

“Making it Work”: A Grounded Theory of How Mixed Orientation Married  
Couples Commit, Sexually Identify, and Gender Themselves

Christian Edward Jordal

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Katherine R. Allen  
April L. Few-Demo  
Christine E. Kaestle  
Margaret L. Keeling

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Blacksburg, Virginia

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## **Abstract**

Married bisexuals who come out to their heterosexual partners do not invariably divorce. This qualitative study included 14 intact, mixed orientation married couples. The mean marriage duration was 14.5 years, and the mean time since the bisexual spouse had come out was 7.9 years. The research focused the negotiation processes around three constructs: (a) sexual identity; (b) gender identity; and (c) marital commitment. Dyadic interviews were used to generate a grounded theory of the identity and commitment negotiation processes occurring among intact mixed orientation married couples. The findings revealed two sexual identity trajectories: Bisexuals who identify before marriage and reemerge within marriage; or bisexuals who do not identify before marriage but who emerge from within marriage. Two gender identity processes were reported: gender non-conformity and deliberate gender conformity. Finally, two negotiation processes around marital commitment were found: (a) closed marital commitment, and (b) open marital commitment. Closed marital commitment was defined as monogamous. Open marital commitment had four subtypes: (a) monogamous with the option to open; (b) open on one side (i.e., the bisexual spouse was or had the option to establish a tertiary relationship outside the marriage); (c) open on both sides or polyamorous; and (d) third-person inclusive (i.e. couples had or were seeking a third person to bring into their marriage for both spouses). The implications for research and clinical practice were discussed.

## Table of Contents

Table of contents.....	iii
List of Tables .....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Dedication.....	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Theoretical Framework.....	3
Rationale for the Study .....	8
Overview of the Proposed Study .....	11
Significance of the Study.....	12
Research Questions.....	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	14
Review of the Empirical Literature.....	14
Clinical Significance of the Study .....	23
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	30
Rationale for the Approach.....	30
Chapter 4: Findings.....	61
Discovering Bisexuality Before and After Marriage.....	61
Gender Negotiations: Non-conformity and Deliberate Conformity.....	69
Disclosing to Spouses, Seeking Support, and Coming Out to Others While Married.....	78
Making MOM Work is an Intentional, Relational Process.....	94
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications.....	114
Overview of the Findings and Grounded Theory .....	114
Implications for Research and Clinical Practice.....	124
Future Research .....	129
In Conclusion.....	129
References.....	131
Footnotes.....	155
Appendix A.....	156
Appendix B.....	157
Appendix C.....	158

Appendix D.....	159
Appendix E.....	160
Appendix F.....	161
Appendix G.....	168
Appendix H.....	169

## List of Tables

<i>Number</i>	<i>Page</i>
Table 1: Mean Age, Marriage Duration, and Time Since Disclosure to Spouse.....	33
Table 2: Couple Demographic Information.....	35
Table 3: Online Groups For Mixed Orientation Married Couples and Spouses.....	39
Table 4: Coding Scheme One.....	49
Table 5: Focused Coding Audit Trail.....	52
Table 6: Discovering Bisexuality Before and After Marriage.....	62
Table 7: Negotiating Gender Identity Within Marriage.....	71
Table 8: Marital Commitment Typology.....	96

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Christian Jordal

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## **Dedication**

For my past: Dennis Jordal, who sat down and did my homework with me every night from first to third grade and by the grace of God managed to avoid a coronary.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Ninety percent of adults will marry at some point in their lives (Cherlin, 2009). It has been estimated that there are two million mixed orientation marriages between a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person and a heterosexual person in the United States (Buxton, 2001). This estimate is conservative, and limited by time and to those individuals who sexually identify themselves and who have disclosed their sexual identity to their spouse. It excludes those individuals who may endorse same-sex attraction but who are unaware that their attraction warrants identification or who reject such labeling. The actual incidence of mixed orientation marriage is likely higher as same-gender sexual experimentation and relationships have increased (Hernandez & Wilson, 2007; Mosher, Chandra, & Jones, 2005).

The average age at first marriage in the United States increased in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The dating-to-relationship-to-marriage life-course trajectory for some may include long-term partnership, cohabitation, and even parenthood prior to marriage. Greater educational and financial parity between the sexes and increased access to birth control have allowed some women to delay marriage despite continued inequity. Social changes have led scholars to reconsider fundamental notions of adult development (Arnett, 2000). The increased transparency afforded by social media across society and the rapid pace of social change taking place suggests that this will only continue.

It has been suggested that social status is a motivating factor for same-sex attracted persons who marry (Higgins, 2002; Percy, 2005). The inaccessibility of same-sex marriage, the benefits and status afforded to married persons in the United States, and the ease and decreased stigma of divorce reinforce the marriage outcome for relationships.

Marriage is a status one builds up to, often by living with a partner beforehand, by attaining steady employment or starting a career, by putting away some savings, and even by having children...it used to be the foundation of adult personal life; now it is sometimes the capstone (Cherlin, 2009, p. 851).

Mixed orientation marriage research reinforces the notion that mixed orientation marriages are unhealthy (Corley & Kort, 2006) and “fatally flawed” (McCarthy, Ginsberg, & Cintron, 2006). Virtual support groups for heterosexual spouses; gay, lesbian, bisexual and sexually questioning married persons; and couples support the notion that coming out can be traumatic to the marital relationship. Divorce is not inevitable, however, despite the push to choose reported by many mixed orientation married persons. Same-sex attracted persons are successfully coming out to and with their spouses, both before and within marriage. Many of these couples are choosing to stay married and are seeking support and guidance through that process from others, including therapists. They report that making it work is a challenging albeit valuable process that has deepened their emotional understanding and connection and expanded their notion of marital commitment.

Kays and Yarhouse (2010) reviewed existing mixed orientation marriage research and cited several resilience factors across the empirical literature including communication, cohesion, commitment, negotiation, and flexibility. These definitions vary across the literature, and research focusing on intact and long-term mixed orientation married is limited (Buxton, 2001, 2004; Hernandez & Wilson, 2007; Yarhouse & Seymore, 2006). Additional research might support and refine existing resiliency factors and expand our understanding of the range of mixed orientation marriage outcomes.

The purpose of this chapter is to substantiate my rationale for this project. I will identify the theoretical models through which the phenomena are viewed. I will also define the variables to be studied and include relevant contextual issues.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical frames for this study were social constructionism and intersectionality theory. These frameworks are defined and integrated in the proceeding paragraphs.

#### **Social Constructionism**

Social constructionists view the world from a critical stance and reject essentialistic and naturalistic viewpoints (Burr, 2003; Parker, 1998). In contrast to essentialist ideology, which advances a “natural order” of gender and sexuality, social constructionists challenge the primacy of biology and the notion of individual determination (Philaretou & Allen, 2001). Knowledge is seen as the product of a social and interactional process of co-construction on relational and structural levels. These negotiated understandings are culturally and historically bound to the individuals, societies, and time period they represent. “The categories which we as human beings apprehend the world does not necessarily refer to real divisions” (Burr, 2003, p. 3). The process of constructing knowledge is inherently biased and prioritizes certain persons and socially acceptable actions over others.

#### **Intersectionality Theory**

The feminist framework of intersectionality is theory for “considering the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage” (Cole, 2009, p. 170). Crenshaw (2005) delineated two types of intersectionality: structural and political. Structural intersectionality is defined as the manner in which larger socio-cultural constructs marginalize individuals. Political intersectionality is defined as the competing interests of

multiple identities. Sexual, gender, and marriage identities are “nested” within each other (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008, p. 366). They coexist and are constructed within relational and social contexts. Intersectionality theory allows for viewing the interaction and processing of multiple categories across social locations (Collins, 2000; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008).

Scholars have advocated for greater consideration of gender and sexual identity negotiation processes within and the contexts of marriage and family (Ferree, 2010; Gamson & Moon, 2004). The underutilization of intersectionality theory in sexuality research has historically led to a focus on membership as opposed to the emergent and on-going process of identifying across the life-course (Shields, 2008).

### **Theoretical and Methodological Integration**

Gender and sexuality have historically been conceptualized as distinct and essentialistic constructs within family science (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). Gender difference has also been used to substantiate a “stratified sexuality” (Risman, 2004, p. 43). Gender and sexual identity cannot be differentiated experientially, nor isolated from the relational and social processes that construct them. The influence of larger social forces on the scripting of individual identity is common to both social constructionism and intersectionality theory (Burr, 2003; Warner, 2008). Intersectionality theory further allows for the “simultaneous consideration of the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of identity” (Cole, 2009, p. 170). The co-occurrence and construction of gender and sexual identity between bisexual spouses and their heterosexual partners and how it informs the process of commitment within intact mixed orientation marriages represent a plausible intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) and alternately “a uniquely hybrid creation” (Shields, 2008, p. 305) that warrants further study.

Grounded Theory Method (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Glaser, 1967) was the chosen methodology for the proposed project. “Grounded theory assumes that there is a problem or topic that needs to be examined with the objective of constructing a theory that helps to better understand the issue (Blustein, Kenna, Murphy, DeVoy, & DeWine, 2005, p. 351). Warner (2008) suggests that qualitative methodology is especially effective for considering the processing of multiple identities. Qualitative methodologies that facilitate the examination of complex phenomenon and the processes associated with them are considered a natural fit with intersectionality theory (Shields, 2008; Silverman, 2001). The reciprocity and relationship building that occurs between participants and the researcher (Daly, 2007), and the space for researcher reflexivity, also support this theoretical choice. Research methodology will be detailed in Chapter Three.

### **Bisexuality as a Distinct and Emerging Identity**

Bisexuals continue to be relegated to the status of “other” within American society. They face the presumption of privilege in gay and lesbian communities, yet possible discrimination within the larger heterocentric society. “For many heterosexuals, bisexuals are promiscuous and untrustworthy individuals.... For many homosexuals, bisexuals are cowards and turncoats” (Vernallis, 1999, p. 347). The lack of a tangible, independent bisexual community has led to the presumption that bisexuals frequently lead lives of isolation, secrecy, and shame. Family scientists are not immune to the influence or the bias of these social prescriptions. Existing bisexual research has been challenged as presuming sameness with lesbian and gay experiences (Gammon & Isgro, 2007). Sampling difficulties may not fully explain the scientific trend to group bisexuals within other sexual minorities; it may also be attributable to how sexual identity is conceptualized. Sexual identity formation is frequently seen as a terminal process ending in

coming out (Groo, Bimbi, Nanin, & Parsons, 2006). Coming out is defined as the “process of describing oneself in terms of social constructs rather than a process of discovering one’s essence” (Rust, 1993, p. 63). Presumed sameness among sexual minorities confounds scholarly understanding of the bisexual lived experience.

### **Sexual-Gender Identity Formations in a Relational and Social Context**

The call has been made to shift sexuality research from individual to relational conceptualizations (De Cecco & Shively, 1983). Sexual identity formation is an ongoing, fluid process shaped by cultural expectation and may include identity, desire, eroticism, emotion, and relationships (Ritchie & Barker, 2006). Societal influences on the identity development process within relationships have been overlooked in the research literature (Phinneas & Goossens, 1996). Existing theories of bisexual identity formation (Klein, 1993; Zinik, 1985) categorize the process and exclude vital contextual influences. A significant effort has been made to label and categorize bisexual behaviors. However, by displacing gender as the primary means for understanding sexual pleasure, desire, and identity, some scholars suggest that bisexuals defy categorization (Gammon & Isgro, 2007, p. 166). The fluid nature of sexual and gender identification may pose a challenge to the design and implementation of research projects dedicated to developing a richer understanding of the phenomena. Intact mixed orientation marriages may prove fertile ground to better understand the process of identifying on a relational level and in light of cultural influences.

### **Identity Within The Context of Mixed Orientation Marriage**

The definition of a mixed orientation marriage in the empirical literature has varied due to the fluid nature of sexual identity. It has included a heterosexual man or woman married to a gay man (Buxton, 2005; Corley & Kort, 2006), a lesbian woman (Buxton, 2005), or a bisexual

man or woman (Buxton, 2005), and same-sex attracted men (Higgins, 2002). Previous scholars have highlighted the limitations of categorical definitions of identity (Rust, 2001; Savin-Williams, 2005) and suggested that attraction, not identity, be the defining characteristic of mixed orientation relationships (Kays & Yarhouse, 2010). Bisexuality continues to be conceptualized by family scholars as a “temporary stage” of identification prior to identifying as gay or lesbian (Biblarz & Savci, 2010, p. 489). The non-transitional nature of bisexuality has been suggested (Diamond, 2009), and existing bisexual research has been challenged as presuming sameness with lesbian and gay experiences (Gammon & Isgro, 2007). With this in mind and for the purposes of this project, a mixed orientation marriage was defined as one between a bisexually identified person and his or her heterosexual married spouse (Buxton, 2001, 2005, 2006b). It has been estimated that there are two million mixed orientation marriages in the United States (Buxton, 2001). This figure has been extrapolated from existing United States census data regarding the percentage of respondents who self-identify as a sexual minority, and empirical research supporting those who report being currently or formerly married. United States census data has been challenged as under-representing sexual minorities due to classification flaws, the omission of sexual orientation as a distinct category, and the sensitive nature of the subject matter (Smith & Gates, 2001). The prevalence of mixed orientation marriage is likely underestimated.

### **Marital Commitment Among Mixed Orientation Married Couples**

Cultural expectations presume that all marriages are heterosexual and monogamous (Scheinkman, 2005). “The dominant version of relationships available in western culture is of life-long or serial monogamy with “‘the one’ perfect partner” (Ritchie & Barker, 2006, p. 587).

Mixed orientation marriages may deviate from the cultural prescription, and their existence challenges the privileged notion of heterosexual marriage.

The experience of trauma and adjustment difficulties reported by bisexual spouses and their heterosexual partners after coming out supports the difficulty of maintaining a mixed orientation marriage in light of dominant social scripts related to marriage (Buxton, 2005). Buxton's (2006a) clinical work suggests that one-third of mixed orientation couples divorce. The experience of those couples that elect to stay married has been described as a struggle to integrate the individual and relational impact of the disclosure against socially acceptable definitions of marriage and gender (Buxton, 2005). Social pressure was the most common reported reason for marriage among a mixed sample of gay and bisexual men (Pearcey, 2005). Individual and relational attributes that allow such couples to negotiate their relationships in light of dominant social scripts is limited. Commitment has been found to be a consistent modifier across the mixed orientation marriage literature (Kays & Yarhouse, 2010). The definition has varied among scholars, but commitment has primarily been associated with monogamy (Buxton, 2006a). This has not prevented mixed orientation couples from successfully opening up their relationship. Pearcey (2005) has suggested that scholars explore the processes of commitment among mixed orientation married couples that stay together.

### **Rationale for the Study**

Cherlin (2004) has argued that increasing rates of cohabitation, the delay in onset of first marriage, increasing divorce rates, and the shift to a companionship-based definition of the relationship, represent a deinstitutionalization of marriage. Recent state and federal government legislation such as Proposition 8 in California and the federal Defense of Marriage Act, coupled with increased federal funding for research and programs to define and strengthen marriage

(Johnson, 2003) would seem to both fit with and support this assumption. But attempts to reinvigorate the institution of marriage are not benign. These larger cultural processes influence individual lives by frequently reinforcing heterosexual and gendered definitions of marriage. The current political climate in the United States defends heterosexual marriage as the ideal and only acceptable form in many states. Mixed orientation marriages, along with gay and lesbian relationships, are considered an aberration and a threat to a hegemonic institution that has been challenged as privileging.

Mixed orientation married couples are in all likelihood no less immune to cultural marriage scripts than other couples. However, the mixed identity nature of their marriage and the negotiated processes that may occur in the process of maintaining commitment may represent a reconstruction of marriage. The advances of the cause may represent a legitimate deconstruction of the institution, but the possibility of a reconstruction warrants further study. Acitelli and Young (1996) suggested that the sexual and gender identities and relational behavior of heterosexual couples are more susceptible to the influence of cultural scripts. Kurdek (2003, 2005) suggested heterosexual couples were more susceptible to gender scripting than their same-sex counterparts.

Scholarly interest in mixed orientation marriage has continued over the past several decades (Buxton, 1994, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Deabill, 1987; Hatterer, 1974; Hays & Samuels, 1988; Kohn & Matusow, 1980). Research and clinical evidence support that some couples remain married post disclosure of the married spouse's bisexuality (Buxton, 2006a; Pearcey, 2005). "The minority of couples who stay married struggle privately to integrate the disclosed circumstances into their lives and still appear to outside as opposite gender couples" (Buxton, 2005, p. 51). Although a major contributor to the mixed marriage literature, Buxton

does not explore the process of gendering nor expand upon the influence of cultural prerogatives on the process of identity formation within mixed married couples.

Reality is socially constructed by complex, organized, interconnected patterns of behavior within a social group or culture (Burr, 1995). The presumption of sameness in the research literature among bisexuals, and their lesbian and gay counterparts, extends beyond sampling issues to conceptualizations of bisexuality as an identity. Numerous research questions remain regarding the coming out process of bisexuals and their relationships with each other, as well as their spouses, partners, and families. The increasing visibility of bisexual persons and greater accessibility to resources such as the Internet is an opportunity for family scholars to broaden our view of the lives of bisexual persons.

### **Operational Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts**

For the purposes of this research project, the following definitions were used. The definitions have been derived from the empirical literature.

**Bisexual:** The challenge of typology is that, invariably, it excludes potential participants. There will be same-sex attracted individuals who refuse to identify as bisexual, gay, or sexually questioning. In the interest of focusing on the phenomenon of interest, bisexuality, only those participants who identified as such were included in the participant pool. For the purposes of this research, bisexual persons were defined as “sexually, emotionally, and erotically attracted to both men and women, usually in varying degrees that fluctuate over time, and may or may not have sex with partners of both genders” (Buxton, 2006a, p. 110). Participants must have disclosed their bisexuality to their spouses prior to the onset of the research.

**Coming out** was defined as the “process of describing oneself in terms of social constructs rather than a process of discovering one’s essence” (Rust, 1993, p. 63).

**Commitment** was defined as “remaining with one’s partner over time and believing that relationship promotes the wellbeing of both parties” (Oswald, Goldberg, Kuvalanka, & Clausell, 2008, p. 411).

**Gender** was defined as an ongoing negotiation process informed by societal beliefs and norms that directly inform how individuals do gender within their daily lives and relationships (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

**Identity** was defined as “a substructure of sexual functioning that includes gender identity, object choice, and intention....What one wishes to do with a sexual impulse” (Althof, 2000, p. 247, as cited in Yarhouse, 2001). It is also “a reflection of sociopolitical organization rather than a reflection of essential organization” (Rust, 1993, p. 63).

**Infidelity** was defined as “a break in the commitment or trust between two partners caused by a secret romantic, social, or sexual involvement with another person” (Duba, Kindsvatter, & Lara, 2008, p. 293).

**Marriage:** All research participants were legally married to a self-identified heterosexual person at the time of the study. All resided within the United States. Given the paucity of the participant pool, the duration of marriage, while noted, was not controlled.

**Mixed orientation marriage:** A marriage between a bisexually identified person and their heterosexually married spouse (Buxton, 2001, 2005, 2006a).

**Sexual orientation:** Selection criteria required that at least one member of each mixed orientation married couple self-identity as bisexual. Sexual orientation included: Emotional preference; social preference; attraction, behavior, fantasy, lifestyle, or self-identification (Klein, Sepekoff, & Wolf, 1985).

### **Overview of the Proposed Study**

The proposed study was a qualitative exploration of the lived experience of intact mixed orientation married couples with the aim of developing grounded theory. This study explored the processes of forming sexual identities on a relational level; gendering in light of larger social prescription, and committing in light of “the conflict of monogamy” (Deacon et al., 1996). The principal methodology was one-on-one, audiotaped interviews of couples. Participants were also given the opportunity to reflect upon and give their feedback regarding preliminary findings to confirm, deny, and correct preliminary findings. I utilized a grounded theory framework to examine how participants define and make meaning of their marriage with the aim of expanding and refining existing marriage theory. Participants were recruited via Internet website advertisements and local and regional bisexual support organizations. “The Internet is fast becoming the communication of choice for many Americans” (Granello & Wheaton, 2004, p. 387). Snowball sampling was used to generate a theoretically saturated sample (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

### **Significance of the Study**

Existing marriage theory and research has been conceptualized, designed, and implemented based upon a heterosexual norm. While the importance of research to clinical work has been questioned (Johnson, 2003), marriage and family therapy as a discipline is founded on this research.

Evidence supports that bisexual, gay, and lesbian persons are at increased susceptibility for negative mental health outcomes related to discrimination (Firestein, 1996; Klein, 1993; Rust, 2001). Despite this evidence, they continue to seek mental health services with greater frequency than the general population (Morgan, 1992; National Lesbian and Gay Health Foundation, 1988, as cited in Panchankis & Goldfried, 2004). Morrow (2000) suggested that

inadequate training and a lack of contact with lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons led to biased treatment of such persons in therapy. Additional research is warranted to better understand and serve mixed orientation couples.

Identity formation, notably the coming out process of sexual minorities, is historically viewed as an individual, terminal process. More recently, it has been suggested that identity formation processes are fluid and may occur at the relational and systemic levels (Doherty & Carroll, 2002), and across the life course (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Patterson, 2008; Schachter, 2005). Clinical evidence suggests that mixed orientation married couples who stay together post disclosure manage societal prescriptions of marriage (Buxton, 2005). Buxton does not reference the process of how such couples reject cultural prescription. Research may serve to illuminate possible relational and contextual factors that occur in mixed orientation marriage and how gender is navigated against the backdrop of socially prescribed roles. Empirical findings would assist in augmenting existing marriage theory, and sexual identity formation theory, allow for a reevaluation of existing marital therapy techniques, and possibly suggest amendments specific to working with mixed orientation couples.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do mixed orientation married couples that stay together after the disclosure of the bisexual spouse's sexual identity negotiate commitment in light of dominant cultural scripts regarding monogamy?
2. How do mixed orientation married couples that stay together after the disclosure of the bisexual spouse's sexual identity negotiate sexual and gender identities within the marital relationship in light of dominant cultural scripts regarding marriage and identity?

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Review of the Empirical Literature

#### Mixed Orientation Marriage

The women's rights and gay right's movements that took place during the 1960s and 1970s in the United States fueled scholarly interest in mixed orientation marriage. The earliest studies of mixed orientation marriages were clinical in nature and focused on gay men married to heterosexual women (Hatterer, 1970, 1974; Imelinsky, 1969). These studies documented men's struggle to come to terms with their sexual identity, and integrate that identity with their roles as husband and father. Sexual identity has been defined in the mixed orientation marriage literature as "a substructure of sexual functioning that includes gender identity, object choice, and intention...what one wishes to do with a sexual impulse" (Althof, 2000, p. 247, 249, as cited in Yarhouse, 2001). The major motive for homosexuals to marry was considered to be negative feelings towards gay lifestyles (Matteson, 1985). These early studies were limited to case descriptions and small sample sizes. They also closely followed the aims of prior research: The examination of identity formation and the conflict of being gay or bisexual and heterosexually married.

