

Bisexual Relationships: Investigating the Impact of Attitudes Regarding Bisexuality on
Relationship Satisfaction Among Female Same-Gender Couples

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ABSTRACT

Bisexual individuals experience negativity toward their identities from heterosexual as well as gay and lesbian individuals. While there is a large body of research on the negative mental health consequences due to bi-negativity among individuals who identify as bisexual, little research exists exploring the relational impacts of bi-negativity. Informed by symbolic interaction theory and minority stress theory, this study investigated the impacts of attitudes regarding bisexuality on relationship satisfaction in female same-gender couples with at least one bisexual-identified individual through the following research questions: (a) How, if at all, do the attitudes toward bisexuality of individual partners influence perceptions of relationship satisfaction? and (b) How do partners negotiate the influence of attitudes toward bisexuality on their relationship? To address these questions, data from semi-structured interviews of eight female same-gender couples were analyzed using constructivist grounded theory methodology. Findings indicated that couples moved through a process of the following: pre-relationship factors, relationship formation, relational emotion work, and shared relational meaning. Couples additionally are influenced in each phase of the process by macrosystemic oppressions. Clinical implications to assist mental health professionals better serve these couples were determined.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

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DEDICATION

To the couples who graciously allowed me a glimpse into their relationships, entrusting me with their stories. To the pioneers of the LGBT rights movements, fighting for visibility. To the many sexual and gender minority communities all over the world, continuing to fight for equal rights. I dedicate this dissertation to you.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Background and Significance

Up until the *Journal of Bisexuality (JoB)* debuted in 2000, research on bisexuality arguably reflected the erasure of the identity. Often, bisexual participants in research studies were grouped with lesbian and gay participants, either as a large group or by gender. The creation of the *JoB* ushered in an era of visibility for research on bisexuality. Elia and Eliason (2012) reviewed the first decade of research in the journal and found several common topical themes. These included: bisexual visibility; definitions, meanings, and models of bisexual identities; HIV/AIDS; media images of bisexuality; attitudes about bisexuality, including stigma and biphobia; and bisexuality and marriage (Elia & Eliason, 2012). Through a focus on this specific identity, the body of research on bisexuality during the first decade of the *JoB* highlighted the unique minority stressors bisexual individuals face and the impact these stressors have on their lives.

Several studies indicate the mental health impacts from minority stress (Bauer, Flanders, MacLeod, & Ross, 2016; Flanders, 2015; Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009; Jorm, Korten, Rodgers, Jacomb, & Christensen, 2002). Bisexual individuals experience similar microaggressions, oppression, and discrimination as other sexual minorities. However, they additionally experience events unique to bisexuality. Among the most common of these bisexual-specific minority stressors is bi-erasure and stereotypes regarding bisexuality. These experiences of minority stressors have been shown to result in higher rates of anxiety (Flanders, 2015), depression, suicidality, and substance use (Bauer et al., 2016; Jorm, et al., 2002). Given the negative mental health impact of minority stressors on bisexual individuals, it is important to understand the potential mediating factors that present a risk and/or are protective against

minority stressors. Among the most influential mediating factors is social support, which ranges from romantic relationships to community organizations (Mereish, Katz-Wise, & Woulfe, 2017; Pollitt, Muraco, Grossman, & Russell, 2017; Saewyc, Homma, Skay, Bearinger, Resnick, & Reis, 2009; Toft & Yip, 2018).

Ross, Dobinson, and Eady (2010) investigated the impact of several micro-, macro-, and meso-level factors on mental health for bisexual individuals. Of note at the meso-level, 55 bisexual-identified participants in Ontario, Canada indicated the significant positive impact supportive partners can have on well-being. Additionally, non-supportive partners, or potential partners, can have a negative effect on relationship dynamics (Ross et al., 2010). The results of this study, however, did not specifically expand on the extent and nature of this impact on relational dynamics such as relationship satisfaction. More research on the connection between supportive partners and mental health as well as relationship dynamics is indicated, and the current study seeks to contribute to this gap in the literature.

In another study of over 500 bisexual adults, Mereish and colleagues (2017) investigated the effects of distal and proximal minority stressors on psychological distress and suicidality. For this study, distal stressors included anti-bisexual experiences with others, while proximal stressors included internalized heterosexism and concealment of identity. Results indicated that the presence of both types of stressors for participants were associated with increased loneliness, and further associated with increased psychological distress and suicidality (Mereish et al., 2017). Implications of these results suggest the need for increased support systems, along with resources to decrease the mediated impact of loneliness. Romantic partners may serve as a resource or support system to decrease loneliness, thus decreasing psychological distress. Further, distal and proximal minority stressors for those in relationships could lead to partners

pulling away from one another, which could lead to loneliness (Mereish et al., 2017) as well as decreases in relationship satisfaction. More research is needed to understand how romantic relationships fit into this role of support.

While romantic relationships have been connected with increased minority stressors (Ross et al., 2010), there are also potential beneficial effects from relational involvement. Feinstein, Dyar, Bhatia, Latack, and Davila (2016) found positive associations between discrimination and anxiety and depression for single bisexual individuals, but not those who are partnered. Findings from a study by Ross, Goldberg, Tarasoff, and Guo (2018) explicitly highlighted the importance of partners' unconditional identity support among pregnant plurisexual women. The authors suggest such support promotes mental health generally as well as throughout the transition to parenthood. Taken together, these studies indicate growing evidence for relationship involvement as a minority stress buffer in bisexual individuals. The current study seeks to explore the dynamics within female bisexual relationships that may act as minority stressors or buffer against the effects of external minority stressors.

History of Bisexuality Research

Sexual orientation is defined as an individual's physical and affectional preferences towards certain genders in relation to the individual's gender (Shively & DeCecco, 1977). Historically, the conceptualization of sexual orientation has been based on binary classifications of gender, sex roles, and affectional preferences (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1977). That is, gender has been dichotomized as either male *or* female, sex roles as masculine *or* feminine, and sexual orientation as heterosexual *or* homosexual. This dichotomous conceptualization erased the fluid realities of many individuals whose identities did not fit the binary, such as bisexuality.

Foucault (1978) believed that we use institutional systems to impose power over society and individuals through identity labels, thus identity is political. For instance, United States federal law prior to 2015 specified marriage could only be legal between a man and a woman (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015). Legal benefits afforded to married couples would not extend to those who were unable to marry under the historical legal definition. Within this law are dominant paradigms that uphold heterosexism, monosexism, and compulsory monogamy. Identities are complex as well as socially constructed; therefore, meanings of identity labels are more fluid in reality than society attempts to impose through such laws (Butler, 1990).

Many queer theorists claim that identity labels maintain heteronormative assumptions as well as the binary categorization of heterosexual-homosexual, and have ignored bisexuality as a distinct sexual identity (Sullivan, 2003). A small portion of queer theorists and researchers of bisexuality claim that bisexuality aids in the deconstruction of the heterosexual-homosexual binary (Angelides, 2001; Burrill, 2009; Callis, 2009; Gurevich, Bailey, & Bower, 2012). The brief historical review that follows will highlight the progression of theoretical and empirical investigations leading to the current binary conceptualization of sexual orientation, specifically bisexuality.

Binary Sexuality and Focus on Pathology

Early research on sexual orientation focused on exploring binary classifications of sexuality through a similar frame of normal versus abnormal. Freud (1910) and Krafft-Ebing (1893) contributed significantly to the narrative of homosexuality as abnormal. Freud determined through his clinical experiences that homosexuality consisted of deviant behaviors. While he was among the first to acknowledge bisexuality, this was considered as a state of further arrested development in which individuals were unable to come to terms with their homosexuality. In this

view, an individual has only reached sexual adjustment if they have successfully foreclosed on a heterosexual identity (Freud, 1910). Krafft-Ebing (1893) more strongly suggested that homosexuality was pathological.

Both of these prominent figures in the mental health field set the stage for any same-sex attraction and behavior to be viewed as pathological. Further, Freud's emphasis on arrested development reinforced the dichotomous conceptualization of sexual orientation as either heterosexual or homosexual. Any indication of attraction to or behavior with more than one gender, perhaps indicating a bisexual identity, is viewed as a state of confusion or inability to foreclose on either a heterosexual or homosexual identity. Thus, according to Freud (1910), a bisexual identity was even more pathologized than a homosexual identity.

Through groundbreaking research, Kinsey and colleagues (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953) found a large number of individuals experienced same-sex attraction and behavior. Results indicated that about 37% of males (Kinsey et al., 1948) and up to 20% of females (Kinsey et al., 1953) had same-sex sexual experiences. Further, the results of these studies suggested sexual orientation existed on a continuum rather than on a fixed binary. The Kinsey Heterosexual-Homosexual Scale (Kinsey et al., 1948) was constructed based on these findings, which included seven points (zero to six) indicating various levels of attraction and behavior. A zero on the scale indicates exclusively homosexual behavior and/or attraction while a six indicates exclusively heterosexual behavior and/or attraction. One through five indicate varying levels of behavior and fantasy, with three the point of equal amounts of heterosexual/homosexual behavior and/or attraction indicating the "true bisexual" (Kinsey et al., 1948). Overall, the research produced by Kinsey and colleagues

brought to light the wide variety in sexual behavior and attraction, which was a crucial step toward normalizing fluidity in behavior and attraction.

Paradigm Shift Around Bisexuality

While the Kinsey reports were important in highlighting the prevalence in same-sex attraction and behaviors, research by Evelyn Hooker prompted a paradigm shift even further away from pathology. Hooker (1957) investigated the differences between a sample of heterosexual males and a non-clinical sample of homosexual males. Results indicated that there were no differences between the samples on many psychological tests. Highlighting the lack of difference between the groups eventually led to the removal of homosexuality in 1973 from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association (Spitzer, 1981).

As the rhetoric surrounding same-sex attraction and behavior shifted away from pathology, researchers shifted their questions toward understanding the lives and experiences of lesbian and gay individuals. Cass (1979) developed a model of sexual orientation identity development. Other researchers then began to investigate disclosure (Badgett, 1996; D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; Savin-Williams & Dubé, 1998), effects of discrimination (Herek, 1998; Proctor & Groze, 1994), relationships (Harry, 1983; Koepke, Hare, & Morgan, 1992; Kurdek, 1989), and more recently the intersections of various other identities (Bowleg, 2008; Cahill, 2009; García, Gray-Stanley, & Ramirez-Valles, 2008; Meyer, 2010). Additionally, researchers recognized that sexual attraction and behavior is fluid and not fixed. For instance, Klein (1978) expanded on Kinsey and colleagues' research by creating a sexual orientation grid that conceptualized sexuality among multiple dimensions and across time that was not captured by the original linear Kinsey scale, which categorized sexual identity at a snapshot in time.

Capturing sexual identity at only one time point can mistakenly reify the assumption that bisexual individuals need to engage in behavior with more than one gender at once.

The dimensions on the Klein grid include sexual attraction, sexual behavior, sexual fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, self-identification, and a heterosexual/gay lifestyle (Klein, 1978). Using the original Kinsey scale, Klein, Sepekoff, and Wolf (1985) asked participants to rate themselves in each domain for their past, present, and ideal choice, which captured the fluidity in attraction and behavior over time. Results indicated the need for multi-dimensional understanding of sexual orientation. This research, along with the original research of Kinsey and colleagues, provided evidence for the existence of bisexuality beyond the arrested development perspective of Freud (1910).

Significant scholars, such as Fritz Klein (1978), Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz (1977), and Janet Bode (1976), argued for separate analyses of bisexuality as a distinct sexual orientation in the 1970's through their empirical research. Prior to this time, individuals who experienced attraction to or behavior with more than one gender were considered "really homosexual," due to the heterosexual-homosexual binary conceptualization. Blumstein and Schwartz (1977) found that participants indicated shifts in the choice or preference of gender in a partner over time. However, the presence of attraction to, as well as enjoyable sexual experiences with, more than one gender indicated a bisexual self-identification among participants.

Despite such findings, research on bisexual individuals separately from lesbian and gay individuals was rare up until the *JOB* was established in 2000. Since this time, research distinctly on bisexuality has grown significantly, alongside arguments against the prevailing dichotomous understanding of sexuality. For example, Lisa Diamond (2003, 2008a, 2008b, 2016) has researched extensively on the topic of sexual fluidity. Through her research findings, she has

argued that sexuality, especially among females, is fluid over time and depending on the situation (Diamond, 2003; Diamond, 2008a). She argued that individuals often experience non-exclusive bisexual patterns of attraction, longitudinal changes in attraction over time, and inconsistencies among sexual attraction, behavior, and identity (Diamond, 2016). In her study of 79 non-heterosexual women, Diamond (2008a) further suggested that findings indicated “bisexuality is best interpreted as a stable pattern of attraction to both sexes in which the specific balance of same-sex to other-sex desires necessarily varies according to interpersonal and situational factors.” (p. 12). Bisexual women, then, are fluid in their behaviors and attraction to more than one gender, and hold a stable fluidity over time.

The researchers highlighted thus far have been critical in legitimizing research efforts on the topic of bisexuality. As a result, the body of research on bisexuality has grown significantly over the past two decades. The following sections highlight existing research on concepts related to the current research study, namely attitudes regarding bisexuality and relationship satisfaction.

Overview of the Study

Rationale for the Study

In this section, I will highlight the specific gaps in the current literature regarding the impact of attitudes regarding bisexuality on relationship satisfaction that justify the current study. With mixed findings, it is important to conduct more research on relational dynamics among bisexual-identified people in order to continue to investigate the strengths and challenges they experience in relationships. Additional research such as this would provide crucial information to inform practitioners and policy makers on how to best support mental health among these

individuals and couples. Existing research on bisexual relationships, however, is lacking (Klesse, 2011; Hayfield & Lahti, 2017).

Despite a common theme in the *Journal of Bisexuality* (Elia & Eliason, 2012), the topic of “bisexuality and marriages” has largely focused on mixed orientation marriages with a dichotomous hetero-homo assumption. That is, researchers investigated aspects of relationships in which gay men engaged in seemingly heterosexual marriages. Research focusing on mixed orientation, therefore, offers a very narrow view of bisexual experiences (Rust, 2000b) and aids in maintaining negative and stereotypical views towards bisexuality. More researchers should investigate various relationship formations beyond that of heterosexual coupling to understand the range of possible experiences.

A further investigation of the research included in the *Journal of Bisexuality* since 2010 indicates that there have been a handful of articles specifically on bisexuality within relationships. In order to find this information, I searched through every issue of volumes 11 through 17 to obtain the topics investigated. My search found that less than one percent of articles, or ten out of 178 total articles, were focused on the topic of bisexuality in relationships. Three provide theoretical discussions of issues present in relationships (Benack & Swan, 2016; Buxton, 2011; Klesse, 2011). Six were empirical studies investigating various phenomenon for bisexual in relationships from an individual perspective (Anderson, Scoats, & McCormack, 2015; DeCapua, 2017; Hartman-Linck, 2014; Head & Milton, 2014; Hoang, Holloway & Mendoza, 2011; Robinson, 2013). One article investigated individuals’ attitudes towards being in a relationship with a bisexual person (Armstrong & Reissing, 2014). Each of these articles have made important steps toward increasing knowledge about lived experiences of bisexual individuals in relationships, and also indicates that more research is needed.

While bisexuality is often grouped with other sexual orientations in many research studies historically, researchers of bisexuality have shifted their approaches to obtain samples consisting solely of bisexual identified or behaving persons. Topics investigated in this increasing body of research include issues related to identity (Flanders, Robinson, Legge, & Tarasoff, 2016; Rostosky, Riggle, Pascale-Hague, & McCants, 2010; Rust, 2000c), attitudes (Feinstein et al., 2016; McLean, 2008b), mental health (Jorm et al., 2002; Ross, Bauer, MacLeod, Robinson, MacKay, & Dobinson, 2014) and sexual behavior (Dodge et al., 2016; White Hughto, Biello, Reisner, Perez-Brumer, Heflin, & Mimiaga, 2016). Behavioral bisexuality is a popular subject, particularly in regards to research on HIV transmission. For instance, Hubach and colleagues (2014) interviewed 77 behaviorally bisexual men on their patterns of condom use with their male and female partners. Klesse (2011) argued this large focus on behavioral bisexuality has added to the pathological view of bisexuality through a focus on oversexualization of the identity and naming bisexual individuals as “threats” and carriers of disease from the homosexual to the heterosexual populations (Gorna, 1996; Klesse, 2005; Richardson, 2000; Rust, 2000a).

