UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIP POWER AND VIOLENCE AMONG BISEXUAL WOMEN

By

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A DISSERTATION

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

Human Development and Family Studies – Doctor of Philosophy

2023

ABSTRACT

Bisexual women report rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) that are significantly higher than lesbian and exclusively heterosexual women. Regardless of their perpetrator's gender, bisexual women also experience more critical healthcare needs after experiencing IPV than other women. Existing research on opposite-gender and lesbian couples suggests that power imbalances underpin IPV; however, the relationship dynamics of bisexual women's same-gender relationships have been scarcely studied. The purpose of this dissertation study is to explore the sources and impacts of power imbalances in bisexual women's intimate relationships with other women, particularly as it pertains to IPV. This dissertation uses a community-engaged research method – concept mapping – to explicate power imbalances in these relationship dynamics, with study participants and researchers analyzing the mixed methods data together. Participants engaged in a three-stage concept mapping process: 1) brainstorming, 2) sorting and rating, and 3) interpretation sessions. Brainstorming was conducted via GroupWisdom, an online concept mapping software platform. Participants generated responses to the following prompt: In queer relationships, what are things women say or do to show they have power over their partner? After a master list of 87 responses was created, participants then sorted and rated these statements to create clusters that visually represented similar ideas or themes. Using multidimensional scaling and hierarchical cluster analysis, the concept mapping platform generated a point map and the research team determined that a seven-cluster solution best fit the data. Finally, in-depth, one-on-one interviews were conducted with participants to analyze the cluster maps and determine whether these clusters were representative of their experiences.

During these three phases, participants most commonly described the exploitation of queer experiences as the main source of power imbalances in their same-gender relationships.

Namely, participants described their partners using their comparably limited history of dating women to gain control over them. There were also power dynamics related to one partner being "out" about their sexual orientation, while the other was closeted. Additionally, hegemonic gender roles traditionally seen in heterosexual couples were often replicated in bisexual women's same-gender relationships, with the more masculine partner often being perceived as the power holder. White privilege and other racial dynamics were persistent experiences of the woman of color in this sample. Participants described a variety of impacts that these power imbalances had on them, such as feeling uncertain and insecure regarding their identities and being hesitant to enter new intimate relationships. Underlying these experiences of power imbalances, emotional manipulation and abuse was reported by many participants, characterized by verbal insults and their partners' binegativity. Overall, this study engaged bisexual women in various phases of the research process, including analysis, to ensure their experiences were reflected in research on relationship power and IPV. Findings from this study implore future violence and health equity researchers to address bisexual women as a distinguishable group from other sexual orientations. These are women with unique experiences and health profiles, and as such, their relationship dynamics look different than those of heterosexual and lesbian couples.

This dissertation is dedicated to my sister, Jaimie Johnson, and my grandma, Patricia Reid. My biggest cheerleaders who turned into my sweetest angels.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The journey of completing this dissertation, and indeed this degree, has been a long and winding one marked by academic triumphs and personal tragedies. As such, I must begin by thanking my incredible parents, Trisha and Brian Reid, for their persistent love and support. Dad, as I once said, you always do things fully in life with no half-measures. You are a curator of amazing experiences, but most of all, you are the most sincerely loving and supportive person I know. You have always uplifted me whether I am high or low, and made things possible for me. Mom, I wish I had the words that would do the love I have for you justice. You have always held me together, and you have the biggest piece of my heart. Anything that is good or kind about me came from you, mom. This accomplishment of mine is a testament to the love you both have for me. Thank you, and I love you.

To my wonderfully intelligent and funny partners in crime, Kenzie and Kayla Schrah. You two are not only my nieces, but my best friends. Our adventures together are my favorite memories in my life. Thank you both for always giving me fun to look forward to and for being so open-minded and kind. I am so proud of the both of you and know you change the world just by existing in it. To my sisters, Melissa and Jessica, I am so lucky to have you in my life. I look up to you both and know you have always been cheering me on since I was a little high schooler in plays. To my grandma, Judy Wood, I am so grateful for your friendship and all our lunch dates. To my iconic friends, Briar and Tatiyana, you are the two that have always uplifted me and ensured I was laughing. This acknowledgements section would be incomplete without also mentioning my late sister, Jaimie Johnson. Jaimie, it was your life and my love for you that inspired me to go on this PhD journey in the first place. To my Grandma, Patricia Reid, I inherited from you a lifetime of dreams. Thank you both so much for loving me better than

anyone ever has. I carry you both with me wherever I go.

And then, there is my academic family who has given me such unconditional support throughout my time at Michigan State University. To Dr. Heather McCauley, you have changed my life for the better and helped me find my purpose. Not only are you brilliant, but you are the kindest person I have ever met. No matter how uncertain or anxious I am feeling, one conversation with you makes me feel like I have the means to take on the world. Thank you for teaching me, along with Dr. Joanne Smith-Darden, that the world is never too big to create change in, especially when you have an amazing team working with you. To Dr. Hope Gerde, thank you for always showing up for me. From writing my letters of recommendation at all stages of my career to always having the most brilliant ideas, I never take for granted that you have guided me towards success. Thank you to Dr. Soma Chaudhuri for being a mentor who is brilliant, kind, and shows me how to get things done. You have always supported my dreams and done all you can to make certain they happen for me. To Dr. Yijie Wang, thank you for your endless patience and encouragement. You have always been a friendly face capable of putting me at ease while also gifting me with knowledge. All of you have always been all that I needed you to be, and I feel ready for whatever comes next thanks to your example.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Despite an extensive history of research on intimate partner violence (IPV), the experiences of bisexual women have received limited attention in the literature. Recently, however, research has begun to document the health profiles of bisexual women. Among the emerging data is that bisexual women are at higher risk of experiencing IPV than their lesbian or exclusively heterosexual counterparts (Barret & Pierre, 2013; Messinger, 2011). According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), 60.1% of bisexual women report IPV, compared to 46% of lesbians and 37% of exclusively heterosexual women (Chen et al., 2020). Bisexual women are particularly vulnerable to IPV, including physical, emotional, financial, and sexual abuse (Head & Milton, 2014). Related to these experiences, bisexual women report poorer health outcomes associated with IPV than their peers, such as increased physical injury and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Barrett & Pierre, 2013; Coston, 2021, Dyar et al., 2020; Martin-Storey & Fromme, 2016; Messinger, 2011).

While findings from the NISVS suggest that men are the primary perpetrators of IPV against bisexual women (Walters et al., 2013), it remains critically important to understand IPV perpetrated by bisexual women's same-gender partners. Indeed, recent findings by Coston (2020) indicate that bisexual women are more likely than their exclusively heterosexual and lesbian counterparts to require health care assistance after the occurrence of IPV, regardless of their perpetrator's gender. Of further importance, bisexual women may be reluctant to report same-gender IPV, as the result of the societal messages received by queer women that IPV perpetrated by another women is innocuous (Gillum & DiFulvio, 2012), and queer women are also fearful of contributing to the harmful, homonegative notions that same-gender relationships are invalid (McDonald, 2012). In a similar vein, researchers have previously experienced

reluctance in studying this topic to avoid adding to the stigma endured by bisexual women (Merrill & Wolfe, 2013). Unfortunately, this has inadvertently aided in the continued struggle for bisexual women to identify and disclose their experiences of same-gender IPV, because there remains a scarcity of language to explain it (Bornstein et al., 2006; Head & Milton, 2014, Turrell, 2000). With all this considered, the rates of IPV perpetrated by bisexual women's same-gender partners are likely higher than indicated by current statistics.

Considering the expansive nature of IPV, this dissertation focuses on power and how power manifests in abusive behaviors among bisexual women. Previous literature focused on IPV among heterosexual couples, and lesbians to a lesser extent, has revealed power as the crux of IPV (McKenry et al., 2006; McClennen et al., 2002). Renzetti (1992) authored seminal research on lesbian couples that conceptualized power in same-gender relationships as "the ability to influence others, to the ability to get others to do what one wants them to do, regardless of whether or not they want to do it" (p. 43). To date, however, research that independently explores the manifestation of power imbalances in bisexual women's same-gender relationships is in its infancy, including how these power imbalances impact IPV among this population.

Theoretical And Conceptual Frameworks

Gender, Resources, and Power

The traditional theories presented in this dissertation posit that gender is intrinsically woven into the operationalization of power. These two concepts, gender and power, collaborate to create the conditions in which IPV occurs (Jakobsen, 2014). While theoretical frameworks underlying IPV have placed men as perpetrators and women as victims, this traditional cast of characters fails to translate to women's same-gender IPV experiences (Buttell & Canon, 2015). Regardless, gender remains a vital component of same-gender IPV research, because same-

gender IPV looks different than when violence occurs in a heterosexual relationship (Brown, 2008). This is at least partially due to the fact that society fails to afford the same privileges to women as it does to men. This impacts the sources of power that women, especially queer women, have at their disposal (Brown, 2008).

Amongst the various theories of gender and power, there are four publications in particular that are adept at interlinking gender with power: Judith Butler's 1990 book, *Gender Trouble*; Raewyn Connell's 1987 book, *Gender and Power*; Hilde Jakobsen's 2014 article, "What's Gendered about Gender-Based Violence?" and Deniz Kandiyoti's 1988 article, "Bargaining with the Patriarchy." Although these theories heavily rely on the men as perpetrators narrative, their contribution has shaped how current IPV research is conceptualized. After these theories are assessed, this dissertation will present resource theory to begin addressing the limitations of these gender theories in understanding IPV in bisexual women's relationships.

Conceptualizing Gender and Sexuality

In this dissertation, I will draw on Judith Butler, who became influential in queer theory with the publication of *Gender Trouble,* to conceptualize gender. According to Butler (1990), gender is an act of culturally influenced, repetitive performances rather than a biological trait of which people are inherently born. Butler (1990) posits that hegemonic gender roles are binary (meaning one is either a man or woman), because this construction supports the continuation of male hierarchy and heterosexuality. According to Butler's heterosexual matrix, identities are only tangible if they are compulsory heterosexual (1990). For instance, a person assigned female at birth will be assigned a feminine gender and will also be expected to have heterosexual desires for men. Same-gender desires challenge this matrix and, thus, people with such desires are oppressed by the heteronormative and homophobic society (Butler, 1990).

As such, society imposes heterosexual norms on same-gender couples (Gillum & DiFulvio, 2012). For example, gender and sexuality remain coupled despite the existence of lesbians, because society equates lesbian desires to being masculine (Hemmings, 1997). Often, women with same-gender partners are given labels such as "butch" if they appear stereotypically masculine or "femme" if they appear stereotypically feminine (Eves, 2004). This further promotes the notion that same-gender couples consist of a masculine partner and a feminine partner like heterosexual couples. Bisexual women, however, fail to conform to this restricted, binary view of gender, because they are attracted to multiple genders, rather than being attracted exclusively to women like lesbians (Callis, 2009). Despite their pivotal contribution to queer theory, Butler (1990) does not fully develop the concept of bisexuality. When bisexuality is mentioned in *Gender Trouble*, it simply appears in a wider list of queer identities. Ironically though, bisexuality is a main contender for making the gender trouble that Butler advocates for, because it begins to shatter the constructed, and at the end of the day illusionary, view that gender and sexuality are binary (Callis, 2009).

Indeed, in the limited studies about how butch and femme identities manifest for bisexual women, particularly regarding appearances, bisexual women deny being entirely masculine presenting or entirely feminine presenting. Instead, they describe themselves as possessing elements of both masculinity and femininity (Clarke & Spence 2013; Hayfield et al., 2013; Rothblum, 2010). Thus, bisexuality exists in direct contrast to society's view that queer identities can be confined to heteronormative gender roles (Callis, 2009). Perhaps it remains unsurprising that society has attempted to invalidate the bisexual identity by denying its existence (Macalister, 2003), further invoking power over these identities.

Resulting in contradictory evidence, IPV research has continuously hypothesized that

butch identities are sources of power in lesbian and bisexual women's same-gender relationships (Kimball, 2001; Sanger et al., 2018). This further shows that society is insistent upon retaining heteronormative gender roles, as Butler (1990) claimed. The importance of discussing Butler (1990) is to establish bisexual identities as oppressed by this homonegative society, as this then impacts how power can manifest in their same-gender relationships as it relates to IPV.

Gender-Based Violence

While gender and sexuality are not as binary as society claims (Butler, 1990; Callis, 2009), it remains true that men have more societal power than women, especially lesbian and bisexual women (Brown, 2008). Raewyn Connell (1987) identified three structures that maintain this patriarchal, homophobic societal order: labor, power, and cathexis. According to Connell (1987), there exists a sexual division in labor that irrationally deems women as fit for certain jobs (i.e., secretaries) while men are fit for other, more lucrative careers (i.e., salesmen). Connell (1987) posits that power is the force that maintains this unequal social order. Authoritative positions are distributed to men, and men then use these privileges to continue male supremacy. Finally, the structure of cathexis claims that relationships are created based on the emotional attachments people have to one another, which are determined by social patterns. Although they are inherently unequal, heterosexual relationships are socially hegemonic, while same-gender relationships are not supported by society (Connell, 1987). This inequality allows IPV to be supported when it occurs in heterosexual couples (Jakobsen, 2014); however, it fails to explain why women perpetrate violence in their same-gender relationships (Buttell & Cannon, 2015).

Perhaps unintentionally, most gender and power theories have shaped the perception that women are never perpetrators of IPV, creating the myth that women's same-gender relationships are inherently equal (Baker et al., 2013; Bornstein et al., 2006; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008). The

existence of IPV suggests power imbalances within these relationships, largely debunking the idea that women's same-gender relationships are a mythological Utopia (McKenry et al., 2006; McClennen et al., 2002). Despite their limitations, gender and power theories, such as the one provided by Connell, have important implications for how power is conceptualized in IPV research on bisexual women's same-gender relationships. While men and women perpetrators both use IPV to enact power in their relationships with women, the underlying factors dictating this use of power is different. For instance, women perpetrators are largely unable to yield labor and societal norms as their sources for power like men perpetrators (Brown, 2008; Buttell & Connell, 2015). Heterosexism and sexism support men using power, while women's use of power is considered contradictory to societal norms (Cannon et al., 2015). Research has explored the idea that women perpetrators are borrowing from masculinity to enact IPV over same-gender partners.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Emphasized Femininity

The same constructs that allow for men to benefit from IPV at a societal level (Connell, 1987, Jakobsen, 2014) also continue to impose heteronormative gender roles on women's same-gender relationships (Butler, 1990). In order to explain the culture of male supremacy, Connell (1987) proposes the existence of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. Briefly, hegemonic masculinity refers to the practice of men being dominant in society and having control over women, while emphasized femininity refers to woman being subordinate to men's domination over them. According to Jakobsen (2014), IPV is a prominent tactic for supporting gender inequality and is supported by society only when perpetrated by men, while women are expected to be receptive to their own abuse. Thus, taken together, these two concepts contribute to explaining why IPV is a gendered phenomenon.

The question that continually arises, then, is how power imbalances manifest in bisexual women's same-gender relationships, since women perpetrators fail to gain the same benefits from society possessed by men perpetrators. Using these theories of gender and power, previous research has investigated the idea that women perpetrators borrow authority derived from hegemonic masculinity to gain power in their same-gender relationships (Sanger et al., 2018; Kimball, 2001). The prevailing hypotheses have claimed that women with more masculine traits, labeled as butch women, are perpetrators of violence against women with more feminine identities (Sanger et al., 2018; Kimball, 2001). In the previous section of this paper, Butler's (1990) theory was used to explain the issues with such a perspective; thus, it is unsurprising that much research has contested these hypotheses. Initial findings indicate that whether lesbian and bisexual women identify as more masculine or more feminine (or "butch" and "femme") has limited to no bearing on whether they perpetrate or experience IPV; instead, women possess both masculine and feminine traits that emerge in their relationship dynamics (Balsam & Szymanski, 2016, 2005; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Bailey et al., 1997). However, a qualitative study by Sanger and colleagues (2018) found that more masculine partners did indeed assert more control over their more feminine partners, who were submissive in comparison. Regardless of whether a woman identifies as butch or femme, these cumulative findings suggest that both can use the aggressive behaviors that Connell (2002) contributes to masculinity. However, since women perpetrators fail to benefit at a societal level, this current paper defers from crediting practiced masculinity as the sole source of power imbalances in bisexual women's same-gender relationships.

Bargaining with Patriarchy and Homonegativity

Thus far, this dissertation has established that bisexual women's gender and sexuality are

incompatible with society's binary perspective (Butler, 1990; Callis, 2009). It has also sought to examine how gender, nevertheless, is interlinked with power to determine outcomes of IPV (Connell, 1987; Jakobsen, 2014). This paper has largely concluded that gender is an important contextual factor surrounding the manifestation of power imbalances, because gender dictates the power sources available to IPV perpetrators. From a theoretical perspective, the sources of power in bisexual women's same-gender intimate relationships remain underdeveloped. To address this, this paper considers the work of Deniz Kandiyoti, who posits that women are left to bargain within the patriarchy to gain power and control against each other, although this still fails to offer them status in the larger society (1988). Kandiyoti (1988) cites classic patriarchy, where older women perpetrate IPV over their daughters-in-law, as an example of women attempting to gain power over each other in a patriarchal society. This offers them a semblance of control in a society that otherwise oppresses them. Women may fail to receive the same societal benefits as men when perpetrating IPV (Cannon et al., 2015), but IPV can offer them power in their intimate relationships at an intrapersonal level. Similar to the women referenced by Kandiyoti (1988), bisexual women are living and having to survive in the patriarchy, which also produces homonegative social norms (Brown, 2008). They have to bargain within this society in order to retain any degree of power in their lives. As such, some women may become perpetrators of IPV in their same-gender relationships to gain power against their partner that is otherwise not available to them in society (Renzetti, 1998).

IPV is perhaps a tactic in gaining power because women perpetrators witness how the patriarchy supports IPV within heterosexual couples and then replicate these messages in their same-gender relationships (Kaschak, 2012). Indeed, lesbian and bisexual women report feeling pressure to fit into the heterosexual molds of relationships that promote one partner being

dominant over the other (Gillum & DiFulvio, 2012). Based on the heterosexual scripts available to them, they may use IPV as a tactic to assert this power over their same-gender partner (Gillum & DiFulvio, 2012). Thus, heterosexual norms still impact same-gender relationships and how they function. Power imbalances still manifest from these relationships, with IPV emerging as an outcome, but it must be reiterated that a woman's gender deters her from gaining the societal status provided to men perpetrators (Brown, 2008; Jakobsen, 2014). This dissertation proposes that resource theory can expand on theories of gender and power to help explain even further the sources of power that manifest into IPV within these same-gender relationships.

Resource Theory

While gender has important implications for the sources of power in bisexual women's same-gender relationship, it fails to completely explain why women perpetrators perpetrate IPV in these relationships (Renzetti, 1998; Ristock, 2003). The paradigm this dissertation has constructed suggests that bisexual women's same-gender IPV needs to be considered within the context of a patriarchal, homonegative society. The implication of living within this context is that women are largely powerless when it comes resources such as labor and wealth (Connell, 1987). These disparities align with how resource theory conceptualizes the manifestation of IPV. According to resource theory, perpetrators achieve power through utilizing the resources at their disposal, such as income and education (Allen & Straus, 1979; Goode, 1971). However, if resources are limited to them, such as they are limited to women perpetrators of same-gender IPV, then violence becomes the favored tactic in achieving power (Allen & Straus, 1979).

Compared to heterosexual IPV, same-gender IPV is notably different in that both the victim and perpetrator are living as oppressed minorities, which greatly limits the resources available to them (Brown, 2008). To gain power then, women perpetrators often resort to

perpetrating emotional IPV over their same-gender partner. For instance, bisexual women report that their perpetrators tried to isolate them from others or threatened to reveal their sexuality without their consent (Brown, 2008). Furthermore, women perpetrators often take advantage of the emotional bonds that their same-gender partners experience with them. Women often report having deeper emotional connections in their same-gender relationships than in their opposite gender relationships, which is then exploited by women perpetrators (Bornstein et al., 2006; Gillum & DiFulvio, 2012). These are all instances of women perpetrators using IPV as a resource to gain power over their same-gender partners, because other sources of power are unavailable to them. When integrated together, theories of gender and power explain why traditional resources of power are mostly inapplicable for women perpetrators of bisexual women's same-gender IPV experiences (with the possible exception of wielding masculine coded behaviors, such as aggression), while resource theory accounts for the consequences of this depletion.

Limitations

The limitation of the theories discussed in this dissertation is their exclusion or underdeveloped inclusion of bisexual people. While this dissertation included the available empirical research on bisexual women, the conclusions made from a theoretical perspective are restricted by the original frameworks' failure to fully consider the experiences of bisexual people. Nevertheless, it was important to discuss these theories because they lay the foundation for IPV research and were used to create the hypotheses in research on same-gender relationships. Another limitation is that these theories almost exclusively address IPV in heterosexual relationships, with men as the sole wielder of violence and power (Connell, 1987, Jakobsen, 2014). This has almost certainly created bias in research that considers same-gender

IPV from the perspective of these theories (such as the work of Sanger et al., 2018). Future work needs to focus on extending these theories to be more inclusive. To address these limitations, this paper proposes that minority stress theory and lived experiences of binegativity are considered in addition to these theories. The purpose is to create an inclusive framework that finally centers bisexual women into the narrative.

Centering Bisexual Women In The Narrative

Previous discussion on theories of gender, power, and resources have established why these concepts are integral to IPV research. Namely, women are in disempowered positions in society, which impacts their abilities and strategies to wield power (Connell, 1987; Jakobsen, 2014; Kandiyoti, 1988). In order to gain power over their same-gender partners then, women perpetrators resort to using IPV, because that is the primary resource left available to them (Allen & Straus, 1979). In response to the limitations of these theories, this paper introduces minority stress theory, which allows for a perspective not rooted in heterosexuality. Minority stress theory contributes to understanding why bisexual women are at a disadvantaged position in their same-gender relationships that allow sources of power to be used against them, as it relates to IPV.