Additional non-clinical studies followed when homosexuality was removed as a mental health disorder in 1974 from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychological Association, 1974). The focus continued to be on the experience of bisexual and gay married men (Deabill, 1987; Kohn & Matusow, 1980; Wolf, 1985). Nahas and Turley (1979) suggested that mixed orientation marriages were the "new couple" and reported they experienced satisfying relationships. This may have reflected an early shift away from pathologization. Research examining the experience of bisexual women married to heterosexual

men occurred in the 1980s (Buxton, 2006a; Coleman, 1985). Despite these early attempts at inclusion of bisexual women, the majority of existing research has focused on the experience of bisexual and gay married men (Brownfain, 1985; Dank, 1972; Higgins, 2002; Latham & White, 1978; Malcolm, 2000, 2008; Pearcey, 2005; Ross, 1971).

It was not until recent decades that the experience of heterosexual spouses, notably women married to gay and bisexual men, was considered (Buxton, 1994, 2001, 2004, Grever, 2001; Gochros, 1989; Hays & Samuel, 1988). Several of these studies have highlighted the trauma that heterosexual wives experience when they learn their spouse is gay or bisexual and the need for emotional support around this process (Buxton 1994, 2005, 2006b). “The heterosexual spouses struggle...to resolve concerns about sexual rejection and deception, traditional concepts of marriage and gender, and...long held attitudes about homosexuality (Buxton, 2005, p. 51). It has been suggested that the process is stage-driven wherein heterosexual spouses move from shock to anger to acceptance (Buxton, 2005; 2006a).

Scholars have highlighted the need to augment and refine existing clinical approaches for working with bisexual and heterosexual spouses and mixed orientation married couples (Buxton, 2006b; McLean, 2004; Weitzman, 2006). The PARE model has also been suggested for working with mixed orientation married couples whose religious affiliation is Christian (Yarhouse & Kays 2010). It focuses on the following areas: (a) providing sexual identity therapy, notably around the degree of importance sexual identity has for the same-sex attracted individual; (b) addressing interpersonal trauma and repairing trust that may have occurred as a result of the coming out process; (c) fostering hope and a sense of resilience in the marriage through increased communication and compromise between spouses; and (d) enhancing sexual intimacy through sensate focus homework assignments. The model has not been empirically substantiated.

The clinical nature of existing research limits our understanding of mixed orientation marriage. “What are sometimes called theories of marriage are often little more than empirical generalizations” (Fincham & Beach, 1999, p. 55). A call has also been made to move beyond description and generate theory regarding the phenomenon (D’Augelli, 2003). Additional research to substantiate and augment existing approaches to working with mixed orientation married couples is warranted.

The experience of mixed orientation couples that stay together successfully post disclosure is limited. Yarhouse, Pawlowki, and Tan (2003) surveyed 16 intact mixed orientation married couples and suggested the following themes motivated couples to stay together: (a) inherent motivation to keep the marriage intact; and (b) couples’ experience of religious faith and shared values. A five-year follow up study of intact mixed orientation married couples suggests that some couples are able to maintain their marriage after a bisexual or gay spouse comes out to their heterosexual spouse. Pearcey and Olson (2009) surveyed 90 heterosexual women married to gay and bisexual men. They found that nearly 25% of the women reported that it was the positive treatment they received from their husbands that informed their decision to marry. Sampling issues and the sensitive nature of the subject matter continue to impede research. Existing research, while limited, provides evidence that mixed orientation married couples are maintaining their marriage post disclosure. The process by which they are doing so remains unclear.

### **Bisexual Marriage**

Buxton (2001) estimated that nearly two million men and women in the United States who are or have been married will come out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. The Kinsey Reports estimated that from 2-10% of bisexuals were married (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948).

Masters and Johnson (1979) found that 32% of homosexual women and 16% of homosexual men reported having been previously married.

The perspective of the bisexual married male is predominant across the existing literature (Brownfain, 1985; Coleman, 1982; Dank, 1972; Gochros, 1978; Higgins, 2002; Latham & White, 1978; Malcolm, 2008; Matteson, 1985, Ross, 1971; Wolf, 1985). Coleman (1985) suggested that bisexual women marry more frequently than bisexual men, but research exploring the experience of bisexual married women is limited to clinical observation and by small participant samples (Bates, 2004; Buxton, 2004). Coleman (1985) found that bisexual married women were more likely to marry younger, to be unaware of their sexual identity prior to marriage, and more likely to divorce, as compared to bisexual married men. These findings are limited given the age of the research, the clinical nature of the participant sample, and the use of a self-generated, non-piloted “Kinsey-type” (p. 87) survey. The social construction of marriage may put a unique pressure upon women to conform to an idealized version of femininity and marriage (Otnes & Pleck, 2003). Economic disparity between men and women reinforces social expectations and subsequent behaviors (Wolf, 1985). Current research exploring possible unique perspectives and challenges to bisexual women who marry heterosexual men is warranted.

Bisexual marriage literature is also limited by the descriptive nature of the findings and pathological conceptualizations of such relationships. While the use of non-clinical samples has increased, the trend towards viewing these individuals and relationships as pathological has continued up until the present (Corley & Kort, 2006; Higgins, 2002). “The research literature presents a striking contrast between successful innovative marriages, and those in which concealed homosexual behavior prevents positive identity and destroys a marriage” (Matteson, 1985, p. 151). In an Internet-based survey of virtual chat rooms, Dew (2005) found that 69% of

heterosexually married men self-identify as gay or bisexual and nearly 78% reported one sexual encounter outside of marriage in the past year. Many of these encounters are covert (Chaney & Dew, 2003).

Bisexual women and men are coming out before and within marriage. Research exploring the rationale and meaning that bisexuals who marry heterosexual partners has implications for augmenting collective understanding of sexual and gender identity processes. Gillis (1998) suggested that the increased visibility of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons might be reshaping identity development. Coleman (1985) postulated that sexual identity might change as a result of marriage. The validity of existing stage-driven frameworks of sexual identity development in light of recent social changes has been called in question (Diamond, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1998). The context of the marriage relationship may facilitate sexual identity development for some bisexual persons. Fetner (2005) suggested that the process of coming out within marriage also has implications for gender role development. Family scholars have also called for the creation and expansion of existing marriage frameworks to guide future research and clinical interventions (Holman, 2001; Carroll, Knapp, & Holman, 2005).

### **Commitment**

Commitment is pivotal to an enduring relationship (Adams & Jones, 1999). Research supports that commitment is a constructed phenomenon and that communication and daily behaviors reinforce it among heterosexual couples (Ballard-Reisch & Weigel, 1999; Sahlstein & Baxter, 2001; Thompson-Hayes & Webb, 2004). High commitment scores among heterosexual couples predict relationship stability at 6-month (Sacher & Fine, 1996), 5-year (Sprecher, 2001), 7-year (Kurdek, 2000) and 15-year intervals (Bui, Peplau, & Hill, 1996). Research also supports that relational commitment among heterosexual partners is associated with greater relationship

maintenance behaviors and increased relationship duration (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989). Evidence suggests that commitment predictors are stable across gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples (Kurdek, 2004, 2006). Commitment predictors among bisexual or mixed orientation couples are unexplored within the literature.

Scholars have developed several conceptual models of commitment. Johnson, Caughlin, and Huston (1999) used longitudinal data of heterosexual couples to support a tri-part model of commitment including personal, structural, and moral commitment. There is some empirical support for the application of this model among gay, lesbian, and bisexual couples (Oswald et al., 2008). The Investment Model (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998) breaks down commitment into individual satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size and supports relationship longevity among heterosexual couples. Kurdek (2008a, 2008b) conceptualizes commitment to include: Personality traits; support from family and friends; effective arguing; dependence on the relationship. Predictive validity for the model has been established among heterosexual and same-sex couples (Kurdek 2008a, 2008b).

The primary aim of the research appears to be refining scholarly understanding of commitment with the goal of predicting relationship duration. While existing models are both substantiated and complex, commitment is conceptualized on an individual and relational level. Systemic influences do not extend beyond the immediate system level of family and friend level (Kurdek, 2008a). Mixed-orientation and same-sex couples face unique relational challenges due to a lack of institutional and social supports (Rostosky, Riggle, Dudley, & Comer-Wright, 2006). The inclusion of social constructs and specificity of commitment modeling to mixed orientation and same-sex populations may perpetuate a more concise understanding of commitment.

Huston (2000) suggested that all relationships are shaped by cultural expectations. Same-sex couples are not immune to this influence. Researchers vary in the definition and conceptualization of commitment among same-sex couples. Rostosky et al. (2006) found that commitment among female and male same-sex couples was defined across seven constructs: Comparisons; costs; inter-couple differences; investments; personal and relationship values and ideals; rewards, and sexual boundaries. “Decisions about monogamy were central to couples’ perceptions of commitment” (Rostosky et al., 2006, p. 216). Oswald et al. (2008) measured commitment by self-reported relationship duration and found individual endorsement of religiosity and the legalization of relationships predicted higher levels of commitment. Evidence also suggests that perceptions of relationship value may change when gay and lesbian couples have a formal commitment ceremony (Smart, 2007). However, commitment research among mixed orientation couples is limited to clinical description (Buxton, 2001, 2004; Weitzman, 2006).

Dominant discourse suggests that bisexuality and monogamy are incompatible (Vernallis, 1999). Bisexuals are culturally scripted to be “resistant” gays and lesbians (Groves et al., 2006). They are presumed to be fickle about their partnerships and indiscriminate in their sexual behaviors (Vernallis, 1999).

When I think of ‘bisexual’ I think of bedhopping....They not only can’t commit to being one or the other, but probably can’t commit to whoever they’re with, be it male or female. How could someone who wants to be in a long term committed relationships still call themselves bisexual...without some infidelity coming into the picture? (p. 347)

Mixed orientation couples may face unique challenges to commitment given the nature of their union and in light of predominant heterosexual and gendered scripts regarding marriage. Kurdek (1991) suggested that a lack of institutional and social supports for same-sex couples weakens commitment. Research would assist in substantiating this claim and better understanding how mixed orientation couples process commitment in light of cultural expectations regarding marriage.

### **Sexual Identity Development**

Erik Erikson's (1956) stage theory of ego identity is among the earliest models of identity formation. Influenced by the essentialist scientific movement of the previous decades as well as psychoanalytic thought, identity was conceptualization as a stage-driven "crisis" occurring during adolescence, and the most important time period for identity development was childhood and adolescence. The shame and potential for discrimination in greater society may lead to a developmental delay in the identity development of bisexual, gay, and lesbian persons. Early identity development models may not fully capture full range of the bisexual, gay, and lesbian identity development.

Sexual and gender identity frameworks specific to same-sex attracted persons developed following the women's and gay rights movements of the later 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two underlying themes emerged: (a) anti-essentialism and, (b) social constructionism. Essentialists view sexual identity as "an aspect of an individual fixed at birth or in early childhood, and stable throughout the life span" (Eliason, 1996, p. 32). Social constructionists view identity as a dynamic, ongoing process influenced by larger social and political organizations (Rust, 1993). The Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation model (Altman, 1971) was developed from the gay male identity perspective and suggested that societal attitudes influence and impede the process. This model

represented a divergence with identity formation theories of the past, but is not based on empirical evidence (Eliason, 1996).

Plummer (1975) posited the idea that same-sex attracted individuals move through four stages of identity formation: sensitization, disorientation, coming out, stabilization. The process began when an individual became cognizant of difference between themselves and others, and this realization precipitated a crisis. Obtaining a homosexual identity was terminal and cathartic.

Moses (1978) was among the first to consider identity development among same-sex attracted women. The aim was how lesbian women managed their identification in light of larger social processes. Evidence supports that 12% of women self-labeled as lesbian and 44% reported their lesbian identity was due to circumstances beyond their control. Cass (1979) used personal clinical observation to establish a six-stage theory of sexual identity development. The stages included: (a) confusion, (b) comparison, (c) tolerance, (d) acceptance, (e) pride, and (f) synthesis. The identity development model differed from previous models in that it included social engagement with other gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons as a fundamental aspect of the final two stages of development. Over the course of time, researchers began to consider the possibility of gender difference in identity development. Kitzinger (1987) developed a stage model of identity development based upon a lesbian sample ( $n = 41$ ). The demographic profile of participants and stage nature of the model confound the results (Eliason, 1996). However, the third stage entitled “sex is only a part of identity” (Kitzinger, 1987, p. 97) alluded to expanding scholarly notions of identity. Identity was being reconceptualized as emergent, bound to social scripts, and never fully fixed (Troiden, 1988), as well as a non-real location (Rust, 1993). Despite the progress that has been made, existing sexual identity models have been challenged as linear, modeled on male samples (Cohen & Savin-Williams, 1996; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000).

### **Gender Differences in Sexual Identity Development**

Kirkpatrick and Morgan (1980) suggested that identity differences between same-sex attracted women and their male counterparts were not attributable to sexual identity but rather to gender identity differences. Theoretical and empirical research suggests that the sexual identity development process for women may be more fluid, less susceptible to social scripting, and more likely to deviate from milestone-driven identity models (Diamond, 1998, Golden, 1996, Rust, 1993). Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, and Gladue (1994) found gender deviation in preferences for non-committal sex; sexual and emotional fidelity; interest in visual stimuli; and intrinsic partner characteristics.

Identity formation processes may occur at the relational and systemic levels (Doherty & Carroll, 2002), and across the life course (Patterson, 1995; Schachter, 2005). The challenge of conceptualizing and measuring identity development on a relational or systemic level notwithstanding, researchers have continued to apply and substantiate identity models that view the process as individualized, stage-driven, and terminal (Brady & Busse, 1994; Meyer & Schwitzer, 1999; Worthington, Navarro, Savoy, & Hampton, 2008). Existing sexual identification theories fail to account for the possibility of a bidirectional, relational aspect to identity formation suggested by Doherty and Carroll (2002). Research also suggests that gender differences may occur in identity processing. I chose to conduct dyadic interviews in order to address possible contextual and gender influences related to the process of identifying among mixed orientation married couples. My methodological rationale will be explained more fully in Chapter 3.

### **Clinical Significance of the Study**

Patterson (1995) estimates that approximately 50 million people in the United States

identify or know someone who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

Epidemiological data suggests bisexual, gay, and lesbian persons may be more likely to meet criteria for mood disorders such as depression and anxiety (Cochran & Mays, 2000; Gilman et al., 2001). The potential discrimination that bisexual, gay, and lesbian clients experience in psychotherapy may be decreasing (Kilgore, Sideman, Amin, Baca, & Bohanske, 2005).

However, more subtle microaggressions may still occur, especially for ethnic bisexual, gay, and lesbian persons (Eubanks-Carter, Burckell, & Goldfried, 2006; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007).

Yarhouse and Burkett (2002) suggested expanding existing therapy to include a continuum of services for same-sex attracted clients including: gay-integrative therapy, chastity-based therapy, sexual identity management, and reorientation therapy. Gay affirmative or gay integrative therapy affirms the inherent goodness of identifying as GLB and assists clients in integrating their same-sex attraction with their identity. Reorientation therapy attempts to assist the client in converting their sexually preferred object and achieving “heterosocial competence” (Safren, 2005, p. 30). The ethics of reorientation therapies have been questioned (Brown, 1996; Haldeman, 1991; Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1998). Chastity-based therapy “helps assists clients live celibate lives in keeping with their personal beliefs and values” (Yarhouse, 2001, p. 197). Sexual identity therapy is an attempt to assist clients in developing their identity in light of systemic influences. Empirical evidence substantiating psychological and religious-based affirmative therapy services for bisexual, gay, and lesbian persons is limited. Haldeman (1994) reviewed the existing literature on sexual reorientation therapies utilizing psychological and religious approaches and found no evidence to support their efficacy. Clients who participated in such treatments reported experiencing depression, suicidal ideation, suicidal attempt, difficult

sustaining relationships and decreased self esteem as result of the therapeutic service (Haldeman, 2002; Shidlo & Shroeder; 2002). Serovich, Craft, Tovielli, Gangamma, McDowell, and Grafsky (2008) noted that from 1956 until 2004 only two studies published the participant drop out rate and suggested it was attributable to the adverse nature of the treatment.

Haldeman (2002) noted the importance of social processes on identity formation. Existing approaches do not address plausible relational and systemic influences involved to identity formation (Doherty & Carroll, 2002); the deconstruction and construction of identity across the life course (Patterson, 1995); nor do they account for possible intersections between gender and sexual identity (Buxton, 2006a),

Holding an either/or view of sexual orientation, a one-dimensional orientation solely as sexual behavior, or the assumption that sexual orientation is defined by the gender of one's sexual partner keeps them from understanding bisexual-heterosexual relationships and offering effective counseling. (p. 110)

The governing bodies for the three major mental health disciplines (that is, couples and family therapy, psychology, and social work) have published affirmative policy statement detailing the history of the gay rights movement and the declassification of homosexuality as a disorder (American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, 2005; American Psychological Association, 2011; National Association of Social Workers, 2011). The American Psychological Association (2011) has a published set of 21 guidelines for working with bisexual, gay, and lesbian clients that are grounded in existing empirical literature. Psychological theories prioritize the individual and may not fully capture the relational and social influences on identity development. The discipline of couples and family therapy, with its focus on systems theory and

relationships, might fit well with burgeoning conceptualizations of sexual identity as a relational process that is susceptible to social scripting. The absence of substantial guidelines within the disciplines of couples and family therapy, as well as social work, represent educational void for clinicians and puts bisexual, gay, and lesbians clients at increased susceptibility for discrimination.

### **Expanding on Empirically Supported Practices**

Couples therapy within the field of marriage and family therapy is dominated by three clinical approaches: Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT; Johnson & Greenman, 2006); Cognitive Behavioral Marriage Therapy (CBT; Deacon, Reinke, & Viers, 1996); Gottman Method Couples Therapy (GCT; Gottman, 1999). The empirical validity of the EFCT and CBT has been recognized (Dunn & Schweibel, 1995; Jacobson & Addis, 1993; Johnson, Hunsley, Greenberg & Schindler, 1999) and the latter has even been used infrequently with bisexual populations (Deacon, Reinke, & Viers, 1996). Empirical support for clinical approaches is scant, and the aforementioned authors are to be commended. While there has been increased interest in the relationship experience of gay and lesbian couples (Gottman, Levenson, Swanson, Swanson, Tyson, & Yoshimoto, 2003), studies frequently are comparison based, relegating same-sex attracted couples to sexual other (Knudson-Martin & Laughlin, 2005) and excluding bisexual and mixed orientation couples from selection criterion. Clinical evidence suggests that mixed orientation married couples experience communication difficulties, issues of trust, and negative emotions such as anger, fear, resentment, and jealousy, among others, similar to their heterosexual married counterparts (Buxton, 2006a). Cultural prescriptions regarding marriage, sexuality and gender may place unique challenges on these couples. Clinically relevant research would assist clinicians in better serving the needs of mixed orientation couples.

### **Moving Beyond Infidelity**

Bowenian Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978) would conceptualize infidelity as an externalized attempt to get individual physical, psychological, and emotional needs met through a person or persons other than the married spouse. “The concept [of triangulation] provides a theoretical framework for understanding the microscopic functioning of all emotional systems... a two-person emotional system is unstable in that it forms itself into a three-person system [or triangle] under stress” (Gilbert, 1992, p. 73).

Marriage therapy promotes the idea that healthy relationships are monogamous ones (Scheinkman, 2005). Practicing couples therapists rated infidelity as the second most damaging relational problem (physical abuse was rated the first) (Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997). Infidelity is defined as “a break in the commitment or trust between two partners caused by a secret romantic, social, or sexual involvement with another person” (Duba, Kindsvatter, & Lara, 2008). There is increasing empirical support for the following couples therapy intervention models: Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT; Johnson & Greenman, 2006); Cognitive Behavioral Marriage Therapy (CBMT; Deacon, Reinke, & Viers, 1996); and Gottman Method Couples Therapy (GMCT; Gottman, 1999). EFCT frames discordant communication and behavior occurring within a relationship as indicative of a historic attachment related injury that plays out within the current relationship. Therapists working within a CBMT frame assess and attempt to change negative cognitions and beliefs of one or both relational partners that directly impact the behavior of each individual towards the other person. GMCT is empirically validated and focuses on insight building, proactive communication and skill development, and conflict management to change the interaction pattern of a couple. These approaches collectively frame extra marital relationships as avoidant attachment and symptomatic of relational decline.

Postmodern therapies such as narrative therapy are not immune to the collective bias of viewing external relationships as infidelity (Duba et al., 2008). Blow and Hartnett (2005) in a 25-year comprehensive review of infidelity literature noted, “clinical literature, opinion, and speculation on this topic are abundant, research literature is sparse” (p. 183).

Research exploring the phenomenon of extramarital relationships frequently utilizes gay male participant samples. LaSala (2004) surveyed monogamous and non-monogamous gay male couples and found that 30% are monogamous on report. National survey data of gay and lesbian persons supports this frequency (Bryant & Demian, 1994). The marginalization of gay males may be less susceptible to the heteronormative script of monogamy (Johnson & Keren, 1996). Greenan and Tunnell (2003) suggest a structural multidimensional model for working with gay male couples that takes into consideration interaction effects with larger systems such as family, community, and society. They also suggest that the intimacy experienced by gay males in open relationships is not impacted by the openness of their relationship. This theory was based on clinical experience. Scholars theorize that open relationships may work for some gay couples (Johnson & Keren, 1996; Shernoff, 2007).

Empirical evidence exploring the nature and effect of extramarital relationships on intact mixed orientation marriages is limited to clinical observation (Buxton, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2006a). Mixed orientation married couples who stay together post disclosure may ignore societal prescriptions of marriage and seek non-monogamous relationships (Buxton, 2005, 2006a). Heterosexual spouses in mixed orientation marriages also report feelings of sexual inadequacy and fear of exposure to sexually transmitted infections after the sexual identity disclosure of their spouse (Buxton, 2006a). The process of maintaining commitment within a non-monogamous mixed-orientation marriage is limited to clinical description (Buxton, 2006a).

Marriage and family therapists who pathologize extramarital relationships may operate from a “heterocentric frame of reference” (Green, Bettinger, & Zacks, 1996, p. 212). Cultural expectations reinforce these heterocentric notions more broadly via training protocols for couples and family therapists (Long & Serovich, 2003). This limits the conceptualization of marriage, and may pose potential negative consequences if such assumptions are employed in therapy with mixed orientation couples.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Rationale for the Approach

The aim of Grounded Theory Method (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is the exploration of a topic with the goal of generating a richer understanding of the phenomenon and developing new theory which serves to augment existing theory (Blustein, Kenna, Murphy, DeVoy, & Dewine, 2005). Scholarly understandings of mixed orientation marriage are confounded by small samples (Coleman, 1985; Pearcey & Olsen, 2009) and treatment protocols that frequently lack empirical support (Buxton, 2006a; Corley & Kort, 2006). The call has also been made to move beyond description and generate theory inclusive to same-sex attracted couple relationships (D'Augelli, 2003).

In this study, mixed orientation marriage was viewed through the lenses of social constructionist theory and intersectionality theory. Intact mixed orientation marriages occur at the intersection of sexuality and gender, and subject to the pressure of dominant social scripting. Social constructionist theory and intersectionality theory are well suited to exploring complex relational dynamics (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1999).

Selection criterion included bisexual women and bisexual men and their heterosexual spouses in intact mixed orientation marriages where the bisexual spouse has disclosed their sexual identity to his or her heterosexual spouse. The experience of bisexual women married to heterosexual men is under-represented in empirical literature (Coleman, 1985). Differences in sexual identity may be a result of gender difference (Kirkpatrick & Morgan, 1980), and several studies support gender variation in the experience of sexual identity (Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, Gladue, 1994; Diamond, 1998; Golden, 1996; Rust, 1993; Saghir & Robbins, 1980).

Intersectionality theory posits that phenomena should be viewed from multiple social positions (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008).

