualistic sexual stratification system, and looks at the possibilities for social change that bisexuality brings to the discussion. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, politically motivated bisexual identities challenge this organization and confront the assumptions of the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm on which our social order is based. A sexual politics that draws clear us/them distinctions, as many identity-based social movements have done, does not harness the capacity of a truly queer political movement based on a shared ideology rather than shared experiences in the bedroom.

Project Organization

This project is organized based around thematic chapters that present the data and analysis, with a summary of the findings, conclusions, and limitations discussed in the final chapter.

The following chapter, Chapter 2, provides a review of the three main bodies of literature this project draws on (sexual identities in the social sciences, bisexuality in the social sciences, and the performance of identities, specifically the performance of sexual orientation identities), as well as the major theoretical works mentioned earlier in this introduction (symbolic interaction, social constructionism, feminist theory, and queer theory) that provide the framework of this project. Several key concepts of this project are defined, and a brief overview of my methodological conceptual framework is also included.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed discussion of my methods of collecting and analyzing the data. Difficulties in sampling a "hidden" population are discussed, as well as some of the unique advantages and disadvantages of focus group interviews. Here I also discuss the characteristics of my sample.

In Chapter 4, "Why Bi? Motivations for Identifying as Bisexual," I discuss several themes that motivated the women in my sample to attempt to make visible their bisexual identity through the creation of a bisexual display. These motivations fall into three main themes: feeling whole or having an authentic identity, deliberate attempts to break down stereotypes about bisexuals, and political or ideological factors which motivate the women to make themselves visible as bisexuals. This chapter also examines the ways these motivations for (and often the meaning of) bisexual identity have shifted or changed for the women in my sample now that they are no longer single or looking for sexual partners.

Chapter 5, "(In)Visibility and the Challenge to Bisexual Identities" examines issues related to bisexual visibility (and invisibility) and the problems this invisibility

creates for identity performance. This chapter addresses several of the obstacles to gaining visibility, including a general lack of bisexual visibility and the misappropriation of identity due to the common belief in dichotomous sexuality that renders bisexuals as visible only as straight or gay/lesbian.

Chapter 6, "Creating a Bisexual Display," focuses on ways to create a bisexual display both in a variety of contexts. I begin with a discussion of the ways the women used visual and interactional cues in attempts to make themselves visible as bisexual women in what I term "wide engagements," followed by a discussion of the ways they attempt to mark themselves as bisexual within more "limited engagements" for smaller audiences. This chapter addresses how these attempts to use gender displays to create a bisexual display have implications for the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm as well as further our understandings of gender and sexuality displays.

Chapter 7 provides a summary of the implications for this study discussed throughout the data chapters, and the significance of this project in furthering sociological understandings of bisexual identity performance. Limitations of the study and key areas for future research based on the findings from this study are also discussed.

CHAPTER 2:

Review of the Literature and Conceptual Framework

In this chapter I provide an overview of relevant bodies of literature and discuss my conceptual framework for this project. I begin with a discussion of the three areas of social science literature that provide the foundation of this project: sexual identities, bisexuality, and identity performance. Using these areas as a jumping off point, I discuss how this project arose from the gaps in the literature, and end with a discussion of my conceptual framework which draws from symbolic interactionist, social constructionist, queer, and feminist perspectives to examine the performance of bisexual identities.

Review of the Relevant Literature

This project is focused on how one performs bisexual identity, and is informed by three areas of literature: sexual identities in the social sciences, bisexuality in the social sciences, and performance of identities, specifically performance of sexual orientation identities. What follows is a brief discussion of the relevant literature on sexual identity as it pertains to bisexual identity formation, followed by a discussion of bisexuality and finally a review of the literature on the performance of identities.

Sexual Identity

Identity in general is considered an area of interest for sociologists, especially in the field of social psychology, and sexuality is one among many social bases for identity (Howard 2000 p. 311). One of the most important social psychological concepts for this project's discussion of identity formation is that of the "self." The self is not something a person is born with but rather develops over time (Mead 1977). The self is experienced through reflection on the feedback of others, as Mead explains, "The individual

experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs" (Mead 1977 p. 202). This interaction between the individual and others in society in the formation of the self has been a key focus in the social psychology of identities. Rosenberg (Rosenberg 1981) discusses in detail the way the self-concept—how the individual sees her/himself—is constructed through social interaction with others, and at the same time shapes the interactions one has. This self-concept is the focus of most models of sexual orientation identity development.

Since the conceptualization of the term "homosexual" in the late 18th Century (Foucault 1990) through the mid-1960's, the literature regarding homosexuality and identity development was dominated by medical and deviance perspectives. With the Stonewall riots and the rise of gay liberation movements came an explosion of literature from psychology, sociology, and social psychology to explain the development of gay identity that focuses on the process, or stages of identity development. The following is a brief overview of the major works on sexual orientation identity formation over the past thirty years, with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each specific model followed by a general discussion of the limitations of linear models, especially as a means for the study and conceptualization of bisexual identities. Understanding current theorizing of how sexual identities are formed provides a groundwork for understanding this project's questions regarding the motivations behind the performance of a bisexual identity.

Altman

Dennis Altman's *1971 The Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* was one of the first post-Stonewall texts to be published concerning homosexual identity (Altman 1971; Eliason 1996). While this was not an empirical study, it is noted here as it signified the break from a medicalized or deviance perspective to a description of homosexuality as socially constructed. In many ways it was Altman's break from these theories of deviance to one of social construction that allowed the following scholars to create their models of homosexual identity development, and therefore this work is worth mentioning.

Plummer

Plummer's 1975 work is written from an interactionist perspective (Eliason 1996; Plummer 1975) and describes the process of becoming a homosexual. Plummer identified four stages in this process: (1) sensitization – becoming aware of the possibility of being a homosexual, (2) signification and disorientation – feelings of being different and anxiety and confusion over this difference, (3) coming out – self-recognition as a homosexual and an exploration of the gay community, and (4) stabilizing homosexuality – a commitment to a homosexual lifestyle. One of the major weaknesses of this model is that Plummer offers no empirical data to support his work. A second weakness is that Plummer is only concerned with homosexual men, not lesbian identity formation, so we have no way of knowing if this model holds across gender differences. A third weakness is that he does not actually define homosexual identity or indicate its relationship to the self-concept (Troiden 1998). This lack of definition creates a problem for any test of his hypothesis. However, one of the strengths of Plummer's work is that while he does

construct a stage model of homosexual identity, he does not argue that there is an ideal sequence to becoming a homosexual, allowing flexibility to his model (Eliason 1996). In arguing that there is no "ideal" process of identity formation, Plummer allows for much of the flexibility and instability of identity that is witnessed in real life, and this flexibility is important when applying theoretical models to flesh-and-blood individuals.

Troiden

In Troiden's research in the late 1970's he tested a model very similar to Plummer's model with a sample of 150 gay men (Troiden 1998). His model also included four stages: (1) Sensitization, (2) Dissociation, (3) Coming Out, and (4) Commitment. Troiden's second stage in the model, dissociation, consists of a conscious distancing of one's sexual feelings from a personal sexual identity, and this takes into account the confusion many in his sample reported as they progressed toward a gay identity. Like Plummer's model, however, this model also has its limitations—it was only tested on males, so its ability to inform our knowledge of lesbian identity formation is limited. Additionally, like Plummer, Troiden fails to define homosexuality or relate the concepts of self-concept and identity (Cass 1984b), which makes replication of his study difficult. A decade later Troiden revised his model to the following stages: (1) Sensitization, (2) Identity Confusion, (3) Identity Assumption, and (4) Commitment (Troiden 1998). One strength in this revised model is that the "Identity Assumption" stage (similar to the "coming out" stage in his previous model) acknowledges that stigma and other social realities might prevent public disclosure of sexual orientation for some individuals and, therefore, "coming out" is not a focal point in his theory of identity development. This allows for a greater range of experiences as one moves through the process of adopting a

gay identity, as those who do not "come out" are not necessarily excluded from this revised model. Another strength is that in this revised model Troiden distinguishes between stages of homosexual identity and "homosexual events," discussing the former as something emergent and never fully determined in a fixed sense, and the latter as "well-defined, clearly recognizable occurrences in the lives of women and men who define themselves as homosexual and adopt homosexuality as a way of life" (Troiden 1998 p. 276). While this distinction clarifies the scope of Troiden's model and allows a greater range of flexibility in the process of "becoming" homosexual, I would argue this is more a model of life events that those who identify as homosexual go through, not a model of how one comes to identify as homosexual. Additionally, in using average ages of event occurrences in his model, Troiden obscures the variety and flexibility he claims his model has. His model is also focused on adolescents and young adults who adopt a homosexual identity, so one cannot necessarily generalize his model to those who adopt a homosexual identity later in life (Eliason 1996). A major strength is that, with this revision, Troiden explored gender differences in this model and acknowledges that identity formation may be different for gay men and lesbians.

Ponse

Barbara Ponse's model (Ponse 1978) overcomes some of the limitations of the models discussed above as hers is the first to look explicitly at lesbian identity formation. Her study focuses on identities formed against the backdrop the norms within the lesbian community. She also offers empirical evidence for her model through informants, observation, and in-depth interviews with lesbian identified women. Ponse developed a "gay trajectory" consisting of five elements that can combine in various ways to lead to a

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lesbian identity: (1) subjective feelings of being different from heterosexual women due to attraction to other women, (2) an understanding that those feelings could be labeled as "lesbian," (3) assumption of a lesbian identity, (4) seeking lesbian community, and (5) engaging in a sexual or emotional lesbian relationship. An advantage of this model is that it is not a linear stage model but rather creates a more fluid trajectory of identity development, with the possibility that elements will occur at varying times or in various combinations within an individual's life. One of the difficulties of identity research brought to light in Ponse's work is the problem of who "really counts" as a lesbian, as Ponse found some degree of independence between identity and sexual activity among her respondents. Ponse developed a typology of lesbian identities which is helpful in a discussion of the flexibility of identity. Most of her respondents were of the "lesbian identity with lesbian activity" type, but she also found "lesbian identity with bisexual, heterosexual, or celibate activity," "bisexual identity with lesbian activity," and women categorized as "heterosexual identity with lesbian activity"(Ponse 1978). Unlike previous attempts to create a model of identity, Ponse is more concerned with detailing the range of identities women assume within the lesbian community. This is viewed as a limitation by some (Troiden 1998) as Ponse does not describe how these women came to assume a lesbian identity. But I argue that Ponse's shift in focus to the many "lesbian" identities available is a strength because it draws attention to something other models have not—that homosexual identity is not singular, but rather there exist plural and complex homosexual identities that one can adopt along the "gay trajectory" of identity development. However, one limitation of Ponse's work is that 96% of her sample consisted of white women, so the perspectives of lesbians of color are almost completely

neglected. Another critique is that she did not use standardized questions in her interviews and that the variation she finds is because her study is not limited to only lesbian-identified women with lesbian activity (Troiden 1998). Again I argue that the variation found is a strength, not a weakness, when it comes to what her work can tell us about actual lesbian existence and experience. By widening her scope to the variety of women engaged in the lesbian community, regardless of identity, Ponse's research examines the assumptions regarding the relationship of identity and behavior by pointing out that some lesbian-identified women do not engage in lesbian activity and some women engaged in lesbian activity are not lesbian-identified.

Cass

Vivienne Cass (Cass 1979; Cass 1984a; Cass 1984b) provides the first theoretical model of homosexual identity formation that explicitly attempts to explain both lesbian and gay male identity. Her model is also one of the more comprehensive as she attempts to explore cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of identity formation. Cass's model consists of six stages of identity formation: (1) Identity Confusion – one begins to question the assumption that they are heterosexual through their experience of feelings that could be labeled homosexual, (2) Identity Comparison – a person examines his/her behavior compared to the feedback of others and the identity of the homosexual in general, (3) Identity Tolerance – the person tries out the label of homosexual and makes contact with other homosexuals, (4) Identity Acceptance – if initial contact with homosexuals is positive the person may move into a state of acceptance of his/her homosexual identity; selective disclosure to others may occur, (5) Identity Pride – to achieve congruence the individual may divide the world into a heterosexual/homosexual

dichotomy, and if the heterosexual world is too negative the person may reject them as inferior to homosexuals, and (6) Identity Synthesis – congruence is achieved and identity fully accepted; homosexuality becomes merely one aspect of the integrated total identity.

Cass conducted a study to test her model using data from 109 male and 69 female respondents and found consistency between the factors that make up her stages and the respondents' self-defined stage of identity. Cass also concluded that because of overlap between stages 1 and 2 as well as 5 and 6 it may be possible to narrow the model to a four-stage model, which she does in later revisions. Others have also tested Cass's model and found a definite fit between this model of identity development and the experiences of gay men and lesbians (Levine 1997). What is most significant about Cass's model is that she proposes identity synthesis as the endpoint while previous models proposed the acceptance of a homosexual identity as the end result. This difference is important when we consider identity politics and social change. For Cass, identity development is not complete until the homosexual identity is merely one aspect of the self, but one is less likely to work for social change if they do not perceive their sexuality as an important if not primary part of their being (Eliason 1996). According to the model proposed by Cass, gay rights activists are not yet at the end-point of her model of identity development because they identify primarily as gay or lesbian. This has important implications for identity politics but Cass does not address this issue. Another drawback to Cass's work is that her concept of identity equates identity development with identity disclosure. According to Cass, homosexual identity development culminates with an increasing desire to disclose one's identity to non-homosexual audiences (Cass 1984b). This aspect of her model does not take into account the reality that due to a variety of factors many

gay men and lesbians do not disclose their sexual identity to everyone in their lives (Troiden 1998).

Sophie

Sophie (Sophie 1986) attempts to synthesize early models of gay male identity formation into a model aimed specifically at lesbian identity formation. Her model consists of four stages: (1) First Awareness, (2) Testing and Exploration, (3) Identity Acceptance, and (4) Identity Integration. Sophie tested her model through interviews with 14 women currently experiencing changes in their sexual orientation identity. Sophie found that order and timing of events varied among women and for some lesbian identity was not the final stage of development. Sophie also found that the process of identity development was very sensitive to sociohistorical context, as evidenced by the fact that the influence of the gay liberation movement and the support provided within the lesbian community was very significant for respondents exploring lesbian identity. One of the strengths of this research is that Sophie concludes that the linear nature of previous models does not always capture the reality of identity development, especially in terms of describing the later stages in the process. While a stage of awareness may generally come prior to adopting a homosexual identity, exploration, acceptance, and integration may come at various points. Another strength in this model is that Sophie uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches, which may be the best way to attempt to capture both the broader stages as well as individual differences. Unfortunately, in this particular example, Sophie's small sample size of only 14 respondents makes quantitative analysis less meaningful and makes her findings less generalizable. One final limitation is that her sample appears to be homogeneous and predominantly composed of feminist-identified

women, who likely have fewer conflicts about coming out as lesbian due to their feminist politics (McCarn and Fassinger 1996).

Chapman and Brannock

Chapman and Brannock (Chapman and Brannock 1987) surveyed 197 women, most of whom were lesbian-identified, to gather information about their lives from their first awareness of being a lesbian to their current lesbian identification. They argue that the process of self-labeling occurs through interaction with non-lesbians as a woman discovers that her experiences and feelings are different from other women. They propose a five-stage model of lesbian identity development: (1) Same Sex Orientation, (2) Incongruence, (3) Self-Questioning Exploration, (4) Self-Identification, and (5) Choice of Lifestyle. One of the significant differences in this model is that it attempts to combine a biological basis for sexual orientation with a chosen identity. According to this model, orientation precedes the recognition that one might be a lesbian, which is followed by a prolonged period of questioning in which homosexual and heterosexual activity occurs. This is followed by the adoption of the lesbian label and a final stage in which a woman decides to seek other women for relationships or consider other options, such as celibacy. The strength of this model is that it allows for a long period of exploration in which sexual activity and sexual identity are not necessarily connected. It is also one of the few models developed specifically to explore sexual identity in women. A drawback is that, much like other models, Chapman and Brannock propose a linear model with involvement in a lesbian lifestyle as the ultimate goal. While the exploration stage offers some fluidity, the model is, overall, linear and does not allow for much variation in outcomes. Additionally, as McCarn and Fassinger point out, while the survey data the

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authors provide is useful in understanding women's experiences, it is not entirely clear how this data is linked to the model being tested (McCarn and Fassinger 1996).

McCarn and Fassinger

McCarn and Fassinger (McCarn and Fassinger 1996) create a model of lesbian identity development that separates individual identity from group membership identity, a distinction that is helpful to gaining a better understanding of the distinction between internal and social processes at work in identity formation. They use the term "phases" rather than "stages" to imply greater flexibility within the model, and while they do lay out a progression of phases, they state that they conceptualize the process as continuous and circular rather than linear. Both individual and group membership identities are composed of four phases: (1) Awareness, (2) Exploration, (3) Deepening/Commitment, and (4) Internalization/Synthesis. For individual identity development, awareness concerns the feelings of being different; the exploration phase consists of exploring one's strong attraction to women; deepening/commitment refers to a deepening of self-knowledge about one's sexual attractions and the crystallization of choices about sexuality. For some women this may mean identifying as lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual depending on how one perceives their choices as well as their sexual and emotional attractions; finally, in the last phase a woman experiences a fuller self-acceptance of her desire for women as part of her overall identity. For group membership identities the authors identify slightly different processes for these four phases: first, awareness of the idea that heterosexuality is not a universal norm and that lesbians and gay men exist; second, a woman explores the lesbian/gay community and seeks knowledge about lesbians and gay men; the third phase in developing a group

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membership identity involves a deeper awareness of the value of the gay and lesbian community and the oppression faced by lesbians and gay men; fourth, the lesbian woman identifies as a member of a minority group and synthesizes this group identity into her overall self. The strength of this model is that the authors separate individual identity formation from engagement with a group identity, which is helpful for understanding that these are in fact two processes of identity formation and that it is possible to develop a lesbian identity outside of an identity as a member of the lesbian community (for example, women in rural areas without access to urbanized gay communities still identify as lesbians). However, even though the authors state their model is not meant to be linear, it is difficult to view it any other way. It seems clear that synthesis and integration of a lesbian identity is the ultimate goal. Though the authors mention the possibility that women may identify as bisexual or heterosexual and have same-sex desires prior to Phase 3 of the individual model, the final phase concerns the development of a lesbian identity, which implies that those who form bisexual or heterosexual identities are not completing the process appropriately.

As this discussion shows, most of these models create a linear path from heterosexual identification to homosexual identification and do not account for prolonged or static bisexual identity. Instead, bisexuality is theorized as a phase along the process of becoming gay or lesbian, not as an endpoint itself (Cass 1979; Cass 1984a; Cass 1984b; Chapman and Brannock 1987; Eliason 1996; Gonsiorek 1995; McCarn and Fassinger 1996; Sophie 1986; Troiden 1998). These models also assume a linear development towards a stable and unchanging identity rather than allowing for fluidity and changes in identity throughout the life course. In addition, these models assume that

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increased salience of a homosexual identity – increased same-sex sexual contact, for example – leads to a more stable and unchanging homosexual identity. Research on those who identify as bisexual, however, has shown the opposite of what such models would predict—as the salience of bisexual identity decreases over the lifespan, certainty and stability of a bisexual identity increases (Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor 2001). Weinberg et al. found that even though the salience of a bisexual identity decreased due to less involvement with a bisexual lifestyle—sexual encounters with "both" sexes and involvement in the bisexual community, for example—participants grew more certain about their bisexual identity rather than less certain. Rather than questioning or changing identity, participants questioned or changed the criteria on which they based their identity and considered their continuing dual attractions a basis for identity rather than change their identity to match their current sexual behaviors (Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor 2001 p. 202). Research on bisexual identities calls into question these linear models that presume an identity based almost exclusively on behavior. "While *doing* may be necessary to *being* when one is young, and a sexual preference identity is high in salience, a continuing sexual attraction to both women and men may suffice when the salience of the sexual preference identity is lower and the time, energy, and opportunities to act on the attraction decrease" (Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor 2001 p. 204). For the monogamous bisexual, identity cannot be based on current sexual behavior but rather, as Weinberg et al. found, bisexuals must change the criteria on which they base their identities as various life circumstances—such as monogamous relationships, decreased sex drive, or lack of contact with the bisexual community—shape opportunities for sexual behaviors.

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Although more recent scholarship on sexual identities has increasingly focused on bisexual identity (Ault 1996a; Esterberg 1997; Fox 1995; Fox 1996; Paul 2000; Rust 1995; Rust 2001b), models resembling those discussed above have not been created to model bisexual identity formation. This may be because bisexuality lends itself better to more fluid conceptions of identity rather than the linear, categorical stage or "phase" models of identity formation that are commonly found in the existing sexual identity literature in the social sciences. It is towards more specific accounts of bisexuality in the social science literature that I now turn.

Bisexuality

Ask for a definition of bisexuality and you will likely get as many different definitions as people you ask. Generally definitions of bisexuality focus on sex, gender, or sexuality (or all three) and the dichotomous split between maleness/femaleness, masculine/feminine, and heterosexuality/homosexuality, although in contemporary Western society bisexuality is most commonly conceptualized as the latter (Storr 1999). Bisexuality is sometimes conceptualized as a space containing elements of both categories on either side of the slash, or as a middle ground between the two on some linear scale. Bisexuality can also be conceptualized as a potential to be attracted (emotionally and/or sexually) to others of a variety of genders. For some, bisexuality might entail being 2-4 on the Kinsey scale, or it might only include those who are strictly a Kinsey 3. One of the difficulties of research on bisexuality is the variety of meanings the word has. However, because this study is mainly concerned with bisexual identity performance rather than sexual behaviors, my review of the literature on bisexuality is

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primarily focused on theoretical and empirical research on bisexuality as it informs our thinking about bisexual identities and, more specifically, bisexual identity performance.

Theoretical Conceptualizations of Bisexuality

Previous theoretical work on bisexuality has generally fallen into three categories (Hemmings 2002). The first is the concept of bisexuality as a bridge. Here bisexuality exists in the gap between heterosexuality and homosexuality and therefore only has meaning in relation to these two opposite positions. As Hemmings points out, seen this way bisexuality does not deconstruct but rather upholds the categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Bisexuality is also seen as more of a phase because, as Hemmings argues, no one stays on a bridge for very long. A second way to conceptualize bisexuality has been to see it as transcendence—as existing in the overlap between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Hemmings rightly points out that in this theoretical conceptualization bisexuality again is not a new space but rather parts of heterosexuality and homosexuality. This formulation of bisexuality tends to remain abstract since the powers and institutional forces that create and maintain the categories of heterosexual and homosexual are not taken into account. The final conceptual category used in bisexual theory that Hemmings discusses is the concept of bisexuality as transformative. Here bisexuality is a site of political struggle, a perspective similar to a feminist standpoint. When we conceptualize bisexuality as an active space of struggle, "bisexuality becomes less a static ground and more a peopled location..." (Hemmings 2002 p. 3-4) and it becomes easier to understand bisexuality as both a fluid location of political struggle and a potentially stable and meaningful identity category based on a commitment to this political struggle.

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Theoretical Models of Bisexual Identity

One of the key changes in the development of bisexual identity is the Klein Grid, which accounts for one's past, present, and ideal attractions, desires, and behaviors with regard to sexuality (Klein 1993). This model separates various components of sexuality and attempts to account for the past and present, as well as explore the way the individual would ideally like to be. Unlike the Kinsey Scale, which places the individual along a linear continuum between the heterosexual and homosexual endpoints, the Klein Grid has the advantage of creating sexual orientation as a three-dimensional scale, accounting for multiple measures of desire and behavior. However, this grid still assumes that sexual orientation is based on the gender of one's object of desire (Young 1997) rather than on other characteristics that may be as, or more, important in sexual attraction, and the Klein Grid, like the models of sexual identity discussed earlier, also assumes bisexuality falls somewhere between heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Empirical Studies of Bisexual Identity

In addition to theoretical models of bisexual identity, several empirical studies have also been conducted to better understand bisexual identity. Blumstein and Schwartz (Blumstein and Schwartz 1976; Blumstein and Schwartz 2000) conducted in-depth interviews with 156 bisexual men and women and examine the diversity within those who self-identify as bisexual. They found several factors that were conducive to labeling oneself bisexual, including same-sex experimentation within the context of friendship, bisexual encounters such as "threesomes," and political positions favorable to bisexuality, including involvement in feminist politics. They also found that actual homosexual experience did not need occur prior to one labeling him or herself bisexual. The authors

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also argue that, "Bisexuality illustrates and illuminates important facets of processes of self-labeling, of the plasticity of human sexuality, and of the differences between the erotic and the emotional socialization of men and women in our society"(Blumstein and Schwartz 2000 p. 341). They found several key differences between men who self-identify as bisexual and women who self-identify as bisexual. Overall, women reported being less traumatized by initial same-sex experiences and were less likely than men to allow a single homosexual experience to lead to identifying as exclusively homosexual. Women reported that same-sex activities were an extension of female affection and did not necessarily have implications for their sexuality. Men, however, were far more worried about what the experience might mean for their masculinity. Men also reported much more difficulty than women in coping with their homosexual behavior and the development of a homosexual or bisexual identity.

A body of research by Paula Rust examines bisexual identity among both men and women (Rust 1996a; Rust 2001a; Rust 2001b). In an international sample of over 900 bisexually-identified men and women Rust found a great deal of diversity among respondents, including diversity around what labels they use to identify - only 64% of respondents indicated that "bisexual" was their first choice of identity label, others preferred labels such as "bi," "pansexual," or "ambisexual" to name just a few of the 24 labels used in various combinations (Rust 2001b). In an exploration of the differences in relationships choices made by 577 bisexual men and women, Rust found that 17% were involved in monogamous relationships. The most common relationship among bisexuals was a primary partner with secondary relationships. This finding concurs with Reinhardt's exploration of bisexual women in heterosexual partnerships, in which the

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vast majority of women reported being involved with women in a secondary relationship outside of their primary heterosexual relationship (Reinhardt 2002). While this relationship style was most common among both bisexual men and women, Rust does note differences between men and women in their next most common relationship arrangements. Among women, the next most common relationship was serial monogamy (11%) while among men lifetime polyfidelity was more common (14.1%) followed by a multiple relationships in which none are considered primary (9%). Contrary to popular myth, very few bisexual women and even fewer bisexual men reported being involved in "swinging," which may reflect the overall heterosexual focus of most swinging groups (Rust 1996b).

In addition to differences between men and women who identify as bisexual, differences between bisexual women and lesbians have also been documented (Rust 1993; Rust 1995). Rust (1993) examined the identity formation of 346 lesbians and 60 bisexual women, finding that on average women who identify as bisexual come out later in life and experience more changes in their identifications than women who identify as lesbian. 77% of lesbians reported coming out by age 23, compared to the average age of 28 for bisexual respondents. In addition, bisexual women reported becoming aware of same sex attractions later than lesbians (18 years old vs. 15 years old). Bisexuals were no more likely than lesbians to report wondering about their sexual identity at the time of the study; however bisexual respondents tended to have more variety in their previous identifications than lesbians. Bisexuals were less likely than lesbians to come out initially as lesbian (27% compared to 66%). However, less than half of bisexuals came out as bisexual initially. These differences may be due to the dichotomous structure of sexuality

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in our society, and a lack of bisexual visibility. In an either/or structure those who find themselves in the middle may not be sure of how to label themselves, or they may fluctuate between labels as their desires shift over time.

Despite these studies, relatively little is known about bisexual identity. Small sample sizes and the great diversity among those who identify as bisexual make generalizing difficult, which in turn creates a lack of generalized models of bisexual identity formation. Despite what is known about bisexual identity, given this difficulty it is not surprising that existing models of sexual orientation identity formation do not account for bisexuality.

While there is a small, but growing, literature on bisexuality and bisexual identity within the social sciences, little attention has been paid to the performative aspects of bisexual identities. The performance of identity, or how one marks oneself to display one's self-concept for others to see, is the main focus of this project, and that is the area of the literature I will now discuss.

Performance of Identities

Goffman and Performance

Although Goffman does not discuss the performance of identities based on sexual orientation, a brief discussion of Goffman's concepts as they pertain to this work is necessary here. Goffman defines a "performance" as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (Goffman 1959 p. 15). The others who contribute to the performance are the "audience," "observers," or "co-participants." The "front" is the part of the performance that "regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those

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who observe the performance" (Goffman 1959 p. 22). Goffman uses the term front to refer to the "expressive equipment" that is used, intentionally or unconsciously, by an individual during a performance. The front can refer to the setting of the performance or the appearance and manner of the performer. Researchers who examine the performance of sexual orientation identities often examine the ways that an individual makes use of this front to convey his or her identity to others.

Performance of Sexual Identities

The research of Esterberg has examined the performance of sexual orientation identity by focusing on issues of performance of lesbian identity (Esterberg 1996; Esterberg 1997). Esterberg's research uses responses from 25 interviews and 79 surveys among lesbian and bisexual (22 of the total 104 participants) women in a progressive rural East Coast city. Esterberg's participants discuss performing their lesbian identities in terms of "getting caught up in the role" (Esterberg 1996 p. 265) and wearing certain clothes to make themselves feel more butch or femme, as well as feeling a certain way, as one woman described it, having "a certain swagger when I walk" (Esterberg 1996 p. 265). Esterberg discusses the way the actions of her participants are transformed into something playful. However, this playfulness is "serious play," and is only extended in terms of interactions with other lesbians—as one participant discusses, if a straight man called her a "butch dyke" that would be interpreted as an insult, not as part of her performance as a lesbian. Esterberg's participants also discuss playing "spot the dyke" as they try to recognize other women like themselves. Here, the way "lesbian" is coded is particular to one's idea of lesbian identity. Visual and interactional cues, such as haircuts, clothing, eye contact, and jewelry, were used by women to both pick out other lesbians

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and to mark themselves as lesbian so that others could identify them. This attempt to recognize others was both playful (no one thought they could accurately recognize a lesbian all the time) and serious, as the recognition provided a sense of community and shared identity. The serious aspect of identifying others as lesbian was problematic for participants who felt they didn't "look like a lesbian" and were often misidentified by others. These women wanted others to mark them as non-heterosexual, but their identity was often missed by others leaving them to feel invisible as lesbians or bisexual women. This was particularly troubling for women who had a more politically-driven lesbian or bisexual identity (Esterberg 1996). Esterberg concludes by discussing the ways lesbian styles have been changing in the 1990's, as "lesbian chic" has made it to the mainstream media and lesbianism has been distorted and depoliticized. Esterberg argues, however, that these mainstream images, though distortions, at the same time reflect a very real shift in the increasing playfulness of lesbian imagery and that "the lesbian 'uniform' is no longer ubiquitous" (Esterberg 1996 p. 276). Still, the butch or androgynous forms of lesbian imagery are more highly valued and visible, which, as Esterberg points out, is not surprising in a culture that values men as the standard. She concludes that more research is needed on the performance of lesbian identity so that we can gain a better understanding of the ways women draw on concepts associated with "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1991) for their own purposes in their interactional and institutional accomplishments of lesbian identity. As Esterberg agues, "Focusing on the performative aspects of lesbianism and the accounts that lesbians give of their performances enables us to reflect on the ways in which women draw from traditional accoutrements of gender for their own purposes. In doing so, it is important not to miss

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the larger ways in which lesbian performances, as social interactions, are structured." (Esterberg 1997 p. 96-97). It should be noted that bisexual performance also draws on traditional accoutrements of gender, and in this way the institutional context of gender in which both lesbian and bisexual performances occur must not go unnoted.