Experiences of Minority Stress

Bisexual women live within a society that is both sexist and homonegative. While previous theories have established society as founded on patriarchy (Connell, 1987; Kandiyoti, 1988), the focus on heterosexual relationships have left the implications of homophobia underdeveloped. The introduction of minority stress theory into this dissertation will address this gap. Minority stress is the psychological distress that occurs from being a member of a minority population that suffers from oppression and stigmatization (Brooks, 1981). Same-gender couples live outside the heteronormative construction of society, which has been theorized to explain the

poor mental health outcomes experienced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) community (Meyer, 2003; DiPlacido, 1998). Minority stress is traditionally used as a theory to explain bisexual women's high rates of depressive symptoms (Friedman et al., 2014; Shearer et al., 2016; Schrimshaw et al., 2013), which are higher than those reported by both heterosexual and lesbian women (Friedman et al., 2014); however, it has also been linked to bisexual women's higher rates of IPV (Carvalho et al., 2011; DiPlacido, 1998).

As it relates to the LGB community, minority stress includes external stressors (hate crimes and discrimination) and internal stressors (internalized homophobia and identity concealment; Meyer, 2003; DiPlacido, 1998). Of particular importance to bisexual people is internalized homonegativity, which refers to when people internalize negative socialization regarding their queer identities (Meyer, 2003). Compared to lesbians, bisexual women are more vulnerable to experiencing internalized homonegativity (la Roi et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2006). Bisexual women who experience internalized homonegativity also report poorer relationship quality, creating more problems in their relationships (Frost & Meyer, 2009). Internalized homonegativity increases bisexual women's risk for same-gender PV victimization (Sylaska & Edwards, 2015). Compared to lesbians, bisexual women are less likely to reveal their sexual identities (Dyar et al., 2015; Parker, 2015). As introduced in the section about resource theory, these bisexual women are more vulnerable to being "outed" or having their sexual orientation revealed without their consent. This is a tactic of emotional abuse used to gain power over bisexual women (Brown, 2008).

Although coming out with oppressed sexual orientations is difficult, this disclosure can result in lower levels of psychological distress and higher self-esteem (Morris et al., 2001; Jordan & Deluty, 1998); however, it fails to be linked to lowering levels of IPV (Balsam & Szymanski,

2016; 2005; Frost & Meyer, 2009). Even when bisexual women do disclose their sexual orientation, they reap less benefits that usually come with revealing a stigmatized identity (Pachankis, 2007). This continues to place them at a disadvantaged position in their relationships, which is why their experiences of minority stress provide an important context to studying power in their same-gender relationships.

Rationale

Existing research has emphasized the importance of the role gender plays in promoting power imbalances that result in IPV (Blanc, 2001; Wagers, 2015). Traditionally, this has manifested in exclusively focusing on heterosexual relationships. In particular, the diverging roles of men and women have been considered when studying why these power imbalances occur. Preliminary research in this topic has been conducted in Africa. In preliminary studies, the primary focus was how power impacts women's abilities to negotiate use of contraceptives and safer sex practices (Dunkle et al., 2004; Pulerwitz et al., 2000). The overall finding was that women who have less power in their relationships are less likely to have safe sex and are more likely to experience IPV (Dunkle et al., 2004; Jewkes et al., 2010). Another prominent focus in this research has been how women's societal power (level of education, income, etc.) affects their experiences of IPV, with results indicating that women are essentially vulnerable regardless of whether they have high levels or low levels of societal power (see Choi & Ting, 2008; Conroy, 2014; Gibbs et al., 2018; Jewkes et al., 2010). To a much lesser extent, research has also considered the interplay of power and IPV in lesbian couples. The main finding from these foundational studies is that power does indeed have a large role in the manifestation of IPV (McClennen et al., 2002; Renzetti, 1992). While this research provides a starting point in understanding power and IPV, the experiences of bisexual women have largely been ignored. It

should never be assumed that research can simply be translated to this population, as bisexual women are a distinct group from heterosexual and lesbian women. This proposed study will allow for the nuances of bisexual women's experiences to be considered, rather than simply comparing them to other women of different sexual orientations.

In addition to experiencing poorer mental health outcomes than their counterparts (Chan et al., 2020; Colledge et al., 2015; Prell & Traeen, 2018; Smalley et al., 2015), bisexual women are a particularly distinct group due to the fact that they experience binegativity, which is the oppression they endure for being bisexual (Bennett, 1992). Binegativity often includes the full erasure of their identities from being excluded from both queer and heterosexual communities, as well as the violence perpetrated against bisexual people (Klesse, 2011). Often, binegativity is cultivated from a deep mistrust of bisexual people, largely due to the myths that surround this sexuality, such as the stereotype that bisexuality is only a transitionary phase (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; DeCapua, 2017; Dodge et al., 2016; Johnson & Grove, 2017; Klesse, 2011; Matsick & Rubin, 2018; Messinger, 2012). Oftentimes, bisexual people struggle with feeling a sense of community that might otherwise help them (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Bradford, 2004; Molina et al., 2015), because both heterosexual and queer people perpetrate binegativity against them (Bradford, 2007; Erickson-Schroth & Michell, 2009; Roberts et al., 2015; Van et al., 2019).

This binegativity also has detrimental effects on how bisexual women experience minority stress. Indeed, bisexual women endure bispecific-stigma in addition to regular minority stress, which results in them having poorer overall health and poorer physical health (Craney et al., 2018; Dyar & London, 2018; Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Mereish et al., 2017; Watson et al., 2018). Bispecific-stigma is a significant predictor of the IPV outcomes of verbal coercion and sexual violence (Flanders et al., 2020; Flanders et al., 2019). Future research would benefit from

considering how bispecific-stigma specifically manifests in bisexual women's same-gender relationships. In their relationships with women, specifically, bisexual women are often viewed as being conduits for diseases (Flanders et al., 2017) and are also perceived as preferring men (Mastick & Rubin, 2018). Thus, while men are still likely the main perpetrators of IPV against bisexual women, it remains important to consider their relationships with other women, who have also been found to frequently promote binegativity. IPV likely looks different in relationships with women, however, as women victims of same-gender violence often report higher rates of psychological IPV than physical or sexual IPV (Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, 2017).

Taken together, there exists a gap in the literature regarding how power manifests in bisexual women's same-gender relationships in a way that promotes IPV. It is known that bisexual women experience bispecific minority stress perpetrated by women, but not how this might promote power imbalances in these relationships. The current study aimed to remedy this gap by allowing bisexual women to contextualize their experiences through a concept mapping project. An important goal of this project was to engage bisexual women in generating knowledge regarding their specific experiences. As a highly minoritized group, it is especially imperative to allow them a stake in the work done to improve their lives.

Research Questions

I conducted a concept mapping (CM) study to explore power imbalances in bisexual women's same-gender relationships. CM is a social science research method that values participatory and inclusive collaborations with the targeted population (Kane & Trochim, 2009). I chose this study design to engage bisexual women in conceptualizing power imbalances in their same-gender relationships and offer them an opportunity to be involved in all stages of the

research process. CM is comprised of three steps: 1) brainstorming, 2) sorting and rating, and 3) interpretation sessions. The guiding research questions for this study were as follows:

1.) How do bisexual women conceptualize power imbalances in their same-gender relationships?

2.) What are the impacts of these power imbalances in bisexual women's same-gender relationships, particularly as it pertains to IPV?

Summary

Bisexual women are twice as likely to experience intimate partner violence as exclusively heterosexual women (Walters et al., 2013). They are also more vulnerable for experiencing physical injury and PTSD, among other concerning health outcomes (Barrett & Pierre, 2013; Coston, 2021, Dyar et al., 2020; Martin-Storey & Fromme, 2021; Messinger, 2011). Research among heterosexual and lesbian couples has identified power as a key motivator in the manifestation of IPV (McKenry et al., 2006; McClennen et al., 2002). However, to date, research has yet to conceptualize how power imbalances specifically impact IPV in bisexual women's same-gender relationships. The current research study seeks to rectify this gap by assessing how power imbalances occur in these intimate relationships, specifically as it relates to the relational outcome of IPV. This foundational knowledge will aid in achieving a deeper understanding of bisexual women's same-gender relationships, which will allow for them to receive more tailored and adept clinical care. While Chapter 1 introduced the theoretical background of the problem to be addressed in this dissertation, Chapter 2 will synthesize relevant literature to further contextualize the lives and relationships of bisexual women, with a particular emphasis on the implications for power imbalances in their same-gender relationships.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this review of the literature, I aim to lay the groundwork for my research that explores how power manifests in bisexual women's same-gender relationships, as it relates to IPV specifically. First, I will outline the definitions of key terms (IPV, power, bisexuality) to clarify the scope of the identified topic. Afterwards, I will synthesize the available literature on relationship power and bisexual women's specific experiences of IPV and discrimination to provide a foundation for contextualizing bisexual women's lived experiences. To truly understand the potence of power, we must begin by exploring how IPV literature has conceptualized power and IPV in heterosexual and lesbian couples. This will offer an initial framework for how to consider the relationship between power and IPV within the bisexual community, one that will be strengthened by synthesizing literature regarding the lived experiences of bisexual women and attempt to understand the specific social stressors that they endure. Finally, we consider how these social stressors impact and promote their experiences of IPV. While this thorough synthesis of the literature lays the foundation for further studies of IPV in bisexual women's same-gender relationships, it also illustrates the gap in the literature that this dissertation will address -- how power imbalances impact bisexual women's IPV experiences.

Definition of Independent Variables and Social Context

Intimate Partner Violence

IPV consists of a spectrum of abusive behaviors enacted against a current or former intimate partner. It manifests through actions or threats of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse (Saltzman et al., 1999; Wolfe et al., 2001). More recently, the definition of IPV has been expanded to include stalking and coercive behaviors, such as reproductive coercion (Smith et al.,

2017). This dissertation considers the full range of behaviors that encompass IPV, while also anticipating that certain forms will be more salient regarding bisexual women's same-gender relationships.

In the United States, one in three women have experienced physical or sexual IPV across their lifetime (Smith et al., 2017). This number rises to nearly half of American women when psychological aggression, such as emotional abuse, is considered. While all genders are susceptible to experiencing IPV, research suggests that women and girls endure more severe acts of violence against them than those who identify as men or boys (O'Keefe, 2005; Smith et al., 2017). In particular, not only do bisexual women have significantly higher prevalence rates of IPV than their lesbian or heterosexual counterparts, but they also experience poorer mental and physical outcomes as a result of IPV (Walters et al., 2013).

Power

Power is paramount in explaining the systems that enable IPV to occur; however, power is also a rather polarizing concept that has escaped a stable definition in the IPV literature (Wagers, 2015). According to Pulerwitz and colleagues (2000), who are responsible for the development of a widely implemented measure of relationship power for heterosexual couples, power expands beyond individual factors. Rather, it refers to one partner exhibiting greater control over decision-making than the other, one partner possessing more control over their partner's behaviors, and/or one partner intentionally violating the other's wishes and boundaries. A primary component of this literature review will be to explore the conceptualization of power over the years by drawing in research on heterosexual and lesbian couples.

Bisexuality

Bisexual people account for approximately one half of the lesbian, gay, bisexual,

transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community (Gates, 2011; Parker, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2013). It is estimated that 5.5 percent of people in the United States identify as bisexual, making it the largest demographic of LGBTQ people (Copen et al., 2016). Of those who identify as bisexual, 73 percent are women (Parker, 2015). Research has used a multitude of definitions to conceptualize bisexuality, each with crucial implications for how research is conducted, and the results yielded from this research (Flanders et al., 2017). Traditionally, bisexuality was identified as having romantic or sexual attraction to both men and women (Klesse, 2011). More recently, bisexuality has been defined as existing beyond binary views of gender, indicating that bisexual people can be romantically or sexually attracted to two or more genders (Flanders et al., 2017; Mereish et al., 2017). However, bisexuality is not contingent on having had romantic relationships with people of various genders (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Flanders et al. 2017), nor must bisexual people have equal degrees of attraction to every gender (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Flanders et al., 2017; Galupo et al., 2017). It is crucial to note that there are different health outcomes for women who are classified as bisexual based on their identity versus those classified as bisexual based on their sexual behaviors (Bauer & Jairam, 2008; Bauer & Brennan, 2013). For the purpose of this dissertation, we focused on bisexual-identified women who have had intimate relationships with other women, in order to learn about these same-gender relationships. Furthermore, these behaviorally bisexual people are at the highest risk for experiencing IPV, compared to bisexual people who exclusively have sex with men or who have never had sex (Dyar et al., 2020; Messinger, 2011).

Conceptualizing Power

Research on Heterosexual Couples

Power dynamics are a primary component of relationships, especially when people strive

to influence their partner in order to achieve a goal or when people are dependent on their partner to fulfill basic needs (Kelley et al., 2003). In particular, gender-based power imbalances are a crucial underlying factor in explaining the occurrence of IPV (Blanc, 2001; Wagers, 2015). As such, the foundational research on power imbalances related to IPV has been conducted on heterosexual couples, with the primary consideration being how gender impacts the traditional roles of men as perpetrators and women as victims. While power imbalances are often assumed between couples, it remains important to measure these imbalances in order to draw conclusions about their implications (Blanc, 2001). In the violence field, the most prevalent measurement of power imbalances is the Sexual Relationship Partner Scale (SRPS). The SRPS was designed to measure how power in relationships impact the decision-making processes related to sexual behaviors (i.e., safe sex negotiations; Pulerwitz et al., 2000). Essentially, low scores on the scale indicated greater power imbalances and were associated with more instances of IPV and forced sex. It was originally developed for ethnic minority women who contracted HIV/AIDS in their heterosexual relationships. Power imbalances within these relationships were hypothesized to deter women from negotiating safe-sex practices with their men partners (Pulerwitz et al., 2000). The measure was also shown to be significantly correlated with physical and sexual IPV, education, and condom use (Pulerwitz et al., 2000).

Much of the research on power imbalances in heterosexual relationships has been conducted in Africa. Using the SRPS developed by Pulerwitz, Dunkle and colleagues (2004) measured relationship power in South Africa as it related to women's negotiation for using contraceptives. When men scored high for using dominance and control, the women in relationships with them were more likely to be infected with HIV. Overall, women who had more controlling partners were less likely to have used condoms (Dunkle et al., 2004). These

findings are echoed in other studies located in Africa. HIV+ South African women reported higher relationship inequity and were also more likely to have experienced IPV (Jewkes et al., 2010).

Indeed, power and IPV are intrinsically related within these contexts. In sub-Saharan Africa, IPV is less likely to occur when a household supports egalitarian decision-making processes (Choi & Ting, 2008; Mann & Takyi, 2009; Uthman et al., 2009). In rural Malawi, women who are involved in men-dominated relationships are more likely to experience IPV than women in egalitarian relationships or women-dominated relationships (Conroy, 2014). However, in South Africa, it was found that women were also more likely to experience IPV if their household was women-dominated, especially if the women were expected to make decisions around contraceptives (Choi & Ting, 2008). This is perhaps supported by the theory that when women have more power within society, men feel threatened by this and use violence to assert power and control in an attempt to resist this shift in gender roles (Gelles, 1974; Jewkes, 2002; Jin et al., 2014). When families are men-dominated, this is associated with women's submission and makes them more vulnerable for experiencing IPV; meanwhile, when the household is women-dominated, men will regain their perceived lost power through violence (Choi & Ting, 2008).

Another explanation for the occurrence of violence is the idea that gender roles support men's right to access power and control by abusing their wives (Jewkes, 2002). Resource theory is particularly relevant here. Namely, women who have less resources are financially dependent on their men partners, which leaves them more vulnerable to physical IPV and power imbalances related to negotiating safe sex (Foa & Foa, 1980). In sub-Saharan Africa, pathways explaining the link between IPV and power imbalances involve economic resources, gender roles, and male

dominance (Choi & Ting, 2008). Male dominance is an underlying factor that leads to IPV due to women's inherent submission to men. In a study in South Africa, there was increased physical IPV when women had lower occupational status than their partner and had no monetary income, indicating that economic dependence increases the risk for physical IPV (Choi & Ting, 2008). However, in Malawi, women who possessed economic power were still not protected against sexual IPV. In Nigeria, women who earned more than their husbands were more vulnerable to experiencing physical IPV than women who earned the same amount as their husbands (Antai, 2011). Women in lower socioeconomic occupations also had increased risk for physical IPV (Antai, 2011). Therefore, there is much nuance regarding the role of economic status in IPV.

In South African societies, women who have more social status and education than their husbands are at risk for increased IPV (Jewkes et al., 2010). When both partners have higher education, they hold more gender equitable attitudes, which seemingly limits controlling behaviors and thereby IPV (Gibbs et al., 2018). Furthermore, Choi and Ting (2008) found that women having lower education than their partners did not increase their risk for experiencing IPV. In a study in Malawi, however, a higher level of education served as a protective factor against physical IPV, because women were able to negotiate more power in their relationships (Conroy, 2014). The income and education level of the women's partners had limited to no influence on whether they perpetrated IPV. However, in Nigeria, more women reported physical IPV when their male partner had secondary or higher education (Antai, 2011).

There are other studies that have emerged from across the globe regarding power imbalances and IPV. A study conducted in Turkey found that women with higher education and income levels had more relationship power, which limited their experiences of IPV (Erkal et al., 2021). In contrast, a study conducted in India failed to find a correlation between IPV and a

women's education and income (Jin et al., 2014). Meanwhile, in Haiti, women who did not complete their primary school education reported higher levels of sexual IPV than women who were entirely uneducated; however, women who did complete a primary school education had no differences from entirely uneducated women (Gage & Hutchinson, 2006). Women in this sample also experienced more IPV when their households were men dominated compared to when the household was women dominated or egalitarian.

Research on power imbalances and IPV have also occurred in the Western context. Using Pulerwitz's scale, it was found that girls with more control over their sexual relationships were less likely to experience IPV (Teitelman et al., 2008). Condom use is commonly assessed using this scale as a proxy for power within a relationship (Bralock & Koniack-Griffen, 2007; Tschann et al, 2002). In an African American sample of adolescents, participants reported high levels of power imbalances in their relationships; however, the frequency of condom use was not associated with relationship power (Bralock & Koniack-Griffen, 2007). Adolescents who had more emotional intimacy power, meaning they report less emotional involvement in the relationship, were more likely to have their preferences related to condom use followed (Tschann et al, 2002). A possible explanation for these findings is that adolescent girls who date older partners are vulnerable to experiencing low power in these relationships, and thereby, they are less likely to negotiate for safer sex (Teitelman et al., 2011). However, Volpe and colleagues (2013) found no evidence that a difference in partners' ages was related to low relationship power.

As for adults, women who had high levels of relationship power reported using condoms more often than those who reported low levels of relationship power (Pulerwitz et al., 2002). Women who reported lower levels of relationship power also experienced higher rates of

psychological and physical IPV (Buelna et al., 2009). Women who had lower levels of sexual relationship power were also more likely to have had a STI. This study found that sexual relationship power mediated the relationship between STIs and IPV (Buelna et al., 2009). IPV is further linked to power, because dissatisfaction in power dynamics has been shown to be a primary predictor of IPV (Kaura & Allen, 2004).

Similar to studies in South Africa, research in the Western context suggests that education and income have crucial implications for relationship power. Indeed, women with more education and higher income generally have more power in their intimate relationships (Martin-Lanas et al, 2019; Pulerwitz et al., 2002). However, contention occurs when the men partners desire for their distinguished women partners to stay home with the children (Willie et al., 2020). Also similar to those South African studies, there have been contradictory findings regarding the influence of household dynamics on power. It has been found that American families that are men dominated have the highest rates of conflict, whereas egalitarian families have the lowest rates of conflict (Coleman & Straus, 1986). Couples with more conflict also report more IPV (Coleman & Straus, 1986). However, in a study that encompassed 32 countries, including South African nations and the United States, women dominance was more closely related to IPV than men dominance (Straus, 2008). Essentially, the dominant partner uses IPV to maintain their position, while the subordinate partner uses IPV to change the power structure. This is the perhaps why studies find such varying results.

From the perspective of the perpetrator, men with lower baseline relationship power were more likely to display greater aggression during conflict in an attempt to regain power over their partner and to reestablish their masculinity (Overall, Hammond et al., 2016). Another study of male perpetrators found that power and control mediate the association between trauma exposure

and emotional abuse, but not physical abuse (Maldonado & Murphy, 2021). However, this is perhaps in contrast to the finding that men who perpetrate physical abuse have an elevated desire to exert power and control (Zavala & Melander, 2019).

As indicated by the contradictory results reported in this section, it is imperative to consider the influence of societal contexts on how power manifests to impact IPV. Overall, however, these results seemingly indicate that women are potentially vulnerable to power imbalances regardless of education, status, or income. Male perpetrators either use IPV to reaffirm their power or to regain their power, indicating that women are continuously at risk for experiencing IPV (Straus, 2008).

Power and Control Wheel

Throughout the existent literature, the power and control wheel has been used as a tool to understand the function of power within abusive relationships. Developed in 1982, the power and control wheel was originally used as a conceptual tool for identifying the abusive behaviors utilized by men against women in heterosexual relationships (Pence & Paymer, 1993). The wheel was developed by women-identified survivors of IPV with the purpose of describing to judges and prosecutors the abusive tactors used by their partners. These survivors aimed to elucidate the everyday occurrences of abuse that served to be reinforced by larger instances of physical and sexual IPV. Since then, the purpose of this tool has been to help survivors of IPV to identify their perpetrators' tactics, and as such, support survivors in seeking help (Pence & Palmer, 1993). The wheel includes the following eight themes: intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, minimizing/denying/blaming victim for abuse, using children to exert control, power derived from male privilege, economic abuse, and coercion tactics. The perpetrator's desire to exert power and control over their victims is found at the center of the wheel. Indeed, power and

control are seen as the primary motivators of abuse in this model. Physical and sexual violence are located outside of the wheel, because the threat of these occurrences helps to reinforce control tactics. However, it should be noted that sexual and violence need not occur for a partner to be abusive (Pence & Palmer, 1993).