Dyadic interviewing may lead to a more expansive and reliable report (Allan, 1980; Bennett & McAvity, 1985; Daly, 1992b). Interviewing couples together allows for greater honesty and historical accuracy of the report (Daly, 1992a). Dyadic interviewing has also been reported as challenging to implement (Blow & Hartnet (2005). It also may also lead to concealment of sensitive subject matter (Daly, 1992b). Greater accuracy and the opportunity for spouses to augment, refine, or correct the report of their partner was my rationale for a conjoint interview. I attempted to address the limitation of concealment by giving each participant a post-interview questionnaire separately, upon completion of the formal interview. I also reiterated to the participants at the beginning and, as appropriate, within the interview that there were, “no correct answers,” in an attempt to foster joining, decrease anxiety, and promote greater honesty from participants. I also punctuated that participants were free to comment on something their spouse said during the interview. Given that identity formation processing may occur at a relational and systemic level (Doherty & Carroll, 2002), and this process may include co-creation (Munt, Bassett, & O’Riordan, 2002), I elected to interview couples simultaneously for these reasons. My theoretical orientation as a couple and family therapist in systems theory, and my familiarity and comfort working clinically with couples also supported my choice.

The Internet is an increasingly common recruitment and data collection method for accessing hidden populations (Rhodes, Bowie, & Hergenrather, 2003). Internet recruitment and data collection is inexpensive and accessible to both the novice and seasoned researcher (Rhodes et al., 2003). Evidence suggests that the Internet has served as a gateway for bisexuals to find personally valid means of expression (Dew & Chaney, 2005). The authenticity and veracity of

Internet-based participant reports have been questioned (Rhodes et al., 2003). Educational, economic, racial and gender disparities have also been noted among Internet drawn samples (Rhodes et. al., 2003; Strickland, Moloney, Dietrich, Myerburg, Cotsonis, & Johnson, 2003). Demographic survey data was collected (Appendix A) to assess for the depth of sample bias.

### **Participants**

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 14 mixed orientation married couples that reside in the United States. All couples were legally married; the mean marriage duration was 14.5 years. The husband identified as bisexual and the wife identified as heterosexual in 7 couples. The wife identified as bisexual and the husband identified as heterosexual in 7 couples. The mean time since disclosure of bisexual identity to their spouse was 7.9 years. The range across the participants was also included (see Table 1 below).

Table 1

*Mean Age, Marriage Duration, and Time Since Sexual Identity Disclosure to Spouse*

	Reported Age (Wife)	Reported Age (Husband)	Marriage Duration (Years)	Time Since Disclosure to Heterosexual Spouse (Years)
<i>M</i>	38.9	40.7	14.5	7.9
<i>SD</i>	10.7	10.0	11.3	7.4
<i>Range</i>	25-56	24-56	1.5-33	2.0-28

The participant sample consisted of 10 Caucasian and four mixed race couples. Twelve couples reported this was their first marriage, and two spouses reported that the current marriage was their second. Six couples did not identify any religious affiliation. Five couples reported a Christian religious affiliation, whereas three couples endorsed agnostic or atheistic beliefs. Twenty-six of the 28 spouses reported at least some college-level education. Eleven couples reported a combined annual income of at least \$40,000. Seven couples reported having at least one child. Table 2 reports the participant demographics in greater detail.

Table 2

*Couple Demographic Information*

	Racial Identification (Husband/Wife)	Marriage Number (Husband/Wife)	Religious Affiliation (Husband/Wife)	Educational Achievement (Husband/Wife)	Combined Annual Income (U.S. Dollars)	Children
1	Caucasian/Caucasian	First/Second	Christian/Pagan	Associate degree/ Bachelor degree	25,000- 39,000	No
2	Caucasian/Caucasian	First/First	None/None	Some college/ Associate degree	40,000- 59,000	No
3	Multiracial/Asian	First/First	None/None	Some college/ Bachelor degree	40,000- 59,000	Yes
4	Caucasian/Caucasian	First/First	Atheist/Agnostic	Some college/ H.S degree	> 100,000	Yes
5	Caucasian/Caucasian	First/First	Christian/None	H. S. degree/ Bachelor degree	> 100,000	Yes
6	Caucasian/Caucasian	First/First	None/None	J.D./Ph.D.	> 100,000	Yes
7	Caucasian/Caucasian	First/First	Christian/Christian	Master degree/ Bachelor degree	75,000- 99,000	Yes
8	Caucasian/Caucasian	First/First	Christian/None	D.C./ Bachelor degree	25,000- 39,000	No
9	Caucasian/Caucasian	First/First	Agnostic/Agnostic	Bachelor degree/ Bachelor degree	40,000- 59,000	Yes
10	Multiracial/Caucasian	First/First	Atheist/Atheist	Master degree/ Master degree	25,000- 39,000	Yes
11	Caucasian /Caucasian	First/First	Christian/Christian	Bachelor degree/ Bachelor degree	60,000- 74,000	No
12	Declined to answer/Multiracial	First/First	Declined to answer/Christian	Bachelor degree/Master degree	25,000- 39,000	No

13	African/Caucasian	First/First	None/None	Bachelor degree/Associate degree	40,000-59,000	No
14	Caucasian/Caucasian	Second/First	Christian/Christian	J.D./Master degree	>100,000	No

## Recruitment

Recruitment occurred over the course of 10 months between July 2009 and May 2010. Potential couples were recruited from among the following: websites marketed towards bisexual persons; bisexual organizations affiliated with social networking sites; member-only online groups for mixed orientation married spouses and couples; LGBTQ organizational list serves; academic organizational list serves. A project announcement (Appendix B) was posted either by myself or via the list serve moderators of the online groups, LGBTQ organizations, or academic organizations where participants were sought. Table 3 contains a list of 18 online mixed orientation marriage member-only support groups located during the recruitment phase of the project. I sought and was given permission by the site moderators to include their group anonymously on the list.

The project announcement generated 35 prospective couples. I created an electronic table to keep track of potential participants and confirm that they met inclusion criteria for participating in the project. This table included the following information in this order: participant couple number assigned by me; first names; sexual identification; marriage duration; time since coming out to a heterosexual spouse; geographical location; source where they learned of the project; geographical location; participation status (e.g., agreed to participate, pending, declined, not eligible, or no response to my request); interview date and time; interview contact number (e.g., cellular phone, land-line phone, SKYPE account identity); reason for exclusion. Fourteen prospective couples did not respond to the initial invitation. Seven additional prospective couples were excluded from participation for the following reasons: The bisexual spouse was not out to their spouse; bisexual spouse was out less than six months to their spouse;

heterosexual spouse expressed discomfort with participation; couple reported being in process of divorcing; couple reported divorcing since the initial invitation to participate.

It took three months before I was able to successfully recruit participants for the project. The 14 couples were recruited from 9 separate sources including: social networking sites; websites for bisexual persons; mixed orientation married web-groups; and academic and bisexual list serves. One couple was recruited via another participating couple. Couples were interviewed over the course of seven months from November 2009 until May 2010.

The actual number of cases studied in qualitative research is not as important as "the potential of each case to aid...in developing theoretical insights" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 91). A hallmark of qualitative analysis is theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2006, Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theoretical saturation was defined as the point at which the new interview data fit within and leant nuance to the existing categories, but it did not warrant the generation of new ones (Glaser, 1992). This criterion was achieved by the 14th interview.

Table 3

*Online Groups for Mixed Orientation Married Couples and Spouses*

Group <sup>1</sup>	Published Site Description <sup>2</sup>	Reported Subscribers and/or Members as of May, 1, 2010
Group #1	This is a group for women seeking help with finding alternative solutions to divorcing their Bi/Gay husband. We want to provide positive discussions that will help the wives adjust to the news that their husband is gay/bi.	1036
Group #2	This is a group for bisexual married men to share their experience of marriage and family as a bisexual married man.	2345
Group #3	There are tens of thousands of gay and bisexual married men of faith who are struggling to reconcile their faith with their sexuality. This group seeks to assist men in this journey.	657
Group #4	A closed-loop relationship consists of two married men who are friends as well as monogamous sexual partners. Members can identify as bisexual, straight, gay, bi-curious, or just curious. They must be married.	4124
Group #5	This group is for married women who love women yet intend to stay married and need to discuss how to make the duality of being lesbian or bi and married to a man will work.	743
Group #6	This is a group for gay married men.	1922
Group #7	This is a support group for married gay or bisexual men who either have or intend to come out to their wives.	280
Group #8	This is a list for couples of mixed sexual orientation who are working to keep their relationship strong and growing. It provides a positive environment where these couples can express their concerns, share their successes, and give and receive support and encouragement.	298
Group #9	This is a group for women who are bisexual or lesbian and married to men.	9
Group #10	This is a group for bisexual married Jewish men who want a closed-loop relationship with other married Jewish men.	189
Group #11	This is a support group for either or both members of a mixed orientation marriage or relationship working to remain monogamous.	485
Group #12	This is a group for those who are in mixed orientation	1307

	marriages. Straight spouses who are married to gays or bisexuals and also the married gays and bisexuals themselves. The group welcomes all those in this situation no matter how they have decided to deal with this within their own marriage.	
Group #13	This group is for men who have been, are, or considering marriage to a lesbian or bisexual woman.	772
Group #14	This group is open to both spouses and is a place to share experiences, and seek help or opinions from other couples.	5
Group #15	This group is for older, married men who have or think they might enjoy man-to-man sexual encounters.	5970
Group #16	This group is for married women who want to explore relationships with other women.	51
Group #17	This is a group for either or both members of a mixed orientation marriage or relationship that desire to remain monogamous.	5
Group #18	We are a loving, supportive group of straight women who are/have been married to or committed to bisexual, gay, and transgender men.	2835

<sup>1</sup> Group names are not given to protect the anonymity of both the participants and the non-participating members of the groups.

<sup>2</sup> The site description is taken directly and verbatim from the group webpage or list-serve. Descriptions were reproduced in part or in their entirety, depending on the length.

## **Procedures**

This research project was reviewed and approved by my faculty doctoral committee in the Department of Human Development, as well as the Institutional Review Board, at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Participants were emailed an electronic copy of the Informed Consent prior to the interview. Participants were also given the option to receive these documents via mail prior to the interview. All participants emailed me acknowledgement of both receipt of the Informed Consent and their voluntary agreement to participate in the research project. I kept an audit trail of all electronic consent obtained by participants. Informed consent procedures were reiterated again and verbal consent was garnered prior to the start of the interview. Participants were also informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and their ability to withdraw from the study at any time was highlighted. All couples were mailed and returned signed hardcopies of the Informed Consent to me after completion of the interview. Written consent forms were identified with the couple identification number generated by me. The Informed Consent detailed both grievance procedures and third-party point of contact (Primary Advisor and Institutional Review Board of affiliated university) in the event they occurred before, during, or after participation. No participant elected to invoke this right at present. I kept a record of the date when electronic, written, and verbal consent was received for all couples.

The participant interviews were dyadic in format. I previously discussed the challenges and my rationale for choosing to interview couples simultaneously. I used Skype, a computer software program that allows for audio conversations over the Internet, to interview the 14 couples. All interviews were audio taped with the express knowledge and consent of the couples. Audio recording of interviews allows the interviewer to be fully attentive to the conversation

(Daly, 2007). The mean interview time was 90:28 minutes. The interview time range was 50:37 minutes to 124:21 minutes. “Intensive interviewing permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25). I transcribed all 14 participant interviews, and deleted the contents of each audiotape upon completion of the corresponding transcript. Transcripts were labeled with the date and time of the interview, the couple’s assigned number, and the participants’ first names in an effort to differentiate and keep track of the interviews. The mean transcript length was 18.7 pages, and the range of transcript length was 14 to 31 pages.

### **Measures**

**Pre-interview questionnaire.** Each participating spouse completed a pre-interview questionnaire after verbally consenting to participate and prior to the start of the formal interview. The pre-interview questionnaire contained 15 questions to organize and track participants’ demographic information. Table 2, provided above, details relevant demographic information obtained via this questionnaire. A complete copy of the questionnaire may be found in Appendix A.

**Formal interview.** The semi-structured interview contained a series of open-ended questions for one or both participant spouses. Several questions also contained a probe question in an attempt to deepen the participant’s report and to alleviate possible obscurity in the initial question. The following questions were asked to prompt participants to discuss their courtship and marriage decision-making process: “How did you meet?” and “how did you come to the decision to get married?” To prompt bisexual participants to discuss their disclosure process, they were asked: “How did you come out to your spouse?” and “what influenced your decision to come out?” Heterosexual spouses were asked to reflect on the impact of their spouse’s disclosure of bisexual status: “How was it to learn that your spouse was bisexual?” and “how

has your partner's coming out led you to reflect on your own sexuality?" Couples were asked, "who knows about your mixed orientation marriage?" and "what have you told them?" in an attempt to ascertain how the couple might be coming out together and to whom. Each couple's experience of marital commitment and possible changes that may have occurred since disclosure, were gauged by the following questions: "How do you define commitment within your marriage?" and "how has your commitment changed since coming out?" Couples were asked: "What does it mean to be a man or woman in a mixed orientation marriage?" and "how do you think gender plays out in your marriage?" as a way to explore their current and historic experiences of gender. Couple strengths and challenges were assessed by the following questions: "What are the challenges in your mixed orientation marriage and how do you handle them?" and "what are the strengths?" Support options were gauged by asking couples: "How would it be for you to discuss your mixed orientation marriage with a marriage therapist?" and "how do you feel about online communities and groups for MOM couples?" A complete copy of the interview guide may be found in Appendix C. I took hand-written notes during each interview and used them to generate memos related to the phenomenon of interest.

**Post-interview questionnaire.** Upon completion of the formal interview, I requested that each spouse step out of the room, while the other spouse completed the post-interview questionnaire separately. I asked each couple which spouse wanted to start first. I then requested the other spouse leave the room and return to complete the questionnaire after his or her spouse was finished. I asked the first participant in each couple to verbally acknowledge when the spouse had left the room. All 14 couples verbally reported they followed these instructions. However, I have no confirmation that the participants followed my instructions beyond this verbal report to me.

Participants were asked the following questions, “what did you have difficulty discussing in front of your spouse?,” and “is there anything you could not say?,” to address possible concealment by one or both of the spouses during the dyadic interview. Twenty-three participants responded “no.” Five spouses reported the following as difficult conversational topics: the insecurity of a bisexual spouse; the insecurity of a heterosexual spouse; suspicion; doubt; not being “100% invested” in the marriage; and “my husband doesn’t like to see when I’m upset.” One participant disclaimed his participation with the caveat that “[attending] couples therapy makes participation easier.”

The degree of disclosure between the spouses was gauged by the question: “Have you ever had an extramarital affair or relationship (This will be kept confidential)?” One heterosexual participant reported having one extramarital episode “with an old boyfriend,” which she disclosed to her spouse. Another heterosexual participant reported having extramarital affairs with a man and a woman, “on the down-low.” The remaining 26 participants reported “no” including one participant who reiterated the question did not apply within the context of an open relationship.

Heterosexual participants were asked, “have you ever had a sexual encounter with a member of your samesex?,” to assess the static nature of the participant’s heterosexual identity. Three participants endorsed same-sex encounters including: “as part of a foursome with my husband;” “high school exploring, breast touching;” and “not sex, sexualized, one time.” Eleven heterosexual participants reported “no.”

I attempted to assess each participant’s experience of the interview, as well as anticipate interview guide limitations, by asking: “Is there something that I didn’t ask in the interview that you think might be important for me to know about mixed orientation marriage?” Twenty-four

participants reported “no.” Four participants reported the following topics: “children;” “[there’s] not a lot of support in the LGBT community;” “guilt over my ability to marry when gay and lesbians cannot;” and “it takes a lot of patience.” Many couples reported feeling positive about their participation in the project. Several remarked that their desire for greater visibility for intact mixed orientation marriages prompted their participation.

### **Data Analysis**

Grounded Theory Method (GTM; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was the analytical framework for the project. GTM was developed in response to a concern its creators had regarding the academic training of social scientists in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. “Graduate students...were being trained to confirm the ideas of early theorists...but were not being encouraged to generate theory themselves” (LaRossa, 2005, p. 839). In considering the scarce literature on intact mixed marriages and the limitations previously discussed with both existent marriage theory and couples therapy, GTM afforded for the development of a theory on how intact mixed orientation married couples experience and maintain marital commitment, negotiate sexual and gender identities after coming out and in light of dominant cultural scripts regarding identity and marital commitment.

**Memoing.** I maintained memos during the recruitment, data collection, and analysis processes. Memos were reflexive in nature, and attempted to establish content and process codes; develop and refine code categories, highlight contextual and interceding conditions to the phenomenon, and develop themes across the participant reports (Charmaz, 2006). In a memo dated February 14, 2010, I discussed how I noticed how couples were referencing emotional connection and a desire for children as an important factor in their decision to marry.

All the couples I have spoken to reference that they felt a strong emotional connection to their partner in the beginning. They elected to get married because that's what their family did, or that's all they knew. Many have children, and they associate children, family with marriage.

During the recruitment phase of the project, I was monitoring message boards on bisexual websites where I had posted my research announcement. I also posted questions seeking responses from the bisexuals to assist me in deepening my understanding of the experience of married bisexuals. Examples of questions that I posted were: "It seems to me that coming out, within marriage, is still an individual process and may be the responsibility of the bisexual spouse alone. I'm wondering if there is a couple coming out process?," and "what is commitment in bisexual marriage?" In a memo dated September 7, 2009, I discussed my emerging thoughts of a tentative typology I might find among the participants based on the responses of some non-participants to my informal survey:

It seems like there are three types of bisexual marriages: One where the bisexual is out from the beginning, and their spouse is okay with it; one where the bisexual disclosed their bisexuality prior to the marriage, but it was assumed that marriage somehow nixed it because marriage is seen as a choice to be monogamous; and one where the bisexual did not disclose it and is having sex with other partners outside the relationship.

**Open coding.** I read through all the transcripts prior to initiating the open coding of the data. Open coding has been called "the guts of the GTM approach" (Orona, 1997, p. 179, as cited in LaRossa, 2005). I then re-read all the transcripts while simultaneously writing down, in pencil, potential codes that reflected the language of the participants and preliminary processes. I did this line-by-line for all 14 transcripts. Examples of open codes were: "staying straight," "wanting

to belong,” and “questioning membership”. Examples of in-vivo codes quoting the exact words of the participants included: “intentional commitment” and “push to choose”.

Once I completed the open coding of all 14 transcripts, I typed all the codes from each transcript into a separate electronic document. Open coding allowed for the development of preliminary categories in an attempt to make meaning of the concepts generated during the analysis. The initial round of open coding generated 1687 open codes. These open codes were then aggregated both within and across all 14 transcripts. This process culminated in the development of 12 preliminary categories. For example, open coding generated 24 potential sub-themes within that construct of marital commitment across all 14 transcripts (see Appendix F).

There is scholarly debate regarding the methodological definition of a category (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). Glaser initially argued that a category was a construct that allows for classifying multiple concepts. Strauss and Corbin (1998) later went so far as to define a category as representing the phenomena itself. Glaser (1992) has a more conservative understanding, “a category is a type of concept usually used for a higher level of abstraction” (LaRossa, 2005, see Glaser, 1992, p. 38.). The analysis was conducted using Glaser’s interpretation. Initial categories were named globally and were primarily an attempt to sort the data (e.g. gendering; marriage and family therapy; affiliated communities and group interaction). Later categories reflected the possible processes I was seeing in the data (e.g., developing a “new” normal for marriage or sticking with the “old” one; achieving a sense of community; “making it work” requires honest talk and realistic expectations).

**Axial coding.** Axial coding commenced upon the completion of open coding. “The purpose of axial coding is to sort, synthesize, and organize larger amounts of data and reassemble them in new ways after open coding” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60). I aggregated similar

categories across the 14 transcripts. I then created individual electronic documents for each preliminary category and copied and pasted the topically relevant open codes from each successive transcript to this new master category document. I then reviewed the codes within each master category document and grouped like codes together into preliminary sub categories. The “six C’s” (Glaser, 1978, p. 74; 76) of each category were considered in this process including: (a) causes (e.g., the pressures and incentives to marry); (b) contexts (e.g., potential differences around coming out to parents as opposed to children); (c) contingencies (e.g., couple rules around opening up their marriage); (d) consequences (e.g., the loss of potential family, friends and community when a bisexual person or mixed orientation married couple comes out); (e) covariations (e.g., participants who endorsed religiosity and may have lost that community by coming out developing a new support community); and (f) conditions (e.g., cohort effects related to bisexual participants coming out later reportedly due to not knowing about the existence of bisexuality). This process generated the first coding scheme, which include 12 categories and is detailed in Table 4.

Table 4

*Coding Scheme One*

Number	Name	Number of Subcategories
1.	Decision to marry	16
2.	MFT	14
3.	Gendering	10
4.	Commitment	20
5.	Opening up the marriage	19
6.	Coming out to self and spouse	19
7.	Coming out to family and friends	13
8.	Experience with the LGBT community	5
9.	Community and group interaction and support	10
10.	Sexual identity	7
11.	Marriage challenges	7
12.	“Making it work”	5
		$M = 12.1$
		$SD = 5.6$

I reviewed the interview transcripts and consulted with my dissertation advisor to refine the initial coding scheme into a format that could be tested. This process took two revisions and generated coding scheme draft three (see Appendix G).

**Focused coding.** I tested coding scheme 3 on two randomly selected transcripts (1 and 6). Table 5 details the process of focused coding and refining the coding scheme to achieve theoretical saturation. Focused coding (Charmaz, 2006) is the identification of a core category that has the “ability to pull other categories together to form an explanatory whole” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 146). The influence of the core category on the theoretical interpretation of the data is noteworthy (LaRossa, 2005). Focused coding was repeated four additional times and between each trial, raw interview data, field notes, and researcher memos were reviewed, and I consulted with my dissertation advisor in an effort to refine the coding scheme. The number of interview transcripts that were test coded increased with each draft of the coding scheme, culminating in the focused coding of all 14 transcripts using coding scheme nine (see Appendix H). The final coding scheme reflected three overarching themes of the data that will be detailed in Chapter Four.