Based on the current body of research, there is a growing understanding of the lived experiences of bisexual individuals along with a large gap in research providing a comprehensive view of their experiences in relationships. While research on bisexual relationships is small, the increase in focus on this topic is encouraging and likely to continue growing (e.g., Anderson et al., 2015; Armstrong & Reissing, 2014; DeCapua, 2017; Hartman-Linck, 2014; Head & Milton, 2014; Hoang et al., 2011; Robinson, 2013). Researchers who have led the way on this topic have highlighted the negative experiences bisexual individuals face within such relationships. In order to build upon this important research, the proposed study seeks a comprehensive understanding

of female bisexual relationships through researching issues that arise in these relationships, but also how couples manage them, from a shared dyadic perspective.

Bisexuality scholars also have begun to call for expanded research on romantic relationships. Klesse (2011) argued that professionals from a variety of fields are poorly equipped to understand bisexuality intimacies, and more research must be done to investigate the impact of the interplay between bi-negativities and oppression on these relationships. Lahti (as cited in Hayfield & Lahti, 2017, p. 2) similarly argues for a more complex understanding of bisexuality in relationships. Existing research on the damaging effects of oppression and negative attitudes on intimate relationships is largely for gay and lesbian relationships only, ignoring the unique difficulties experienced by bisexual people in relationships (Klesse, 2011). Some of these difficulties include: (a) perceptions of an over-sexualized person that is incapable of monogamy; (b) erasure of an identity when in committed relationships; (c) beliefs that bisexuality is a transitory phase rather than a stable identity (Callis, 2013; Fox, 2006; Klesse, 2011; McLean, 2008b). Other research has highlighted issues related to bi-negativity in relationships based on gender of partner (e.g., Decapua, 2017; Dyar, Feinstein, & London, 2014; Molina, Marquez, Logan, Leeson, Balsam, & Kaysen, 2015). For bisexual women, while there were negative experiences with both men and women, participants reported more bi-negativity with male partners. Such negative beliefs toward bisexuality result in bisexuals being ruled out as potential partners (Li, Dobinson, Scheim, & Ross, 2013) and significant insecurities among partners, which can lead to destabilizing dynamics in relationships (Klesse, 2011) such as lack of trust and objectification or oversexualizing (Li et al., 2013).

Purpose of the Study

Decapua (2017) suggested future research on bisexuality should investigate experiences of bi-negativity in romantic relationships and to interview partners of bisexual participants to add complexity to results. Campbell, Hayfield, and Reid (2017) also recommended more research on the impact of bisexual stereotypes on bisexual people's lives, as well as bisexuals in a wide range of relationships in order to build knowledge on this topic. This study fills these various calls for an empirical investigation into the intricacies of bisexuality in relationships. Through dyadic qualitative interviews, this study examined the impact of individual and partner attitudes regarding bisexuality on relationship satisfaction. Symbolic interactionism and minority stress theories were used as the theoretical framework guiding the study. Specific research questions include the following:

1. How, if at all, do the attitudes toward bisexuality of individuals partners influence perceptions of relationship satisfaction?
2. How do partners negotiate the influence of attitudes toward bisexuality on their relationship?

Definitions

Throughout this document, several terms will appear that are worth discussing and defining for clarification. I will first discuss the several definitions of bisexuality and provide the rationale for the definition that I will use to conduct this study. Following, I will provide definitions on bisexual relationships, bi-negativity, biphobia, bi-erasure, monosexual, monosexism, and mononormativity.

Bisexuality

Various definitions of bisexuality exist in the field, and there are debates as to which constructs best represent a holistic definition of this sexual orientation (Parks, Hughes, &

Werkmeister-Rozas, 2008; Rust, 2008). Bisexuality has several definitions depending on the theoretical lens, professional field, historical and social influences, and more. Contemporary definitions of sexual orientation generally are based on concepts of attraction, desire, affection, fantasy, behavior, and self-labeled identity. Behavior, attraction, and identity are the three concepts most commonly used by researchers in combinations to conceptualize sexual orientation in a multi-faceted manner (Parks, et al., 2008; Wolff, Wells, Ventura-DiPersia, Renson, & Grov, 2017).

Behavioral definitions are beneficial for risk-based research, but there are various standards for the amount of behavior that constitutes a particular sexual orientation (Klein et al., 1985; Martin & Knox, 2000). Researchers and theorists also have defined bisexuality through sexual practice and/or sexual potential in the past, present, or future (Fox, 1996; Klein et al., 1985; Zinik, 1985). That is, if an individual has ever had or could ever have sexual relations with (or desires for) people of different genders, they are considered bisexual. This definition, however, does not account for those individuals who may behave in ways that appear to fit the definition of bisexuality, but whom do not claim the identity label. Men who have sex with men are one group of people who may not be accurately described by this label. These individuals' behaviors indicate sexual activity with more than one gender in the past or present. However, these men do not always claim a non-heterosexual identity label (Futterman, 2001). Furthermore, equating behavior with identity could further erase a bisexual identity and reinforce the idea that bisexual individuals are only seen as having "sex" rather than a "life" or "family" like heterosexuals do (Ochs, 2011).

Friedman and colleagues (2004) found that adolescents viewed attraction as the most relevant concept in defining their sexual orientation. However, there is not a consistent

agreement among researchers and the general population as to the amount of attraction to which genders determines a bisexual identity. A debate in the community, and often a source of misconceptions regarding bisexuality is gender of choice in behavior and attraction. Many people argue that bisexuality is an attraction to or behavior with biological males and females only. Several bisexual individuals, however, indicate a range of fluidity in the genders of interest, and often resist the dichotomous nature of gender and sexuality (Eisner, 2013; Rust, 2000c).

Flanders, Lebreton, Robinson, Bian, and Caravaca-Morera (2016) suggested that self-identity, for bisexual individuals specifically, may hold more significance than behavior and/or attraction alone. For instance, a bisexual self-identity could represent fluidity in sexuality or a political statement. Lisa Diamond (2008b; 2016) has conducted research extensively on the subject of sexual fluidity, particularly around bisexuality. Her body of research, primarily on bisexual women, suggests that a bisexual identity is relatively stable over time, but those who claim a bisexual identity experience fluctuation in attraction to various genders over time.

Rust (2008) recommended that researchers define bisexuality based on the purpose of the research. Due to the complexity and ambiguity of bisexuality, researchers are beginning to prefer self-identification as the primary means to define a bisexual individual (Hartman-Linck, 2014; Klesse, 2011). Based on the issues with defining bisexuality by attraction and behavior, the definition of bisexuality that will be utilized in this study will be based off of self-identity. Since self-identity measures have been shown to be the best measures in research on experiences of specific communities and microaggressions (Saewyc et al., 2004), I will define bisexuality as: persons who self-identify as bisexual or feel that the label “bisexual” is applicable and meaningful to their identity.

Bi-negativity and Biphobia

Bi-negativity is a term to refer to negative attitudes held by individuals about bisexual-identified persons (Eliason, 2000). Such negativity is often manifested through stereotypes and misconceptions regarding the bisexual identity. Biphobia, on the other hand, is defined as having negative beliefs and/or a fear of bisexual individuals (Obradors-Campos, 2011). These two terms are often used interchangeably. Eliason (2000) argued that using the term “phobia” indicates an irrational or uncontrollable fear, which does not adequately account for the very rational and controlled fear perpetuated by society as a result of hatred rather than fear. In that vein, I will use the term bi-negativity throughout this paper.

Bi-erasure

Callis (2014) has referred to bisexuality, along with pansexual and queer identities, as a “borderland” identity. Using theories of racial/ethnic borderlands, Callis (2014) claimed that bisexuality is an identity that lies outside of the cultural norms, thus borders, of binary sexualities (e.g., heterosexual, lesbian, gay). As a result, bisexuality is then misread or not read at all by these binary sexualities, it is both not accepted and invisible. Bisexual invisibility, or bi-erasure refers to the efforts to hide, eliminate, or make invisible the bisexual identity (Lambert, 2009; Yoshino, 2000).

Monosexual

Monosexual refers to the sexual orientations in which there is attraction, behavior, and self-identification involving one gender (Eisner, 2013). This term is often used in opposition to bisexual individuals, or others who have attraction or behavior with more than one gender. Hemmings and Blumenfeld (1996) raised significant and valid concerns with the term, claiming it is more divisive than descriptive. Here, it is used to highlight differences between bisexual identified individuals and lesbian, gay, and heterosexual persons. I do not wish to minimize the

homophobia and negative experiences of these populations. Bisexual persons, however, do experience negativity and phobias unique to their identity. The term monosexual therefore is used here merely as a term to denote differences in attraction, behavior, and self-identity related to these negativities and phobias.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

As indicated previously, research on bisexuality has historically been couched within research on all minority sexual orientations, which has conflated findings regarding experiences of this specific identity (Dodge & Sandfort, 2007). More recently, research has begun to focus on experiences of bisexual-identified individuals separately from other sexual orientations, largely from an individual, risk-based, or deficit perspective (e.g., Austin, Herrick, & Proescholdbell, 2016; Klein & Dudley, 2014; White Hughto et al., 2016). The information yielded from these types of studies has indicated that bisexual individuals are at higher risk for mental health and substance abuse issues (Jorm et al., 2002) due to significant negativity and discrimination from heterosexual as well as gay and lesbian individuals (McLean, 2008a). Since bisexual individuals experience negativity from heterosexual and lesbian/gay individuals, they likely experience a substantial impact on their romantic relationships as well as their individual mental health (Armstrong & Reissing, 2014; Callis, 2013; DeCapua, 2017; Feinstein et al., 2016; Johnston, 2015; Klesse, 2011; Li et al., 2013; McLean, 2008b).

Research on bisexual relationships, especially from a dyadic perspective, remains scarce. This study seeks to contribute to the literature on bisexuality from a relational perspective by using a dyadic, mixed-method design guided by symbolic interactionism and minority stress theories to investigate the impact of attitudes regarding bisexuality on relationship satisfaction among couples with at least one bisexual identified individual. In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the societal influence on bisexuality followed by a review of the existing literature on attitudes regarding bisexuality and relational processes that likely impact relationship satisfaction.

Societal Influence

Bisexuality is a heavily stigmatized identity due to societal expectations based in heteronormativity and mononormativity. As mentioned previously, Foucault (1978) discussed how identity labels are used by societal institutions to exert power and control. In analyzing the writings on heteronormativity, Marchia and Sommer (2019) further concluded:

Heteronormativity: 1) reinforces the dominant heterosexual code with its hierarchy, normalization, and exclusion; 2) is a pervasive system that needs to be addressed, questioned, and challenged in terms of sexuality; 3) is the privileging of heterosexuality; 4) is linked to the oppression of LGBTQ people; and 5) is inherent in heterosexual institutions and social codes. (p. 276)

In the United States, examples of heterosexist institutions and social codes include legal codes and statutes. Laws defining marriage to be between one man and one woman existed for centuries, with lawmakers citing religious and moral reasons for elevating heterosexual marriage above anything else. Laws have recently been amended to allow marriage between same genders, which is a significant victory towards equality. However, the mere existence of any law dictating who marriages should include is the way the U.S. society continues to exert power.

While societal attitudes have grown to become more accepting of sexual minorities in recent years (Flores & Park, 2018), there is an existing undercurrent of heteronormativity that is sewn into the fabric of our society. It is what this country was founded upon and will continue to play a role in society. The current political climate highlights the tension in our society over which identities are normalized and which are pathologized. There is a hierarchy of acceptable identities and acceptable behaviors that accompany those identities (Seidman, 1991). Additional laws and policies oppress sexual minorities, keeping them below heterosexual individuals on this

hierarchy. For example, there are no federal laws to ensure non-discrimination for employment, adoption, education, or housing. Additionally, there are no federal laws to condemn hate crimes against sexual minorities, bullying in school, or conversion therapy (HRC, 2019), despite evidence indicating the significant mental health risks each pose. While several states have passed laws addressing some of the above topics, the lack of federal laws allows for inequality across the country. The message sent by the gaps in non-discrimination laws is that our society does not value sexual minority individuals to the same degree as heterosexual individuals. There is an automatic assumption of heteronormativity because of the historical pathologizing of same-gender attraction and behavior. Sexual minorities are thus “different”, which further reiterates the hierarchy.

According to Butler (1990), who extended the discourse on heteronormativity to include the intersection between sexuality and gender, the patriarchal nature of the U.S. constructs the categories and social norms of male/female and heterosexual/non-heterosexual. What results from such categories and social norms are manifestations of hegemonic masculinity and idealized femininity (Butler, 1990), which further aids in stigmatizing bisexuality through gendered stereotypes.

In addition to heteronormativity, monosexism and mononormative assumptions within society further stigmatize bisexuality. Eisner (2013) defined monosexism as “a social structure operating through the presumption that everyone is, or should be, monosexual, a structure that privileges monosexuality and monosexual people, and that systematically punishes people who are nonmonosexual” (p. 63). Such monosexist beliefs foster and perpetuate stereotypes and misconceptions regarding bisexuality. Mononormativity refers to the beliefs that reinforce monosexuality (e.g., heterosexual, gay, lesbian) as the norm in relationships. Further, it is a

belief in a dichotomy of sexual attraction and desire. These beliefs are reinforced through the epistemic erasure non-binary identities experience, in which both heterosexual and lesbian/gay groups have a committed interest to. This interest serves to aid monosexuality as the norm through stabilization of sexual orientation. That is, as long as monosexuality is viewed as the norm, there is minimal confusion around identity questioning (Yoshino, 2000).

Attitudes regarding bisexuality are situated within a societal structure of heteronormativity and mononormativity. The following is an overview of attitudes held by heterosexual and sexual minorities, and the impact bi-negativity can have on bisexual individuals.

Attitudes Regarding Bisexuality

Stereotypes

As mentioned previously, Callis (2014) has referred to bisexuality, pansexual, and queer identities, as a “borderland” identity. As a result of bisexuality laying on the borders of cultural norms with the assistance of heteronormativity and mononormativity, there are several negative attitudes regarding bisexuality held by individuals in this society. In this section, I will review literature focused on attitudes regarding bisexuality held by others, such as heterosexual and sexual minority populations, as well as experiences bisexual individuals have with bi-negativity.

Attitudes from others. Despite evidence suggesting bisexuality as a stable rather than transitory orientation (Diamond, 2008a), bisexual individuals face much negativity from all sexual orientations (Callis, 2013; Johnston, 2015; Klesse, 2011; McLean, 2008a; Obradors-Campos, 2011). Negativity held by others is perhaps due to the ambiguous nature of bisexuality (Burke et al., 2017). This negativity comes in the form of monosexism, stereotypes and misconceptions, and microaggressions. Common stereotypes held against bisexual individuals

include the belief that they are unable or unwilling to maintain monogamy, promiscuous, immature, confused about their “real” identity, and that they are carriers for sexually transmitted infections (Callis, 2013; Fox, 2006; McLean, 2008b).

Several studies also have investigated attitudes regarding bisexuality held by lesbian and gay individuals. Dodge and colleagues (2016) investigated attitudes toward bisexual men and women among a nationally representative sample of over 3,000 heterosexual, lesbian, gay, and other-identified (i.e., asexual, pansexual) individuals, intentionally excluding bisexual identified individuals. Their results indicated that lesbian and gay identified individuals reported significantly fewer negative attitudes and biases regarding bisexuality than heterosexual individuals, and slightly fewer positive attitudes than “other” identified individuals. That is, individuals identifying as a sexual orientation beyond heterosexual, lesbian, or gay (e.g., queer, pansexual, etc.) reported the most positive views towards bisexual individuals, although the differences between these attitude scores were not significant. Friedman and colleagues (2014) found similar results in their study that sought to create a scale measuring attitudes toward bisexual individuals. Over 600 individuals self-identifying as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or “other” participated in the study. While heterosexual participants reported the highest bi-negative attitudes of each sexual orientation groups, lesbian and gay participants reported significantly higher bi-negativity than bisexual participants.