In 1995, the wheel was modified by the Southern Arizona Task Force on Domestic Violence to represent experiences of the LGBTQ population. This adapted wheel included ideologies, such as heterosexism, binegativity, and homonegativity, that are central to the experiences of this community of survivors and serve to support their continued oppression (McClennen, 1999; Southern Arizona Task Force on Domestic Violence, 1995). These ideologies of binegativity and homonegativity are utilized to isolate and intimidate victims. For instance, these concepts belittle same-gender IPV as mutual fighting, and they also support the notion that same-gender survivors will not be believed if they disclose their IPV experiences (Roe & Jagodinsky, 1995). Furthermore, the modified wheel includes the action of outing, which refers to when a perpetrator threatens to reveal their same-gender partner's sexual orientation without their consent (Ristock & Timbang, 2005). The effects of outing include threatening people's employment or housing security, increasing their experiences of harassment, and restricting their access to LGBTQ communities (Ard & Makadon, 2011; Dank et al., 2014). In a sample of 184 gay men and lesbians, a quarter of the participants reported that themselves or their partners perpetrated the controlling behaviors represented on the wheel (Frankland & Brown, 2014).

The power and control wheel has been used in increasingly unique ways, such as to analyze tweets. In tweets from the #MaybeHeDoesntHitYou hashtag, McCauley and colleagues (2018) identified the occurrence of all eight spheres of abuse as represented by the power and

control wheel. They also identified the additional tactic of reproductive coercion, which is not yet on the wheel. The power and control wheel has also been used beyond the traditional framework of IPV by examining how men use mobile phones to perpetrate abuse (Havard & Lefevre, 2020) and by applying it to work-place bullying (Scott, 2018).

However, the power and control wheel is frequently criticized for not being empirically grounded. Indeed, the power and control wheel was never meant to be a universal description of abusive behaviors (Pope & Ferraro, 2006), which perhaps explains why certain studies have found that the wheel fails to translate to other populations (Julie Liu & Regehr, 2008; Rankine et al., 2017). Further critiques of the power and control wheel highlight that it is only relevant to individualistic societies (Kim, 2002; Rankine et al., 2017) and that it fails to represent the experiences of all women (Hughes, 2005). Despite the modifications for the LGBTQ community as previously discussed, it still is criticized for largely assuming that men are the only perpetrators of abuse, which minimizes the impacts of same-gender IPV (Chavis & Hill, 2008).

Research on Lesbian Couples

To a much lesser extent than heterosexual couples, research has considered how power imbalances impact IPV as experienced by lesbian couples. In a mixed method study of lesbian couples, Renzetti (1992) identified power as a primary contributing factor to lesbian IPV. Power in these relationships is defined by personal characteristics, feelings/patterns of interaction, status differentials, and conflict (Renzetti, 1992). Inspired by these findings, McClennen and colleagues (2002) developed a lesbian abuse scale to assess power imbalances in these relationships. The scale identified six primary factors of power: status differentials, internalized homophobia, fake illness, intergenerational transmission of violence, communication and social skills, and substance abuse (McClennen et al., 2002).

In a qualitative study focusing on lesbian experiences of IPV, Ristock (2003) found important implications for how power manifests in these relationships. First, women survivors of lesbian IPV reported that the abuse most often occurred in their first same-gender relationship. Their perpetrators often exploited their fears that they would be unable to find another partner, which caused them to remain in the abusive relationship. The women also discussed how their partners wielded power over them by constantly threatening to "out" them without their consent, particularly to people who might have harmful reactions to their sexual orientation. Interestingly in this study, the participants varied in whether their IPV experiences were bidirectional or whether there was a clear perpetrator and victim.

Research on lesbian IPV has also operated from the hypothesis that gender presentation has a large impact on victimization and perpetration. Indeed, Balsam and Szymanski (2016; 2005) found that women who were more feminine presenting had higher victimization rates of IPV, which may be explained by the research that indicates butch identities are more validated in the lesbian community (Zipkin, 1999). On the other hand, lesbians who are butch, or more masculine presenting, are more likely to perpetrate IPV (McKenry et al., 2006). However, other research suggests that butch identities are not sources of power in women's same-gender relationships (Kimball, 2001). This is largely because all women possess both masculine and feminine traits, which emerge in their relationship dynamics (Balsam & Szymanski, 2016, 2005; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Bailey et al., 1997). Thus, labeling gender presentation as a source of power in lesbian relationships is frequently contested despite being the prevailing hypothesis seen in the literature.

Centering Bisexuality In The Narrative

Thus far, we have reviewed the existing literature on power and IPV within the contexts

of heterosexual and lesbian couples. This has allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how power is conceptualized in IPV research. However, the impacts of power on violent relationships remains largely understudied as it relates to bisexual women, and especially in their same-gender relationships. As such, it is imperative that we narrow in on what is known about bisexual women and their experiences of IPV. To accomplish this, we must first understand the particular contexts that foster such high levels of IPV for bisexual women.

Previous research has on bisexual women has greatly suffered due to LGBTQ people being treated as a homogenous group (Barker et al., 2012; Barmea et al., 2018; Cox et al., 2013) and due to bisexual women being excluded from analysis all together (Przedworski et al., 2014). In a systematic literature review on IPV among bisexual people, Bermea and colleagues (2018) identified 36 articles that included bisexual women; however, only one article (Head & Milton, 2018) considered bisexual people as an exclusive group. A noted limitation across findings was their failure to differentiate between lesbians and bisexual women. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of bisexual women's IPV experiences, we must begin to address them as a group distinguishable from other sexual minority women (Barrett & Pierre, 2013, Turell et al. , 2012). Indeed, bisexual women experience higher rates of IPV and report poorer mental health outcomes than lesbians (Chan et al., 2020; Colledgeet al., 2015; Outlaw et al., 2023; Prell & Traeen, 2018; Smalley, Warren, & Barefoot, 2015), which further indicates that bisexual women are a distinct population with their own vulnerabilities and risk factors. A scoping review of 99 studies on sexual minority women found that bisexual women are consistently at the highest risk for physical, sexual, and psychological abuse (Porsch et al., 2022).

Lived Experiences of Bisexual Women

Binegativity, in particular, is a unique problem that affects bisexual people. This term is

used to describe the specific oppression that bisexual people endure due to their sexual orientation (Bennet, 1992), which includes violence against them and erasure of their identities (Klesse, 2011). Due to the Western ideals of binary sexuality, bisexuality is often erased, because women are strictly perceived as either heterosexual or as a lesbian (Bradford, 2004; Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009; Head, 2020; Ochs, 2011; Van et al., 2019). Regardless of the gender bisexual women are currently dating, their sexuality continues to be erased. When bisexual women are in relationships with men, they are considered heterosexual, while they are viewed as lesbians when they are in relationships with women (Deschamps, 2008; Hayfield et al., 2014; McLean, 2008).

This binegativity largely arises due to distrust of bisexual people, manifested in part by the myth that bisexuality is simply a transitionary phase rather than a valid sexuality (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; DeCapua, 2017; Dodge et al., 2016; Johnson & Grove, 2017; Klesse, 2011; Matsick & Rubin, 2018; Messinger, 2012). There is a perception that bisexual people will eventually choose a strict orientation as exclusively heterosexual or exclusively gay (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013). As such, bisexual people experience unique forms of minority stress due to the stigma and invalidation of their identities based on these cultural stereotypes (Flanders et al., 2019; Hartman-Linck, 2014, Klesse, 2011; Ochs, 2011).

Furthermore, both heterosexual and other sexual minority people can be perpetrators of binegativity (Bradford, 2004; Erickson-Schroth & Michell, 2009; Roberts et al., 2015; Van et al., 2019), further out casting bisexual people from society and leaving them without a strong community (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Bradford, 2004; Molina et al., 2015). Individuals who have been in relationships with bisexual people are particularly biased against them (Cox et al., 2013). This discrimination is often spurred by frustration aimed at bisexual people for the perception

that they refuse to claim a firm identity regarding their sexuality, as well as a fear that bisexual people will leave their partner for the opposite gender (Feinstein et al., 2014). Lesbian partners are prone to invalidating bisexual identities by labeling their same-gender relationships as experiments, while men partners may hold the perception that they can guide bisexual women to heterosexuality (Flanders et al., 2017). In their relationships with women, especially lesbians, bisexual women report being viewed as conduits for diseases, such as sexually transmitted infections (Flanders et al., 2017). The negative feelings that some lesbian women hold towards bisexual women is sometimes attributed to the Androcentric desire hypothesis, which claims that bisexual women are more sexually and romantically attracted to men than women. For example, using a mediation analysis, Matsick and Rubin (2018) found that lesbian women rated bisexual women as being more attracted to men than women, which accounted for negative feelings towards bisexual women. Although research has mostly focused on the perception of lesbians, a qualitative study found that both men and women partners were prone to feeling insecure about dating a bisexual woman due to her attraction to multiple genders (DeCapua, 2017). Bisexual women in this same study described a preference for dating women; however, they also reported that it was easier to date men to appease their families and society at large (DeCapua, 2017).

As such, bisexual people often report feeling ostracized, discriminated against, and entirely rejected by the LGBTQ community (McLean, 2008). Perhaps unsurprising then, bisexual women have lower levels of involvement in the LGBTQ community compared to lesbians and other sexual minority women (Feinstein et al., 2017; Prell & Traeen, 2018). Unlike their counterparts, bisexual women were found to use drugs more often when they were heavily involved in the LGBTQ community, which a meditation analysis suggested was due to feeling more perceived discrimination (Feinstein et al., 2017). However, this should not be considered a

universal finding, as Prell and Traeen (2018) found that involvement in the LGBTQ community was neither a protective nor adverse factor for bisexual people. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that bisexual women usually experience more discrimination from the heterosexual community than the LGBTQ community (Dodge et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2015). However, a recent qualitative study with bisexual adults challenged this claim, as the participants reported more discrimination from the LGBTQ community than the heterosexual community (Van et al., 2019). This discrepancy could be attributed to the qualitative study including the experiences of bisexual men, rather than only bisexual women. Overall, McLaren and Castillo (2020) found that bisexual women report fewer depressive symptoms when they perceive themselves as belonging to both the heterosexual and LGBTQ communities.

Furthermore, there exists the harmful assumption that bisexual women are complacent to heterosexual privilege and traitors to the LGBTQ community due to their attraction to men (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; McLaren & Castillo, 2020; Messinger, 2012). Lesbians, compared to gay men, report more beliefs that their bisexual partner will leave them in order to obtain the perceived social privileges of having a heterosexual partner (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Hayfield et al., 2014; Klesse, 2011; Rust, 1995). These negative perceptions by lesbians towards bisexual women can most notably be traced back to the development of the feminist movement. As this movement progressed, some lesbians felt hostile towards bisexual women, because they viewed them as betraying the cause by continuing to engage romantically and sexually with men (Israel & Mohr, 2004).

After enduring these negative perceptions, it is perhaps unsurprising that bisexual women experience more shame regarding their sexuality than lesbian women and more actively wish to hold a different sexual identity (Prell & Traeen, 2018). These experiences of binegativity result

in higher rates of internalized binegativity, which is then associated with bisexual women possessing more uncertainty over their sexual identity (Brewster & Moradi, 2010). This uncertainty leads bisexual women to resort to labeling themselves as lesbians or exclusively heterosexual (Dyar & London, 2018) and is related to greater symptoms of depression (Maimon et al, 2021). Even when bisexual women do accept their bisexual identities, they are less likely to disclose their sexual orientation than lesbians (Chan et al., 2020; Mohr et al., 2017; Pew Research Center, 2013; Prell & Traeen, 2018). Bisexual women who are more open about their bisexuality have better mental health outcomes than those who conceal their identities (Morris et al., 2001). Indeed, bisexual women who conceal their identities are less likely to be satisfied with life and are more likely to report symptoms of depression (Prell & Traeen, 2018), as well as overall poorer mental well-being (Chan et al., 2020). There are notable advantages to coming out as bisexual, such as better mental health, improved relationships, and more critical social consciousness (Brownfield et al., 2018).

Bisexual-Specific Minority Stress and IPV

Sexual minority people experience IPV and adverse health outcomes due to the presence of minority stress (Edwards, Sylaska, & Neal, 2015). For instance, identity concealment and internalized homonegativity, both heavily associated with this theory, are associated with IPV perpetration (Edwards & Sylaska 2013). As for victimization, sexual minority women who anticipate experiencing discrimination for their sexual orientation report more IPV than those without this anticipation (Carvalho et al., 2011). It has also been found that discrimination has an indirect effect between bisexual identity and experiencing more IPV (Martin-Storey & Fromme, 2021). According to Bostwick and colleagues (2014), bisexual people experience less overt discrimination due to their sexual orientation than other sexual minority individuals. Aligning

with the minority stress theory, this should result in bisexual people reporting better mental health, yet bisexual people often report worse mental health than their other sexual minority counterparts. Bisexual-specific stigma is perhaps the explanation behind bisexual people still experiencing poorer health outcomes (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Ross et al, 2010).

In addition to regular minority stress, occurrences of bisexual-specific minority stress is associated with poorer overall health, poorer physical health, increased anxiety and depression, suicidality, and sexual risk behavior (Craney et al., 2018; Dyar & London, 2018; Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Mereish et al., 2017; Watson et al., 2018). These experiences of bispecific minority stress are associated with negative identity valence (meaning an individual has a negative perception of their own identity), which is associated with poor mental health outcomes (Dyar & London, 2018; la Roi et al., 2019). However, locational context is important when considering these findings, as a study of bisexual people in Ontario, Canada found contrary results. There was no association between binegativity and anxiety (MacLeod et al., 2015).

Regarding IPV specifically, perpetrators of IPV are more likely to be abusive towards their bisexual partners, if they possess any ideas rooted in binegativity (Turell et al., 2018). In particular, bisexual stigma is a significant predictor of the IPV outcomes of sexual violence and verbal coercion (Flanders et al., 2020; Flanders et al., 2019). This might help in explaining why bisexual women report such higher rates of sexual violence than lesbian women. Due to their plurisexuality, bisexual women are often stereotyped as hypersexual by perpetrators who assume this identity translates to automatic consent of multiple sexual partners (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009; Flanders et al., 2019; Flanders et al., 2017). This perception is linked to bisexual women experiencing sexual violence, because perpetrators assume their consent to sex (Flanders et al., 2017; Van et al., 2019). Related to this occurrence is

the pressure bisexual people also experience to prove their sexual identities via performing unwanted sexual acts (Barker et al., 2012; Boyer & Galupo, 2015; Flanders et al., 2017; Johnson & Grove, 2017). There are also persistent stereotypes that bisexual people are incapable of monogamy and thereby prone to infidelity, which spurs partner jealousy (Armstrong & Reissing, 2014; Dyar et al., 2020; Friedman et al., 2014). and leaves bisexual women vulnerable to experiencing IPV (Dyar et al., 2020; Hall & Girod, 2018).

Internalized homonegativity (which refers to the internalization of negative attitudes regarding one's sexual orientation) and heterosexism (which refers to the ideology that heterosexuality is the norm) also play a crucial role in understanding the sexual violence experienced by bisexual women. Bisexual women who experience more anti-bisexual prejudice report greater internalized heterosexism, leaving them vulnerable to experiencing more verbal sexual coercion (Salim et al., 2020). As for internalized homonegativity, bisexual people who experience anti-bisexual stigma report more internalized homonegativity and are also more likely to experience verbal sexual coercion (López & Yeater, 2021). Indeed, internalized homonegativity has been found to result in more verbal sexual coercion, but not sexual assault (Murchison et al., 2017). Salim and colleagues (2020) identified internalized homonegativity as a partial mediator for the positive relationship between verbal social coercion and anti-bisexual discrimination.

Furthermore, bisexual women who receive more negative social reactions regarding their sexual orientations are at more risk for sexual coercion (Kuyper & Vanwesenbeeck, 2011). Across studies, most bisexual people contribute their sexual assault and coercion experiences to their partner's binegativity (Van et al., 2019; Flanders, Anderson, & Tarasoff, 2020; Watson et al., 2021). Compared to lesbian women, bisexual women also receive more negative reactions

regarding their sexual assault, which is a larger determent in their recovery than it is for heterosexual women (Sigurvinsdottir & Ullman, 2015). In college environments, bisexual women are less likely to perceive their institution's response to sexual violence as helpful and are also less likely to equate college with community than heterosexual women (Seabrook et al., 2018). Indeed, a sense of community was a moderator for the relationship between sexuality and student response to sexual violence, indicating that bisexual women who felt less community also held less favorable perceptions (Seabrook et al., 2018). Overall, sexual violence experiences impact how bisexual people perceive and understand their sexual orientation by causing them to question their identity and deterring them from disclosing their bisexuality (Watson et al., 2021).

Bisexual people are often perceived as disloyal, confused, and untrustworthy, which deters people who hold these binegative attitudes from dating them (Armstrong & Reissing, 2014). Among many binegative attitudes, bisexual women report experiencing bisexual erasure, hypersexualization, and social marginalization (Flanders et al., 2019). When bisexual women are out about their identity, this has the potential to either harm or help them. While Mohr and colleagues (2017) found that the well-being of bisexual people is supported by being out about their bisexual identity to family members, other studies contest these results. López and Yeater (2021) found the opposite to be true, as their findings suggest that being out to family and friends creates more experiences of anti-bisexual stigma. Perhaps due to the bisexual-specific minority stressors previously discussed, greater degrees of outness are related to negative outcomes for bisexual people, but not their gay and lesbian counterparts (Feinstein et al., 2019). However, a study that included both lesbian and bisexual women survivors of sexual IPV found that their assault happened after disclosing their sexual orientation in over half their experiences. (Hequembourg et al., 2013). Further indicating the potential dangers of outness is the positive

association between outness and anti-bisexual discrimination, which then causes more experiences of sexual violence (Watson et al., 2022). A potential positive of outness, however, is that it promotes more rape acknowledgement, which means that an individual identifies their rape as sexual assault rather than minimizing it (Anderson et al., 2021).

Coping Mechanisms

Research has, albeit slowly, begun to take a strength-based approach to study microaffirmations that validate bisexual people. These microaffirmations include acceptance, social support, and emotional support, as well as recognition of bisexuality and binegativity (Flanders et al., 2019). Bisexual people have also identified identity-specific media consumption and role models as a coping mechanism. In other words, they benefit from seeing queer and bisexual representation present in media, history, or their personal lives (Brownfield et al., 2018; Dunlop et al., 2021; Van et al., 2019). The concept of resilience has also emerged as a protective factor against anti-bisexual discrimination (Scandurra et al., 2020; Van, Mereish et al., 2019; Watson et al., 2018). Overall, then, it is crucial that possessing a bisexual identity is not seen as a determent to people. Society might support binegative ideas, but the actual sexual orientation of bisexuality should never be considered inherently harmful.

Importantly, in a scoping review analyzing the risk and protective factors that shape bisexual people's vulnerability to IPV (Corey et al., 2022), only one study included a protective factor (Head & Milton, 2014). According to Head and Milton (2014), participants identified the insight gained from IPV in previous relationships as having a potentially protective effect against future IPV. With this one exception, there is a dearth in understanding of protective factors against IPV that are specific to bisexual people. Future research should address this prevalent gap in the literature.

Bisexual Women's Same-Gender IPV Experiences

While research suggests that LGBTQ individuals report more IPV than their heterosexual peers, bisexual people are particularly vulnerable to victimization due to their elevated experiences of discrimination (Martin-Storey & Fromme, 2016). Overall, bisexual people have higher risk rates of experiencing IPV compared to other LGBTQ individuals (Coston, 2021; Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2016; Martin-Story & Fromme, 2016; McCauley et al., 2015; Whitton et al, 2016). Using a national sample of women who report sex with men and women, Coston (2021) found that bisexual women were three to almost seven times more likely to experience sexual IPV, psychological IPV, and stalking than their heterosexual or lesbian peers. Compared to other LGBTQ people bisexual women are twice as likely to experience IPV (Barrett & Pierre, 2013). These findings are echoed by other literature that has reported bisexual women as particularly vulnerable to experiencing stalking, physical IPV, sexual IPV, and psychological IPV than heterosexual or lesbian women (Chen et al., 2020; Whitfield et al., 2021). Bisexual women are particularly at risk for experiencing sexual IPV (Edwards, 2015; Olsen et al., 2015). However, with same-gender partners, women endure higher rates of psychological IPV than physical or sexual IPV (Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, 2017). According to Hellemans and colleagues (2015), psychological IPV may have deleterious effects on women that are comparable to or exceed physical IPV. Once again, bisexual people experience particularly concerning outcomes from IPV. One in four bisexual people, especially bisexual women, experience severe consequences from IPV, such as physical injuries, at higher rates than gay men or lesbian women (Barrett & Pierre, 2013).

While literature has identified men as the primary preparators of IPV against bisexual women (Coston, 2021; Messinger, 2011; Turrell, Brown, & Herrmann, 2018), the importance of

contextualizing IPV in their same-gender relationships should never be underestimated. For instance, Graham and colleagues (2019) found that women in same-gender relationships were more likely to report injury victimization than women in mixed-gender relationships. Indeed, IPV victimization was highest for women in same-gender relationships. In relation to this finding, bisexual women are more likely to require healthcare needs after the occurrence of IPV, regardless of their perpetrator's gender (Coston, 2020). Evidence also suggests that adolescent victims of same-gender IPV are at risk for violent delinquency, binge drinking, and low academic achievement (Edwards, 2015; Gehring & Vaske, 2017). Furthermore, instances of same-gender IPV are most likely underreported. Women in same-gender relationships often hesitate to report IPV for fear of perpetrating negative stereotypes regarding these relationships (McDonald, 2012). Additionally, societal stereotypes also prevent these women from reporting IPV, because same-gender violence is viewed as innocuous or nonexistent (Gillum & DiFulvio, 2012; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008). Despite society's refusal to acknowledge same-gender IPV, this is a public health crisis with detrimental effects to victims. Indeed, people who experience same-gender IPV report more depressive symptoms than those who have not experienced IPV and more violent delinquency than those who report mixed-gender IPV (Gehring & Vaske, 2017).