Although the literature on lesbian appearance reviewed here does not explicitly draw on the concept of performance, this literature is useful in examining the cultural scripts available to those performing a sexual orientation identity. In addition, research on certain kinds of lesbian appearance—such as butch—makes use of the concepts related to identity performance. Several authors have examined the concept of "doing" lesbian beauty and appearance (Blackman and Perry 1990; Hammidi and Kaiser 1999; Schorb and Hammidi 2000) as well as doing masculinity and femininity within lesbian sexualities (Halberstam 1998). In these discussions, lesbians actively engage with stereotypes regarding hair and clothing as a way of identifying themselves as lesbians. For example, having the "dyke haircut" can be a way of both announcing their sexuality and making themselves visible to others as lesbians. Here lesbianism is almost as much about style, dress, and attitude as it is about specific sexual practices. This line of theorizing can be seen most clearly in discussion of butch style (Inness 1998; Soloman 1993). As Inness explains, "Butch is a word to describe a woman with a certain attitude, a certain look, a certain energy and way of self-presentation and self-identification" (Inness 1998 p. 236). Butch goes beyond being a specific established pattern of sexual interaction to a style, a way of interacting not just with sexual partners but with the world. Through the literature on lesbian style and appearance we can see the ways that style is deliberately deployed to signify identity.

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Performance of Bisexuality

A recent study by Miller uses Goffman's concepts of front and performance to examine the bisexual front and ways of "doing bisexuality" (Miller 2006). Miller's work focuses on the ways bisexual identity is often misappropriated as either heterosexual or homosexual, and the ways bisexuals themselves work to resist these misappropriations and construct an authentic bisexual identity. Building off West and Zimmerman and West and Fenstermaker's work on "doing gender" Miller extends this concept to "doing sexuality," arguing that sexuality and gender are constructed through interaction simultaneously (Miller 2006). Miller acknowledges, however, that because social others do not see bisexuality but rather misidentify bisexuals as either heterosexual or homosexual, bisexual identity is hidden by the heterosexual matrix and that "'doing gender' cannot yet mean 'doing bisexuality' only 'doing heterosexuality' or 'doing homosexuality'" (Miller 2006). For bisexuals gender cues cannot be used to convey to others a bisexual sexuality in the ways that gender cues may convey a heterosexual or homosexual sexuality. Instead, Miller contends, bisexuals must rely on other verbal or overt visual cues to perform identity.

The Gaps in the Literature: My Research Questions

As discussed in this review of the literature, sociologists are concerned not just with the mechanics of sexual behavior but rather the societal issues which frame our meanings and ideas about sexuality. A review of social science literature on sexual identities, and, more specifically, on bisexual identities and performance, leaves us with several unanswered questions. In a political climate influenced by gay pride and queer politics, how are sexual identities made visible and used to create change? Does the

meaning of bisexual identity change when sexual behavior changes (for example, when one is not sexually involved with both men and women). How does the concept of performance bridge the gap between sexual behavior and identity? And how would looking at these performances help us to better understand identities based on sexual orientation? These are some of the larger sociological questions not answered in previous research that this project has attempted to examine.

More specifically for this project, while Esterberg's (1996) work examines the ways lesbian identity is performed, and Miller (2006) begins to examine how bisexual identity is performed, the ways bisexuality is performed in the absence of sexual behavior (and in the absence of seeking sexual partners) has not been researched. From literature on lesbians we cannot know if the meanings of cues used in performance are different for bisexual women, or even if bisexual women use the same cues at all. What makes up a bisexual front?

In addition to these issues raised in comparison with lesbians in Esterberg's work, we do not know what factors encourage or inhibit performance of bisexuality. For example, does one's partner also being bisexual encourage one to display their bisexual identity more than if their partner is heterosexual? Does the presence of children in the home change the performance of bisexual identity? In Esterberg's research some participants reported that their performances were a way to feel like a part of the lesbian community and show their interest in potential sexual partners. For bisexual women who are not looking for sexual partners, is the display of bisexual identity a way to find community? And why is this community important even when one is not acting on sexual desires? This project looks at these issues and asks the following key research questions:

(1) How do women perform bisexual identity outside of sexual behavior?
(2) What motivates these performances?
(3) Do these performances disrupt heteronormativity and/or homonormativity?

Although aspects of all three research questions infiltrate each of the thematic findings chapters, the first question will mainly be addressed in Chapter 6 in discussing the creation of bisexual displays. The second question provides the framework for Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 addresses the third question peripherally in discussing how the invisibility of bisexuality creates difficulty in performing bisexuality and disrupting either heteronormativity or homonormativity. Unfortunately, the invisibility of bisexuality at the macro-structural level (which I discuss in more detail below) creates difficulty in addressing this third question in more than an exploratory manner in this project. Instead I focus on some of the ways that performing bisexual identities may disrupt heteronormativity (and to a lesser extent discussed here, homonormativity) at the micro level of interpersonal interactions.

Conceptual Framework

Rather than imposing a theoretically-based hypothesis to be tested this work is exploratory and descriptive in nature. At the same time, however, no researcher is a truly objective "blank slate" out to discover what others have to say about a topic. Indeed, even the choice of topic, and what is considered legitimate to research, is influenced by theoretical considerations. This study draws on several theoretical concepts within social constructionism, feminist, and queer theories as well as symbolic interaction, and here I will discuss how each of these four areas pertain to the literature discussed previously, my research questions, and my methodological framework. A "map" of my framework is included as Figure 1.

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Drawing together these concepts from social constructionism, queer theory, feminist theory, and symbolic interaction, this project sets forth a framework for studying and understanding the performance of bisexual identities. Although bisexual identities find little support or visibility at the institutional level, at the micro level we can use concepts such as gender displays, the presentation of self, and performativity to begin to examine how bisexual identities are created or made visible outside of sexual behavior and why these performance, though often difficult to recognize due to the binary construction of sex/gender/sexuality, are so important.

Social Constructionism

The sociology of sexuality has been heavily influenced by the argument that sexuality is socially constructed. That is, sexuality is not a natural phenomena, nor is it something entirely rooted in biology and reproduction, but rather it is a product of social, historical, and political forces with meanings that change over time and across cultures (D'Emilio and Freedman 1997; Epstein 1994; Seidman 1994; Stein and Plummer 1994; Weeks 2003). Unlike sexologists, who were concerned more with the mechanics of sexuality, sociologists have been concerned with the ways meanings of sexual practices and sexual identities have shifted over time, and the ways dominant ideas regarding sex (gender norms, compulsory heterosexuality, and monogamy) shape and control behavior as well as organize society into different classes of sexual beings. Two central concepts of social construction that guide this project are the changing or unstable meanings of sexuality (and the identities based on these changing meanings) and the social construction of sexuality at four levels of facets, encompassing both macro and micro social processes.

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The Changing Meanings of Sexuality

At its core, social constructionist approaches to sexual identity argue that identical sexual acts may have varying social significance and meaning across cultures and historical periods (Foucault 1990; Greenberg 1988; Vance 1998). Different forms of social construction theory may go further to argue that sexual desire itself is socially constructed, and therefore sexuality itself may be an unstable category of study. As Vance (1998) asks, "If sexuality is constructed differently at each time and place, can we use the term in a comparatively meaningful way?" (Vance 1998 p. 164). From a social constructionist perspective then, identities based on sexual behaviors have a very limited meaning within society, because they are based on socially constructed categories within a specific time and place. Some critics of social construction theory have argued that this theory implies that sexual identities are somehow trivial and not real or important because they are the product of social constructions, however social constructionists of sexuality have argued that this is an oversimplification (Vance 1998). Because an identity springs from behavior which only had meaning because society has determined so, this does not mean that the identity is any less authentic or that it does not have very real consequences in the life and experiences of the individual or groups who share these identities. Instead of tossing out sexual identities, then, social constructionism cautions us to view the meanings of these identities not as static or essential properties of the individual but as a label that has been given meaning by society based on behaviors and desires whose significance has and continues to change.

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Levels of the Social Construction of Sexuality

The sex/gender/sexuality paradigm is the assumption that one's gender is systematically related to one's sex and sexuality. A biological male, for example, is assumed to have a masculine gender and be focused on women in terms of sexual desire and behavior. This paradigm relies on the assumption that there are two opposite and distinct genders, sexes, and sexualities, and this is the foundational assumption of the social organization of sexuality. Bisexuality can go unrecognized within this dichotomous organization, rendering bisexuals invisible within society. How, then, can one study bisexuality from a sociological perspective? Jackson has put forth a discussion of the social construction of gender and sexuality that examines social construction in four intersecting levels or facets (Jackson 2006 p. 45). If one considers these four levels, one can examine the ways bisexuality is rendered invisible at almost every turn in the social construction of sexuality. At the macro-structural level, gender is organized as a hierarchical social division and heterosexuality is organized through institutions such as marriage (Jackson 2006). At this level, bisexuality is rendered invisible through a binary sex/gender/sexuality paradigm that organizes such hierarchical social divisions and institutions. At the level of meaning or discourse, bisexuality remains invisible as dominant discourses of sexuality remain grounded in the same binary sex/gender/sexuality paradigm that creates invisibility for bisexuality at the macro-structural level. At the level of routine, everyday, social practices we again see little room for the existence of bisexuality, as sexuality and gender are constituted and reconstituted within various contexts and relationships along a binary assumption of gender and sexuality. At this level, however, we may see room for visible bisexual identity with

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particular localized contexts, for example, within the context of a conference on bisexuality, or perhaps even a broader queer-friendly context, we might see space for a visible bisexual identity to emerge through interaction because these interactions are occurring with individuals who may not subscribe to a dichotomous sex/gender/sexuality system. It is toward the fourth facet of the social construction of sexuality that Jackson discusses, however, that most attention is given in this project. This is the level of subjectivity, or how the individual perceives her own desires and emotions and makes sense of them in her identity. At this level bisexual identities can become visible within the self, despite the fact that the other levels of the social construction of sexuality leave little room for such an existence. Using the subjective level of the social construction of sexuality, this project is able to focus on the actions and intentions of individual bisexually-identified women, yet situate these individuals within a larger context in which bisexuality is denied by dichotomous assumptions within the social organization of sexuality.

Queer Theory

Building on a social constructionist view of sexuality, queer theory is being increasingly used with in the discipline of sociology, though it is still not incorporated in much of mainstream sociological discourse on sexuality. Queer theories, however, are quite useful for this project in discussing the deconstruction of the binary categories on which the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm (and corresponding sex, gender, and sexuality identities) is based. The concepts of heteronormativity and homonormativity are also addressed as insights of queer theory on the core research questions of this project. A third core concept of my theoretical framework that comes from queer theory is the

concept of performativity, however rather than discuss this concept here I will address it specifically in my discussion of identity performance later in this chapter.

Deconstructing Binary Categories

Dichotomous views place all individuals into two categories—heterosexual and homosexual—with no possibility for sexualities not defined by those two terms. Queer theories have worked to transcend this traditional approach of dualistic thinking, this is perhaps the biggest contribution made by these theories to the sociology of sexuality identity. As queer theory becomes increasingly incorporated into the sociology of sexuality, and into the discipline as a whole, binary definitions of social categories can be broken down and truer (though far more complex) pictures of social life may emerge.

The key features of queer theory have been well-summarized by Stein and Plummer (Stein and Plummer 1994 p. 181-182):

> (1) a conceptualization of sexuality which sees sexual power embodied in different levels of social life, expressed discursively and enforced through boundaries and binary divides;
> (2) the problematization of sexual and gender categories, and of identities in general;
> (3) a rejection of civil rights strategies in favor of a politics of carnival, transgression, and parody which leads to deconstruction, decentering, revisionist readings, and an anti-assimilationist politics;
> (4) a willingness to interrogate areas which normally would not be seen as the terrain of sexuality, and to conduct queer "readings" of ostensibly heterosexual or nonsexualized texts.

Queer theory problematizes the very categories on which sexual identities are based—sex and gender—and breaks down the binary, categorical conceptualization of sexual power, which has traditionally been construed as male/female, masculine/feminine, and heterosexual/homosexual divides.

When it comes to a study of sexual identity then, what can queer theory tell us?

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Within queer theory there are many debates about the usefulness of sexually-based identities (Gamson 1995). Because queer theory seeks to transcend the categories of sex and gender it tends to problematize identities based on these categories, and while its deconstruction of the dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality and male and female create a hopeful space for those who would label themselves bisexual or transgender, queer theory's universalizing of this space means that these labels would cease to have meaning. What queer analysis offers the study of sexual identities, then, is a recognition that dichotomous descriptions of the sex and gender of one's object choice are not an accurate basis for sexual identities (Valocchi 2005).

Queer theory has been very influential in deconstructing normative categories such as heterosexuality. By rejecting the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy, queer theory argues that sexuality exists on a continuum and is fluid and ever-changing, thus labels for sexual identities such as "gay" or "straight" are misleading. While queer theory has thus opened up the way for the existence of bisexuality (as well as transsexuality and transgenderism), overall queer theory has not paid much attention to bisexuality or bisexual identity. Below I discuss several reasons why this may be the case.

First, in academia and society in general there exists a general repulsion at the thought of bisexuality. It has been well documented (Klein 1993; Rust 1995; Rust 1996b; Young 1997) that stereotypes and assumptions about bisexuals portray them as indiscriminant, promiscuous, carriers of disease who are apolitical fence-sitters unable (or unwilling) to commit romantically or politically. The prejudice brought up by the idea that bisexuals are promiscuous or indiscriminant speaks to how sex-phobic society is, as these are only negative in a society that privileges monogamy and discourages sexual

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behavior more generally. Society's general prejudice against bisexuals and a revulsion to the images these stereotypes convey may be one of the reasons queer theory stays clear of the topic (Young 1997). The second reason for the lack of bisexual incorporation in queer theory may have to do with bisexual scholars and activists themselves and the way bisexuality is constructed. Some bisexuals have a tendency to claim bisexuality as a superior form of sexuality, to condemn others for monosexist thinking, and to claim that everyone is "really" bisexual, downplaying heterosexual or homosexual identity as false consciousness. While not all writing on bisexuality falls under this line of thinking, writings such as these further the resistance of lesbians and gay men to work with and accept bisexuals, and the privileging of bisexuality over all other forms of sexuality works against some of the central tenets of queer theory in its deconstruction of a hetero/homo divide. A third reason for the lack of attention to bisexuality within queer theory may have to do with inertia. Silence tends to breed silence and therefore the relative lack of attention to bisexuality and bisexual experiences is self-perpetuating in queer theory (Young 1997). Given the fact that bisexuality tends to be fairly invisible, the lack of scholarship on bisexuality means that scholars who don't think much about bisexuality in the first place are unlikely to consider its importance for analysis. Queer theory that does address bisexuality tends to be published in special collections on bisexuality rather than more mainstream queer theory texts (Young 1997), thus further marginalizing bisexual theory within queer scholarship. This is related to a fourth reason for the neglect of bisexuality, the coding of the term "queer" to mean "gay and lesbian" in common language. If one views "queer" to mean "gay and lesbian" then there is no reason to study bisexuals. On the opposite end, "queer" can also be used as a catch-all for

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gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersex, and a variety of other sexual minority identities, such as fetishists, BDSM, etc. In this view, there is no need to make bisexuality explicit since it's already somewhere in the mix, thus rendering bisexuality invisible among a plurality of "queer" identities. While these linguistic matters are not necessarily the focus of queer theory, these types of discussions do tend to come out in matters of queer politics, which is influenced heavily by the academic scholarship of queer theory (Udis-Kessler 1995; Young 1997).

One point that must be addressed before moving on is that the various meanings of the term "queer" often cause confusion when discussing queer theory. To many people, "queer" simply means "gay and lesbian" and so "queer theory" or "queer studies" would seem to be the same thing as gay and lesbian theory and studies. This is not the case. Queer theory emerged within gay and lesbian theory and was heavily influenced by poststructuralist perspectives (Seidman 1995). The key differences between gay and lesbian theory and queer theory are expressed as the "contradictions of the closet" (Sedgwick 1990). Gay and lesbian theory has a minoritizing view of homosexuality, emphasizing homosexual identity and experience, while queer theory has a universalizing view, reading homosexual desire into a variety of situations and problematizing the identities of heterosexual and homosexual. For gay and lesbian theory, same-sex object choice is what separates homosexuals from heterosexuals and these are distinct groups, while queer theorists are concerned with what counts as "same-sex" in the first place and why sexual object choice should even matter. Both a minoritizing and universalizing view rule out the possibilities of bisexual existence, the former because of the set up of heterosexuals and homosexuals as distinct and mutually exclusive groups, and the latter

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because it questions the basis of the categories from which we currently construct bisexuality—sex and gender. This relationship between queer theory and bisexuality will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

The biggest reason, I argue, for the lack of attention to bisexuality within queer theory has to do with language. As discussed previously, queer theory deconstructs the categories on which many of our identities are based. Queer theorists problematize the divide between heterosexuality and homosexuality, as well as categories of sex and gender. While the real meaning of what it is to claim a bisexual identity is open for discussion among bisexuals themselves (Ault 1996b; Bower 2002; Rust 2001b), the word itself contains assumptions that are antithetical to queer theory's basic goals. The word "bi" implies that something is between two poles. A person who identifies as bisexual is often conceptualized as someone who falls between heterosexual and homosexual, someone who is attracted to both men and women, implying two and only two sexes. Queer theorists would argue that there aren't two poles of heterosexuality and homosexuality, and that there are not two genders or sexes, as what we consider gender and sex are both socially constructed and falsely dichotomized into masculine and feminine, male and female (Butler 1990). How can one be bisexual and be attracted to men and women if there are no men and women as entities to which one might be attracted? How can one be a mixture of heterosexuality and homosexuality if there is not a dividing line between these categories? Bisexuality depends on the hetero/homosexual divide and on the idea that there are two sexes and two genders to which one could be attracted. Without these concepts, bisexuality loses its meaning.

The troubles of the word "bisexual" are not lost on scholars of bisexuality or on

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many bisexually-identified individuals. Though bisexuals most commonly refer to themselves as "bisexual" or "bi" (Rust 2001b), many prefer other terms to describe their sexual identity that do not imply an in-between status, such as pansexual or pansensual, but the problem is that often these alternatives are not intelligible to larger society (Rust 1992). Bisexual, despite being an inaccurate description that implies a bipolar theoretical orientation of sexuality, is a word that is generally understood, and is therefore still useful for individuals constructing identities and mobilizing for political change. However, because queer theory brings us the knowledge that the categories on which these identities are based are socially constructed, the concept of bisexuality—at least as it is currently conceptualized—is not theoretically useful for queer theory.

Heteronormativity and Homonormativity

Heteronormativity is a structural force that reinforces, through social policies and institutions, the belief that sex is dichotomous and complimentary (male and female), that sexual relations are normal only when they occur between people of these two different sexes, and that each sex has certain natural roles in life. (Warner 1997). The existence of bisexuality calls into question the core of heteronormativity—the idea that gender is the primary (if not only) factor in sexual orientation and that there are two opposite and distinct sexualities based on two opposite and distinct genders to which one might be attracted (Nagle 1995; Schwartz and Rutter 1998). Research on gender identity, including research on transgender and intersex people (Denny and Green 1996; Fausto-Sterling 2002; Turner 1999), has shown that gender is not dichotomous, a fact already known to those "in the middle" such as bisexuals, trans individuals, and those born intersex. In addition, many bisexuals report that gender is not the primary factor that determines their

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attraction to an individual (Murray 1995; Ross and Paul 2000) but rather factors that relate more to the overall person. The existence of bisexual attraction provides insight into the way sexuality is (mis)constructed and (mis)organized in our society, and in this way bisexual identity might be used as a tool to challenge heteronormative assumptions.

Homonormativity is a fairly new term that is often used to refer to the normative forces within homosexual relationships and communities that mirror heterosexual structures. This homonormativity includes a politics that is not "queer" but rather one that does not question dominant heteronormative structures and institutions but rather supports and sustains them (Duggan 2004). The support within LGBT communities for the economic and political status quo—for example capitalism, support for the institution of marriage, and gender-normative roles within the family—are all examples of homonormativity seen in contemporary U.S. LGBT society. Many radicals within the LGBT community (as well as radicals who would label themselves heterosexual) have found the increasing focus on assimilation into heterosexual society to be very problematic. By focusing on the non-sexual behaviors that are tied to the performance of bisexual identity, this project argues that being "queer" has less to do with whom you are having (or not having) sex with and more to do with questioning heteronormativity and homonormativity.

Feminist Theory

Feminists expose the structures of gender inequality that are at work in the construction and deployment of sexuality (Chapkis 2002). Here I will outline several core feminist works that inform my framework for conceptualizing and analyzing the performance of bisexual identities in this project.

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Another area of literature within feminist theory that addresses sexual identity is the concept of "doing gender." Here the development of gender can be seen as something that is accomplished at both an individual and institutional level, through daily interactions with others (West and Fenstermaker 1993; West and Zimmerman 1991). Gender, then, is relational in that it is accomplished and constantly constructed and re-constructed through our interactions with others. This approach is rooted in social constructionist ideas of gender being something that is created rather than something that is essential to the individual, and people "do gender" constantly, whether they want to or are aware that they are partaking of the process (West and Fenstermaker 1993).

Closely related to, yet often seen as in contention with, this concept of "doing gender" is the concept of the heterosexual imaginary. The heterosexual imaginary is that which hides from view the way heterosexuality structures gender, allowing heterosexuality to go unquestioned as "natural" while gender is viewed as socially constructed (Ingraham 1994). Some feminist sociologists have argued that because heterosexuality has often gone unexamined in gender studies, the ways heterosexuality organizes gender within social life has been obscured. Instead of using gender as a starting point for analysis, these scholars seek to begin with heterosexuality (Ingraham 1994).

Rather than trying to determine who is more correct, I would argue that by using the heterosexual imaginary to inform "doing gender" we can begin to see the ways that the social construction of gender is directly tied to the social construction of sexuality. Gender and sexuality are interdependent in structuring a heteronormative society. Indeed,

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gender and sexuality often rely on the same interactive processes to be accomplished, and are often signified through the deployment of the same gender (and I would argue sexual) displays (Connell 1999; Lorber 1999). By blending these concepts we can see the ways that sexuality, like gender, is an interactive process rather than a static social characteristic. Heterosexual masculinity and femininity are accomplished through interaction just as non-heterosexual masculinities and femininities are accomplished. The idea that masculinity and femininity are "done" as part of sexual identity is fairly intuitive; any young man who did not "do" masculinity well as a child and was called "fag" will easily understand the connection between doing gender and doing sexual identity. However, the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm views these categories as dichotomous, leaving those who do not fit neatly into one or more categories in a difficult position. As West and Zimmerman (1991) discuss, others will "do gender" for an individual regardless of what gender the person is trying to project (West and Zimmerman 1991), leaving those who are trying to break down dichotomous categories in the position of having their identities misappropriated. This is a common problem for bisexuals, who often find that in their attempts to "do bisexuality" they are mistaken for straight or gay/lesbian (Miller 2006).

Gender Displays

According to Lorber (1999), the concepts of gender and sexuality can both be viewed as being composed of three core concepts: status, identity, and display. Gender status is being taken as a man or a woman; gender identity is the sense of oneself as a man or woman, which can have various sexual identifications. Gender display is being feminine or masculine according to current post-industrial norms and expectations and

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involves sexualized behavior and appearance. Sexuality involves desired and actual sexual attraction, emotions, and fantasies as well as behavior. Sexual identity involves self-identification and a lifestyle. Sexual status involves a social recognition of the identity (Lorber 1999 p. 417). Lorber discusses at least five types of gender displays – masculine, feminine, ambiguous, cross-dressed as a man, and cross-dressed as a woman (Lorber 1994 p.59). Similarly, Goffman defines gender displays this way: "If gender be defined as the culturally established correlates of sex (whether in consequence of biology or learning), then gender display refers to conventional portrayals of these correlates" (Goffman 1979 p.1). Gender displays rely on conventional meanings related to masculine and feminine appearance (clothing, hair, make-up, etc). Unlike "doing gender, gender displays are an optional performance and focus on what *we would like to convey* about our gender to social others. In addition, unlike "doing gender," gender display focuses not on the macro-structural level at which gender is accomplished (and bisexuality invisible) but instead, I argue, may be more useful for a discussion of bisexual performance at the level of subjectivity because it focuses on what the actor would like to convey to others about his/her gender.

Lesbian Feminism and Bisexuality

Lesbian feminism informs my conceptual framework in terms of understanding sexual identities as in part political rather than purely based on sexual behaviors. This project is focused on examining the non-sexual behaviors that are part of performances of bisexual identity, as well as the reasons these performances are important for women who are not looking for sexual partners. Understanding the political motivations of sexual identities helps us understand the continued importance of a bisexual identity, and of

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being visible as a bisexual woman, to the participants in this study. Unfortunately, the literature on lesbian feminism is not favorable to bisexual identities, and tends to see such identities as apolitical. Thus, my discussion of lesbian feminism here is more about the absence of bisexuality rather than its inclusion.

Countless examples from lesbian feminist publications have documented the, at best, apathetic—and sometimes outright hostile—attitude bisexuality is met with in the lesbian and lesbian-feminist community (Rust 1995; Rust 2000; Young 1992). Despite their underlying basis of sexuality in their mutual attraction toward women, bisexual women and lesbians seem to be viewed very differently. A March 2004 issue of *Girlfriends*, a popular lesbian magazine, featured an article on partnerships between lesbians and bisexual women entitled "Mixed Marriages," with the sub-heading "Off the Fence." Here bisexual women are seen as so different from lesbians that relationships with them are considered "mixed." The notion of "mixed" marriages is not new to our society, with cross-racial relationship also referred to as mixed. The connotation here is that lesbians and bisexual women are involved in a quasi-interracial relationship, and fears of miscegenation are also present in the article. To add insult to injury, the stereotype of bisexuals as fence-sitters is also invoked. This attitude toward bisexual women is largely due to the idea that within a lesbian-feminist framework a woman's commitment to feminism is often measured by the strength of her commitment to other women. This commitment to other women is sometimes evaluated by how well a woman separates men from her life, a standard by which bisexual women are set up to fail (Armstrong 1995). As George explains, as lesbian separatism began to place greater emphasis on differences between men and women, "It was not sexual desire for or

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emotional commitment to women which gained women access to the lesbian fold; it was rejection of men" (George 1993 p. 49). While some feminists argue that heterosexuality, bisexuality, and lesbianism are all flawed choices under patriarchal oppression, for other scholars lesbianism is the answer to the problem of sexual danger (Rich 1993) and, moreover, lesbianism as a political choice women make to end male domination that may or may not have to do with sexual desire for other women. Again, bisexual women's continued involvement with men causes them to be failures under this definition of feminism, and their political allegiances as well as their romantic attachments are called into question.

This idea of lesbianism as a political choice rather than as a sexual orientation is the key to understanding why bisexual women are less accepted by lesbians compared to the extent that bisexual men are accepted by gay men (Armstrong 1995). Though bisexual men and women both experience marginalization within the gay community, bisexual women and lesbians seem to be like oil and water, and the political nature of lesbianism and its feminist roots seem to account for this. Unlike having a lesbian identity, the identity of "bisexual woman" tends to be perceived as apolitical. Though both terms identify women who are committed to other women, the implied difference in their sexual availability to men divides the two. No matter how committed a woman may be to feminist politics and to loving other women, if she says she is bisexual there is still an implied possibility that she is sexually available to men. Given the lesbian-feminist emphasis that the sexual availability of women to men equals sexual danger, the bisexual woman is still potentially victimized by male sexual power.

Aside from political or theoretical concerns, lesbians also articulate a fear that

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their love and energy will be wasted on bisexual women who will just run back to men and heterosexuality after they finish "experimenting" with women (Rust 1995; Young 1992). The labels "lesbian until graduation" or "bisexual until graduation" illustrate this idea that same-sex behavior is a phase women will eventually drop for an exclusively heterosexual life rather than maintain same-sex relationships (Plante 2006). This assumes that lesbian-identified women don't break each other's hearts, fall out of love, cheat, etc. or at least that bisexual women are more likely to do these things, an assumption which may have anecdotal evidence from some lesbians, but overall does not appear to be justified by any research on the behavior of bisexual women when involved with other women.

Despite the fact that these accusations of bisexual women as apolitical can be disproved with many examples of bisexual women who are very involved in lesbian politics, the fact remains that the identity of "lesbian" does have an implied feminist political edge that "bisexual woman" does not. Some bisexual women attempt to rectify this by claiming multiple labels for their identities, such as "bisexual lesbian," to emphasize their politics. Unfortunately, although bisexuals seem to have a stake in creating new and more complex words to describe identities, attempts by bisexuals to invent new labels of identity often create words that are unintelligible outside of certain circles. While there is always the possibility for pain and hurt in relationships between lesbians and bisexual women (as there is in any relationship involving two or more people, regardless of identity or orientation), I would argue that some of this animosity could be alleviated if bisexual women were able to make their politics more evident in their identities. Granted, not all bisexual women are feminists (and not all lesbians are

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feminist for that matter) but having something to signify bisexual feminists' political solidarity with lesbian feminists would be a step in the right direction.

In addition to the problems of language just discussed, what is really missing from much of feminist discourse on sexuality, particularly lesbian feminist discourse, is the idea of agency and sexual choice. Some branches of feminist discourse see women only as victims and do not allow for the possibility of sexual choice at all. Others see lesbianism as the only sexual choice a woman can make given the ubiquity of sexual danger at the hands of men. But to me, and to other bisexual feminist scholars (Armstrong 1995; Udis-Kessler 1992), the goal of a feminist sexual politics should be to both free women from men's control and develop women's sexual agency. Central to this is the idea that women are capable of making informed sexual choices, and that a woman's choice of whether or not to relate sexually and/or emotionally to men should be allowed under a feminist sexual politics, not viewed as "false consciousness" or perceived as holding on to the privileges of heteropatriarchy.

By no means is all feminist scholarship on bisexuality negative. Indeed, even some of what may be labeled lesbian feminism is not entirely negative on the subject. Some feminist scholars have recognized the potential of examining the core issues of feminist sociology through the lens of bisexuality. As discussed earlier, feminist sociologists are interested in deconstructing the categories of sex, gender, and sexuality in an effort to build more complex and complicated ideas into their research and theory (Lorber 1996). The experiences of bisexuals offer interesting combinations of these categories that make up what we call gender (gender status, gender identity, and gender display) and sexuality (behavior, desire, emotions, sexual identity, and sexual status)

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(Lorber 1999). As this project shows, incorporating bisexuality into our theories of gender and sexuality can provide unique insights into the social organization of sexuality and gender founded on a binary sex/gender/sexuality paradigm. For example, while some may see sexuality as only a matter of sexual behavior and sexual desire, the experiences of many bisexual women make clearer the distinctions between emotional attachment, sensuality, and sexual desire (Rust 1992). Bisexuality can also expand the range of sexuality to incorporate past, present, and future or ideal desires, behaviors, and attachments (Klein 1993), helping us to further expand the relationships between gender, sex, and sexuality to include past, present, and potential interactions.

Symbolic Interaction

In this project I take a symbolic interactionist approach in understanding how self-identities rely upon the meanings one attributes to a particular societal role, and that these meanings are learned and reinforced through social interactions.

The Presentation of Self

Goffman's description of performance considers the ways the individual in everyday life, presents herself and her activities for other people, the ways she guides and controls the impressions others make of her, and the kinds of things she may or may not do while maintaining this performance, or, to put it more succinctly, "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (Goffman 1959 p. 15). This project is focused on the ways bisexual-identified women attempt to guide and control the impressions others make of her and the kinds of things she may or may not do while attempting to guide those impressions. My focus on "bisexual display" encompasses these things she does to try to make visible her

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bisexual identity within a variety of interactions or "encounters" which are when an individual is in the continued presence of one or more others (Goffman 1959 p.15). Bisexual display includes all the "sign equipment" that is used in my participants' attempts to control the impressions of others and make bisexual identities visible, such as pins or other propaganda, as well as art and decorations within the home, which is discussed in Chapter 6. Bisexual display also includes appearance (gendered clothing, hairstyles) and manner (attitude, confidence), that are concepts central to Goffman's discussion of "front" in a given performance (Goffman 1959). However, as I will discuss in the next section, my framework does not see the actor as somehow removed from the performances. To use Goffman's term, these performances are "sincere" because the performer believes in the part she is playing (Goffman 1959 p.18). But because this is a performance of a self-identity, and something the performer *is* in terms of the self, in my framework I combine Goffman's ideas of performance with Butler's concepts of performativity, discussed below, to create a framework of identity performance informed not just by symbolic interaction but also by feminist, social constructionist, and queer theories.