Mulick and Wright (2002), who investigated the reliability of the Biphobia Scale, also compared attitudes toward bisexual individuals among a sample of over 200 heterosexual, lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. As indicated earlier, the researchers categorized the scores from the scale into mild, moderate, and severe bi-negativity. Results indicated that 13% of lesbian and gay participants held moderate levels only of biphobia (scores between 31-75 on

Biphobia Scale), which was significantly lower than the 48% of heterosexual participants who held moderate to severe levels (scores between 75-150). All bisexual participants reported only mild bi-negativity, with scores ranging from 0 to 30. (Mulick & Wright, 2002), supporting the existing research that lesbian and gay individuals hold higher bi-negative attitudes than other sexual minorities even though their bi-negativity is less than that held by heterosexual individuals.

As suggested by the research studies above, bisexual individuals themselves do not hold bi-negative attitudes to the same degree as heterosexual, or even lesbian or gay, individuals. Burke and LeFrance (2016) expanded on this topic by investigating attitudes of bisexual individuals toward heterosexual, lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals on a variety of measures. Among a sample of 346 bisexual individuals, results indicated that bisexual individuals do not hold several stereotypes of other bisexual individuals, such as viewing them as indecisive, prone to monogamy, focused on sex, or likely to cheat (Burke & LeFrance, 2016). While bisexual individuals may be more accepting of their own identity category, the body of research on attitudes regarding bisexuality suggests there are still those who hold internalized biphobia. Bisexual individual experience several minority stress experiences due to attitudes held by others as well as internalized biphobia.

Bisexual individuals' experiences with bi-negativity. Monosexist and stereotyped beliefs perpetuate the use of bisexual-specific microaggressions. Rooted in understandings of racial microaggressions (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978), microaggressions among the sexual minority community refer to subtle acts or messages of discrimination that emphasize heteronormativity and mononormativity (Nadal, Rivera, & Corpus, 2010). An example is the use of the phrase “that’s so gay!” which is often used derogatorily. Many bisexual

individuals frequently experience microaggressions in their daily lives. In a study on the experiences of 10 bisexual women, Bostwick and Hequembourg (2014) found that common bisexual-specific microaggressions were verbal statements of misconceptions. Examples include “you just want your cake and eat it to!” or “just make up your mind.” Participants experienced hostility towards them for their sexual identity, denial/dismissal of their identity, inability to understand the identity and how it can exist, pressure to change, exclusion or resistance from the larger LGBT community, and dating exclusion and hypersexuality (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014).

Hayfield, Clarke, and Halliwell (2014) interviewed 20 self-identified bisexual women regarding their experiences with marginalization. Echoing the findings of Bostwick and Hequembourg (2014), participants highlighted three themes that captured their experiences with marginalization (Hayfield et al., 2014). These themes include a lack of belonging in the LGBTQ+ or heterosexual communities, dismissal of bisexuality as a legitimate and stable identity, and the sexualization of bisexuality. As a result of these marginalizing experiences, participants felt misunderstood and misrepresented within society (Hayfield et al., 2014).

McClelland, Rubin, and Bauermeister (2016) also interviewed bisexual individuals regarding their experiences with microaggressions. The participants indicated they were exposed to several stereotypes about bisexuality, leading to varying reactions from friends and family following disclosure. Reactions included disgust, discomfort, titillation, and ambivalent tolerance. The authors also investigated participants’ reactions to discrimination. Despite the participants indicating they had not experienced discrimination, they reported experiences which were examples of discrimination. The authors posited that such experiences were ingrained into the daily experiences of these participants so much so that they were minimized and dismissed.

The accumulation of negative experiences of stereotypes related to their identity is considered an example of chronic minority stress (Opatow, 1990), and can contribute to these participants viewing their experiences as outside the scope of discrimination (McClelland et al., 2016). Minimization of discrimination by participants is highlighted through the themes captured by the authors regarding their reactions to discriminatory experiences. These themes included “not me personally” and “let it roll off your back”. Strategies in the latter category involved avoidance of disclosure and passing as heterosexual and cisgender.

Todd, Oravec, and Vejar (2016) similarly investigated bisexual individuals’ experiences of biphobia in the family of origin context. Participants experienced interpersonal hostility and invalidation, perceptions of their identity as unstable, viewing current relationships or relational history as proof of an instability or to perpetuate the stereotype of bisexuals as experimenting or being in a phase, perceptions of sexual irresponsibility, and bi-invisibility. Family members, specifically mothers, often expressed more support for relationships with other-sex individuals, perhaps as a way to bring the bisexual individual back into line with cultural and familial expectations preferring heteronormative sex and relationships.

Bisexual individuals also have spoken of the significant tension they feel in the LGBTQ+ community due to the negative attitudes expressed especially by lesbians and gay men. In a study of 60 bisexual men and women, many participated in the lesbian and gay community despite having mixed feelings towards it (McLean, 2004). Participation included: going to gay/lesbian nightclubs, attending social or cultural events, and volunteering for groups serving the community. However, they expressed some indifference towards, and lack of participation in, more organizational aspects of the community. Additionally, most participants participated in the community in such ways that made them invisible as bisexuals, choosing not to reveal their

sexual orientation or allowing others to assume their identities as gay or lesbian. One-third of the participants in this sample did not participate in the community in any way due to the perception of the community excluding bisexuals. Negative experiences in the community made participants confused and uncertain of their place in the community at large.

Many bisexual individuals exhibit varying signs of internal distress from experiences of bi-erasure and bi-phobia. McLean (2008b) found that many bisexual individuals experience mental health issues in the face of these experiences. In a qualitative study of 60 bisexual men and women, participants highlighted a variety of consequences due to their experiences of bi-phobia and bi-erasure, including isolation and exclusion (McLean, 2008b). Participants discussed the intensity of their feelings of loneliness and exclusion, leading them to feel depressed, anxious, and suicidal. Many participants indicated it was easier to hide their identity in order to maintain their relationships, which further reinforces bi-erasure (McLean, 2008b). Jorm and colleagues (2002) also found that bisexual individuals are at higher risk for mental health and substance abuse issues. Continued internalization of biphobia can also lead to a variety of negative consequences, such as impairment in developing a positive bisexual identity (Israel & Mohr, 2004).

Intersectional Contexts

Experiences of biphobia and bi-negativity among bisexual individuals are heavily influenced by the intersection of identity categories. As indicated through some of the above research, attitudes regarding bisexuality vary by sexual orientation. Attitudes held by others are also influenced by their own race, ethnicity, gender, age, education, social class, and other identity categories. Further, bisexual persons experience varying degrees of acceptance based on their identity categories. The way in which each of these categories converge creates unique

experiences. If an individual is a member of several minority identity categories, the intersection of them converges in such a way that multiplies the minority stress experiences and consequences. The multiplicative nature of minority stress is due to the inherent oppressive nature of minority identities in our society.

As discussed earlier, bisexuality is situated within a patriarchal, heteronormative, and mononormative society. It is also situated in a society that privileges white, Western, youthful, educated, and upper-class individuals. Societal institutions and social norms reinforce these privileges, and further create assumptions associated with each privilege. The predominant assumption of privilege indicates any person who does not belong to the privileged identity categories are abnormal, leading to racism, ageism, elitism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism. Just as identity categories interact, the privileged assumptions associated with those identities interact to create unique experiences based on the integrated social location of individuals.

While it is methodologically difficult to account for every intersection of various identity categories, several researchers have investigated the role some categories play in holding bi-negativity. For example, Cox, Bimbi, and Parsons (2013) examined how social contact influenced bi-negativity among over 1,300 lesbians and gay men. Analyses of demographic factors revealed that older and non-white participants were separately correlated with significantly higher bi-negativity scores. Further analyses examining both gender and ethnicity indicated that women of color held the most negative attitudes (Cox et al., 2013). Regression analyses also were conducted for each gender by race group to identify predictors of bi-negativity. Results indicated that among women of color, older individuals held significantly more negative attitudes. Older age and a lower frequency of socialization with bisexual individuals significantly predicted increased bi-negativity among white women. Among men of

color, the older one was, and the more often one dated bisexual people, the more negative attitudes they held. Lastly, older age, less frequent socialization, and higher frequency of sex with bisexual people significantly predicted higher bi-negative attitudes among White men (Cox et al., 2013).

Dodge and colleagues (2016) examined gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, income, and sexual orientation differences in holding attitudes toward bisexual men and women among a nationally representative sample. They found significant differences in attitudes among several of these categories. Participants who were younger, female, white, more educated, a sexual minority, and who earned a higher income all held significantly less bi-negative attitudes than those who were over the age of 25, male, Black, educated with a high school diploma or less, heterosexual, and who earned less than \$25,000 per year (Dodge et al., 2016). With the exception of gender and sexual orientation, each identity category in this study that was associated with greater bi-negativity is considered a minority status. These results highlight the co-constructed nature of oppression.

The oppressive institutions in society, such as racism and sexism, work together to amplify the effects of each other. Hierarchies exist even within each identity category to maintain various minority statuses and to elevate others. For example, feminist movements have helped improve the lives of many women, but predominantly white women (Crenshaw, 1991). Racism exists within movements toward gender and sexual equality, seemingly to give the movements more validity. Thus, varying bi-negative attitudes among different races, gender, and more exist, which further strengthens oppression against bisexual individuals.

Researchers who investigated different attitudes toward bisexual men and bisexual women strengthen this point further. In a sample of over 1,400 heterosexual, gay, lesbian, and

bisexual individuals, Friedman and colleagues (2014) found that bi-negative attitudes toward bisexual men and bisexual women differed. Specifically, all participants held significantly higher negative attitudes toward bisexual men than bisexual women by 2.5% (Friedman et al., 2014). These results were echoed by several other studies. Eliason (2000) investigated the stigma facing bisexual men among over 200 heterosexual undergraduate students. Results indicated that heterosexual men had a greater tendency to believe a larger number of stereotypes about bisexuality, and were significantly more likely to give negative ratings toward bisexual men than heterosexual women did. Additionally, there were no significant differences in attitudes toward bisexual women among heterosexual men and women (Eliason, 2000). Zivony and Lobel (2014) also investigated the invisible stereotypes of bisexual men among a sample of over 200 heterosexual men and women. Using an experimental method to examine differences in attitudes toward a variety of relationship pairings (bisexual man dating a man, bisexual man dating a woman, heterosexual man dating a woman, gay man dating a man), researchers found that bisexual men overall were viewed as significantly more likely to be more indecisive and confused, less likely to maintain a long-term relationship, more likely to have had many previous relationships, and be more open to new experiences than heterosexual or gay men (Zivony & Lobel, 2014). Findings from a study by Armstrong and Reissing (2014), echoed these findings as well. The authors investigated attitudes of over 700 men and women towards casual sex, dating, and committed relationships with bisexual partners, and found that heterosexual men viewed bisexual women as more sexual adventurous and less likely to be monogamous than heterosexual women (Armstrong & Reissing, 2014).

Rust (1993) investigated beliefs about bisexual women among over 300 self-identified lesbians in order to ascertain the popularity and distribution of attitudes toward bisexual women.

Results indicated the most prevalent belief among lesbians was that bisexuality is used as a transitional identity, with 79% of lesbians believing a bisexual identity is more likely to be transitional than a lesbian identity. This is likely influenced by heterosexist assumptions as well as the experiences of 40% of respondents who identified themselves as bisexual in the past themselves (Rust, 1993). Results also indicated that 82% of respondents believed bisexuals found it easier to pass as heterosexual than lesbians do, and 65% believed they were more likely to pass as heterosexual. Over half the lesbian sample agreed that bisexual women are not committed to other women as much as lesbians are, and would abandon political movements toward equality when the “going got tough” (60% and 53%, respectively) (Rust, 1993). The author suggested that lesbian’s attitudes toward bisexual women are grounded in viewing bisexuality as a threat to lesbian politics due to the maintenance of relationships with men. If bisexual women’s identities and experiences are trivialized, and doubt is casted on their authentic existence, the threat is neutralized. Additionally, if bisexual women are viewed as likely to pass as heterosexual or abandon female partners for male partners when wishing to benefit from heterosexual privilege, they are then choosing heterosexual political interests over lesbian political interests (Rust, 1993). This idea is further based in the assumption of bisexuality as half heterosexual and half gay rather than a distinct and fluid sexuality (Diamond, 2008). Through such bi-negative attitudes related to lack of loyalty to same-gender partners, lesbians defuse a perceived potential for a political challenge among bisexual women (Rust, 1993), and thus further oppressing bisexuality.

The results of these studies indicate that there are significant differences in attitudes based on gender of the holder of attitudes, gender of the bisexual person, and gender of the bisexual person’s partner, in addition to their sexual orientation. Heterosexual men view bisexual

men much more negatively than bisexual women or even gay men. Likely, this is due to fear of perceived sexual advances from other men, which is further viewed as a threat to their masculinity (Eliason, 2000). Additionally, bisexual men may not be as readily visible as gay men, making them potentially more threatening (Eliason, 2000). Bisexual women, on the other hand, are perceived as more acceptable among heterosexual men, but with continued stereotypes that they are willing to engage in sexual encounters with multiple partners at the same time (Eliason, 2000). Within these assumptions lies an interplay between gender roles, gender expression, sexual orientation, and relational orientation. Heterosexism, sexism, and assumptions of monogamy work together to continue the varying experiences of oppression for bisexual individuals.

Within a relational context, institutional oppressive forces first influence bisexual individuals through relationship formation and disclosure timing. Due to pervasive bi-negative attitudes spanning across all sexual orientations, bisexual individuals often have difficulty finding potential partners. Feinstein and colleagues (2016) investigated associations between attitudes toward bisexuality and willingness to engage in romantic or sexual activities with bisexual individuals. Results indicated that more negative attitudes toward bisexuality were found to be associated with less willingness to engage in romantic and sexual relationships with a bisexual partner (Feinstein et al., 2016). Other studies support this concern among bisexual individuals, finding they experience bi-negative attitudes and microaggressions from potential male and female partners, causing them to feel restricted regarding who they could and could not date (Bradford, 2004; Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Li et al., 2013). Dating exclusion and hostility often seem to be interconnected; though some may view expressions of dating exclusion

from others as a helpful way to weed out potential negative or unsupportive partners (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014).

Participants in Li and colleagues (2013) and Bradford's (2004) studies emphasized the ongoing struggle with deciding to disclose. They discussed the difficulty of disclosing a bisexual identity in relationships, since it must happen in every relationship, which is not something that individuals of other sexual orientations experience. Further, participants reported that the decision to disclose to partners had implications for their ability to rely on supportive partners (Li et al., 2013), but were cautious regarding self-disclosure due to previous experiences of invalidation and denial of their identities (Bradford, 2004). That is, in order to reap the mental health benefits of having a supportive partner, disclosure of identity must be done, but they needed to understand if a partner might be accepting of their identity prior to disclosure (Li et al., 2013). Therefore, bisexual individuals may decide to delay disclosure until they began to understand the level of support they might receive from their partners (Li et al., 2013). Unfortunately, when disclosure occurs after the relationship has begun, partners may experience confusion, misunderstandings, conflicts, fears, and resentment (Bradford, 2004). The following section continues to explore the relational processes present within bisexual relationships once bisexual individuals have found a partner and disclosed their identity.

Relational Processes

Bi-erasure Through Monogamy

Despite preliminary evidence to suggest the presence of protective factors, relational involvement could serve as an additional stressor to the bisexual individual. Research indicates that there are widespread societal beliefs that bisexual relationships cannot be healthy or stable due to the stereotypes described above (Klesse, 2011). Beliefs in these stereotypes also can lead

to bi-negativity and bi-phobia, which encourage bisexual invisibility (Yoshino, 2000). One of the most common stereotypes of bisexual individuals is that they are uninterested or incapable of monogamy. Research indicates, however, that the majority of bisexual individuals prefer monogamous relationships (Anderson et al., 2015; Klesse, 2011; Toft & Yip, 2018). Further, Rust (1996) proposed that non-monogamy among bisexuals is not due to an inability to practice fidelity, but instead indicates a positive choice to value other forms of relationships that may be more fulfilling for some.