In women's same-gender relationships, IPV is often found to be bidirectional, meaning that both partners perpetrate violence against each other (Edwards et al., 2015; Li, Cao, Zhou, & Mills-Koonce, 2021; Messinger et al., 2021; Whitton, Dyar, Mustanski, & Newcomb, 2019). The primary explanation presented by research for this happening is that same-gender partners have comparable power (Rolle et al., 2018). They are regarded, typically, as being equal in their social status and physical strength. Hence, the abused partner will retaliate against the perpetrator

(Rolle et al., 2018). In particular, women who experience psychological IPV might then use physical IPV to maintain balance in their relationship (Milletich et al., 2014). However, Porsch and colleagues (2022) point to the possibility that bidirectionally is overestimated in same-gender relationships, especially as a large stereotype of same-gender IPV is that it is mostly bidirectional (Brown & Groscup, 2009). According to Messinger (2018), more than half of same-gender IPV is bidirectional, which Porsch and colleagues (2022) contextualize as being similar to the rates found in heterosexual couples (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2013)

A form of IPV distinctive to same-gender relationships is identity abuse. Identity abuse against LGBTQ people leverages oppressive systems against them, such as heterosexism, to cause harm (Ard & Makadon, 2011; West, 2012). Examples of identity abuse include outing someone's sexual orientation, limiting their access to the larger LGBTQ community, and belittling their sexual orientation (Ard & Makadon, 2011; Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Bornstein et al, 2006; Guadalupe-Diaz & Anthony, 2017; West, 2012; Woulfe & Goodman, 2021). Emerging evidence suggests that bisexual women experience identity abuse at rates two times higher than lesbian women (Woulfe & Goodman, 2021). This is especially concerning, considering the effects of identity abuse on PTSD and depressive symptoms is comparable to the effects that physical abuse has on these outcomes (Woulfe & Goodman, 2020). Positively, affirmative identity may act as buffer for the effects that identity abuse has on depression and PTSD symptoms (Woulfe & Goodman, 2020).

The concept of fusion has received much attention as a potential risk factor for women in same-gender relationships (Causby et al., 1995; Milletich et al., 2014). Fusion refers to the loss of boundaries that occur in a relationship due to extreme closeness, which results in tension, anxiety, and a loss of individuality (Causby et al., 2014; Milletichet al, 2014). According to

Milletich and colleagues (2014), higher levels of fusion were indeed a significant risk factor for IPV. In other words, women will perpetrate physical IPV against a same-gender partner that they deem too emotionally independent or dependent to rebalance the power in the relationship. It is important to note that fusion has been primarily studied in lesbian couples; however, it might have implications for women's same-gender relationships more broadly. In addition to fusion, internalized homonegativity is another risk factor associated with IPV in women's same-gender relationships (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2019; Decker et al., 2018; Kimmes et al., 2019; Renzetti, 1988). In their same-gender relationships, fusion and internalized homonegativity were found to be the significant risk markers for perpetrating physical IPV, although not victimization (Kimmes et al., 2019). Perpetrators use internalized homonegativity to justify their violence, while victims might feel they deserve the abuse as a consequence of being in a same-gender relationship (Balsam, 2001). Taken together, fusion acts as a potential mediator between IPV and internalized homonegativity (Lewis et al., 2014; Milletich et al., 2014). Furthermore, internalized homonegativity influences relationship quality, which is mediated by psychological IPV (Li et al., 2019). Other primary risk factors for IPV in same-gender relationships are victimization occurring in peer networks, witnessing IPV as a child, and physical and mental health problems (Edwards et al., 2015). As for perpetration, women are more likely to physically and psychologically abuse their same-gender partners when they have endured stigma and discrimination, alcohol use, or anxiety and depressive symptoms (Do et al, 2021).

Within the literature that focuses on power and IPV in heterosexual relationships, the effects of women's societal status if often considered. While not as developed, research has begun to consider the influence of societal status as held by bisexual women and other LGBTQ people. It has been found that the more power a bisexual woman has (such as high income and

educational attainment), the more likely she is to report IPV victimization (Coston, 2021). Furthermore, LGB people with lower levels of education or physical and mental limitations are more susceptible to experiencing IPV (Barrett & Pierre, 2013).

As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, both heterosexual and LGBTQ communities can be perpetrators of binegativity. Thus, bisexual people endure much isolation, which promotes the continuation of IPV by restricting their access to support systems and resources (Bernard, 2019; Bradford, 2004; Flanders et al, 2017; Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009; Head. 2020; Roberts et al, 2015). Perpetrators of same-gender IPV also manipulate their partners who fear coming out by discouraging them from seeking community support or support in family and friends, in addition to deterring them from attending counseling, and reaching out to the police (Ard & Makadon, 2011). Further isolation occurs, because survivors of same-gender IPV are often reluctant to reveal their abuse to the LGBTQ community in fear of being rejected (Turrell & Herrmann, 2008). The loss of this community would be highly detrimental to many LGBTQ individuals, as the community becomes akin to family for those mistreated by their friends and biological family (Bornstein et al., 2006; Walters, 2011).

With all this information considered, the crucial nature of continuing to center bisexual women in our research is evident. There is a burgeoning understanding of how power plays a key role in women's same-gender IPV experiences, as seen by the research on fusion. However, there remains a vital need to contextualize power imbalances in these relationships and ensure that the focus in on bisexual women rather than only lesbian women.

Clinical Implications For Existing And Future Research

After reviewing this literature, it is crucial to identify the prevailing clinical implications for working with bisexual women, particularly those who have experienced same-gender IPV. A

continuous determent to treating these women is that health care providers are not always knowledgeable about same-gender relationships. Indeed, heterosexism is a prevalent issue for bisexual women, because health care providers often assume their intimate partners are only men (Flanders et al., 2017). Consequently, bisexual women might feel uncomfortable communicating with their providers that their perpetrator was a woman, which further serves to silence their specific experiences. As such, it is imperative to tailor interventions to bisexual people, especially because their IPV experiences are not smoothly translated to heterosexual IPV paradigms (Head, 2020). However, for an effective intervention, Longobardi and colleagues (2017) suggest that is crucial to integrate risk factors commonly endured by sexual minority people with what is known about predictive risk factors for IPV in heterosexual couples. By integrating the majority framework of IPV with the specific experiences of sexual minority people, this allows for a holistic approach to providing care to this population.

In order to achieve a more welcoming environment for bisexual women, and the LGBTQ population more broadly, service providers recommend hiring more diverse staff that will help in creating policy changes and procedures (Furman et al., 2017). This would help to extinguish the heterosexist values that institutional barriers, such as training procedures and service provision, succeed in upholding (Simpson & Helfrich, 2007). For bisexual women, in particular, these new procedures should promote prevention efforts that are informed by stressors related to minority stress (Edward et al., 2020). As thoroughly discussed in this literature review, bisexual women endure bispecific minority stressors that greatly impact not only their IPV experiences, but their daily lives. By addressing these unique stressors, health care providers can begin to tailor their strategies to bisexual people. Furthermore, by finally including bisexual women in prevention and intervention efforts, we can begin to develop frameworks for what a healthy relationship

looks like with a bisexual partner (Head, 2020). Currently, there is no existent framework for this, which bisexual people have identified as a determent (Head & Milton, 2014). Education surrounding bisexual women and strategies aimed at their specific experiences will create a more welcoming environment for them to seek care and thrive in society.

Summary

Bisexual women endure bispecific minority stress that is aimed at invalidating their identities, which leaves them at increased risk for experiencing poor mental health outcomes. It also creates an environment where they are much more vulnerable to experiencing IPV than their heterosexual or lesbian counterparts. Despite the severity of this issue, little research to date has attempted to contextualize bisexual women's violent same-gender relationships. From research on heterosexual and lesbian couples, we understand that power is at the crux of IPV; however, research remains in the beginning stages of understanding how power plays a role in bisexual women's relationships, and specifically their same-gender relationships. Emerging evidence suggests that outing a bisexual women's sexual orientation and exploiting her societal status are perhaps the primary tactics in achieving power over a bisexual woman. This current study aims to engage bisexual women in a concept-mapping project where they can conceptualize their experiences and identify for themselves the tactics used to create power imbalances in their same-gender relationships. By increasing our research with bisexual women, we will continue to create and improve prevention strategies to eventually eradicate their experiences of IPV and promote a society more welcoming to their identities.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to address persistent gaps in the literature, a concept mapping (CM) study was conducted to provide foundational knowledge on bisexual women's experiences of power imbalances in their same-gender relationships. Primarily, we were interested in the following research questions: 1) How do bisexual women conceptualize power imbalances in their same-gender relationships? 2) What are the impacts of these power imbalances in bisexual women's same-gender relationships, particularly as it pertains to IPV?

Study Design

A CM study was conducted to allow bisexual women the opportunity to conceptualize power imbalances as they pertained to their intimate relationships with other woman. CM is a social science research method that values participatory and inclusive collaborations with the targeted population (Kane & Trochim, 2009). As a research method, CM engages community participants and explores their views on a particular topic, from which a conceptual framework is formulated. It is a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative processes with multivariate statistical analyses. Essentially, participants answer a prompt, and then their generated statements are visually represented in two-dimensional cluster maps (Galvin, 1989, Kane & Trochim, 2007, Trochim & Linton, 1984; Trochim, 1989). In contrast to strictly qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviewing, in which the data are collected and then analyzed solely by researchers, CM participants contribute to both data generation (via responding to a computer-based survey) and data analysis (via interpretation sessions), driving much of the discussion and interpretation of the findings (Galvin, 1989, Kane & Trochim, 2007, Trochim, 1989). As a final note in regard to its appropriateness for the current project, there is also precedence using CM for IPV research (i.e., Holliday et al., 2019).

Methodological Orientation

The methodology of this present study has been inspired by queer theory, which has roots in the works of Judith Butler. Butler (1990) posited that gender is an act of repetitive, culturally influenced, performances that uphold the ideals of male hierarchy and heterosexuality. By society's logic, individuals who are assigned female at birth will possess feminine traits and have exclusively heterosexual desires for men. Bisexual women, in particular, challenge this societal construct by being attracted to multiple genders (Callis, 2009). Therein lies crucial implications for my personal ontology and epistemology that informs my research, as bisexual women are either ignored or considered to defy hegemonic norms relative to heterosexual and sexual minority orientations. This study aimed to offer bisexual women a significant position of power in working alongside researchers to generate knowledge about bisexual women's relationship experiences.

According to Warner (2004), queer research methodology thrives in equitability when researchers remain reflective on their own positions of power on the production of knowledge. To address this, I reflect on these persistent power dynamics in my positionality statement. Warner (2004) also highlights the importance of a qualitative approach to queer research, which allows queer people to generate knowledge using their own words. I have followed this suggestion with CM, that allowed bisexual women the opportunity to conceptualize power imbalances themselves. In addition to queer theory, adding a feminist perspective to methodology allows for the further consideration of how power plays a crucial role in the relationship between researcher and participant (Maynard 1994; Price-Chalita 1994; Morris et al., 1998; Oakley 1998). Participatory research contests these hierarchies by permitting research participants a greater voice as a vehicle for generating knowledge (Browne et al., 2017; Kindon

et al., 2007). By incorporating a queer, feminist framework into my work, I aim to not only contribute to our understanding of bisexual women, but to also uplift these women through telling their stories and experiences.

Ethics Statement

This study was reviewed by the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board and granted an "exempt" determination. Prior to beginning the study, participants were provided an information sheet with an overview of the study, confidentiality policies, and risks and benefits. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw their participation in this study at any time. In these informed consent documents, the research team stated that the nature of this study would include potentially triggering topics, such as IPV. It was imperative to ensure that the participants understood enough about the content of the study to make an informed decision to support their mental health and well-being.

Furthermore, the bisexual community, and the LGBT community at large, are a highly stigmatized group (Weiss, 2011); thus, additional precautions are important to consider when engaging them in research. In previous research, LGBT people have displayed hesitance to participant in studies due to fear that their anonymity would not be properly protected (Baker et al., 2013). As such, the research team requested a waiver of written consent, as the participants' signature would be a potential link to the study. Participants indicated their consent by clicking into the study and beginning the brainstorming step of the CM process. This study also includes survivors of IPV. Although this population is particularly vulnerable, their voices in research help reduce and ultimately eradicate violence (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). We followed guidelines recommended by the World Health Organization (2001) for conducting research with IPV survivors. Namely, the research team provided participants with relevant resources, such as

information on seeking services for mental health or IPV. All participants were aged 18 or over to mitigate the requirements of mandatory reporting.

Research Positionality

Considering the interpretative process that is the foundation of qualitative research, it is a best practice that researchers remain reflexive regarding their identities and values and how they affect each stage of the research process (Leavy, 2017). I identify and am largely perceived as a white, cisgender women. I also come from a middle-class socioeconomic background and am highly educated. These intersecting identities grant me much privilege in society, especially as many of them are visible when I enter a room. As such, participants with marginalized identities may experience discomfort or distrust in speaking to me about sensitive topics such as IPV and sexual minority status. It is my responsibility as the researcher to address these concerns through promoting an equitable environment by conveying that participants' lived experiences are valuable. Additionally, I must constantly be aware of my privileged identities in order to recognize any biases I may carry that could impact the way I conduct and analyze my research.

Another hallmark of my identity is that I am bisexual. This was particularly relevant to this research study because my participants were all bisexual, queer, and pansexual women. However, this might have been an identity of mine that was not immediately obvious to my participants. During the informed consent process, I explained that this study was led by a team of queer researchers and that we were interested in LGBTQ-specific experiences. In the interview process, I was also forthcoming about my sexual orientation when this information was relevant. The aim of this candidness was to create an environment where participants knew they were being supported by other members of their community.

In addition to these identities, I also carry much power as a researcher. Indeed, these

participants were trusting me to tell their stories accurately and fairly. To achieve this, I feel strongly that research should be as participatory as possible, such is the case with CM. Indeed, in CM, participants are involved in the process of data generation and data analysis. This helps to shift the power structure to being more equitable. Despite the plethora of feedback we received from participants, however, it was the final decision of my research team and I regarding how to finalize the clusters map. As such, I continued to demonstrate reflexivity as a researcher through understanding how my position of power and intersecting identities impacted all my decisions.

Recruitment And Participants

Cisgender and transgender women aged 18 and over who identified as bisexual were recruited for participation in this dissertation study. Women who identified as pansexual or who identified as queer but were behaviorally bisexual (defined as having relationships with different genders) were also included. In addition to these requirements, the participants also needed to report either current or previous intimate relationships with other women. While sexual minority women encompass a range of sexual orientations, behaviors, and identities (Saewyc, 2004), their relationship histories and dynamics with women were the focus of this study. While IPV is a central focus of this study, it was not a requirement for women to have experienced it. This allowed the research team to understand the diverse impacts of power imbalances and helped decipher which particular dynamics are more salient in contributing to a violent or abusive relationship.

Prior to the recruitment process, it was understood that LGBT identities suffer from such a severe degree of stigmatization that it can be difficult to recruit participants from this community into research (Meyer & Wilson, 2009). Recruitment of bisexual individuals is particularly difficult because of binegativity and exclusion from both straight and LGBTQ

communities (Weiss, 2011). Thus, convenience and snowball sampling have long been the recommended recruitment methods for research with bisexual people (Burleson, 2014). I followed these recommendations by using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. First, a recruitment flyer advertising relevant information for the study was distributed to LGBTQ centers on college campuses across the country (n = 73). This flyer was also distributed via various social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. After this initial round of participants was recruited, snowball sampling occurred. The original participants were asked to recruit other bisexual women into the study; however, to ensure data was not inflated due to characteristics that might be shared by the original participants and their contacts, each participant was only allowed to recruit a maximum of two other bisexual women. Through snowball sampling, two additional participants were recruited.

CM is comprised of three primary steps: 1) brainstorming, 2) sorting and rating, 3) interpretation sessions. Eligible participants were invited to complete all three of these phases and received reimbursement for each individual step. Tango gift cards were used to reimburse participants. Tango is a website often used for research that allows participants to select from various gift cards to an array of different businesses. For the brainstorming process, participants were given a $10 Tango gift card. Those who completed the sorting and rating phase were given another $15 Tango gift card. Finally, a third Tango gift card worth $40 was sent to those who participated in the interpretation sessions.

Demographics

Demographic characteristics of the sample is provided in table 3.1. A total of 33 bisexual women completed brainstorming, 27 completed sorting and rating, and 18 completed in-depth interviews. It is important to note that there were two participants who did not complete the

brainstorming process but were recruited during the sorting and rating phase. All participants identified as either a transgender or cisgender woman. On the initial screener survey, only one woman specifically stated that she was transgender; however, it is possible more participants identified as transgender. On the screener survey, it was not required to indicate whether the participant was cisgender or transgender. Overall, participants were primarily in the 18 to 24 age range and a majority identified as White. Most participants did identify as bisexual; however, there were also women who held pansexual or queer identities. In the initial screener survey, a question regarding IPV history was not included. However, we collected additional demographic information during the CM process. Namely, we inquired over the participants' histories of physical, sexual, and emotional IPV. To assess for physical and sexual IPV, participants were asked the following question: *Have you ever been physically hurt or pressured to have sex by an intimate partner?* To assess for emotional IPV, we asked the following question: *Has an intimate partner ever humiliated you, threatened you with harm, insulted you or made you feel bad?* There is precedent for this particular question to be used to collect information regarding emotional IPV (i.e., McClintock et al., 2021).

Table 3.1

Participant Demographics

Demographics		*Phase 1* *N=33* *% (n)*	*Phase 2* *N=27* *% (n)*	*Phase 3* *N=18* *% (n)*
Age	18-24	79 (26)	81 (22)	89 (16)
	25-34	18 (6)	19 (5)	11 (2)
	35-44	3 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Race	American Indian or Alaska Native	3 (1)	4 (1)	6 (1)
	Asian	6 (2)	7 (2)	11 (2)
	Black or African American	3 (1)	4 (1)	6 (1)
	Latina	6 (2)	7 (2)	11 (2)
	Mixed	3 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	White	79 (26)	78 (21)	67 (12)

Table 3.1 (cont'd)

Sexual Orientation	Bisexual	82 (27)	89 (24)	89 (16)
	Pansexual	9 (3)	4 (1)	6 (1)
	Queer	9 (3)	7 (2)	6 (1)
Relationship Status	Casually dating multiple partners	3 (1)		
	Casually dating one partner	12 (4)		
	Cohabitating	3 (1)		
	In a monogamous relationship	33 (11)		
	Married	6 (2)		
	Newly Single	12 (4)		
	Polyamorous relationship	3 (1)		
	Single	27 (9)		
Physical/Sexual IPV	Yes	61 (20)		
	No	39 (13)		
Emotional IPV	Yes	64 (21)		
	No	36 (12)		

Concept Mapping Procedures

CM was selected for this dissertation based on its reputation for generating data that is participatory and rich qualitatively, as well as its ability to capture the experiences of hard-to-reach populations (Robinson & Trochim, 2007). Bisexual women were recruited to participate in three CM phases: 1) brainstorming; 2) sorting and rating; 3) interpretation sessions. The first two phases were completed using an online CM platform called Group Wisdom. After the conclusion of the initial two steps, participants engaged in interpretation sessions, which were conducted as audio-recorded one-on-one interviews via Zoom.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming has a rich history of generating content through the participation of the identified population (Osborn, 1953). To complete this process, participants used an online CM platform called Group Wisdom. After being directed to this site, they were required to make a confidential account unique to them. While informed consent procedures were sent via email, they were again reminded of them while on Group Wisdom. On this platform, participants were asked to individually generate as many statements as possible to the following prompt question:

In queer relationships, what are things that women say or do to show they have power over their partner? Participants generated a total of 98 statements in response to this prompt. Once brainstorming was completed, the primary investigator compiled the final list of statements and deleted any duplicates. This resulted in a total of 87 unique statements that were then used for the next phase, sorting and rating. This number is consistent with the CM literature that recommends including less than 100 statements in the sorting and rating phase to avoid participant fatigue (Kane & Trochim, 2007).

Sorting and Rating

The second step was also conducted in Group Wisdom and engaged participants in sorting and rating activities that utilized the master list of items generated in the brainstorming step (Rosas & Kane, 2012). On Group Wisdom, participants individually sorted the 87 brainstormed statements by grouping similar statements together, guided by their own view of how the items related to one another. The participants also assigned unique names to each group they sorted to further indicate how they believed the items were related to each other. After the sorting process, the participants then rated each statement based on two questions aimed at providing additional context to their answers. First, they were asked to rate the statements based on how much each statement listed reflected their own experiences. Then, they rated the statements based on the following question: *How strongly do you think each statement listed below would influence the likelihood that abuse will happen in a woman's intimate relationship with another woman?* This was influenced by a rating question used in Holliday and colleague's 2018 CM article. A total of 27 respondents participated in the sorting and rating phase, with two participants having not previously participated in the brainstorming step.

After participants completed the sorting and rating process, this information was then

analyzed using the Group Wisdom platform. More specifically, hierarchical clustering and multi-dimensional clustering were conducted to generate point maps based on how the respondents sorted and rated the brainstormed items. Using a similarity matrix, the technology compiles the data based on how frequently each statement was sorted together. The multidimensional scaling algorithm then plots points closer together based on how frequently they were sorted together. Afterwards, hierarchical cluster analysis is used to form statements into groups based on how close they are together. Visually, clusters and points that are closer together on the point maps have a stronger relationship (i.e., were more frequently sorted together) than those that are further apart. Group Wisdom generated potential cluster solutions that were then analyzed by the research team. Ultimately, the research team decided on a final seven cluster solution because this solution had the least amount of overlapping clusters. The final cluster map was then presented for feedback to participants during the proceeding interpretation sessions.