Identities, Performances, and Performativity

Identities are made up of the meanings one attributes (and that others attribute to one) of oneself within a particular role (Burke and Reitzes 1981). This definition of identities takes into account both macro and micro aspects of the social processes of identity as meanings shift across time/situations/cultures and these meanings are developed and maintained through interpersonal interaction with others as well as self-reflection (Burke and Reitzes 1981). The identities one has provide a perspective through

which one interprets and interacts with society. These interactions with the rest of society are, in turn, interpreted as appropriate or inappropriate for the identity one has based on the meanings of the identity and the individual's actions (Burke and Reitzes 1981; Stets and Burke 2003). Through interactions in which the meanings of identity and actions coincide, a performance of that identity is developed. As discussed in Burke and Reitzes (1981) the key is that "the link between identity and performance is through *common meanings*" (p. 85, italics in original). People then engage in behaviors as part of their identity performance which they believe others will correctly interpret (through these common meanings) as a way of portraying who they are and how they expect to interact with others (Swann, Rentfrow, and Guinn 2003).

These common meanings are key for both the actor in determining what behaviors to include (or exclude) from an identity performance as well as for the audience viewing and interpreting the performance. Goffman (Goffman 1959) discusses the cooperation between the actor and the audience in the performance of an identity. However, Goffman's view of performances, as well as that of others in social psychology, seems to see quite a bit of distance between the self and the role being performed (Schlenker 2003; Tice and Wallace 2003). Here the link between one's identity and their performance is often seen as inauthentic or as a manipulative gesture to control the impressions others make of you (putting one's "best self" forward rather than an "authentic self") While the insights these scholars have made in identity research is invaluable, this distance can be confusing, at best, and destructive, at worst, for a project such as this one. Here the "role" of being bisexual is both a behavior and a part of the self. Here Butler's (Butler 1993b) discussion of performativity and play adds to our discussion of performance. Rather than

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seeing a separation between the self and performance Butler looks at the self as performance. She discusses that playing at being a lesbian does not mean that one is not one "really." Rather, by playing at being one this is the way that "being" one gets "established, instituted, circulated, and confirmed" (Butler 1993b p. 311). This is what she calls "deep-seated play," (Butler 1993b p. 311) rather than a performance from which one can separate their identity (their "being") from their performances (Butler 1993b). This is critical for understanding the links between identity and performance used in this project.

For the purpose of this project then, the behavior one engages in must be linked to their identity through a common meaning. Not all behavior one might see as "bisexual performance" may indeed be a performance of bisexuality for the actor. At the same time, the performance the actor engages in as part of her performance of bisexuality needs to be interpreted by others, through a common cultural framework, as part of a performance of bisexuality. While this may sound complicated, in this project it is more straightforward than it initially seems. Participants, who self-identify as bisexual, will be reporting behaviors they engage in that they see as part of their bisexual performance. The ways they use cues that are tied to institutional scripts regarding gender and sexual orientation provide a common cultural framework of meaning for interpreting these performances as part of bisexuality. At the same time, bisexual performances are shaped and contained within these institutional meanings of gender. While bisexual women may present agency in subverting traditional trappings of gender in their performances, their actions, and the meanings of these actions, exist within this dominant framework of gender. Additionally, due to the general invisibility of bisexuality in society at large, the

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"common" framework here wherein bisexual performances occur (and are correctly interpreted) may be very limited and exist mainly within the bisexual community itself rather than society at large, as many cues may be misread by those outside that community framework. Finally, there is not a distance between the identity and the performance in the way these two concepts are often discussed in the social psychological literature. Rather, the performance is part of "being" bisexual, and the ways one "is" bisexual is constituted through the performance of bisexuality.

Key Terms and Concepts

Research on bisexuality has shed new light on issues of importance to the discipline of sociology. The literature on bisexuality explores the ways sexuality is linked to the social organization of society through various mechanisms of inequality such as monosexism, genderism, heterosexism, homophobia, and sexism as well as the concepts and categories used to place people into specific social locations and create oppressive rules for interaction, the concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality. Above I discussed several key concepts that provide the foundation of my conceptual framework in answering the three research questions I laid out above. Here I will provide a brief discussion of how specific terms within this framework are defined in this project to examine the performance of bisexual identities.

Bisexuality

Because this study is mainly concerned with bisexual identity rather than various sexual behaviors which may or may not be labeled bisexual, for this study bisexuality is defined through self-identification with the label "bisexual."

Bisexual Display

As discussed above, Lorber defines gender display as "being feminine versus being masculine according to current post-industrial norms and expectations" and involves sexualized behavior and appearance (Lorber 1999 p. 417). Building off this definition, I define bisexual display as projecting a bisexual sexual identity according to current Western, post-industrial, Twenty-First Century norms and expectations. A bisexual display involves using the accoutrements of gender as well as more direct visual and verbal cues to project a bisexual sexual identity through interactions with others under current societal norms and expectations. For example, the "butch femme" use of appearance cues (borrowed and blended from butch/femme culture) to signify her bisexual desire and identification (Stasia 2003) can be seen as using a bisexual display to cue others in to her bisexuality. Display is distinct from performance in that, unlike performances which require an audience to perceive and interpret a performance, display is focused on the meanings that cues have for the actor rather than on interpretations of those cues by the audience.

Identity

For this project I am interested in how one self-identifies, and therefore I am interested in the way in which one views herself as belonging to social categories, rather than how others may view her. This simplified definition allows me to not have to make a decision about whether a potential participant is or is not bisexual—if she says she is, that complies with the definition of bisexual identity used for this project. Given that there is little consensus on what it really means or who counts as bisexual, and that because of monosexist assumptions many self-identified bisexuals are not identified by others in this

way, this definition is practical for the goals of this project. Through identity performance one attempts to display her self-identification so that others may also perceive them as belonging to a particular social group.

Performance

Identity performance refers to the ways one displays and projects her identity for others, using various cues to clue the audience in on the identity being displayed. Sexual orientation identity performance, then, consists of various actions and cues used to display or announce one's sexual orientation identification.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the pertinent bodies of work that have contributed to this project, including sexual identity, bisexuality, and the performance of identities, and have discussed the insights of symbolic interaction, social constructionism, feminist theory, and queer theory that provide the overarching theoretical framework for this project. I have also discussed my own research questions for this project which stem from gaps within the current literature, and include a discussion of the central theoretical terms and concepts for this project related to the performance of bisexual identities.

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CHAPTER 3:

Methods

The findings presented in this study are based on four semi-structured focus group interviews with 14 self-identified bisexual women in long-term monogamous relationships with men. In addition, follow-up individual telephone interviews were conducted with two of the participants to further explore certain issues of interest. In this chapter I begin with a discussion of my methodological concerns and the methods used in my research, my sampling methods and selection criteria, and my strategy for analyzing the data. This chapter will also highlight some of the difficulties I encountered in my research and general methodological limitations of this project.

Methodological Concerns

As a feminist sociologist, my research is influenced by the goals and principles of feminism, and more specifically, feminist critiques of sociological methodology. This project is guided by several specific goals of feminist methodologies, and my goals for this project include: (1) placing women's experiences at the center of research, (2) allowing women to explore their experiences in their own words, and (3) using research methods that attempt to place the researcher on a more "equal" level with participants (DeVault 1999; Fonow and Cook 1991; Gorelick 1991; Jayaratne and Stewart 1991; Reinharz 1992; Stacey 1988). When I speak of placing women's experience at the center of this research, I am speaking of experience as knowledge. Collectively, women's experiences reveal ideas and realities about the social world that we may not see if we are not putting women's lives at the center of our work (Hartsock 2004; Smith 1987). The knowledge of bisexual women about their daily lives is central to this project

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investigating the ways these women perform identities and what these experiences can tell us about the social construction of sexuality. In addition, my use of focus groups and self-reflection throughout the research process are attempts to fulfill the second and third goals stated above.

Feminist Critiques of Social Science Research Methods

As discussed in Stacey (1988), for most feminist researchers personal interests and skills often meld with feminist concerns in determining the research topic and the methods employed in the project (Stacey 1988). In choosing this topic and designing a research plan, my personal interests and skills also melded with my feminist politics and my concern over using methods that were heavily influenced by the critiques feminist sociologists have made against traditional methodology. Here I will briefly lay out what those feminist critiques are and the alternatives proposed, then discuss how my feminist concerns are explicit in the goals of my research.

Due to feminist sociologists' negative personal experience with traditional research methods, their political concerns over existing methodologies that support sexist, racist, and elitist attitudes and practices, and feminist philosophical concerns rejecting positivism, the claim of being value-neutral, and the idea the scientific method precludes contamination of findings by the researcher (Jayaratne and Stewart 1991), many feminists have worked to critique traditional research methods and build alternative ways of doing research. Here I will briefly lay out four of the major critiques feminists have launched against traditional sociological research methods, followed by a discussion of some of the alternatives suggested and how those alternatives are the foundation of my own methodological approach.

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The first critique of traditional research methods used in sociology deals with the claim of objectivity. Feminist researchers have made clear that subjects are situated, and that the traditional view of an objective researcher situated nowhere is a fallacy. Additionally, the very practice of scientific objectivity's categorizing experiences and subjects into observable objects to be investigated neglects the processes used to construct those objects in the first place (Jayaratne and Stewart 1991). The second main feminist critique of method concerns the relationship between the subject of study and the researcher. Feminists have turned away from methods that allow for exploitation and domination and have instead used methods which emphasize connection (Jayaratne and Stewart 1991; Mies 1991). The valuation of experience and the emphasis on agency and self-definition in feminist standpoint theory helps feminists to create researcher/researched relationships that are less exploitative, though still not altogether free of the pitfalls of power and exploitation in research (Riessman 1991). Another critique of sociology which is specifically framed by feminist standpoint theories is the hierarchy of social life; we tend to define as important the tasks that men do (Sprague and Kobrynowicz 1999). By beginning from women's experience, feminist research methodologies emphasize the importance of the things women do. This focus on women's experience has also allowed feminist researchers to tear down the public/private dichotomy in which sociologists have only been concerned with public life. This has led to research focused on women's lives and the work that women do, as well as given value to this work and women's experiences. The final major critique of sociological methods made by feminist researchers that I will address here is a criticism of the categories available for analysis. The dominant pattern, which runs throughout the history of

Western European social thought, creates supposedly mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories (Alway 1995). Real life experience, however, contradicts this dichotomous logic through the fact that people are located within intersecting oppressions and occupy hybrid spaces.

So what are the methodological alternatives proposed by feminist sociologists? There is no single feminist method, though some methods lend themselves more readily to feminist use than others (Stacey 1988). Feminist methodology produces methods of research which include reflexivity, an action orientation, attention to the affective components of research, and use of the situation-at-hand (Fonow and Cook 1991). The importance of reflexivity for the feminist researcher cannot be emphasized enough. Inherent in recognizing women's positions within society is the recognition that the researcher also has a particular position, and reflexivity allows the feminist researcher to engage her own role in the research process.

Researcher Reflexivity and Insider Research

As part of researcher self-reflexivity, I must disclose that this project involves an insider perspective. In the course of recruitment as well as during the focus groups, participants often asked how I identify my sexuality and why I was interested in this project. I truthfully answered that as a bisexual woman in a long-term monogamous relationship with a man, I was interested in the voices of other women in the same situation. The advantages and pitfalls of insider research have been well documented by others (Collins 1991; Hash and Cramer 2003; LaSala 2003), but here I will provide a brief overview of these issues.

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One key advantage of insider research that was an advantage for me in this project is that insider researchers often have resources for finding hidden populations, such as the one in this study, because of their familiarity with resources in the community. Insiders are also likely to gain the trust of participants, especially in the case of a minority population since it may be believed that the insider has the interests of the community at heart and will not take advantage or misconstrue their statements the way an outsider might. In my initial contacts with organizations I discussed my previous publications relating to bisexuality in an effort to gain trust and access. Additionally, several participants later mentioned having read my work, either academic or non-academic, and knew of my own sexual orientation identity and experiences prior to the focus group.

Another key advantage of insider research is that insiders, because of their position and the "lenses" through which they view social reality, may ask questions and gather information that others could or would not (Baca Zinn 1979). The personal interest of an insider researcher may drive their research agenda in a way that focuses on the communities of which they are a part, communities which may not otherwise be the focus of much research. Insiders may also ask research questions that come *from* such a community, rather than questions which are driven by outside perspectives and/or misunderstandings and stereotypes about the group.

Among the drawbacks of insider research, however, is that sometimes participants may take for granted that the researcher understands the meanings of what they say, or vice versa, and areas that need further probing and explanation may be missed (LaSala 2003). The insider research may also assume that because of their insider status they will be accepted by the community they are studying and not take into account major

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differences such as race, class, gender, and educational background, leaving these differences glossed over or ignored. In terms of this study, as a researcher I must acknowledge that despite being an insider in the minority bisexual community, I am also white, highly educated, and come from a professional upper middle-class background. This fact cannot be ignored considering the majority of my sample also falls into these demographics, and despite being an insider my difference from some parts of the bisexual community makes me an outsider as well. Additionally, many of the organizations I contacted in an attempt to gain access to my sample were groups where I am both an insider and outsider. Biphobia that may be present in some organizations aimed at the lesbian and gay populations, creating problems with my accessing these groups, and my whiteness, also likely shaped the ways I approached organizations aimed at minorities within the LGBT community despite my efforts to express my sincerity and intentions.

A final disadvantage of insider research deals with boundaries. One's insider status and commitment to "their own" can leave a researcher feeling an obligation to "give back" that goes beyond the exchange and reciprocity of other research relationships (Baca Zinn 1979; Stacey 1988). In this project, contact with participants was far more limited than in a more detailed ethnographic or observational study. There was no "leaving the field" because I was usually only with participants for a matter of hours during the focus group interviews, and perhaps an additional hour in contact on the phone or via email. Because of this I did not deal with many of the issues other insider researchers have discussed in terms of being involved in the day-to-day lives of their participants. However, I did have to set clear boundaries which sometimes felt artificial or unfriendly to me, but were none-the-less necessary for both myself and my

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participants. For example, during my travels I was extended several social invitations after the focus group interview. I truly enjoyed getting to know the women during the groups, but I felt that further engagement would have blurred the boundaries between me as a researcher and me as a fellow bisexual woman, so I had to decline the invitation despite my worry about appearing unfriendly. I also felt that social contact would have shaped my research and entered my data, even if I did not explicitly include anything said or observed during social outings, and therefore it would be exploitative for me to accept such social invitations.

Other Methodological Concerns

The general limitations of this research are discussed in a later chapter, however a few conceptual and methodological issues need to be addressed and clarified at this time. Sociology, particularly feminist scholarship in sociology, provides a clear discussion of the distinction between behavior and identity (Schwartz and Rutter 1998) and this distinction is especially vivid in issues of sexual behavior and sexual identities. This project addresses this distinction not by conflating behavior and identity but rather separating the two through the use of data from those who identify as bisexual but are not engaging in bisexual sexual behavior. For this group of individuals sexual behavior is not aligned with sexual identity. The focus of this project, however, is on the ways other types of behavior (performance) are aligned with identity. The concept of performance, as it is used here, is not about sexual behavior but rather deals with behavior one engages in to make visible their identity. While performance is, indeed, a behavior, this project should not be read as collapsing the distinction between identity and behavior, but rather

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striving to further explore that gap and examine other ways behavior can be tied to identity.

Another important discussion for this project is the distinction between what people do and what they say they do. This is a problem discussed throughout the social science literature on research methods for more than fifty years, and is of particular concern for research that relies on interview or survey data rather than direct observation (Berg 2001; Cannell, Miller, and Oksenberg 1981). When asked to recall past behaviors, for example, the length of time between the incident recalled and the interview can have an impact on the respondent's recollections and cause underreporting of events the longer ago those events occurred (Johnson, Gerstein, and Rasinski 1998). Several studies of the division of domestic labor between husbands and wives also show the effect of over-reporting behaviors that are socially desirable, in this case, men over-reporting the number of hours they spend on housework as attitudes change about the roles of men and women (Press and Townsley 1998). The desire to respond in a socially desirable way may be particularly important for very personal matters, such as questions about sexuality and sexual behavior (Catania 1999). This project attempts to minimize these problems in several ways. First, most of the interview consisted of asking respondents to report on current behavior rather than trying to recall past behaviors, making it more likely that poor memory will not affect responses. Second, all the women in the room shared a common "bisexual" label for sexuality, so stigma would be less of a factor in underreporting matters related to sexuality. In addition, because this project is concerned with the performance of bisexuality, the aspects of bisexual performance respondents were asked to discuss are behaviors done at a more conscious level in an effort to make

their bisexual identity visible. If participants are aware of their behaviors and engage in these as their way of making their identity visible to others, it is likely that they will accurately report what these behaviors are.

Definition of Terms:

The subject of my study is bisexual women in monogamous long-term relationships with men. As perhaps all the words in the previous sentence may have contested definitions, below is a description of how each of the key terms were operationalized in my study.

Bisexual - As discussed in Chapter 2, there are many definitions for the word "bisexual" both in social science research and in contemporary societal usage of the term. However, because this study is focused on bisexual *identity* here I consider participants bisexual if they tell me they are. Thus, bisexual self-identification is the primary consideration for participation in this study.

Women/Men - In determining who is a "woman" in a relationship with a "man" I would like to have used self-definition, but this would have proved too complicated for this specific project. Many individuals who identify as bisexual may themselves be transgender or attracted to those who are transgender. While the experiences of those in trans-relationships are also valuable for research, for the purposes of this particular study being trans-inclusive would yield very different data than what I am focused on here. While I hope to study bisexuals in relationships with transmen and transwomen in future project, because my focus here is on those who are most often misappropriated as

"heterosexual" I wanted to select participants who are cisgender[1]. Therefore, for the purposes of this study I am using "woman" to mean one born, raised, and currently identified as female and "man" to mean one born, raised, and currently identified as male.

Monogamous - While there are several issues involved in monogamy, for the purposes of this project I am not so much concerned with emotional monogamy to one's partner, or other definitions of monogamy (and non-monogamy) but rather concerned primarily with sexual contact outside of the partnership. Given that monogamous bisexuals are a minority within the bisexual community, and that often bisexuals question the concept of monogamy, this project recognizes that 100% monogamy may be an unrealistic expectation for any couple. For this study participants:

> (1) should be in relationships that they identify as monogamous
> (2) they should not have significant sexual contact with anyone other than their partner within the past year. Sexual contact is not considered significant provided it is brief, limited, did not lead to orgasm nor intended to lead to orgasm, and participants were clothed.

This definition is used so that those who are otherwise monogamous but may have kissed someone (an example in the project included kissing a friend at a New Year's Eve party) could be included, but those who had engaged in more significant sexual contact or dating outside the relationship would be excluded.

Long-Term - When one considers a relationship "long-term" varies from person to person. For the purposes of this study I have considered one's relationship "long-term" provided the couple have been together at least one year. The relationship status could

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[1] The term cisgender is the preferred term in many trans-inclusive spaces to denote those whose gender identity is one that society deems as matching biological sex. The term is based on the Latin "cis" meaning on the same side" as opposed to "trans" meaning "on the opposite side." The goal of using the term cisgender is to convey that the idea that the opposite of transgender is not "normal" men and women.

consist of legal marriage, domestic partnerships or having had a commitment ceremony, cohabitation, or dating but not living together.

Recruitment and Sampling Procedures

Due to a variety of well-documented difficulties in finding and recruiting sexual minority populations (Gorman 2003; Hash and Cramer 2003; Sullivan and Losberg 2003), including the fact that there is no directory of bisexual persons from which to randomly sample, this study uses a purposive, non-random sample. The goal is not statistical power or generalizability, but rather an exploration and description of the experiences of identity that bisexual women in long-term monogamous relationships with men have. My goal in this project is not to make claims that all women who identify as bisexual perform their identity in a certain way, or that all bisexual women in long-term monogamous relationships with men see their identity as something important to make visible. Instead, I intend to describe how these women perform their bisexual identities and their motivations for making themselves visible as bisexual women despite being in relationships many would misappropriate at "straight."

Recruitment

This study focused on the Upper Midwest region for both practical reasons (easier to travel, already have contacts), and because what little research has been done on SOID issues tends to focus in large cities on the East or West coasts, mainly New York and San Francisco. Those cities have well-established LGBT communities as well as relatively large and established bisexual communities (Mishaan 1985; Rubenstein and Slater 1985), so my project differs from these earlier works by tapping a sample of bisexual women that do not come from areas that necessarily have the support and strengths (such as

bisexual visibility) of areas with a thriving bisexual community. I also originally intended to avoid cities where the majority of residents are affiliated with a university, as this population has often been over-studied, but because of difficulties in recruiting participants some flexibility on this point was necessary.

Research on gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people has largely been criticized for a lack of racial/ethnic and class diversity (Croom 2000; Fukuyama and Ferguson 2000; Meezan and Martin 2003; Rust 1996a; Wheeler 2003). In part this may be due to the perception that gayness is a "white thing" leading many people of color to choose other labels of identity (for example, same-gender-loving). While the target population for this study was very small[2] efforts were made to try to recruit racial/ethnic minorities and working class participants. Qualitative projects that wish to recruit greater numbers of minorities and working class participants must often dedicate more time and money to the project (Cannon, Higginbotham, and Leung 1991). Given both monetary and time constraints some suggested means of obtaining a more diverse participant pool were not feasible for this project. However, steps to recruit a more diverse sample were taken in this study by targeting recruitment efforts in cities with high minority populations. One method for increasing diversity is to identify special newsletters or organizations that can help with outreach to minority populations (Cannon,

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[2] I estimate the total number of bisexual women in long-term monogamous relationships with men to be 78,396 women nation-wide. This figure is based on 2000 census data of the total US population of women over the age of 18 (U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000) and the data on bisexual identification which estimates the number of bisexually-identified women at .5%
Laumann, Edward O., John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels. 1994. *The Social Organization of Sexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.(Laumann et al. 1994). Research estimates that between 22% and 29% of bisexual women are in monogamous relationships (Burleson 2005, Weinberg et al. 1994) and of that number it is unknown what percent are women in long term monogamous relationships with men. Therefore, an estimate of 78,396 represents this author's best guess at the highest estimate of population, and it is unknown how many might be residing within the Upper Midwest region, where the data was collected.

Higginbotham, and Leung 1991). For this study, LGBT organizations, especially organizations catering to minority populations, were targeted for recruiting participants in Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, Milwaukee, Dayton, Youngstown, and Cincinnati. These cities were selected because they are both within the upper-Midwest target area and because they have an African American population ranging from 40% to 84%, based on 2000 U.S. Census data.

Once cities were selected an internet search for bisexual, LGBT, and related organizations (for example, "alternative" bookstores and newspapers), was conducted to identify organizational networks that could be used to distribute a call for participation in this project to their members. A call for participation was distributed to 111 such organizations in Toronto (10 organization), Chicago (24 organizations), Indianapolis (11 organization), Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti (14 organizations), Detroit/suburbs (7 organizations), Minneapolis/St. Paul (11 organizations), Cincinnati (6 organizations), Cleveland (8 organization), Dayton (5 organizations), Youngstown (4 organizations), Milwaukee (3 organizations) and 8 online organizations that cater to bisexuals nationwide. In addition, flyers were posted at queer bookstores in Indianapolis and Milwaukee and at a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community center in Toronto. An ad with the call for participation was also run in the classified section of a weekly Detroit-area lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender newspaper for two weeks during Motor City Pride and Michigan Pride, both very high circulation weeks for the newspaper.

Sampling

The call for participation yielded sixty respondents, who were then given a brief questionnaire via email or postal mail (respondents could choose the medium, though all

but one chose to receive and return the form via email) to determine if they met the requirements for participation as defined above as well as to obtain demographic information and availability for focus group interviews. From the information gathered in these screening surveys thirty women were identified who met the study requirements; the other thirty were excluded because they did not meet one or more of the study requirements (the most common reasons were they were not currently in a relationship for at least one year, they were not in a monogamous relationship, or they were partnered with a transman or transwoman). Because consent was obtained at the time of the focus group interview, demographic information is only discussed below for the fourteen who participated in an interview rather than the thirty women who met the study requirements.

Once at least four participants were identified in a given city a focus group was arranged based on participant availability. This threshold of four was reached in four cities: Chicago, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, and Toronto, yielding a total of 14 participants. One additional participant was a part of the Toronto group, but upon further discussion and reflection her responses were excluded because at the time of the focus group she no longer considered her relationship monogamous.

Limitations of Recruitment and Sampling

There is often an effect of volunteer bias among those who choose to participate in research, especially research related to matters of sexuality (Strassberg 1995; Trivedi 1998). All participants for this study were recruited through bisexual, LGBT, or feminist organizations and therefore the sample may differ significantly from bisexual women in long-term monogamous relationships with men who do not maintain ties to these types of organizations. Because they have maintained these ties it is likely that the women in the

sample may be more active, socially and politically, with LGBT organizations and see their bisexual identity in relation to this social and political activity. Additionally, while this sample was recruited from cities which have not been the focus of much research on the bisexual community, all lived in or near a sizable city rather than rural areas. This means that women in the sample often had access to outlets, such as gay bars and bookstores, Pride marches/festivals, and a general queer community that women outside of these areas would not have access to.

The Sample

Characteristics of the Sample

Characteristics of the sample can also be seen in Table 1. All participants are referred to by a pseudonym, and unlike many studies of people with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community, this study assigns surnames to participants. As Kath Weston points out, introducing participants by first name only can have the effect of withholding the individuality, respect, and full adult status that participants deserve (Weston 1997). In addition to protecting the identity of participants with pseudonyms, many specific details have been withheld, including exact age and which focus group the participant was a part of, because this information could identify individuals within the small bisexual community of a given city.

Despite efforts to maximize racial/ethnic and class diversity, the sample was mostly white, college educated, and middle class. While this is troubling and far from ideal, these demographic characteristics are not surprising given previous research which has shown that there is little diversity among those who self-identify as bisexual, with over half having a college degree or advanced degree and more than half being solidly

middle to upper-middle class ($30,000 to over $100,000) (Burleson 2005). As mentioned above, identity labels such as "bisexual" are often critiqued as being "white." Since this study relied on self-identification as bisexual, many people of color who may fall under the category of "bisexual" in terms of desire would not qualify because they have not chosen the label bisexual. In addition, because this study is focused on women who are in monogamous relationships with men, to identify as bisexual is to renounce some of the heterosexual privileges that would otherwise be afforded to the couple. Women who find themselves otherwise marginalized, through race or class, may have more difficulty or see fewer benefits to labeling themselves bisexual when involved in an "opposite" sex relationship. Additionally, because this sample was composed of volunteers the problems of volunteer bias present throughout sexuality studies, or even in more general research projects, exists (Strassberg 1995; Trivedi 1998). Volunteers for sexuality research tend to have more positive attitudes about sex compared to those who do not volunteer, and are more outspoken about sexual matters (Strassberg 1995). Mores about sexuality, especially women's sexuality, in some minority communities, may inhibit women from volunteering for such projects at the same rates as white women. Despite these difficulties, each focus group contained one woman of racial/ethnic minority background, however far more work must be done to seek out the voices of *all* bisexuals.

Ten participants were white, three were of minority racial/ethnic heritage, and one was multiracial. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 47, with the majority (eight participants) aged 25-35. Six participants hold a college degree, four hold advanced degrees, and the remaining four are currently enrolled in college. Four participants made less than $14,999 (USD) annually, but all four of those participants were full-time

students. Two participants made $15,000 to $29,999, five made $30,000-$44,999 annually, two made $45,000-$59,999, and one made more than $60,000 annually (responses for Canadian participants were approximated based on the current exchange rate).

Nine of the women were in relationships with heterosexually-identified men, four were with men who label themselves bi, queer, or questioning, and two were with men who do not identify their orientation. The most common relationship arrangement was legal marriage, with nine women legally married, three living together but not married, and two dating but not living together. Relationship length ranged from 11 months to 20 years, with the average relationship of 6.7 years. All fourteen participants were in relationships they identified as monogamous. Nine of the women had been monogamous since the relationship began, two had no sexual contact outside the relationship for the past year, and three had had sexual contact outside the relationship within the past year, but the contact did not lead or intend to lead to orgasm. Of the fourteen participants, only three had children. Two of those had children under the age of five; the third had children who were teenagers and young adults.

Sources of Data

The main source of data for this project was focus group interviews. Individual follow-up interviews were also conducted with racial/ethnic minority participants to be able to discuss issues of racialized bisexual identity that did not come up in the predominantly white focus groups. Data was also collected from the demographic information obtained on the scheduling form as well as field notes from the focus group observations.

Focus Groups

Krueger (Krueger 1994) argues that most focus groups dealing with complex issues should be kept to no more than seven participants. Morgan (Morgan 1996) states that the common rule of thumb in sociology is to limit most projects to four to six groups, as the data tends to become "saturated" after that limit. Keeping this in mind, in this project I set out to conduct 5 focus groups with small groups of approximately 4-8 women. Because the threshold of at least four participants was only met in four cities, a fifth focus group could not be scheduled. In addition, while three of the four groups contained at least four participants, due to several "no shows" at the Indianapolis focus group only two participants were interviewed.

These focus groups were structured in terms of moderator involvement, and semi-structured in terms of the standardization of questions (Morgan 1996). As the moderator I was actively involved in managing group dynamics and encouraging equal participation from all participants, however the questions for discussion were broad and allowed for a range of topics and themes to emerge within the conversation. While the topics covered in each group were similar, because the questions were not rigidly structured each group had a unique conversation which focused more or less on each topic depending on group dynamics and which topics the group wished to spend more or less time discussing. One advantage of allowing space for each group to determine the topics that are of greater importance to them is that this allows issues to emerge which the researcher and/or previous groups may have thought of less significance.

As a method, focus groups have several advantages and disadvantages. One key advantage is that focus groups have the benefit of allowing interaction among participants

to generate a greater depth of information on issues to which participants may not have previously given much thought. Focus groups consist of more than the sum of data from individual interviews because participants can interact with each other, asking questions and explaining themselves (Morgan 1996). Focus groups "let people spark off one another, suggesting dimensions and nuances of the original problem that any one individual might not have thought of" (Ruben and Ruben 1995 p. 140) and this advantage will be helpful in discussing the performance of bisexual identity as it is a topic many participants may not consciously consider in their day-to-day lives. Another practical advantage of focus groups is that they often have the advantage of time costs (as compared with individual interviews) (Berg 2001), and in this case focus groups allowed me the ability to only have to take the time and expense of travel to a particular research site once or twice, rather than repeatedly for each interview.

Disadvantages of focus group interviews include the effect the moderator has on the group dynamic. The moderator's guidance of the topics of conversation can keep the group on task in terms of the researcher's interests, but these interruptions by the moderator to the flow of the conversation also disrupts the very group dynamics that make focus groups important (Morgan 1996). In addition, some researchers argue that focus groups may not be appropriate for the study of "sensitive topics" because focus group participants may censor themselves in front of other group participants. However, this concern largely ignores that fact that focus groups have been widely and successfully used to study all forms of sexual behavior (Morgan 1996), one of the most "sensitive topics" a researcher can cover. Another disadvantage of focus groups, as well as any interview technique, is that the researcher must rely on what participants *say* as actually

reflective of what they *do.* As discussed earlier, it is my hope that because I am operationalizing performances as behaviors which are intentionally engaged in, participants may report the behaviors they engage in as part of this performance and their motivations for doing so more accurately than they would report behaviors that they are not consciously engaging in. For many researchers this problem is dealt with by adding an observational component to the research design, but for this project that was not feasible. However, during the focus groups I was able to observe participants for a brief period of time and could confirm some of the things they reported as things they actually do in their performances. For example, many participants discussed using the way they dress as an element in their performances of bisexual identity, and often they style of dress they described was present in the clothing they were wearing at the group. This does not completely free my project from this problem, but it does provide one reliable check that, indeed, at least some elements of behaviors spoken in relation to their performance of a bisexual identity are elements actually enacted in their performances as observed by the researcher.