The data collection and analysis phases also suggested a plausible typology existed among the couples. This typology was incorporated into coding scheme three and tested throughout the analysis phase. The typology itself went through three iterations. I initially suggested four possible couple-types across the participant pool. This estimate collapsed over the course of focused coding into three and eventually two couple types defined in coding scheme nine and coded across all 14 couples in Table 5. The typology focused on process differences in the bisexual spouse’s awareness of their same-sex attraction and identity prior to marriage. These

types were coded as “I knew but married” and “I married then realized.” The typology will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

Table 5

*Focused Coding Audit Trail*

Couple I.D. #	First Round (Coding Scheme Draft 3)	Second Round (Coding Scheme Draft 5)	Third Round (Coding Scheme Draft 6)	Fourth Round (Coding Scheme Draft 8)	Fifth Round (Coding Scheme Draft 9)	Possible Connected Codes (Fifth Round)	Typology
1	101 203 208 401 501 502	101, 106, 100* 201, 203, 204, 207, *200 301, 302, 303, 300*		101, 103, 105, 106 201, 203, 204, 205 301, 300*	101, 103, 105, 106 201, 202, 203, 205, 206 301, 304	103 and 205 103 and 206 103 and 301 103, 106, and 301 103, 202, and 205 103, 202, and 206 105 and 106 106 and 301 106, 202, and 205 202 and 205 202 and 301	101
2		101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 100* 201, 202, 203,205, 207 301, 302, 303, 300*		102, 103, 104, 105, 106 201, 204, 205, 206 301, 302, 304, 300*	102, 103, 104, 105, 106 203, 204, 205, 206 301, 302, 303, 304	102 and 104 102, 103, and 104 102, 104, 301, and 302 103 and 301 103, 203, and 301 105 and 106 105 and 204 106 and 204 106 and 301 203 and 303 301 and 304 303 and 304	102
3		101, 102, 103,		101, 103, 105,	101, 103, 104,	101 and 103	101

Couple I.D. #	First Round (Coding Scheme Draft 3)	Second Round (Coding Scheme Draft 5)	Third Round (Coding Scheme Draft 6)	Fourth Round (Coding Scheme Draft 8)	Fifth Round (Coding Scheme Draft 9)	Possible Connected Codes (Fifth Round)	Typology
		104, 105, 100* 201, 203, 204, 205, 206 301, 303, 300*		106, 201, 202, 204, 205, 206, 200* 301, 303, 305, 300*	105, 106 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206 301, 302, 304	101 and 106 103 and 301 105 and 106 201, 202, and 203 202, 203, and 205 204 and 206 204, 206, and 304 205 and 206 301 and 304	
4		101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 100* 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 200* 301, 302, 303, 300*		101, 103, 104, 105, 106 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 200* 301, 302, 303, 305, 306, 300*	101, 103, 104, 105, 106 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206 301, 302, 304	101 and 201 101, 202, and 301 101, 104, 201, and 202 101, 105, 202, 205, and 301 103 and 104 103 and 202 103 and 204 103, 202, 301, and 302 104 and 202 104 and 203 104, 201, and 301 104, 106, and 202 105 and 204 106, 204, and 302 201, 203, 204, and 205 202 and 205	101

Couple I.D. #	First Round (Coding Scheme Draft 3)	Second Round (Coding Scheme Draft 5)	Third Round (Coding Scheme Draft 6)	Fourth Round (Coding Scheme Draft 8)	Fifth Round (Coding Scheme Draft 9)	Possible Connected Codes (Fifth Round)	Typology
						202 and 302 202 and 304 203 and 205 204 and 206 204 and 302 204, 205, and 302 205 and 302 205 and 206 206 and 302 301 and 304 302 and 205 302 and 304	
5		101, 102, 103,104, 105 201, 203, 204, 206, 208, 200* 301, 302, 303, 300*			101, 103, 104, 105, 106 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206 301, 302, 303, 304	101 and 202 103 and 204 103 and 205 104 and 303 104, 201, and 301 105 and 106 106 and 303 202 and 204 204 and 205 204, 205, and 206 205 and 302 205 and 304 205, 206, 301, and 304 206, 301, and 304 301 and 303 301 and 304	101

Couple I.D. #	First Round (Coding Scheme Draft 3)	Second Round (Coding Scheme Draft 5)	Third Round (Coding Scheme Draft 6)	Fourth Round (Coding Scheme Draft 8)	Fifth Round (Coding Scheme Draft 9)	Possible Connected Codes (Fifth Round)	Typology
						302 and 303	
6	101 102 103 203? 205? 206 207 208 302? 303? 403 501? 502?	101, 103, 105, 106, 100* 201, 202, 203, 204, 206, 208, 200* 301, 302, 303, 300*			101, 103, 105, 106 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206 301, 304	101 and 202 101 and 106 103 and 105 103 and 106 103 and 202 103 and 205 104 and 304 105 and 106 106 and 202 106 and 203 106 and 205 106 and 301 106, 202, and 203 106, 202, and 304 201 and 202 202 and 205 203 and 205 204 and 206 205 and 304 301 and 304	101
7			101, 103, 104, 105, 106 201, 203, 204, 205 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306		101, 103, 104, 105, 106 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206 301, 302, 304, 305	101 and 104 103 and 205 103 and 301 103 and 105 103, 201, and 304 104 and 201	101

Couple I.D. #	First Round (Coding Scheme Draft 3)	Second Round (Coding Scheme Draft 5)	Third Round (Coding Scheme Draft 6)	Fourth Round (Coding Scheme Draft 8)	Fifth Round (Coding Scheme Draft 9)	Possible Connected Codes (Fifth Round)	Typology
						106, 201, and 205 201 and 301 203 and 302 203 and 206 204 and 304 204 and 205 205 and 304 205 and 206 205, 206, and 304 301 and 302 301 and 304 301, 302, and 304 302 and 304	
8			101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106 201, 203, 204, 205 301, 302, 303, 305		102, 103, 104, 106 201, 203, 204, 205, 206 301, 302, 304, 300*	102 and 106 102 and 301 102, 104, and 301 103 and 104 103 and 106 103 and 301 104 and 302 104, 204, and 301 106 and 206 106 and 301 203 and 204 204 and 205 204 and 302 301 and 304 302 and 304	102
9			101, 102, 103,		102, 103, 104,	102 and 206	102

Couple I.D. #	First Round (Coding Scheme Draft 3)	Second Round (Coding Scheme Draft 5)	Third Round (Coding Scheme Draft 6)	Fourth Round (Coding Scheme Draft 8)	Fifth Round (Coding Scheme Draft 9)	Possible Connected Codes (Fifth Round)	Typology
			104, 105, 106, 100* 201, 202, 203, 204 301, 302, 305		105, 106 201, 203, 204, 205, 206 301, 304	102 and 304 103 and 104 103 and 201 104 and 105 104 and 301 104 and 304 105 and 201 106 and 201 203 and 205 203 and 301	
10			101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106  201, 203, 204 301, 302, 303, 305		102, 103, 104, 105, 106 201, 202, 203, 204, 205 301, 304	102 and 103 102 and 201 102 and 205 102, 104, and 202 103 and 106 103 and 304 104 and 304 105 and 106 105 and 304 106 and 301 203 and 205 301 and 104 301 and 304	102
11			101, 103, 104, 105, 100* 201, 202, 203, 204, 205 301, 302, 303, 305, 306		101, 103, 105, 106 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206 301, 302, 304	201 and 301 202 and 301 202 and 205 202 and 203 202 and 205 203 and 206	101

Couple I.D. #	First Round (Coding Scheme Draft 3)	Second Round (Coding Scheme Draft 5)	Third Round (Coding Scheme Draft 6)	Fourth Round (Coding Scheme Draft 8)	Fifth Round (Coding Scheme Draft 9)	Possible Connected Codes (Fifth Round)	Typology
						204 and 206 204 and 302 205 and 206 206, 301, and 302 302 and 304	
12			102, 103, 104, 105, 100* 201, 203, 204, 205, 200* 301, 302, 303, 305, 300*		102, 103, 104, 106, 100* 201, 203, 205 301, 303, 304, 305	102 and 103 102 and 106 103 and 301 106 and 304 203 and 301 205 and 301	102
13				102, 103, 104, 106* 201, 204, 205 301, 302*, 304, 305	102, 103, 106 201, 203, 204, 205 301, 302, 304	102, 106, and 301 103 and 301 103, 106, and 301 106 and 302 203 and 204 205 and 304 301, 302, and 304 302 and 304	102
14					102, 103, 105, 106 201, 202, 203, 204, 205 301, 302, 304	102 and 106 102 and 304 105 and 201 202, 203, and 204 204 and 205 205 and 304 301 and 302 301 and 304	102

## **Trustworthiness**

Standard of rigor within qualitative research is termed “trustworthiness” (Toma, 2006). Trustworthiness is established by demonstrating that findings are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. “These notions are parallel to internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity” (Toma, 2006, p. 412). A comprehensive review of the existing empirical literature and the detailed project design were proposed prior to the start of this project with the aim of establishing reliability. The use of multiple data sources, termed triangulation, is routinely used in qualitative research to address trustworthiness. Individual interview data can present a challenge supporting trustworthiness. The dyadic interview format served as a means to check and balance individual participant reports and support trustworthiness. All participants were also given the opportunity to review preliminary coding scheme nine with the express purpose of feedback, revision, and refinement upon completion of the data analysis. Member checking builds reciprocity and assists in the development of the relationship between the participant and me (Daly, 2007). Four couples responded to my call to review the coding scheme; the participant response rate was 28% at the time this draft was finalized. One couple gave detailed feedback and pointed out which codes fit and did not fit with their experience of their marriage:

I suppose, for us, 102 is the most accurate, and 104 is somewhat representative. 106 also somewhat applies for us. It doesn't change how our marriage operates, but does influence who we tell and what behavior we engage in, in particular situations (Ann, Couple 14). I used this data to check the accuracy of my focused coding of their transcript. Three other couples reported that the coding scheme fit their experience. “Your coding looked very thorough

and accurate” (Lisa, Couple 6). Researcher memos, field notes, and coding schemes used throughout the data collection and analysis support the validity and transferability of the results.

### **Reflexivity**

The constructivist view of qualitative analysis supposes that all researchers are biased. The author choice of research phenomenon, participant population, method, and interpretation of existing theories and research all shape the analytical direction and theoretical interpretations. Bias was addressed through steadfast adherence to the analytical protocol of Grounded Theory Method including: a comprehensive review of the empirical literature; note and memo writing before, during and upon completion of the data collection; Internet searches related to the phenomena of interest; the ongoing review of data and reevaluation of existing coding schemes by myself, my dissertation advisor, as well as an external auditor familiar with my research. The end result was not the creation of theory, but rather the discovery of it (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter includes the findings from my grounded theory study of 14 intact mixed orientation married couples. I describe the themes that emerged across the couples' perceptions of how they maintain marital commitment after bisexual husbands and wives have come out, and the process of how couples navigate their sexual, gender, and marital identities, notably around coming out to each other, family, and friends and engaging with supportive communities. I also address four themes that emerged from the participants' life stories: (a) the discovery of bisexuality before and within marriage; (b) the negotiation and acceptance of gender non-conformity among mixed orientation married couples; (c) the coming out and seeking of support from others, and (d) the revaluation of marriage and marital commitment

### **Discovering Bisexuality Before and After Marriage**

Bisexual individuals who came out to their heterosexual spouses negotiated the process in one of two ways. Seven bisexual participants were aware of their sexual identity prior to marriage and still chose to marry. Seven other bisexual participants discovered their sexual identity after they married and with the assistance of a heterosexual spouse. Table 6 previews the two experiences of discovering bisexual identity. The discovery process reveals how bisexuality becomes a key part of the negotiation process between individual and marital identities, and how this informs the negotiation process around couples' understanding of marital commitment and decisions related to opening the marriage.

Table 6

*Discovering Bisexuality Before and After Marriage*

I knew I was bisexual before we married:			I discovered I was bisexual after we married:		
<i>Couple #</i>	<i>Bisexual Spouse</i>	<i>Heterosexual Spouse</i>	<i>Couple #</i>	<i>Bisexual Spouse</i>	<i>Heterosexual Spouse</i>
1	Brandi (W)	Bill (M)	2	Mike (M)	Michelle (W)
3	James (M)	Joan (W)	8	Barbara (W)	Brent (M)
4	John (M)	Jill (W)	9	Erik (M)	Elise (W)
5	Sam (M)	Susan (W)	10	Kane (M)	Kristal (W)
6	Lisa (W)	Lee (M)	12	Chanel (W)	Chris (M)
7	Matt (M)	Maggie (W)	13	Stella (W)	Stanley (M)
11	Larry (M)	Louise (W)	14	Ann (W)	Andrew (M)
<i>n=7</i>			<i>n=7</i>		

### **Discovering Bisexuality Before Marriage**

Two bisexual women and five bisexual men reported that they were aware of their same-sex attraction and, in some cases, identified as bisexual prior to marriage. These seven individuals varied with regard to their acceptance of their bisexual identity prior to marriage, and this varied across gender lines. Both bisexual women and one of the five bisexual men reported identifying and coming out prior to marriage. “Right from the very beginning, it was obvious” (Brandi, Couple 1). These three bisexual individuals who discovered their bisexuality before marriage were more likely to report pragmatism around their decision to marry. “I was pretty fulfilled with the straight sex I was having and still aware of my same-sex attraction of course, but at the time I felt no need to pursue it” (Larry, Couple 11).

Four bisexual men reported being aware of their same-sex attraction, but not coming out until after marriage. They reported a lack of awareness of bisexuality as a viable identity as part of their rationale. “I realized very early I was a bisexual, but I didn’t have a word or concept” (James, Couple 3). These men also spoke to the internalized fear of their same-sex attraction and an awareness of the potential for discrimination.

I wanted to believe I was straight, even though I knew I wasn’t, but being raised in the home I was, I knew I could not accept this of myself, so I just denied it, and just hid it, and forced myself to be straight. (Matt, Couple 7)

These seven participants reported that they were happy with their heterosexual spouse and referenced a diminished sense of importance to their bisexual identity after marrying. “I’m very happy with [my wife] Joan. Most of the time it means very little that I’m bisexual” (James, Couple 3). Bisexuality may become dormant for a period of time within marriage. “It’s like,

when we're together, the other side of Brandi's sexuality doesn't come out. It really doesn't exist" (Bill, Couple 1).

### **The Discovery of Bisexuality Within Marriage**

Seven additional bisexual spouses reported that they were unaware of their bisexual identity prior to marriage. Three bisexual women and two bisexual men referenced an inchoate awareness of their same-sex attraction. "It was all pretty nebulous at that point. I had actually kissed a girl when I was little, you know, just playing, and I remember finding that exciting" (Barbara, Couple 8). These bisexual participants also referenced adolescent same-sex sexual experimentation, but did not endorse a bisexual identity. "I had what I thought were just typical 14 or 15 year old episodes of experimentation, but I didn't really make the connection at the time" (Erik, Couple 9). They also reported not knowing anyone else who identified as bisexual. "I hadn't known anyone who was bisexual who had been going through that process while I knew them, or struggled with that process, so it didn't really click" (Kane Couple 10).

Three bisexual spouses stated a belief that the awareness was there, but it just was not accessible to them. "Michelle helped me discover an identity of myself that I was somewhat suppressing all this time" (Mike, Couple 2). They also reported they came to the realization with the active assistance of their heterosexual spouse.

Andrew recognized it in me before I did...[he] turned to me and said, "I have something to tell you. Don't be upset, but I think you might be bisexual." I knew that was what was going to come out of his mouth. (Ann, Couple 14)

Bisexual individuals who discover their sexual identity within marriage highlighted the challenge of that process. Two bisexual husbands highlighted the ambiguity of identity labels and the struggle that can occur in claiming them:

This process is very hard and very emotional. I was really occupied with the process of how I identify myself and how I want to identify myself to other people, friends, family, and I struggled a lot with labels because I never felt like bisexual was quite the right word for me. I'm on the more heterosexual end of bisexual. I'm not very comfortable with many of the labels, but I've come to accept bisexual as the one that best fits. (Kane, Couple 10)

However, unlike their bisexual counterparts who discovered their bisexuality prior to marriage, these other bisexual individuals expressed less fear around the discovery. These bisexual spouses suggested that the emotional support of their heterosexual spouse assisted them in the discovery process. "Brent knew immediately too...he was as much a part of the discovery" (Barbara, Couple 8).

### **Bisexual Spouses Rediscovering Their Own Sexual Identity**

Bisexuality may lie dormant for some period of time within monogamous marriage. Two bisexual men and one bisexual woman who discovered their bisexuality prior to marriage reported experiencing an identity crisis at some point in their relationship. The identity crisis was defined as feeling emotionally alone, unhappy, and, for some, disconnected from the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities. Lisa (Couple 6), a bisexual wife who was out prior to marriage reminisced about her former life, prior to marriage:

I took a job in New York, so ...I've been leaving the house every week and commuting to New York...and we have a child, so it's, ...kind of a chance to get away. I've also had to establish...a professional identity that I haven't...really had in the past, 'cause prior to this I've been home most at the time working my on? dissertation or whatever, as I'm sure you know, and...then I also ran into my undergraduate mentor who...advised my

undergraduate thesis, which is on lesbian literature and...she was a? very influential person for me, and I think it just made me see myself through that perspective again, the kind of, lesbian, feminist perspective and it's like, "Oh, well, you know, there's the other whole side of my life that I've left behind." (Lisa, Couple 6)

The two bisexual men who came out a second time reported that a desire to act on same-sex feelings precipitated the process:

I kind of came out to her again. I mean it, it seemed like...that after the first disclosure ended with my basic commitment to not act on that attraction...the subject kind of got dropped. It was kind of as if we didn't acknowledge it, and we never talked about it, so it was kind of like I came out but then went back in the closet again, and...then the second coming out, which was just a few years ago, had some more significant effects because...I felt it was time. I felt strongly at the time that I wanted to pursue that attraction or pursue some sort of physical relationship with another man. (Larry, Couple 11)

### **Heterosexual Spouses Reconsidering Their Own Sexual Identity**

All 14 mixed orientation married couples reported having ongoing discussions with their spouse about sexuality identity. Twelve heterosexual spouses reported some reconsideration of their own sexual identity after learning that their spouse is bisexual.

I think the biggest thing is that it's forced me not to make any assumptions because I think the fact that Barbara's attracted to women, and I didn't even notice early on. It never occurred to me, and so since that something that's changed for her, progressed for her, and I've evaluated why, maybe why I'm pretty much strictly heterosexual, and it's

kind of forced me to analyze things. It's led me to analyze things and not take anything for granted. (Brent, Couple 8)

Two other heterosexual husbands not part of the above group suggested that learning their wives were bisexual did not inform their own process of understanding their sexual identity at all. "It really hasn't" (Andrew, Couple 14). The evaluation process also included a denial of same-sex sexuality. "I have no interest whatsoever in sexuality with males" (Chris, Couple 12). These sentiments were the exception among the participants.

Three heterosexual spouses who did reevaluate their sexual identity referenced their belief in a sexual "continuum" in that process. The criterion of their reevaluation was the existence of attraction to same-sex persons.

I just kind of see it as an issue of attraction. I've never felt, I mean I understand there's a continuum. I don't see rigid molds. It's just I've never...been attracted to someone of my own gender. I can see the attractiveness in someone. I have close relationships with men. In terms of where sex is involved, that's not something of interest to me, so that's how I'd define myself as being heterosexual. (Lee, Couple 6)

Despite reporting increased discussion about sexual identity with their bisexual spouse, all 14 heterosexual spouses highlighted a boundary between attraction and engagement in sex with a same-sex partner. "It's not that I would actually want to go have sex with a woman, but I'm okay with the idea of it" (Elise, Couple 9).

### **Reconsidering and Discovering Sexual Identities Through Marital Sex**

Marital sex was reportedly how bisexual individuals discovered, explored, and maintained their sexual identity within marriage. Three bisexual men and one bisexual woman

discussed how they came to the realization of their sexual identity through marital sex and, alternately, the limitations of that exploration.

Kristal has helped me explore that [my bisexuality] a little bit. When we make love, she's open to alternative types of sex, so we have used a dildo, so Kristal's been able to penetrate me, and she's allowed me to have anal sex with her, but she's still a woman and I'm curious what it would be like to experience sex with a man. (Kane, Couple 10)

Elise (Couple 9), a heterosexual wife in a monogamous marriage reported how she and her husband use fantasy and gay pornography to supplement their regular sexual activity and address her husband's unfulfilled sexual needs.

If he's feeling particularly frustrated at not being able to express the bisexual part of himself, we find a way to work through it...typically, probably with fantasy, porn. You know talking about it ahead of time, whatever he's going through...he talks about it until he's feeling better, and we might use some fantasy stuff to work through anything else.

Three of these four couples also suggested that fantasy and pornography were their gateway to exploring sexual identity with partners outside of marriage. "Before we found someone it was a lot, a lot of fantasy...what would we do if we had a man here, and what does he look like, like we would create our own little vignette" (Susan, Couple 5).

The use of fantasy to satiate same-sex desire reportedly only went so far with some bisexual spouses, as nine couples report seeking and opening their marriage. Couples' report of the decision and negotiation processes around opening up the marriage will be addressed later in this chapter.

The process of rediscovery and the sexual dialogue created between married spouses created a new dialogue around sharing crushes for three other couples not referenced above. Two couples had opened their marriage, and one couple kept their marriage closed:

We joke about it a lot. We might be sitting in a restaurant and see somebody and I'll say, "So what do you think of him? He's quite a hunk"...it's just common, somewhat common conversation for us anymore. (Maggie, Couple 7)

The bisexual discovery process and the ensuing exploration reportedly led to new shared couple activities for the above-referenced seven couples. These activities included: watching gay pornography, gay clubbing and, rarely, sexual intercourse with their spouse in the proximity of other couples. Matt (Couple 7), a bisexual husband, highlighted the curiosity that heterosexual spouses may feel on learning that their spouse is bisexual:

Since I've come out, Maggie's horizons have been extended quite a bit. We, she wanted to watch some gay porn. She knows that I would go to some gay clubs...she wanted to see them, so I took her.

Maggie (Couple 7), his heterosexual wife, suggested her rationale for exploring new activities and venues. "I figured I was leading this dull, boring life, and he was having all this fun. I figured it was about time for me to have some excitement too."

### **Gender Negotiations: Non-conformity and Deliberate Conformity**

Nine mixed orientation married couples reported perceiving themselves as gender non-conforming in regard to: (a) appearance; (b) childcare activities; (c) employment; (d) opposite-sex friendships; or (e) household task preferences. Couples emphasized the influence of their family of origin on their gender non-conformity. Their non-conformity suggests mixed orientation married couples may develop a greater sense of personal agency that they express

both within and outside of their marriage. Five mixed orientation married couples reported choosing a traditional gender arrangement. This process was reported as deliberate, and bisexual men and women reported feeling they might have to sacrifice their gender identity for their sexual identity if they were in a same-sex relationship. Heterosexual spouses suggested they were comfortable with a narrower definition of gender. A gender typology of “non-conformers” and “deliberate conformers” is detailed in Table 7.

Table 7

*Negotiating Gender Identity Within Marriage*

Number	Couple	Gender Typology
1	Brandi & Bill	Non-conformers ( <i>n</i> =9)
2	Michelle & Mike	
3	Joan & James	
5	Susan & Sam	
6	Lisa & Lee	
7	Maggie & Matt	
9	Elise & Erik	
10	Kristal & Kane	
14	Ann & Andrew	
4	Jill & John	Deliberate conformers ( <i>n</i> =5)
8	Barbara & Brent	
11	Louise & Larry	
12	Chanel & Chris	
13	Stanley & Stella	

### **Gender Non-conformity in Appearance, Employment, and Friendships**

Four heterosexual women and two bisexual woman reported feeling they had a masculine appearance or behavioral traits. As Susan (Couple 5), a heterosexual wife put it, “I happen to be six foot tall. I’m not skinny. I look like a linebacker from the [New York] Jets. I’m not the most feminine of women.” Women in mixed orientation marriages may feel expected to gender themselves in stereotypical ways. Michelle (Couple 2), a heterosexual wife, discussed how her mother attempted to change her gendering and alternately the relief she felt when she realized her husband’s expectations:

I would consider myself a tomboy throughout my whole life, so I just never...my mom tried to get me to clean and cook and sew and do all the girly things that I would never do them. That’s just how I’ve always been. So, for him not to expect me to be that way has always been a blessing to me, because I don’t feel I’m trying to be something I’m not. I can’t be the desperate housewife.

Women in mixed orientation marriages may experience a sense of relief in finding a partner who find their non-conforming appearance attractive. Her bisexual husband reported this as part of his attraction to her. “I love that in a girl” (Mike, Couple 2).