Bisexual invisibility is reinforced when bisexual individuals are partnered and in monogamous relationships, due to the assumption that the gender of a person's partner reflects the entirety of that person's sexual identity (Bradford, 2004; Johnston, 2015). That is, mononormativity in society leads to assumptions that an individual is attracted to only one gender, thus if a bisexual-identified woman is in a relationship with a woman, society assumes she is a lesbian. Conversely, if she is in a relationship with man, she is assumed to be heterosexual. This normative discourse results in the complete erasure of a bisexual identity, since the person is defined only by the gender of their partner (Rust, 2000c). Bisexual individuals in monogamous relationships might begin to feel trapped between erasure of their identity and easing the fears of their partners.

In a study by McLean (2004), who interviewed 60 bisexual men and women in Australia, participants reported the need to reconcile their bisexual identity with a desire for a committed relationship. As such, this reconciliation sometimes resulted in participation in non-monogamous relationships. In both monogamous and non-monogamous relationship structures, participants reported putting considerable time and effort into negotiating their relationships as well as demonstrating a significant commitment to trust, honesty, and communication in their

relationships. Participants also expressed the intention to ensure both partners' needs and desires were met within the relationship. Participants highlighted the difference between non-monogamy and infidelity, considering the amount of effort put into negotiating the terms of such relationships. Participants expressed a deep commitment to communicating about any jealousies or insecurities that arose. These findings suggest that bisexual individuals are indeed capable of healthy, committed relationships, which may or may not be monogamous.

For bisexual partners choosing monogamous relationships, maintaining visibility can be challenging, especially if their partners hold negative beliefs about bisexuality. Being visible, however, is reported as an important aspect of their identities (Campbell et al., 2017; Hartman-Linck, 2014). Some research has explored ways in which bisexual individuals remain visible in monogamous relationships. In order to maintain an active bisexual identity, participants in a study by Hartman-Linck (2014) employed a variety of displays. These included intellectual study (such as taking classes on sexuality or reading books about bisexuality), finding desire and eroticism of everyday life through fantasy and role-plays, and creating a bisexual space in the home. While these displays may go unrecognized by others, participants indicated the displays still function as a way to feel an authentic connection to their identities.

Campbell and colleagues (2017) also found that participants actively sought to keep their identities visible in their monogamous relationships. As a result, participants used several techniques to keep their bisexuality visible in relationships. These included talking about bisexuality and the importance of their identity in their relationships, correcting misunderstandings about identities with others, and advocating for bisexual people and their inclusion in various contexts. Participating in a bisexual community as well as the larger LGBTQ+ communities also were reported as important to increasing visibility.

Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction, sometimes referred to as relationship quality, generally refers to a wide variety of constructs that play a part in romantic relationships, causing partners to feel varying levels of fulfillment in the relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Several constructs that are often thought of in relation to relationship satisfaction are: (a) happiness in the relationship or with a partner; (b) level of agreement on how to spend time together; (c) how partners make decisions; (d) how and when to show affection; (e) feelings of connection and warmth with partners; (f) communication; (g) meeting each other's needs; (h) meeting expectations of roles; (i) enjoying each other's company; and (j) trust (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Funk & Rogge, 2007; Hendrick, 1988). Relationship satisfaction in bisexual relationships is an understudied area of research. However, there are a few studies on bisexual relationships more generally that are worth highlighting for their groundbreaking investigations into the dynamics of such relationships.

Perales and Baxter (2018) conducted a study to compare relationship quality among heterosexual, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in Australia and the United Kingdom. Results indicated that bisexual people reported the lowest relationship quality among all of the groups in both countries, and the differences were greater in Australia than in the UK. Bisexual women in relationships with heterosexual men reported the lowest relationship quality in Australia. Bisexual women in the UK partnered with heterosexual men also reported decreased relationship quality, but not as significantly as bisexual men in relationships with heterosexual women (Perales & Baxter, 2018). The researchers of this study, however, did not investigate the factors associated with levels of relationship satisfaction. Other researchers suggest some of these factors may include configurations of roles among and between partners.

Through qualitative analysis, Lahti (2015) investigated how five bisexual women and their partners use discourses of romantic love, using Foucauldian discourse analysis. Due to the variety in couple pairings (two partners with men, two partners with women, and one partnered with a transman), no one clear bisexual couple discourse emerged, which is consistent with other literature (Campbell et al., 2017). Findings indicated that female partners' bisexuality did not define the relationship, and instead, couples sought to make their relationships intelligible through engaging in the discourse of the enduring couple relationship. Through this discourse, participants aligned with their respective hetero/homo/trans distinctions based on the gender of their partners. Aligning in this way fit within the discourse of romantic love, along with the assumption of monogamy. While this appeared to be an easy alignment influenced by heteronormativity and mononormativity, participants engaged in frequent negotiations around their relational discourse with questions such as: Is our relationship traditional or equal? Are we similar or different? Do gender and bisexuality play a role in the relationship or not? Through such negotiations, couples invested in an equal relationship in order to avoid traditional gender hierarchies (Lahti, 2015).

Instead of complete bi-erasure within these relationships, bisexuality presented itself as the "imaginary third" (Lahti, 2015). This refers to the ambiguous presence of bisexuality within the relationship that gives space for the possibility of experimentation beyond the traditional monogamous boundaries. Participants in the study discussed the possibility of exploring beyond the boundary, thus making bisexuality visible. But, the threat of such exploration to the enduring relationship discourse, thus losing one's partner, led to avoidance of the topic and continued ambivalence (Lahti, 2015). In these relationships, bisexuality is neither visible or invisible. The liminal space of bisexuality in relationships, as suggested by Lahti (2015), may contribute to

relationship quality and satisfaction for bisexual couples. It is unclear, however, in which direction, and likely is dependent on other variables, such as perceived bi-negativity and mononormativity.

Any stereotypes held by partners of bisexual individuals also could negatively impact relational dynamics of bisexual couples. Further, stereotypes held by partners of bisexual individuals can destabilize relationship values, such as trust and commitment (Bradford, 2004), leading to jealousy and fear of rejection at a later time (Klesse, 2011). Stereotypes regarding bisexuality, including hypersexuality and non-monogamy, have been reported among bisexual individuals as a method of control in abusive relationships (Head & Milton, 2014). Head and Milton (2014) investigated the experiences of intimate partner abuse among 10 bisexual individuals. The majority of participants reported being forced into non-monogamous relationships or multiple-partner sexual activity. Partners of the bisexual participants also used biphobia to control the bisexual participants through threats of disclosure as a form of punishment (Head & Milton, 2014).

Li and colleagues (2013) also highlighted the issues that can arise in bisexual relationships due to stereotypes. Participants shared experiences in which partners believed they were more likely to cheat because they are bisexual. Further, the lack of trust extended to beliefs that bisexual partners would leave the relationship to be with someone of a different sex than the non-bisexual partner, which was interpreted as a more negative experience than being left for someone of the same sex as the non-bisexual partner. Bisexual women reported several experiences of being objectified by male partners, who made them feel as though their bisexuality was for their partners sexual benefit.

In a study investigating bisexual women's experiences with bi-negativity in romantic relationships, DeCapua (2017) interviewed 10 women in same- and different-sex relationships. Results indicated that women in all relationships were made to feel their bisexual identity was invalid. Partners would ignore the bisexual identity label or refer to bisexuality as a phase. Partners also expressed fears and insecurities about other sexes. Female partners worried more about bisexual partners cheating with males, while male partners were more worried about bisexual partners cheating with females.

Other factors influencing relationship satisfaction for bisexual couples also may include emotional expression. Suppression of emotional expression has been found to decrease relationship satisfaction among heterosexual couples (Vater & Schröder-Abé, 2015). For bisexual couples, suppression of emotional expression might likely include reactions to bi-phobia and bi-erasure, both within and outside of the relationship. Expressions considered to be microaggressions within the relationship likely decrease relationship satisfaction, while expression of support in the midst of microaggressions might increase satisfaction. On the other hand, if a partner of a bisexual individual suppresses expression during microaggression experiences from outside the relationship, relationship satisfaction is likely to decrease. More research on reactions to bi-phobia and bi-erasure in bisexual relationships is needed to understand this process further.

In addition to emotional expression, understanding and support in bisexual relationships is likely to effect relationship satisfaction. In a study of heterosexual couples, perceived understanding from partners appeared to serve as a mediating factor between conflict and relationship satisfaction (Gordon & Chen, 2016). Participants who felt understood by their partners experienced more conflict resolution as well as higher relationship satisfaction. Partner

support also has been shown to be inversely associated with depressive symptoms as well as increased relationship satisfaction for many couples (Cramer, 2004). Among bisexual individuals, understanding and support likely includes an understanding and acceptance of their sexual identity.

Lastly, the negative effect of bi-negativity on a bisexual person's mental health likely has an influence on the relationship. Otis, Riggle, and Rostosky (2006) investigated the impact of mental health on relationship satisfaction among a sample of 45 female same-sex couples. Using dyadic analyses, the authors found that poor individual mental health was associated with lower levels of intimacy and overall relationship satisfaction among female same-sex couples (Otis et al., 2006). Further, mental health of both partners impacted each partners' perceptions of relationship satisfaction. These findings suggest the impact minority stress experiences of bisexual individuals impact their partners, and thus their overall relationship satisfaction.

Summary

The rise in research on bisexuality over the past two decades has provided a wealth of information on the experiences of bisexual individuals. Still, there is yet to be research conducted on several aspects of bisexuality. As the research above highlights, there are significant gaps in understanding relational dynamics for those bisexual individuals in relationships. Specifically, there is very little research on relationship satisfaction in bisexual couples. While several studies investigated attitudes regarding bisexuality, there is a gap in the literature examining the impact such attitudes have on relationship satisfaction. Methodologically, there is a need for a relational understanding of the complex processes that unfold between bisexual partners. The present study sought to fill a gap in the literature. Specifically, this study investigated the impact of attitudes regarding bisexuality on relationship satisfaction within female same-gender relationships. The

qualitative dyadic design captured the complexity of bisexual relationships using symbolic interaction theory and minority stress theory, which will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

To investigate the impact of attitudes regarding bisexuality on relationship satisfaction, I used an integrated framework of symbolic interaction theory and minority stress theory. In this chapter, I will provide an overview of each theory and an explanation of how they separately contribute to the conceptualization of aspects of the current study. I will then provide a discussion of how the integrated framework guides the entirety of this research.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interaction theory is used by researchers to explain how interactional processes produce meaning (Blumer, 1969). Rooted in pragmatism, this theory looks at the process by which humans practically define a variety of objects, which refer to ideas, roles, social norms, behaviors, or actions (Blumer, 1969). The self also is considered an object (Longmore, 1998). Therefore, we are constantly creating and re-creating our own meanings and definitions through our perceptions of interactions, events, and situations (Blumer, 1969). As LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) stated, symbolic interactionism “is a frame of reference for understanding how humans, in concert with one another, create symbolic worlds and how these worlds, in turn, shape human behavior” (p. 136).

For this study, I will employ Sheldon Stryker’s (1980) structural symbolic interaction perspective. While Blumer (1969) viewed individuals as having more agency regarding the impact of society on the self, Stryker (1959) viewed the self and society as having a reciprocal relationship. That is, meanings and interactions involved in social processes lead to relatively stable processes, creating and upholding social structures from which society emerges (Carter & Fuller, 2016; Stryker, 2008). Society, however, also exists prior to the existence of nearly all

human beings. Thus, society shapes the “self” which, in turn, shapes social interaction creating a cycle of meaning-making interactions (Stryker, 2008).

Styker (2008) also posited that “society is composed of organized systems of interactions and role relationships and as complex mosaics of differentiated groups, communities, and institutions, cross-cut by a variety of demarcations based on class, age, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.” (p. 19). Individuals engage in various social relationships based on their backgrounds and resources; however, such engagement is regulated through social boundaries that create structures (Stryker, 2008). Structures on a large scale include race, gender, class, age, ethnicity, and presumably sexual orientation. Examples of intermediate structures include neighborhoods, schools, and associational memberships, which are thought to shape the content and organization of the “self” (Stryker, 2008). Large scale structures, such as heteronormativity, are thought to operate through intermediate structures, such as marital laws, to affect relationships in social networks (Stryker, 2008). Bisexual individuals’ sense of self, then, is shaped through interactions with both intermediate and large-scale structural boundaries, which often negate the validity of a bisexual identity leading to bi-erasure.

Assumptions and Key Concepts

Symbolic interaction theory rests on several assumptions. LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) conceptualized seven assumptions across three themes. The first theme stresses the importance of meanings for human behavior, the second theme is focused on the development and importance of self-concept, and the third theme investigates the relationship between individual autonomy and societal constraint. In this section, I will expand on each of these assumptions using key concepts as they relate to the current study.

Meanings for behavior. The first assumption underlying this theme in symbolic interaction theory is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings things have for them (Blumer, 1969). Through the use of language and symbols, individuals communicate with others to create these meanings, which aids in the second assumption that meanings arise in the process of interaction between people (Blumer, 1969; Carter & Fuller, 2016). Symbols refer to the shared interpretations individuals commonly respond to (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Interactions, therefore, refers to the verbal and nonverbal actions individuals engage in to communicate with others (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). The third assumption is that meanings are created and recreated through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with things they encounter (Blumer, 1969).

Self-concept. Under the second theme that focuses on the development and importance of self-concept, LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) listed two assumptions: (a) individuals are not born with a sense of self, rather they develop self-concepts through social interactions; and (b) after self-concepts are developed, they provide an important motive for behavior. Self-concept is defined as a composite of the various identities, self-evaluations, attitudes, beliefs, values, and motives individuals use to conceive of themselves (Longmore, 1998). Roles, which are behavioral expectations and meanings that are attached to positions within the social structure, become internalized by individuals, and also aid in building the “self” (Stryker, 1980). Since expectations of roles may vary across social settings, individuals use symbolic cues from previous experiences or normative expectations based on the generalized other to assess potential actions. Therefore, roles can be used to predict behavior in individuals in certain social categories (Stryker, 1980).

Given there are several positions individuals hold within their social structures, there also are several roles they hold as well. Role conflict can occur when the expectations attached to the social positions contradict one another (Stryker, 1980). For instance, Stryker (1980) gave several instances in which role conflict may occur:

Such expectations may call for incompatible performances; they may require that one hold two norms or values which logically call for opposing behaviors; or they may demand that one role necessitates the expenditure of time and energy such that it is difficult or even impossible to carry out the obligations of another role. (p. 73).

While role conflict can be difficult to navigate, Stryker (1980) insisted that this be viewed as a normal result of a complex social structure, in which there are overlapping as well as independent networks of interaction. Role strain, or the difficulty fulfilling role obligations and expectations, similarly is a normal process (Stryker, 1980).

Another concept aiding in an individual's self-concept is identity, which is the internalized expectations and meanings an individual takes on (Stryker, 1980). Just as there are several roles a person performs, individuals also claim several identities. The number of identities individuals claim directly corresponds to the number of roles that a person participates in (Stryker, 1980). It is important to differentiate identity from roles, however, as they are separate constructs. While roles refers to a set of expectations based on social positions, the internalization of those expectations is referred to identity (Stryker, 2008). Depending on the situation, individuals arrange their identities hierarchically in order of importance, which is known as identity salience (Stryker, 1980). Identities and roles, then, work together to form the complex idea of the "self" (Stryker, 1980).

Charles Horton Cooley (1902) created the concept of the looking-glass self, which refers to how an individual's sense of self is based on beliefs about how they are perceived by significant others. The concept of significant other indicates that there are certain people in an individual's social structures whose perspectives occupy a greater importance to the individual (Stryker, 1959). There are three steps involved in the looking-glass self. In the first step, individuals imagine how they are perceived by others. Then, individuals interpret others' reactions to their interactions with them. In the third step, individuals use the interpretations from step two to develop a self-concept (Cooley, 1902).

Societal influence. The third theme highlighted by LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) investigated the relationship between individual autonomy and societal constraints. The two corresponding assumptions under this theme include: (a) individuals and small groups are influenced by larger cultural and societal processes; (b) individuals formulate the details of social structure through social interaction in everyday situations.

Mead (1934) asserted that individuals present different "selves" to others based on the context of the situation. Goffman (1959) expanded on this idea, arguing that individuals attempt to control the impression that others try to form of them, which is referred to as impression management. Behaviors can be manipulated based on the audience and the impression individuals are trying to achieve (Goffman, 1959). Individuals with partners could behave differently separately than they do together, or they could behave differently as a couple in private spaces than they do in public.