Focus Group Dynamics

Locations for the focus group were chosen based on recommendations from local contacts involved in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. The first group took place in a queer bookstore next door to a coffee shop in Indianapolis, which provided a bi-friendly atmosphere but had the drawback of not being particularly quiet or entirely private. The second group occurred in a gay-owned coffee shop in Milwaukee that had private conference rooms. The third group was located in a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community center in Chicago, which had a private conference

room but provided a more businesslike atmosphere. The final group took place at a women's health center in Toronto. This group convened during hours when the center was closed in order to maximize participant privacy. Each location played a role in the group dynamics, and it is my assessment that the venue that provided the best environment was the coffee shop in Milwaukee, while the venue that provided the worst environment was in Toronto. This assessment is based on several factors, including the camaraderie that developed among the participants as well as the rapport that developed between me and the women in the groups. In Milwaukee, the women specifically discussed how much they had looked forward to coming to the focus group to hear about other women in the same situations they face, and several women shared announcements about upcoming events in the area. In Toronto many of the women had met previously through other bisexual organizations and their past knowledge of each other and local groups was brought into the focus group. In addition, due to elements beyond my control (traffic that caused a half hour drive to take nearly an hour and a half) I arrived just as the group was scheduled to start and all participants had already arrived. With the other three groups I arrived early, set up the interview space, and greeted each participant as she arrived. While the Toronto group still yielded excellent responses from participants, I had a feeling that my tardiness coupled with their previous meetings of each other created a very different dynamic than what was present in the other three groups. Another difference between the Toronto group and the other three groups was that three of the participants were not Canadian or U.S. born, and for two of them English was a second language. A difficulty encountered in the Indianapolis focus group was that half of the participants scheduled for the focus group did not show up, leaving the group with only

two participants rather than four. This created a different dynamic than the other groups, which all consisted of four participants.

Interviews

While focus groups do have many advantages, most often they are conducted in combination with at least one other research method (Morgan 1996). As a way to obtain greater detail than might be obtained during a single focus group, I conducted complimentary follow-up, individual, semi-structured interviews as a secondary research method in order to further explore the ideas and themes discussed during focus group participation. After an initial examination of the data gathered in the focus group, I determined that issues related to race and ethnicity were largely ignored in most focus group conversations, likely largely due to the fact only one women of color was present in any given group and white people, whether in the LGBT community or straight society, tend to ignore issues of race and ethnicity. Therefore, I selected the four women who had indicated that they were a racial/ethnic minority on their screening form. All four of these women had previously consented to participate in follow-up interviews for further data collection. Of these four women, I was able to schedule and conduct the interviews with two of them. These individual interviews lasted 20-30 minutes and were designed to both clarify points they had discussed in the focus groups and also specifically ask about their racial bisexual identity, particularly how racial, sexual, and gender stereotypes have shaped their experiences.

The major strength of including interviews in my research design was to allow for the explorations of topics that may be very important for some participants but were not focused on much, if at all, by the participants in the focus group. In general, telephone

interviews work best when one is using a structured or semi-structured set of questions and when conducted with participants whom the researcher has already met face-to-face to establish rapport (Ruben and Ruben 1995), and these were both considerations in the structure and timing of my interviews. I chose to use a semi-structured interview schedule rather than a structured or unstructured style for many of the same reasons I chose this style in the focus groups. Rather than assuming I would know in advance all questions I would need to ask the way a standardized interview assumes, the semi-structured interview allowed me to both direct the conversation through asking specific questions, and to follow-up and clarify points of understanding between myself and the participant through the use of probes (Berg 2001). I also determined that a semi-structured interview would be a better continuation of the relaxed atmosphere created in the focus groups.

One of the biggest drawbacks in interviewing deals with effective communication (Berg 2001). Because the follow-up interviews were conducted over the telephone, neither I nor my participants were able to use non-verbal communication cues to assist in conveying meaning. In addition, because the focus of the follow-up interviews mainly pertained to issues of race/ethnicity, as a white researcher I was particularly concerned over communicating not just the wording of the questions but my intentions as well.

One difficulty I encountered in conducting the interviews was scheduling them. I was only successful in scheduling interviews with two of the four minority women who participated in the sample. One woman I was unable to get in touch with following the focus group, and the other I was able to reach but emails attempting to schedule a time for a phone interview were not returned.

I was able to conduct interviews with an African American woman and an Asian American woman, and these two interviews went well, with the rapport I had felt from these women in the groups continuing in our conversation on the phone. However, as a white researcher I wanted to be careful about the questions I asked regarding the effect that the interplay that stereotypes about race, gender, and sexuality had on these women's feelings about their bisexuality and their experiences of being an "out" bisexual. I cannot and did not wish to presume to know their experiences of bisexuality as racial/ethnic minority women. While I am unable to know exactly how my own race/ethnicity played out in the interactions I had with all the participants, one incident that occurred in a follow-up interview did give me pause. At the end of my conversation with the Asian American woman I interviewed, I asked her if she had anything she wanted to add that I hadn't asked, or any questions for me in general. She asked me if I was Asian American and was surprised to learn that I am not (interestingly, this is a question I am asked frequently) and I wonder if in my interactions with her in the group and individual interview she was speaking to me as a fellow racial "insider" and if other group members interacted with me assuming I was not white as well.

Eligibility Screening/Demographic Survey

As mentioned above, a brief survey was sent to all respondents to ascertain their eligibility to participate, gather basic demographic information, and collect information about their availability for a local focus group. 36 survey forms were returned, 30 of which were from participants who met the criteria to participate in the study. Because this form was only meant to gather background information about participants and assist in scheduling the focus group interview, social characteristics obtained on these forms are

only included in this study for the 14 women who later participated in a focus group and signed a consent agreement. A sample screening form is included as Appendix B.

Fieldnotes

Immediately following each focus group I wrote fieldnotes detailing the physical location of the group, notes on group dynamics, brief physical descriptions of the participants, and my own impressions and reflections regarding the group. This information is used in this study as a means of contextualizing some of the responses given. For example, participants would sometimes reference our surroundings in their responses, or a physical characteristic of one of their fellow group participants. This information is also helpful in reflecting on group dynamics, as the physical setting of the group influenced issues such as the level of privacy and feelings of friendliness or warmth discussed above. Writing these fieldnotes also allowed me to reflect on the influence I might have over the group dynamics. For example, in three of the four groups I arrived early and had snacks and beverages prepared as I welcomed each participant. For the fourth group, however, I was delayed by traffic and arrived late, after all participants were already present and seated. Unfortunately, I felt I did not get to establish the same rapport with this group that I had with the previous three, and because all participants had already introduced themselves to one another I felt more like an outsider breaking in on their conversation.

Consent Procedures

Written consent was obtained from participants at the beginning of all focus group interviews. Participants were also given a separate consent form to participate in further individual follow-up telephone interviews. In addition to obtaining individual consent, I

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also verbally asked participants to agree to not reveal any of the other participants' names or identifying characteristics to anyone outside the group. Copies of the consent form were available for participants to take home after the interview so that they could keep both my contact information and contact information for my institution's review board for human subjects research.

Analytic Strategy

The analytic strategy for this project draws on concepts from my conceptual framework, discussed in the previous chapter, to examine *how* the performance of bisexual identity might be accomplished as well as *why* one might be motivated to partake in such performances. The coding of the data from each focus group was guided by my three main research questions: (1) How do women perform bisexual identity outside of sexual behavior, (2) What motivates these performances, and (3) Do these performances disrupt heteronormativity and/or homonormativity?

My analysis for this project was guided by theoretical concepts from my conceptual framework which informed my research questions. For example, the concepts of performance and gender display (Goffman 1959; Goffman 1979; Lorber 1996; Lorber 1999), and other concepts from my framework such as "doing gender" (West and Fenstermaker 1993; West and Zimmerman 1991) and performativity (Butler 1993b) all guided how I analyzed the data pertaining to my first research question on bisexual identity performance. Social constructionist views that the meanings of sexuality (and thus identities based on sexuality) are fluid and the deconstruction of binary categories emphasized in queer theory informed my analysis as well. Earlier findings regarding the importance of feminist and queer political positions to bisexual identity (Baumgardner

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2006; Blumstein and Schwartz 2000; Bower 1995; Udis-Kessler 1992; Zipkin 1992) and the very notion of sexual identity as a political statement (influenced by lesbian feminism and queer political movements) also guided the analysis in I began the project on the assumption that indeed one can express bisexuality outside the bedroom through political action. It is also important to recognize in the analysis that context is crucial. The focus groups and individual interviews are a "jointly constructed interaction unfolding through time" (DeVault 1995 p. 628) in which all participants—the speaker, the other participants in the focus group, and myself—interact to create the context of the words spoken.

Data Analysis and Coding

In analyzing the data I used a qualitative data analysis software package (Nvivo) to help identify themes and organize the data. This software was chosen for this project for several reasons. The first reason was that this was the software package I used in my previous research, so it was already familiar to me. Another reason I chose to use this software was that data can be stored, copied, and worked with efficiently without taking up the physical space that hand-coding and hard copies would have (as well as the fact that work can easily be copied and stored separately from the original, so damage to the original data is not a huge set-back in research) In addition, the software allows the researcher to quickly and easily call up all data that has been coded for a specific theme so that various quotes from participants can be analyzed side-by-side, allowing contradictions and subtle differences to surface more easily (Wieitzman 2003).

Analysis of the data occurred in four waves. In the first wave I coded for specific themes I had laid out in my research proposal. These themes were: (1) the terms women use to describe their own identity (for example, "bisexual" "bi-dyke" or "queer"), (2)

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ideological motivations for the maintenance of bisexual identity, (3) participant's involvement with LBGT organizations and women's/feminist groups, (4) how "out" the woman is about her bisexuality, and to whom she is out, (5) whether or not they are "out" to their children (if they have children), and (6) participant's partner's sexual orientation identity. This round of coding was done while data collection was still ongoing. Each group was analyzed and coded for these six themes right after transcription was finished (which was normally within one week of the focus group occurring).

The second wave of coding was specific to information regarding issues related to race and ethnicity. This round of coding was done after all four focus groups were complete, prior to conducting the follow-up interviews with the participants who had identified themselves as racial/ethnic minorities. The main goal of this round of coding was to gather information with which to construct the follow-up interview questions.

The third wave of coding consisted of an open-coding procedure with a line-by-line reading of the focus group and interview data. This level of coding created a long list of themes, available in Appendix C. These codes were then recoded to place similar/identical codes under the same code heading, and this collapsed list is available in Appendix D.

The final wave of coding was done once the major themes were coded and reorganized in the third phase. Once the significant themes that were to be the focus of this study were identified, the data was then recoded specifically for these themes. The goal of this phase of coding was to make sure that key points related to these major themes had not been missed in earlier waves of coding. The major themes that were focused on for this research project included issues of visibility (public and private

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visibility), motivations for being visible, and issues of homonormativity and relationships.

In the analysis in the chapters that follow I use a transcription method in which a hyphen signals a brief pause or hesitation, and an ellipsis indicates that I have omitted some material from the quotations presented. Words appearing in brackets are my own description of something the speaker is referencing, such as a gesture toward another member of the focus group or a local organization whose name I have changed to help protect the identity of my participants, or a description of something occurring in the group, such as laughter.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have discussed my methodological goals and limitations and the methods used in my research. This discussion includes an overview of the contributions of feminist methodologies to this project, my recruitment and sampling techniques, including characteristics of the sample and limitations, and the sources of data for this project, which include focus groups, individual interviews, fieldnotes, and a survey used to gather background information about the participants. I also provide an overview of the analytic strategy I employ for this project and the coding schemes used.

CHAPTER 4:

Why Bi? Motivations for Identifying as Bisexual

One may wonder why the women in my sample want to be visible as bisexuals at all given that they are in long-term monogamous relationships with men and therefore in terms of current (and presumably the foreseeable future) sexual behavior they are in heterosexual relationships. Bisexuals are stereotyped as wanting to "pass" for heterosexual and gain heterosexual privilege (Armstrong 1995; Bower 1995; Kaplan 1992), so the assumption would be that bisexual women in relationships with men would want to pass for straight and "forget" their bisexual identity. Indeed, some women do cease to identify as bisexual once involved in a long-term relationship (with a man or with a woman) but many others continue to use this identity label to describe themselves.

In this chapter I will discuss several themes that motivated the women in my sample to attempt to make visible their bisexual identity through the creation of a bisexual display (which will be the focus of Chapter 6). These motivations fall into three main themes: feeling whole or having an authentic identity, deliberate attempts to break down stereotypes about bisexuals, and political or ideological factors which motivate the women to make themselves visible as bisexuals. I will also discuss what these motivations might tell us about political alliances and social movements based on sexual identities. Before addressing these motivations, however, I will first discuss the ways that the motivations for (and often the meaning of) bisexual identity has shifted or changed for the women in my sample now that they are no longer single or looking for sexual partners.

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Shifting Motivations

In Esterberg's 1996 study of lesbian identity performance, one reason the women cited for wanting to be visible as lesbians was to attract women sexual partners (Esterberg 1996). For the women in my study this reason is moot. As Cloe Shepard discusses below, being seen as available to both men and women was an important reason for making her bisexuality visible when she was single, but for a variety of reasons it continues to be important for her to remain visible as bisexual now:

> Cloe: "Certainly when I was single it was more important for me to be visible as a bisexual cause I was interested in both men and women. I wanted to look available to both. As a married woman no because I don't end up being sexual with anyone other than my partner. Though sometimes for personal or political or emotional reasons I want to be visible, but it's a little different."

Some of the women I spoke with felt that it may be a little misleading to "advertise" or make visible their bisexuality since they are not looking to meet new sexual partners. Anna Ellison discusses how despite feeling it's important for her to be visible to others as a bisexual woman, she sometimes feels like she's misleading others because she is not looking for new sexual partners:

> "I - it's important to me to make myself visible as a bisexual, but it's tricky because I also don't know how best to do that. Because I'm married to a man so it sort of seems pointless kind of to go out of my way to communicate that I'm bisexual because I'm not right now going to try to pursue a relationship with a woman. And I intend to remain monogamous at least for the foreseeable future unless we come to some other agreement. So it kind of just seems - there doesn't seem to be much point in really going out of my way to express that I'm bisexual because - it just kind of gives people, it just feels a little misleading."

While Anna does see herself as a bisexual woman, the fact that she is not "on the market" makes her worry that she will mislead people if she makes herself visible as a bisexual woman. Her difficulties with this issue appear to stem from the lack of consensus about

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what exactly it means to be bisexual, as this statement from her later in the same focus group makes clear:

> "I think the things that's weird about it is that, like I'm a woman, and if I'm with a man then we're both straight, and if I'm with a woman then we're lesbians, for at least that time period. So it's hard to tell because it's performative. I think that's one of the reasons I have a hard time identifying as bisexual because I'm not actively bisexual. So it seems silly to go out of my way to say I'm bisexual when I'm not going to act on it. So that's one of the things about it, like my sense of it, is that if you're going to be bisexual it means that you're kind of actively pursing these kinds of relationships. So that's one of the hard things about it."

While monogamy does not make one any less lesbian or gay (or any less heterosexual for that matter), Anna articulates a common perception that bisexuality and monogamy cannot coexist in a way that makes sense to others. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, the monogamous bisexual may be the most invisible of all the bisexuals because of this common perception that one is only bisexual when actively pursing sexual experiences with people of "both" genders.

It is important to recognize that one of the major motivations for making sexual identities—any sexual identity—visible deals with finding sexual partners. However, this is not the only basis for sexual identity, as others have discussed (Blumstein and Schwartz 1976; Blumstein and Schwartz 2000), and the women in my sample illustrate that sexual identity can be based on more than sex. Almost all of the women in my sample agreed that if they were single or in non-monogamous relationships they would probably make more of an effort to make their bisexuality visible to others as they navigate the dating scene. However, they also all agreed that even though they are in monogamous relationships and aren't putting their bisexuality out there as an attempt to pick up dates, it is still important for them to be out and seen by others as bisexual. Research has shown that bisexual identity does exist outside of bisexual behavior, despite

the "common sense" notion that bisexuals must pursue members of "both" sexes in order to maintain their bisexual identity. As Blumstein and Schwartz, as well as anecdotal discussions of bisexual identity show, sexual contact with both men and women does not need to occur in order for one to label oneself bisexual (Blumstein and Schwartz 1976; Blumstein and Schwartz 2000). Several of the women in my sample were married prior to coming out as bisexual, and reported having had no actual sexual contact (though plenty of fantasized sexual contact) with other women, yet they still identify as bisexual. Clearly, bisexual identity must have meaning outside of having sexual experiences with men and women. Research has found that there are non-sexual factors linked to claiming a bisexual identity, particularly having a feminist political perspective (Blumstein and Schwartz 1976; Burleson 2005), and the literature on bisexual feminism and the history of the bisexual movement also explicitly shows the political basis of bisexual identity (Armstrong 1995; Blasingame 1992; Bower 1995; George 1993; Hemmings 2002; Kaplan 1992; Udis-Kessler 1992; Udis-Kessler 1995; Young 1992; Zipkin 1992). Such political or ideological motivations are clearly seen through the discussions of the women in my sample, as discussed below. Despite the idea that bisexuality is an identity that is based in the bedroom, sexual behavior is not the only reason—and sometimes is not a reason at all—for being visible as a bisexual. It is these other reasons for being visible as bisexual on which I will now focus.

Key Motivations

Although finding sexual partners is often a major reason people (heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual) indicate their sexual identity to others, the focus of this research is on the non-sexual aspects of bisexual identity, and that is the topic to which I now turn.

The women in my sample discussed a variety of reasons they felt it was important for them to be visible as bisexual women even though they are not single or looking for potential sexual partners, and these reasons consist of three main themes: wholeness and authenticity, smashing stereotypes, and political/ideological allegiances.

Wholeness and Authenticity

One reason to make bisexual identity visible that several women articulated was to feel "whole" or authentic—to not be seen as bisexual would be to mask or push away some part of themselves, as Brianna Roberts states:

> "...you don't think about it and you push it away. And then that's pushing down a part of yourself that's important."

The idea that bisexuality was just a part of who they were was a theme expressed in every focus group. To not be visible as a bisexual woman, then would, for many, feel like they were hiding a part of who they are or not being honest (with themselves or others) about themselves. As Hannah Brewer discusses below, first within the focus group and again in a follow-up telephone interview, her bisexual identity does not change depending on whom her partner is but rather is a core part of how she sees herself:

> "I don't have a problem saying I'm bisexual even through I'm not actively pursing a relationship with another woman at this time because I just feel like it's a part of my identity. It's not so much that I have to be actively pursing a woman if I'm dating a guy, I just feel it's part of who I am. Just like someone who's gay or lesbian.
>
> "For me...I claim this as who I am, regardless of the gender of the person I'm with. It doesn't turn on or off my bisexuality like a switch. It's who I am."

Hannah illustrates the desire vocalized by many bisexuals to have one's identity be centered within themselves rather than dictated by the perceived sex/gender of their partner. The same sentiments were expressed by Emma Compton in a conversation

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regarding a comment made by Anna earlier in the group about her not being "actively bisexual" now that she is in a monogamous relationship:

> "Actually, this touches on something that Anna said early that made me wonder about the same thing, you talked about being actively bisexual...well, two things, one is that how can you stop being bisexual? It's how you see yourself, it's what your attractions are."

Like Hannah, this comment from Emma describes bisexual identity as a core part of how she sees herself, and therefore it is not something that ceases to be because of external factors such as her relationship status or the gender of her partner. This construction of bisexual identity as focused on the bisexual rather than on the sex/gender of one's partner directly contradicts societal constructions of sexuality which rely on perceived "sameness" or "difference" between partners to determine the sexual identities of the pair.

Despite many negative stereotypes about bisexuals, the women I spoke with had often claimed a bisexual identity as a way of asserting their strength and independence. Chapter 6 will discuss in more detail my finding for some women being self-confident and independent is an attitude they linked to their bisexual identity, and the idea that bisexual women may be more independent than their heterosexual counterparts is common in bisexual feminist scholarship (Baumgardner 2006; Bower 1995; George 1993; Yoshizaki 1992). For some women, bisexual identity brings up stereotypes about strong independent women rather than negative images, and drawing on this positive image was another reason for making bisexual identity visible. For Maria Morrison, the label bisexual has positive associations and presenting herself as bisexual also means showing that she is strong and independent:

> "...first of all, English is my second language so that term didn't come to me, I hadn't been introduced to it until maybe two years ago I was exposed to it. So to me bisexual or bi means confident, strong...it's a really strong word."

The positive relationship between bisexual identification and independence or strength was another part of why some of the women felt that being visible as a bisexual woman was a way of honoring their full self-identity.

Although the women in my sample were not pursing sexual relationships outside of their current partnership, this did not mean they were only attracted to or only had desire for their partner. As will be addressed in Chapter 6, erotic fantasies about others is one way the women kept their bisexual desires in their thoughts, and this was also a factor in terms of feeling that being visible as a bisexual woman was a more honest portrait of who they are. Here Hannah discusses how she feels her continued attraction to women means that bisexual identity is still a big part of who she is:

> "Just because I'm with a guy doesn't mean I'm any less bisexual or any less attracted to women because I can go to a movie with a hot chick and still think she's hot."

The idea that bisexuals somehow cease to *really* be bisexual once they are no longer actively pursing relationships with more than one gender is a common perception in society, and is a main reason that bisexuals, particularly monogamous bisexuals, remain invisible to others, as I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter. In addition to wanting to make bisexual identity visible as a way of expressing a feeling of wholeness or a more honest or authentic identity, another important reason the women in my sample discussed for wanting to be visible as bisexual women was to question the stereotypes about bisexuals—such as the stereotype that bisexuals cannot be happily

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monogamous—and this desire to question stereotypes about bisexuals is the next theme I discuss.

Smashing Stereotypes

Political motivations for being visible as bisexuals will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, but closely related to such political motivations was the idea that being visible as a bisexual would help to debunk the stereotypes that so often accompany perceptions of bisexual people, as Hannah discusses below:

> "I feel that it's very important because too often people let their assumptions run wild, or they think, here's a bi chick she must be easy. And in terms of LGBT rights, I mean, yes, we have the fallback of straight privilege as you [gestures toward fellow group member Allison Schaffer] said, but that doesn't mean we should take the easy way out. I think we should always be outspoken. One of the first years I went to the Pride march the bi contingent got booed and it really bothered me. And - we're a minority within the minority. A lot of lesbian women I know will flat out say that they won't date a woman who's bi. I'm not sure how it goes for men, but to have that discrimination just thrown on the table before you even know someone is just really disheartening. It's very important to me that people say yes, I'm bi, and that doesn't define who I am. It doesn't mean you can take your assumptions and run with it, because you wouldn't like it if someone did that to you if you're gay or lesbian."

Research has shown that exposure to lesbians and gay men decreases prejudice toward these groups among heterosexual people (Herek 2002; LaMar 1998). However, because of the invisibility of bisexuality, people are not often exposed to bisexual people and therefore stereotypes are the only information they have. Without the context of a broader bisexual social movement, it is often up to individual bisexuals to be "out" and counteract such prejudices and stereotypes. Being out and visible as a bisexual who defies many of the stereotypes about bisexuals (such as the idea bisexuals can't be monogamous, that they would rather pass for straight, that they are apolitical) is one reason the women in

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my sample discussed for their continued efforts to make their bisexual identity visible to others.

Several women also mentioned that being in a relationship made them feel safer about being out about their bisexuality because they might encounter fewer stereotypes about being promiscuous or indiscriminate lovers. In addition, because they were in a relationship with a man, the women discussed how they wanted to be visible as bisexuals rather than assumed to be straight, contradicting stereotypes about bisexuals wanting to "pass" or receive straight privilege. Similar to Miller's findings, the women in my sample also did not want to be assumed to be straight (Miller 2006). This comment from Vickie Butler illustrates both the safety of being out in a relationship and this desire to not be seen as straight:

> "I've been afraid to be really out when I've been single because I think men kind of read it as some kind of allurement, and I haven't been keen to have those kind of men around me. And I haven't had a lot of time where I've been single because I've tended to move from one relationship right into another one, but I've always found it was more important to be out as bi when with a man because there's that tendency for people to assume you're heterosexual, even if you're presenting in the most extreme of queer, a lot of people just refuse to see it. Whereas - I felt it was less upsetting to be mistaken for a lesbian - somehow being mistaken for lesbian didn't feel distressing in the way being mistaken for straight did."

Because of stereotypes about bisexual, especially bisexual women, some women may not feel comfortable or safe being out when single because of ideas about bisexuality that are seen as an enticement by some men. The assumption that one will be "easy" or that a woman would have a "threesome" or make out with another women to turn on a male audience is common within our society, and many bisexual women would rather not deal with those kinds of assumptions (and those who hold such assumptions). In this comment was also see that being mistaken for straight can feel more upsetting than being mistaken

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for lesbian, a feeling that is common among many bisexual women (Miller 2006). As this chapter discusses, personal and political motivations are often behind this desire to not "pass" for straight even if one's bisexual identity is still not recognized.

Stereotypes about bisexuals being promiscuous or sexually indiscriminant were a reason many women in my sample felt safer being visible as bisexual in a monogamous relationship, and a reason they felt it was even more important to be visible as an attempt to smash that myth. Hannah, who is African American, further articulated her thoughts about why it is important for her to be out as a bisexual woman during a follow-up telephone interview:

> "I'm very conscious of the misconceptions about Black women's sexuality. That Black girls will do things white girls won't or that they must be a freak in the bedroom. I try to be aware that despite how I act there are stupid expectations and assumptions about how Black women behave in bed. Being Black, bi, and female then there's really the assumption you must be a freak in bed. I try not to further the stereotype. There are also a lot more assumptions about promiscuity. I had "bisexual" on my profile on yahoo and I had to take that off because I kept getting so many unwanted approaches from people."

For Hannah, being visible as a Black bisexual woman is important because her visibility can help fight stereotypes and create new concepts of what it means to be bisexual. By being bisexual *and* monogamous, this creates a new concept of what it means to be bisexual, and, perhaps, fights the assumption that bisexuals cannot be happy with just one person because they will "miss" something from one gender or another. Indeed, the monogamous bisexual may point to the idea that the "two" genders are not really so fundamentally different that one needs "both" to be happy. In this way, the women in my sample have the potential to disrupt perhaps the most foundational pillar of heteronormativity.

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Often tied to why the women in my sample want to be visible as bisexuals to counter stereotypes about bisexuals is their political motivations for being visible as bisexual women. The desire to cause others to question their assumptions about sexuality or specifically about bisexuals is tied to feminist and queer concerns regarding sexuality and gender, and this topic of political or ideological ties to queer and feminist politics is the final motivation I will discuss here.

Political/Ideological Allegiances

A third reason the women in my sample discussed for why they want to be visible as bisexual women deals with the political aspects of bisexual identity. Unlike lesbian identity, bisexual identity had been dismissed within feminist scholarship as apolitical and the links between bisexual identity, feminism, and queer politics have often been ignored outside of a small field of scholarship (Armstrong 1995; Hartman 2005; Hemmings 2002; Rust 2000; Udis-Kessler 1995). However, the connection between wanting to be visible as a bisexual woman and having an orientation toward feminist and queer ideology was clear in the focus group conversations. In discussing these connections Vickie simply said, "I came out as feminist first." For her, feminist identification and bisexual identification were, in many ways, two sides of the same coin. Feminism opened up a more sexually-liberated, woman-centered view of sexuality for her, which in turn allowed her to come to a bisexual identification as well. This experience is not uncommon. However, the tensions between feminism, particularly a more "sex-negative" feminism, and a desire for women can also be a source of conflict and struggle, as Vickie goes on to explain:

> "...Because I had this view in my head of what THE feminist position has to be. And sometimes I have to realize that what's good for me in my development as a

> queer woman isn't always going to be the feminist thing. That sometimes what's feminist isn't overlapping with what's good for me as a queer woman. Like the pornography issue. Almost all the feminists I grew up with were very anti-pornography, but pornography, growing up pornography was the only place I saw things...saw queer women. My parents had the Screw Reader, this underground sex magazine that was political but really graphic. And it had these articles about how to give oral sex and as a kid reading this I thought this was going to be really important. There was one on blow jobs and one on going down on women, and I read both of those like a maniac. It made me realize that there's more going on in porn than just what men, or what particular types of men are getting out of it. And watching how anti-porn laws have worked in Canada to prevent lesbians from sharing political information because it's of a sexual nature and I realized that the kind of men who would be buying the objectifying porn can use the laws made to try to stop it to stop stuff for us. So that expanded my view of feminism, that there's not just one type of feminism that's good for all women.

Vickie's statement points to the ways a sexual desire for women can cause tensions within certain threads of feminist theory and activism, but at the same time, this desire for women also helped her expand her view of feminism, branching out to find more sex-positive and queer-friendly feminisms.

Five of the fourteen women in my sample said they were involved specifically with feminist organizations, and several others were involved in broader work related to women's or gender equality issues. They reported feeling that this work was related to their desire to be visible, as Brianna Roberts discusses:

> "...we don't say feminist but gender equality...so involvement in that is a subtle way of saying hey, this is what I do, this is what I identify with, this is what I'm trying to help with."

In a different focus group, Sydney discussed how being involved in feminist artwork and being very woman-centered have been an important influence for her to be out and visible as a bisexual woman:

> "I also do a lot of work about feminist art and so...I make it, like it's not necessarily a lesbian or a bisexual thing, but it's a very pro-woman thing. I'm very conscious of gender issues. That's really important for me and at times, it's

> kinda like was Vickie was saying, like I do this feminist art thing and it's really important to me to keep that visible commitment. Maybe professionally that's not the best career move, but it's one way of remaining involved and visibly involved."

Like Cloe and others, Sydney describes her involvement with feminist work and "gender issues" as being tied to her bisexual identity and as a reason for being visible and staying involved.

In addition to being active in feminist organizations and activism, nine of fourteen women in my sample mentioned specific gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender groups that they have been involved with, either currently or in the past, and felt that their ties to that social movement were part of why they want to be visible as bisexual women. Other women reported not being involved with a specific group, but rather keeping informed about current events and news related to GLBT issues. This finding is not particularly surprising, given that the women for this study were primarily recruited through bisexual, GLBT, and feminist organizations and therefore one would expect the majority of them to be involved in such groups. However, this does not discount the fact that their involvement in these groups is one reason that they want to make visible their bisexual identity.

For some women, their involvement with a male partner made it more difficult to be involved in GLBT organizations. Here Cloe discusses her involvement both with feminist and GLBT organizations in college, and how having a male partner has shaped her experiences:

> "I'm involved in NOW and I'm involved in the feminist community. I'm not involved in the GLBT community here. That has an interesting history when I was an undergrad, which is were I met my partner, I was just starting, I was basically just coming out to myself and I was looking for some support from the campus GLBT community, and that's where I had all my really bad experiences

> with lesbians. And some gay men, but mostly with lesbians. And I was really turned off by that experience because..,well I fell in love with my partner and it was like, you're with a man, you don't belong here. And then we moved here and the first year I was commuting a lot. But now with my friend at work I've been trying to get more involved and I've had the good experiences to realize I'm not going to be judged by every lesbian I meet. I'm definitely generally politically involved, including GLBT issues."

Due to the tensions that exist within the GLBT community, particularly between lesbians and bisexual women, the women in my sample sometimes reported difficulties being involved in GLBT organizations, particularly once they began a relationship with their current male partner or "came out" as having a male partner. Despite these tensions, however, staying connected to the GLBT movement and being knowledgeable about current issues, such as the same-sex marriage debates, was strongly tied to their bisexual identity. As Anna Ellison discusses below, following the news about GLBT issues and discussing those issues with others is one way she tries to show her alliance with other GLBT people:

> "...I follow the political stuff dealing with gay rights. In college I was in the GLBT student group and stuff like that, so I've always had that political angle. Though not for bisexual advocacy, but gay rights kind of stuff.... And I like to keep up on all the various horrible laws different states are trying to pass and the general anti-gay climate, and I talk about that a lot with people I come across. I think that's one way that I'm at least visible as caring about the issues and I'm on the side of gay and lesbian people. So there's those things. And also, even though I am married, I really don't like the institution of marriage."