The four heterosexual women who reported a gender non-conforming appearance, along with two additional heterosexual women not referenced above, also reported a preference for nontraditional household tasks (e.g., home repair and handling household finances) and employment:

We have non-traditional type roles. I work for a family business that is in the construction business. I work with all guys. I think nothing about...doing yard work and things that a

traditional woman would not do, and Sam is just the opposite...so for most people, we would have reversed roles (Susan, Couple 5).

The three bisexual husbands married to heterosexual women reporting non-traditional employment or household task preferences also indicated their own work as florists and interior decorators.

Gender non-conformity among mixed orientation married couples also extended to friendships. The four couples referenced above also reported a comfort with opposite sex friendships historically for both spouses.

We both tend to have good friends of the opposite sex from ourselves, and, um, that's just how it's always been. Kane has always had more female friends than male, and I've always had more male friends. (Kristal, Couple 10)

### **Gender Non-conforming Household and Childcare Responsibilities**

All 14 couples reported sharing household responsibilities since the onset of their marriage. As previously reported, families of origin among mixed orientation married couples may not always support gender non-conformity in appearance. However, they may create a context for greater equality in marriage:

When I was growing up, we girls were seen as equal to the boys, and Erik is from a family with three sisters, and all the sisters are older and [he has] a very strong mother figure, and the girls [in Erik's family] were equal to the boys, so culturally, we've both come from families where there have been women as strong as the men, and having grown up with that attitude, culturally then, then, you know, we don't see there being this huge gap between men and women (Elise, Couple 9)

Heterosexual and bisexual women in mixed orientation marriages may feel a greater sense of agency that manifests in the division of household labor. “We both do what needs to be done in the household...and whoever is available to do it is just the one who does it” (Brandi, Couple 1).

Four couples out of seven who reported having children said they shared child-care related responsibilities. They also highlighted the challenge of doing so:

We started out, we talked a lot about gender and how we didn't necessarily want to fall into stereotypical roles of he does this, she does this, like Kane is much better in the kitchen than I am, and you know just silly stuff, but I think having kids, we've fallen into more of a standard, like because I breastfeed the baby, I end up doing more of the baby nurturing, and so we tend to fall a little more into the standard male-female gender roles than I think we originally anticipated. (Krystal, Couple 10)

### **Reactions of Others To Couples' Gender Non-conformity**

Bisexual and heterosexual women and men in mixed orientation marriages received a mixed response from others to their gender non-conformity. This response may also be dependent upon the context of the relationship. Mixed orientation married couples that are out within the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities experience greater acceptance of gender non-conformity. James (Couple, 3), a bisexual husband, highlighted how friends in the lesbian community viewed his heterosexual wife's gender non-conforming behavior favorably. “Some of my lesbian friends joke that Joan would make a very good lesbian because she owns all the power tools.”

Gender non-conformity was not as well received within the heterosexual community. Michelle (Couple 2), a heterosexual wife, spoke to how her marriage equality and her self-perceived dominance was viewed negatively by others:

We have an equal share in this marriage. I am a very dominant female. I always have been and always will be, but I also know when to shut up. I don't behave and nobody really tells me what to do. That's an issue that just came up over the weekend...he [husband, Mike] was told by someone that we consider a friend that he was the man of the house, and he needed to crack the whip and make me behave.

Three couples reported some emotional struggle with negotiations around gender with their spouse:

I would say it happened organically, but it really didn't. We had power struggles when we first moved in together. We fought constantly because I think I tried to fill lots of masculine roles. I was used to being the breadwinner always...so I wanted to retain that kind of power.... I was always used to being independent and taking care of things myself. I'm aggressive and dominating, so we had to work together and figure out our roles (Brandi, Couple 1).

Bill (Couple 1), a heterosexual husband, referenced his emotional discomfort with the perceived inequity early in his relationship to his future wife, and how becoming the breadwinner gave him a greater sense of security:

She was making most of the money and paying the mortgage on the place...I felt like kind of an extended visitor in her place.... It's a little more balanced now. She goes to school full time. I go to work.

The gender negotiation struggle may require bisexual and heterosexual men to let go of socially constructed gender expectations, but doing so may open up for greater gender flexibility in mixed orientation marriage relationships. As James, a bisexual husband (Couple 3) stated, "I

just kind of relaxed and let her do more and more of the decision making. I tried to fill the role of being the macho husband [at the beginning], but I wasn't really very good at it."

### **Gender Non-conformity as a Part of The Attraction**

Six couples suggested that their experience of their spouse's gender non-conformity was part of their initial attraction. Jill (Couple 4), a heterosexual wife, suggested that the stereotypical opposite gender traits of bisexual husbands make them more emotionally attractive to heterosexual women:

I say to so many of these women [girlfriends], there is a reason you are attracted to them in the first place. You know, not to...use stereotypes, but a lot of them like to go shopping, are more than happy in a furniture store debating which sofa needs to be bought for the house. You look at more traditional marriages, and they [men] are all off watching football. They're doing their sports stuff. They're spending just as many hours away from home. They're just doing different things. So at the end of the day, aren't you better off with somebody who is a little more in touch with his emotional side?

### **Negotiation Among Gender Non-conforming Couples**

Family of origin experiences may create a context where there is a greater tolerance for gender non-conformity. This perception seems to manifest in a higher incidence of opposite sex friendships among heterosexual spouses. As Andrew (Couple 14), a heterosexual husband highlighted, "I'm a huge fan of woman, and most of my closest friends by number are almost all women. I have a lot of very close friends that are women." Greater acceptance of gender non-conformity may also reinforce bisexual spouses' attraction to their spouse. As Mike (Couple 2), a bisexual husband reported, "I've never met a girl like she is...really quite the tom-boy, and I love that in a girl" (Mike, Couple 2). As one bisexual husband put it, "There is a reason women

married us in the first place. We weren't like other guys" (John, Couple 4). Greater gender non-conformity may also inform the negotiation of family-life responsibilities post marriage: "As far as baby care, he does everything, and some of it better than I do" (Lisa, Couple, 6). Greater flexibility and negotiation around gender may ultimately deepen feelings of acceptance, understanding, and trust that occur between mixed orientation spouses.

### **Deliberate Gender Conformity**

Five mixed orientation married couples reported preferring a traditional gender arrangement. Two bisexual wives suggested that being married allowed them to explore their bisexual identity without compromising their feminine gender display, as revealed in Chanel's (Couple 12) comments:

It's knowing who you want to be and who you allow yourself to be, and that's again why it's been so easy for me to open up about this or to explore this concept at all is because again like I was saying, I don't know, I was talking about stability earlier or just security in a relationship, and I think that has a lot to do with this whole concept of this balancing out this masculine stability that he was talking about in the sense that...I guess just being allowed to express yourself, have who you want, I think people always kind of assume that women by definition are more emotional, more in tune with their sexuality or emotions, again this is stereotype, but...I've been allowed, or I think a woman in a relationship should be able to do that, especially in the context of a mixed or a MOM that the woman can or should be able to, to express herself fully in those ways.

Three of the heterosexual husbands of the five total among the deliberate conformer couples emphasized the importance they placed on being male, to the extent that they may not question their gender identity.

I like being a man. I like a narrower, you know, it was something. I mean we know a number of transgender folks. We're getting to know a number of transgender folks over the years now, and I never felt any inkling of, of wanting to not be a man, and so I've been confident in presenting myself that way, and being that person, and then living life from that outlook, and so I think the main thing is being not ever questioning that, feeling confident in that, you know, removed a layer or, you know, problems, it's, I've been able to be pretty confident in presenting myself that way and not having to question that on any level. (Brent, Couple 8)

### **Disclosing to Spouses, Seeking Support, and Coming Out to Others While Married**

#### **The Reactions of Heterosexual Spouses to Disclosure**

Ten bisexual spouses reported receiving a positive reaction from their heterosexual spouse, when they disclosed their bisexual identity. James, a bisexual husband who came out after marriage, reported his wife accepted him unconditionally, "She totally accepted it, like so what?" Another bisexual husband who had disclosed his same-sex attraction prior to marriage reported a similar experience: "Jill thought it was very cool and actually helped arrange my first time with another man" (John, Couple 4). Heterosexual spouses reiterated their acceptance of their spouse's disclosure, "I remember you [Lisa] making it into a lot bigger deal than I thought it was. I mean it was like you had bad news" (Lee, Couple 6).

Four heterosexual spouses reported having a mixed reaction to learning that their spouse was bisexual. Maggie (Couple 7), a heterosexual wife, reported being shocked:

It was quite a shock at first, because knowing his upbringing, knowing that he was active in the church...coming from that background, to me this was all very foreign, that you

could have someone who was gay or homosexual or whatever, and you have them also be involved in the church, and so it was like how can this be?

Louise (Couple 11), a heterosexual wife, believed the disclosure was an affirmation of her husband's trust and commitment to their monogamous marriage [when he first came out]. "It just confirmed to me that he loved me and trusted me with this information, and that his intention was to continue to stay monogamous. He did for 20 more years."

Two heterosexual spouses of bisexuals whose sexual identity emerged after marriage reported having a sense that their spouse was bisexual prior to disclosure:

A good friend of mine who's a lesbian, she once commented that I had the best gaydar of anyone she's ever met. When I first met Ann, I actually thought she was a lesbian.

Literally, for like six or seven months, I was convinced she was a lesbian...as we became better friends, I kind of came to the realization that maybe she did like guys, but literally the entire time I've known her, I've always got that sense.... She is attracted to guys, I wouldn't say by exception, but it's not...the way heterosexual women are attracted to guys. (Andrew, 14)

These bisexual spouses were more likely to report that their heterosexual partner was instrumental in the process of understanding and claiming their bisexuality.

Three couples discussed the emotional implications of disclosure on the marriage relationship. Eric (Couple 9), a bisexual husband acknowledged the burden he put on his wife by coming out to her. "So in a way...the burden of keeping the secret has shifted from me to her, which I don't know is necessarily fair." Mary, a heterosexual wife, reported feeling a heightened sense of protectiveness towards her husband. "I feel a little more protective about, you know, helping keep his secret from those who really shouldn't know, who might give him grief" (Mary,

Couple 9). The long-term relational implications of this effort to keep the secret are unclear, but heterosexual spouses may experience isolation and anxiety in the effort to keep the secret:

I don't have anybody. There's only one person...that knows about our situation that was a friend of mine that, a friend of both of ours I'd guess you'd say, but it was a friend of mine particularly that Larry outed himself to without...discussing it with me first, and so she was the only one that ever...knew about it, and when Larry first...came out, well when he came out a second time, he, she and I would go out to clubs together from time to time. She was single and was not comfortable going to bars by herself and was interested in dating, so she and I would on occasion go out together, and she was not judgmental about our marriage or his orientation or anything, but I don't have any contact with her currently. (Louise, Couple 11)

### **Is Our Mixed Orientation Marriage A Public or Private Matter?**

Six couples reported that the mixed nature of their union is a private matter. Sexuality was reported to be a bedroom matter. As one heterosexual spouse put it: "What goes on in our bedroom is...what goes on in our bedroom. We never really talk to our family and friends about what goes on between ourselves" (Chris, Couple 13).

There are a variety of contexts where mixed orientation married couples report considering the need and implications of coming out to others. Two couples that elected to disclose their mixed nature to others reported having rules around disclosure:

Jill has told most people since then...with my permission. We talked about, discussed it beforehand, would I be comfortable with it, and some [people] weren't as comfortable with it at first, and she [Jill] didn't say anything. (John, Couple 4)

The process of coming out was not always planned. “There was no defining moment where I felt like I just had to tell these people. It was just through friendship and conversation that it really came out” (John, Couple 4).

Twelve couples reported not being out to their parents. In two cases, the participant’s parents were deceased so coming out to them was not possible. Couples questioned the point of coming out to their parents given the couple remained married. John (Couple 4), a bisexual husband, explained his rationale: “Well, there would be no benefit for her, at this point, no benefit of her knowing. It doesn’t affect her. It won’t affect her. Her daughter-in-law is not leaving.”

Seven couples reported having children ranging in age from infancy to adulthood. They reported differing degrees of disclosure to their children from not out at all to partially out. This was based upon couple preference and the age of the child. As Elise (Couple 9), a heterosexual wife suggested, “He doesn’t have to hide it [the bisexuality] at least with me. He’s careful with our children...because of their ages.” Jill (Couple 4), a heterosexual wife, emphasized the importance of her husband being out to her bisexual son in the future, so that he goes into marriage with his eyes open:

Our marriage looks pretty traditional, [but] if you delve into more specifics and get to know us better, you realize, “No, it isn’t,” but our son is not privy to any of that.... He thinks that just Dad is bisexual and we’re married and that’s that. Eventually, some day we’ll change that...because as of now, he identifies as bisexual himself, and I don’t want him to go into marriage thinking he can just put that side of him aside, like his father did, and lead a traditional life, because his father didn’t, and we didn’t lead a traditional life, but at 19, he doesn’t need to have any of that information yet.

Brandi (Couple 1), a bisexual wife suggested it would be important to being out to support the sexuality identity development of any children she and her husband might have:

I'd probably want to be more out in front of my children, just so, you know, if they happened to be bisexual, gay, any of that, they would feel more comfortable coming to me cause they would know that I'm not just straight, I have a mixed orientation and I could be sympathetic in that sense. So it would be very important for me to be very upfront about it and have it not be so compartmentalized at that point.

Brandi's report suggests that coming out may achieve saliency as children reach adolescence. However, Matt (Couple 7), a bisexual husband, highlighted the difficulty of coming out to children may continue as they age:

I'm not out to our two sons and their wives yet, and I'm not sure when or if it will happen. If they were ever to ask me point blank, I would tell them. They have both met my current boyfriend; they know him...and they don't know him as my boyfriend. They just know him as a friend, and they've seen him in the house here with Margaret and they've, you know, so it's not that we're hiding everything, but, you know, again, they don't want to think that mom and dad have sex, let alone that dad has sex with another man.

Six mixed orientation married couples highlighted the stigma that could come from coming out in their work environment. Heterosexual spouses reported not being out about their mixed marriage in the work environment. "I don't tell work associates because the environment I work in is a pretty conservative environment. My boss is a Mormon. I don't know if he would quite understand" (Andrew, Couple 14). Bisexual spouses reported being out at work, but only to

a degree. “I was pretty much out to everyone in the office, but I never really made a show or spectacle” (Brandi, Couple 1).

### **The Mixed Reactions of Family, Friends, and Others**

Mixed orientation married couples are coming out to family, friends, and others in a variety of professional and personal contexts. Bisexual spouses who were out prior to marriage reported that no one questioned their decision to marry. “I had already dated enough men that people kind of knew I was bi...so I don’t think anyone questioned it [getting married]” (Lisa, Couple 6).

Bisexual spouses who came out after marriage reported friends reacted mostly with surprise:

So far, we haven’t had too much of an issue. We’ve had the one guy tell me...I was kind of screwed up, but otherwise they didn’t really out and out reject us. I don’t think...we’ve rarely had anybody out and out reject us on that. There’s been a varying degree [of reaction], mostly surprise. (Mike, Couple 2)

Jill (Couple 4), a heterosexual wife, suggested that female family and friends may experience concern for heterosexual wives when they learn about their mixed marriage:

My sister...she had a problem with it for the first year, but not because she didn’t [accept John]...she’s known John since she was 11-years-old. As far as she is concerned, John’s her big brother. Where she was worried was that she was concerned for me. I think that’s been [consistent]...all of my closest girlfriends and sisters, in my life, each and every one of them have gone through a small stage of “Are you sure you’re okay?” because they saw John had outside relationships...he had that boyfriend for four years and then, since then, now he just had a bit of a break, and he just got some friends with benefits as they

crop up...and they've always just been very concerned that I was not just accepting it 'cause I had no choice. And, so that's where their concern was, not because they were unapproving or disapproving of what John was or what our lifestyle is.

Mike (Couple 2), a bisexual husband, spoke to a double standard he had experienced in the process of coming out to heterosexual men:

There's still quite a bit of stigma towards...gay and bi's ...I mean, especially for...the guys. I mean we kind of ran into this whole situation [recently]...it was sort of a long weekend...we ran into an issue where we had some friends whose wife...is bisexual and they kind of go about it in a little different way than we do, but at the same time, she's practically loved for it, whereas I was told that what I do is, well, bluntly, fucked up.

The process of coming out can precipitate the loss of relationships with family and friends for mixed orientation married couples. Couples acknowledged these losses and reported having to develop new avenues of support:

I don't feel as closed off, I don't think, and I don't know if that, I mean, as, as Maya has come out as bi and as we've explored the poly [amorous] lifestyle, it's created community for us that we used to get...from the, the church, religious side of things, and...it feels to me as if it's opened up a greater sense of belonging and community.

(Brent, Couple 8)

Couples also achieved a greater sense of community for themselves via engagement in virtual and in-person support groups for mixed orientation married spouses. This process will be discussed later in this chapter.

Mixed orientation married couples further developed support by engaging with the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities. One couple reported being received with curiosity:

John and I both smoke, and if we're at a gay bar, and I go outside for a cigarette, and I end up talking to whomever is also out there and having a cigarette, and they're blown away by my story, and they sort of say, "Are you here with friends or whatever," and I say, "No, I'm here with my husband," and they sort of look at me blankly, and I'll just say, "My husband's bisexual, and we're here with friends," and they'll be like, "Wow, how does that work?" (Jill, Couple 4)

Two couples reported facing bias from members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities. "Well, bisexuality isn't real. If you're questioning, you should just come out [as gay or lesbian]" (Lisa, Couple 6), as well as the mixed orientation marriage community:

For the most part...the men that I've met that hear of my situation...they really don't see it working. I mean I think they have a pretty negative outlook. Actually, a lot of the men that I've met in these discussion groups, local coffee group, a lot of the men have been married for you know a pretty significant part of their lives and then, for whatever reason, came out and got divorced. (Larry, Couple 11)

Nine couples reported seeking support through participating in individual and marriage therapy both currently and historically. They reported positive experiences with therapy; "I visited a number of counselors...so I feel like counseling can be very beneficial" (Kane, 10); and negative experiences; "When he was a kid, he had a brief experience with group therapy, and it

was a bad experience for him, so I think that also plays into it [his reluctance]” (Stella, Couple 13).

Two couples spoke to the difficulty of finding a therapist with experience working with mixed orientation married couples:

I don't think we would find the right person here...I mean we would definitely want to go to an LGBT affirming therapist. I don't know that they're [here]. We probably have to ask around, and it might take some time to find a marriage therapist...that met our needs I think. (Kane, Couple 10)

Barbara (Couple 8), a bisexual spouse that was able to secure an affirming therapist, reported to the additional hurdle of having to educate therapists about the open aspect of her marriage:

Oh, we've done that [marriage therapy]...that's probably the biggest thing is I find, no matter what I go in to talk to a therapist about, I have to educate them. I can't assume that, that...the therapist is going to understand my situation at all...I can't assume that they're even going to have heard of polyamory, so...it's...a big challenge to have to...educate every new therapist that I come into contact with. Part of me is like annoyed...and you know I have tried doing things like asking on a [online] poly [amorous] group, “Does anybody have a good counselor that that I could go to?”...but unfortunately it's never worked out that even if we, if a friend did have a recommendation, for us that we could end up going to that person [cause we lived in a different part of the country]. So, I have, to this, to this day, I've seen a number of therapists, and I've never met one who knew what polyamory was...okay, yeah, she did

know what polyamory was, but her only real example of a polyamorous relationship was one that was very unhealthy.

Another heterosexual wife who attended couples psychotherapy with her bisexual husband for two years acknowledged the unique challenges of mixed orientation marriage. However, she also reiterated the need for more guidelines: “There’s no easy answers, but if somebody could give you better guidelines...they could give some guiding hand in the whole thing” (Susan, Couple 5).

### **Developing a New Community**

Mixed orientation married couples that come out at some point during their marriage risk the loss of important family, friends, and loved ones who formerly served as a source of support. Eight couples reported seeking information, understanding, and support from a variety of outlets including books; in-person and online support groups; gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities organizations; and mixed orientation married couple gatherings.

Maggie (Couple 7), a heterosexual spouse, reported seeking self-help books to help her understand and cope with her husband’s bisexuality. She reported that books are scarce and more focused on facilitating the coming out process than maintaining the marriage:

You look for books out there on mixed orientation marriages. There basically are none...I mean I have looked and looked and so has everyone in the [mixed orientation marriage online] groups that we belong to, and we can find things about coming out, and you know that sort of thing, but then even marriages, but when you get to the end of it, it usually ends up that the marriage ends in divorce, and so that just seems to be the way it is, and there are organizations online like the Straight Spouse Network, um, Wives of Bi/Gay

Husbands, but they are all so very negative about staying together, and it's like the only option is divorce. (Maggie, Couple 7)

Eight couples reported participating in public website and private web-group forums for bisexual persons, mixed orientation married spouses, and mixed orientation married couples. Online websites and groups vary with regard to their membership requirements. Eligibility may include couples or spouses-only. Couples reported feeling affirmed via their participation in the mixed orientation marriage online member-only groups:

I belong to [MOM Group #1; mixed orientation marriage online group for spouses] and [MOM Group #2] which is the couples group, and John...belongs to [MOM Group #3] which is [for] husbands out to wives, and [MOM Group #1]...we've got well over 1,000 members now. Um, some come, some go, you know, a lot we obviously don't hear from, but it's a very active group, and there are a lot of people like us. (Jill, Couple 4)

The Internet may offer some mixed orientation married couples an avenue to connect with others, but it may also expose them to discrimination, depending upon the nature of the website or group. Susan (Couple 5), a heterosexual wife, describes her experience after a recent forum posting on an online bisexual website:

There are some trolls on the bi site that say some incredibly cruel and hurtful things about the relationship that I have with Sam.... People who don't even know me or the relationship that I have with Sam would just be so incredibly hateful, and say such condescending and mean things because I'm basically with a gay man.

Three bisexual participants reported active involvement with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender organizations in their communities. While they reported supporting their spouse's engagement, two heterosexual spouses also expressed reservations about this involvement.

“There’s a sense of...being left out. He has...other friends that I’m not, there not our friends, there his friends, and I don’t have any social interaction with” (Louise, Couple 11).

Mixed orientation married couples that do not co-construct a new community for themselves may also experience a tension between the competing needs of the married spouses. Bisexual husbands and wives may need to engage and be supported via community, yet such involvement may trigger additional anxiety related specifically to their involvement in the community:

There have been like insecurities and suspicions before, but even more so now that I am active in the community, and I think for him it’s, not that I can speak for him, but to me it feels like, “Not only do I have to worry about her running off with some other guy. Now I have to worry about her running off with some other guy or another woman,” and it’s just kind of doubles the amount of suspicion. I really need that freedom...but that freedom without suspicion. Bill has expressed suspicion a few times that I might be dating someone else... that’s something that becomes an undercurrent for things. It’s not necessarily always perceivable; it’s there, but, you know, I kind of feel...suspect, and that kind of, I think, spills over, and when we’re trying to problem solve, that...the suspicion, that’s not a solvable problem. (Brandi, Couple 1)

Two couples also reported planning and attending in-person gatherings for mixed orientation married couples. Jill (Couple 4) reported that the gatherings were held annually and took place over the course of several days in a geographically central location in the United States. These in-person gatherings offered couples the opportunity to meet in-person with other couples that they had got to know via the online mixed orientation marriage membership groups.