Hochschild (1979) argued that individuals engage in emotion work to ensure the feelings they are expressing are appropriate for the given situation. Since social norms dictate which emotions are appropriate and when, individuals must actively produce and manage their

emotions. Emotion work refers to the act and effort of managing and shaping emotions without focus on the success of an outcome. Hochschild (1979) discussed two types of emotion work: evocation and suppression. Evocation is the act of bringing cognitive focus is directed to an initially absent feeling that is desired, while suppression is the act of bringing cognitive focus to an initially present feeling that is undesired (Hochschild, 1979). Hochschild (1979) suggested that emotion work can be done by the self upon the self or others, and by others upon the self. I suggest also that emotion work can be done by the self *with* and *for* others.

Three techniques of emotion work include cognitive, bodily, and expressive. Cognitive emotion work focuses on the attempts to change thoughts, ideas, or images in order to change the feelings associated with them. Bodily emotion work includes attempts to change the physical or somatic symptoms of an emotion. Expressive emotion work includes attempts to change the gestures associated with inner feelings. While separate techniques, they often are utilized at the same time (Hochschild, 1979).

Strengths and Criticisms

There are several strengths of symbolic interactionism. The first is that it is among the most influential family theories. LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) argued that symbolic interactionism has had the most impact on the study of families over any other theoretical framework. While considered a classical theory, symbolic interactionism continues to hold relevance for contemporary issues in the field of family science (Allen & Henderson, 2017). Symbolic interactionism also is easily integrated with other theories and is often used to supplement other theoretical frameworks that do not adequately account for the micro perspective (Allen & Henderson, 2017). Finally, this theory provides the foundation for research that seeks to

understand how individuals interact and make meaning in the world through both qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Allen & Henderson, 2017; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

There also are several criticisms of symbolic interactionism. The first criticism is that symbolic interactionists downplay the impact of economic and institutional inequality and discrimination (Allen & Henderson, 2017; Longmore, 1998; Stryker, 1980). Such external factors often do not allow individuals the power to determine their reality as much as this theory suggests. Symbolic interactionism is an adaptable theory, therefore often viewed as too flexible and only a loose collection of concepts rather than a formal, testable theory since the concepts are difficult to operationalize (Allen & Henderson, 2017; Longmore, 1998). Lastly, an early criticism suggests that this theory does not adequately take into account the emotional impact on behavior. However, several theorists have incorporated the role of emotion in creating meaning from interactions into the overall theoretical framework (Cooley, 1902; Hochschild, 1979).

Application to the Current Study

Symbolic interaction theory is an appropriate framework for several aspects of the current study. There is evidence to suggest the applicability of this framework both theoretically and methodologically. Several assumptions and key concepts can be used to effectively explain the processes that will be investigated in this study. Additionally, symbolic interactionists have addressed the methods that can be used to research such concepts (Blumer, 1969; Carter & Fuller, 2016). The following is a discussion of the suitability of symbolic interaction theory for the current study.

Theoretically, symbolic interaction theory allows the researcher to investigate the processes by which couples or families create a shared meaning of the world, along with the various contexts that can impact the creation of such shared meanings (LaRossa & Reitzes,

1993). In this study, couple processes involved in making meaning of the impact of attitudes regarding bisexuality on relationship satisfaction will be explored.

Symbolic interactionists recognize that sexuality, specifically sexual orientation, is a social construction. That is, people learn about sexual behaviors and how to interpret sexual behavior in cultural contexts (Longmore, 1998). Several misconceptions regarding sexual behavior among bisexual individuals exists within society. Specific social organizations provide varying degrees of such messages, largely indicating that bisexuality is not accepted. For example, individuals belonging to ethnic minority subgroups or religious affiliations often experience bi-negativity from within those social organizations (Brooks, Inman, Malouf, Klinger, & Kaduvetoor, 2008; Jeffries, Dodge, & Sandfort, 2008).

Minority Stress Theory

Minority stress theory is the second theory used in this study, primarily to conceptualize the unique stressors faced by individuals with minority statuses. Before discussing the application of minority stress theory to the current study, I will discuss the major assumptions and key concepts in relation to several aspects of the issues addressed in the current study.

Assumptions and Key Concepts

The primary assumption held by minority stress theorists is that any minority status is a stressor (Brooks, 1981). Minority stress is defined as the psychosocial stress derived from minority status (Brooks, 1981). Like other minority groups, sexual minorities experience chronic stress related to the stigmatization of their identities (Meyer, 1995). Stressors is a term that refers to an antecedent agent or situation that originates from various sources and requires a system to adapt or readjust (Brooks, 1981). Stress, then, is the state between the antecedent and the readjustment or adaptation (Brooks, 1981). Meyer (2003) extended the concept of stressors to

include proximal and distal stressors. Proximal stressors are the subjective processes related to self-identity, which vary in the social and personal meanings that are attached to them and the stress they entail (Meyer, 2003). Examples of proximal stressors include expectations of rejection, concealment of identity, and internalized homophobia. Distal stressors refer to objective events and conditions that do not depend on an individual's perceptions (Meyer, 2003). Examples of distal stressors include prejudice events of discrimination or experiences of violence.

Minority stress is considered to be unique, chronic, and socially based. That is, minority stress is experienced in addition to other, more general stressors, which requires minority people to put forth more adaptational effort than those in majority groups (Meyer, 2003). Minority stress also is connected to fairly stable underlying social and cultural structures, leading to consistent and persistent issues for minority individuals (Meyer, 2003). In addition to stemming from these structures, minority stress develops out of social processes and institutions beyond the individual, such as heteronormativity and mononormativity. General stressors, on the other hand, often derive from individual events or conditions, or the biological, genetic, or other non-social characteristics of a person or group (Meyer, 2003).

Meyer (1995) posited that the three processes of minority stress are internalized homophobia, perceived stigma, and actual prejudice events. Internalized homophobia refers to an individual holding negative societal attitudes towards the self. Perceived stigma refers to an individual holding expectations of rejection and discrimination. Prejudice events under this theory refers to specific experiences of discrimination and physical, mental, or emotional violence (Meyer, 1995). Each process has been found to predict psychological distress in sexual

minorities, and the combined effect of all three has been found to increase the psychological distress (Meyer, 1995).

Minority stress can be multiplicative if an individual holds multiple minority statuses. Hayes, Chun-Kennedy, Edens, and Locke (2011) found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual students of color reported more distress than heterosexual students of color, who in turn reported more distress than White heterosexual students. Similarly, Sung, Szymanski, and Henrichs-Beck (2015) found that Asian American lesbian and bisexual women reported additional stress in both their sexual orientation and racial communities. The work of these scholars suggests that sexual minority stress has a multiplicative effect of stress for people of color.

Minority stress is often associated with in negative mental health outcomes for individuals (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009; Mereish et al., 2017; Meyer, 1995; Meyer, 2003). In order to decrease the negative impact of minority stressors, individuals often attempt to engage in coping processes. Coping is the psychological process that allows one to manage current stressors (Brooks, 1981). Minority group members often cope with minority stressors by maintaining strong community connections, which is known as minority group coping (Meyer, 2003). However, this can be difficult for members who hold multiple minority statuses as described above, since they can feel as though there is no reprieve from the stressors associated with their minority statuses depending on the group they may be connected to. Finding a community that fits the exact intersection of an individual's identity can be challenging. For bisexual individuals, a strong community connection is similarly difficult to find, since both heterosexual and lesbian/gay communities often hold bi-negative attitudes towards bisexuality (Callis 2013; Klesse, 2011; McLean, 2008a). Depending on the geographical location, finding a bisexual-specific community is next to impossible (Dodge et al., 2012), which can lead to

bisexual individuals unable to engage in minority group coping to buffer against the negative effects of minority stressors. Fortunately, advancements in technology have allowed for online communities to form that can provide bisexual individuals some form of minority group coping remotely (Maliepaard, 2017).

Application to the Current Study

Minority stress theory is particularly applicable to the current study, given the emphasis on the impact stressors faced by individuals with minority statuses have on individual and relational functioning. The minority stress model has been used in several research studies on sexual orientation broadly (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Dyar, Feinstein, & London, 2015; Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009), as well as on bisexuality specifically (Belmonte & Holmes, 2016; Dyar et al., 2014; Flanders et al., 2016; Johnson, 2016). In fact, Feinstein and Dyar (2017) claimed that minority stress has been the predominant theory used to investigate issues related to bisexuality. Several studies suggest bisexual individuals experience unique minority stress experiences (Feinstein & Dyar, 2017; Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009, Mereish et al., 2017). Results of a study that surveyed over 800 lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals across the nation, conducted by Lewis, Derlega, Brown, Rose, & Henson (2009), further suggested that bisexual individuals likely experience more proximal stressors than distal stressors. The bisexual participants reported more internalized biphobia and concealed their identity more often than lesbian and gay participants. Further bisexual participants reported less stress related to experiences of discrimination and violence than lesbian and gay participants (Lewis et al., 2009).

In addition to the minority stress impact on individual outcomes, recent research suggests that relationships also can be impacted. Elder, Morrow, and Brooks (2015) suggested that when

couples are bonded, conjoint coping of external minority stress can bring potentially strengthen the relationship. On the other hand, Kamen, Burns, and Beach (2011) found that relationship satisfaction in same-sex male relationships was impacted by the minority stress of discrimination, moderated by trust and commitment. That is, for couples who experienced frequent discrimination, decreased trust predicted decreased relationship satisfaction (Kamen et al., 2011). Further, for couples who reported low levels of internalized heterosexism, increased commitment predicted increased satisfaction (Kamen et al., 2011). Other factors, such as gender, also could mediate the psychological distress of minority stressors. Molina and colleagues (2015) found that poorer mental health outcomes were reported among bisexual females with single-male partners than those partnered with a single female. While the research focused on the impact of minority stress on relationship satisfaction is limited and somewhat conflicting, the studies highlighted here provide evidence for the relationship between minority stress and relationship satisfaction. The current study will add to the body of research on the relationship between minority stress, conceptualized as attitudes regarding bisexuality, and relationship satisfaction.

My Integrative Theoretical Framework

Symbolic interaction theory and minority stress theory converge to help frame the current study in several ways. As a theory specializing in micro-level perspectives of individuals and relationships, symbolic interactionism provides a framework for understanding individual and relational meaning-making processes. Minority stress theory provides the bridge from micro- to macro-level perspectives. Using the model developed by Meyer (2003), Figure 1, Integrated Theoretical Model, shows the integration of symbolic interactionism concepts with minority stress theory to explain the theoretical understanding guiding the proposed study.

As can be seen in Figure 1, general stressors resulting from circumstances in the environment are still accounted for in the impact on relationship satisfaction, as indicated by box (a) and (c). Box (c) accounts for minority statuses in relation to sexual orientation, race, and gender. Gender of partner is also included here since bisexual individuals communicate a minority status when partnered with the same gender. Minority status alone leads to experiences of both distal stressors [box (d)] and proximal stressors [box (f)], and can impact interactions with others [box (e)]. In the context of romantic relationships, bisexual individuals who are partnered with heterosexual-identified individuals could experience distal stressors of discrimination and violence from such partners. The very state of being a sexual minority in such relationships may trigger partners to act on potential heterosexist or homophobic beliefs. Such beliefs are created through an individual's interactions with society. If heterosexual-identified partners of bisexual individuals are influenced by social norms, cultures, and institutional structures that provide negative messages about sexual minorities, they may likely ascribe negative meanings to such identities, leading to homophobic or heterosexist ideals.

Depending on the situation and context, individuals engage in impression management and emotion work to varying degrees. The interactions one has with others then leads to proximal stressors, as well as impacts the creation of shared meanings highlighted in box (g), self-concept [box (h)], and coping strategies [box (j)]. Often, bisexual individuals anticipate rejection not only from heterosexual partners simply because they are a sexual minority, but also from other sexual minority partners based on interactions they have with the larger sexual minority community (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014). Some bisexual individuals avoid disclosure of their sexual minority identities because of the negative reactions they have experienced in the past (Bradford, 2004), which is conceptualized as impression management.

Individuals with multiple minority statuses may be particularly likely to use impression management, as they may feel the need to conceal their identities depending on the community with whom they are interacting (Lewis et al., 2009).

Managing impressions of bisexual identities, deciding whether or not to disclose, can have a significant impact on a couples' shared meaning regarding bisexuality as well as on the bisexual individual's self-concept. Negative reactions from others can lead to individuals ascribing a negative meaning to their self-concept and identities (Meyer, 1995; Stryker, 1959), which can in turn affect interactions with others. Interactions, meaning making, and self-concept, therefore, create a feedback loop that also impacts stressors, coping, and outcomes. Self-concept can also moderate the impact of stressors on outcomes [box (k)]. The original minority stress model conceptualized characteristics of identity [box (i)] to include prominence, valence, and integration of identity (Meyer, 2003). In symbolic interactionism terms, this refers to identity salience, which uses all aspects of an individual's self-concept to determine the hierarchical structure of the "self".

A couples' shared meanings regarding bisexuality likely impacts their ability to cope with both proximal and distal stressors. Each partner in a bisexual relationship will have their separate attitudes regarding bisexuality. Depending on the difference of attitudes as well as the interactions within and outside the relationship, couples as a unit may utilize different strategies to manage the impact of attitudes regarding bisexuality on relationship satisfaction. If such strategies indicate a maladaptation to stressors, individuals can begin to or further question their identities (Brooks, 1981; Carter & Fuller, 2016).

Chapter Four: Methods

In this study, I investigated the impact of self and partner attitudes regarding bisexuality on relationship satisfaction among female same-gender couples with the following research questions:

RQ1: How, if at all, do the attitudes toward bisexuality of individual partners influence perceptions of relationship satisfaction?

RQ2: How do partners negotiate the influence of attitudes toward bi-sexuality on their relationship?

In this chapter, I will discuss the study design and qualitative approach used to develop a process model of couple negotiations around the impact of bi-negativity on relationship satisfaction. I will present the overarching qualitative study design first, followed by a description of the participants. Lastly, I will discuss the analyses conducted that led to the formation of the study model.

Initial Study Design

Initially, I intended to answer the above research questions using a partially mixed sequential dominant design (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). With this methodology, I intended to first obtain quantitative data from couple dyads in order to conduct several dyadic-level analyses to determine the effect attitudes regarding bisexuality have on relationship satisfaction. Then, I planned to use this data to inform the dominant phase of the study, qualitative interviewing. The initial study design first recruited participants to complete the survey then indicate their interest in dyadic interviews. Thus, the sample for the qualitative phase was a sub-sample from the larger quantitative sample.

I actively focused on several recruitment efforts, with the help of five master's-level students, for a total of six months in several locations across the country. These efforts resulted in a total of only sixteen couples completing the full survey. In consultation with my advisors, and based on the efforts taken to increase recruitment, we made the decision to focus solely on the qualitative portion for this dissertation project. This decision was in line with my primary interest in the study broadly, as well as the original qualitative dominant mixed method design. The purpose of the study remained unaltered: investigating how partner attitudes may have an influence on relationship satisfaction among female same-gender couples, with a specific focus on the process of how couples negotiate that potential influence.

Grounded Theory

Constructivism is a paradigm grounded in the belief that reality is socially constructed through various experiences and variables (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, 1994; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). This paradigm aligns with the integrated theoretical frameworks of Symbolic Interactionism and Minority Stress. Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) was developed as a critical approach to move away from positivism and toward an approach that acknowledges the role of the observer/researcher. According to Charmaz (2014), the researcher co-constructs the data alongside the participants.

Given that relational processes are largely dependent on the constructed realities of each partner, this approach is appropriate for the current study. Further, my research questions focus on an interest in gaining an understanding of the processes couples utilize to negotiate the influence of attitudes regarding bisexuality on relationship satisfaction, which indicates a grounded theory approach (Burck, 2005; Charmaz, 2000; Daly, 2007). Using constructivist

grounded theory allowed for multiple perspectives to inform a theory regarding relational processes in bisexual relationships.