Anna further explained that because of her interest in feminist politics, she questions the institution of marriage, despite the fact she herself is married. Nine of the fourteen women in my sample were legally married at the time of the focus groups, yet most agreed that marriage wasn't necessarily an institution they were entirely comfortable with or didn't have some reservations about. When the topic of marriage was discussed among group members, ideas about how marriage might not be a great institution, particularly

for women, and that monogamy is not necessarily the only (or best) way to define a relationship were common considerations.

Explicitly resisting the dominant ideology of dichotomous sex/gender/sexuality and actively divesting of heterosexual privilege were also reasons the women discussed. As Allison Schaffer explains below, she often uses the label "queer" as well as bisexual as a way to acknowledge that there are more than two genders:

> "...it's more of a political identity. As I've more and more been involved in activist work and political things I've claimed bisexual as an identity to put forth. I also use the word queer, I identify as queer. I think that I sort of resist bisexual because it goes with the binary that we as bisexuals reject anyway, like I date men and I date women, and it neglects different kinds of gender. So I like to use queer to connote more fluidity of how I see my sexuality and many people's sexuality."

Using bisexuality as a tool for explaining to others the fluidity of sex/gender/sexuality is an important reason for being visible as a bisexual woman. This desire to break down such binaries is linked to feminist and queer politics, as breaking down these categories and striving for equality and social justice are principle goals of both movements. In discussing feminist and queer politics, the issue of heterosexual privilege often came up in conversation. The women struggled with the fact that as women in relationships with men—relationships that mean most people assume they are heterosexual women—how do they work to dismantle a system which gives them heterosexual privilege. This desire for social change was a strong motivator for being visible, as Hannah explains:

> "...we have the fallback of straight privilege... but that doesn't mean we should take the easy way out. I think we should always be outspoken."

For the women in my sample, being outspoken, or, as Miller says, "living out loud" by being visible as a bisexual is a way to educate others about bisexuality and about inequality in general, and this is an important reason to create a bisexual display. Despite

having the "fallback" of heterosexual privilege available because of their relationships with men, these women felt they should be visible as bisexuals to educate others about the false dichotomy of gender and sexuality in furtherance of queer feminist aims.

Discussion

What do these motivations for being visible as a bisexual tell us about bisexual identity, or, more generally, about sexual identities? As this chapter has shown, there are reasons outside of sex to be visible as a bisexual, and bisexuality is not an apolitical identity that is based solely on a desire to have sex with both men and women. The desire to present an honest identity, to question stereotypes about bisexuality and bisexuals, and the link to feminist and queer politics are all reasons to create a bisexual display that have nothing to do with picking up a sexual partner. There are reasons to be bisexual outside the bedroom. Here I would like to discuss a few implications this finding has for feminist and queer political movements, specifically through a shift in focus from identity-based political movements, which rely on fixed identities, to a politics of ideas, which can accommodate a range of (fluid and shifting) sexualities and genders under shared political ideas and goals.

Bisexual Feminism

My own previous work as well as that of others have shown that bisexuals are often accused of wanting heterosexual privilege and not being as politically invested compared to lesbians and gay men (Armstrong 1995; Burleson 2005; Hartman 2005; Hemmings 2002; Rust 2000; Udis-Kessler 1995). However, feminism is a crucial part of bisexual identity for many women as well as men (Burleson 2005), and in this chapter I have discussed feminist politics as a motivation for creating a bisexual display and

attempts to divest of heterosexual privilege rather than "pass" for straight. For this reason, more attention needs to be paid within feminist scholarship to the lens of bisexuality. Although there has been work within bisexual scholarship on this link, little attention has been paid within feminist research.

One example of how feminist discussions may be influenced by an expanded emphasis on bisexuality is in the issue of relationships with men. Despite rhetoric that "feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice," many feminists have relationships with men—our lovers, sons, fathers, brothers, and friends. Because bisexuals have "looked both ways" (Baumgardner 2006), they may be more inclined to relate to men in ways that differ from societal expectations. They are likely to be leery of male control and privilege in relationships and may negotiate more equitable relationships and seek out partners more open to such possibilities. Several of the women in my sample discussed the fact that even though they were married they had serious problems with the institution of marriage, and others discussed the idea that monogamy and marriage should be a choice rather than an expectation. Such ideas about relationships are what Baumgardner refers to as "gay expectations" and she suggests that bisexual women may have the potential to negotiate relationships with men that meet their feminist/queer expectations of emotional intimacy, satisfying sex, and egalitarian relationship structures (Baumgardner 2006). Bisexual women can create change by relating with men on their own terms and through the creation of alternative relationship structures such as non-monogamy or partnerships that do not include marriage (Kaplan 1992). The sexual choice experienced by bisexual women may lead them to feminism, or perhaps feminism leads them to sexual choices, or the two work together in some other way, but regardless

the links between bisexuality and feminism for bisexual women deserve further study not just in the margins of bisexual studies but within feminist scholarship as well as we learn how "gay expectations" might help us structure all our relationships in a more feminist-friendly manner.

Another issue of key interest to feminist scholars that is uniquely informed through a fuller incorporation of bisexual feminism deals with several "isms." Through bisexual feminism we can see the relationship between heterosexism, monosexism, and sexism as linked to the over-arching oppression of genderism (Nagle 1995). Genderism artificially channels people into two biological sexes, and this belief is the underlying assumption of all three oppressions of heterosexism, monosexism, and sexism. Bisexuals challenge the assumptions of the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm that constructs the world as being composed of two-and-only-two sexes, genders, and sexualities, and assumes a relationship among these three categories (men will act masculine and desire only women as sexual partners, women will act feminine and desire only men as sexual partners). Although bisexuals may not challenge the belief that there are two-and-only-two biological sexes in the same way that, for example, intersex individuals might, by not constructing their lives in the ways dictated by the paradigm they bring into question the entire order, not just the dichotomy they most directly challenge (sexuality). Nagle (1995) takes readers through the task of imagining, in turn, worlds in which there is no heterosexism, monosexism, or sexism. In her thought experiments, eliminating one of these oppressions would not eliminate the others if genderism is still left intact. However, without genderism the other oppressions can not exist. Sexism requires distinctions between "men" and "women" in order to create inequality. Monosexism and

heterosexism would also cease to exist should genderism disappear, as there could no longer be a distinction between sexes and therefore the distinction of who one is "allowed" to be sexual with would not be an issue (Nagle 1995). An exploration of bisexual feminism allows us to see the root of so many oppressions under the umbrella of genderism, and this should be of key interest for further theorizing as feminists seek to disrupt the gender order and combat sexism and other oppressions.

In addition to understanding the role of feminism in motivating bisexual displays, using a bisexual display to cause others to question their own assumptions can be a great tool for educating others about gender and sexuality and thus furthering the goals of feminism in deconstructing these categories. Making bisexual identity visible can help show the falseness of the dichotomous assumptions of the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm, and this is an idea that will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6. Feminism motivated the women in my sample to challenge the assumptions of others about sex, gender, and sexuality through making their identities visible and discussing these concepts with others. Such one-on-one education about the falseness of this paradigm may seem small, but none-the-less others may be educated through the actions of these women. When bisexual feminism motivates bisexual displays a unique and valuable teaching tool may be created for exposing the way this paradigm structures social life, and how disruptions to this paradigm are possible in our everyday world.

Although the 1990's produced a growing body of theoretical and anecdotal work on the connections between feminism and bisexuality, feminism's influence on bisexual identities, especially on creating bisexual identities apart from sexual acts or behaviors, needs further exploration and empirical research both within bisexual scholarship and

feminist scholarship. Understanding the feminist politics behind a bisexual identity and display enhances our understandings of the ways bisexuality is an identity beyond the bedroom, that is, a political identity with a goal of social change.

Identity Politics

Identity-based political movements rely on a firm line between "us vs. them" in which identity is both clear cut and unchanging, and no one can exist in between "us" and "them" to blur these boundaries. Such movements are not based on a more fluid notion of self-concept or sexuality identities, nor on the everyday lives of many individuals who do not experience such clear distinctions. This discussion highlights major features of identity-based political movements, with specific attention to movements based on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) identities, and highlights the way the way the fluid nature of sexuality when viewed through the lens of social constructionism is particularly problematic for a movement rooted in stable notions of identity.

Identity-based political movements emerged as oppressed populations mobilized for social change in the last half of the Twentieth Century. The first step toward creating an identity-based political movement is to have a social basis that creates an identity to rally around. Studies have shown that those who are placed on the lower end of a hierarchy of power (race, class, or gender, for example) tend to feel identification with others in the same position (Gurin 1980). This sense of identification with similar others has been used, effectively in many cases, to mobilize those in lower power positions for collective action. Along with this identification with people who are similar comes an opposition to the "others" one perceives on the higher side of the power relationship. Clear-cut lines are used to mobilize "our side" against "their side," with the tendency to

divide society into bipolar and mutually exclusive categories. This is especially the case with identity-based political movements that are liberationist in nature. The gay liberation movement that emerged following the Stonewall riots rejected the earlier homophile movement's assimilationist politics and instead formed a movement that focused on and celebrated the idea that gay men and lesbians *are* different from heterosexuals (Seidman 1993). While this perspective has been helpful in increasing gay and lesbian visibility, establishing political issues that are of importance to same-sex couples (such as second-parent adoptions) and mobilized many individuals in the gay and lesbian communities, real life includes exceptions to the us/them divide that cannot be dealt with under the current identity politics framework (Gamson 1995). The disruption of this dichotomous framework will be discussed in more detail later in this section with the rise of queer political movements, but for now I would like to focus on a particular binary model of identity politics that has been adopted within the gay movement, that of an ethnic identity model.

There are several obvious differences between identities based on race and those based on sexuality, particularly that one's awareness of their sexual identity tends to occur later in life than one's awareness of their race or ethnic identity (Howard 2000). Despite these differences, an ethnic model of identity has been used in the LGBT movement as a strategy for identity construction and political mobilization. As others have observed (Epstein 1998; Seidman 1993), unlike homosexual identity, ethnic or racial identification is usually made from birth, and the family is an important transmitter of one's racial or ethnic identity. Further, it is difficult for most people to hide the color of their skin (though some people can and do "pass") while many people can hide their

sexual orientation much more easily. Additionally, framing sexual orientation as a type of "ethnic" identity "presupposes sexual object-choice as a master category of sexual and self-identity" (Seidman 1993) meaning that the gender of one's partner is seen as the primary motivation for identity formation. One the other hand, sexual categories, like racial and ethnic categories, are products of history and culture that vary over time (D'Emilio and Freedman 1997; Epstein 1998; Foucault 1990; Weeks 2003) and therefore it may not be quite so strange to use an ethnic identity model as a basis for mobilization for gay rights. Much as the Civil Rights Movement argued that one cannot choose one's skin color and therefore everyone should be equal under the law, gay and lesbians have used the same logic regarding sexual orientation to demand equal rights. If choice in sexual orientation is absent, on what basis can rights be denied? This model requires a dichotomous view of sexuality—one either is or is not homosexual—and furthermore assumes that sexual orientation is innate and unchanging. Although this may be a logical strategy for protecting civil rights within the current political context, it does not offer the possibility that one could be neither homosexual nor heterosexual, or that one might change identities multiple times over the course of their lives. By neglecting the idea that personal and social identities are related to a fluid self-concept, identity politics precludes the idea of change and, in the long run, cannot continue to be an effective way to mobilize (Gamson 1995).

Racial identity politics is not quite sure what to do about bi-racial individuals who blur the us/them boundary, feminist politics—especially feminist separatism—has yet to come up with what to do about transgender (just look at the problems that come up every year at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival) or intersex individuals (Turner 1999), and

the lesbian and gay movement doesn't know where to place bisexuals, transgender/transsexual, intersex, or other gender queer people in the binary divide created by identity politics. The experiences of all these groups who blur the boundaries are important for reflection in that we are forced to consider that there may be a bit of "them" in "us" and vice versa. But how do we form political movements without an identity politics that has worked (in some cases better than others) for over thirty years?

The queer political movement of the 1990's attempted to change the shape of identity politics by broadening the available identities of "us" and "them" and blurring the boundaries between the two. The challenge of queer theory and politics is primarily in its disruption of sex and gender identity boundaries and deconstruction of stable identity categories. (Gamson 1995). Queer politics tends to be a politics of ideas, not identities (Highleyman 1995) and the design of this political movement is to eventually create a world where our current identity categories would have no meaning. Slowly more social movements are queering their strategies, and the rise of a broader bisexual movement in the 1990's has also called into question both the dichotomy set up by identity politics and the very notion that the gender one feels attracted to should be used as a basis for identity in the first place (Highleyman 1995; Nagle 1995; Udis-Kessler 1995). While queer politics has gained some attention, especially among younger generations, the gay and lesbian movement is still largely dominated by a model of identity politics. One reason for this may be that it is difficult to give up identities, especially for oppressed groups who can see the benefits of solidarity and mobilization inherent in identity politics. Additionally, queer politics falls into much the same pitfalls as deconstructionist perspectives (Seidman 1995), that is, queer politics may help shed light on the ways our

identities are socially constructed, but it does not provide a solid base for solidarity and social movements. This is evident in the fact that despite attention to queer political groups such as ACT-UP, the dominant model of mobilization for social change today largely remains the same identity-based model it has been for the past thirty years. People are still oppressed because of the (socially constructed) identities they inhabit, and therefore we have not yet entered a world where identities can be shed because we do not yet have a viable alternative as a means for working for social change and equality. Despite such limits of queer politics within society today, and the pull of mobilizing through identity-based politics, I argue that bisexuals must resist using an identity-based model around which to organize. As I will discuss in greater detail below, the potential for bisexuality to change the landscape of sexuality is squandered when bisexuality is treated as a stable identity category to which some individuals (and not others) belong.

From Identity Politics to a Politics of Ideas

Many social movements scholars would argue that identity-based politics, despite some successes, have stagnated or are even beginning to self-destruct (Gamson 1995; Highleyman 1995; Seidman 1993). As discussed above, the goal of queering our political movements is to eventually create a world where our current identity categories would have no meaning. Here is where bisexual identity may hold the greatest potential in changing political movements, provided they learn from the queer politics of the 1990's and attempt to create a politics that is not based on a stable notion of identity. As Baumgardner points out, "Bisexuals rate an initial, but there is no organizing around bisexuality" (Baumgardner 2006 p. 192). While this lack of organization has meant that those who identify as bisexual have been rendered invisible, it also means that bisexuality

might not come with the baggage of organizing around a stable or ethnic model of identity the way the broader gay and lesbian movement has. Generally speaking, the small bisexual movement in existence has thus far has worked to call into question both the dichotomy set up by identity politics and the very notion that the gender one feels attracted to should be used as a basis for identity in the first place (Highleyman 1995; Nagle 1995; Udis-Kessler 1995). Although bisexual identity is not free from all the pitfalls of identity-based political movements, as I will be discussing momentarily, much of the organizing that has gone on around bisexual identity has been far more influenced by a fluid concept of identity rather than a stable model.

Our current conceptualizations of bisexuality are bipolar, categorical, or both (Kaplan 1995) and these conceptualizations are not very compatible with a politics of ideas that deconstructs binary divides and stable categories. Rust (Rust 1992) attempts to eliminate the bipolar aspects of bisexual identity, yet her model of bisexuality is still categorical, with a "Choice C" category of sexuality available for bisexuals that does not fall between heterosexuality and homosexuality, but still groups bisexuals into a particular, stable category. Bipolar and categorical models of bisexuality are not useful as political identities, especially when one is engaged in the politics of dismantling binary and categorical thinking. As bisexual feminist Rebecca Kaplan argues, "I do not want to be in Box C. I do not want a 'both/and' world, in which I am seen as gay and straight, but the sex(es) of my lovers is still a question of important public interest, and possibilities are still restricted to two categories" (Kaplan 1995 p.275). A "both/and" model is still binary and categorical, and is not useful to those engaged in queer politics. Kaplan's model of bisexual identity involves constant motion, like electron shells in atoms, and

sexual attraction is thought of in terms of probability clusters (Kaplan 1995). Though this model of bisexual identity still needs to be fully theorized, this line of thinking can lead scholars to theories about all identities in non-binary, non-categorical terms. Additionally, by thinking outside of binaries we can see connectedness among people across differences and build useful coalitions based on shared ideas, a useful strategy if we are to ever move out of identity politics, and bisexuality has the potential of leading the way.

Simply creating a space for bisexuals at the table of sexual politics cannot be the goal of incorporating bisexual identities into queer and feminist scholarship and political movements. The greatest challenge bisexuality poses to our current construction of sexuality is the ability to illustrate the fluid and dynamic nature of sexuality. Bisexuality is currently able to pose such a challenge because the current organization of sexuality is monosexual and gendered. As Rust points out, "If we succeed in reconstructing the sexual landscape to support a bisexual identity, we will have destroyed its revolutionary potential" (Rust 1996c p. 81). Creating space for a new ethnic model of bisexual identity may be a tempting way to fight against the invisibility of bisexuals, but ultimately it will not revolutionize the way sexuality is organized in our society. Instead, bisexuality must be like the mythical phoenix—the concept, the identity, must burn up in order for a new sexual landscape to emerge from the ashes.

Bisexual identity, therefore, is in a strange position of being useful while working to make itself irrelevant. Although bisexual identity may be seen as a means for organizing for change, in the end any concept of a stable identity will fail. Identity-based politics attempt to construct stable boundaries around fluid identities, and new theorizing

and organizing around bisexuality needs to be wary of reconstructing this trap and creating a solidified bisexual identity around which to organize.

Within identity politics, a clear line between heterosexuals and homosexuals is needed and identities must be stable and unchanging. Bisexuals blur this line and show that such a dichotomy between heterosexuals and homosexuals does not exist. Studies of bisexual identity have also shown that identities do shift and change, and can be based on multiple factors. The women in my sample all said that they would pick the label "bisexual" if they had to pick one label from the list "heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual," but overall the labels they use to describe themselves and their positions on the sexual landscape have changed over time and within different contexts. The desires, ideas, and emotions on which they based their identities have also varied. And, also important for a system of identity-based politics rather than one which organizes around shared goals or ideologies, the women in my sample articulated that not all who share an identity share similar goals, as Sydney discussed during one focus group:

> "I think it's also true that not all gay people are queer. I've met some really right-wing gay men."

Identities are very complicated, and can overlap, conflict, and change. A politics based on a stable model of identity would assume that all who share a certain identity have the same goals and values, yet, as Sydney points out above, this may not be the case. Organizing for social change based on shared values and goals would be more useful than organizing based on a socially constructed and unstable category that encompasses a great deal of diversity.

By moving away from such a politics of identities toward a politics of ideas, movements can focus on shared goals and ideologies rather than shared identities based

on gender, race, sexuality, class or any of a plethora of other identities we hold, which, ultimately, are unstable anyway. Queer and feminist movements based on such a politics of ideas would be more inclusive and diverse, and likely a stronger movement that would offer a major shift in political organizing as it exists today.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the ways that the motivations for (and often the meaning of) bisexual identity has shifted or changed for the women in my sample now that they are no longer single or looking for sexual partners. Although the reasons for being visible as a bisexual change when the task of finding sexual partners is no longer relevant, the desire to be visible remains. I discussed several themes that motivated the women in my sample to attempt to make visible their bisexual identity through the creation of a bisexual display, and these motivations were described in three main themes: feeling whole or having an authentic identity, deliberate attempts to break down stereotypes about bisexuals, and political or ideological factors which motivate the women to make themselves visible as bisexuals. I conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of how the non-sexual reasons for being visible as a bisexual could shape queer and feminist political movements and shift us from a politics based on innate, unchanging identities to a politics shaped by ideas.

CHAPTER 5:

(In)Visibility and the Challenge to Bisexual Identities

In this chapter I examine issues related to bisexual invisibility and the misappropriation by social others of bisexual identity as straight or lesbian, and relate the ways that the invisibility of bisexual identity creates unique issues for identity development, the performance of identity, and bisexual organization. Here I will address several of the problems in gaining visibility that the women in my sample discuss. These problems include a general lack of bisexual visibility and the misappropriation of identity due to the common belief in dichotomous sexuality that renders bisexuals as visible only as straight or gay/lesbian. In this chapter I also include a discussion of the advantages that come with invisibility that the women in the sample shared during the focus group interviews, such as the ability to pass or feeling like one does not have to conform to a stereotype. Finally, I discuss the ways that bisexuality's status as an unrecognized social identity category creates interesting questions for the concept of self-identity and identity performance, as well as for organizing a bisexual social movement that could in turn promote visibility. First, however, I discuss what the invisibility of bisexual identities tells us about the social construction of sexualities.

Invisibility

Bisexual author William Burleson has argued that the lack of bisexual visibility is perhaps the biggest challenge facing the bisexual community (Burleson 2005). Despite developments by queer theory and an emerging scholarship on bisexuality, bisexual persons largely remain invisible in our society and are assumed to be either straight or gay/lesbian based on the (perceived) gender of the person they are with. As long as

sexual identity is assumed based on the body of one's partner, bisexual identity remains external to the individual and bisexual visibility continues to be a difficult goal to achieve.

The way society conceives of sexuality in dichotomous terms means that those who take on a bisexual identity remain invisible as bisexuals, although they may be mistaken for either straight or gay/lesbian. The social construction of sexuality works against the concept of the existence of bisexuality, let alone the visibility of a bisexual identity. Jackson has put forth a discussion of the social construction of gender and sexuality that examines social construction in four intersecting levels or facets (Jackson 2006). If one considers these four levels, one can examine the ways bisexuality is rendered invisible at almost every turn in the social construction of sexuality. At the macro-structural level, bisexuality is rendered invisible through a binary sex/gender/sexuality paradigm that organizes societal institutions such as marriage. Currently there is debate about two kinds of marriage: same-sex and opposite-sex. Same-sex marriage is referred to as "gay marriage," and relationships are referred to as either same or opposite sex, heterosexual or homosexual, rendering bisexuality invisible in the discursive level of the construction of sexuality as well. Indeed, to say one is in a "bisexual relationship" or pushing for bisexual marriage is rather confusing. At the level of routine, everyday social practices we again see little room for the visibility of bisexuality, as sexuality and gender are constituted and reconstituted within various contexts and relationships along a binary assumption of gender and sexuality. At this level, however, we may see room for visible bisexual identity with particular localized contexts, for example, within the context of a conference on bisexuality, or perhaps even

a broader queer-friendly context, we might see space for a visible bisexual identity to emerge through interaction because these interactions are occurring with individuals who may not subscribe to a dichotomous sex/gender/sexuality system. It is toward the fourth facet of the social construction of sexuality that Jackson discusses, however, that most attention is given in this project. This is the level of subjectivity, or how the individual perceives her desires and emotions and makes sense of them in her identity. At this level bisexual identities can become visible within the self, despite the fact that the other levels of the social construction of sexuality leave little room for such an identity.

Before discussing in the next chapter how bisexual identities might be made visible at this level of subjectivity through bisexual displays, however, this chapter is concerned with the ways bisexuality is rendered invisible and the effects invisibility has on the social construction of sexuality at the level of subjectivity and self-identity.

Bisexual invisibility can be a self-perpetuating cycle, as a lack of visibility means that there are no cultural scripts or well-known roles from which to draw to make bisexuality visible. This problem can be seen in the way my participants discussed that, despite a desire to be recognized as bisexual women, they often felt they didn't know how to make themselves visible. This lack of "know how" is the topic to which I now turn.

Lack of "know how"

One of the issues the women in my sample discussed repeatedly was that they weren't really sure how to go about making their bisexual identity visible, in part due to the lack of a visible bisexual social movement. This lack of bisexual visibility is a problem discussed in many studies of bisexuality (Bower 2002; Burleson 2005; Burrill

2002; Macalister 2003; Ochs 1996), and in all the focus groups the women in my sample discussed how a general lack of bisexual visibility made it difficult for them to know exactly how to go about expressing their bisexual identity. Even though they all identify as bisexual, the women spoke about not knowing how to make that identity visible and feeling like some sort of universal symbol or stereotype would be helpful for them to mark their identities, as this comment from Allison Schaffer, a white college student in her early 20's makes evident:

> "...I've also found that it's very, very difficult to be visible as bisexual. I don't even know how. I don't think there's any way to be visible as bisexual unless you like wear a shirt that say 'bisexual' or have all the badges and buttons and bumper stickers that we use to show our identity. Which I have of course. But I don't really know how to do it... And I feel like I have to choose how I present myself, how I look and how I act, I have to choose to present as lesbian or present as straight. And that's very frustrating, and I feel like people do make assumptions about me. I feel like I could go either way, a lot of people would assume that I'm lesbian and other people would assume I'm straight. And the main thing I think about is that sometimes I try to be visible as not straight."

Here Allison makes reference to the use of pins and other visual markers that help make bisexual identity visible, and this is a topic I will address in more detail in the next chapter. Even with these symbols, however, bisexual identity may still remain invisible due to a lack of awareness—both among bisexuals and among non-bisexuals—of specific bisexual symbols. For example, one participant discussed how having a pin which read "bi" was mis-identified by others as a cue she was bilingual. Another discussed how a pin she had which read "ACDC" could be interpreted to mean that she was a fan of the rock band of that name, not a reference to "going both ways."

Even when such cues were available, however, Allison and others in the groups still felt they lacked the know-how of how to make their identity visible to others. The feeling like one does not have the "know how" to present a bisexual identity was a

common problem the women discussed in the focus group. The following four quotes were each taken from a different focus group conversation, but speak to this common theme. The first is from Maria Morrison, a white woman in her late 20's from Eastern Europe who has been with her partner for two years. The next passage is from Hannah Brewer, an African American woman in her early 30's who has been dating her partner for about five years. The third quote comes from Brianna Roberts, a college student in her late teens who identifies as multiracial and has been dating her partner for three years. The final quote comes from Cloe Shepard, a white woman in her early 20's who is legally married to her partner of nearly five years.

> Maria: "...I feel like I need to go to school for it or something."
>
> Hannah: "I think you can't really say 'pin the tale on the bisexual' because unlike with someone who may be obviously gay or lesbian, there's not type. It's kinda like we're Snuffaluffagus."
>
> Brianna: "it's so hard because there's no cultural stereotype, so that's good and it's bad. It's good that there's no stereotype, but it's bad because we don't even think about it."
>
> Cloe: "yeah, we need some kind of a symbol. We go to the bar and we need some kind of a symbol, we don't really have the rainbow and we need something."

Maria and Cloe both speak of feeling like one can learn to be visible through something external. As Maria said, jokingly, it's as though bisexuals need to go to school in order to learn how to make visible their identities. Cloe illustrates how despite the rainbow flag being a symbol for the larger LGBT community, in general the rainbow is perceived as a symbol denoting lesbian or gay identity. Although bisexuals and transgender people have created their own pride flags and symbols, for the most part those symbols have not caught public attention outside of bisexual and transgender communities and therefore do not create identity markers that can be perceived those outside those communities. The

desire for an external or more universal (or, at the very least, recognized by society in general) way of expressing and making bisexual identity visible was a common concern among participants, and this need for a recognizable way to be bisexual is related to the lack of stereotypes about what exactly constitutes a "bisexual look." As Brianna's comment above illustrates, the lack of a bisexual stereotype cuts both ways. Bisexuals may have an advantage in not being commonly perceived based on stereotypes, but at the same time bisexuals are disadvantaged in that they are not perceived at all. As Hannah states, bisexuals are like Sesame Street's Snuffaluffagus—they are there, but most people lack the ability to see them. This comment from Hannah echoes Heather Macalister's discussion of bisexuality as "the Snuffaluffagus of sexualities" in which it's difficult to be visible as bisexual when people still debate whether or not bisexuals even really exist (Macalister 2003 p.25).

Unlike a young lesbian "coming out" and opting for the "dyke haircut" as a way of making her lesbianism known (Schorb and Hammidi 2000), there does not exist a similar "bisexual haircut" (although some bisexuals in this study did see their hairstyle as being connected to their bisexual identity, a topic which will be taken up in more detail in Chapter 6) or other stereotypical style bisexual women can use to make their bisexuality visible. This makes it all but impossible for bisexuals to use such cultural stereotypes to make visible their sexual identity, and often when they do try to engage stereotypes about non-heterosexual styles for women they find that they are mistaken for lesbians rather than being correctly identified by others as bisexual women, a topic to which I now turn.

Identity Misappropriation

One reason bisexuality may remain invisible is a lack of knowledge on how to make one's own identity visible, as discussed above by the women in my sample. Another reason bisexuality often remains invisible is a lack of knowledge on the part of others that bisexuality even exists. Due to the limitations of the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm, in which sexuality is assumed to consists of two—and only two—opposite and distinct sexualities, the possibility that one may be interacting with someone who is bisexual rarely crosses a person's mind. Often, attempts to display bisexual identities are misappropriated by others as straight or gay/lesbian identities.

The women in my sample all had numerous examples of cases of mistaken identity, where they were assumed to be straight or lesbian rather than bisexual. Most often they were assumed heterosexual because of their relationships with men, although there were also examples where others assumed they were lesbian and were surprised to "discover" the woman was in a relationship with a man. Much in the way that others will "do gender" for an individual by labeling their identity without necessarily the active participation of the individual (West and Fenstermaker 1993), sexual identity misappropriation is something bisexuals deal with frequently (Miller 2006). Stories of being frustrated by not having one's identity recognized as bisexual but rather being assumed straight or lesbian were a common theme through the focus group interviews.

Identity Misappropriation in Straight Society

In addition to the problems bisexuals in general face regarding visibility, for the women in my sample visibility was particularly difficult because of their relationships with men. As women in monogamous relationships with men, they are often perceived as

heterosexual, and could therefore gain the privileges that come with heterosexuality by remaining silent and invisible. Yet these women are uncomfortable with the option of "passing" and, as Allison's statement above addresses, many would rather be perceived as not-heterosexual—even if that means being misidentified as lesbians—than pass for heterosexual.

Since most people assume another's sexuality based on the (perceived) sex of their partner, bisexual women in relationships with men are most likely to be assumed to be straight while bisexual women in relationships with women are assumed to be lesbians. Single women, it would seem, have their perceived identity change daily depending on who their date is on a given night, while celibate women may have the easiest time "convincing" others of their bisexuality since they have no partner by which to judge (George 1993). Other studies have shown that bisexual women who are in long-term monogamous relationships with men, like the women in my sample, have to "insist very loudly that she is bisexual, not heterosexual" (George 1993 p. 104) in order for her identity to be perceived by others.

Because the women in my sample are assumed to be heterosexual, they reported that the topic of sexual orientation was unlikely to come up when meeting new people. Being able to be visible without seeming "pushy" was a problem may of the women faced, as these quotes from Brianna Roberts and Sydney Wyatt, a white woman in her early 40's from England who is legally married to her partner of two and a half years, illustrated during separate focus groups:

> Brianna: "We've talked about how hard it is to stay out sometimes. Like you can't really just go out and announce it, but at the same time if you don't say anything and if you're not involved in any sort of way it's like you're hiding it by not saying anything. "

> Sydney: "I think for me - I'm still finding it difficult to be out as bisexual because I don't know how to insert it - it feels a bit artificial to be like, oh nice to meet you I'm Sydney and I'm bisexual. It doesn't seem to come out naturally unless I'm in more queer environments. With the lesbian thing I thought it was very important to tell everybody because you know if someone had a problem they had to get over it. So I always made a point of bringing it up. Whereas with bisexual I don't worry that I'll be unmasked, I almost feel like it's pushy to bring it up in situations where that's not being asked. So I don't really know if I want to make it more a part of the conversation - without ramming it down people's throats."