Interpretation Sessions

Focus groups are traditionally used in CM to interpret the results of the cluster map. To protect the anonymity of vulnerable participants; however, the research team instead decided to conduct one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with participants. These interviews were completed by the primary investigator (Reid) and lasted between 19 and 80 minutes. During November and December of 2022, all 18 interviews were conducted virtually using the HIPAA complaint online platform, Zoom. This allowed participants to be recruited from across the United States. The consent forms previously sent to participants included consent to audio-record their interviews. After obtaining this permission again, each interview was recorded using the speech to text transcription application called Otter.ai. The primary investigator was committed to protecting participants' anonymity, particularly by refraining from asking questions that would

disclose identifiable information, such as their hometown or name. In addition to this precaution, any identifiable information that the participants may have offered during the interviews were redacted from the final transcripts. Before and after each interview, participants were provided with resources focused on mental health and IPV help services to further promote and protect their well-being.

A semi-structured script designed by the research team was used for all of the interviews. In the first portion of these interviews, the primary investigator began by presenting the final cluster map to the participant, including the statements that went into each cluster. The participants were then asked to reflect on the composition of the cluster map. This was an additional opportunity for them to interpret what each cluster meant to them, and most importantly, it allowed them to provide feedback for each cluster. More specifically, the participants reflected on how the statements were related to each other. They also created names for the clusters and provided suggestions for improving the clusters. After discussing the clusters in-depth, the interview then shifted to questions aimed at gaining a more complete understanding of how power imbalances emerged in the participants' same-gender relationships. This was an opportunity to further contextualize the CM results. For instance, the participants were asked to tell a story about a time their woman partner used power over them. There were also thorough discussions regarding the participants' perceptions of the impacts of power imbalances, with an emphasis on IPV and how it may manifest when power imbalances are present in a relationship.

Data Analysis

The primary investigator deidentified and quality checked the transcripts generated from Otter.ai to ensure their accuracy in capturing the participants' words verbatim. After this, the transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clark's (2006) six phase framework for conducting

thematic analysis: familiarizing the research team with the data, generating initial codes from the data, searching for themes, reviewing these emergent themes, defining and naming said themes, and finally, writing the report. The first step requires the research team to familiarize themselves with the data. This was achieved through initial and secondary readings of the transcripts and journaling about patterns that emerged from the data. Based on the interesting concepts that emerged during the journaling process, the research team then began generating initial codes to organize the data into meaningful themes. These initial codes and themes were largely based on the semi-structured interview guide. At this point, the transcripts were uploaded to ATLAS.ti software for coding. After this process of formal coding, participant quotes were extracted that were determined to be exemplary examples of the themes. Throughout this process, an expert violence and LGBTQ researcher was consulted for their perspective on the emergent themes and the broader implications of each theme. The themes were then defined and assigned names to signify their greater meaning. When this process was completed, the main themes were revisited to ensure content saturation, which the research team ultimately decided had indeed occurred.

During this process of data analysis, the research team was careful to address Lincoln and Guba's (1986) criteria for trustworthiness- credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was established through using systemic analysis among the research team, as well as engaging in extensive memo writing of the transcripts. The research team also regularly met to debrief to discuss the present themes, further strengthening credibility. To establish dependability, the research team maintained an extensive audit trail documenting each step of the research process. Confirmability was achieved through extensive, continued engagement with the literature, as well as having a research team comprised of violence and LGBTQ experts. Transferability was established by including rich descriptions of the

participants and the research process. The research team also acknowledged and reflected on their positionalities, which strengthens transferability (Morrow, 2005). It was imperative to challenge each other on our positionalities and how our identifies influence our personal biases, which then impacts how data is analyzed, understood, and presented.

Summary

For this dissertation, CM was selected to allow bisexual women, a highly marginalized and hard to reach community, an opportunity to conceptualize in their own words their personal experiences of power imbalances in their intimate relationships with other women. Indeed, CM is respected as being a research method that values mixed-methods and participation from the community. It uses quantitative and qualitative approaches to create visual cluster maps that indicate primary themes of a given topic (Burke et al., 2005; Burke et al., 2014). In this chapter of my dissertation, I acknowledged my methodological orientation and my positionality as a cisgender, white, bisexual woman from a middle-class background. It was important to reflect on these identities to understand how they might promote biases in my analysis and presentation of the data. I then provided a detailed description of how CM was used to address our research questions and how it engaged participants in every step of the research process. Furthermore, I discussed how trustworthiness was established for this qualitative data. In the next chapter, I will provide an in-depth account of the results that emerged from this CM process, including crucial themes that emerged from the on-one-one interviews that provided further context to the cluster map results.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The results of the CM study, including the interview phase, are presented in this chapter. First, I discuss the cluster map that was generated from participants' sorting and rating phase. I then contextualize these clusters with the qualitative data from the interviews. Namely, I will outline the major themes and subthemes that emerged from the interview data. These data sought to answer the following research questions:

1) How do bisexual women conceptualize power imbalances in their same-gender relationships?
2) What are the impacts of these power imbalances in bisexual women's same-gender relationships, particularly as it pertains to IPV?

Characteristics Of Clusters

In the initial brainstorming phase, participants generated a list of 87 unique statements in response to a prompt question that asked them about the things women say or do to gain power over their women partners (Table 4.1). After these statements were sorted and rated by participants, the research team then decided on a final, seven-cluster solution to best represent the data (Figure 4.1). It is again important to remember that the points on the cluster map are relative- meaning, the points that are closer together have a stronger relationship than those further apart on the map. In addition to grouping the statements together, the CM platform, Group Wisdom, also generated titles for each cluster based on the participants' labels of their sorting groups. The original seven-cluster solution included the following clusters: 1) manipulation tactics; 2) aggression/ignoring boundaries; 3) making the other partner jealous purposefully; 4) social manipulation; 5) let people come out when they're ready; 6) toxic gender roles; and 7) racial issues. During the interview process, participants were asked about their

perspective on the cluster map that emerged from the sample's data.

Table 4.1

Overview of clusters with statements as generated by Group Wisdom

Cluster	Statement name (number)
1. Manipulation tactics	
	Holding grudges (1)
	Making you feel like you're constantly messing up whether you actually are or not (2)
	Not participating in shared-decision making when a decision is one that affects both people (12)
	Threaten breaking things off (19)
	Love-bombing and then being cold to their partner, the back & forth (20)
	ghosting' the partner to make them worried (21)
	withholding response and affection (24)
	Put down their partner by commenting on something about themselves but is indirectly an insult to the partner (28)
	Jealousy as manipulation (if the jealousy goes too far, it can lead to statements like "you don't love me if you hang out with that friend") (30)
	making a show of being so upset with you that they cannot get out of bed or get dressed; staying in bedroom with door locked (38)
	Threaten to hurt herself (39)
	Say "you don't love me if…" (41)
	Guilt tripping (42)
	Be passive aggressive (44)

Table 4.1 (cont'd)

	Using emotions in order to manipulate or justify their actions (46)
	Threaten to leave (48)
	Leaving when they don't like something (52)
	Communicating only when they feel like it (53)
	Making you chase them or beg for their approval (60)
	Constantly making you feel guilty (61)
	Telling you that you're lucky to have them because nobody else would want you (63)
	Emotional manipulation and purposely hurting your feelings (65)
	Belittling, making you feel small and that you have no say in the relationship (67)
	Highlighting their partner's shortcomings or insecurities (71)
	Leaving their partner out of decision-making (73)
2. Aggression/Ignoring boundaries	
	Co-ownership of a significant item or pet (5)
	Putting pressure on someone's coming out process or not respecting another person's timeline (8)
	Offhand comments about sexual experience (generally lack of) (17)
	Leveraging tense housing/family situations (18)
	Making first moves, initiating contact of all sorts (25)
	Objectify other women (27)

Table 4.1 (cont'd)

	Go on dates or have sex with men (36)
	Hold money and other things over their partner's head (47)
	Bring up finances/who makes more money (51)
	"Forgetting" established boundaries (55)
	The most distressing part was just the crossing of physical boundaries even when I stated discomfort (78)
3. Making the other partner jealous purposefully	
	Discussing other options/solicitations (6)
	Showing "cute" other people on social media (7)
	Refer to an ex (29)
	Make you feel jealous by talking about other romantic interests (40)
	Flirt with other people to show that they can. (43)
	Compare past relationships to their current ones to say their current partner is not doing enough (45)
	Negatively comparing their partner's appearance to theirs (57)
4. Social manipulation	
	Not sticking up for you or having your back and/or allowing you to be embarrassed (11)
	Social manipulation - saying things about you in group chats, excluding or passively inviting you to friendship gatherings, holding you separate from their friends (13)
	Putting down their other relationships with friends (22)

Table 4.1 (cont'd)

	Making passive aggressive remarks about intelligence, income, family background, occupation, maybe even physical appearance (23)
	Point out physical flaws, blemishes, weight gain, etc (35)
	Using degrading statements or manipulative statements to show power (49)
	Weaponizing poor mental health to make their partner compliant (54)
	Always trying to bargain a yes out of a no (56)
	Socially isolating partners by deliberately creating divisions between friends/family. (E.g. demanding the time their partners normally spend with others or suggesting their partners friends/family are toxic) (58)
	Being overly judgmental, especially on physical appearance (59)
	Shaming you for past mistakes in relationships (62)
	Raising their voice (68)
5. Let people come out when they're ready	Question whether you are actually queer/gay (3)
	Refusing to come out and forcing the partnership to live in secrecy (9)
	Failing or refusing to see other perspectives, including but not limited to that of their partner (10)
	In the past, I have been misgendered and told masculinized things by my partner in order to make me feel smaller (14)

Table 4.1 (cont'd)

	Attempt to take on the role of the protector in the relationship (15)
	When I've been with women, it was not so much asserting power as much as feeling who had it: the person less committed (26)
	Asserting their intelligence while diminishing their partner's intelligence at the same time (31)
	Hold past of straight-passing relationships against you (34)
	Threaten to out me/us to family or colleagues (37)
	Constantly reminding you how much smarter they are than you (64)
	Bringing a partner to a social event where the partner does not know the group and then not introducing the partner (72)
	Age is used to assert dominance (75)
	Using being closeted as a manipulation tactic (80)
6. Toxic Gender Roles	
	Authenticity testing (particularly in first queer relationships) (4)
	Assert themselves as sexually experienced (usually in opposition to someone unexperienced) (16)
	I would say traditional physical interactions can illustrate power assertion, especially to the outside. For instance, holding their hand from the front (as in leading the person), an arm around the other person, a hand over the person's leg, etc. (32)
	Act rough and be an aggressive "stud" (33)
	Acting masculine or dominant (50)

Table 4.1 (cont'd)

	When in queer relationships, you could see one woman being more Masculine and "Acting as the man" and the other would act as any woman in a relationship (66)
	Trying to be more performatively queer their partner (I am more valid because I have done xyz) Or just gatekeeping in general (69)
	Labels like top, bottom, and pillow princess taking on new connotations outside of just sex (70)
	I think women try to seem more masculine to project this onto their partner (77)
	Stereotypes about masculine and feminine lesbian relationships can lead to a difference in the power dynamic because of the stereotype that the "masculine" partner is more similar to the man in a "straight" relationship, they can use this to show power (82)
	Stereotypes about women with "top energy" can make it easier for a woman to feel she is more assertive which may be confused with power for some but I do not think in my experience assertiveness means power. I have seen occasions when more feminine women act more submissive to those kinds of masculine partners I think to uphold a heteronormative idea with two opposing identities in a relationship (86)
	Sometimes with woman who is more androgynous and masc presenting asserts a power when in public, e.g. grabbing your hand like a man would in a busy bar and leading you somewhere, or feeling she has to speak up when men flirt or are inappropriate to you as though she is taking this protective male identity (87)
7. Racial issues	

Table 4.1 (cont'd)

	Education status may be used to assert dominance, similar to economic status (who is the breadwinner) (74)
	Racial privilege is added into conversations to instill fear (76)
	Women with a greater history of dating women may show power over a partner who is new to liking women by commenting on how three more experienced, and "teaching" or "training" the newer partner how they should act in a queer relationship (81)
	In relationships I have been in with queer white women, they have used their physical strength to assert their power (83)
	In relationships I have been in, queer white women show their power by using their white privilege (84)
	If I am dating a white woman versus another woman of color, I feel like there is an inherent imbalance in whose queerness is considered more "valid" or "authentic." Despite femme/butch elements in either person's presentation, I find that the WOC will always be considered more masc, though that doesn't necessarily translate to more power (85)

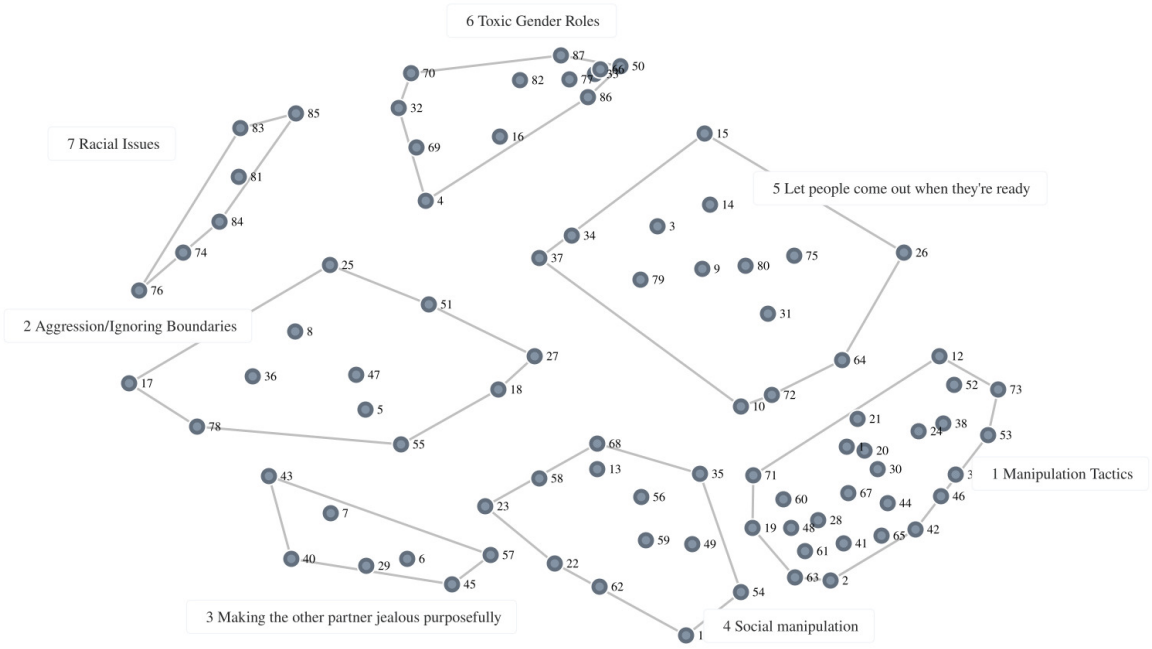

Figure 4.1 Final Cluster Map generated by GroupWisdom

Cluster 1: Manipulation Tactics

For many of the participants, the statements in this cluster were representative of emotional abuse or emotional manipulation. Indeed, these were statements representing actions that were designed to make a partner feel "uncomfortable" or "stuck." One participant described these statements as "all sort of emotional ways of sort of getting someone to submit or gaining power in those ways." Participants also differentiated statements that were threats or "passive" versus those that were "concrete" actions, such as physically leaving. However, the consensus regarding this cluster was that the statements were all related.

Cluster 2: Aggression/Ignoring Boundaries

Compared to the first cluster, participants criticized this cluster for being less concise. Many participants suggested moving all the statements to different clusters and were therefore unable to name this cluster. Among the seemingly contrasting themes that emerged, participants believed that this cluster was comprised of several different ways of gaining power, such as

through financial manipulation or socioeconomic status overall, invalidating identity (e.g., forcing someone to come out), crossing physical boundaries, and objectification. However, there were three participants who believed these statements were cohesively grouped together. According to them, the statements were all examples of "dealing with boundaries." While the other participants hesitated with calling this cluster cohesive, the concept of boundaries was reoccurring for many of them regarding these statements.

Cluster 3: Making the Other Partner Jealous Purposefully

Regarding the third cluster, participants agreed that the overarching theme was jealousy being used as a manipulation tactic. One participant described it as a "difference in power dynamics, depending on comparison to a different relationship or some sort of a different significant other." Indeed, participants discussed how many of these statements dealt with other people who were external to the relationship and how these other dynamics were used in an unhealthy way to incite jealousy. While most participants determined that all these statements should remain as a group, there were a select number of participants who felt that the statement regarding comparing appearances (#57) would be better suited for another cluster.

Cluster 4: Social Manipulation

For cluster 4, there was less consensus regarding how these statements fit together. For some participants, these statements largely belonged to different clusters. For example, there were persistent themes of social manipulation but also clear themes of degradation and verbal abuse. Namely, participants felt that "raising their voice" (#68) belonged to a separate category centered on physical abuse or physical manipulation. Despite these various themes, other participants tied these statements together by saying they all had to do with degrading comments, particularly those spoken around other people. One participant described these statements as

having to do with "putting you down in front of your peers." These were statements aimed at isolating a partner or "having you question yourself."

Cluster 5: Let People Come Out When They're Ready

Regarding cluster five, most participants found these statements to not fit together as a cohesive theme. For instance, participants identified themes of financial abuse and how other factors, such as age and intelligence, are used to gain power over a partner. These other factors were tied together with financial abuse, because they are all provide "authority over you." However, there were statements that participants identified as a unique grouping. Namely, there were statements that represented LGBTQ specific issues, such as being closeted being used a manipulation tactic (#80). According to participants, these statements were aimed at "weaponizing queer identities" and making a partner "question" whether their queer identity is legitimate. As such, it was recommended that these statements form their own category in order to properly represent power dynamics specific to LGBTQ relationships.

Cluster 6: Toxic Gender Roles

Overall, participants were in consensus regarding the primary theme of cluster six. According to their consensus, these statements exemplify how the stereotypical gender roles become incorporated into women's queer relationships to gain power over a same-gender partner. In other words, one partner "performs" the more masculine role in the relationship to "co-opt heteronormative dynamics and…to create power roles in a homosexual relationship." While participants found this cluster similar to the previous one, they differentiated this cluster from the last, LGBTQ specific cluster, due to its emphasis on gender roles. Participants suggested moving the statements regarding authenticity testing (#4) and assertion of sexual experience (#16) to cluster five. Otherwise, this was considered a highly cohesive cluster.

Cluster 7: Racial Issues

Perhaps the most consensus regarding clusters occurred in the seventh and final cluster. For many of the participants, the word that encapsulated this cluster was "privilege," particularly "white privilege" or "white supremacy." One participant described these statements as "leveraging whiteness as a means of power." The statements that participants differed in including were "education status being used to assert dominance…" (#74) and "women with a greater history of dating women…" (#81). While many participants sorted these two statements into different groups, other participants threaded all these statements together by explaining that they are all different types of privilege. There was much discussion about how education status exists similarly to previous statements of financial abuse because these are examples of privilege. The participants recommended having one cluster about privilege; however, most participants believed that racial privilege should be its own cluster separate from financial abuse and manipulation or education status. As for statement 81, it was largely determined this was a better fit for the LGBTQ specific cluster.

Revised Cluster Maps

After the interpretation sessions, the research team compiled the suggestions of the participants and revised the clusters and the statements assigned to each cluster. Table 4.2 displays these revised clusters with statements. The names assigned to each cluster all derive from the labels that participants assigned to the clusters in the interviews. Due to the variety of suggestions that the participants had, however, it is important to note that these revised clusters may not represent all their opinions. Rather, the research team considered their suggestions in tandem with the guiding theories to revise into the statements that reflect the main themes across data sources. A notable addition is an eighth cluster centered around physical manifestations of

power imbalances, which participants explained was vastly different from emotional or verbal manipulation. The eight clusters are as follows: 1) emotional manipulation; 2) using privilege; 3) jealousy; 4) putting you down; 5) LGBTQ-specific issues; 6) patriarchal gender roles; 7) white privilege; and 8) pushing physical boundaries.