Participants and Recruitment

Recruitment

Rust (2008) suggests that researchers use a combination of strategies when recruiting bisexual participants. This is due to issues related to the definition of bisexuality, so I employed a variety of strategies based on the definition of interest in the study. Such strategies for bisexual populations should include bi-specific communities (local, national, online), snowball sampling, and respondent-driven sampling (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2013; Dodge, Reece, & Gebhard, 2008; Rust, 2008). In the current study, I recruited participants using purposeful sampling strategies, which involves selecting information-rich cases for in-depth analysis (Patton, 1990). Specifically, I used snowball sampling, which is a sampling method that utilizes participants to identify other potential participants who may also provide information-rich cases (Patton, 1990).

Recruitment information was disseminated through local LGBTQ+ organizations (e.g., local university groups and city organized groups, such as Parents and Friends for Lesbians and Gays), as well as on bisexual-specific internet group sites (e.g., binetusa.org, bisexual.org, biresource.org), general university areas and community organizations on two campuses, through organizational listservs (such as National Council on Family Relations and American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy), and through social media groups for sexual minority individuals. In order to establish rapport and trust I engaged with several recruitment sites and organizations prior to requesting permission to advertise. I included my contact information on recruitment materials so that potential participants could contact me directly. The

recruitment flyer and letter are provided in Appendix A (Recruitment Flyer) and B (Recruitment Letter), respectively. Prior to recruitment, this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) through Western Institutional Review Board, Virginia Tech IRB, and University of Nevada Las Vegas IRB.

Inclusion criteria

Eligibility for the study required that participants identify as female in a monogamous, same gender relationship lasting six months or more with both partners 18 years of age and older and fluent in the English language. Additionally, at least one partner needed to self-identify as bisexual or find the label “bisexual” meaningful to their identities. Some bisexual couples are non-monogamous, but this study only included those in monogamous relationships. Separate analyses of each of these relationships is needed as they likely have unique experiences from that of non-monogamous or polyamorous relationships (Parsons, Starks, DuBois, Grov, & Golub, 2013).

Sample Demographics

There was a total of 58 recorded responses to the initial survey, of which 50 respondents provided a couple ID and a total of 32 respondents (16 couples) completed the full survey. Twenty-six respondents provided contact information in order to be contacted for participation in the interview. The final sample included eight couples. The sample overall was young, with age ranges between 19 and 34 ($M = 24.2$). Questions regarding race, sexual orientation and religion were open-ended, allowing them to write in their responses. The sample was predominantly White ($n = 11$, 69%) and had at least some college education ($n = 12$, 75%). Three participants were Hispanic, one participant was mixed race, and one participant was indigenous to Australia. Couples had been together for a range of 1 to 13 years, with an average length of relationship of

3.4 years. One participant was the primary guardian of her niece and nephew, but the remainder of couples did not have children. The majority of participants reported incomes between \$0-\$29,999 ($n = 14$) and were currently university students ($n = 11$). Table 1, Sample Demographics, displays the demographic information of the sample.

Data Collection

Recruited participants were provided with a link to the initial survey through recruitment materials, which also provided information about the study as required by the IRB including the study purpose, participant expectations, potential benefits and risks of involvement, and contact information for myself, my co-advisors, and both Virginia Tech IRB and Western IRB. Before participants began the survey, they were prompted to read the informed consent (Appendix C: Informed Consent) and agree to participate in the study. Each partner completed the survey separately and provided their own individual consent to participate.

Participants were then asked to complete screening questions that ensure they met inclusion criteria. Participants who either did not provide consent or did not meet all inclusion criteria were directed to a page thanking them for their interest in the study. Each partner in the couple dyad were prompted to complete the survey separately and asked to provide a code unique to the couple at the beginning of the survey using an open text box. Couple codes were chosen and shared among the partner dyads so that responses could be linked. This approach allows for flexibility in obtaining survey data from partners (McEwan, 2013).

Following completion of the survey, participants were asked if they were interested in participating in follow-up interviews. Participants who indicated interest, were directed to a separate survey page to provide an email address and phone number to be used to contact them. Participants were given an opportunity to provide an email address using another separate survey

page to be entered into a drawing for one of two \$50 Amazon gift cards. The separate surveys ensured their contact information were stored separately from participant data. To combat fraudulent survey takers in the compensation survey, I used Captcha capabilities in Qualtrics. Drawing winners were selected at random at the end of data collection.

The survey consisted of demographic questions and four validated scales measuring the constructs of interest. Demographic questions included participants' age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, education, employment status, income, parental status, age of first disclosure, and time of disclosure to partner. The three validated measures included the Attitudes Regarding Bisexuality Scale- Female (ARBS-F) (Mohr & Rochlen, 1999), Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI-32) (Funk & Rogge, 2007), Continuum of Conflict and Control Relationship Scale (CCC-RS) (Carlson, Rogers, Wheeler, Kelchner, Griffith, & Liu, 2017), and the Transphobia Scale (Nagoshi, Adams, Terrell, Hill, Brzuzy, & Nagoshi, 2008). Each partner in the couple dyad completed the same survey separately. The survey is provided in Appendix D (Qualtrics Survey). The present study utilized the full CCC-RS in order to screen for violence and coercion prior to the interviews. Additionally, one question from the CSI-32 was utilized in the present study to facilitate discussions of relationship satisfaction in relationships.

Upon completing the online survey, participants were given the opportunity to indicate interest in qualitative interviews by providing contact information including phone numbers and email addresses. I contacted each participant who provided this information within one week of survey completion. At this initial contact, I discussed the aims of the qualitative interviews and gained consent via email to participate. If only one partner provided their contact information, I asked that partner to discuss participation in the interview stage with their partner and to provide me with the partner's contact information. If no contact occurred from the partner within one

week, I followed up with another email. Interviews were scheduled only when both partners provided consent via email to participate in the interview process.

Participants had the option of in-person interviews at the location of their choice or via a video conferencing platform of their choice (i.e., Skype, Google Hangouts). Online interviews have several considerations. Technology issues can be frustrating for participants and absenteeism is more common than in face-to-face interviews (Janghorban, Roudsari, & Taghipour, 2014). However, this method also offers several benefits. Participants can choose a location in which they are most comfortable, which likely increases honest responses. Conducting online interviews synchronously is cost-effective, flexible, and allows researchers to reach geographically distant participants (Janghorban et al., 2014). Seven of the eight couples completed the interviews online; three via Skype, three via Google Hangouts, and one via Discord. One couple completed the interview in person on a university campus. Prior to beginning the interview, participants were asked once more to separately review and agree to the informed consent via a Qualtrics survey solely designed for the purpose of the qualitative interview consent. Prior to the start of the interview, I ensured that each participant had separately agreed to participate.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the couple dyad and were recorded using an audio recorder owned by myself. The use of dyadic interviews is warranted in this study given the systemic processes in question. Conducting interviews with both partners present allowed for the relational processes to be displayed as well as discussed openly with all relevant members (Bjornholt & Farstad, 2012). Limitations of this interview format include the potential coercion and the possibility for conflict in interviews (Reczek, 2014). Similarly, dyadic interviews may result in a form of response bias in which participants wish to appear without

conflict, provide different responses than they might in an individual interview, and scheduling with multiple individuals can be difficult (Bjornholt & Farstad, 2012; Reczek, 2014). However, interviewing multiple individuals involved in any relational process avoids the risk of individual secrets being revealed to the researcher, which is a significant ethical concern (Bjornholt & Farstad, 2012).

To minimize the potential for significant conflict or tension, I reviewed participants' responses on the CCC-RS questions in the survey, designed to screen for controlling behaviors, prior to the interview. All participants reported no significant controlling behaviors in their relationship. Additionally, I purposefully used open ended questions directed at both partners, which Reczek (2014) indicates allows couples to provide a joint account of their experiences and tends to minimize conflict or disagreement in the interview. When minimal conflict arose during the interviews, I externalized the issue being discussed into the context of the larger societal factors influencing them. This is a suggestion given by Daly (2007) to diffuse the tension between the partners. Additionally, this is a technique that allows for the couple to refocus on answering the research questions. This was an appropriate strategy, as externalizing to societal factors fits into the scope of the research, and also allowed for me to observe any possible negotiations between the partners on the topic. All couples were able to redirect themselves to answering the interview questions and conflict did not escalate for any of the couple dyads.

The length of interviews lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours, with an average interview length of 1 hour and 15 minutes. The interview questions were informed by the research questions and the integrated theoretical framework, with an emphasis on the couple attitudes regarding bisexuality and the processes by which each partners' attitudes influence their perceptions of relationship satisfaction. The semi-structured interview protocol is provided in Appendix E

(Interview Schedule). Following the interview, each couple was provided compensation in the form of a \$25 Amazon gift card sent via email to the participant chosen by the couple.

Participants were asked if they would be willing to be contacted in the future for follow up questions or clarifications, and all provided verbal agreement.

While I exerted considerable attempts to continue to increase the diversity and size of the sample, these efforts were unsuccessful. However, the data yielded from the final sample began to show signs of saturation of ideas. Saturation is achieved when the collection of new data no longer sheds light on the phenomenon under investigation (Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Qualitative researchers recommend sample sizes of 15-50 people for grounded theory studies (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Creswell, Plano Clark, Guttman, & Hanson, 2003), but as Morse (1995) stated, “the quantity of data in a category is not theoretically important to the process of saturation. Richness of data is derived from detailed description, not the number of times something is stated” (p. 148). Thus, a specific sample size is not the goal in grounded theory studies. The present study included data from eight couples for a total of sixteen partners, who provided rich descriptions of their relational processes aimed at managing the influence of bi-negativity on relationship satisfaction. I also conducted follow up interviews with seven of the eight couples, which provided me with additional rich descriptions of specific processes in the couples’ relationships.

Data Analysis

The software MAXQDA 12.0 was used in this study to aid in organization of data and coding. All participant information, audio recordings, and transcriptions have been stored on a password-protected private computer. Recordings were transcribed by five master’s level students, whom I trained and provided specific directions on appropriate de-identification of the

transcriptions. Additionally, I provided directions regarding the formatting of the transcript to best capture the flow and dynamics of the conversation. Each transcriber was provided with a protocol document to assist them in the process.

Constructivist grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2014) informed analysis of the qualitative data. A three-step process was used to code the interviews, which follows the steps of the constant comparative method (Boeije, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Padgett, 1998). The first step consists of line-by-line, open coding (Charmaz 2014). In this step, I read through each line of the transcripts looking for meanings and actions associated with the topic and made notes in the margins regarding potential themes. I then created a table of initial codes in relation to the research questions. Additionally, I engaged in memo writing (Appendix G: Selected Memos and Member Check Meetings) to record my initial thoughts on the data. I discussed these initial themes with my advisors as well as master's-level students who assisted in transcribing the interviews.

Next, as initial themes began to emerge from the data and open coding, I moved to focused coding (Charmaz, 2014) to group initial codes into categories. In order to conceptualize which categories and subcategories were used in the final model, I utilized constant comparison methods within and across couple transcripts and created a map of emerging themes. Appendix H (Conceptual Phases) is my first conceptual map of initial codes and categories. After discussing this initial map with my advisors, I moved into theoretical coding, which further refined the categories and subcategories.

With the goal of discovering the processes couples use to manage bi-negativity on their relationship satisfaction, I used theoretical coding to develop a story for the ways in which the categories and subcategories related to one another (Charmaz, 2014). In the initial stages of

theoretical coding, I created a conceptual listing of categories by phases, which is displayed in Appendix I (Diagram Iterations). Additionally, I constructed a more extensive coding table that included all categories and subcategories for each couple dyad by phase, which assisted in identifying when partners discussed a focused code. Through engaging in several discussions with my advisors, I created diagrams with visual representations of an emerging process model. Appendix J displays the iterations of diagrams based on these discussions.

During this process, there were emerging themes that prompted collecting more data from participants. In order to obtain this data, I conducted follow up interviews with seven couples, using a brief semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix F: Follow-Up Interview Schedule) constructed with the assistance of my advisors. I obtained IRB approval of the follow up interview schedule prior to contacting the participants. One couple was unable to participate in the follow up interview. These interviews were intended to gain more information to test subcategories in a constant comparative manner. The majority of the questions required partners to retroactively report on aspects of their relationship. For example, each participant was asked to report their relationship satisfaction in the beginning of their relationship using the same scale they used in the survey. The transcripts from these interviews were analyzed using focused codes. The final process model includes a total of 23 subcategories that fit within 6 categories (Table 2: Typology of Categories and Subcategories by Participant and Couple). Descriptive quotes for each of these categories and subcategories are provided in Table 3 (Representative Quotes by Major Categories and Subcategories).

Rigor and Trustworthiness

I identify as a White, middle-class, educated, married, bisexual-identified female that is trained in marriage and family therapy. Each of these identities shape my own personal

understanding of bisexual relationship processes. My personal experiences provide me with unique insight into real-world issues, but they are only my own. As a systemic therapist, I am trained to recognize and investigate important relationship processes. In my role as a therapist, I routinely conduct research to provide best practices to my clients. I have found that there is an inadequate amount of research on the relational processes of bisexual couples. All of my roles and experiences have motivated me to choose this area of research for my scholarly career. Given my positionality, personal biases may likely to enter into the empirical process. Therefore, it is crucial that I use methodological strategies that maximize trustworthiness and rigor in my research.

Multiple strategies were used throughout the study to ensure rigor and trustworthiness. The combination of these strategies increases confidence in the findings. Peer debriefing (Guba, 1981), was utilized throughout the study to increase the credibility of findings (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1986), which involved engaging in discussions with individuals who have knowledge on the research topic, but are not involved in the research study (Lietz, Langer, and Furman, 2006). In the initial stages of the study, I met with a women's group at a city LGBT center to discuss the topic of bisexuality in relationships. These discussions provided me with insight regarding concepts of age and generational influences that aided in data analysis. I also consulted with colleagues and members of my dissertation committee regarding emerging themes and codes, as well as any methodological changes made. Questions and feedback from the peer debriefing team were recorded using an audit trail.

An audit trail is a method that increases the dependability of qualitative findings (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986). I also used the audit trail to record the decisions I made and tracked the steps of the study from start to finish. As mentioned above, memo writing was also

used during the coding process specifically to record the process by which data was analyzed (Charmaz, 2014). This approach is a mixture of textual, conceptual/theoretical, operational, and reflexive memos (Strauss, 1987). Both the audit trail and memos are separate documents securely stored along with participant data on a password protected computer owned by the researcher.

Lastly, I practiced reflexivity (Guba, 1981) throughout data collection and analysis using peer debriefing and memo writing. Reflexivity is described as “the ways in which a researcher critically monitors and understands the role of self in the research endeavor” (Daly, 2007, p. 188), and increases the confirmability of qualitative research. I examined my biases and assumptions regarding the population and phenomenon of interest by discussing them with peer debriefers and additionally through written self-reflection. I acknowledge my insider status as a bisexual female and was careful to allow my positionality to aid in the co-construction of the findings while also providing space for other ideas to emerge (Charmaz, 2014).

Chapter Five: Findings

In this chapter, I outline the findings of the study. The findings of this study are organized to reflect a grounded theory process model of four phases that bisexual couples move through in their relationships. Within each phase, the participants grapple with their own attitudes about bisexuality as well as their growing commitment to be in the relationship and to find satisfaction within it. The first two phases, pre-relationship factors and relationship formation, address the first research question: How, if at all, do the attitudes regarding bisexuality of individual partners influence perceptions of relationship satisfaction? The remaining two phases, relational emotion work and shared relational meaning, address the second research question: How do partners negotiate the influence of attitudes toward bisexuality on their relationship? In this chapter, I will first present an overview of the phases and how they relate with one another. Then, I will discuss the specific factors and processes of each phase. Lastly, I will discuss the macro-systemic oppressions that permeate processes occurring within each phase. Appendix J displays the prevalence of each category and subcategory across participants. Appendix K provides representative quotes for each category and subcategory.

Brief Overview of the Process Model: How Couples Move Through Phases

In this brief overview, I will outline the flow of the emerging process model, shown in Figure 2 (A Process Model of Relationship Satisfaction in Bisexual Intimate Relationships), by describing each of the phases and how participants move through them. The process model presented here highlights how bisexual females and their partners manage attitudes regarding bisexuality and negotiate their commitment to each other. Within the model, couples appear to move through four phases: three distinct relational phases that are first informed by a *pre-relational phase*. This pre-relational phase includes several factors influencing the development

of attitudes regarding bisexuality. Each partner individually formed their understanding of same-gender attractions and bisexuality through intrapsychic, interpersonal, and institutional factors, in addition to their sexual orientation identity development processes, disclosure experiences, and previous relationship experiences.