Here the difficulty of "inserting" one's sexual identity into one's daily life is apparent. While it would feel strange to introduce yourself to everyone as bisexual, because of these women's relationships with men and the assumption that everyone is heterosexual until proven otherwise, issues related to sexual orientation rarely come up in conversation. Unless a bisexual woman brings up the topic of her bisexual identity in a conversation, her identity will remain invisible to others.

Identity Misappropriation in the LGBT Community

In interactions with heterosexual people the women in my sample discussed the difficulty of making their bisexual identity visible because the topic of sexuality simply does not come up in most conversations and the assumption of heterosexuality goes unquestioned. In interactions within the LGBT community, however, the topic of sexuality and sexual identity is often a central focus. Here the problem is not one in which the topic does not come up and one is assumed heterosexual, but rather one in which women are assumed to be lesbians or straight allies. Again, bisexual identity is invisible, but for different reasons.

Below Brianna discusses the way she feels her identity is perceived within LGBT organizations she is involved in at the university where she is student:

> "...not to fit in or be included, but to bring that aspect to the table. Like they think you're just one of those straight people and it's like oh no no no. I feel like I have to explain it more and more, and it feels important because I feel like if I don't say it then it's just something that gets shrugged off and bisexuality is going to be one of the lesser covered things. You feel more pressured. I mean I feel more pressure to say something around straight people or around gay or lesbian. It seems like you have to say it more so that people will understand what you're doing."

Later in the focus group she continues

> "I was trying to think of why it feels like there's more pressure and it's because if you show up with a girl, or if you're a guy and you show up with a guy, it's obvious that you're lesbian or that you're gay. So it's just like whatever, let's go. But if you've been involved with someone of the opposite gender and you're still trying to identify as queer then it feels like you have to explain it because it doesn't seem like it's a concept for some people. You either have to be gay or you have to be straight. There's no - it's all one end of the spectrum."

Even within LGBT or queer space bisexuals tend to be perceived by others as either gay/lesbian or as straight allies. The "B" of "LGBT" remains largely invisible. Many of the women also spoke about not feeling comfortable talking about their male partners within LGBT space or coming to LGBT events with male partners because of feeling like they would then have to explain themselves, or that they would be mistaken for straight allies rather than as member of the community. Just as many people in same-sex relationships have to "come out" when they talk about their partners within heterosexual circles, so too do bisexuals have to "come out" when discussing opposite-sex relationship with the LGBT community, and often this type of "coming out" is greeted with hostility, misunderstanding, and ostracism, as past studies of the tensions that often exist between lesbians and bisexual women illustrate (Armstrong 1995; Hartman 2005; Hemmings 2002; Rust 1995; Rust 2000; Udis-Kessler 1995). The women in my sample did not want to be perceived as straight allies to the LGBT community, and yet the assumption that they were lesbian was also equally uncomfortable, and several of the women felt

dishonest in passing for lesbian in this context. Similar to Miller's (2006) respondents, the women I spoke with would prefer to be perceived as bisexual, but, failing that, would rather been perceived as lesbian than straight both in heterosexual and LGBT contexts (Miller 2006).

Related to the issue of not having one's identity recognized in either straight or LGBT contexts is the feeling of not having a "home" in either group. This feeling of lacking a real "home" in both the straight and gay worlds was a theme illustrated by here by Savannah Mooney, an Asian-American woman in her early 30's who is legally married to her partner of 13 years. As an adopted child, she compares her lack of having a "home" sexually to her lack of having a "home" racially:

> "It's funny because I think when I'm in lesbian and gay circles then people assume that I am also, and then - so it's weird talking about my husband because that's like being in the straight world and talking about being gay. But like, for me at least - it's kinda reflective of other parts of my life, because I was adopted and so I grew up in a white world but I'm not white, and I'm not accepted in the Korean world either, so it's like there's a whole lot of places where there's a little bit of both but no real home."

Bisexuals often report feeling stuck in the middle of society's dichotomous view of sexuality. They fit in with neither the straight nor the gay community, and struggle to find a community to call home. Because of a lack of visibility many bisexuals feel that being visible and creating community among bisexuals is particularly important, and the reasons the women in my sample gave for why they want to be visible as bisexual women are discussed below.

Some Advantages of Invisibility

Passing

Bisexuals are often stereotyped as wanting to have and being able to have heterosexual privilege due to their ability to "pass" for straight. Bisexual invisibility does, indeed, create a situation in which many bisexuals are assumed to be heterosexual unless they make an effort to mark themselves as non-heterosexual (and, even then, their attempts to make this distinction may not always be correctly read by others). However, in general sexual orientation is not publicly visible and therefore most gay men and lesbians also have the ability to "pass" for heterosexual in most interactions (D'Augelli and Garnets 1995). As Kate Bornstein states, "Everyone is passing: some have an easier job of it than others" (Bornstein 1995 p. 125). The women in my sample may indeed have an easier job of it than others, especially since they are in relationships with men. However, having the ability to pass does not mean that one is comfortable or desires such an ability.

Despite having the ability to pass for straight, this was not an option that the women in my sample were comfortable with. Although some did mention the advantages of being able to choose who to tell about their bisexuality—for example, not being "out" to in-laws was seen as a positive, but more in terms of not being comfortable with one's in-laws knowing anything about their sexuality rather than a desire to appear heterosexual. As Allison said in a quote above, "And the main thing I think about is that sometimes I try to be visible as not straight." Even if one cannot make herself visible as bisexual, the women often at least made an attempt to mark themselves as not heterosexual (often causing them to be perceived as lesbians). The idea that bisexuals

would make attempts to mark themselves as not straight and would rather be misidentified as lesbian instead of heterosexual also follows Miller's findings that the bisexuals in her sample would rather be identified as anything but straight (Miller 2006). The women in my sample reported being very aware of heterosexual privilege and having a desire to do what they could to divest of such privileges whenever possible and to not quietly pass for heterosexual. As Hannah discusses, just because bisexual women like herself may be *able* to take advantage of heterosexual privileges, that doesn't mean that they *should*:

> "...we have the fallback of straight privilege... but that doesn't mean we should take the easy way out. I think we should always be outspoken."

The Lack of Stereotypes or a "Bisexual Look"

Overall the women in my sample felt that the lack of a bisexual stereotype was a good thing, since it freed them from feelings of having to live up to any one way of being bisexual, and allowed them a bit more flexibility in when and where they revealed their bisexual identities. Not having to live up to a stereotypical bisexual look allowed the women in my sample to use their own style to create a unique bisexual look using a variety of cues (discussed in detail in the following chapter) and this freedom was seen as a positive. However, the inability to play with stereotypes and create a visible "bisexual look" can also mean much greater difficulty in finding a way to make visible a bisexual identity. As Isabella Martin, a white woman in her late 20's discusses:

> "...it's so hard because there's no cultural stereotype, so that's good and it's bad. It's good that there's no stereotype, but it's bad because we don't even think about it."

Being recognized by others as bisexual could create a stronger sense of community among bisexual women and make it easier to find support and resources. Lesbian women have reported that being visible is important to them because being recognized as a lesbian gives them a feeling of being part of a community and having a shared experience and alliance with other lesbians (Esterberg 1996; Esterberg 1997). Playing "spot the dyke" is more than just an amusing hobby, it's a matter of survival – of finding a way to feel like you are not alone in the world and that others share your experiences, desires, and identity (Esterberg 1996). Without stereotypes about fashion and style or easily recognized symbols of bisexual identity to rely on, bisexual women (and men) may feel very isolated and lack a sense of being part of any larger bisexual community or movement.

Discussion

In this section I address the ways that invisibility makes the use of the term "performance" problematic or confusing when discussing bisexual identity, as well as the ways the invisibility of bisexual identities in society creates unique questions for models of identity development. I also discuss how a lack of visibility creates problems for organizing around bisexuality, and how this lack of a major collective movement further exacerbates bisexual invisibility.

As I will argue in the following chapter, using the concept "doing bisexuality," which relies on social others *correctly understanding and interpreting* bisexual identities, may not be the best way of understanding the creation of a visible bisexual identity at this particular moment in time. Here I focus on how the concept "performance" may also not be the best descriptor of attempts to make bisexual identity visible due to the fact

bisexual identities are rarely correctly recognized as such. First, however, I will address how a lack of visibility creates problems for models of identity development and causes us to ask questions regarding the formation of the self-concept through the reflection of that identity by society.

Invisibility as a Challenge for Bisexual Identity

In discussing the importance of the reflected self in creating identity, Mead explains that self-identity is experienced through reflection on the feedback of others (Mead 1977). Rosenberg also discusses the ways the self-concept—how the individual sees her/himself—is constructed through social interaction with others (Rosenberg 1981). To construct a bisexual self-identity, however, often means having a self-identity that is rarely able to be correctly reflected in the feedback of others since bisexual identities are often unrecognized as such. Although identities can be used to make oneself more visible, to take on a bisexual identity is to be rendered invisible in society.

The formation of the self-identity is the subject of the sexual orientation identity formation models discussed in Chapter 2 (Altman 1971; Cass 1979; Cass 1984a; Cass 1984b; Chapman and Brannock 1987; McCarn and Fassinger 1996; Plummer 1975; Ponse 1978; Sophie 1986; Troiden 1998). As discussed in that chapter, these models do not account for a prolonged bisexual identification and assume a linear path of identity formation. In addition, these models often include some form of "coming out" and being recognized by others as a gay man or lesbian, showing the importance of the recognition by others of one's self-identity in the development of a sexual minority identity. As the women in my sample discuss, however, recognition by others of one's bisexual identity cannot be counted on as a mechanism for the development or maintenance of bisexual

identities. In this way, bisexual self-identity development once again does not fit with conventional models of sexual identity development, and bisexual identity may be unique in that it often must develop with little or no accurate reflection of the self-identity by society.

Invisibility as a Challenge for Performance

Key to understanding identity is understanding the ways identities are composed of meanings one attributes (and that others attribute to one) of oneself within a particular role (Burke and Reitzes 1981). As discussed in Chapter 2, this definition of identities takes into account both macro and micro aspects of identity as meanings shift across time/situations/cultures and these meanings are developed and maintained through interpersonal interaction with others as well as self-reflection (Burke and Reitzes 1981). Through interpersonal interactions in which the meanings of identity and one's actions coincide, a performance of that identity is developed. As discussed in Burke and Reitzes (1981) "the link between identity and performance is through *common meanings*" (p. 85, italics in original). People then engage in behaviors as part of their identity performance which they believe others will interpret through these common meanings as a way of portraying who they are and how they expect to interact with others (Swann, Rentfrow, and Guinn 2003).

Correctly understanding and utilizing these common meanings is crucial for both the actor in determining what behaviors to include (or exclude) from an identity performance as well as for the audience viewing and interpreting the performance. However, this chapter has discussed how bisexual identity is often invisible, and how common meanings of gender and sexuality create binary categories in which there is no

room for bisexuality. How can one perform identity when there are no common meanings from which to draw? As the following chapter discusses, the women in my sample used cues that are tied to institutional scripts regarding gender and sexual orientation, but as we see in this chapter these cues are rarely correctly interpreted. Is the term "performance" then particularly useful in discussing the phenomenon of making bisexuality visible through one's actions? In order for the term to correctly apply to the phenomenon discussed in this project, the focus would need to shift from the understanding of the audience to the intentions of the actor and perhaps even to understanding the actor as part of her own audience. Despite the fact that bisexual identity performances are often unnoticed or misidentified, it was still important to the women in my sample to make an effort to perform bisexual identity for their own sense of "keeping bisexuality alive," to sum up the sentiments of several participants. Much like the riddle about a tree falling in the woods with no one around to hear it make a sound, it still matters to the tree, just as bisexual identity performance still seems to matter to the actor, even if no one is around or able to accurately interpret her actions. Performance may serve a function in the development and maintenance of bisexual identity, even if that function is not to effectively communicate one's identity to others. If performance is an important part of enacting bisexual identity in the daily lives of the women in my sample, perhaps it is because the performance is just as important for the actor creating it as audience comprehension of the performance is.

Invisibility as a Challenge for Bisexual Organizing

One of the well-documented challenges in creating gay and lesbian community has been the problem of invisibility. Sexual orientation may be publicly hinted at, but it

does not have to be publicly identifiable, and most gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals are capable of "passing" as heterosexual if they so desire (D'Augelli and Garnets 1995). This ability to blend in obviously has advantages in a homophobic society, but in terms of community building and organizing for social change, it presents certain problems.

Bisexual identity is often more invisible than gay or lesbian identity because even when one wants to become visible, as my participants discuss, there is a lack of stereotypes or schemas to draw on to make others recognize you as bisexual. As Macalister points out: "...a stereotypically feminine women, married with children and a pretty manicure. Straight. A masculine, short-haired, make-up-free flannel-wearer with rainbow and pink triangle stickers on her truck. Lesbian. But woe to those who don't fit the textbook stereotypes!" (Macalister 2003 p. 27). Obviously, either one of these characters in her example could be bisexual, but because our sexual identity schemas come in only two variations—straight and gay—bisexuality is not even a possibility considered in assuming the sexual orientation of either woman.

In a society where bisexual identity is not even considered as a possibility, it is difficult to imagine a strong, visible bisexual community, and the invisibility of bisexual identity may be the biggest challenge facing bisexual organizing (Burleson 2005). Although there are a growing number of bisexual organizations, conferences, and scholarly writings—even a specialized journal of bisexuality—many bisexuals do not know they exist. In addition, these organizations are often run by a handful (or fewer) of individuals and the organizations fold once those individuals are no longer able to or interested in continuing their work. There is little sense of bisexual history or community

among the bisexual women I interviewed, despite the fact that several of them have been involved with or currently belong to bisexual organizations.

Gay and lesbian visibility and social change has come about largely because of collective movements, however fraught with problems such a movement may be (D'Augelli and Garnets 1995). Although in the next chapter I discuss some of the ways bisexuality is made visible at the micro level and changes that are possible because of this visibility, without a major collective social movement organized around bisexuality it is unlikely that macro-level changes can occur, because society at large does not recognize the performance of bisexuality at the individual level as performances of *bisexuality*, and therefore structural assumptions of a binary sex/gender/sexuality paradigm remain intact. Although individual acts may transgress the norms of gender and sexuality within individual social interactions, these acts cannot have a transformative effect on society or inequality without a social movement behind them with a larger agenda of transformation. For this reason, a social movement is very important for bisexuality to reach its potential in disrupting such assumptions, and yet no such major movement has yet emerged.

Conclusion

It seems no discussion on bisexuality would be complete without acknowledging one of the biggest challenges for bisexuals—invisibility—and because this is a major challenge for creating a bisexual performance that is understood by others it is the topic of this chapter. In a society based on a dichotomous sex/gender/sexuality paradigm there is not room for the existence of bisexuals. Yet, bisexuals do exist, and they do want to be visible rather than "pass" for heterosexual as they are stereotyped for doing. However,

how to be visible is a difficult question, but it is one that must be answered if bisexuals are going to be able to recognize one another and find the sense of community that others have written is so important for sexual minorities (Esterberg 1996; Esterberg 1997).

Although lack of a stereotypes about what bisexuals look like is a positive in that it frees bisexual men and women from having to adopt a particular "uniform" in order to be recognized, this lack often means that bisexuals are not recognized at all and are misidentified as gay/lesbian or straight. Due to this lack of understanding or common meaning that would allow for a visible bisexual identity, the term "performance" as understood within the literature may not be the most useful term for discussing bisexual identity at present, as we can only see bisexual performances from the point of view of the actor, not the audience. For this reason I focus in the next chapter on the creation of bisexual displays, a term which focuses more on the intentions of the bisexual person striving to make her identity visible rather than the ability (or inability) of an audience to use common meanings to understand and correctly interpret these displays as part of a bisexual performance. In order for bisexual displays to be understood by others as performances of bisexuality the dichotomous assumptions of the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm would have to be upended. As the next chapter will discuss, the very existence of bisexuals and the creation of bisexual displays provides an opportunity to transgress these dichotomies within individual interactions, and the previous chapter focused on the possibilities for alliances that could help create a transformative political movement through which collective action and societal change might occur.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have discussed some of the problems that arise from a lack of bisexual visibility both for bisexually-identified individuals and for organizations built around these identities. Those who identify as bisexual often find that they are misidentified by others as being either straight or gay/lesbian whether they are in straight settings or within the lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender community. Despite the stereotype that bisexuals want to and can "pass" for heterosexual and therefore receive heterosexual privileges, I discuss how the women in my sample were not comfortable with passing for straight. Although invisibility can have some advantages—such as not feeling as though one has to live up to a certain visible stereotype—the lack of a stereotype or "bisexual look" hinders one's ability to make their bisexual identity visible and find the support and comfort that may be provided by an identity-based community.

CHAPTER 6:

Creating a Bisexual Display

This chapter focuses on the ways that the bisexual women in my sample describe creating a bisexual display, a concept which I define and discuss in further detail below. In this chapter I begin with a discussion of the ways the women in my sample used various cues in attempts to make themselves visible as bisexual women in a variety of contexts, which I separate into "wide" and "limited" engagements, similar to the terminology used to describe the release of a film or play in relation to the intended audience. Displays aimed at a "wide" audience are just that – displays that may be perceived and interpreted by a larger audience, including strangers in public settings. Displays described here as "limited" refer to displays that are done for a smaller audience, sometimes just within the family or even just for the actor herself. As discussed in Chapter 5, the invisibility of bisexuality often means that these displays are misinterpreted (or missed entirely), and the women in my sample often had more ability to control the impressions others made within "limited" contexts where the relationship with the audience is often ongoing, but, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, understanding bisexual displays in different social contexts is important even if the actor's intentions are not correctly interpreted by the audience.

After discussing the ways bisexual displays are created in these contexts, I discuss the ways that the concept of bisexual display draws on the links between gender and sexuality displays, as well as how it is distinct from other terms used in the literature, specifically the concept of "doing bisexuality." This chapter also addresses how these attempts to use displays of gender and sexuality markers to create a bisexual display have

implications for the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm that organizes society as well as furthers our understandings of the links between gender and sexuality displays. First, however, I begin with an elaboration of the term "bisexual display" as I am using it in this project to describe a particular phenomenon of making identities visible.

Bisexual Displays

As discussed in Chapter 2, in this project I am using the term "bisexual display" to refer to the projection of a bisexual identity within the context of current Western, post-industrial, Twenty-First Century norms and expectations. This concept builds off of both Goffman's (1976) and Lorber's (1999) discussions of gender display and indeed does include some aspects of playing around with gender displays, as this chapter will discuss in detail. Gender display, however, is based on common meanings and understandings, or common cues that can be utilized as part of a gender display. As the previous chapter illustrates, bisexual identities lack such common meaning from which to draw. What does it mean to display a bisexual identity in the context of current norms? As this chapter will illustrate, it means drawing from the common meanings available regarding genders and heterosexual and homosexual sexual identities in a "mix-and-match" fashion to create a unique hybridized bisexual display. In this way bisexual display utilizes, but diverges from, such definitions of gender displays.

Although most of the data discussed here focuses on visual cues that make up bisexual displays, I also include a discussion in this chapter of more direct mechanisms of making bisexual identity visible, such as speaking out, and less tangible elements, such as attitude, which were discussed by my participants and have also been discussed as aspects of other sexual identity displays and/or styles, such as "butch" displays among

lesbian women (Inness 1998; Soloman 1993). Projecting a certain attitude, or, as one of Esterberg's participants states, "a certain swagger when I walk" (Esterberg 1996 p. 265), draws on such current norms and expectations regarding gender and sexuality and is therefore included here as part of creating a bisexual display along with visual cues. Although direct actions such as speaking out are not necessarily aspects of what I'm calling bisexual display, due to the invisibility of bisexuality such direct measures are often taken by those attempting to create a bisexual display since such a display may often be misinterpreted by others, and therefore such overt actions are discussed in this chapter as well.

Wide Engagements

In this section I discuss several ways the women in my sample used visual cues, projecting a certain attitude, and opportunities to speak up and speak out to make themselves visible as bisexual women in the context of wide engagements of the performance, or to say it another way, to a broader audience than just themselves and small groups of close friends. As discussed in Chapter 5, these women may not always be properly identified by others in society as bisexual, nonetheless the women in my sample made attempts to mark themselves as bisexual and speak out about their bisexuality. The following quote from Vickie Butler, an Indigenous woman in her early 30's who is legally married to her partner of ten years, addresses many of the key thematic aspects that will be addressed through this section:

> "I've tried everything as far as bi visibility goes. I went through a period where I wore all the buttons and all the jewelry and all the rainbow everything. It's really embarrassing in retrospect and I must have looked like such a dork. When I was dating bisexual men I was really butch because I was super paranoid about being seen as a straight couple. And instead we'd be mistaken for gay men, which

> because they were just coming out as bi brought out all sorts of issues that were just no fun to deal with in the relationship. A lot of the time my hyper-activism, as I like to call it, was a way of trying to be visible. Because it's so easy to just disappear and have people not get it, not get even the most unsubtle cues. I remember one time I actually had a shirt that had bi on it, and people thought that it meant that I spoke French. And it just struck me - like who would wear a shirt advertising their bilingual skills? That's such an odd thing. So - I worked really hard at different stuff trying to be out. Now I'm less - I'm less hyper about it, I'm less anxious about it, and I've noticed that I - at one time I didn't have any straight friends. Like I would avoid straight people, I wasn't meeting straight people except at work, and I wouldn't really cultivate those friendships. So I remember thinking that I hadn't talked to a straight person in a really long time, and one of my friends said well, you talk to me all the time and I was like, what? I thought he was queer. And I was like, you're straight? And he was like, yeah, very straight, and my girlfriend is straight. I thought he was bi - he's very theatrical the way he's dressed. And it made me realize that in trying to make this super queer world for myself I had accidentally included all kinds of people I had assumed were queer because they weren't the norm, but they weren't necessarily not heterosexual. So I had made this accidentally heterosexual friend. And it really made me appreciate that not everything that is heterosexual is straight. Like there are variations of queerness that aren't sexual, and meeting the kinky straight people that aren't just a man with his submissive wife. Meeting variations opened my eyes to the different types of queerness possible."

Vicki's description of her attempts at bisexual visibility illustrates several mechanisms the women I spoke with utilize in making themselves visible to others, including the use of pins or other "propaganda" and playing with gender displays and concepts like butch/femme in a variety of ways. In this section I will discuss the cues the women in my study talked about, including, but not limited to, the act of speaking out about one's identity in public settings and working to divest of the privileges that come from being in a relationship that most people would assume is "straight."

What Does A Bisexual Look Like?

When I asked the women what a bisexual looks like, the question was generally greeted with lighthearted laughter and a discussion of the fact that it is difficult to pin down a description of the way a bisexual might look. Previous scholars have discussed

how, although some stereotypes may exist, pinning down a style or look specific to bisexuality proves to be difficult, and is related to the lack of visibility of bisexuals (George 1993; Miller 2006). Similar to these findings, in the previous chapter I discussed how the lack of stereotypes about how bisexuals look often means that bisexuals go unrecognized by others in society, even if they want their identity to be made visible. However, this lack of a stereotype also creates space for a wide variety of cues and signals to be deployed, as Emma Compton, a white female in her late 40's who had been married for 20 years explains:

> "One of things I love about bisexuality is that I don't think there are any markers. I love the idea of contemplating that anyone in a room could be bisexual, like looking around and thinking, I wonder how many bisexuals there are in here?"

Emma's comment makes clear that for some women, not being pigeon-holed by stereotypes about how bisexuals look opened up space to come up with their own ideas about what bisexuals look like. Most of the women relied on descriptions of themselves and their bisexual friends as a basis for answering the question "what does a bisexual look like?" The most common response was that the "bisexual look" involved some form of androgyny, as the following responses from Brianna Roberts and Isabella Martin illustrate:

> Brianna: "well, if you're playing word association, the first image that popped into my head is typically what my friends are. Either semi-butchy or wearing a lot of hemp with mushroom necklaces and looking really hippie. But if I think about that for more than a split second it doesn't really make sense. What a bi would look like - the only thing - if I had to place it in a label or a stereotype I would say some from of androgyny. At least a hint of it. I mean, if I had to. Yeah, androgyny."

> Isabella: "I'd say feminine butch. But that creates other - I guess androgyny if I had to pick out something, because that makes it non-specific. You know, move away a little from the typical lesbian stereotype and there you go."

Here the women describe the bisexual style as being part straight and part lesbian, which is not surprising given that the concept of bisexuality is often theorized as a hybrid of heterosexuality and homosexuality. A stereotypical bisexual style also involves androgyny, a mixing of masculine and feminine characteristics or styles to create a bisexual look that is distinct from yet draws on lesbian styles. The association of bisexuality and androgyny has a long history, with historical definitions of bisexuality often relying on either a biological mix of male and female or a psychological mix of masculine and feminine (Storr 1999), as well as bisexual characters in pop culture being marked by an androgynous or hybrid style such as "butch femme" (Stasia 2003). The "butch femme" is perhaps a fairly accurate description of the bisexual look described by the women in my sample. Similar to Baumgardner's depiction of the bisexual girls in combat boots and spaghetti-strap tank-tops at an Ani Difranco concert (Baumgardner 2006), the "butch femme" is seen as collapsing the dichotomous "butch" and "femme" into a single category that mixes the prescribed "dress codes" of the two legendary codes of lesbian desire to signify bisexuality (Stasia 2003). Although there may not be a well-known cultural stereotype of the bisexual, such a "butch femme" aesthetic is perhaps the closest thing to such a stereotype in our society.

The use of gendered markers to create a bisexual display will be a topic to which I return later in this chapter. First, I will discuss one of the more overt markers used in a bisexual display. Despite there being few cultural stereotypes for bisexuals to use to make themselves visible, the women in my sample did discuss several specific examples of things they do to make themselves visible as bisexual women as well as markers they

look for in others when attempting to recognize other bisexuals. These specific markers are the topics I discuss in further detail below.

Pins and Propaganda

One specific marker of bisexual identity that was discussed by the women in my sample, and has also been found to be a non-verbal cue or sign used to signify bisexual identity in other studies (Miller 2006), was the use of pins and other propaganda to make themselves visible to others. Here Cloe, Brianna, and Hannah each discuss their use of pins, t-shirts, and other "pride" items as a way of signifying their identity:

> Cloe: "I'm generally pretty femme, so there's nothing that would indicate to anybody that I'm other than a heterosexual woman. I have like a pride jacket with all my various causes and social issues on buttons, and obviously one of my issues on there is GLBT, so people sometimes wonder when they see that."
>
> Brianna: "In terms of visual cues in general I actually go with pins. Pins on my purse or on my shirt, just a more subtle hint. If you spend the extra 5 second to read my pin you'll find out something extra about me."
>
> Hannah: "For awhile I had quite a bit of paraphernalia, like bi pride flags and stuff."

Pins, pride flags, bumper stickers, and pride jewelry were mentioned as ways to make bisexual identity explicitly visible. The use of specific bi pride paraphernalia, however, was complicated by the fact that even within the bisexual community not everyone recognizes or even has knowledge about the bi pride colors and the flag. When the bi pride flag was mentioned in one focus group several members asked what the flag looked like, and here Vickie explains:

> "It's pink, purple, and blue. And it came out at the same time they made a trans flag, which looked exactly the same but like vertical instead of horizontal or something like that. I still don't understand the difference. And having bits of your culture presented to you from outside like that - you have this impression that bi people are out there doing something, making things somewhere, and eventually it'll arrive here, like a care package in a box."

Although pins and propaganda were discussed in all the groups as an effective way to make bi identity visible to others, the lack of familiarity with symbols that are specific to bisexual pride rather than broader lesbian and gay pride (such as the rainbow flag) creates a feeling among some women that these pride symbols are a limited way of expressing bisexual identity because they are not recognized by others. In addition, as Vickie's comment makes clear, those who identify as bisexual may feel as though created symbols, such as the bi pride flag, come from "outside" their own communities rather than being something they have a personal investment in. The commodification of gay and lesbian culture has been a topic of discussion within the LGBT community for some time, and it is not surprising that bisexual pride might also suffer the same pitfalls of a consumerist society. During one focus group that occurred inside a local queer bookstore, one participant commented on the array of "pride gear" for sale around the store. The marketing and selling of "pride" seemed a very odd concept, and while bisexual pride items may be helpful for some in displaying their bisexual identity, a feeling of wary detachment from such products was apparent in discussions among the women who were aware of these items.

Playfulness with Gender Displays

Although pins and propaganda were discussed as a direct—though sometimes limited, misread, or otherwise problematic—way of making bisexual identity visible, the idea that received the most discussion in the focus groups in terms of making identity visible had to do with the concept of playing with gender displays to create a more androgynous or hybrid display. The use of gendered markers in creating a visible bisexual identity is not unique to my findings, and Miller also discusses the ways her

participants would aim for "confusion" in their gender presentations (Miller 2006). The women discussed their perceptions that there's a certain playfulness in the display of bisexual identity, a mixing of various gender and sexuality markers, that they commonly saw in themselves and in other bisexual women. Sydney describes this playfulness in terms of being out of "uniform"

> "...more flamboyant, playing around with typical accoutrements - like mixing it up, like you're not in the dyke uniform but you're not in the straight uniform. So kind of a playfulness."

Given that bisexuality is often viewed as being "in between" heterosexuality and homosexuality it is not surprising that the "bisexual look" might also involve such in-between-ness in masculine and feminine, straight and lesbian, dress. Several of the women discussed the ways they mix up their fashion style to incorporate masculine and feminine elements, such as combining a feminine dress with pants or combat boots, or hair styles that tow the line between masculine and feminine, and Brianna discussed:

> "...to go along with the androgyny, I have these glasses that kind make me look more like a guy. And in a lot of productions, theater productions in high school, I often played a guy. So sometimes I'll just do a little something different with my hair or a little something different with the shirt I wear, and then it's like, is that a boy or is that a girl. It's easy when you don't have a big chest [laughs]"

The idea that one can play around with these typical gender-based styles and create a unique look based on this variety was a concept repeated in every focus group. Here Savannah, Vickie, and Kayla Nielsen, a white Eastern European married woman in her late 20's who has been with her partner for ten years, all point to the common thread of variety in the bisexual look:

> Savannah: "I - I don't know, if maybe there's more variance in the way bi people dress. That there's just not one way of looking."

Vickie: "We used to joke about this at Pride, like how do we spot the bisexual women. And what we figured out was to look for a mix of unexpected things. Like the dress with unshaven legs. Or this portion high femme and this portion high butch. Look for things you don't expect. Like the woman who looks straight but has self-esteem, sometimes that was a giveaway. [laughs]"

Kayla: "I think the flexibility of dress, like dressing like a boy but really femme, mixing the two. Like wearing really female symbols. I really like being able to be this one day and that the next, and not worry about it."

A benefit of the playfulness and variety seen in the deployment of style illustrated by these women is that they discussed feeling a lot more freedom to wear whatever they want. Unlike lesbian participants in Esterberg's research, who discussed the lesbian uniform and the idea that there were some styles or outfits a lesbian would never wear, specifically feminine styles (Esterberg 1997), the women in my sample felt that no style was really "off limits" for bisexual women. They discussed not feeling like they had to be a slave to feminine fashion in the ways they might be if they were heterosexual, but at the same time being able to play with femininity more than they would if they were lesbian—as Sydney discussed above, to not be in the "uniform" of straight women or lesbian women. This theme was illustrated by Sydney several times, as she discussed her previous identification as a lesbian prior to identifying as bisexual:

"I think for me when I started going out with a guy after being with women I definitely got into girly stuff. I hadn't really allowed myself that stuff when I was a lesbian, so I got skirts and jewelry, and it was actually a lot of fun to kind of tart up in a way that I hadn't."