Table 4.2

Overview of clusters with statements as revised by participants

Cluster	Statement name (number)
1. Emotional Manipulation	Holding grudges (1)
	Making you feel like you're constantly messing up whether you actually are or not (2)
	Not participating in shared-decision making when a decision is one that affects both people (12)
	Threaten breaking things off (19)
	Love-bombing and then being cold to their partner, the back & forth (20)
	Ghosting' the partner to make them worried (21)
	Withholding response and affection (24)
	Making a show of being so upset with you that they cannot get out of bed or get dressed; staying in bedroom with door locked (38)
	Threaten to hurt herself (39)
	Say “you don’t love me if…” (41)
	Guilt tripping (42)
	Be passive aggressive (44)

Table 4.2 (cont'd)

	Using emotions in order to manipulate or justify their actions (46)
	Threaten to leave (48)
	Leaving when they don't like something (52)
	Communicating only when they feel like it (53)
	Making you chase them or beg for their approval (60)
	Constantly making you feel guilty (61)
	Telling you that you're lucky to have them because nobody else would want you (63)
	Emotional manipulation and purposely hurting your feelings (65)
	Belittling, making you feel small and that you have no say in the relationship (67)
	Highlighting their partner's shortcomings or insecurities (71)
	Leaving their partner out of decision-making (73)
	Failing or refusing to see other perspectives, including but not limited to that of their partner (10)*
2. Using Privilege	
	Co-ownership of a significant item or pet (5)
	Leveraging tense housing/family situations (18)
	Hold money and other things over their partner's head (47)
	Bring up finances/who makes more money (51)

Table 4.2 (cont'd)

	Making passive aggressive remarks about intelligence, income, family background, occupation, maybe even physical appearance (23)*
	Asserting their intelligence while diminishing their partner's intelligence at the same time (31)*
	Constantly reminding you how much smarter they are than you (64)*
	Age is used to assert dominance (75)*
	Economic dynamics within the relationship can cause economic abuse (79)*
	Education status may be used to assert dominance, similar to economic status (who is the breadwinner) (74)*
3. Jealousy	
	Discussing other options/solicitations (6)
	Showing "cute" other people on social media (7)
	Refer to an ex (29)
	Make you feel jealous by talking about other romantic interests (40)
	Flirt with other people to show that they can (43)
	Compare past relationships to their current ones to say their current partner is not doing enough (45)
	Negatively comparing their partner's appearance to theirs (57)
	Objectify other women (27)*
	Go on dates or have sex with men (36)*

Table 4.2 (cont'd)

	Jealousy as manipulation (if the jealousy goes too far, it can lead to statements like "you don't love me if you hang out with that friend") (30)*
4. Putting you down	
	Not sticking up for you or having your back and/or allowing you to be embarrassed (11)
	Social manipulation - saying things about you in group chats, excluding or passively inviting you to friendship gatherings, holding you separate from their friends (13)
	Putting down their other relationships with friends (22)
	Point out physical flaws, blemishes, weight gain, etc. (35)
	Using degrading statements or manipulative statements to show power (49)
	Weaponizing poor mental health to make their partner compliant (54)
	Always trying to bargain a yes out of a no (56)
	Socially isolating partners by deliberately creating divisions between friends/family. (E.g. demanding the time their partners normally spend with others or suggesting their partners friends/family are toxic.) (58)
	Being overly judgmental, especially on physical appearance (59)
	Shaming you for past mistakes in relationships (62)
	Put down their partner by commenting on something about themselves but is indirectly an insult to the partner (28)*

Table 4.2 (cont'd)

5. LGBTQ Specific Issues	Question whether you are actually queer/gay (3)
	Refusing to come out and forcing the partnership to live in secrecy (9)
	In the past, I have been misgendered and told masculinized things by my partner in order to make me feel smaller (14)
	Hold past of straight-passing relationships against you (34)
	Threaten to out me/us to family or colleagues (37)
	Women with a greater history of dating women may show power over a partner who is new to liking women by commenting on how three more experienced, and "teaching" or "training" the newer partner how they should act in a queer relationship (81)*
	Putting pressure on someone's coming out process or not respecting another person's timeline (8)*
	Offhand comments about sexual experience (generally lack of) (17)*
	Authenticity testing (particularly in first queer relationships) (4)*
	Assert themselves as sexually experienced (usually in opposition to someone unexperienced) (16)*
6. Hegemonic Gender Roles	
	I would say traditional physical interactions can illustrate power assertion, especially to the outside (32)

Table 4.2 (cont'd)

	Act rough and be an aggressive "stud" (33)
	Acting masculine or dominant (50)
	When in queer relationships, you could see one woman being more Masculine and "Acting as the man" and the other would act as any woman in a relationship (66)
	Trying to be more performatively queer their partner (I am more valid because I have done xyz) Or just gatekeeping in general (69)
	Labels like top, bottom, and pillow princess taking on new connotations outside of just sex (70)
	I think women try to seem more masculine to project this onto their partner (77)
	Stereotypes about masculine and feminine lesbian relationships can lead to a difference in the power dynamic because of the stereotype that the "masculine" partner is more similar to the man in a "straight" relationship, they can use this to show power (82)
	Stereotypes about women with "top energy" can make it easier for a woman to feel she is more assertive which may be confused with power for some but I do not think in my experience assertiveness means power. I have seen occasions when more feminine women act more submissive to those kinds of masculine partners I think to uphold a heteronormative idea with two opposing identities in a relationship (86)
	Sometimes with woman who is more androgynous and masc presenting asserts a power when in public, e.g. grabbing your hand like a man would in a busy bar and leading you somewhere (87)

Table 4.2 (cont'd)

	Attempt to take on the role of the protector in the relationship (15)*
	Making first moves, initiating contact of all sorts (25)
7. White Privilege	
	Racial privilege is added into conversations to instill fear (76)
	In relationships I have been in with queer white women, they have used their physical strength to assert their power (83)
	In relationships I have been in, queer white women show their power by using their white privilege (84)
	If I am dating a white woman versus another woman of color, I feel like there is an inherent imbalance in whose queerness is considered more "valid" or "authentic." Despite femme/butch elements in either person's presentation, I find that the WOC will always be considered more masc, though that doesn't necessarily translate to more power (85)
8. Pushing Physical Boundaries*	
	"Forgetting" established boundaries (55)*
	The most distressing part was just the crossing of physical boundaries even when I stated discomfort (78)*
	Raising their voice (68)*

* Indicates a statement has been moved from its original cluster placement.

Pattern Matching

Pattern matching provides a visual, pairwise comparison of the cluster ratings (Figure 4.2). In the sorting and rating process, participants were asked to rate the statements based on two questions: 1) *How much does each statement listed below reflect your own experiences?* 2) *How strongly do you think each statement listed below would influence the likelihood that abuse*

will happen in a woman's intimate relationship with another woman? The first question was rated on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = not at all to 3 = definitely my experience). The second question also rated on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = does not influence to 3 = strongly influences). While "toxic gender roles" and "making the other partner jealous purposefully" were the most relevant experiences to most participants, they were also the ones rated the lowest in influencing the likelihood of abuse occurring. Meanwhile, "social manipulation" and "manipulation tactics" were rated as having the highest likelihood for influencing abuse. While this predominantly White sample rated "racial issues" as lower in relevance to their own experiences, it was rated as having a higher likelihood for abuse occurring.

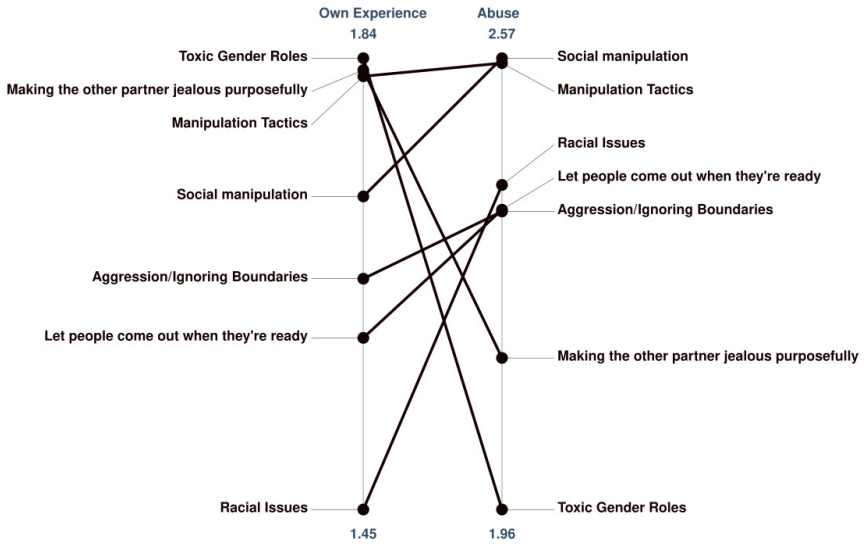

Figure 4.2 Pattern match figure displaying the cluster rating results of how relevant each statement is to the participants' own experiences (1 = not at all to 3 = definitely my experience) and the likelihood that each statement would influence abuse occurring in a woman's intimate relationship with another woman (1 = does not influence to 3 = strongly influences).

Interpretation of Scale Ratings

During the one-on-one interviews, participants were asked about their thought process when they rated the statements, particularly regarding the likelihood that each statement would

influence abuse occurring in a woman's intimate, same-gender relationship. Some revealed that they had defined abuse as meaning physical abuse, rather than as encompassing a range of behaviors, including emotional tactics. However, others also rated high any statements that they considered emotional abuse.

A few participants emphasized that none of the statements should be underestimated, as they all had the potential for creating abusive environments. As one participant explained,

> "… because I was like, who am I to say that like something absolutely won't affect or like won't have an impact? Like that's just I think it's really dangerous to have that mindset because then that kind of reinforces like the group of people who just like don't believe women and like don't believe survivors, and I'm like, Well, no, we have to understand that like, every situation is different. It's complicated. Like we might not understand how co owning might impact it, but like, there is yeah, there's probably a story there."

Another participant found the question difficult to answer, because some of the statements, such as those relating to social or emotional manipulation, were already displaying abusive behaviors rather than only influencing them. She explained,

> "…I felt a little unsure of because so we have those categories of like, social manipulation or like one on one emotional manipulation. It's like, if those things are happening, you are already in abuse territory, or you are sitting on the wall. And it's like I don't I really wasn't like how likely if what you're asking like how likely those things are to make abuse happen. I'm like, it's already happening… we are at the end of the scale. We're already there."

Interview Results

Major themes and subthemes emerged from the one-on-one interviews regarding sexual

orientation and labels, sources of power imbalances, and the personal and relational impacts of power. The findings below are presented below, roughly in the temporal order that they were discussed during the interviews. To exemplify these themes, exemplary quotes from participants are included.

Sexual Orientation and Labels

To provide a thorough contextualization of these women's experiences, it is first important to understand their sexual orientations. According to the results from the initial screener survey, sixteen of the participants identified as bisexual, while the other two identified as queer and pansexual, respectively. While many participants did identify with the bisexual label, others did so reluctantly. As one participant said, "I would say bi, but I don't really know. I don't really like titles and no. I'm like too indecisive." Another participant who indicated she was bisexual on the screener survey admitted she was either "bisexual or queer." Queer was a label that was resounded with some of the participants. In particular, one participant who had a history of dating women, men, and nonbinary individuals felt that queer was a label that described her orientation, but that bisexual was a better indicator of her behavior. She said:

> "…I probably would say queer, even though I suppose my behavior is bisexual leaning towards women, and when I'm with a woman, I prefer to you know, think I'm a lesbian but I have dated people who are non-binary."

One participant identified as pansexual, a label she felt was deeply intertwined with bisexuality. She explained:

> "…Um, 10 years ago, I would have said like staunchly I am… I am pansexual. There is a very adamant difference. So more authentically, I would say pansexual but like, over the past 10 years, I'm like, well, it falls under the bisexual umbrella. So like, I'll use those like

I have a pansexual flag behind me right now that I'm trying to unwrinkle, but I use both interchangeably."

Other participants, mostly those who identified as bisexual, described the evolution of their sexual identities, with some admitting that sexuality was "fluid" for them. Participants felt that sexual orientation is not always a fixed point and that it is valid for it to change over time. As one participant said, "…my sexual identity, it has gone through like a lot of permutation." Another participant described:

> "…It's like it's complicated. I feel like I don't I don't know how I don't like feel I mean, I do feel like I like say I'm bisexual but I don't know like how strongly I attached I specifically like I I've, I know that like I am not like lesbian or straight, obviously. But I just like, you know it is such a spectrum. And those terms encompass a spectrum, which I appreciate."

Sources of Power in Queer Relationships

When prompted to describe a situation when their woman partner used power over them, all but one of the participants identified that power dynamics came into play in their intimate relationships with other women. There were various examples of power imbalances, and it is important to note that many of these women experienced multiple power dynamics at once. The themes are organized from most salient to least salient.

Having a More Experienced Partner (n = 10)

Many participants described power imbalances that emerged from their lack of experience with queer relationships relative to their partners' experience. Indeed, many of the relationships described in this portion of the interview were the participants' first queer relationship. As one participant said, "…I felt a power imbalance just because of my lack of

experience of the time." Another participant described:

> "…I think in this particular one, there was again that just like subconscious, like, like lack, like my lack of experience, or like experience levels, just like subconsciously, like put us at that differential because I like she just had so much experience that like, I didn't feel comfortable like initiating always. Or, like I wasn't always sure like exactly what was happening. Like physically. So just like that part of it, too. Like you have to put so much trust in your partner then that they're showing you like what a queer relationship is actually, like."

Participants described the impacts of this particular power imbalance. Considering that for many of them this was their first queer experience, they described that they depended on their partner to teach them about these relationships. One participant explained, "… I didn't assert myself as much as thinking the person who has more experience should lead the relationship." This example of a power imbalance also had the potential to manifest into unhealthy relationship dynamics. One participant admitted, "…you kind of accept, I think worst behavior when you just want to have the experience and stuff."

When it came to having more experience, age also played an important role in this dynamic. In other words, participants felt that their older partners had more power over them. As one participant said, "…she was older than me. So I felt like sometimes, like she was acting like she knew better than me."

Withholding Communication (n = 5)

To gain power in their relationships, some women described their partners withholding communication from them. In particular, two participants described being "ghosted" by their partner, while another described receiving the "silent treatment." One participant described the

impact of withholding communication as follows:

> "…I'm definitely like, whoever's giving the silent treatment to the other partner definitely like is trying to gain power in that situation, because their partner then has to, like, actively work two or three times as hard to like, communicate and it's like completely ignoring like any of their partner's needs for like, communication and security. So it's like really manipulative, and like I understand that some people like it's also like not intentionally manipulative, like some people like get overwhelmed really easily, especially like early on in a relationship but it's just like disrespectful to the other partner."

Another participant described how her partner would withhold communication as a form of punishment. She recalled:

> "…if I would go to leave or if I would say that I wanted to do something with my friends, she would immediately get very upset with me and explain how she didn't want me to go and would beg me to stay or be really sad about it or if I did end up going she wouldn't text me the whole time or she wouldn't reply to me the next day, which also I feel like is kind of holding something over my head. It's almost like a punishment."

Masculinity Versus Feminine Roles (n = 4)

As seen in the CM process, participants also described how stereotypically masculine and feminine roles seen in heterosexual dynamics impacted their intimate relationships with women. According to one participant, the more masculine partner "…does have more control. Because she is more masculine and like, it was just kind of a gradual thing that like, without me even knowing, like, my brain started to accept that." While another participant described her more masculine partner as "lovely," she also admitted that "…they kind of did assert their dominance

over me." Because she had a more masculine partner, one participant described feeling the need to be more "submissive." She said:

> "…I think that in the same way that like, men can treat women as submissive and like overall like that's, like expected, especially like white women. Expected of them. Like I always felt like in that experience that impacted our relationship in a way that made me feel like I needed to kind of like follow suit…"

In certain instances, these power dynamics were identified as being directly borrowed from the patriarchy. One participant described how her partner "…took in the same… heteronormative stuff that I was talking about. Like she felt like she needs to be the masculine person in the relationship." However, one participant questioned whether acting more masculine actually afforded more power to her woman partner. She explained, "…I don't know if they have it (power), but they think they have it for sure the way that they act."

Binegativity (n = 4)

Binegativity was also present in participants' relationships with women. In particular, the participants' partners would often introduce the participants' past histories with men into arguments. This occurred regardless of their partners' sexuality. Despite her partner also being bisexual, one participant explained that their different levels of attraction to men created a power imbalance in their relationship. Binegativity was used to "…show that like, I would leave or something." Further, one participant said:

> "…I think it definitely gave her more power over me that way because it was something she could hold over my head. Because even when we would talk about it, or I would try to bring it up and tell her like, hey, I really don't like that you said that to me when we were with all of our super guy, guy friends at the bar who love us, but she would always

take it negatively when I would try to bring it up and then essentially hold it over my head as sort of leverage like, Well, I wouldn't do that. And you know, I wouldn't do that because I'm more driven towards women or I'm more attracted to women rather than men and they don't really appeal to me like that. The way they appeal to you. She would definitely use that as a steppingstone to get above me."

Overall, these participants felt that their partners failed to respect their bisexual identity and that their bisexuality was effectively used against them or outright invalidated. One participant also described how binegativity bled into her partners' relationship with her friends. She said:

"…she thought I was in denial the whole time. Yeah, …so she had told her friend that I was a lesbian. And when I asked her about it, she was like, "Oh, I forgot you're still in that phase". And I was like, "it's not a phase." And she said that, like, I just needed more time and I would realize that, like it was just compulsive, heterosexual, heterosexual or something like that. I had never even heard the term before."

LGBTQ Specific Stressors (n = 4)

During discussion of the CM results, participants discussed in-depth the role of stressors specific to being LGBTQ. These stressors were also identified as power imbalances when the participants described their own experiences. Namely, two participants described the tensions that arose when they were closeted about their sexuality while their partner was out about being in the LGBTQ community. While none of the participants described their partner verbally threatening to out them, it was a fear that loomed over at least one participant. She explained,

"…you don't have any options to go in and the fear of like, that's the only person who knows so she also has the power in knowing this secret about you and like so you will

accept the worst behavior too because it in that regard. I think that was confusing. Like this is a soft person for you and also like kind of an abusive person emotionally."

In particular, these tensions were evident when it came to the families of the participants and their partners. As one participant said, "…she was really pushing me to like, meet my parents and have mee come out but I'm not comfortable with that." Conversely, one participant discussed the isolating feeling that occurred when she was the partner who was out and her partner was closeted. She explained,

> "…when we were dating, she was not, like, willing to be open about our relationship to very many people, especially at the beginning. Which, you know, I wanted to be understanding and like, you need to, you know, you have to take your own time to figure that out. And I understand that that takes time. Like it took me a lot of time. But it's very hard to be in a relationship where you are not really sure what's going on in the relationship. You can't talk about it with other people because they don't know that your partner is queer."

Racial Dynamics (n = 2)

In the interview phase, there were six participants who did not identify as White. At least two of the participants identified that racial dynamics were sources of power imbalances in their relationships with women. Even when being with another woman of color, one participant explained how colorism was a factor in them being perceived differently. The other participant described being masculinized for being a woman of color, and how this did not afford her privilege. She said:

> "…I would say that was an example of my power being taken away. I'm sure if I was a White woman, and I was being seen as more masculine because I wanted to because I

was presenting in a certain way because I wanted to be perceived as more Butch or more masculine. I, my situation would have been very different but because that was not something that I wanted to project that was very based on a racialized identity of mine as well. That was a removal of my power…"

This participant went on to further explain how society's racism justified her partners' racism. She said:

"…I'd say it was initially started by societal perception, and it was able to be used in our personal dynamics because of that reinforcement and that validation by society's interpretations of her identity and my identity and our relationship when paired with one another."

Comparison to Other Options (n = 2)

For two participants, their partners would use their attraction to other people to yield power. For example, one participant explained that she felt as though she had to "prove that I was important" to her partner in order to compare to her partners' ex-girlfriend. This made these participants feel as though they were competing for the attention and affection of their partners. As one participant described:

"…she would say consistently, like a lot of these things resonated with me because she would consistently discuss her other options. Talk about you know, other people who were trying to kiss her or we were also long this long distance for a period of time. Um, and so she would constantly like.. she would constantly be using social media and those kinds of things to like, post with other women or, you know, show me like, the pretty people that she was interacting with and those kinds of things as a way to like, you know, get me to respond or get me to give her more attention or just get me to feel kind of, like

indebted I guess to her for even being with me. Um, yeah, that was just like a really weird… and it happened for a while and eventually that was like why we broke up because like, it was just really hard to deal with at a certain point, constantly being like, compared to other people or feeling like you were in competition."

Impacts of Power Imbalances

Participants were explicitly asked how the power dynamics that emerged in their same-gender relationships impacted them individually and their relationship overall. Those findings are presented in this section, with the themes organized by saliency.

Creating Insecurity and Uncertainty (n = 6)

As a result of power imbalances in their relationship, participants described feeling uncertain about different facets of their lives. For one participant, this manifested in the form of questioning her gender identity. For others, it caused them to doubt their sexual orientation, especially when they had partners that consistently challenged their bisexual identity. As one participant said, "…I think it just like invalidated, like, my identity a little bit because it's like, oh, maybe women don't like me." Another further explained this feeling of invalidation:

> "…I think it was just like in general, like invalidating in general because like, especially like as a bisexual woman, like you're always going back and forth like am I actually bi? Am I actually like attracted to women and then your first relationship you're finally like, Yes, this is like, correct. I am but then like when your partner's like, actually, maybe you're not, you know, like, even if it's subconsciously like just subconsciously implying that you're less queer than them. It just is super invalidating and makes the whole like journey of figuring yourself out that much harder."

These feeling of insecurity and uncertainty were, at times, directed at the relationship

itself. One participant said they were "…insecure about like, our relationship status or like, how I should be treated like maybe this is normal in a queer relationship when like, it should not be." Overall, power imbalances caused many participants to "question" themselves and their identities. It also, at times, resulted in increased attachment the partner who was wielding power. One participant described:

> "…I think she, because this was kind of like, the only person for a couple, maybe three years that I was even exploring in that way. And I think I put a lot of weight and thinking I had a lot of feelings for her when in reality, like, I just wasn't exploring other people. So I think it impacted me in the in the sense that I was very attached to her because I wasn't dating other people. And and of course, with the back and forth it made me like more insecure and uncertain but once I kind of ended things with her, I think my dating with woman and was, you know, really great."

Terminating Relationship (n = 5)

While some participants felt an increased attachment to their partner, other participants recognized power imbalances as being a catalyst in ending their relationships. As one participant explained it, "…it was like the beginning of the end" once there became a pattern of power imbalances. Indeed, another echoed this sentiment by saying they "broke up not long after" an instance where power was blatantly used. The termination of these relationships occurred after a variety of different power imbalances had occurred, rather than there being one particular example being more consequential. It is important to note, as well, that none of the power imbalances described were in the participants' current relationships.

Impact on Future Relationships (n = 3)

Two participants reflected on negative impacts that their previous relationship had on

future relationships, particularly as it pertained to power imbalances. One participant attributed the power imbalances in her previous relationship as the reasons she had not entered into a new one, because it made her "more hesitant to like put up boundaries and stuff like that." Another participant explained:

> "…I think that made me a little bit more sheltered in my relationships, because unfortunately, I did deal with that for quite a bit of time, but I didn't want to be dealing with that. I just didn't know it at the time. So now that I understand and I've gone through with my therapist, or I've talked about it or digested it with myself, um, I've kind of understood that it has made me a little bit more closed off because when I first met her she wasn't like that at all. And somehow it grew into that. So I'm a little weary of something like that because I never know if it may grow into that again."