We've gone now to four different mixed orientation marriage couple gatherings, and that's where we've met other people... through the [MOM Group #2] couples group, and things, so, you know, we've developed this little bit of friendship... friends from around the globe really, mostly here in the states, but some from Canada, and some from across the seas and, and so, it's nice to have that community that we can be ourselves in, but generally society does not really look at, you know, why in the world are we staying married? Now, if I, if I want to be with a guy, why don't I leave her and, and do that, and it's not that I just want to be with a guy. I need her in my life too. So, um, it, we're careful with who we tell because a lot of people just won't understand it and accept it, and we figure why do they really need to know? Then again, there are times when we want to shout it from the rooftops just to try to end some of the stereotypical, you know, gay bashing that happens in society, and things are changing for the good, but... I don't know if we want to be the poster children for gay rights within married couples. (Matt, Couple 7)

One mixed orientation married couple that made the decision to stay married, to work on their relationship, and to engage with others in the online community, reported achieving a sense of eldership through that process:

We have a lot of friends who are in mixed orientation marriages as well, through the web sites and stuff. Being in [name omit; large East Coast city], it certainly makes it easy. We have thrown many parties, gatherings... where we have had the chance to meet people in the same boat as us... so we've ended up with quite a big group of friends that are in the same... no one is, quite frankly, as far along as we are, and some of them are dealing with an awful lot of issues that we've past. I call it my paying-it-forward because if you take

these Internet groups and have nothing but newbies in them, they'll all sink together. You need to have some people who've been there, done that, and come out the other side to be able give some kind of help. (Jill, Couple 4)

### **The Push To Choose**

Nine mixed orientation married couples report feeling pressure to categorize their sexuality as gay or lesbian and dissolve their marriage. "There's a very strong push to choose" (Louise, Couple 11). Couples reported feeling this push from society; family; the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities; and therapists.

Society says, "Well, okay, we'll accept you if you're gay, but we really don't think you should act on it because that's sinful, but if that's the way you are, that's fine, but it shouldn't be with your wife, you shouldn't because you can't either be true to yourself or your wife shouldn't have to deal with that because it's not fair to her," and so they accept a divorce. (Maggie, Couple 7)

Brandi (Couple 1), a bisexual wife, reported feeling the pressure to choose from parents. "I have to continually come out to people, like even my parents. I've come out three times to them." Joan (Couple 3), a heterosexual wife, reported her family might react negatively if they learned of the mixed nature of her marriage. "Well, they might just feel like... why you stuck with him that he likes man [sic]?"

Mixed orientation married spouses may internalize the "choose" message and question whether or not to stay married, as exemplified by Jill (Couple 4):

We did go through a stage or two where John kept throwing the divorce word at me and saying, "You're free to leave," and "You can go," and I think he was testing me and pushing me to see, you know, his guilt was so huge, that he had put this outside

relationship on me that in a way he was just saying it would be easier for all involved if you just say, “I’ve had enough and walk out the door.”

Jill (Couple 4), also suggested that bisexuals in mixed orientation marriages may be treated as “sell outs” by members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities. Larry (Couple 11), a bisexual husband, referenced feeling incompatible with that same community:

I really, honestly, in my travels rarely come across somebody who actually does identify as bisexual, so I would have to say most of the people that, you know, the gay people, the gay community does not see it [bisexuality and marriage] as compatible. Mostly, the gay community says there’s no way you can make that work, and you’re wasting your time, and...being bi is just is just a rest stop on the way to becoming gay, you know...they don’t believe that that really exists and it’s only like there’s anyway to balance a marriage and an active sex life...with another man, or with the same-sex.

Three bisexual participants referenced current and historic involvement in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities. Brandi (Couple 1), a bisexual wife, highlighted how this mitigates the feeling of having to “choose:”

My orientation it’s inconsequential within the context of my relationship, and whenever I’m with straight friends, you know, my orientation is inconsequential. So, when I’m out working in the [GLBT] community, working with other people, doing counseling and things, in a way, I feel like it validates me as a person. It validates that part of me, and it kind of reassures that, “No I don’t have to choose, and just because I got married doesn’t mean that, you know, I don’t still like women.”

The potential for discrimination may make some married bisexuals hesitant to engage in the very community that allows them to maintain a connection to their sexual identity within marriage:

Nine couples reported seeking individual or couples therapy. Seven mixed orientation married couples experienced or referenced fearing the push to choose from mental health practitioners. Mixed orientation married couples who had access to therapeutic support reported having to see multiple therapists in order to find the right one. Three bisexual husbands reported having their sexual identity questioned:

I was seeing a counselor and actually it was a woman, a lesbian woman, and she had pretty strong feelings about what I should do, and she thought that I was coming out, and she thought I needed to divorce, we needed to separate and, ah, so she kind of started steering me that way, and I realized that her, her recommendations weren't really in line with what I was hoping to achieve, and so I changed counselors. (Larry, Couple, 11)

Louise (Couple 11), Larry's heterosexual wife, suggested that therapists may suggest divorce without sufficient therapeutic assessment:

The first counselor that he went to...at that time, he and I had been monogamous for you know 20 plus years and his last [sexual] experience [with a man] had been like 30 years ago, and she was suggesting that he get divorced, basically with no experience, no same-sex experience for 30 years and just throw away the marriage without thinking about it. (Louise, Couple 11)

Four couples that sought therapy reported a variety of issues that may undermine therapeutic outcomes and lead to premature termination of therapy services. Matt (Couple 7), a bisexual husband who attended therapy suggested therapists might myopically focus on his bisexuality to the detriment of other presenting clinical issues: "Some therapists...zero in on the

sexuality issue.” Two couples that had attended therapy also expressed concern that therapists were “interested in [working with] LGBT, but they really had...no experience with it” (Lisa, Couple 6). One additional couple who reported attending therapy and had opened their marriage also expressed the concern that therapists might be undereducated and pathologizing, as Barbara (Couple 8) stated:

I’m not there to fix my polyamory. That’s not the issue...so and if I ever did have an issue that was related to polyamory or my sexual identity, as a bisexual, well, the sexual identity probably wouldn’t be as big of an issue because there’s a lot more education available for people, for therapists to, you know, deal with bisexuality, but there’s not a whole lot out there about open relationships, and, you know...I just don’t think there are a lot of therapists who have had any exposure at all to the issues that we might run into, and how to help us resolve those issues in healthy way that doesn’t include saying, “You should just be monogamous.”

The push to choose message that mixed orientation married couples may experience from therapists, loved ones, and the gay and lesbian communities can be internalized within the couple itself. They may choose to seek support from other mixed orientation married couples via online membership groups and in-person gatherings. However, those who cannot may feel isolated and more susceptible to this push to choose.

### **Making MOM Work is An Intentional, Relational Process**

Making mixed orientation marriage work after a bisexual spouse comes out to their heterosexual partner is an intentional process that can require couples to reevaluate their understanding of marital commitment and, if elected, negotiate the process of opening up that marriage. Some couples elect to maintain a monogamous marriage and do so for multiple years.

Four couples reported continuing to maintain a monogamous marriage post the disclosure of a bisexual spouse. Other mixed orientation married couples report opening their marriage shortly after the disclosure, while others may open it up after an extended period of monogamy. Ten couples reported the intention or opening up their marriage by seeking a same-sex or opposite-sex partner for the bisexual spouse or seeking a third person to bring into the marriage for both spouses. I will attempt to explain the process by which the couples reconsider their commitment, and if they elect to open their marriage, how they do so while simultaneously maintaining their marriage. Table 8 contains a description of a suggested marital commitment typology across the couples. Couples were differentiated into one of two groups: (a) closed marital commitment and (b) open marital commitment. Closed marital commitment was defined as monogamous. Open marital commitment has four subtypes: (a) monogamous with the option to open; (b) open on one side (i.e., the bisexual spouse was or had the option to establish a tertiary relationship outside the marriage); (c) open on both sides or polyamorous; and (d) third-person inclusive (i.e., couples had or were seeking a third person to bring into their marriage for both spouses).

**Table 8**

***Marital Commitment Typology***

Marital Commitment Type				
Closed	Open			
<i>Monogamous</i>	<i>Option to Open</i>	<i>One-sided</i>	<i>Dual-sided</i>	<i>Third-person Inclusive</i>
Brandi & Bill (Bisexual woman)	Joan & James (Bisexual man)	Jill & John (Bisexual man)	Barbara & Brent (Bisexual woman)	Michelle & Mike (Have male partner)
Lisa & Lee (Bisexual woman)		Maggie & Matt (Bisexual man)	Stella & Stanley (Bisexual woman)	Susan & Sam (Have male partner)
Elise & Erik (Bisexual man)		Louise & Larry (Bisexual man)		Chanel & Chris (Seeking female partner)
Kristal & Kane (Bisexual man)		Ann & Andrew (Bisexual woman)		

### **Making The Decision to Remain Monogamous**

Mixed orientation married couples were asked about their experience of marital commitment and any changes they experienced after the sexual identity disclosure of the bisexual spouse. Mixed orientation couples consistently reported an important contextual variable that influenced the meaning they imbued into marital commitment: monogamy.

Four mixed orientation married couples that had not opened their marriage reported that their sense of commitment and their decision to not open the marriage related to their sense of unity as a couple and the marriage ceremony itself:

I mean with commitment...you know you are a unit. In that case, the individual, in my case, my bisexuality becomes less important in the context of the unit. I felt commitment before then [our marriage], but, I, as far as completely, like cutting myself off and not being with anyone else ever, as a possibility, that happened more after, through the marriage [ceremony] because we hadn't always had a piece of paper saying that. We made like an official, legal commitment to one another. (Brandi, Couple 1)

Three of the couples that elected not to open their relationship emphasized that marriage, as opposed to a long-term relationship, was their preferred relational outcome:

I have always sort of held a special place for marriage and known that I wanted to get married. I don't know there was any one thing that prompted that decision. It sort of just gradually was, "Well, I'm committed" and want to spend the rest of my life with this person, and so I wanted to demonstrate my commitment, and I proposed. (Kane, Couple 10)

The four couples that were monogamous also reported that their marital commitment did not change after the disclosure of a bisexual spouse. Rather, the importance they placed on marital commitment and the struggle to achieve it became more salient to them.

It's a daily choice to honor our agreements, and so I think of commitment as a, it's a day by day thing that becomes a long term, I mean, we've been communicating and struggling to know each other and honor the truth within each other...we've been making this choice...for over 20 years, and so it's become a long term commitment...the commitment doesn't change or didn't change... it's an awareness of what commitment is became more real, more immediate. (Brent, Couple 8)

James (Couple 3), a bisexual husband, reported that he and his wife were monogamous, but discussed having the option to open up the marriage shortly after he came out. "We decided very early on, we both stated that non-monogamy by itself wasn't a reason to break up. So, we've always been able to be monogamous because we both had permission not to be." This option was reportedly available to both spouses. Having the option to engage in an additional sexual relationship outside the marriage may allow some mixed orientation married couples to preserve their marital commitment but not feel bound by it.

### **Making The Decision To Open The Marriage**

Ten mixed orientation married couples reported opening or seeking to open their marriage as part of their reevaluation of marital commitment. The potential suppression and loss of identity for a bisexual spouse within marriage was reported by three heterosexual spouses as an important part of their reconsideration of marital commitment and their choice to open their marriage:

Bisexuality is something, in a way, that I find to be very sad, because no matter what you do, in order to be with somebody, you're going to have to sacrifice half of who you are, or live in some kind of open type of relationship because a true bisexual by the fact of saying, you know, when you get married, you say, "You're forsaking all others," and that means, in the traditional sense, you will no longer have any kind of sexual relationship with somebody else. Now, if you're a true bisexual, you're asking them to give up a whole half of who they truly, truly, truly are, and to me, the saddest thing in the world would have been for John to have woken up at age 60, or 70, or 80, or whatever and say, "Oh, no, what did I miss?" The sacrifices I make by saying, go, have sexual relationship with men, far outweigh what it would be for John to suppress that part of himself. (Jill, Couple 4)

Two additional heterosexual spouses reiterated the struggle of prioritizing the sexual needs and happiness of their spouse over their own happiness and belief in commitment as monogamy.

I both know that Kane is attracted to me, but I also know that I can't necessarily meet all of his needs...I feel compelled to ask him about...his attraction to men, and...I think it's opened up our sexual experiences, but mostly I'm trying to be as open minded as possible. (Kristal, Couple 10)

Barbara (Couple 8), a bisexual wife, suggested that bisexuality is incompatible with monogamous marriage over the long term:

If we were in a traditional monogamous relationship, I don't think that being bisexual would be compatible with that. It seems like I'd feel like I'd have to choose to express myself with either women or with men, and, you know, if I decided that I needed to

express that part of myself that's attracted to women, I would have had to feel like I was gonna' leave the relationship with Brent, so... you know, for me, since I'm not the type of person who would have another relationship...without his consent I wouldn't do that...so, if we were in a monogamous relationship and he wasn't...okay with me being involved with a woman, I wouldn't, and if I was involved with a woman and I was monogamous, I wouldn't be involved with Brent, because the two things I think are incompatible. Barbara (Couple 8)

The consequences of opening a marriage may extend beyond the couple themselves and reinforce the sense of secrecy around mixed orientation marriage. Jill (Couple 4), a heterosexual wife who is a member of several online communities for mixed orientation married couples, referenced her experience within that community:

I know a bunch of people on the Internet who are like, "Yes, we're monogamous, and I'm never going to do anything," and I'm thinking to myself, "How sad is that," you know, you're to, to have to push down and swallow and not act on something that is so instinctual, to me, is unbelievably sad. And when you're dealing with someone who is a true bisexual, what are the options? You know, either he is in a committed relationship with a woman and craving men, or in a relationship with a man, craving women, or he never gets to have an intimate relationship because he doesn't want to commit to one person, and have that person, you know, be upset, or sad, or not be able to handle the other side of who they are. It's a very tricky position to be in, and... it's just a really hard life to lead, if you want to be happy, and ultimately, we all deserve to be happy. (Jill, Couple 4)

Regardless of whether they remain monogamous or elect to open their marriage, couples may experience mixed reactions to their choice, even within the mixed orientation marriage online community.

### **Successfully Negotiating The Process of Opening The Marriage**

Mixed orientation married couples reported opening their marriages for bisexual spouses, and in some cases, heterosexual partners as well. Couples also reported having and seeking a third person to bring into their marriage. Couples that opened their marriage reported immediate and ongoing challenges, notably around the issue of trust. Couples who successfully managed the process reported a series of strategies that will be detailed below.

Five mixed orientation married couples reported that establishing rules were important to the process of opening up the marriage. Eleven couples emphasized the importance of communication to maintaining their sense of marital commitment. Stella (Couple 11), a bisexual wife, described the intellectual and emotional process that she went through:

It was hard for me to be able to see that we could each date other people and it wouldn't negatively effect our relationship... but yeah a lot of tough conversations, a lot of communication, a lot of trial and error then talking about error...yeah, figuring out what works for us and what doesn't work for us, you know like, for instance, how much to tell, how much not to tell...like Stanley is very happy hearing everything. He likes hearing about what I'm doing, feeling part of it...whereas I don't like a lot of information. I like to kind of know the basics...so yeah, things like that, just working through a lot of how this was going to work. (Stella, Couple 13)

Five bisexual spouses also reported their heterosexual spouses wanted to know whom they were involved with or to be involved in finding the person:

She would know when I put another personals ad out there...she even saw my ad that I put on Silver Daddies, where I met my current friend...so it, it, she has become part of this. One of...our agreements after...I came out, and we sat down and sorted this out [was] how are we going to make this work, and she had asked that when I meet somebody, if I'm going to be going into a relationship with him, if I felt it was going to lead to that, she would like to meet him before we got involved with each other and that has steered more guys away than you can even believe, um, and once in a while, somebody says, "Yeah, okay, that's fine, I'm, I'm, you know, interested in seeing how this works with you, so I'll meet your wife," and it's just for her comfort level. (Matt, Couple 7)

This involvement may set up additional roadblocks to finding a stable sex partner outside the marriage. However, heterosexual spouses reported feeling valued by their spouse via this inclusion:

I'm lucky enough that John has also made me part of his [bisexual] life. He has never said, "I don't want you to meet my gay friends. I don't want you to go out with them. I don't want you involved in it." It's the absolute opposite, you know, I know every single one of his friends pretty much. Some of them are as close to me as they are to John, including friends he has sexual relations with. (Jill, Couple 4)

Louise (Couple 11), a heterosexual wife who was not involved in her husband's "bisexual life" reported feeling emotionally distanced by their spouse:

He...has other friends that I'm not, they're not our friends. They're his friends that I don't have any social interaction with. I don't have any connection with or, you know, if he goes out with his gay friends, I don't know who they are, what they talk about, where

they go, what they do. I'm not a part of it, so that's different for us, 'cause, you know, most couples, I mean some, some straight couples, the guys have their bowling league or softball team, and we've never had that separation that we do now.

Two bisexual husbands reported feeling the need to sometimes withhold information in order to protect their heterosexual spouse. Sam (Couple 5), who shares his male partner with his wife, referenced wanting to protect his wife's feelings:

I think, for me, one of the biggest things is I'm always concerned that what I would do would hurt Susan in some way, you know, emotionally hurt her and cause stress and uneasiness...and maybe, yes, talking about things is, obviously, the answer to it, but sometimes maybe how to bring up certain issues, and how to well how can I express my feeling of, I don't know, wanting to be, if I wanted to be with a man just myself, and we weren't going to do it [have sex] as a couple, well how, how can I bring this about and not make her feel that, you know, she's done something wrong.

Two heterosexual and one bisexual spouse affirmed that opening their marriage created a greater context for insecurity:

In a monogamous relationship, if you're feeling jealous because, for instance, your spouse has a, you know, thinks that that supermodel on the TV is attractive, and you don't feel very attractive and so you feel jealous...that's an issue you can look at and say, 'Well, he's with you. He's staying with you. There's reasons he's attracted to you. Let's look at why you feel your... you know, your partner might be more attracted to that person than you"...but in a polyamorous relationship you might have that same kind of situation and not only are they attracted to this other person, but they're sleeping with this

other person. They have reasons to stay with this other person as well, and so you know it adds a whole different level of potential for insecurity. (Barbara, Couple 8)

Mixed orientation married couples may use rules around opening the marriage to minimize the potential for insecurity by limiting extramarital relationships to same-sex partners. Stella (Couple 13), a bisexual spouse, suggested the gender of her external partner minimized her husband's sense of insecurity. "Because I primarily date other women...[it] doesn't bring any real insecurity to him." Two heterosexual wives stipulated that their bisexual husband's partners must be male. "Oh no, baby, you're in big trouble if your go there [date another woman]" (Jill, Couple, 4).

Three couples also emphasized the importance of establishing primacy around the marriage as a way to minimize spousal insecurity:

I promised her that, you know, I have no intention of leaving her. I think that's one person, you know, one of the fears of the straight spouse...in that once the unstraight spouse accepts himself or herself...that they're going to find themselves totally, and they decide, "Well, gee, I don't want to be married anymore," you know that does happen, but...I have no reason to want to leave her because she is accepting of me, and supporting me as, you know, a bi man that she's married to, but...I know there have been several times where, especially early on, not so much lately, but the first year or two...it was something I had to keep reassuring her that no, I'm not looking for a man to replace you. I'm not looking for a man to run off with...there's just no way that I'm giving up all that I have and the commitment that I've made to her, you know, for another person, um, and so I keep trying to reassure her...letting her know that she is number one, and

priority, and even my current friend knows that he is number two, and, ah, and that the relationship that he and I have is a part time thing. (Matthew, Couple 8)

Two couples reported they had brought a third person into their marriage for both partners. One additional couple reported they were seeking a third partner for both spouses. Two of these couples reported this was their intention from the beginning. “Our plan from the start on him finding a third person for him was also for me” (Michelle, Couple 2). However, Sam (Couple 5), a bisexual husband, highlighted how his rationale changed from seeking a male sexual partner for himself to seeking a male partner for himself and his wife. This decision was also driven by their experience of other bisexual men on the websites they were frequenting:

Initially, we were, ah, looking for someone for me, a man for me to have a relationship with that would have been for me.... Through the process of trying to find someone, we ended on a bisexual site, and while those men were also bisexual, they wanted the interaction with a man, but they also wanted the interaction with another woman. So we then, it sort of switched from finding someone just for me, to trying to find someone that would fit into, someone for the both of us.

Sam (Couple, 5), also emphasized emotional connection as an important component in the decision to seek a third person for both married spouses:

We were looking for someone who could augment our relationship, not just someone for me...my...goal, I guess, was to find someone that I would not only have a sexual relationship with, but I could have some sort of an emotional connection with. I didn't just want to find someone to just have sex with. I wanted someone that I could talk to, send a text message, call up, or send an email “How is your day?” “What's going on?” “How's your week look?”

Chris (Couple 12), a heterosexual husband who was seeking a third partner with his wife, highlighted that the common practice of establishing primary and secondary relationships existent within the mixed orientation marriage community may lead some spouses to feel excluded:

Within the [married bisexual] subculture that we have seen, or attempted to make contact with, there seems to be a concept of having a primary relationship, and then having the woman go off and having a girlfriend, so her juggling two relationships, while having two people feeling partially disincluded...that was not a paradigm that we thought was healthy or wanted to pursue at all. We're very much of the viewpoint of any person who comes into the relationship comes into the existing relationship. It's somebody who comes in with both of us [sic].

One couple reiterated that their decision to seek a third person for both married spouses was not due to some inherent deficit in their marriage:

It's not because of a lack of commitment or love or whatever it might be within this two-person relationship in that sense. I think a lot of, whether it's friends or therapists or whoever might perceive meeting someone else or wanting to look for someone else as some sort of deficiency in the primary relationship, and that's, to understand that that's not what it is. (Chanel, Couple 12)

Ten couples reported three different ways in which they had or were attempting to open their marriage. However, the process of negotiating opening a mixed orientation marriage is nuanced. Jill (Couple 4), a heterosexual wife reiterated that there was no set way to successfully negotiate opening a mixed orientation marriage:

There's just as many rules as there are, there are no rules. Each person, which is why I love the name of our [online] group being [MOM Group #1] because each woman takes their own, we each take our own path, and we each have a different marriage. There aren't two marriages that ever look the same, even within a mixed orientation marriage...you know, there's monogamous ones, there's open on one side, there's open on both sides. There's marriages where nobody's having sex with anybody, period...which kind of boggles my mind, but if it works for them, more power to them.

### **Making Mixed Orientation Marriage Work Takes Intentional Marital Commitment**

Ten mixed orientation married couples reported that it is the foundation of love and sense of shared history that enables them to endure the significant emotional and physical effort to maintain the marriage:

It's about the commitment to the person that you fell in love with, and you try to work on that together, and that's an issue that we've been facing more and more as of late, that it's not always easy, Christian. There's so much incredible, emotional stress that goes along with this, but we keep saying to each other that we can't abandon the relationship we have and have worked to develop over the last, and God I hate to say this, quarter of a century... there is something there to fight for, and if it means that we have to, either individually or as a couple change our perspective, or, in our case, look outside what he and I share...then we half to, then I think we're willing to at least try. (Susan, Couple 5)

Four couples reported prioritizing their marriage vows:

It's always has gone back to...the wedding vows, you know, the, "forsaking all others," I guess I have always, you know, when I look back on that and you say forsaking all

others, it's all others. I don't remember saying, you know, "I love you forever, forsaking all others except the dudes." (Erik, Couple 9)

Maggie (Couple 7), a heterosexual wife, suggested mixed orientation married couples that stay together are determined to make it work:

Initially, it was like the floor dropped out from under you, and you don't know which was to go, and yet I do remember that I never had a thought, a real thought, or serious thought about leaving him...I was going to work it out. We was going try to, I was going to try to understand it and figure out how this was going to work, or how I was going to deal with it. I tend to be a person who says, "Okay, this is the situation, let's figure out how was can deal with it, or solve it, or work with it," and that's pretty much the direction that I took, as opposed to saying, "Okay, here's the door, out you go."