Allowing oneself the freedom to not be locked in by cultural stereotypes about women based on sexuality (straight women are always feminine, lesbian women are never feminine) was can also be seen in the following conversation between three participants in one focus group, Cloe, Liz Coffey, a married white woman in her early 30's who has

been with her partner for 12 years, and Haley Owens, a white woman in her late teens who lives with her partner of just under a year:

> Cloe: "yeah, I was going to agree with that actually because I do have some really dyke-y outfits that I wear, and a lot of times that's when I'm dressed down, you know what I mean? I do vary a lot though."
> Liz: "I have a friend who's a lesbian and there is just no way in hell she'd ever be caught in a skirt. There's just no way. So I wonder if maybe that's something where bisexuals do vary more, like I'll put on a dress when it's appropriate, but I wear what's comfortable at home. And if I'm going out it depends on my mood."
> Haley: "Every day if you see me I'm wearing jeans and a t-shirt. I'm - and this is only because my partner made me, some days I'll wear jeans and a polo [laughs] but all the time it's just jeans and t-shirts."
> Liz: "I guess it kind of like applies to our sexuality, it just depends on the day."

Attitude

In addition to using visual cues to create a bisexual display, the women in my sample also discussed two cues related to displaying a certain attitude that they view as part of making bisexual identity visible. The first cue is eye contact, which is also a cue that has been noted in discussions of performing lesbian identity (Esterberg 1996). Sydney and Maria both agreed that when a woman seems drawn to you, yet you have no other signs she may be a lesbian, this may be a marker of bisexuality:

> Sydney: "...a woman who makes eye contact with you. A woman who you don't have any reason to think is a lesbian but makes eye contact with you."
> Maria: "I agree, like a woman who seems drawn to you."

Eye contact, especially when coupled with the playful style discussed above, was one way these women discussed of making bisexual identity visible and of recognizing other bisexual women. Eye contact can project confidence and assertiveness, which are also attitudes the women in my sample associated with bisexual women. However, given that eye contact is often part of flirtation and a way of making desire known, it may also be one marker that may not be as readily available to bisexual women who are in

monogamous relationships compared to those looking for sexual partners. Due to a desire some women expressed about not wanting to falsely advertise their availability, eye contact that may be read as flirtation or desire might be avoided.

Similar to research on performing lesbian identity through projecting an attitude of confidence and assertiveness (Esterberg 1996), another cue that was brought up in different, though often subtle, ways within the groups was the cue of having self-esteem. Having confidence in yourself, your body, and your capabilities was something several women attributed to stemming from their bisexual identity. As one quote from Vickie discussed above pointed out, one of the "unexpected mix" of things to look for in figuring out if a woman is bisexual is a woman who looks straight by has self-esteem. Although she laughed off this part of her statement there was a seriousness in what she was saying. Maria made this point even more explicitly in discussing her own history and identity in the same focus group:

> "I'm a technician and artist and I'm really kinda handy. I've always been really comfortable with tools and I own a lot of tools and I think that's my area of expertise, and a lot of men in relationships are kinda of scared of that in a way. Because I can do things around the house and fix things around the house, so it's like they're like what do you need me for? I like going out to the garage where I have my workshop. And maybe also being self-employed, being confident I can support myself."

Later in the focus group she continued:

> "I'll be more confident with what I wear and the way I walk and more comfortable with body image, and just more comfortable looking in the mirror, you know?"

Self-confidence and self-reliance was a theme discussed in all the focus groups, with the women in my sample wanting to present themselves as being different from typical straight women, who they seem to perceive as more reliant on men both financially, sexually, and emotionally. Baumgardner also discussed the idea that bisexual women are

more independent than their strictly straight counterparts, as she ponders, "...perhaps bisexual women and lesbians are more independent - at least in terms of their dependence on men. We are more likely to have shrugged off some of our female helplessness, fixed the car, because either there often was no man around to do it or we wanted to do it for our girlfriends" (Baumgardner 2006 p. 143), and although self-esteem and related concepts were not a focus of this research, and none of my interview questions specifically brought up the issue, the topic came up in every focus group as being somehow related to bisexuality, and an underlying belief among my participants seemed to be that bisexual women are often more confident and independent than heterosexual women. Projecting such confidence and independence was, for them then, part of displaying their bisexual identity.

Thus far I have focused on both visual cues such as pride symbols and gender displays, as well as projecting a strong or confident attitude as part of creating a bisexual display. One of the underlying questions of this project is whether or not bisexual women and lesbians rely on the same cues to reveal their identities, or if there are unique cues that are used by bisexual women. A person's "dyke potential" is usually judged by others based off of appearance and assertiveness (Esterberg 1996; Esterberg 1997), and it is interesting to note that while there may be more flexibility and variety in the cues the bisexual women in my sample discuss using, there are many similarities to the cues described by lesbians to make identity known. Although bisexuals may break the "rules" more often or be out of "uniform" with an appearance that blurs the boundaries of butch/femme into butch-femme, they are still utilizing the same cultural stereotypes about lesbian appearance and attitude that lesbians draw on for their own identity performances,

and therefore it is not surprising that these performances are often interpreted as lesbian rather than bisexual, as I discussed in the previous chapter. One way of making themselves visible as bisexuals that may work to more directly indicate their bisexuality is speaking out and refusing to pass as heterosexual when in "opposite" sexed relationships.

Speaking Out and Divesting of Privilege

A third way the women in my sample attempt to make themselves visible in the context of wide engagements is through directly speaking out about identifying as bisexual as a way to force people to question their assumptions about one's sexuality, and about bisexuality in general. Although bisexual women in relationships with men are often assumed to be heterosexual, by speaking out they are insisting that they are not and educating others about sexuality. As George discusses, bisexual women in relationships with men must "insist very loudly that she is bisexual, not heterosexual" (George 1993 p. 104), but by insisting (perhaps loudly) that they are bisexual, the women in my sample are able to make their identity known and attempt to question heterosexist norms and assumptions regarding their relationships. As Hannah discussed during a focus group:

> "And if someone asked, like if I was out at a bar or something and the topic came up, like let's say gay rights came up, and I said something, they'd give me an odd look, like why do you care you're with a guy? And I would have to say, well, I'm bi and this is something that effects me. Just to be outspoken and not let people have their assumptions."

To be outspoken as a bisexual woman is a very direct way of making one's bisexual identity visible, and is a way that is not as easily ignored as perhaps dressing differently or playing around with the accoutrements of gender might be. Speaking out directly confronts those who would rather ignore bisexuality in both the straight and the

gay/lesbian communities. In addition, because most of the women in my sample can easily "pass" for straight given their relationship to a man, speaking out means giving up some of the straight privilege they have. The following discussion between Anna Ellison, a white woman in her late 20's who is married to her partner of four years, and Hannah Brewer addresses this topic:

> Anna: "One of the things that was strange for me is that when I was in relationships with women there's this automatic oppression that comes with that. You have to decide to come out to people, where are you going to let people know you're a lesbian, when do you keep it a secret. Women who are with women, they're gay because society sees them as gay. You can't get out of it. When you're in a lesbian relationship then you're just automatically a lesbian because that's the nature of that relationship, even if you're bisexual. You're oppressed while you're in that relationship, in your role in that relationship. But - me being with a man I get this free pass kind of, where there's not real societal oppression that goes along with that. The trouble for me is that I kind of feel like I let down all of my lesbian friends because now I'm like, just doing my thing in the world and it doesn't matter to society that I'm married, it's great that I'm married. So that's one of the things about it. If you're bisexual in a lesbian relationship you still have to deal with all the baggage that comes along with being a lesbian. So, there's just that extra thing you have to go through. Whereas if you're bisexual in a straight relationship, no one cares. So that's one of the strange dynamics of it is that you do sort of have this choice to enter a relationship that has all these oppressions attached to it or this relationship that society sanctions. I think that's the real struggle of it, and I think that's why gay people often have a problem with bisexuals because you can get out of your oppression if you want to. So I think that's one of the weird parts of it."
> Hannah: "Going on what she (Anna) said about choosing straight privilege or the baggage that goes along with a gay or lesbian relationship - there are those people who are going to see you as taking the easy way out, and that's unfair. Because to me I didn't choose to be bisexual. But for those people who are open about their bisexuality, you're choosing a harder path no matter what relationship you are in. But something we haven't mentioned is what about polyamory? What if you are someone who has one male partner and one female partner? Like not that you're doing group things, but that you're with both. Then what do you do? Because on the days you're with your female partner people are going to perceive you as a lesbian, and when people see you walking hand in hand with your male partner, no one thinks twice about it. Which is patently unfair, but until society gets rid of the whole labeling system - that's the problem, why do I have to declare myself, to basically walk around with my flag out, I'm bi or I'm into leather or whatever. One, it should be no one's business, I shouldn't have to basically declare war and fight for this right to be who I am. But we're really wrapped up in the label issue. People aren't comfortable until they can label you, until they can put you in a box so they know how to deal

> with you. Things like your ethnicity, your gender - until we get over the labeling thing - I guess for me, I see it as an integral part of myself and how I present myself to the world. Bisexuality is something that's who I am. And if I choose to be with a female partner somewhere down the road or polyamory, that's a whole other can of worms. But basically it comes down to, it's unfair. You have to pick and choose and should my male partner and I decide to get married there's a whole other can of worms. Because if you go into a marriage knowing your female partner is bisexual, how do you deal with that later on because the desire does not go away. And just because you put a ring on your finger doesn't mean you no longer desire the opposite or same gender as it may be."

Some internalized biphobia can be read in the above discussion in terms of bisexuals having straight privilege or having it "easier" than their lesbian and gay friends. While bisexuals who are in relationships others might perceive to be heterosexual may not raise eyebrows or incur the hostility that other relationships might bring about, most of the women in my sample where keenly aware of, and uncomfortable with, receiving privilege simply because the relationships they are in are approved of by society in general, and they felt they had a duty to use bisexual displays well as speaking out about their identities as a way of fighting homophobia. As Yoshizaki explains in her discussion of constructing a bisexual feminist marriage, "As a bisexual woman in a heterosexual relationship, I have a responsibility to speak loudly against homophobia. My marriage shields me from much of the targeting that gay and lesbian people often receive. I have the privilege of stating radical ideas without the same fear of persecution and I have a responsibility to do so." (Yoshizaki 1992 p. 160). Because the women in my sample are shielded from some homophobia due to their relationships with men, they are in some ways given greater freedom to speak up and speak out against homophobia. The idea that heterosexual relationships allow bisexual women greater space for being out about their sexuality is a topic I addressed in the Chapter 4, but it is worth briefly coming back to it here. As long as privilege and oppression are doled out based on the match between

one's perceived gender and that of one's sexual partner, bisexuals in "opposite" sex relationships may remain shielded from some of the oppression but they will also never fully have heterosexual privilege either, especially if they work to make visible their bisexuality through the creation of a bisexual display.

Limited Engagements

In addition to the ways the bisexual women in my sample make their identities visible to wide audiences, there are also ways they work to make their identities visible in the privacy of their homes, and to mark such a space as bisexual. Although perhaps not as dramatic as directly speaking out or creating as much of a challenge to heteronormative assumptions as the use of visual cues discussed above, making oneself visible in the home and family was often discussed as being far more important to "keeping bisexuality alive" in everyday life. The three key themes I will discuss here as limited engagements can be categorized as intellectual study, desire and eroticism in everyday life, and creating queer space in the home.

Intellectual Study

Although my sample consisted of a very well-educated group of women, given the lack of available scholarship on bisexuality it is surprising how many of the women were well-read on bisexuality and sexuality in general. Many had taken classes in college or graduate school related to gender and sexuality and continue to read about the topic either by themselves or with their partners, and one woman explained during a focus group interview that she had actually written and published an article on bisexuality, so in addition to reading and studying some were also working to make contributions to the literature themselves. The fact that participants studied matters of sexuality and

specifically bisexual scholarship is not an isolated finding. Similarly, Burleson argues that bisexuals tend to be not just formally well-educated, as a group, but also have spent a great deal of time educating themselves about sexuality. "Many of them can speak with authority on many topics – especially in matters surrounding sexual orientation. Here is a group of people that has devoted a lot of time questioning issues and developed their own answers" (Burleson 2005 p.68). During the focus groups the women exchanged information about various books and articles they had read and made recommendations to each other. They also tended to be well-versed with terms and concepts such as heterosexual privilege, the social construction of gender and sexuality, patriarchy, and the Kinsey Scale.

For the women in my sample, this intellectual study of bisexuality and, more broadly, sexuality was closely related to deepening their own understandings of their feelings and desires as they learned more about the topic, and was an important way of exploring their bisexuality outside of sexual behavior. As Isabella discussed:

> "I just think it's (bisexuality) fascinating. I spent several years studying sexuality and looking at attitudes and stuff. I think that was my way of keeping it alive. Just studying sexuality."

The study of bisexuality and of sexuality more generally both allows for a deeper context for understanding one's own feelings and identity and is one way of keeping bisexuality "alive" and on their minds even when the search of sexual partners is no longer a part of their sexual behavior. Several of the women also read and discussed readings on sexuality with their partners and saw it as a way of both educating their heterosexual partners and including them in their interests.

Desire and the Eroticism of Everyday Life

In addition to intellectual study, another way that bisexual identity is made a part of everyday life is through desire and fantasy. The role of fantasy as well as role-playing with one's partner was a topic that was brought up in all four focus groups, even though it was not an anticipated aspect of this study, and for that reason I believe it is a vital part of keeping bisexuality "alive" within monogamous relationships. Even outside of monogamous relationships, expressing attractions and desires for men and women is one way bisexual people make known their bisexuality (Miller 2006). Although all the women in my sample were in monogamous relationships, in sexual fantasies one is freed from the rules of monogamy and this can be an important arena for exploring desire for a variety of different people, not just one's partner. The recognition that monogamy does not mean you cease to find everyone other than your partner attractive appeared to be common among the women in my sample, and this may be a major factor in why these women have maintained a bisexual identity within a monogamous relationship despite the common assumption that "bisexual" and "monogamous" are mutually exclusive categories. As the following quote from Hannah illustrates, desire for others, even within a monogamous relationship, is part of being bisexual:

> "just because I'm with a guy doesn't mean I'm any less bisexual or any less attracted to women because I can go to a movie with a hot chick and still think she's hot."

For most couples, finding a movie star or other unattainable person attractive is unlikely to be considered cheating, and for the women in my sample being able to express sexual desire for women through watching lesbian or bisexual-themed movies or just crushing

on hot female celebrities was one way of safely expressing same-sex desire and bisexual identity within their relationships.

Another aspect of desire that was discussed in terms of more personal visibility was the sensual aspects of everyday life, or the eroticism of everyday life. As Isabella explained:

> "A couple years ago I did this presentation on this awesome book defining sexuality completely outside of sexual behavior. More touch and taste of things, and how interesting it would be if others had that concept of sexuality, you could live your sexuality everyday, not just in the bedroom. I was fascinated by that and I think one of the ways I've kept my bi-ness alive is to make my environment just completely sensual. So I bring in that aspect and indulge in that. So that's just really fascinating to me."

Later she continues:

> "That (the eroticism of everyday life) fascinates me. And that's one of my favorite thing about identifying as bi because it does open that door to experience everything and anything you want. I can still be completely happy with my husband and my life and my son, but I want to - that is a goal to incorporate sexuality into every aspect of my life."

The connection between bisexuality and finding the sensuality in all aspects of life was also discussed by other women in the focus groups. Several women discussed the importance of sensual imagery in their own artistic expressions, and Brianna discussed the ways that bisexuality and sensuality are incorporated in her writing:

> "Largely I keep it (my bisexuality) alive, at least within myself, through writing. I like to write a lot about, not just...the aspects of different kinds of love. Songs, poetry..."

Bisexual displays in limited engagements can be seen within the self and intimate relationships through desire and sensual expression, but visibility through limited engagements was also discussed in terms of creating visibility within the home through the creation of queer space.

Creating Queer Space in the Home

> Vickie: "I had a super gay apartment. And it had just accumulated as the stuff from my day to day, but I didn't notice how very queer it was until I had strangers coming in to look at my apartment when I was moving. And I suddenly realized that I have a wall covered in pictures of women that I'd cut out of magazine that I thought were hot. I have a bunch of vulvic artwork, and enormous collection of queer books. And the thought that maybe I should un-gay the apartment a little, and I looked around and realized like this was the bisexual shopping network. I had a quilt with a rainbow flag - I mean, everything was just years of accumulating all this gay crap. You couldn't make it look like an Ikea set, like it was too much and I'd have to have everything in boxes or something. So - my house was very - I think sometimes it's more queer than I am."

As Vickie's statement illustrates, in addition to marking your sexual identity on yourself, you can also mark it on your surroundings. Through a combination of pride symbols, artwork, and books Vickie made it clear that her apartment was not the home of a typical heterosexual young woman. The use of markers around the home to make it apparent that this was a bisexual household (or, at the very least, not a straight household) was something that many of the women could relate to:

> Hannah: "For me, I don't have like the *Advocate* lying around, but I do have a lot of sex-positive books, lesbian sex-positive books. I try to keep the most current issue of the pink pages around."

> Kayla: "we have maybe a year or two ago I felt like I was hiding who I was in my own home, and it made me feel like, why should I hide at home of all places? So slowly the fridge began to be the display area for different events or groups or whatever."

> Sydney: "I too have fridge magnets, which were actually from my previous girlfriend, kind of a retro lesbian slut images and stuff so I get people who see that. To me in a funny way, being married and I don't have a job right now because of my visa, so I allow myself to be a little bit of a domestic goddess in a way that I didn't before. Kind of allow myself to have fun with the wifely stuff. So I go on these cooking binges which is really fun, but there's this irony in it for me that I'm doing this stuff which is so coded and doing it in a way where I'm fully aware of what I'm doing. Certainly it wouldn't look at all bisexual or queer to someone else, but I feel like I'm doing it that way."

Here markers of bisexuality serve as a daily affirmation of identity for the women in my sample, and as a way of communicating that identity to others who enter the home. Creating queer space in the home through markers such as magnets on the refrigerator or lesbian or bisexual themed books and artwork can be cues to guests of the house that despite their assumptions this is not a heterosexual home.

Another way of marking the home was through relics of past relationships. Both Sydney and Vickie discussed the way that artwork from previous female lovers was still prominently displayed in their homes:

> Sydney: "One thing that's happened with me and I haven't really dealt with it yet is that the woman I was seeing before I started seeing my husband, she died and it was really really painful. She had been an artist and actually three of her works are up in the house. And she was a very talented artist so people will often comment - and this has only really happened since we moved because before everyone knew her, but people will come and say they really like that photograph and I haven't said oh that was my previous lover, because it's really too painful and I don't want to go into it in that casual conversation. But it's a huge presence in our house, so in a way it's there to be a statement if I wanted it to be, but for now it's just too much to go in to."

> Vickie: "I have the same thing actually my previous girlfriend, actually my first girlfriend painted this big painting for me, and it's actually a representation of the first time we had sex and I've always hung it in the house and people will comment on it. For a long time it was the only painting I even owned so - but people will ask if I did it and I'll explain my ex-girlfriend did it, and some people will ask what it is and I'll say it's a representation of the first time we had sex. So it's there if I want to talk about it, but I could come up with a more generic explanation. I think it's something that I've taken with me as a way of honoring that relationship."

Displaying artwork that is a reminder of a past relationship with a woman was a way both Vickie and Sydney had for honoring that relationship and showing that while their current relationship is with a man, this has not always been the case. For both women, the artwork they display could be explained to others in a way that does not reveal their bisexuality, but they also have the option of making a statement about their bisexuality

through commenting on the artwork if they choose to do so. By revealing their relationship history through the décor of their homes, they have an opportunity to make known their bisexual identity. Revealing one's relationship history is a common way bisexuals can hint at their identity, through "purposeful slips" (Miller 2006 p. 133) in conversation that convey to others their relationship history is not straight-forward (or straight at all). My respondents, however, used non-verbal cues throughout their home as a way to convey their relationship history, expanding the idea of a "purposeful slip" from verbal communication to the creation of queer space in the home

Only three of the women in my sample had children, so there was little discussion of how to create queer space in the home when children are present. Many people may be uncomfortable leaving lesbian sex manuals and sex-positive artwork on display with young children in the home, but other ways of creating queer space were discussed, particularly for women with children. One woman, Emma, whose youngest children were teenagers at the time of the interview, discussed the ways she worked to create space in her home that was LGBT-friendly:

> "One of the things I thought of is that I'm out to my children, so we - we don't have books and magazines but we have many queer friends, transgender friends, bi friends, gay friends, lesbian friends, who are in our home and in our space. And our children have queer friends so there's a bit of a culture within our home. Although it's not anything overt, it's just sort of understood by anyone who's there that it's OK."

Making your home a hub for gatherings of LGBT friends was another way to display bisexual identity through the creation of queer space within the home. Given that many of the women in my sample discussed the importance of queer role models in their lives, creating such a gathering space in the home while children are present may also be an

excellent way to combat the homophobia that children are often taught, and creating a space where they are also free to be whoever they are.

Being bisexual outside the bedroom does not necessarily mean that sexual expression is not part of the picture. As this discussion of bisexual identity performance in limited engagements illustrates, making one's identity visible to others also means knowing how to make it visible within yourself and within your home. Although "wide engagements" of bisexual performance may be perceived (and often misperceived) by a larger audience, visibility through "limited engagements"—within the home and within intimate relationships—is also a valuable part of increasing bisexual visibility.

To conclude, bisexual identity is not something that disappears for women involved in long-term monogamous relationships with men. As Hannah makes very clear in the passage below in which she responds to a comment by a fellow group member, Allison Schaffer, a white woman in her early 20's who has been living with her partner for just under a year, who told the group she sometimes worried that her bisexuality would go away or she would forget about it now that she's dating a man:

> "I think, at least for you, it isn't something that goes away. For me it's a part of acceptance, once I accepted the fact that I'm bisexual and I'm attracted to both in varying degrees, it's not something that's going to go away. Because even though I'm with my male partner, I still think women are attractive. I'm not having sex with other women, but that attraction is not going to go away. A big part of it is not so much the actual sexual part of bisexual. If you still find women attractive, regardless of if you're married or in a long term relationship, I think that keeps your bisexuality alive. You don't have to actively pursue it, but as long as you're still attracted to women."

For the women in my study, being visible as a bisexual was important not just in terms of being recognized by potential sexual partners, but rather to be recognized for who they are. Bisexuality does not go away because of the commitments ones makes to

another person, and learning more about being bisexual outside of sexual behavior, outside the bedroom, has great potential in forging political alliances that can move beyond mere identity politics. In understanding how bisexuality is performed outside the bedroom, and how these performances call into question and disrupt heteronormative assumptions, we can create space for bisexual agency in creating sexual revolutions.

Discussion

The examples discussed here of how the women in my sample create a bisexual display have implications not just for how we understand bisexuality and bisexual identity, but also how gender is linked to sexuality and the ways bisexuality can disrupt the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm. We also must examine the ways bisexual displays draw on gender and sexuality displays for makers and cues, and the ways bisexual display is distinct from "doing bisexuality." In addition, these everyday attempts to make bisexuality visible at the individual level stress the importance of studying sexuality at both the macro *and* micro level, and it is toward this discussion that I now turn.

Bisexual Visibility and the Sociology of Sexuality

As discussed in Chapter 5, a system of sexuality organized by a dichotomous sex/gender/sexuality paradigm renders bisexuality invisible at all but the subjective or individual levels. The sociology of sexuality must be informed by how this paradigm renders such sexualities invisible, and yet there is still space for such invisible sexualities to become visible within a localized (perhaps limited to only a few individuals or even just the self) context. The social system of categorization and stratification based on sexuality is dichotomous, and thus, although bisexual displays are embedded in everyday interaction with both "wide" and "limited" audiences, such interactions are often

misperceived beyond the individual or limited localized context. Understanding bisexuality (and the fluidity of sexuality and identities) requires that sociologists examine these limited localized contexts as they relate to the larger system of sexual categorization and stratification that limits sexuality to two-and-only-two options. Without an examination at this limited localized level, studying sexualities (or genders) that do not fit within the dichotomous paradigm because a difficult, if not impossible, project as it is tricky to study what cannot be observed.

Gender Displays and Bisexual Displays

As discussed in Chapter 2, Goffman defines gender displays this way: "If gender be defined as the culturally established correlates of sex (whether in consequence of biology or learning), then gender display refers to conventional portrayals of these correlates" (Goffman 1979 p.1). For Goffman, gender displays are an optional performance, and are less about innate or essential nature as they are about what *we would like to convey* about our gender. This view of gender display highlights the performative aspects of gender in much the same way that the concept of bisexual display highlights the performative aspects of sexual identity. Although critiqued for not recognizing the way gender is *not* an optional performance (although gender displays, as conventionalized expressions of gender, may be optional) but rather is "an ongoing activity embedded in everyday interaction" (West and Zimmerman 1991 p. 18), this shortcoming may actually be helpful in understanding bisexual displays. Bisexuals, particularly the bisexual women in my sample, may be presented with the option to "pass" as either heterosexual or homosexual. Indeed, as the previous chapter has shown in discussing invisibility, even when they do not want to take such an option they are

often miscategorized anyway. Attempts to create a bisexual display and make oneself visible as bisexual, then, is very much optional in the everyday life of these women. As my participants discussed, however, having the option by default and actively choosing to pass are different issues, and the women in my sample reported taking measures to divest of heterosexual privilege. As one participant, Hannah, pointed out, those who are open and visible about their bisexuality will have a more difficult path regardless of the privileges that may come from the relationship they are in. This is an important aspect of this research, and was the subject of Chapter 4, because it forces us to ask the question of *why* one would create such an optional bisexual display when one as the ability to "pass."

Bisexual Displays and "Doing Bisexuality"

The concept of gender display has been critiqued for seeing gender as optional. "Doing gender," on the other hand, looks at the ways gender is imbedded in everyday interaction. Gender displays are not the same as doing gender, nor should they be taken to mean gender as a socially constructed category. Gender is not optional, for even if we try not to "do" gender, others will still "do" gender for us and we will be categorized as male or female (West and Zimmerman 1991). It is important here to recognize the distinctions between gender displays and doing gender, just as similar distinctions must be drawn between bisexual displays and doing bisexuality. Gender displays—but not gender as a social system of categorization and stratification—is an optional part of a performance. Traditional conventions or markers of gender might be used, or not used, by any individual, male or female, in a gender display. Doing gender, however, goes beyond looking at the use of such markers to examine the institutional arena in which individual relationships are enacted, and here we see that one is *always* doing gender because a

person engaging in any interaction may be perceived as engaging in that interaction *as a man or as a woman.* Similarly, the concept of "doing sexuality" examines both the macro and micro structures in which individuals are imbedded, and argue that we are *always* doing sexuality (along with gender) because a person will be perceived as either heterosexual or homosexual in any given interaction. Both concepts, doing gender and doing sexuality, however, make it difficult to discuss genders and sexualities that fall outside the dichotomous paradigm. Can one ever "do" gender not as a man or a woman? Can one "do" sexuality other than as a heterosexual or homosexual?

This last question is why I argue that "bisexual display" is a more accurate term for the phenomenon described in this chapter than "doing bisexuality." Although Miller argues that we must recognize that sexuality is not "done" in isolation from gender, race, or class, she also concedes that at this point in time bisexuality is not recognized by others in a way that constitutes a meaningful concept of "doing bisexuality" (Miller 2006). Indeed, when one is "doing gender" they are doing a particular raced, classed, and sexualized gender, but because of the limitations imposed by a dichotomous categorization of gender, those attempting to do gender and sexuality as a bisexual masculinity or femininity will be miscategorized as doing heterosexual or homosexual masculinity or femininity. As I discussed in the previous chapter, bisexuals are almost always mistaken for straight or gay/lesbian, and without an audience to correctly perceive a performance of bisexuality the common meanings that make identity performances intelligible to others do not exist. "Doing gender" or "doing sexuality" cannot be accomplished by the individual alone, and therefore "doing bisexuality" lacks meaning

under the current dichotomous system of sexuality, and thus, I argue, is not be the best term to describe the phenomenon that has been the focus of this chapter.

Bisexual displays, however, can focus more on the actions and intentions of the actor, not the perceptions of the audience. In this way bisexual displays overcome the practical and theoretical obstacle of non-recognition by society that "doing bisexuality" must grapple with. Whether or not others "get it," an individual may still use current understandings of gender and sexuality (and race, and class) to create a bisexual display. As the data discussed here shows, often these current understandings of gender and sexuality are used in a "mix and match" fashion to attempt to create a display that confounds either/or understandings of gender and sexuality. Because bisexual display does not rely on interaction with social others in the same way that "doing bisexuality" does, we can discuss bisexual displays in the everyday life of bisexually-identified people without such displays being rendered invisible, misconstrued, and meaningless because bisexuality cannot yet be accomplished in the ways (dichotomous) genders and (dichotomous) sexualities can be accomplished.

Although bisexual display might allow us to focus on the social construction of bisexuality at the level of subjectivity, as here I have focused on the actions and meanings the actor intended to convey about herself, one drawback of bisexual display is that the concept does not access the larger social structure the way that "doing bisexuality" might. The many strengths of "doing gender" might be shared by "doing bisexuality," including highlighting the idea that gender (and sexuality) is an *interactive* process rather than an individual characteristic (Miller 2006; West and Fenstermaker 1993; West and Zimmerman 1991). Gender is seen here not as a stagnant category or individual trait but

rather is moved into the world of social interaction (Miller 2006; West and Fenstermaker 1993; West and Zimmerman 1991). Bisexual displays could, however, fail to challenge the notion that bisexuality is nothing more than an individual identity trait or see bisexuality as a stagnant sexual category by focusing on the individual rather than this interactive process. However, I still conclude that bisexual display is a more useful term, at this point in time, for referring to the ways bisexuals attempt to make themselves visible *as bisexuals* because the lack of societal recognition of even the possibility that an individual might be bisexual means that as an interactive process bisexuality cannot be "done" in the way West and Fenstermaker discussing "doing gender."

Bisexuality and Bisexual Identity

Because current understandings of sexual orientation depend on the gender of one's partner to determine one's sexual orientation, bisexuals are often rendered invisible and are mistaken by others as either gay or straight, depending on the perceived gender of the person they are with. This invisibility has fed into the stereotype that bisexuals want to "pass" for heterosexual, yet the women in my sample often made deliberate attempts to create a visible bisexual identity. What does this tell us about bisexuality and bisexual identity, or more generally about the sociology of sexualities?

Looking at the ways sexual orientation identities may be constructed outside the bedroom in this way opens up new ways of conceptualizing bisexuality as not just an orientation for someone who has sex with men and women, but also as an identity with links to, but not entirely determined by, sexual behaviors. Examining ways of being bisexual beyond sexual behavior creates a space for conceiving of the monogamous (or celibate) bisexual, and allows bisexuality to be more than a "phase" on the way to gay or

straight like so many models of sexual identity, discussed in Chapter 2, would have us think.

Once we can conceive of a bisexuality that is about more than just engaging in sexual behavior with "both" genders, we also open up space for looking at non-sexual motivations for being visible as a bisexual. Bisexual identity has often been depoliticized, but, as discussed in Chapter 4, some bisexuals attempt to create a bisexual display such as that described here specifically because of their political beliefs and alignment with feminist and queer political movements, and here I have discussed the ways that speaking out is a way of creating a bisexual display by directly confronting heterosexism, homophobia, and biphobia. As Hannah points out when discussing speaking out and divesting of heterosexual privilege, although bisexual women in relationships with men *could* remain silent and therefore privileged, that does not mean that they *should.* The women in my sample wanted to be visible and recognized as bisexual women, even though they were not using this visibility as a means for attracting new sexual partners. By understanding bisexuality outside of just sexual behavior we can examine the ways political beliefs and worldviews shape sexuality, and vice versa.

Finally, in understanding the ways gender and sexuality markers are used by bisexuals to attempt to create a bisexual display we see that bisexuality may be invisible, but is not for lack of trying on the part of bisexuals. Often the ways bisexuals try to reveal themselves has been overlooked by prior research because of the fact that these strategies, overall, have not been particularly effective in actually being perceived by others as a bisexual cue. However, just because the audience may not always fully understand the performance of bisexuality, this does not make such performances futile. As discussed in

Chapter 4, bisexual displays, even when not appropriately understood as such, may still serve a function for the bisexual actor, such as creating a feeling of wholeness or authenticity, and tie her to a larger political project. Although the strategies of creating a bisexual display discussed here may not always be perceived by others specifically as a *bisexual* display, there is still an attempt being made to create such a display, and others who are looking for it may be able to recognize it for what it is, thus allowing bisexuals the possibility of at least being visible to each other.