However, one participant felt that her experience had a positive impact on her proceeding relationships. She said it made her "…more open to talking about things that are uncomfortable."

Shifting Communities (n = 2)

Another impact described by two participants was how the relationships where power was present affected their communities, namely their friendships. For one participant, she was involved in the same friend group as her partner, and this manifested in her partner holding power over her even after the relationship ended. Another participant felt her friendships suffered during her relationship, which caused her to feel a lack of support afterwards. She said:

> "…I think it made me also a little bit more sheltered as a person because I didn't necessarily go spend time with friends, all I did was spend time with her and I didn't feel comfortable after we separated to continue to try and reach out to friends that I had almost ghosted in a way but not by choice."

Intimate Partner Violence Perpetrated by Women

An important tenant of this dissertation was to understand the impacts of power imbalances in bisexual women's same-gender relationships, with IPV being an important focus of this conversation. As such, women were asked about their histories of IPV with their women partners. While seven women explicitly identified experiencing IPV in relationships with men, eight women described enduring IPV perpetrated by a woman. Another woman hesitated to discuss experiences of IPV with women in fear of "villainizing" her woman partner.

In seven of these situations, emotional abuse or manipulation was the primary type of IPV experienced. It is important to note that the participants often used the words "abuse" and "manipulation" interchangeably. One participant felt that her partner was calculated with her emotional insults and "would say things she knew would hurt me." Of these experiences, another woman recalled:

> "…yeah, it was with a woman. It was never like sexual coercion or anything because we were still pretty young. We were still figuring that out. But it was more just manipulation of again, unintentionally coming into a gendered and racialized dynamics. Just saying really hurtful things, especially knowing that at that time, like I was showing very clear signs of mental illness, but I was not getting treatment. And essentially, that was when I learned the term gaslighting. That was when I found out about the term and I was like, Ha, that's what's happening here."

Participants discussed how emotional manipulation, especially perpetrated by women, was difficult for them to identify and understand. While one participant called it "very distressing," another explained:

> "…Well, I think the biggest thing like it's hard to identify what's happening at first, like

you just know that you like, feel insecure, you feel like sad, you feel like your partner's doing something wrong, but it's not always easy to pinpoint exactly what because it's like several little like things over a long time versus like one big event. And it's also like harder to gain support from like, external networks. Because of that, because you're like, oh, like, I feel like she's treating me poorly, but you can't pinpoint like an example always. And so like, from an external perspective, it's like, oh, you're just blowing it off or something or like, it's hard to get even, like validation from like friends or family or your support network. So you just like you're digging yourself into a hole or your partner is digging you into a hole that really nobody else can even see."

It was common for women to reflect on how hurtful emotional abuse was with women due to their partners' understanding their insecurities more deeply than men. One participant explained:

"…she was the one who kind of gave me those emotional insults. She wouldn't necessarily like physically harm me or force me to do anything but she would say things that she knew would hurt me. I think no, like, I don't think men are that smart. They say stuff they think is going to be mean but women I think really, at least in my experience, women partners, they have different, I guess a different interpersonal relationship with your own like insecurities or how you feel about yourself and they're more in tune with that and she would definitely use that against me."

Furthermore, three participants described their women partners pressuring them to have sex. One participant described how her partner was fixated on taking her virginity. For another participant, this pressure to have sex eventually graduated to her partner sexually assaulting her. Her partner used her physical prowess to hold the partner down, which was another power

imbalance this participant identified with this particular partner.

Differences Between Men and Women Partners

After reflecting on their personal experiences of power imbalances, participants were asked for further clarity on their perspective regarding how women use power in their relationships, particularly in comparison to how men use power. Overall, the participants agreed that women exploited emotions while men depended on physical prowess. As one participant summarized, "…if a man is threatening something, it's normally something physical versus if a woman is threatening something, it's something like emotional or social." Indeed, men's use of power was described as more "overt" compared to a woman's more "subtle" and "coercive' use of power. One participant further explained:

> "…they (men) use it in a different way rather than emotional abuse that women tend to drift towards. It's more a physical abuse, not necessarily like actually like hitting someone but like, a physical abuse in a way where it changes someone's mentality rather than emotions. Where they think that they should have to listen to him or they should do what he says because you never know maybe he'll get angry and lash out. Women most of the time, use that power differential in a different way. Rather than getting angry and lashing out they'll get quiet. Yeah, or they will somehow hold that grudge. Longer rather than turn to anger, they turn to passive anger, which I think is a little different way to look at it…."

One participant felt that emotional abuse was particularly salient in women's queer relationships. She explained:

> "…I think queer relationships in general, like have more emotional manipulation versus like physical manipulation. And also just because you're queer, like, it's really easy to like

weaponize that identity. And like, have that dynamic with like if you're out or not, or like how much experience you've had as a queer person like that's a lot easier to weaponize in queer relationships, which plays into like more emotional manipulation, versus like hetero couples."

Another difference between men and women using power was that men have more financial capital, according to participants. Men were also considered "more dominant" and their ability to have power was called "easier" than it was for a woman. This was largely attributed to the fact that men benefit from the patriarchy. However, one participant said her woman partner was "…more like calculated, I guess more smart about it." Another participant felt that her woman partner knew how to hurt her emotionally in ways that impacted her deeper compared to a man's ability to inflict emotional pain.

During this conversation, four participants also reflected on the positives of being in an intimate relationship with a woman. Overall, they felt that their women partners "cared" more about them and their experience than their men partners. One participant said, "…I feel like it's easier to talk things out (with women). Because I don't know if it's just like, as women we have experienced so much pain and harm that we're like, let's do everything we can to like not do that and not get to that place."

Summary

The results presented in this chapter outlined the CM results and the results from the interoperation sessions, which were one-on-one interviews with women who largely identified as bisexual. First, I discussed the results of the cluster map which represented how the women's brainstormed ideas were grouped together as themes. The participants had many rich reflections regarding the meaning of each cluster and suggested ways to improve the clusters to represent

their experiences more accurately. Then, I presented the qualitative interview data. Overall, the majority of participants (n = 17) identified power imbalances as being a defining part of their intimate relationships with women. They discussed the various impacts of these power imbalances, including the occurrence of IPV perpetrated by their women partners. In the next chapter, I will provide a discussion to further contextualize these findings and discuss their larger implications.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The overarching purpose of this dissertation was to allow bisexual women the space to conceptualize their experiences of power imbalances that have occurred in their intimate relationships with other women. We were also interested in the impacts these power imbalances had on participants and their intimate relationships, with an emphasis on the occurrence of IPV perpetrated by their same-gender partners. In the first two phases of CM, participants explicated the specific things that women say or do to show they have power over their partner in queer relationships. During the interpretation sessions, nearly all the women (n = 17) in this sample were able to identify distinct instances of their women partners using power over them. Throughout these three phases, the themes that continuously emerged were centered around emotional manipulation, patriarchal gender roles, White privilege and racial dynamics, as well as themes that dealt with LGBTQ specific stressors. In this chapter, I contextualize these findings by discussing sources of power, tactics for exploiting power, and the impacts of relationship power inequity. These findings emphasize the same-gender relationship dynamics that are unique to bisexual women and further distinguish them from lesbian and exclusively heterosexual women.

Sources Of Power

During the brainstorming phase and one-on-one interviews, participants reflected on the sources of power that their women partners used to gain control over them. Power was primarily achieved through three ways: 1) their partners replicated hegemonic gender roles traditionally found in heterosexual relationships, 2) their partners used having more queer experiences as an advantage, as well as other LGBTQ specific dynamics, 3) their partners emulated society's racism in the relationship.

Hegemonic Gender Roles (Masculinity Versus Femineity)

For this sample of women, who mostly identified as bisexual, heteronormativity was ever-present in their queer relationships. Heteronormativity often emerges in same-gender relationships when a woman performs either a traditionally masculine or feminine role and dates a partner who performs the opposite role (Rothblum et al., 2018). As previously established in the first chapter of this dissertation, Judith Butler (1990) posited that sex, gender, and sexuality collaborate to create masculine and feminine identities that are deemed acceptable by Western society. This aligns with heteronormative ideology, which is the belief that there are two genders (men and women) who have natural roles (masculine and feminine) that support their sex assigned at birth (male or female). This ideology further perpetrates the idea that heterosexuality is the norm of society and that other sexualities are invalid (Warner, 1991). While Butler advocated for queer identities to challenge this norm, Callis (2009) indicated that lesbian identities, in particular, are often treated as masculine. This forces heteronormativity onto queer people, although it is notably more complicated with bisexual women, as they have attraction to people with various genders.

The concept of queer identities being subjected to heteronormativity resonated with this sample because they believed their women partners were replicating hegemonic gender roles in their same-gender relationships. Hegemonic gender roles characteristic of heterosexual relationships have been found to permeate queer relationships, particularly as it pertains to men being dominant and women being submissive. Although men are not present in women's same-gender relationships, hegemonic gender roles can still appear in these relationships. When these hegemonic gender roles are being performed, the women partner who is perceived to be more "masculine" often uses control tactics and aggression to display dominance over their women

partners (Gillum, T. L., & DiFulvio, 2012). While other research has challenged this finding, (Balsam & Szymanski, 2016, 2005; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Bailey et al., 1997), the women in this sample found this to be true to their experience. In other words, the partners that wielded power over them did indeed possess more masculine traits compared to the participant, who often discussed being the more feminine partner.

Furthermore, participants described feeling the need to act more submissive as a response to their women partners' assertion of masculinity. According to Connell (1987), hegemonic masculinity is when men continue to be dominant in society and use their dominance to have control over women. Meanwhile, women practice emphasized femininity, where they are submissive to this domination. Sanger and colleagues (2018) have explored whether women can borrow this hegemonic masculinity to gain power in their same-gender relationships. They found that masculine women, commonly referred to as "butch," use heteronormative relationships norms to have power and control over their more feminine partners. In turn, their feminine partners do indeed practice more submissiveness. Foundational literature on lesbian couples has long established that our heteronormative society expects one partner to take on the masculine role (being dominant) and the other partner the feminine role (being submissive; Peplau, 1983). However, other research has found that the feminine partner exerts more control in the relationship (Kanuah, 2013), further illustrating the complexity of these identities. Regardless of whether the more masculine or more feminine partner is the one primarily displaying power, women in same-gender relationships do not outwardly enjoy male privilege; however, these dynamics and performance of hegemonic gender roles often come into play and promote power differentials in queer relationships because our society is indoctrinated in the patriarchy (Kaschak, 2014).

Heterosexism is a large component of heterosexual gender roles being adopted into queer relationships. It is the steadfast belief that the world must be heterosexual (Pharr, 1997), and indeed *is* heterosexual. Following this social structure, queer people are invalidated and excluded from society (Pascoe, 2001). Heterosexism exists at the structural level to illegitimatize queer relationships and maintain power over these identities (Herek, 2007). This not only renders queer people invisible, but also deems them problematic if they are visible. With this continuing to be such a dominating ideal in society, perhaps it is unsurprising that queer couples then try to replicate what they see majority of the time—heterosexual couples.

During the rating process of CM, participants indicated that gender roles were highly relevant to their personal experiences of power imbalances with other women; however, they rated these statements as having the lowest impact on whether IPV would occur. Interestingly, only four participants in the interview process discussed heteronormative gender roles and their impacts. One woman who discussed gender roles even described how masculine queer women are not afforded power in society, regardless of whether they believe they have this power or not. While certain studies have explored the role of heteronormativity in queer women's same-gender relationships, other research that has found queer people actively reject heterosexual norms rather than replicate them (Lamont, 2017). In a systemic review of labor division in lesbian households, it was consistently found that lesbian couples distribute household labor more evenly than heterosexual couples (Brewster, 2016). This serves as further evidence that women's same-gender relationships are overall more egalitarian than their opposite-gender relationships. Overall, then, there are more power dynamics at play in bisexual women's intimate relationships with other women than simply borrowing from patriarchal gender roles.

Queer Experience

For many participants, the same-gender relationships where power dynamics were most salient were also their first queer experiences. This aligns with foundational research on IPV in lesbian couples that found that IPV often happens in women's first same-gender relationships (Ristock, 2002; Renzetti, 1992). Without a framework of previous queer experiences, participants depended on their partner to guide them in what a queer relationship was supposed to look like. According to a qualitative synthesis focused on queer women's experience of IPV, a common theme across the 19 articles was the emergence of power differentials due to different levels of queer experience (Harden et al., 2022). Women were uncertain regarding what was considered acceptable for a queer relationship, which made them more vulnerable to experiencing IPV in these dynamics (Donovan & Hester, 2008; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; McDonald, 2012). When it is a woman's first queer relationship, especially, she might come to believe that abuse is simply how these relationships "were supposed to be" (Kanuha, 2013, p. 1183). This was a sentiment echoed by participants in this dissertation. Participants felt their partners were more knowledgeable about queerness due to them having more experience, and as such, they thought the resulting power imbalances were inherent to queer relationships.

In addition to queer experience, other LGBTQ specific relationship dynamics were found to play a role in power imbalances for my sample. Namely, participants discussed the stress that not being "out" about their sexual orientation placed on their relationship, as well as the impact of concealing their sexual identity. Meidlinger and Hope (2014) distinguished a nuanced difference being outness and concealment. "Outness" is when a person is open about their sexual orientation or identity with others, while "concealment" refers to when a queer person actively attempts to prevent their stigmatized sexual orientation from being known to others. For queer

individuals, outness has been linked to better mental health outcomes (Coffelt & Hess, 2014; Knoble & Linville, 2012; Morris et al., 2001), while concealment is associated with lower mental wellbeing (Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Riggle et al., 2017). Regarding romantic relationship outcomes, early research on the impact of outness on queer relationship satisfaction reported inconclusive results. While Jordan and Deluty (2000) found that outness positively impacted relationship satisfaction in lesbian couples, no correlation between relationship quality and outness was reported in other studies (Beals & Peplau, 2001; Todosijevic et al., 2005). More recent research found that outness is a strategy of resilience that has positive impacts for queer relationships (Knoble & Linvelle, 2012) and that outness is a positive predictor for greater relationship satisfaction (Ballester et al., 2021; Vale & Bisconi, 2020). If an individual reports low outness, this is associated with decreased commitment to their partner, particularly on stressful days (Totenhagen et al., 2018) and lower relationship satisfaction (Sommantico et al., 2018). In lesbian relationships, more openness about sexual orientation with friends and family is positively associated with relationship quality (LaSala, 2013). When queer couples are both out, this is associated with greater relationship satisfaction, and there is a positive effect in their interactions with each other (Clausell & Roisman, 2009; Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). Concealment motivation, which refers to when a queer person remains private regarding their orientation and same-gender relationships (Mohr & Kendra, 2011), mediates the association between internalized stigma and relationship satisfaction in queer people's romantic relationships (Pepping et al., 2019). This may result in decreased involvement with family, which then causes tension for the queer couple (Bosson et al., 2012). Indeed, one participant in my sample described tensions in her same-gender relationships surrounding her partner wanting to meet her family, which the participant was uncomfortable with due to her family's homonegativity.

Despite the promising research on outness, it has been found to have fewer positive outcomes for bisexual women than their lesbian peers. Indeed, the greater degrees of outness that a bisexual person reports is associated with more negative outcomes (Feinstein et al., 2019; Watson et al., 2022). When revealing their sexual identity to family, in particular, bisexual people have been found to be strategic in who they "come out" to, because bisexual people consider how to come out to maximize desirable outcomes. This is largely dependent on their family's cultural contexts, such as bisexual stereotypes and attitudes and heteronormative expectations (Scherrer et al., 2015).

Participants also described binegativity perpetrated by their women partners. In studies with lesbians, binegativity is commonly found, particularly the belief that bisexuality is a phase (Klesse, 2011; Hayfield et al., 2014). Indeed, one participant was told exactly this by her lesbian partner. Furthermore, research on lesbians' perceptions of bisexual women indicates that lesbians believe bisexual women are untrustworthy (Flanders et al., 2016; Hayfield et al., 2014). Interestingly, this was a theme found regardless of whether the participants' partner identified as lesbian or bisexual. There was a persistent fear of being left for a man. As such, lesbians and bisexual partners can both perpetrate binegativity in relationships with bisexual women. For bisexual partners, this is likely linked to their own experiences of internalized binegativity, although further research needs to be conducted to confirm this association. During interviews, the specific impacts of binegativity were not discussed in-depth; however, research on minority stress outlines its potential impacts. As discussed at length in previous chapters, minority stress theory posits that those with a minoritized status, such as bisexuality, endure higher levels of stress due to the stigmatization subjected to them by society (Brooks, 1981; Meyer, 2003). Bisexual people endure additional minority stress due to their plurisexual identity and the

binegativity directed towards it (Dyar & Feinstein, 2018; Yost & Thomas, 2012). This in turn associated with poorer physical and mental health, suicidality, and sexual risk behavior (Craney, Watson, Brownfield, & Flores, 2018; Dyar & London, 2018; Katz-Wise, Mereish, & Woulfe, 2017; Mereish, Katz-Wise, & Woulfe, 2017; Watson, Morgan, & Craney, 2018)

White Privilege and Racial Dynamics

In the brainstorming and interview phases of this dissertation, participants of color described how White privilege was used to gain power over them in their relationships with White women. In queer relationships, White women have long been found to use their Whiteness as a source of power in their relationships with women of color (Harden et al., 2022; Ristock, 2003). White privilege has a documented history of being valued and maintained in the LGBTQ community (Hutchinson, 2000; Riggs, 2010; Valdes, 1997), which excludes and reduces the self-worth of queer people of color (Ghabrial, 2017). White privilege is "an epistemological stance defined by power, a position of invisibility or ignorance, and a set of beliefs about racial 'Others' and oneself" (Arnesen, 2001, p. 9). While whiteness is valued, queer woman of color are often hypersexualized and deemed aggressive, which serves to masculinize them (Logie & Rwigema, 2014). This was the experience of at least one participant in this dissertation, who felt that society and her partner masculinized her due to her minoritized racial identity. While other participants discussed masculinity in terms of creating a power imbalance, this participant described it as a removal of her power due to the underlying racism.

Further exacerbating these racial dynamics is the homonegativity women of color often experience in their racial communities. In different racial communities, it is often not acceptable to hold a LGBTQ identity, which greatly limits a woman of color's support system and increases their vulnerability to experience power imbalances in their queer relationships with white women

(Kanuha, 2013). Bisexuality, in particular, suffers from much stigma in these communities. Indeed, racial communities often perceive bisexuality more negatively (Dodge et al., 2016) and address it as an affront to traditional roles, further invalidating this identity (Brooks et al., 2008; Sung et al., 2015). Foundational research on IPV as experienced by racially minorized women has argued that society deems these women as deviant due to racism and heterosexism, which is then compounded by homonegativity in their own racial communities (Crenshaw, 1994; Kanuha, 1990l Richie, 1985). Queer women of Asian descent often feel as though they must forfeit their racial identity to be queer, which leaves them feeling less than "whole" (Choudhury, 2007; Kanuha, 2013, p. 1186).

In Kanuha's (2013) research with Asian and Pacific Islander queer women, participants discussed feeling a deep emotional bond when dating women who were racially minoritized, especially if they were also of Asian descent. This was the experience of at least one participant in this dissertation who described being in a relationship with another woman of color. However, far from being idyllic, racial dynamics persisted through colorism (referring to discrimination and prejudice against darker skin tones; Hall 2018). This participant was a woman of South Asian heritage, an identity that research has specifically found to experience much racism in the LGBTQ community (Patel, 2019). South Asian women are subjected to erasure of their racial identity in the queer community, as they are expected to assimilate to Western-normative performances of being queer. White privilege, in particular, is attributed to alienating and excluding South Asian women from the LGBTQ community (Patel, 2019).

In addition to creating power imbalances in their same-gender relationships, there are other negative impacts of the LGBTQ community's racism and the homonegativity often rampant in racialized communities. When Asian Americans perceive their racial identity as

moderately or highly important, an association has been found with their discomfort in the LGBTQ community that is race related and their decreased mental well-being (Let et al., 2022). Furthermore, heterosexism in Asian communities and racism in LGBTQ dating experiences has been linked to poorer psychological well-being for Asian Americans (Kim & Epstein, 2018; Szymanski & Sung, 2010; Sandil et al., 2015). The stressors endured by queer Asian American women have also been linked to their experiences of IPV (Choi & Israel, 2016). Perhaps unsurprisingly, bisexual women of color report more internalized binegativity than their White counterparts (Molina et al., 2015). As a consequence of racism in their racial communities, queer people of color often conceal their identities and confirm to heteronormative gender roles (Alimahomed, 2010; Fuller et al., 2009). While research is scarce regarding women of color that identify specifically as bisexual, it is crucial to understand that over half of bisexual-identifying people are not White (Gates, 2010). Bisexual people are also more racialized than lesbian, gay, or heterosexual individuals (Gates, 2010). To cope with the persistent racism experienced in the LGBTQ community, bisexual or nonmonosexual (having attraction to more than one gender) people of color engage in communities comprised of other queer people of color (Lim & Hewitt, 2018). However, binegativity was still present in these networks by lesbian and gay people.

Tactics For Exploiting Power

Underlying the power imbalances that my participants experienced in their same-gender relationships, at least seven of these women also reported explicit emotional abuse or manipulation perpetrated by their women partner. Indeed, emotional abuse was used to further harm the participants in these relationships. Compared to physical and sexual abuse, there is a wide range of phrases to describe the manifestation of IPV that is emotional and verbal in nature, including emotional abuse and psychological aggression. In this dissertation, I interchange

between using “emotional abuse” and “emotional manipulation” to reflect the verbatim voices of my participants. Follingstad (2007) defined emotional abuse (referred to as psychological aggression) as encompassing “the range of verbal and mental methods designed to emotionally wound, coerce, control, intimidate, psychologically harm, and express anger” (p. 443). In my sample, participants mostly common described their abusive women partners directing insults at them with the overall aim to hurt them emotionally. These women felt that their women partners knew what to say to really impact their mental well-being.