Barbara (Couple 8), a bisexual wife, suggested that marital commitment becomes more intentional after a spouse comes out and a marriage is opened:

I wouldn't say that even the other couples who have shorter term relationships are any less committed than we are...you know, our whole community is pretty focused on...intentional commitment...in, you know, really thinking about what were doing and honoring our agreements.

Chris (Couple 12), a heterosexual husband, echoed this realization. "Your relationship becomes a ongoing, conscious project, so you always have to be...you can't be on auto pilot. You actually have to be consciously thinking about your relationship."

Eleven couples reported that frequency of communication was an important part of the intentional process of maintaining a mixed orientation marriage. "We just speak constantly. I

mean it's not like [we go] a day without talking" (Joan, Couple 3). Couples also reiterated the importance of proactive communication in the context of opening their marriage:

We try to anticipate what might possibly go wrong. We also try to anticipate what might possibly go right, and we try to develop plans of action and ways of communicating in the moment to get over some of those things. We say, "Well, if this happens...everything up to this line is okay and everything after this line we'll have to decide in the crucible of the moment"...so there's some security there, some control there. (Stanley, Couple 13)

Three couples also referenced that learning to listen to their partner facilitated mutual understanding and the process of maintaining their marriage:

I'm much better now at actually listening to what he has to say. So, yes, we do still argue about anything, from mundane, everyday life to bigger issues, but I think we're much more conscientious about doing it, as much as we can, with respect for one another... and listening to what the other one has to say. (Jill, Couple 4)

Three couples reported compromise as an important tenet in maintaining their marriages. James (Couple 3), a bisexual husband, referenced how he and his wife handled challenges in their marriage:

Well, we talk about it. We sometimes yell about it. We compromise. It always comes down to one of us or both of us giving in and, ah, compromise and we move on. There's just, ah, nothing that is worth breaking up over. I mean we could never come up against an issue that we thought, "Well, that's it, we can't compromise." There's always a compromise. You say, "Well, is this really important?" No, not really. It's usually just hurt feelings, and you get over the hurt feelings and then you find, oh, that wasn't really that much to argue about.

Jill (Couple 4), a heterosexual wife, reiterated the importance of letting go in the compromise process:

There is no way two people will always see everything the exact same way throughout life. I think that's unrealistic, so there are times when, you know what, it's never going to be resolved, and you let it go.

Mike (Couple 2), a bisexual husband, reported compromising led to a greater sense of tolerance for individual differences:

We bicker over little, stupid shit, but when it comes down to it, even if one of us is off and a situation, and you know, we've had several times, where it's been, you know, where we weren't exactly right, or the other one wasn't exactly right, but at the same time, we still stood by the other one until, you know, we realized, "Oh, wait, we were kind of off on that one." You know, it's trying to direct the other one into the right path, you know, but we still stand by each other in our mistakes.... I mean we've done our fair share, on both sides, of stupid crap that has cost us either time, money, or whathaveyou, and we still stayed by each other through all that, so at the end of the day, we can, you know, have arguments or whathaveyou, but we're still sleeping in the bed, same bed, still, you know, making love.

Three couples highlighted the importance of marital sex and affection in the intentionality of maintaining their marital commitment

Though we're not as sexually active as we could be, we do have some sexual relations. We display it other ways too. We're, I'm very cuddly in bed. Jill keeps the window open. It's 20 degrees out. You can't help but want body heat. It's very natural, but we fit together perfectly, spooning and such. (John, Couple 4)

Stella (Couple 13), a bisexual wife, reported feeling more sexually activated by her heterosexual spouse because she could express her bisexual identity through dating other women, too. “It makes me happy when I date other women, and that happiness gets brought back to my marriage. I’m also more sexual, I think.”

Lee (Couple 6), a heterosexual husband, highlighted emotional and physical support around work and childcare as important components in the process of maintaining his marriage:

Lisa’s on the job market and commuting to [name omit; East Coast city], and I’m trying to pretend I’m staying at my job forever, even though I’m planning on leaving...we have a two-year-old, and we have all kinds of things, so really, at the moment, commitment has come down to support, you know, how do we endure, how do we get through each of these little things that has to be done without losing our minds.

Six couples reported shared decision-making as an important process in remaining committed to their marriage. Couples differed in their need for balance in that process, and two couples highlighted the struggle of decision making in relation to their gender identity. Susan (Couple 5), a heterosexual wife, reported she continued to have difficulty advocating for herself in the process:

One of the things that I’m most guilty of is I make decisions not necessarily what is good for me, but I’m more concerned about Bill, and...sometimes that’s not always good, but I’m more concerned about him than I would be about myself.

James (Couple 3), a bisexual husband, reported his need to share in decisions changed over the course of his marriage as his vigilance in maintaining a “macho” gender identity lessened:

As time goes on, everybody changes and we just changed in ways that complimented each other I guess. Mostly, I just kind of relaxed and let her do more and more of the

decision making. I tried to fill the role of being the macho husband, but I really wasn't very good at it,

Louise (Couple 11), a heterosexual wife, highlighted the importance of finding a balance and considering the needs of the other spouse:

I think generally if something, no matter what it is, throughout our entire marriage, if something is very important to one or the other of us, we don't say, 'Well, no, you can't do that', you know, we have discussions about it, and, you know, just to be supportive of them, whether it's changing career or major purchase or anything like that, time with family. My family's very difficult, very hard to get along with, you know, and, um, you know, Larry's always supportive of me, even in the face of my rotten family.

### **Reconnection and Renewed Love and Commitment Through Coming Out**

Three couples identified coming out and the communication around that process precipitated greater understanding and love. John and Jill (Couple 4) described it as a reconnection:

John: I hit a low point [before coming out], but that opened up a door to communication and...

Jill: For emotional growth

John: ...and reconnection. But in an expanded way

Kane (Couple 10), a bisexual husband, identified the emotional support he received from his wife around coming out as a contributing factor in his experience of love from her:

I know that Kristal will support me through anything.... We have a little saying that we say to each other when we want to talk about our support for each other and it's, 'no matter what'...that we'll be there for each other no matter what...I know that's a truth.

James (Couple 3), a bisexual husband, referenced emotional support and self-determination in his decision to make his wife the primary person in his life:

I feel as a bisexual I do have a choice, in so far as I could have chosen a different partner, who was male, but once I've chosen a partner...you know, you decide to make the other one your primary person in life. You support them and they support you.

Five other bisexual spouses in both monogamous and open relationships, also reported making their heterosexual spouse their primary relationship:

Well, for me, [marital commitment] it's knowing that I'm always coming home to Stanley, and Stanley's always coming home to me...you know no matter who else we might date, we always know that we have that stable base at home...that isn't going anywhere. I always viewed commitment as exclusive like if you're committed to someone that means you rule out somebody else, and now I see it much differently in that you know I see it as... commitment just means that you're sticking with that person and coming home with them, but that doesn't have to mean that there isn't anybody else.

(Stella, Couple 13)

Six couples reported the process led to a deeper, more spiritual sense of love "It made me realize how much I actually love Sam as a person. He's my best friend. He's my soul mate"

(Susan, Couple 5).

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS**

This study was an investigation of how mixed orientation married couples that elect to stay married after a bisexual spouse comes out to their heterosexual spouse, negotiate marital commitment and sexual and gender identities, in light of dominant cultural scripts regarding monogamous marriage and identities. I used two research questions, which are detailed in this chapter, to guide the investigation of the phenomenon. In this chapter, I present the resulting grounded theory of marital commitment and identities-formation among mixed orientation married couples. I also reference the research and clinical implications, as well as future directions for research.

### **Overview of the Findings and Grounded Theory**

The study was guided by two research questions that I will answer in this section. The research questions guiding this project attempted to elicit (a) couples' experiences of their sexual and gender identities and the individual, relational, and societal negotiation processes that occurred both individually and between married spouses within larger systems such as family, community, and society; and (b) couples' experiences of marital commitment and the negotiation process around that construct after a bisexual spouse comes out to their heterosexual spouse. Identities were conceptualized within social constructionist and intersectionality theories.

The findings suggest that there are two types of bisexual individuals in mixed orientation marriages within this sample. The first type, reemerging bisexuals, were aware of their same-sex attraction or identified as bisexual prior to marriage and chose to marry. Their bisexuality then re-emerged within marriage. The second type, emerging bisexuals, were unaware of their bisexual identity prior to marriage and reported its emergence after they married.

Two types of gender negotiation processes also emerged across the participants: (a) non-conformers were couples that reported they were non-traditional in appearance, attractions, friendships, and household responsibilities; (b) deliberate conformers were couples that valued or emphasized the intention to gender themselves in traditional ways. The relational negotiation process around gender that occurred within all the couples was complicated with the arrival of children and career. The negotiation process will be explained in more detail in the section below.

Across the couples, two types of marital commitment emerged: (a) closed or monogamous marital commitment; and (b) open marital commitment. Open marital commitment included marriages where one or both partners had or exercised the option to have a secondary relational partner outside the marriage, and couples who had or were seeking a third partner to bring into the marriage.

### **Negotiations Around Sexual Identities**

**Reemerging bisexuals.** Bisexual spouses within mixed orientation marriages reported a range of coming out experiences. Reemerging bisexual spouses stated that they suppressed their same-sex attraction and came out for the first time after marriage. They also were more likely to report receiving hetero-normative and homophobic messages from family members and friends that precipitated their fear of being gay. Reemerging bisexuals reported these restrictive messages were reinforced within the larger communities with which they were affiliated, and their negotiation process was complicated by the lack of awareness of bisexuality as a distinct sexual identity location. Reemerging bisexuals reported feeling like their same-sex attraction was just a phase and internalizing the homophobic messages of the systems in which they interacted. They also reported a desire to marry.

Reemerging bisexual spouses reported no regret in their decision to marry, but, over time, they felt a loss of their individuality, cut off from their bisexual identity, and disconnected from the gay, bisexual, lesbian, and transgender communities that allowed some to sustain that bisexual identity prior to marriage. The disappearance of their bisexuality was attributed to the demands of family life, notably the responsibilities of career and child-care. Reemerging bisexuals reported feeling the need to come out again and questioning that need. A deeper negotiation of sexual identity began internally when they reconsidered their sexual identity. This relational and systemic negotiation began in earnest when they came out again to their spouse and in some cases other family and friends. The process of coming out again for reemerging bisexuals highlights the dynamic, non-terminal nature of sexual identification (Cohen & Savin-Williams, 1996; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000), and the influence of social scripting on the coming out process (Rust, 1993; Troiden, 1988). Reemerging bisexuals reported reconnecting with their bisexuality via same-sex sexual activity outside marriage and connecting with the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community. However, they also reported being stigmatized by that community. Heterosexual spouses reported a lack of understanding for the need to come out again and concern around their spouse's involvement with the community.

**Emerging bisexuals.** Emerging bisexual spouses also experienced same-sex attraction and even reported the same-sex exploratory behavior of their counterparts, but they identified as heterosexual to themselves prior to coming out. Many reported same-sex attractions and exploratory behaviors such as kissing and flirting, but these fit within their understanding of a heterosexual identity. They also experienced less fear, more curiosity, and even surprise around their developing bisexual identity. They also did not necessarily know that bisexuality was a distinct identity location prior to coming out. Emerging bisexuals seemed more impervious to

social scripting, which is contradictory to existing theory (Rust, 1993; Troiden, 1988). Emerging bisexuals emphasized that it was as a result of the stability of their marriage relationship that they felt comfortable enough to consider a non-heterosexual sexual identity. This supports the supposition that sexual identity might change as a result of marriage (Coleman, 1985). In many cases, it was their heterosexual spouse who first suggested they might be bisexual. Emerging bisexuals expressed greater fluidity in conceptualization of sexual identity, and they were more likely to disclaim their disdain of sexual identity labels.

The sexual identity negotiation process among these individuals started at the relational level. These individuals were more likely to report that their spouse introduced the idea that they were bisexual and assisted them in the development of that process. This finding supports the notions that existing identity-formation models fail to take into account relational influences on the process (Doherty & Carroll, 2002). Once this idea was generated, the sexual identity negotiation process shifted to an individual one as the individual came to terms with the idea that he or she was bisexual and considered avenues to explore it. Emerging bisexuals reported exploring their sexual identity via marital sex and shared fantasies, as well as connecting with the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities.

**Heterosexual spouses.** There did not appear to be a clear pattern among the heterosexual spouses who learned or relearned that their married spouse identified as bisexual. They reported a range of reactions to the disclosure. Some heterosexual spouses reported being unsurprised, and others reported being shocked by the news. The experience of some heterosexuals may suggest a “crisis of integrity” (Buxton, 2006b, p. 54), but it is not the case for all heterosexual spouses. Regardless of the nature of the disclosure, or the type of bisexual spouse (as indicated above), the initial reaction of heterosexual spouses was to reiterate their love to their bisexual

spouse. Reemerging and emerging bisexual spouses reported feeling a deeper sense of trust as a result of the disclosure. Pearcey and Olson (2009) surveyed 90 heterosexual women married, separated, divorced, or partnered to gay men and found that 10.5% of women reported understanding their partner's disclosure and 14.1% felt compassion towards them. While the definitions vary, the positive emotional experiences reported by the participants of this study are consistent with past findings. Once the initial realization set in, couples reported facing a deeper question: What does this mean for our marriage? The negotiation process around marital commitment will be discussed later in this chapter.

Heterosexual spouses varied across gender with regard to the degree of consideration and exploration given to their own sexual identity after their spouse came out to them. They reported being comfortable with using fantasy, gay and straight pornography, actual sexual role-reversal, foursomes, and sexual toys within the context of their marital sex to assist their bisexual spouse in exploring their sexual identity. Heterosexual wives reported being open to the idea of a same-sex partner, as part of a threesome with their spouse. Heterosexual husbands were not open to same-sex exploration. The influence of the coming out of a bisexual spouse on the sexual identification process of heterosexual spouses has not been addressed previously in the research literature. The findings of this study warrant replication to substantiate them.

### **Negotiations Around Gender Identities**

The data suggested two plausible gender identity negotiation processes across the participating couples: (a) non-conformers, and (b) deliberate conformers. Bisexual men and women and their heterosexual spouses were equally distributed across both groups.

**Non-conformers.** Heterosexual wives in this group reported a gender neutral or masculine appearance. They also reported atypical household responsibilities such as carpentry

and finances, and career choices such as working in construction or the armed services. Bisexual and heterosexual husbands in this group reported an interest in or facility with atypical hobbies and household responsibilities such as knitting and interior design. Non-conforming husbands and wives were collectively also more likely to report having opposite-sex friendships. This finding supports previous evidence that bisexuals “may alter traditional forms of doing gender in relationships due to the sex or gender of their partner” (Pennington, 2009, p. 33). Landolt, Bartholomew, Saffrey, Oram, and Perlman (2004) surveyed nearly 200 gay and bisexual men and found a statistically significant association between non-conformity and feelings of rejection. The bisexual and heterosexual participants, who reported gender non-conformity within their marriage, expressed appreciation and comfort with this negotiation process with their partner.

Non-conforming couples reported historically sharing household and childcare responsibilities, yet feeling the pressure with the onset of children and dual-earner careers to conform to a more traditional gender pairing. Bisexual women reported early struggles with their heterosexual spouses around power and shared decision-making. Bisexual men reported feeling a responsibility to conform to a stereotypically masculine model initially. These couples reported settling into and feeling comfortable in their complementary gender identities over the duration of their marriage. The relational gender tension that can occur between gender non-conforming spouses is consistent with existing research that suggests that gay and lesbian parents alternately resist and accommodate gender with the onset of children (Goldberg, 2010).

There was no distinct trend across the non-conforming couples with regard to the bisexual identity type referenced in the previous section. Bisexual spouses in gender non-conforming marriages were categorized in both the reemerging and emerging bisexual groups.

These couples also reported both closed and open marital commitment types. The marital commitment typology will be discussed below.

**Deliberate conformers.** These mixed orientation married couples reported complementary gendering that was stereotypically male and female. Bisexual women in this group reported a desire to present themselves as feminine. They were also more likely to fall within the emerging bisexuals type. These bisexual women emphasized that it was because they were married to a man that they felt secure enough to explore their bisexual identity without having to sacrifice their gender identity as a woman. Bisexual women are not stereotypical gender “inverts” (Peplau & Garnets, 2000, p. 329), and the process of gendering themselves may be deliberate.

Deliberate conformer couples of bisexual women and heterosexual men were more likely to have marital commitment styles that were open (i.e., dual-sided marital commitment or third-person inclusive). Heterosexual husbands in this group emphasized the importance of gendering themselves as male to maintain the gender balance in their marriage, given the likelihood it included other women besides their wives.

Bisexual husbands in this group did not report atypical household or career responsibilities or the presence of opposite-sex friendships. Heterosexual wives also reported typical gendering. Deliberate conformer couples of bisexual husbands and heterosexual wives fell within the open one-sided marital commitment type.

### **Negotiations Around Marital Commitment**

Mixed orientation married couples fell within one of two marital commitment types: (a) closed or monogamous marital commitment; and (b) open marital commitment. Within the open category, there were four subtypes: (a) Monogamous with the option to open the marriage; (b)

open on one side, specifically the bisexual spouse could go outside the marriage; (c) dual sided or open for both bisexual and heterosexual spouses; and (d) third-person inclusive or couples who had or were seeking to bring in a third person into the marriage for both spouses.

**Closed, monogamous marital commitment.** These couples placed importance on marriage and reiterated the oath they took during the marriage ceremony as fundamentally shaping their understanding of marital commitment. In a five year follow up study of intact mixed orientation married couples, Yarhouse, Gow, and Davis (2010) found that “covenant” was among the most widely self-reported reason for maintaining commitment.

Bisexual spouses within this group fell within both the reemerging and emerging sexual identity types, and couples fell within the non-conformer and deliberate conforming gender identity types. The preeminent negotiation did not occur around the construct of marital commitment; negotiation processes among these couples focused on sexual and gender identifications. Bisexual spouses in this group reported the need to express their bisexual identity via involvement in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities. Bisexual husbands negotiated the expression of their sexual identity via marital sex and fantasy. Bisexual women in this group reported feeling disconnected from their bisexuality. They also reported seeking the gender difference of an opposite-sex relationship such as marriage.

**Monogamous marital commitment with the option to open.** One couple fit within this category. The bisexual spouse fell within the reemerging bisexual identity type, and the couple fit the non-conformer gender identity type. I elected to distinguish this marital commitment type within the typology because I conceptualized it as a pivotal entry point to the negotiation process that can disrupt the assumed marriage outcome for mixed orientation married couples: divorce. The possibility for negotiation in itself reinforced and deepened this couple’s tolerance for

difference, notably around sexual and emotional needs. I theorize that couples that can create the emotional space for the possibility of opening their marriage therefore deepen their marital commitment.

**One-sided open marital commitment.** These couples negotiated opening their marriage on one side. Bisexual husbands and wives reported having the option to establish a secondary relationship with a same-sex partner outside of the marriage. This is consistent with existing clinical-based observations that gay and bisexual men in mixed orientation married couples who maintain their marriage may do so by seeking external non-monogamous relationships (Buxton, 2005, 2006a). Heterosexual spouses reported being involved in the process of finding a stable secondary partner for their bisexual spouse. Bisexuals in this category also fit within the reemerging and emerging categories, and couples represented the non-conforming and deliberate conforming gender identity types.

Heterosexual spouses highlighted their concern about the emotional loss that their bisexual spouse faced if they elected to maintain a closed, monogamous marriage. This was a preeminent consideration in their decision to negotiate the opening of their marriage. Bisexual spouses highlighted the importance of reassuring their heterosexual spouse that they had no intention to leave the marriage early in the negotiation process. Heterosexual spouses were also given primary status by their bisexual spouses.

**Dual-sided open marital commitment.** The couples in this group negotiated the opening of their marriage on both sides. Bisexual spouses in this group emerged within marriage with the assistance of their heterosexual spouse. These couples fit within the deliberate conformer gender identity type.

**Third-person inclusive marital commitment.** These couples negotiated the opening of their marriage internally by bringing in or seeking a third person into their marriage for both the bisexual and heterosexual spouses. Bisexual spouses within this group fit within the emerging or reemerging sexual identity types, and couples fit within the non-conformer or deliberate conforming gender identity types. Both spouses reported being engaged in finding a third person to bring into their marriage. This decision was reportedly rationalized as a way to maintain their marital commitment to one another. These couples also were more likely to reject the notion of singular, secondary relationships for either the bisexual or heterosexual spouse that exclude the other marriage partner.

The negotiation process around marital commitment emphasized communication and compromise. Many couples highlighted the importance of communication and compromise with regard to maintaining marital commitment. This is consistent with existing empirical literature that highlights the importance of communication and daily interactions that reinforce the experience of commitment among heterosexual couples (Ballard-Reisch & Weigel, 1999; Sahlstein & Baxter, 2001; Thompson-Hayes & Webb, 2004), and mixed orientation married couples (Kays & Yarhouse, 2010).

### **Grounded Theory**

Bisexuals who come out within marriage are not destined to divorce. The majority of the heterosexual participants responded to the news that their spouse is bisexual with love and affirmation. Couples in this study are demonstrating (a) the resilience to withstand the periods of ambiguity that can occur between the disclosure of a bisexual spouse to a heterosexual partner; (b) the uncertainty and potential loss of community when coming out individually and as a couple; (c) the willingness to sacrifice personal needs and to compromise with their spouse; and

(d) the ability to navigate the precarious process of opening the marriage, in some cases, and, finally, achieving a renewed sense of reconnection to their spouse on the other side.

The “crisis of integrity” (Buxton, 2006b, p. 54) that can occur when a bisexual spouse comes out to a heterosexual partner may precipitate divorce, but it can also set the stage for transformative change to occur within marriage (Fincham, Stanley, & Beach, 2007). Personal sacrifice and a focal shift from an individual to a relational perspective have been positively associated with enhanced marital commitment (Whitton, Stanley, & Markman, 2002; Wieselquist, Rusbuilt, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). The crisis also presents an opportunity for bisexual and heterosexual spouses to reconsider their respective sexual and gender identities and their respective definitions of marital commitment. This process can be a struggle. It requires communication, compromise, respect, and, above all, intentionality. Like heterosexual couples, mixed orientation married couples can have the intention to remain committed to being together for a lifetime (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001), regardless of whether they choose to maintain their monogamous marriage or to open it up. The struggle can also transform them and lead to deeper sense of martial commitment and love for each other. Past research supports that love is an important factor in maintaining mixed orientation relationships (Kays & Yarhouse, 2010; Olson, Gorall, & Tiesel, 2007).

### **Implications For Research and Clinical Practice**

#### **Research Implications**

**Emergent relational sexuality.** This research provides greater evidence that bisexuals who marry may not be fully aware of their same-sex attractions at the time of marriage; or hope to change their same-sex attraction by getting married (Higgins, 2002; Percy, 2005). The sexual identity negotiation process for married bisexuals is marked by tension between the emotional

and sexual needs of bisexual spouses and their heterosexual partners. This research supports the notion that sexual identification is a fluid process that can occur at both an individual and relational level (Doherty & Carroll, 2002). It has been also suggested that identity formation processes occur across the life course (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Patterson, 2008; Schachter, 2005), and that the commitment of bisexual persons to their sexual identity increases with time (Brewster & Moradi, 2010). These findings lend support to the previously referenced research.