The first relational phase, *relationship formation*, was experienced concurrently with identity development and disclosure factors in the previous phase for half of the participants in this study. For the remainder of participants who were in same-gender relationships previously, these two phases were distinctly separate. The interaction of these factors influenced how partners entered their current relationships. In the relationship formation phase, couples encountered general relational stressors in addition to bi-negative insecurities that impacted their relationship satisfaction in various ways. Each partner then made a decision to progress forward in their relationship based on their perceptions of the viability of the relationship and the deep connection they already felt for their partners.

Once in the *relational emotion work phase*, partners worked together to make meaning of their relationship and develop commitment. Partners also engaged in self-reflectivity to work through their individual issues regarding their relationship, as well as learning about bisexuality from their partner and through their own research. While couples engaged in each of these processes separately, the combined effect of each of the factors in this phase led to couples creating a couple identity.

The various factors from the first three phases often led to a shifting of attitudes regarding bisexuality toward a more accepting stance, which then influenced the shift into the *shared relational meaning phase*. The bidirectional processes couples engage in during the relational meaning making phase include periodic fears of commitment loss, commitment

maintenance, impression management and wrestling with tensions of bi-erasure. Such relational processes influence and are influenced by perceived relationship satisfaction.

Occasionally, couples moved back and forth between the relational emotion work and shared relational meaning phases in order to re-negotiate aspects of their relationship, as indicated by the bi-directional arrow between the two phases. These two phases address the second research question regarding how partners negotiate the influence of attitudes regarding bisexuality on their relationship. Various factors in each phase of the process model are impacted by overarching macro-systemic oppressions, such as heteronormativity, mononormativity, homophobia, and biphobia.

Phase 1: Pre-Relationship Factors Influencing Attitude Development

Prior to the formation of the relationship, every participant in this study discussed several factors that influenced their individual development of attitudes toward sexual minorities broadly as well as bisexuality specifically. As Partner 1 from couple 1101 stated, “the factors that [influence]...at least with attitudes towards sexuality...that more comes from before you start dating.” The partners in this study entered into intimate relationships having pre-formed attitudes regarding bisexuality that fluctuated over time. Phase 1 constituted interactions between (a) intrapsychic, interpersonal, and institutional factors, (b) sexual orientation identity development, (c) disclosure experiences, and (d) previous relationship experiences. This phase includes predominantly individual-level process that then lead to the relational-level phases 2 through 4. Given that the processes in this phase are personal to each individual, representative quotes of this phase will be presented only from individuals. Quotes highlighting the dyadic nature of phases 2 through 4 will highlight statements from both partners.

Intrapsychic, Interpersonal, and Institutional Factors

All participants discussed how the combination of intrapsychic, interpersonal, and institutional factors influenced the formation of attitudes. Religion, culture, gender, and age were the most salient intrapsychic factors for this sample. Participants discussed family of origin and peer interactions as important interpersonal factors. Heteronormativity and mononormativity are the predominant factors that are reinforced in the participants' understandings of institutions of marriage, family, and church. The intersection of these subcategories led to participants' understanding of sexual minority identities and their preconceived notions of same gender relationships. This section highlights how the most salient intrapsychic, interpersonal, and institutional factors are experienced by the participants.

One of the most salient intrapsychic factors was that of religion. Eight participants across six couples discussed the ways in which their religion formed a basis for how other interpersonal and institutional factors contribute to their understanding of themselves as sexual minorities as well as how they understand bisexuality broadly. Participants commonly discussed the heteronormative and mononormative constraints associated with conservative religions.

Religion, culture, and family of origin. Growing up in families who actively practiced conservative religions was a significant factor for seven participants across six couples in this sample. As participants grew up, they internalized attitudes that sexual minorities are abnormal and sinners. For example, Partner 1 (P1) from couple Vegas highlighted her experience with religion and internalized biphobia. She stated, "I was trying so hard to be the person that the church wanted me to be, and I knew deep down I wasn't right. I would do everything on the outside but on the inside it felt wrong." Partner 2 (P2) in couple Casey discussed her experiences as well.

P2: I grew up in a religious household, and the religion that my family and I were part of um, was like, religions where it was like not really open to homosexuality...I feel like a

strong message that I grew up with was [that] anybody that's not in a heteronormative relationship is just confused.

Heteronormative expectations include a presumption about which relationships are appropriate. The appropriate relationship involves a man and woman and is procreative in purpose (Grindstaff, 2003). This framework constrains choice of partners for some bisexual people. Embedded within the heteronormative framework is messaging about mononormativity. Both heteronormative and mononormative messages include those about people in same-gender relationships as well as about choice among bisexual people specifically. So, in other words, if one has a choice about a potential mate, it is expected that they choose to be with the "opposite" gender. Partner 1 from couple Bananashark discussed the heteronormative and mononormative influence of her religion.

P1: I come from a very strong Evangelical Christian background. And in that background, they're like, "well you're bi, you can choose to be straight," so you're making the wrong choice. And it's like people who are bi, and they're in a same sex relationship, they're like really looked down on; even more than people who are just gay or lesbian, which are also looked down on because not only are you doing this terrible bad thing, but you are like choosing to do it even more.

Additionally, the participants' culture interacted with factors of family of origin and religion for the racial minority participants. For three Hispanic participants specifically, the intersection of these factors contributed to the development of internalized homophobia or biphobia, which later influenced their current relationships.

Couple Raspberry:

P1: I was raised super (laughs) traditional and super catholic...it's just one of those where traditionally, culturally it's not accepted. Things have been said in the past amongst my family, amongst people I've gone to church with and people that I love. I've grown up with [them] saying like, "if my child's gay, I want nothing to do with them. They're not my child."

Couple Coffee:

P2: I had a cousin...he was dating a girl, but he was also talking to guys on the side. So, we were all like, "what is going on?" We were all confused and we asked him, he said he

wasn't sure so we [thought] he's probably bi. At the same time, we were like "no, you need to pick one. Is it boys or girls?" Because I was in middle school so I was still confused about it all. So, we would tell him he had to pick one and then he would just be with both, and then we'd [think] maybe bisexual is a thing. I still didn't know what it was. And then we didn't talk about it so much. When he did say that he liked both, we wouldn't tell anyone about it because of the Mexican culture, we don't really talk about it. So, he was with the girlfriend to keep the hidden identity of him being bi. He was dating a girl and was also talking to guys on the side. So, then I was like, "maybe you need both at the same time?"

P1: I remember when I was younger, I used to think the same thing [as partner 2] ...probably culture had to do with it...where I'm like it's either one or the other. You can't be both, that was always my mentality.

These participants were influenced by a conservative adherence to religiosity in their family of origin, which resulted in rigid attitudes regarding sexual orientation. One participant, however, highlighted how a different religion influenced her open and accepting attitudes. Partner 2 of couple Vegas discussed how she grew up in a family that practiced a religion with more liberal attitudes toward gender ideology, which played a role in her developing an attitude embracing fluid sexuality. She stated, "My mother was pansexual and a Pagan. Being raised in a very open religion that happens to view that as okay; so, I was raised from a very young age that it was always okay."

Media representation and heteronormativity. Media representation, or lack thereof, reinforced the stigma of same-gender relationships. Six participants across four couples discussed the overwhelming presence of heterosexual couples in television shows, movies, and advertisements. The depiction of only male-female partners in the media sent a societal-level message that these presumed heterosexual relationships were the norm and other relationships were abnormal. Partner 2 in couple Raspberry discussed the impact of underrepresentation of same-gender relationships in the media.

P2: I feel like there's a lot of under representation for us because like anyone you see in social media and billboards you see like male-female like that's a relationship. You

know? So, like the fact that you never see like oh like a gay like couple or a lesbian couple like in the media and stuff like that kind of sucks.

On the other hand, increased representation of “normal” sexual minorities in the media helped to dispel the abnormal myth perpetuated by religious doctrines. Even so, lack of adequate and realistic representation of bisexuality in the media persists. Partner 2 of couple Casey discussed this.

P2: I feel like LGBT representation in movies and in media, and this sounds silly, but Ellen DeGeneres is so popular. Because she’s gay and she is so normal and she’s popular and she’s not a weirdo...it felt like I was taught that everyone was supposed to be weird and then you see people that aren’t weird and you’re like “wait, but if she’s not weird, they’re all not weird?...I think people who identify as bisexual are underrepresented...the only time that you see it, in a movie is if it’s some insanely kinky sex thing, there’s no movies of just normal falling in love in a normal way.

Age and cohort. Several participants ($n = 6$, across 4 couples) discussed how their age and cohort caused some critical tensions against homophobic attitudes during formative, autonomous developmental years. The majority of participants belonged to a cohort that was born after the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States which resulted in significant experiences of discrimination (Berrill, 1990). The cohort effect on their attitudes regarding sexual minorities likely came from their ability to adapt to new situations due to their differences in experiences and resources (Ryder, 1965). As they began to engage in conversations with others in school, they were exposed to new ideas from their peers of a more accepting cohort than those previous. Through such interactions, they learned that the stereotypes may not always be true and that sexual minorities can be normal. Yet, they still engage with family and religious communities that say otherwise. Partner 2 of couple Raspberry discussed her understanding of how her age has impacted her attitudes regarding bisexuality.

P2: Because a lot of people I surround myself with are younger and very open minded, I feel like it’s difficult to find that with older people because they’re just, more cynical in a way. So yeah, my age has definitely helped me because I have such a group of supportive

individuals and even if I meet somebody and tell them they're like 'okay cool like do your own thing' you know... a lot of people my age and in my generation they kind of just stay in their lane and they're not trying to constantly inflict their beliefs...

The generation in which participants were born seems to have played a significant role in the possibility to live openly in their sexualities. Partner 1 of couple Jurassic Park highlighted the influence of heteronormativity in her generation compared to previous generations historically.

P1: Yeah, and age wise I feel like if I was 30 years older, I would have just played straight my whole life. But I think if I was, aged in the time before the AIDS crisis, when that happened, I would have just decided to myself 'it's easier to be straight, I'm going to be straight because I am attracted to men and I can have fulfilling relationships with men.' So, I wouldn't be denying myself having a happy relationship, I just wouldn't be dating people I could possibly date.

This participant's generation has become more accepting, thus allowing her to reject strong heteronormative influences and instead follow what she desires for her relationships.

Gender and hypersexualization. Through all of these formative experiences, participants learned more about differences in attitudes based on gender. That is, bisexual women tend to be viewed more positively than bisexual men (Decapua, 2017), although are sexualized by heterosexual men (Eliason, 2000). Ten participants across seven couples shared how they understood that being female in same-gender relationships made them more acceptable to others, but more sexualized among male peers in public.

Couple Bananashark:

P2: I think being female definitely makes it easier because I feel like a lot of times men are very...bisexual men get stigmatized a lot, as being just gay. Whereas bi women are widely more accepted even though they're sexualized. But I think personally, if I weren't female, I might have a different attitude, just because of the way that it gets perpetrated and the way its expressed.

Couple Always:

P2: If someone learns that I'm bisexual ... the girls don't really care and the guys are like 'oh that's cool'. But if a guy says they are bisexual they are obviously patronized a lot more.

These quotes represent how participants understood that there were differences in attitudes toward bisexual people based on gender of both bisexual individuals as well as gender of the attitude holder. For Partner 2 of couple Bananashark, being female aided in her ability to be more accepting of her partner's bisexuality. Partner 2 of couple Always, on the other hand, described the reactions she received from others regarding her bisexuality. Given that this participant encountered females holding generally accepting attitudes towards her sexual orientation, she may have assumed potential female partners would not hold bi-negative attitudes.

Gender also influenced some participants' understandings of identity. Partner 1 of couple Jurassic Park shared how her attitudes regarding female same-gender attraction was based in hypersexualization of females.

P1: I think being a woman there is a limitation for a lot of women who later realize they're bisexual and that "oh, I'm attracted to men and that's normal and right and everyone thinks women are a little bit hot so it's just normal for me to look at women and appreciate them." So, I think I had a bit of that going on too. Where I was like "oh yeah, I think women are hot, but it's totally not in a gay way, but it's just because everyone does because women are just so obviously attractive!" And so, for a while, for me, [it] didn't seem like a legitimate option to be bisexual even though I kind of acknowledged it in my subconscious. And then when I stopped going to church that I was able to realize I can act on my attraction to women and it's healthy and natural.

As a female, this participant believed attraction to other females was present in everyone. She also referenced how religion intersected with these attitudes, perpetuating heteronormative beliefs about relationships. Her beliefs further impacted her understanding of her own sexuality, dismissing the idea that her attraction for females indicated a sexual minority identity. Identity development is discussed further in the next section. Specifically, findings indicate that developing a sexual minority identity bidirectionally influences development of attitudes regarding bisexuality.

Sexual Orientation Identity Development

As participants navigated the intrapsychic, interpersonal, and institutional factors discussed above, they also developed their sexual orientation identities. The participants reported that the intersection of their social identities played a role in the ease with which they accepted their developing sexual minority identity. In turn, the development of a sexual minority identity influenced their attitudes toward bisexuality. A total of eleven participants across all eight couples discussed their sexual orientation identity development in relation to their attitudes.

Participants talked about how religion had an influence on how their sexual orientation identity unfolded. Over time, the participants questioned their assumptions of heteronormativity based in the religious teachings. Many ($n = 5$) cut off from religion altogether while others sought to reconcile their sexual minority identities within their religious ones. For Partner 1 of couple Bananashark, her faith remained a significant aspect of her life, even above her sexuality. She and her partner continued to attend church on a regular basis, and she used her perspective of her religion to defend her relationship against her more conservative family members. More importantly, she expressed her understanding of her bisexuality to her family through her perspective of God's acceptance of her.

P1: I was in Alabama, where everyone [my family] is from, for Christmas this year and everyone was asking me when we were going to break up, and why I was doing this, and how could I still be a Christian if I was doing this. And for me, my faith is really important to me. I feel like that is more important to me than my sexuality, and I was like "Guys, if I thought God was really not okay with this then I wouldn't do it." And everyone just being like "oh then you don't really know God, obviously."

One couple, Casey, specifically sought advice from their religious community prior to the formation of their relationship, and they were instructed by leaders in the church to resist their same-gender attractions. The couple actively attempted to do so with each other while remaining friends, focusing on topics that were only friend-related. Despite every attempt at resisting their

feelings by limiting their discussions to non-romantic topics, the couple failed to resist their attractions toward each other. This couple developed their sexual minority identities with each other, discussing several aspects of their attractions and feelings, alongside the formation of their relationship.

P2: We were really good friends and we would support each other...we were still good friends but we would try to push away any physical expression of romance or talking about romance or we just tried to be very strictly platonic. It kept not happening.
(Lesbian)

P1: I mean we were both raised being taught it's a choice not...you choose if you have those feelings or not and I think one of the factors that changed things actively trying to not choose it. And [thinking] "I don't know about that whole choice anymore cause we're trying real hard." (Bisexual)

For these participants specifically, failing to resist their feelings and attraction toward one another helped them understand that same-gender attraction was a natural experience rather than a choice. Living that shared experience of oppression likely opened up the possibility for them to accept their own identities as well as a same-gender relationship.

Six out of the eleven participants who discussed sexual orientation identity development engaged in similar overlap of identity development and entering their first same-gender relationship. Their relationships helped them understand their identities and likely aided in developing a deep emotional connection more quickly than the other participants who developed their identities separately from their current partner. Partner 1 from couple Bananashark discussed her experience of coming to understand her sexuality with her partner.

P1: I was already dating her when I started to identify as bisexual. So, I talked a lot of it through with her. Could I imagine myself dating a guy? And things like that. Which was really good because I know a lot of people that wouldn't have had that conversation with their partner because their partner would be threatened by it, but she wasn't.