Despite the scarcity of literature on emotional abuse, the Office for Victims of Crime (2017) recognizes it as the most common manifestation of IPV. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV, 2015), perpetrators use emotional abuse as a tactic to control their partners. In this dissertation, participants commonly discussed emotional abuse as a strategy used by their women partners to exploit power imbalances. Indeed, emotional abuse and manipulation was occurring in tandem with these power imbalances. The tactics described by participants, including verbal abuse and threats, have been documented as causing trauma to the victim (NCADV, 2015).

Furthermore, emotional abuse has been linked to issues specific to queer people, such as connection to the LGBTQ community, internalized homonegativity, and one’s openness about their sexual identity (Mason et al., 2014). For example, in lesbian couples, connection to the LGBTQ community and being open about one’s minoritized sexual identity has been associated with less perpetration of emotional abuse (Byers, 2007; Mason et al., 2014). In a study of Asian and Pacific Islander lesbian and queer women’s experiences of IPV in their same-gender relationships, these women described emotional and psychological abuse, with ranged from many actions such as name calling or threatening to harm herself (Kanuha, 2013).

Emotional abuse, especially tactics involving manipulation, coercion, intimidation, and threats, at times has a greater impact on the survivor's mental well-being than acts of physical abuse (Pico-Alfonso, 2005). According to early research, lesbians in particular reported that emotional abuse is more detrimental than physical injuries (Hammond, 1989).

While the research on emotional abuse in queer couples is generally lacking, there remains a dearth in the literature for emotional abuse as experienced specifically by bisexual people. It is particularly crucial to address this gap in the literature, considering that preliminary findings show that emotional abuse is the most common form of IPV reported by bisexual people (Head & Milton, 2014). According to an autoethnographic account, emotional abuse in bisexual women's same-gender relationships is rooted in binegativity (Ozalas, 2020). This aligns with the findings of this dissertation, as the partners of the participants used binegativity to emotionally manipulate them. Participants described their partners insulting or otherwise invalidating their sexual identity, which could be considered a form of emotional abuse. More research is required to understand the association between binegativity and emotional abuse.

Impacts Of Relationship Power Inequity

As a consequence of the power imbalances persistent in their queer relationships, participants described feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, especially regarding their sexual orientation. This was perhaps compounded by the erasure of bisexuality that bisexual women already endure from society. Previously, I discussed the erasure of queer identities due to heterosexism. Bisexual identities also suffer from additional erasure, with bisexual women being expected to conform to being exclusively heterosexual or exclusively lesbian (Balsam & Mohr, 2007). As such, bisexual people already have higher levels of uncertainty regarding their sexual orientation (Balsam & Mohr, 2007). After experiencing such prevalent discrimination from

society, bisexual people may feel their bisexual identity is delegitimized (Belmonte & Holmes, 2016; Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009; McLean, 2008), which increases levels of internalized binegativity (Puckett et al., 2017; Sheets & Mohr, 2009). Furthermore, bisexual people with same-gender partners report more internalized binegativity than those in heterosexual relationships (Arriaga & Parent, 2019). Hence, participants' increased uncertainty of their sexual orientation after power imbalances were present in their same-gender relationships is perhaps rooted in these additional experiences of internalized binegativity.

Another impact of power imbalances in participants' intimate relationships with other women were how these experiences affected their future relationships. For at least two of my participants, power imbalances were attributed to being a fundamental reason why they hesitated to seek new intimate relationships or otherwise felt "sheltered" in their new relationships. These feelings were reminiscent of the ones experienced by survivors of IPV after their abusive relationships ends. Among their fears regarding new relationships, survivors often report struggling with feeling distrustful of their new partner due to the abuse endured by their previous partner (Flasch et al., 2019).

While this dissertation focused more broadly on impacts of power imbalances rather than exclusively on experiences of IPV, my participants' experiences echoed those reported in the literature on betrayal trauma theory. This theory refers to when an individual is subjected to abuse from an institution or person that they trusted (Freyd, 1996; Freyd et al., 2005). After betrayal occurs in relationships, individuals face the realization that someone they trusted caused them harm, which has ramifications for their mental well-being and deters their abilities to sustain new relationships that are considered healthy (Burton et al., 2011). Survivors may purposefully maintain an emotional distance from new partners and hesitant to commit in order

to protect themselves from experiencing IPV again (Cherlin et al., 2004). Indeed, women who are hesitant to enter new relationships attribute this to the fear of their new partner perpetrating IPV against them (St. Vil et al., 2021). This is reminiscent of one of my participants who described being fearful that power imbalances would once again manifest in any new relationship. She was especially fearful because the behavior of her former partner was not always rooted in attempting to gain control. Rather, the partner gradually sought to gain power over the course of the relationship. Promisingly, one participant described positive impacts on her future relationships, including improved communication with her future partners. This aligns with research that focuses on resiliency in new relationships entered into after the experience of IPV, in which participants described stronger communication skills as a strength of their new relationship (Neustifer & Powell, 2015). Importantly, many women in my sample described currently being in what they considered positive relationships after ending the relationships with women where power imbalances were salient.

Study Limitations

The findings of this dissertation must be further contextualized in light of its limitations. First, it relied on convenience and snowball sampling and featured a predominantly White sample. This, and the self-selection bias inherent in recruitment for qualitative studies, limits the findings' generalizability to larger populations. Indeed, while racial dynamics did emerge from this data, they would perhaps have been more prevalent had the sample been more diverse. In particular, during the rating phase of this study, White participants might not have rated statements representing racial dynamics as high for causing IPV due to a biased perspective. Due to spamming of our screener survey, we were only able to accept participation from individuals with verified university emails and the women they were able to recruit themselves through

snowball sampling. This greatly limited the diversity of our sample, especially regarding education status. Furthermore, this study did not offer a concise definition of IPV during the brainstorming session, which has implications for the various phases of CM. For instance, when participants were asked to rate statements based on their likelihood of causing IPV to occur, it was later revealed in the one-on-one interviews that participants had different definitions of what they considered as encompassing IPV. Namely, there were participants who only defined IPV through physical acts of abuse; however, we were interested in emotional and verbal abuse, as well. A further limitation of this study is that cluster maps will look differently depending on the participants who engage in each step of the concept mapping process. We were unable to interview all the participants from the first two CM phases, and their perspectives would have certainly shaped the revised cluster map. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study advance our knowledge in crucial ways. Perhaps most importantly, it focused exclusively on bisexual-identified women (as well as those within the bisexual umbrella, such as pansexual and queer women) rather than treating them as a homogenous group with other lesbian women. It engaged these women at various levels of the research process, including data interpretation, to ensure their voices were given a platform. In this way, an important step was taken to supporting this community and representing their stories through research.

Future Research Directions

While this dissertation represents an important step forward in research with bisexual women, there is still much work to be done. Namely, we as researchers need to continue treating bisexual women as a group distinguishable from other sexual orientations, particularly lesbian women. While literature on lesbians is scarce compared to heterosexual people, there is an even larger dearth of knowledge regarding bisexual women. Often, bisexual people are treated as a

homogenous group with the larger LGBTQ community (Barker et al., 2012; Barmea, van Eden-Moorefield, &. Khaw, 2018; Cox, Bimbi, Parsons, 2013), or they are otherwise not included in analysis at all (Przedworski, McAlpine, Karaca, & VanKim, 2014). Indeed, a recent systemic review on IPV experienced by bisexual people found that only one article from a sample of 36 articles treated bisexual people as an exclusive group (Bermea at al., 2018). However, as this dissertation has outlined, bisexual people have health profiles and experiences that differ from heterosexual or other queer people. In this discussion chapter, much of the research I used to contextualize my findings was conducted with lesbian couples. This further speaks to the need to include bisexual women in our research. Previous research on women's same-gender relationships has seemingly only focused on lesbian-identifying women or has used "lesbian couple" as an umbrella term to describe women's intimate same-gender relationships. However, this dissertation found that it is crucial to be accurate and inclusive regarding the sexual orientations of the women who comprise these relationships. For instance, the women in this sample experienced much binegativity in their same-gender relationships, which distinguishes them from lesbian women.

In addition to the scarcity of studies specific to bisexual people (Kaestle & Ivory, 2012; Monro et al., 2017), bisexual people of color are particularly underrepresented in sexual minority research (Ghabrial & Ross, 2018). While this dissertation had a predominantly White sample, racial dynamics as sources of power imbalances was a salient experience for participants who identified as women of color. White privilege and colorism factored in as an important role in gaining power over these women. By not striving to diversity our samples, these stories are largely lost in the literature.

In this dissertation about power imbalances, emotional abuse and manipulation was a

prevalent experience for these women. Emotional abuse has long been established as receiving less attention in the IPV literature compared to physical and sexual abuse (Burke & Follingstad, 1999; Capaldi et al,, 2012). While literature on IPV occurring in same-gender couples is already more limited than that of heterosexual couples, even less is known about experiences of emotional abuse in these same-gender dynamics compared to physical and sexual abuse (Mason et al., 2014). Furthermore, studies on emotional abuse in same-gender relationships has long been identified as being deterred by a lack of consistency in a definition and method of assessment for emotional abuse (Burke & Follingstad, 1999). Rees (2010,) cautions researchers about creating a universal definition of emotional abuse, explaining "Emotional abuse, like a well-known painting, may be described, but not 'defined' such that others can recognize it" (p. 60). According to Rees (2010), a definition of emotional abuse may oversimplify the phenomena. However, in order to assess emotional abuse in LGBTQ couples, we need to at least continue refining how it is measured. This is particularly true for conducting research with bisexual women. As this dissertation showed, binegativity is a crucial part of the emotional abuse that bisexual women endure, which distinguishes it from the experiences of other LGBTQ couples and individuals. Regarding the power imbalances that were discussed in this dissertation, a measurement study with survey data collection is an important next step to provide further evidence for the clusters identified in the concept mapping process. The items generated here would serve as the survey items, with the goal of using factor analysis to assess associations between the items and clusters and move toward the development of a relationship power scale reflecting the experiences of bisexual women.

In addition to future research directions, this study also has implications for clinicians. Namely, clinicians working with bisexual women should be aware of the binegativity that

impacts their lives, romantic relationships, and perhaps the reasons they are seeking clinical care. Furthermore, if patients are in same-gender relationships, potential IPV might manifest differently than IPV seen in heterosexual couples, thus presenting differently in the clinical setting. For instance, emotional IPV is perhaps more prevalent in bisexual women's violence same-gender relationships than physical IPV, yet women may not identify these experiences as abuse or think to disclose them to providers. It is imperative that clinicians and researchers alike assess for more forms of IPV than exclusively physical or sexual.

Conclusion

By engaging bisexual women in the research process through CM, this dissertation has provided a rich contextualization of bisexual women's experiences in same-gender relationships that prioritized their voices. Namely, the women in this sample, who were bisexual or identified with labels encapsulated by the bisexual umbrella, described the specific examples of power imbalances that characterized their relationships with other women. Further separating this from research on heterosexual couples, power imbalances in these same-gender relationships were mostly attributed to LGTBQ specific dynamics. For instance, participants felt that their partners with more queer relationship experience had much more power over them, and the participants depended on these partners to guide them through the etiquette of a same-gender relationship. While the hegemonic gender roles that characterize the research and theory on heterosexual couples were also present in bisexual women's queer relationships, the manifestation of these roles was quite different. Indeed, while the participants reflected on their masculine partners having more power over them, they also recognized that these partners were not being granted the larger societal power given to perpetrators who are men. Additionally, White privilege and colorism were discussed in context of same-gender relationships, as a source of power used

against women of color. This was again specific to the queer context, however, because these participants felt more masculinized by their feminine partners. For eight of the women in this sample, experiences of IPV perpetrated by women occurred alongside power imbalances. This IPV mostly manifested as emotional abuse and manipulation. Women found that power imbalances and IPV perpetrated by women were considerably more "covert" than when the perpetrator was a man. Overall, this dissertation helped to establish foundational knowledge on bisexual women's same-gender relationships. These are rich relationships that have notable differences compared to bisexual women's heterosexual relationship dynamics. While this dissertation focused heavily on power imbalances, women also reflected on how positive they felt about dating women and how these relationships had the potential to be emotionally deeper than even their relationships with men. Going forward, we as researchers must continue engaging bisexual women in our research as collaborators rather than just participants. We must also recognize that their intimate relationships with other women are complex, worthy of documentation, and are as valid to study as their relationships with men.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

EXEMPT DETERMINATION
Revised Common Rule

November 9, 2021

To: Heather Lynne McCauley

Re: **MSU Study ID:** STUDY00006701
Principal Investigator: Heather Lynne McCauley
Category: Exempt 3(i)(B)
Exempt Determination Date: 11/9/2021
Limited IRB Review: Not Required.

Title: Measuring Relationship Power and Violence in Behaviorally Bisexual Women

This study has been determined to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d) 3(i)(B).

Principal Investigator (PI) Responsibilities: The PI assumes the responsibilities for the protection of human subjects in this study as outlined in Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) Manual Section 8-1, Exemptions.

Continuing Review: Exempt studies do not need to be renewed.

Modifications: In general, investigators are not required to submit changes to the Michigan State University (MSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) once a research study is designated as exempt as long as those changes do not affect the exempt category or criteria for exempt determination (changing from exempt status to expedited or full review, changing exempt category) or that may substantially change the focus of the research study such as a change in hypothesis or study design. See HRPP Manual Section 8-1, Exemptions, for examples. If the study is modified to add additional sites for the research, please note that you may not begin the research at those sites until you receive the appropriate approvals/permissions from the sites.

Please contact the HRPP office if you have any questions about whether a change must be submitted for IRB review and approval.

New Funding: If new external funding is obtained for an active study that had been determined exempt, a new initial IRB submission will be required, with limited exceptions. If you are unsure if a new initial IRB submission is required, contact the HRPP office. IRB review of the new submission must be completed before new funds can be spent on human research activities, as the new funding source may have additional or different requirements.

Office of Regulatory Affairs
Human Research Protection Program

4000 Collins Road
Suite 136
Lansing, MI 48910

517-355-2180
Fax: 517-432-4503
Email: irb@msu.edu
www.hrpp.msu.edu

Figure 6.1 IRB Approval Letter

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT FLYER

RESEARCH STUDY:

POWER IN BISEXUAL WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIPS

Are you a woman, 18 years or older, who identifies as bisexual?

If you answered yes to this question, you may be eligible to participate in a new study aimed at improving our knowledge of bisexual women's same-gender relationships. The purpose of this research project is to gain a better understanding of how power dynamics in these relationships affect them. Eligible participants will participate in **three phases**: 1) a 30-minute online activity; 2) a second 30- minute online activity; and 3) a Zoom-based 90-minute one-on-one interview with the researcher. Participants will be compensated with a $10 gift card for the first activity, a $15 gift card for the second activity, and a $40 gift card for the interview. **If you are interested in participating, please take our eligibility screener here:**

If you have any additional questions, please contact Taylor Reid at 810-620-1277 (call or text) or at reidtay1@msu.edu.

Figure 6.2 Recruitment Flyer

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Study Title: Relationship Power and Violence Among Bisexual Women
Researcher and Title: Taylor Reid & Heather McCauley, ScD
Department and Institution: Department of Human Development and Family Studies & School of Social Work, Michigan State University
Contact Information: Taylor Reid, reidtay1@msu.edu

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The purpose of this qualitative research project is to understand power imbalances in bisexual women's same-gender relationships, as it relates to the outcome of intimate partner violence.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO

You will be asked to participate in a brainstorming session on an online platform called Concept Systems Global. For approximately thirty minutes, you will generate as many responses as possible to a prompt question aimed at inquiring about power imbalances that occur in women's same-gender relationships. You will also be asked contextual questions about your history of intimate partner violence victimization. On a later occasion, you will be asked to engage in a sorting and rating activity that utilizes the master list of items generated in the brainstorming session, which will have a duration of approximately thirty minutes. Finally, you will be asked to reflect on the cluster maps created from the previous two steps during a ninety-minute, one-on one interview session. During the interview session, you will be asked to reflect on how power imbalances relate to the manifestation of intimate partner violence. You may decline to answer any question that you wish not to answer.

POTENTIAL RISKS

This study possesses minimal risks. However, it is possible that you might experience discomfort while talking about intimate partner violence and the marginalization of women's same-gender relationships.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

While you will not personally benefit from this study, we hope that this study will benefit others in the future by improving our knowledge about power and violence in women's same-gender relationships.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDEENTIALITY

Interview sessions will be audio-recorded and stored on password-protected computers. No identifiable characteristics will be discussed in the interview sessions, nor will these characteristics be transcribed. During interview sessions, you are also encouraged to reflect on

broad experiences rather than your personal experiences. After being transcribed verbatim, the audio-recording will be destroyed. The only identifiable information we will retain is your name and email address in order to send you compensation; however, this information will be deleted afterwards. The information collected will be stored in a password-collected, secured server that is only accessible by our research team and the MSU Human Research Protection Program. The transcripts will be preserved for a minimum of three years after the project is published.

This research is supported by a Certificate of Confidentiality from the National Institutes of Health, which means that the researchers are prohibited from releasing any information, documents, or samples that might identify you without your consent. Your agreement would also be required to provide them as evidence. This protection covers federal, local, or state civil, administrative, legislative, or other proceedings. For example, your information cannot be used as evidence for a court subpoena.

Other important things you need to know are that the Certificate does not waive our responsibility to report any required information from federal, state, or local laws. For example, we would have to report any admission of elder or child abuse, or threats to harm yourself or someone else.

YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW

It is your right to decline participation in this research. You can also withdraw your participation once the research has started. No consequences will occur after you stop, nor will you lose any benefits that you would otherwise receive.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY

You will receive $10 for participation in the brainstorming portion of this study. You will receive $15 for participating in the sorting and rating portion of this study. You will receive $40 for participation in the interview session. In order to prevent bots from interfering with the study, participants will not receive compensation if their answers are deemed nonsensical.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The data collected as part of this research will not be used or distributed in future research projects, even if your identifiable information is removed.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any remaining questions or concerns about this research project, such as scientific issues, how to participate in any part of it, or if you need to report an injury, please contact the researchers.

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Heather L. McCauley, ScD
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If you have questions or concerns about your participation in this study as a research participant, would like to acquire information or offer input, or if you would like to issue a complaint about this project, please contact, anonymously if needed, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or email irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

By participating in any part of this study, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this research study.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

Thank you for participating in this research study and thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today. I am going to begin audio recording our conversation.

We truly appreciate your time and input. Before I begin, do you have any questions for me?

The first part of this process asked you to share ideas you had about the things women say or do to show they have power over their same-gender partners. Today, I'm going to share with you the major ideas that everyone shared through this process. Specifically, I'm going to show you a map with clusters that represent how ideas were grouped together by participants in the study.

Let's look at the first cluster. These are statements that were most commonly grouped together during the sorting and rating process.

1. I will give you time to review the map and ask you to identify what items stand out to you and what items you feel don't belong. Can you tell me why they don't belong?

2. How do items in each cluster relate to one another?

3. What would you name this cluster?

Let's look at the second cluster.

1. What items stand out to you? What items do you feel like they don't belong? Can you tell me why they don't belong?

2. How do items in each cluster relate to one another?

3. What would you name each cluster?

Let's look at the third cluster.

1. What items stand out to you? What items do you feel like they don't belong? Can you tell me why they don't belong?

1. How do items in each cluster relate to one another?

2. What would you name each cluster?

This is the fourth cluster.

1. What items stand out to you? What items do you feel like they don't belong? Can you tell me why they don't belong?

1. How do items in each cluster relate to one another?

2. What would you name each cluster?

This is the fifth cluster that emerged.

1. What items stand out to you? What items do you feel like they don't belong? Can you tell me why they don't belong?

1. How do items in each cluster relate to one another?

2. What would you name each cluster?

This is the sixth cluster.

1. What items stand out to you? What items do you feel like they don't belong? Can you tell me why they don't belong?

1. How do items in each cluster relate to one another?

2. What would you name each cluster?

Finally, this is the seventh cluster.

1. What items stand out to you? What items do you feel like they don't belong? Can you tell me why they don't belong?

2. How do items in each cluster relate to one another?

3. What would you name each cluster?

4. Is there anything that surprises you when you look at these clusters?

5. Is there anything missing that you would want to add?

Now that we have discussed the concept mapping results, I'm going to ask questions pertaining to more in-depth experiences of power in your relationships with women.

6. Can you tell me a story when your women partner used power over you in your relationship?
    a. How did it impact you?
    b. How do you think it impacted your relationship?

7. Do you think your identity as a bisexual/pansexual/queer women impacted the power dynamics in your relationship?

    a. If yes, how so?
    b. Do you think your partners' sexual orientation impacted power dynamics in your relationship?

8. What are the differences between how women, men, and nonbinary people use power in their intimate relationships?

Now, I want to shift discussion a little to talk about the intersections of power and violence.

9. In the brainstorming process, we asked whether you had ever been physically hurt or pressured to have sex or threatened by your partner.
    a. Are these experiences you have had? Can you tell me a little bit more about them?
    b. Probe: Can you tell me if this was in a relationship with a man or women?

10. In the rating process, we asked you to share about these statements would influence the likelihood that abuse happens in a woman's intimate relationship with other woman. Can you take us through your thought process of how you rated these statements?

11. Despite the many challenges that bisexual people experience, what are examples or strategies that women can use to live a happy and healthy life?

12. For bisexual, pansexual, and queer women, what can we as practitioners and academics do better to support you?

    a. What should we know about your same-gender relationships?
    b. What should we know about potential violence in your same-gender relationships?
    c. What can practitioners do to make you feel more comfortable discussing your same-gender relationships with them?

13. What did it feel like to share your story in this setting?

I will turn off the audio recorder now. Thank you for sharing your time and perspective. It is greatly appreciated.