**The ripple effect of non-conforming gendering.** Gender non-conforming mixed orientation married couples may represent the “slow dripping” (Sullivan, 2004, p. 209) or small, daily, individual changes that have the potential to facilitate change at the relational and societal levels (Ferree, 2010). This research also supports that mixed orientation married couples are trying to un-gender their parenting and to raise their children as equals, despite the challenge of maintaining gender non-conformity with competing child-care and career responsibilities. Both of the aforementioned findings may generate change in the gender status quo that exists within greater society (Allen, 2001). The increasing visibility of mixed orientation married couples may reinforce this possibility.

**Transformative and enduring marital commitment.** Marital commitment has been described as a dynamic process that is influenced by unanticipated life occurrences (Byrd, 2009). This research substantiates previous studies that highlight the resiliency of mixed orientation couples (Kays & Yarhouse, 2010), and the solvency of mixed orientation marriage after a bisexual spouse comes out (Buxton, 2004). It lends credence to the idea that marital commitment can be enhanced through personal sacrifice for the sake of a married spouse (Whitton et al., 2002; Wieselquist et al., 1999).

### **Clinical Implications and Recommendations**

Therapeutic support has been self-identified as an important factor in fostering resilience among mixed orientation married couples (Kays & Yarhouse, 2010). Over half of the participants reported seeking individual or couples therapy at some point during their relationship. The potential implications for clinical practice include therapeutic bias and practitioner competency. I suggest two recommendations for how to address these implications: (a) the inclusion of mixed orientation marriage as a content area in the existing educational requirements for couple therapists, as stipulated by the American Association For Marriage and Family Therapy's Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy; and (b) additional research to substantiate the PARE model (Yarhouse & Kays, 2010), an existing framework for working with mixed orientation married couples in psychotherapy.

**Therapeutic bias towards bisexuals.** Psychotherapy often requires clients to be vulnerable to therapists, and sexual minorities are at increased risk for experiencing discrimination (Firestein, 1996; Petford, 2005; see Klein, 1993; Rust, 2000). The isolating nature of individual therapy can magnify this vulnerability, as individual clients rely on their impression to determine if they feel safe and heard by the therapist. Several bisexual spouses reported being told they need to come out as gay or lesbian and divorce their spouse. They were more likely to report having this experience in individual therapy with therapists who claimed a gay or lesbian identity. Previous research suggests that bisexuals may experience bias from therapists whom they perceive are affirming (Green, Bettinger, & Zacks, 1996).

The nature of sexual identification and the process of coming out can generate fear and anxiety for bisexual individuals. This may lead them to avoid psychotherapy or remain silent about their sexual questioning or identity struggle. Participants who reported experiencing bias

from a therapist also reported personal agency around finding another therapist. However, some sexual questioning or sexual minority clients may not feel so empowered. The experience of bias and the natural vulnerability that can occur in individual therapy creates a greater potential for bisexual persons to experience emotional injury in psychotherapy.

**Practitioner competency.** Several mixed orientation married couples reported attending psychotherapy together. Their experiences varied across the participant sample. Some couple reports were favorable; they appreciated simply having the space to talk with their spouse. Other couples reported that they came to therapy for concrete guidance on how to deal with the insecurity around coming out within marriage and how to maintain the marriage, notably if they elected to open their marriage. Mixed orientation married couples reported that some therapists were not honest with them and seemed to lack any knowledge of mixed orientation marriage. Morrow (2000) suggested that inadequate training led to biased treatment of bisexual persons in therapy. Some couples reported feeling the need to educate therapists on how to negotiate an open marriage, yet also feared being pathologized for that decision. Participants characterized the examples of open relationships that therapists knew of as unhealthy.

**Inclusion in the established curriculum.** I suggest that existing couple and family therapy graduate-level curriculum, as stipulated by the American Association For Marriage and Family Therapy's Commission on Accreditation for MFT, be augmented to include mixed orientation marriage as part of the couples therapy curriculum. Additional psychoeducation for practicing therapists, based on the findings of this study include information regarding: (a) the existence of mixed orientation married couples; (b) the insecurity that bisexual and heterosexual spouses feel about the idea of opening the marriage; and (c) the possibilities for enhancing marital sex and exploring bisexuality within monogamous marriage. Further, providing online

resources available to connect with other mixed orientation married couples might decrease the likelihood of that mixed orientation married couples experience bias upon presentation for therapy.

**Empirical support.** The PARE model has been suggested for working with mixed orientation married couples whose religious affiliation is Christian (Yarhouse & Kays 2010). It focuses on the following areas: (a) providing sexual identity therapy, notably around the degree of importance sexual identity is for the same-sex attracted individual; (b) addressing interpersonal trauma and repairing trust that may have occurred as a result of the coming out process; (c) fostering hope and a sense of resilience in the marriage through increased communication and compromise between spouses; and (d) enhancing sexual intimacy through sensate focus homework assignments. Empirical support for the PARE model may assist therapists in better addressing the complex needs of mixed orientation married couples.

Bisexual persons and mixed orientation married couples may present for therapy and come out to their therapist. Greater inclusion in existing curriculum requirements and research to support specific clinical interventions might facilitate a more favorable therapeutic outcome for mixed orientation married couples who want to maintain their marriage.

### **Limitations of the Research**

This project was limited by several factors including sample demographics and sample inclusion criteria specific to marriage status and sexual identification. The majority of the participants were Caucasian. Greater inclusion of persons of African, Asian, Latin, and Indigenous descent in future studies might support existing research or illuminate how the intersections of race and color may lead to an alternate outcome for some mixed orientation married couples.

Participants were required to identify as bisexual or heterosexual and to be married to participate in this project. Future studies focusing on those individuals who do not claim a sexual identity label might foster a more refined understanding of how individuals establish and negotiate priority across their identities. Inclusion of non-marital mixed orientation relationships might allow for an expanded understanding of relational commitment and the decision making process around marriage for some mixed orientation married couples.

### **Future Research**

My research plan includes replicating this and similar studies in the future that explore how gay men and lesbian woman married to heterosexual spouses experience marital commitment and make marriage work. This research also attempted to explore several overlapping constructs including sexual identity, gender identity, and marital commitment. The experiential intersection of these constructs and the related negotiation processes that occurred in the lived experience of participants was challenging to capture and analyze. Gender identity, in particular, was difficult to assess across the participants. I believe this was due to limitations in the construction of the interview questions, the dyadic nature of the interview, and my own “blindness” to gender as gender-identified male. Future projects including co-researchers and using a focus group format to explore the experience of men and women in mixed orientation marriages separately might provide greater insight into the gender negotiation processes among such couples.

### **In Conclusion**

In this study, I found that mixed orientation married couples are coming out successfully to themselves and to their family and friends. They are finding some emotional support in the community connections they established prior to coming out, as well as new sources of

emotional support in the burgeoning mixed orientation marriage community. Emotional support is paramount to successfully navigating the coming out process within marriage at individual, relational, and systemic levels. The process of coming out within marriage initiates an identity crisis for both partners in a mixed orientation marriage. It can lead them to reevaluate fundamental notions of sexual and gender identities and marital commitment. This reevaluation process can be a struggle that requires couples to communicate, compromise, and, above all, be intentional. The struggle can be painful for both spouses, seem ongoing, and lacking a fixed conclusion. However, mixed orientation married couples that have the intention to remain married are doing so, regardless of whether they choose to maintain their monogamous marriage or to open it up. The struggle of negotiating identities and marital commitment has led some couples to an emotional reconnection and a renewed, deeper love for each other, or as some participants labeled it, their “soul mate.”

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Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Group names are not given to protect the anonymity of both the participants and the non-participating members of the groups.

<sup>2</sup> The site description is taken directly and verbatim from the group webpage or list-serve. Descriptions were reproduced in part or in their entirety, depending on the length.

## Appendix A

## Pre-interview Questionnaire

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Couple I.D. # \_\_\_\_\_

1. First name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Spouse's first name: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Your age: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Your gender: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Your race or ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_
6. Your sexual identity: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Your religious affiliation (if any)? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Your occupation: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Your highest level of education achieved: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Your combined annual household income: \_\_\_\_ Up to 25K \_\_\_\_ 25K-39K  
\_\_\_\_ 40K-59K \_\_\_\_ 60K-74K \_\_\_\_ 75K-99K \_\_\_\_ 100K or more
11. How many years have you been married? \_\_\_\_\_
12. How many years were you been together prior to marriage? \_\_\_\_\_
13. How long have you been out to your spouse/how long have you known about your spouse? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Is this your first marriage (If not, how many times have you been married? For how long?) \_\_\_\_\_
15. Were you out to your divorced spouse during marriage? \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix B

Recruitment Flyer

## **Are you in a Mixed Marriage?**

### **Are you bisexual and is your spouse straight?**

*Mixed marriages are frequently referred to as those that occur between bisexuals and heterosexual persons.*

#### **Does this describe your marriage? Are you out to your partner?**

This research study, conducted with the permission of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech), will attempt to better understand the experiences, challenges, and needs of mixed married couples.

Your participation is completely voluntary, *confidential*, and can be withdrawn by you at any time.

Participants will be asked to commit to a single interview, with their married partner, where they will be asked a series of questions about the nature of their relationship with their spouse. Questions will be personal in nature and related to your marital relationship.

Interviews will be conducted at the convenience of the participant, at a mutually agreed, private location.

For more information, please feel free to contact  
Christian Jordal, Principal Investigator  
Department of Human Development  
Virginia Tech  
Phone: 215-802-9750  
Email: [cjordal@vt.edu](mailto:cjordal@vt.edu)

## Appendix C

## Interview Guide

1. How did you meet? How did you come to the decision to get married? Probe: What were your options?
2. How did you come out to your spouse? What influenced your decision to come out? (Heterosexual spouse): How was it for you to learn that your spouse was bisexual, gay or lesbian?
3. How has your marriage changed since coming out?
4. (Heterosexual): What does it mean for you to be straight? How is this different or similar than heterosexual? How has your partner's coming out led you to reflect on your own sexuality?
5. Who knows about your mixed orientation marriage? Probe: How do you talk about it with them? How do people react?
6. How do you define commitment within your marriage? Probe (Both): How has your commitment changed since coming out? How does your commitment compare to other MOM couples?
7. What does it mean to be a man or woman in a mixed orientation marriage? How do you think gender plays out in your marriage? Probe (Both): How has it changed over time? How and when did you come up with this arrangement?
8. What are the challenges in your mixed orientation marriage and how do you handle them? What are the strengths? Probe (Both): How would it be for you to discuss your mixed orientation marriage with a marriage therapist? Probe (Both): How do you feel about online communities and groups for MOM couples?

## Appendix D

## Post Interview Questionnaire

Couple I.D.# \_\_\_\_\_

Participant name \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What did you have difficulty discussing in front of your spouse? Is there anything you could not say?
2. Have you ever had an extramarital affair or relationship (This will be kept confidential.)?
3. If heterosexual, have you ever had a sexual encounter with a member of your same-sex? (Prior to marriage? Post marriage?)?
4. How many days per week do you use the Internet? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How many hours per day do you use the Internet?  
Less than 1    1 to 2    2 to 3    3 to 4    4 to 5    More than 5  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Is there something that I didn't ask in the interview that you think might be important for me to know about mixed orientation marriage?
7. Is there something your spouse said in the interview that surprised you?

Thank you for your participation. I will contact you once all the data has been collected and analyzed to get you and your spouse's feedback on the preliminary results. This will likely be sometime in the Winter of 2010. Follow-up will be made via email. Please note: Your email address will be kept confidential and not shared with anyone.

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Principal Investigator  
Christian Jordal, M.A. MFT  
Doctoral Candidate  
Marriage and Family Therapy program  
Department of Human Development  
Virginia Tech  
Email: [icjordal@yahoo.com](mailto:icjordal@yahoo.com)

Phone: 215-802-9750  
Dissertation Committee Faculty Chair  
Katherine R. Allen, Ph.D.  
Department of Human Development  
Virginia Tech  
Email: [kallen@vt.edu](mailto:kallen@vt.edu)  
(540) 231-6526

## Appendix E

## Pilot Study Disclosure Form

Thank you for agreeing to review the prospective participant survey that may be used for an upcoming research project. The proposed research project will examine the experience of marriage between bisexual men or women and their heterosexual spouses. The focus of the project will be those couples where the bisexual identity of one spouse has been disclosed to the other spouse and who have remained married after that disclosure.

**I welcome your feedback regarding what makes sense to you, what may not, possible changes you might make to the form, and any feelings you might have before, during, and after completing it.**

Your participation is voluntary and completely confidential. You may contact me with any questions you have, and you may withdraw your participation at any time by contacting me.

Thank you,

Christian Jordal, Doctoral Candidate  
Principal Investigator  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)  
Department of Human Development  
**Telephone: 215-802-9750**  
**Email: [cjordal@vt.edu](mailto:cjordal@vt.edu)**

Appendix F

Preliminary Category Development From Open Coding

Marital Commitment

HISTORY

1. Coming back home to
2. Commitment developed early
3. Strong bonds
4. Shared history
5. Fitting well from the beginning
6. Working together well from the beginning

COMPATIBILITY:

7. Fitting together
8. Compatibility
9. Being similar
10. Feeling the same
11. Being emotionally attached
12. Shared interests
13. Sharing
14. Being best friends

SECRETS:

15. Secret that binds
16. Secret “galvanizes” us

COMMUNICATION

17. Talking daily
18. Talking a lot more
19. More time probing deeper feelings
20. Being open about feelings, desires, concerns [MOM question]
21. Having to talk about things more
22. Talking things out
23. Communicating more
24. Communication
25. Continued communication
26. Good communication
27. Always communicating
28. Communication
29. Communicating
30. Communication
31. Communicating
32. Communicating
33. Communicating

34. Open communication
35. Challenging us to communicate
36. Honesty
37. Commitment to the truth even if it hurts
38. Giving honest opinion
39. Honest communication
40. Honesty
41. Being open and honest
42. Listening
43. Listening
44. Discussing decisions
45. Discussing needs and expectations
46. Discussing what's important to each of us
47. Unconventional relationship requires talking
48. Being honest about feelings and fears
49. Willingness to address concerns and feelings directly

#### INTENTIONAL COMMITMENT

50. Day to day becomes long term
51. Commitment involves thinking day to day
52. "Intentional commitment
53. Jumping first
54. Building later
55. Not taking commitment for granted
56. It's a conscious project
57. Can't be on auto pilot

#### QUESTIONING:

58. Lots of assumptions about the path or our relationship
59. Lots of assumptions about what commitment looks like
60. Implications of committing
61. Relationship and commitment examples set by family and mainstream society

#### STAY OR LEAVE?

62. Considering separation
63. Leaving is the easy way out
64. Promising not to leave
65. Not quitting on marriage

#### WORKING AT IT:

66. Marriage takes work
67. Working on issues
68. Fighting for something
69. Doing the work
70. Working hard
71. Marriage is work

72. Building relationships
73. Getting through the relationship formations
74. Persevering
75. Everybody has trouble staying married
76. Dealing with things
77. Getting thru
78. Surviving
79. There is a reward to our effort
80. Being patient

LETTING GO:

81. Moving on
82. Not carrying grudges
83. Not letting things carry on
84. Getting over disappointments
85. Standing by each other despite mistakes
86. Admitting mistakes
87. Accepting process
88. Accepting my need for a man
89. Understanding his relationship with his “friend”
90. Accepting reality
91. Accepting personal limitations

BEING REALISTIC:

92. Being realistic; we fight
93. Realistic expectations
94. Trouble is part of being together
95. Changing our perspective
96. Looking at things differently
97. Seeing it from both sides

PRIORITIZING THE MARRIAGE

98. Putting marriage 1<sup>st</sup>
99. Prioritizing couple over individual
100. Focusing on relationship
101. Prioritizing what’s important
102. Keeping it all in perspective
103. Looking at things differently
104. What’s really important
105. Compromising
106. Finding middle ground
107. Being the most important person
108. Reassuring spouse as priority

SEPERATING SEX FROM LOVE

109. Separating sex from love

- 110. This is something she can't provide
- 111. Marriage is more than sex

AFFECTION/SEX

- 112. Physical affection
- 113. Continuing to be intimate in marriage

EMPATHY:

- 114. Acknowledging feelings
- 115. Concern for partners feelings
- 116. Being careful with each others welfare
- 117. Understanding
- 118. Being concerned for other's welfare
- 119. Being tolerant of each other

DECISION-MAKING:

- 120. Consulting one another
- 121. Making pretty much all the decisions together
- 122. Making sure we're on the same page
- 123. Doing things in a unified way

SHARED ACTIVITIES:

- 124. Arranging to spend time together
- 125. Never dis-including
- 126. Carving out time for us
- 127. Making sure we're doing things together
- 128. Anything we do together is commitment

NEW (?) REALIZATIONS:

- 129. Commitment becomes more real, immediate
- 130. Being like others
- 131. It's been easier for us than others
- 132. Renewed self worth
- 133. Best friends
- 134. Soul mates
- 135. Belonging together
- 136. Soulmates
- 137. The pluses of being attracted to gay men
- 138. Discussing what we find attractive
- 139. This is an unconventional relationship
- 140. More understanding
- 141. Strong marriage
- 142. More mature
- 143. Realizing the depth of my love
- 144. Deeper love

145. New understanding of support
146. Feeling we can talk more openly
147. Rediscovering choices
148. Knowing she is the center of the universe
149. Choosing to be together
150. Initial codependence
151. Dysfunctional models
152. We're like other couples
153. Wanting that difference
154. Tired of dating the same gender
155. Feeling happy
156. Marriage as a learning experience

#### OATH/LOYALTY

157. Sticking together
158. Better together no matter what
159. Decision to marry was serious
160. Marriage should last entire life.
161. I was raised traditional
162. Oath
163. Honoring love and commitment
164. Commitment is love
165. Love means staying together.
166. Honoring agreements
167. "I'm sticking with him 'til he's dead".
168. Wedding vows
169. Forsaking all others
170. Keeping a promise
171. Living our vows
172. Sticking with a person
173. Staying together
174. Fidelity
175. Sense of loyalty
176. Marriage for religious sake
177. Marriage is forsaking all others
178. Happily married
179. Always coming home to him
180. Loyalty
181. Having children strengthens commitment
182. A stable home base

#### RISKS

183. Dangers to health
184. One night stands
185. Being left out.
186. Living separate lives

- 187. Moving too quickly
- 188. Demands of career
- 189. Unexpected emotional stress
- 190. There are limits
- 191. Fear of losing history
- 192. Watching friends' marriages dissolve

## STRUGGLING:

- 193. Struggling to know each other
- 194. Struggling to honor the truth within each other
- 195. Not a huge amount of role models
- 196. We're kind of "flying blind"
- 197. Rebuilding trust

## TAKING STOCK:

- 198. Family life cycle
- 199. Considering future
- 200. Sharing attractions
- 201. Shared life goals
- 202. Shared interests
- 203. Having a long, good connection
- 204. Shared history
- 205. Commitment used to be elusive
- 206. Seeing commitment differently
- 207. It was the right decision
- 208. I can't imagine a different path
- 209. Marriage that stay together have a bit of history before coming out

## SUPPORT:

- 210. Being supportive
- 211. Being supportive
- 212. Mutual support
- 213. Support
- 214. Being there
- 215. Always being supportive
- 216. Support by keeping the house up
- 217. Support even if I think he's wrong or misguided
- 218. Support around difficult family issues

## LOVE:

- 219. Reiterating love
- 220. Loving the person
- 221. Loving
- 222. Day to day interactions that show love and care
- 223. Love
- 224. Commitment

225. Caring deeply

TRUST:

226. Trust

227. Maintaining trust

228. Trust

229. Not worrying

230. Security

## Appendix G

### Coding Scheme Three

#### **100 Perspectives on marriage, commitment, and opening the marriage**

- 101 Getting married made sense
- 102 Taking stock of our marriage and electing to stay together
- 103 Reevaluating our understanding what commitment means to us
- 104 Dealing with the contradictions of being married yet open

#### **200 Coming out to my spouse, others and myself**

- 201 Recognizing my same-sex attraction
- 202 Exploring my same-sex attraction through marital sex, porn, online discussions, and hookups
- 203 Considering the need to and implications of coming out
- 204 Having a sense that my spouse was same-sex attracted
- 205 Coming to terms with our mixed orientation status
- 206 Reconsidering identity, labels and sexual boundaries within marriage
- 207 Having rules around disclosing to others
- 208 Dealing with the reactions of others

#### **300 Gendering is a process of negotiation and struggle**

- 301 Making sense of my attraction to a bisexual spouse
- 302 Not feeling like your 'typical' man or woman
- 303 Having task preferences but falling into traditional roles due to the demands of life

#### **400 Seeking support and guidance on if and how was 'make marriage work'**

- 401 Seeking information, understanding and support from others like us
- 402 Considering the advice of others versus charting our own course
- 403 Seeking alleged 'professional' guidance on if and how to 'make it work' from therapists

#### **500 Making mixed orientation marriage work is an intentional process**

- 501 Recognizing my spouse's needs and prioritizing the marriage
- 502 Making conscientious decisions
- 503 Developing a new discourse with my spouse

#### **600 Bisexual Mixed Orientation Married couple types**

- 601 Emergers
- 602 Sensitives
- 603 Pragmatists

## Appendix H

## Coding Scheme Nine

**100 Coming to realize sexual and gender identities before and within marriage**

- 101 *I knew but married*: Bisexual husbands and wives recognizing their same-sex attraction or sexual identity prior to marriage
- 102 *I married then realized*: Bisexual husbands and wives realizing their same-sex attraction is an identity after marriage
- 103 *Am I still straight? Am I really just 'gay'?*: Couples (re)considering sexual identity and labels within marriage and post disclosure
- 104 *Playtime*: Couples considering and exploring sexual and gender identities within marriage
- 105 *He knits. She doesn't. It works.*: Couples realizing they are gender non-conforming.
- 106 *The lure of conformity*: Couples feeling the tension of career, family, and culture on their sexual, gender, and marriage identities.

**200 The process of seeking support and coming out to others while married**

- 201 *The mixed reactions of heterosexual spouses* reaction to their spouses' disclosure of their bisexual identity
- 202 *Coming out, again?*: Bisexual husbands and wives feeling cut off from themselves and coming out, again, and heterosexual spouses feeling ambivalent.
- 203 *Is this a bedroom matter?*: Couples considering the need to and implications of telling others.
- 204 *The mixed reactions of family, friends, and others to the couple's disclosure of their mixed orientation marriage.*
- 205 *Developing a new community*: Couples seeking sources of information, understanding, and support.
- 206 *Feeling the "push to choose"*: Bisexual husbands and wives being told they are 'gay' or 'lesbian', and couples being told they should divorce.

**300 Making mixed orientation marriage work is an intentional process**

- 301 *We took an oath to be monogamous.*: Couples (re)evaluating sexual boundaries and what commitment means to them.
- 302 *Establishing rules and negotiating the slippery slope*: Bisexual husbands and wives establishing primary relationships with their spouse and secondary relationships with another person.
- 303 *Elastic monogamy*: Couples bringing in a third person into their marriage for both spouses
- 304 *Ways of "making it work"*: Couples connecting with their shared history and each other by talking, listening, and compromising.