Gender Display and Sexuality

Although there were some markers specific to bisexuality used in creating a bisexual display, such as pins or other propaganda, overall there was a reliance on using gender displays and playing with various gendered markers as a way of creating a bisexual display. As Brianna and Isabella both discussed, the "bisexual look" relies on gender markers—such as a mix between masculine and feminine, butch and femme, or an androgynous presentation—to indicate bisexual identity. This reliance on gender to indicate sexuality underscores the ways gender and sexuality are mutually constituted and confirmed in one another. While gender and sexuality have unique aspects and deserve to be fully theorized of their own accord, ignoring the ways gender and sexuality work together, especially when it comes to creating a gendered display of sexuality, such as the bisexual display the women in my sample created, misses a very important aspect of gendered sexualities. Sexuality needs to be more fully incorporated into the theorizing of gender, and vice versa. As Miller argued, we need to more fully understand the ways "doing gender" also means "doing sexuality" (Miller 2006).

Disrupting the Sex/Gender/Sexuality Paradigm

By itself, the existence of bisexuals breaks down the dichotomous categories that are the basis of the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm. Most directly, bisexuality shows that sexuality is not made up of homosexual and heterosexual, but rather multiple sexualities, or at the very least more possibilities than just two. Bisexuality also shows how sexuality cannot be gleaned from the gender of the sexual object choice, further questioning the supremacy of gender in determining sexual orientation, an assumption that is at the core of the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm.

In using various gender displays to construct a bisexual display, bisexuals also construct gender and sexuality in ways that defy the man/masculine/desire women and female/feminine/desire men dichotomy created by the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm. The bisexual display discussed in this chapter relies on a certain kind of playfulness with the styles and displays that usually mark gender and sexuality, and creates a display that is not intelligible under the current sex/gender/sexuality paradigm. As Judith Lorber explained in her discussion of queer activists, "By not constructing gender and sexuality in expected ways, they make visible, in Butler's term, the performativity on which the whole gender order depends" (Lorber 1999 p. 436). Bisexuals do not create sexual identities that fit in the expected hetero/homo dichotomy, and create bisexual displays that mix and match gender markers in their performances of bisexual identity, thus exposing the cracks in the foundation of the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm.

Another important aspect of bisexual displays is the way the can be used to deliberately attempt to confound the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm by making bisexuality visible, or, at the very least, leaving others confused about the sexuality of the

bisexual as they combine and mix up markers of gender to make visible one's sexuality. Despite the fact that these everyday attempts to make bisexuality visible and attempt to disrupt the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm may seem small, it does demonstrate that there is the capacity for human agency in resisting this paradigm, and in that there is the possibility of change.

Chapter Summary

Despite the lack of visibility or cultural stereotypes about how bisexuals look or the way they carry themselves, this chapter focuses on the ways the women in my sample reported making deliberate attempts to mark themselves as bisexual both in "wide engagements" of performance through displays of visual cues and certain attitudes, as well as directly speaking out, and in "limited engagements" through educational pursuits, desire, and markings of queer culture in the home. Through these deliberate attempts to create a bisexual display and break out of the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy these women lead others to question the supremacy of the gender of one's sexual partner as the determinant of one's sexual orientation, the links between gender displays and sexuality, and the dichotomy of sex, gender, and sexuality that is the foundational assumption of our society. Despite the fact that, at this time, bisexuality's invisibility means that one cannot "do bisexuality" the way one "does gender" or "does hetero/homosexuality," the women in my sample are still making attempts at making identity visible—and hoping for acknowledgement of that identity from others—through the creation of a bisexual display. Attention to such localized (often individual) attempts is important for sociological understandings of sexuality that seek to go beyond a dichotomous

sex/gender/sexuality paradigm to study sexualities that are not so neatly categorized, or observable, at the macro-structural level.

CHAPTER 7:

Conclusions

In this project I have discussed the ways bisexual identity might be made visible outside of explicitly sexual behavior, that is to say, outside the bedroom. Sexual identities often presumed from the (perceived) gender of one's sexual object choice, and this project points to other basis for sexual identities—such as feminist/queer political views—and looks at the ways that sexual identities might be made visible or enacted beyond the exclusive focus on sexual behavior. Research on these other factors that are part of sexual orientation identities is critical if we are to gain a better understanding of the broader effects sexual orientation identity has on one's life beyond simply with whom one engages in sexual behavior.

To explore the ways one performs bisexual identity I examined the ways bisexual women perform a bisexual identity when involved in long-term monogamous relationships (in or outside of legal marriage) with men. Given the pressures of homophobia, biphobia, heterosexism, and sexism, the experiences of women who choose to maintain a bisexual identity when involved in a "heterosexual" relationship (and thus a relationship that could provide them with heterosexual privilege) provide insights into both the nature of and resistance to the above mentioned phobias and "isms" as well as a concrete example of the disconnect between sexual identity and sexual behavior. Here I have used the data collected through focus group interviews with bisexual women to discuss some of the non-sexual reasons for holding a bisexual identity, and why these reasons are important within the context of identity politics; to describe the problems invisibility brings for bisexuals, particularly to a concept of "performing" identity, and

therefore why such attempts to perform identity may be so valuable (if limited); and finally, I discussed some examples of the ways the women in my sample saw themselves performing bisexual identity outside the bedroom, despite the difficulties of invisibility.

Implications of the Study

This project has attempted to bring awareness, particularly among the field of feminist sociology, to the topic of bisexual identity performance, the ways these performances are constrained by the construction of sexuality in dichotomous terms, and the importance of understanding the motivations behind such performances to feminist and queer political projects. In addition, I have also focused on the importance of studying the social construction of sexuality at the subjective level as it relates to the macro-structural level, since many identities, particularly bisexual identities, are invisible within the dichotomous construction of sexuality unless we look at the level of subjectivity. A study, such as this one, that focuses on the micro level of subjectivity, yet is informed by broader inequalities that have been the focus of feminist scholarship, offers a unique lens through which to examine bisexual identities, and the potential such identities have for disrupting the dichotomous construction of sex, gender, and sexuality, even if this potential is limited.

Here I summarize some of the major implications of this research project as they relate to sociological understandings of bisexual identity performance.

Motivations and Identity Politics

Although previous research on sexual identity performance has discussed the importance of such performances for indicating sexual interest (Esterberg 1996; Esterberg 1997; Miller 2006), researchers have found that bisexual identities also exist

without same-sex activity and that certain political positions, specifically feminism, are linked to bisexual identity (Blumstein and Schwartz 2000). As I detail in Chapter 4, one of the reasons the women in my sample wanted to be visible as bisexuals was due to their commitment to feminist and/or queer movements and ideas, and this link to social movements is an important aspect in understanding bisexual identity performance, and also for understanding what such performances might offer social movements.

Although non-binary, non-categorical models of bisexual identity still need to be fully theorized, such conceptualizations of bisexuality can help move us from identity politics based on binaries to a more useful view that sees connectedness among people across differences and can build coalitions based on shared ideas.

Many social movements scholars would argue that identity-based politics, despite some successes, have stagnated or are even beginning to self-destruct (Gamson 1995; Highleyman 1995; Seidman 1993). As discussed in Chapter 4, the goal of "queering" political movements is to eventually create a world where our current identity categories would have no meaning, and I have argued that this is exactly the space where bisexual identity may hold the greatest potential in changing political movements. Although the lack of a social movement based on bisexuality has meant that those who identify as bisexual have been rendered invisible, it also means that bisexuality might not come with the baggage of organizing around a stable or ethnic model of identity the way the broader gay and lesbian movement has done over the course of the last four decades. Although bisexual identity is most certainly not immune to the allure of identity-based political movements, bisexuality does pose significant problems for any movement based on firm "us" and "them" categories, and much of the organizing that has gone on around bisexual

identity has been far more influenced by a fluid concept of identity rather than a stable model. In this way, bisexual identities may be useful in pushing towards political movements based on shared ideas rather than shared identities. Queer and feminist movements based on such a politics of ideas would be more inclusive and diverse, and likely a stronger movement that would offer a major shift in political organizing as it exists today.

As I discussed in Chapter 4, simply creating a space for bisexuals at the table of sexual politics cannot be the goal of incorporating bisexual identities into queer and feminist scholarship and political movements. The greatest challenge bisexuality poses to our current construction of sexuality is the ability to illustrate the fluid and dynamic nature of sexuality. Bisexuality is currently able to pose such a challenge because the current organization of sexuality is based upon a dichotomous and stable view of sex, gender, and sexuality. As Rust points out, "If we succeed in reconstructing the sexual landscape to support a bisexual identity, we will have destroyed its revolutionary potential" (Rust 1996c p. 81). Although organizing around an ethnic model of bisexual identity may be a tempting way to fight against the invisibility of bisexuals, ultimately it will not revolutionize the way sexuality is organized in our society. As I point out in Chapter 4, to truly challenge the social organization of sexuality, bisexual identities cannot have stable or static meaning, and very concepts on which such an identity is based must be deconstructed and challenged in order for a new sexual landscape to emerge. Bisexual identity, therefore, is in a strange position of being a useful tool while working to make such identities irrelevant. Although bisexual identity may be seen as a

means through which we can begin organizing for change, in the end any concept of a stable identity must collapse if a truly queer movement is to exist.

Invisibility and Self-Identity Formation

As I discussed in Chapter 5, self-identity is experienced through reflection on the feedback of others (Mead 1977). Rosenberg also discusses the ways the self-concept—how the individual sees her/himself—is constructed through social interaction with others (Rosenberg 1981). To construct a bisexual self-identity, however, often means having a self-identity that is rarely able to be correctly reflected in the feedback of others since bisexual identities are often unrecognized as such. Models of sexual identity formation often rely on recognition by others and "coming out" as signs that one has fully achieved the process of identity formation (Altman 1971; Cass 1979; Cass 1984a; Cass 1984b; Chapman and Brannock 1987; McCarn and Fassinger 1996; Plummer 1975; Ponse 1978; Sophie 1986; Troiden 1998). As this study shows, however, recognition by others of one's bisexual identity cannot be counted on as a mechanism for the development or maintenance of bisexual identities. In this way, bisexual self-identity development does not fit with conventional models of sexual identity development, and bisexual identity may be unique in that it often must develop with little or no accurate reflection of the self-identity by society.

Invisibility and the Sociological Study of Bisexuality

The invisibility of any group presents problems in scientific study. Sociological understandings of bisexuality are hindered due to the invisibility of bisexuality and bisexual identities within the social construction of sexuality. At this point in time, bisexuality may only be visible at the subjective or individual level, and thus creates

difficulty for any macro-level study of bisexual identities. Although this study has discussed the potential of bisexual identities experienced at the subjective level to challenge or disrupt macro-structural forces, such potential is greatly limited by the invisibility of bisexuality within society.

The way society conceives of sexuality in dichotomous terms means that those who take on a bisexual identity remain invisible as bisexuals, although they may be mistaken for either straight or gay/lesbian. As discussed in Chapter 5, the social construction of sexuality works against bisexual visibility at all but the subjective level (Jackson 2006). At the macro-structural level, bisexuality is rendered invisible through a binary sex/gender/sexuality paradigm that organizes societal institutions such as marriage. At the discursive level of the construction of sexuality, bisexuality is again invisible under a dichotomous imagination of sexuality in which bisexuality does not exist. At the level of routine, everyday social practices we again see little room for the visibility of bisexuality, as sexuality and gender are constituted and reconstituted within various contexts and relationships along a binary assumption of gender and sexuality, and "doing sexuality" cannot, under such conditions, mean "doing bisexuality," as I detailed in Chapter 6. At the level of subjectivity, or how the individual perceives her desires and emotions and makes sense of them in her identity, however, bisexual identities can become visible within the self, despite the fact that the other levels of the social construction of sexuality leave little room for such an identity.

This invisibility means that performances of bisexuality are often misunderstood as straight or gay/lesbian or missed completely by those who might witness such performances. As I discuss in Chapter 6, using the concept "doing bisexuality," which

relies on social others *correctly understanding and interpreting* bisexual identities, may not be the best way of understanding the creation of a visible bisexual identity at this particular moment in time, and instead put forth a concept of bisexual display for both "wide" and "limited" audiences as a better way to understand such performances.

Bisexual Display

In this project I am use the term "bisexual display" to refer to the projection of a bisexual identity within the context of current Western, post-industrial, Twenty-First Century norms and expectations. This concept builds off of both Goffman's (1976) and Lorber's (1999) conceptualizations of gender display, and gender displays are were often used as cues for bisexual identity, as the women in my sample discussed in Chapter 6.

I have argued that because bisexuality is not recognized by the "audience" the concept of performance is problematic when discussing the ways bisexuals use various cues to attempt to make visible their bisexual identities. It is for this reason that I use the term "bisexual display" rather than "doing bisexuality" since the dichotomous construction of sexuality prohibits "doing" bisexuality beyond the subjective level, and a institutional and interactional aspect is necessary to "do" sexuality in the way gender is accomplished through "doing gender" (West and Fenstermaker 1993; West and Zimmerman 1991). Although my research is similar to Miller's in that we have both approached bisexuality as a performance, Miller uses the term "doing bisexuality" to emphasize the ways sexuality is not accomplished in isolation from gender (or race and class) (Miller 2006). Indeed, when one is "doing gender" they are doing a particular raced, classed, and sexualized gender, but because of the limitations imposed by a dichotomous categorization of sex/gender/sexuality, those attempting to do genders and

sexualities that do not fit this dichotomous model will be misinterpreted as others "do" gender and sexuality for them and place them into one category or another. As I discussed in Chapter 5, bisexuals are usually misidentified as gay/lesbian or heterosexual, and even those who "mix-and-match" gender displays or attempt a more androgynous gender display as a way to reveal bisexual identity will still be seen and categorized by social others as belonging in one binary gender category or the other rather than disrupting such categorizations. My emphasis on the invisibility of bisexuality within the "dichotomous imagination" (Miller 2006 p.247) at every level of the social construction of sexuality beyond the subjective level of self-identification departs from Miller's work, and I argue that meaningful discussions of making bisexual identity visible are better done within a framework of "bisexual display" rather than "doing bisexuality" at this point in time. I also argue that "bisexual display" is a better term because "display" emphasizes the idea that it is an optional part of a performance, unlike "doing bisexuality" which draws on the ways one is *always* doing gender (and sexuality), in everyday interactions. The activities and cues discussed in this project are, most certainly, optional performances for my participants. They have the option of playing with gender displays in a mix-and-match fashion, wearing pins or other propaganda that announces their bisexual identity, or creating queer space within their homes. These markers may be interpreted by others through interactions (and often incorrectly interpreted), but this is not the same thing as accomplishing bisexuality through interaction in the way that the term "doing bisexuality" would imply. Bisexual displays may be deployed for a variety of reasons, as discussed in Chapter 4, such as honesty and authenticity, a desire to break down stereotypes about bisexuals, or for feminist and queer ideals, but the key is that

displays are indeed *deployed* for these reasons. They are optional rather than "done" for us at all times. Bisexual sexual orientation itself may not be optional, but the display of bisexual identity through the means discussed in this project is optional. This is an important facet of bisexual identity. Bisexuals are stereotyped as wanting to "pass" and have heterosexual privilege, but the fact that some bisexuals instead opt to create a bisexual display is significant, and, as I discussed above, has implications for political organizing.

Studying Sexuality Outside the Bedroom

Studying the ways sexual orientation identities may exist beyond the bedroom, as I have done in this project, opens up new ways of conceptualizing bisexuality as not just an orientation for someone who has sex with men and women, but also as an identity with links to, but not entirely determined by, sexual behaviors. Examining ways of being bisexual beyond sexual behavior creates a space for conceiving of the monogamous (or celibate) bisexual, and allows bisexuality to be more than a "phase" on the way to gay or straight like models of sexual identity that were discussed in Chapter 2 would have us think.

Once we can conceive of a bisexuality that is about more than just engaging in sexual behavior with "both" genders, we also open up space for looking at non-sexual motivations for being visible as a bisexual. Bisexual identity has often been depoliticized, but, as discussed in Chapter 4, some bisexuals attempt to create a bisexual display specifically because of their political beliefs and alignment with feminist and queer political movements, and speak out to directly confront heterosexism, homophobia, and biphobia. The women in my sample wanted to be visible and recognized as bisexual

women, even though they were not using this visibility as a means for attracting new sexual partners. By understanding bisexuality outside of just sexual behavior we can examine the ways political beliefs and worldviews shape sexuality, and vice versa.

Limitations

In Chapter 3 I discussed some of the limitations of particular methods of sampling and data collection I used in this project. This project did not utilize random sampling but instead used a purposive, non-random sample. Therefore, this project is not generalizable to the entire bisexual population, or even the entire population of bisexual women in long-term monogamous relationships with men. Generalizability, however, was not the goal of this project. Instead, my goal was exploratory in nature and this project has focused on describing how the women I sampled report performing their bisexual identities and their motivations for making themselves visible as bisexual.

Another limitation is the narrow focus of the data collected. As my research questions indicate, this project is focused on matters related to identity performance; how bisexual identities might be performed outside sexual behavior, why one would engage in such performances, and whether or not these performances might disrupt heteronormativity and/or homonormativity. Although the women in my sample discussed a desire to disrupt heteronormative assumptions—often as part of feminist and/or queer political views—and some hinted at a desire to disrupt homonormativity as well, the invisibility of bisexuality beyond the individual level made it difficult to discuss the ways bisexual performance could disrupt these assumptions existing at the institutional level. Therefore, the data is severely limited in its ability to answer this third research question in anything but a peripheral way.

In addition, because participants for this study were recruited through bisexual, LGBT, or feminist organizations, the sample may differ significantly from bisexual women in long-term monogamous relationships with men who do not maintain ties to these types of organizations. Because they have maintained these ties it is likely that the women in the sample may be more active with such organizations and see their bisexual identity in relation to this social and political activity, thus feminist and queer political ideas may play a larger part in the meanings and motivations for their bisexual identities than women who do not have such ties to such organizations. Additionally, while this sample was recruited from cities which have not been the focus of much research on the bisexual community, all lived in or near a sizable city rather than rural areas. This means that women in the sample often had access to outlets, such as gay bars and bookstores, Pride marches/festivals, and a general queer community that women outside of these areas would not have access to.

Limitations also exist regarding the diversity of the sample. Despite the efforts I employed in this project to maximize racial/ethnic and class diversity, the sample was mostly white, college-educated, and middle class. This may not be surprising given that these characteristics are similar to previous studies of those who self-identify as bisexual, (Burleson 2005), and, as discussed in Chapter 2, identity labels such as "bisexual" are often critiqued as being "white" and many people of color who may fall under the category of "bisexual" in terms of desire would not choose the label bisexual for their self-identity. In addition, because this study is focused on women who are in monogamous relationships with men, to identify as bisexual is to renounce some of the heterosexual privileges that would otherwise be afforded to the couple. Women who find

themselves otherwise marginalized, through race or class, may have more difficulty or see fewer benefits to labeling themselves bisexual when involved in an "opposite" sex relationship.

Future Directions

Although there is a growing body of scholarship on bisexuality and bisexual identity, further research is still necessary, as is continued research on gendered and sexual identities more generally. As this project has shown, in addition to studying gender and sexuality in their own right, sociological scholarship must also focus on the ways gender and sexuality interact, and the ways sexual identity displays utilize gender displays and vice versa.

This project also indicates that further research regarding optional performances of sexual identities, and the ways these identities are performed outside of sexual contexts, would further our understandings of the ties between sexuality, identity, performance, and politics. Previous research has found ties between political positions favorable to bisexuality—such as feminist or queer ideals—and having a bisexual self-identity, and this project has found further evidence for such a link. Research that examines sexual identity performance in relation to such political positions would shift sexuality research outside the bedroom and examine the role one's worldview plays in sexual identities.

Another implication of this work for future research is a shift in focus to the subjective level of the social construction of sexuality. Much sociological scholarship on the social construction of sexuality tends to focus on the macro-structural level, yet this project has shown that often the voices and experiences of those whose sexualities do not

fit within the dichotomous framework that organizes sexuality can offer insights on gender and sexuality as well. Research needs to focus on how macro-level processes shape and constrain sexualities as the micro level, and place value on subjective experiences of sexual identities even when such identities have limited ability to challenge the dichotomous construction of sexuality at the macro level. Performances of bisexual identities may not be correctly interpreted by the audience, but these performances still have meaning for the actor, and research needs to focus on multiple levels in order to understand these meanings.

Future research should also explore intersections of bisexual and transgender identities. Both identities are rendered invisible within a dichotomous sex/gender/sexuality paradigm, and in both cases "display" may be a more meaningful conceptual framework for study than "doing," as the difficulties of "doing" an unrecognized identity have been discussed throughout this project. Given the emerging transgender scholarship and current trends to examine bisexuality and transgenderism together, this is an area particularly ripe for further research and would further our understanding of the social construction of both gender and sexuality, and the lives of those who do not fit the dichotomous paradigm that organizes either construct.

Overall, further research on the optional displays of identities that fall outside the dichotomous sex/gender/sexuality paradigm can help us gain understanding how these displays are examples of individual agency to resist such dichotomous constructions of genders and sexualities despite the limitations imposed by invisibility.

APPENDICIES

APPENDIX A

Focus Group Interview Guide

I. Introduction and Consent

II. Opening Questions

(1) Participant's Name (may use pseudonym) and what word(s) they like to use to describe their sexual identity (bisexual, bi, queer, etc)

III. Introductory Questions

(1) When you hear "bisexual" what comes to mind?

(2) Have you always considered yourself to be (your present identity) or has this changed over time? What other labels have you used to describe yourself?

(3) What is the status of your current partnership (legal marriage, domestic partner, cohabitating, dating)?

(4) How long have you been together?

(5) Have you and your partner ever discussed the possibility or engaged in other types of relationships, such as nonmonogamy?

(6) How does your partner identify himself? Are you out to your partner?

(7) Do you have children? Are you out to your children?

(8) Are you out to other members of your family? Your friends? Coworkers?

IV. Key Questions

(1) What ways to you feel you show or express your bisexual identity?

-depending on information given, probe for specifics in:

a) political activism: feminism and women's organizations; LGBT activism; Pride Marches

b) social activities: gay/lesbian bars and coffee shops; women's music festivals

c) media: books, movies, music, magazines, television

d) grooming: clothes, hair, jewelry

(2) Under what circumstances/ in what situations do you express your bisexual identity?

(3) Under what circumstances/in what situations have you not expressed your bisexual identity?

(4) Is it important to you to make yourself visible to others as a bisexual? Why/Why not?

(5) Thinking back to previous relationships or when single, was it more/less/about the same in importance for you to make yourself visible as a bisexual?

V. Final Questions

(1) Is there anything else that you would like to add or feel is important that we didn't discuss?

APPENDIX B

Sample Participant Screening Form:

Thank you for your help with this project on bisexual identity. This form is designed to collect some background information about you, your identity, and your present relationship to assess your eligibility to participate in this project, as well as preferences for scheduling a focus group in your area to collect more information. The information you provide will only be used by the researchers for this specific project.

Thank you!

(1) Name (first name only):_____

(2) Age: _____

(3) Educational level – indicate highest level achieved
___high school diploma or GED
___associate's degree or technical degree
___some college
___college degree
___advanced degree (Master's, Doctorate, Law, Medical)

(4) Occupation:_____

(5) Income
___$0-14,999
___$15,000-29,999
___$ 30,000-44,999
___$ 45,000-59,999
___$60,000-74,999
___$75,000-89,999
___$90,000 or above

(6) Race/Ethnicity (check all that apply)
___White (Non-Hispanic) ___African American/Black ___ Hispanic ___Asian/Pacific Islander ___ Native American ___Other (specify) _____

(7) Do either you or your partner consider yourselves transgendered/transsexual?
___ yes ___ no

(8) Of the following categories, choose one you MOST identify with (check only one):
___heterosexual/straight ___homosexual/gay/lesbian ___bisexual

(9) What word(s) do you prefer to use to describe your sexual orientation?

(10) What is your partner's sexual orientation (if known):

(11) Do you have children? If yes, how many and what ages?

(12) How long you have been in your current relationship?

(13) What is the status of your relationship:
___ legally married
___ have had a commitment ceremony, living together
___ not married, living together
___ dating, not living together
___other (please describe)

(14) Would you describe your current relationship as monogamous: __yes __no

(15) Have you had sexual contact with someone other than your partner since your relationship began? __yes __no

(15a) If yes, have you had sexual contact with someone other than your partner within the past year? __yes __no

(15b) If yes, did this contact lead to or intend to lead to orgasm? __yes __no

Please continue on the next page

This page will be detached from your previous responses. The contact information you provide will not be linked to your responses on this form.

Scheduling:

At this time a specific date for the focus group has not been scheduled, but will likely be in late March/early April. Please rank your general availability for a group for the following days of the week and times, with 1 being your first choice, 2 your second, and so forth:

___Thursday (evenings)
___Friday (evenings)
___Saturday (mornings)
___Saturday (afternoons)
___Saturday (evenings)
___Sunday (mornings)
___ Sunday (afternoons)

Contact information:

Please provide your contact information. This will only be used by the researcher for communication regarding the date/time/location of the focus group.

First and Last Name:_____

Mailing Address:_____

_____

Phone: _____

Email:_____

Preferred method of contact (whenever possible your preferred method of contact will be used)

Please return this form to:

Julie E. Hartman
Program in Women, Gender, and Social Justice
313 Linton Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824
Email: hartma75@msu.edu

APPENDIX C

Code List

1 being visible
2 class
3 coming to the focus group
4 culture
5 desire
6 feminism
7 homonormativity
8 identity terms
9 lesbians
10 lgbt group involvement
11 thoughts on marriage
12 meanings of bisexual
13 motivations
14 movies
15 music
16 out to children?
17 outness
18 partner's soid
19 personal visibility
20 pins/propaganda
21 political involvement
22 privilege
23 race
24 relationships
25 speaking out
26 visual cues
27 what does a bisexual look like?

APPENDIX D

Collapsed Code List

1 public visibility: being visible, speaking out, visual cues - pins/propaganda, what does a bisexual look like?
2 class and race
3 coming to the focus group
4 homonormativity
5 identity terms
6 lesbians
7 meanings of bisexual
8 motivations – feminism, lgbt group involvement, political involvement
9 outness – outness to children?
10 private visibility: personal visibility, culture, movies, music, desire
11 privilege
12 relationships - partner's soid, thoughts on marriage

FIGURE 1:
Conceptual Framework

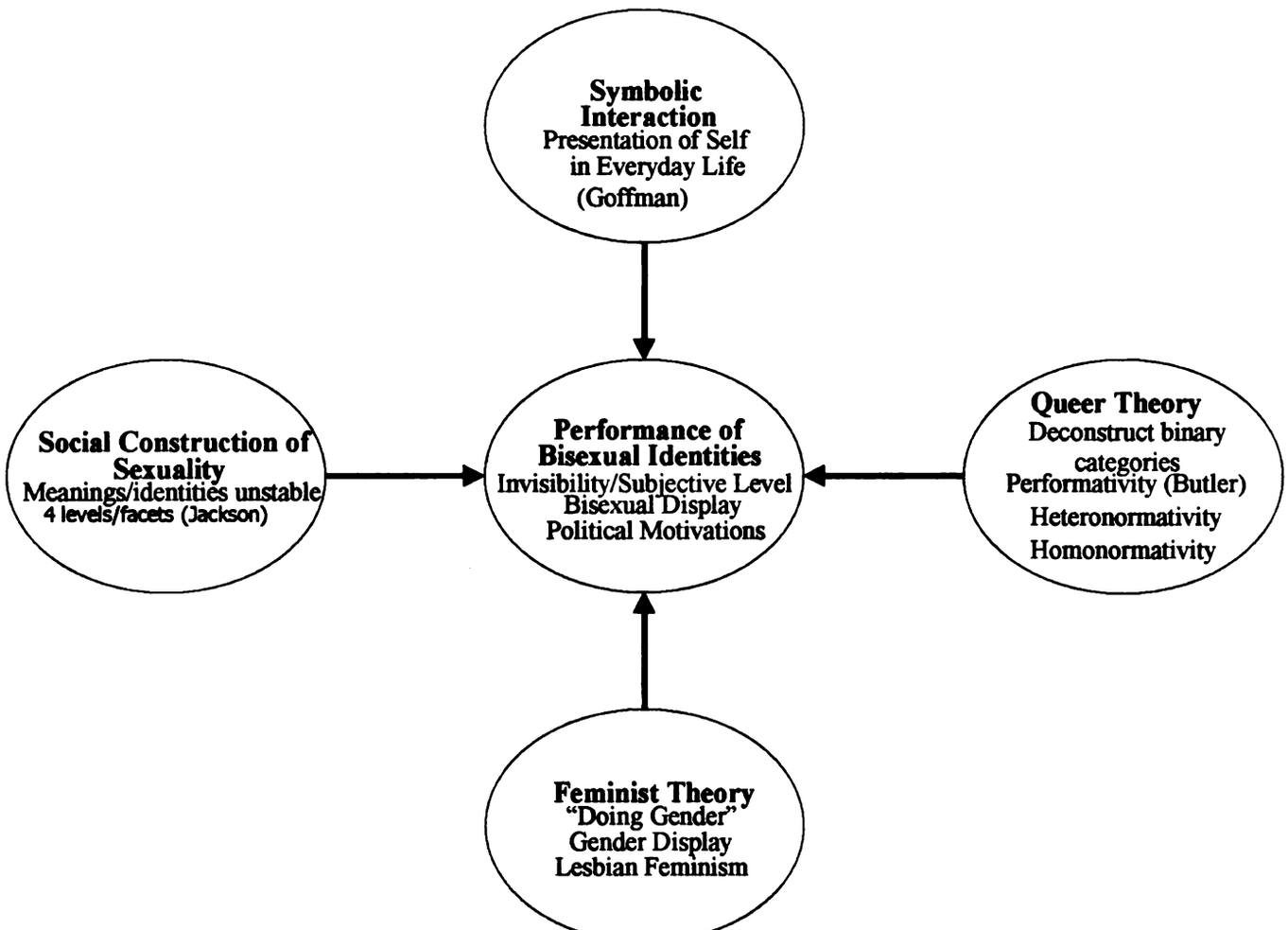

TABLE 1:
Characteristics of the Sample

Name	Age	Education	Income (USD)	Race	Relationship Length	Relationship Status	Partner's Orientation
Allison Schaffer	Early 20's	some college	0-14,999	White	11 months	not married, living together	hetero
Anna Ellison	Late 20's	college degree	0-14,999	White	4 yrs	legally married	"married"/unlabeled*
Brianna Roberts	Late Teens	some college	0-14,999	Multiracial	3yrs	dating, not living together	hetero
Cloe Shepard	Early 20's	college degree	30-44,999	White	4.5yrs	legally married	unlabeled
Emma Compton	Late 40's	college degree	30-44,999	White	20 yrs	legally married	queer
Haley Owens	Late Teens	some college	0-14,999	White	11 months	not married, living together	hetero
Hannah Brewer	Early 30's	some college	30-44,999	African American	5 yrs	dating, not living together	hetero
Isabella Martin	Late 20's	college degree	30-44,999	White	6.5 yrs	legally married	hetero
Kayla Nielsen	Late 20's	advanced degree	45-59,999	White	10 yrs	legally married	bisexual
Liz Coffey	Early 30's	college degree	60-74,999	White	12 yrs	legally married	hetero
Maria Morrison	Late 20's	college degree	15-29,999	White	2 yrs	not married, living together	hetero
Savannah Mooney	Early 30's	advanced degree	30-44,999	Asian American	13 yrs	legally married	bi/questioning
Sydney Wyatt	Early 40's	advanced degree	45-59,999	White	2.5 yrs	legally married	hetero
Vickie Butler	Early 30's	advanced degree	15-29,999	Native American	10 yrs	legally married	hetero

* this was an open-ended question and data is given as the label written by the respondent

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