Disclosure Experiences

Participants made disclosure decisions based on the intersection of intrapsychic, interpersonal and institutional processes as well as their stage in the identity development process. Fourteen participants across all eight couples discussed disclosure experiences. Some decided not to disclose their identities to their families, but had engaged in some degree of disclosure to friends. Most participants ($n = 11$) disclosed to both family and friends, and were generally accepted. Some family members and friends reacted to disclosure in negative ways. The reactions from family and friends provided messages about sexual minority identity broadly, as well as bisexuality, specifically. Disclosure experiences that impacted attitude development included holding onto heteronormative identity, avoidance of a bisexual identity, parents' misunderstandings about bisexuality, and bi-negativity in LGBT spaces.

Holding onto heteronormative identity. Heteronormativity continued to have an influence on disclosure experiences for some participants. Three participants specifically discussed their decision to disclose as bisexual in order to maintain a connection to a heteronormative option, but later disclosed as a lesbian. Partner 2 of couple Bananashark stated, "I guess when I first came out, I thought that I was bi because of, I guess heteronormativity." Partner 1 of couple Always further discussed how her disclosure process influenced her understanding of bisexuality as a transition identity, a phase that people go through. The combination of this participant's identity development and disclosure experiences led her to avoid bisexual women as partners.

P1: I was so scared to come out to anybody. My dad's [religious faith] and my mom's [religious faith] and I thought they were going to disown me...so when I first came out to my family, I came out as bisexual first. But I think for me, bisexuality, labeling myself as bisexual when I was a teenager was, more of a transition term for me because it was easier, it was more accepted. Because it still has that connection to the normative heterosexual identity.

Avoidance of a bisexual identity. In attempts to avoid negative disclosure experiences, participants were careful to choose how they disclosed their identities to others. One option was to avoid a bisexual label so as not to be associated with the stigma of bisexuality. Partner 1 of couple Bananashark shared that she originally disclosed her sexual orientation as “her partner”. This decision seemed to be based in both a discomfort with her sexuality generally, but also due to an avoidance of stigmatized labels.

P1: I wasn't really identifying as anything and that was a really comfortable place for me because I grew up with all of those labels being so stigmatized and I was like “I'm not any of them.” And when people asked me, I'd be like my sexual orientation is [participant number two's name]. Which was a very huge thing to say and also very safe for me.

Claiming her identity as “her partner” allowed for this participant to safely explore her identity which was heavily influenced by her religion and family of origin. An avoidance of claiming a bisexual identity resonated with Partner 1 of couple Jurassic Park as well, due to stigma associated with the label.

P1: When I first came out, I had a boyfriend for a while and then during our relationship I realized I was attracted to women. Then, when we broke up I came out as a lesbian for a couple of months before I realized that bisexual was a label for myself personally and started identifying as bisexual...I think part of it had to do with I didn't like the negative stigmas and associations around bisexual women and so I was kind of like, I can remove myself from that...

Another strategy used by two participants was to avoid disclosure altogether until a certain time. Partner 1 of couple 1101 decided to delay disclosure until she was in a relationship with a woman, despite her belief that her generational cohort “made it easier at least telling people our age because we're almost certainly not gonna come across much backlash.” She was concerned how her friends might react if she was single when she came out to them.

P1: I didn't tell very many people at all that I was not straight until I was in a relationship. And then when I was in a relationship it became a lot easier for me to tell people, I think a lot of that was just more of, if I wasn't in a relationship and I told some

of my female friends, they might get a little weirded out. But if I was in a relationship it was different because they didn't have to be worried that I was trying to go after them.

Partner 1 of couple Raspberry also decided to delay disclosure until a few months into the relationship and slowly shared her sexual orientation as well as the existence of the relationship to trusted friends.

P1: There was a period of a few months where we were completely in secret but when I let my best friend know and then some of my inner-friend circle. I started branching out and [saying], "I'm bi, I have a girlfriend, I'm in this relationship" and they responded well. I had a friend that didn't respond too well but she responded with "but I still love you and I want to meet this person and I want to support [you]". Hearing that honestly helped me just as much as my accepting friends because it's been preparing me for that moment where I have to sit in front of my grandparents and my aunts and uncles and be like "hey this is what's going on." But then that definitely helped me become more comfortable with who I am and [with] my relationship and it's helped our relationship exponentially because I feel like I've been able to give her more than I did at the beginning of our relationship.

The various reactions this participant received following disclosure helped her feel more comfortable in her sexual orientation identity and gain more confidence in disclosing to family members.

Parents' misunderstandings about bisexuality. Two participants spoke of confused reactions from a parent following disclosure which highlighted a common stereotype associated with bisexuality. Heterosexual, lesbian, and gay people often view bisexual people as being confused about their sexual orientation, and either hypersexual or really just gay (Callis, 2013; McLean, 2008b). Partner 1 from couple Vegas shared how her mother's reaction highlighted her attitudes regarding bisexuality that are based in mononormative assumptions.

P1: When I came out, my mom was so confused at what that even meant. I told her I was bisexual and she was so confused like, is that a thing? She didn't know what it was. I mean, she's from a different generation.

Partner 2 of couple Coffee had a disclosure experience with her mother that also included confusion based in mononormativity. Her mother expressed confusion over her sexual

orientation and also reinforced the stereotype that bisexual people are “just confused” about their sexuality. “My mom was kind of like, ‘How is it that you like both? Are you sure? Maybe you’re just confused, maybe you don’t know what you’re doing.’” Hearing reactions from parents that are based in stereotypes can further reinforce an overall negative attitude toward bisexuality, possibly resulting in internalized bi-negativity (Kovalanka & Goldberg, 2009; Todd et al., 2016). This participant continued to share her experience with confusion about her identity.

P2: I feel like at one point we are a little confused...we still can be confused. I [know I] like boys and girls...It’s almost [that] I don’t know why I like both. It’s a weird confusion that I get. Why is it that I get attracted to both, when there’s people that are attracted to one or the other? I don’t know, it’s just weird.

Previous Relationships

As mentioned earlier, half of the participants were in previous same-gender relationships. These previous relationships played a role in the development of attitudes toward bisexuality for five participants. While experiences with previous bisexual partners was a relatively positive experience for some, it was a negative experience for others. Partner 1 in couple Always, who now identifies as lesbian, described her negative experiences of previous relationships with bisexual women. Every one of her former bisexual partners eventually left the relationship to pursue other relationships with men. Having experienced several hurtful break ups in addition to her own experiences initially identifying as bisexual, led to her internalizing negative attitudes regarding bisexual individuals.

P1: Every girl that I had ever dated who had labeled themselves as bisexual, they ended up either cheating on me or leaving me for a guy. And I just wasn’t very happy about that, so I was worried that it would happen again...my personal experiences with dating people that were bisexual just didn’t end well. So now I have this sort of confirmation bias about how I feel, felt about people who identified as bisexual.

A combination of her identity development, disclosure, and previous relationship experiences lent even more credence to her formed stereotype that bisexuality is a phase and that

bi women will leave lesbian partners for the comfort of heteronormativity. While she had numerous negative experiences dating bisexual women, other participants had generally positive dating experiences with bisexual women. Two participants specifically discussed their recognition of bi-negativity in society, but that they never held stereotyped views, which seemed to help them separate the bisexual identity from behaviors of their previous partners.

Couple Jurassic Park:

P2: All of my previous partners have been bisexual. So, I was kind of just like ‘hey it’s just a fact of life’ sort of thing... I don’t categorize a whole group of people based on the experience I’ve had with two people. So, they cheated on me because they were just terrible humans at that point in time, not because they were bisexual. (Jurassic Park P2)

Couple Bananashark:

P2: I mean both relationships I’ve been in, I’ve dated bi women. I guess I’ve never really felt like it was an issue. I definitely know that there’s a lot of stigma around it, but I personally have never felt that. I’ve never felt afraid in my relationship because I was dating a girl that was bi. (Bananashark P2)

One of the bisexual participants, Partner 1 of couple Jurassic Park, discussed the differences in the relational dynamics when she had a male partner and a female partner. Particularly, when dating a heterosexual male partner, she experienced discomfort with discussing LGBT issues which are important to her. When dating a woman, she has been able to engage in these discussions.

P1: When I’ve dated straight men, I felt like I couldn’t talk about LGBT issues much because they just didn’t understand, or care really. And they just didn’t, they couldn’t relate to it. They couldn’t understand fully. Whereas, when I dated a woman, any woman, they could because any woman I would date would be bi or lesbian and they would be able to understand LGBT issues cuz they are affected by them... when I was [with my ex-] boyfriend and I realized I was attracted to women and I told him, he was a bit weird about it and thought I was going to go sleep with women and not tell him, and that made me uncomfortable.

For her, these drastic differences in her dating experiences revealed the impact a partners’ attitudes could have in a relationship. She further stated that it, “made me comfortable knowing

that [partner] had dated other bisexual women.” She felt accepted by her partner knowing that she did not hold bi-negative attitudes.

Interplay of Pre-Relationship Factors

The factors affecting the development of attitudes regarding sexuality discussed here intersected in a unique way for the participants of this study. The participants below emphasized the interaction of sexual minority identity development, disclosure experiences, previous relationship experiences, as well as intrapsychic, interpersonal, and institutional factors.

Couple Bananashark:

P2: Well I came out really young. I started questioning my sexuality when I was a freshman in high school...and I grew up in a really small conservative town, so there were not a lot of gay people, there were not a lot of people of color, it was just a very straight, white, heteronormative community. And so, I met a few people who like didn't really fit into that category and one of my best friends freshman year was bi, and so I hung out with her a lot. And that was my first exposure into people who aren't straight. And then because of hanging out with her and hanging out with her friends, I was like, “maybe I am not straight.” And then for a while I was like “oh I must be bi,” because I had convinced myself that I was attracted to men, but then by the end of sophomore year of high school I was like no, never mind, I just like women. And then from like junior year onward I identified as a lesbian.

Couple Casey:

P2: I think all of those things determine what things you will see in the world around you. So, they kind of determine your environment and in a way, they create your lens, the way that you are going to see the world.

The development of attitudes, impacted by the above factors, further affects the formation of relationships. The next section highlights the processes during the relationship formation phase for the participants in this study.

Phase 2: Relationship Formation

Participants in this study entered into their current relationships with attitudes that were influenced by the Phase 1 factors. As mentioned previously, approximately half ($n = 9$) the participants across six couples in this sample reported their current relationship was their first

same-gender relationship. For these participants, their relationships began simultaneous to the process of their sexual orientation identity development and disclosure experiences. They spoke of internalized homophobia and biphobia that impacted their ability to act on same-gender attractions previous to their current relationship. The remaining seven participants across five couples entered into their current relationships with previous same-gender relationship experiences.

Phase 2 included (a) general stressors, (b) bi-negative insecurities, (c) initial relationship satisfaction, and (d) making decisions about relationship viability. As the participants formed their current relationships, they encountered both general stressors as well as stressors specific to sexual orientation. Each of these stressors compounded upon one another in a way that impacted each partner's satisfaction in the relationship. Before couples progressed forward in their relationship to engage in relational emotion work, they made a decision regarding the viability of the relationship.

General Stressors

All eight couples attributed the challenges that they faced in the beginning of their relationships to general stressors of beginning a new relationship. These stressors included a lack of understanding each other's communication styles, differing personality styles, and individual related physical and mental health issues that impacted their relationship. Couple Raspberry discussed the communication struggles they experienced.

P1: I feel like if you bottle stuff up, like at the beginning we both did. We didn't know how to talk to each other yet or how communicating with each other. We were still learning each other. I think we would bottle it up and then we would explode on something that was so small that became so big.

P2: It just delayed the inevitable. You can choose to try to fix it now or fix it later and then there's going to be resentment there from not fixing the problem earlier.

Couple Vegas described the stressors of different personality styles and mental health issues had on their relationship. Partner 2 described herself as a very open person with everyone she interacted with, sharing personal information and opinions. Partner 1, on the other hand, described herself as reserved and concerned that people would not accept her genuine self. Consequently, these personality traits impacted their interactions with one another during the beginning stages of their relationship.

P1: I was kind of repressed about a lot of things.

P2: She always made me feel like I was embarrassing her or pushing her too far.

P1: A lot of the things that she showed me in the beginning of the relationship that she was interested in were radically different than what I was accustomed to. So, I probably freaked out a little because that's what I do. I have a lot of anxiety and anytime anyone throws a monkey wrench into the works it freaks me out.

P2: I just wanted her to be more open, and she did not. She just wanted to be shy. And it made it very difficult.

Couple Jurassic Park described how medications to manage mental health and lack of communication impacted their sex life. Partner 1 lacked a sufficient sex drive due to medications and did not communicate the situation with her partner, leading Partner 2 to feel unwanted.

P1: At the beginning of the relationship I was on Zoloft. So, we weren't having sex a lot because Zoloft like made me not want to have sex...for the first couple of months, that was an aspect of our relationship that both of us were used to that wasn't happening.

P2: [Partner 1] didn't tell me for like months that that was why we weren't having sex. I just thought she might not be attracted to me.

Couple Coffee also discussed their sexual interactions in the beginning of the relationship. Since Partner 2 had never been in a relationship with a female previously, Partner 1 was concerned about initiating sex before she was ready. She made several assumptions regarding her partner's desires but was not forthcoming about them.

P1: In the beginning when we first started dating, I didn't think she wanted to have sex with me. Especially because I was her first girlfriend, I didn't think she would want to. I don't know why. I [thought] I wasn't going to be good enough...it was going to be so much different from a guy, then I [thought] she was going to feel uncomfortable or she wasn't going to do it.

P2: That's true because she wouldn't make the first move. I always had to make the first move.

Partner 1 here also referenced concerns she felt when comparing herself to her partner's previous male partners. These concerns could be rooted in fears regarding bisexual people and the stereotype that they are strongly influenced by heteronormativity, such that they would leave a same-gender relationship for the safety of a heterosexual relationship (Israel & Mohr, 2004). Bi-negative insecurities were shared by this couple and others, and are discussed in the following section.

Bi-negative Insecurity

Bi-negative attitudes were present for seven participants across six couples. These attitudes presented as insecurities for participants in the beginning of their relationship. Bi-negative insecurities were held by bisexual identified individuals as well as those who identified as lesbian and un-labeled individuals. The most salient theme that emerged regarding bi-negative insecurity was the influence of gender and the threats that are posed to the monogamy of the relationship. Additionally, participants discussed how they communicated their insecurities to their partners.

Gender and threats to monogamy. Four participants described the insecurity they felt was focused on differences regarding gender. That is, partners compared themselves to previous and potential male partners that were viewed as threatening to the relationship. Couple Casey discussed each of their insecurities rooted in proximal stressors of internalized bi-negativity when thinking about their relationship. Partner 1 shared her concerns about choosing a harder life away from heteronormativity and the possibility of her partner choosing an easier life with someone else. Partner 2 expressed her insecurity through comparing herself to past male partners of Partner 1.

P1: I think one thought that I had is...we kinda chose the rougher road. If we're attracted to men why don't we just go that route?...this idea of bisexuality...if you're attracted to both then just go with the simpler one.

P2: There have been times when I've been intimidated to think about the men that she's been with and, do I measure up? Is she secretly wishing that she could pick one of them?

P1: There's times where I feel intimidated...that there's other people that she could choose to be with.

Lesbian partners of bisexual partners also felt insecure due to specific bi-negative attitudes they held. For instance, Partner 1 of couple 1101 discussed her fear regarding the stereotype that bisexual women are influenced by heteronormativity and would return to relationships with men because it might be easier.

If we were talking about someone else possibly taking [partner 2] away, I would be much more concerned about that happening with a boy than that happening with another girl. I don't think I'm concerned at all about [partner 2] finding some other girl and starting to date her. But maybe she'll meet some boy and decide that oh it's so much easier with the boy.

Communication of insecurities. Partners who were fearful or insecure communicated their feelings with their partners in some way, predominantly in a direct manner. Partner 1 in couple Always stated, "I have always been very open about my feelings and why I feel that way towards bisexuality, ever since the start of our relationship," and explained to her partner how she formed her beliefs due to negative experiences in her past relationships. Partner 2 of couple Casey often compared herself to her Partner 1's previous male partners. She communicated the insecurities she felt based in these comparisons to her partner, which provided an opportunity to feel heard.

I feel like I didn't have to have this sad dark thought corner that I kept to myself. Like the actual communication, the fact that I didn't have to stew over it by myself. I could be open with her about it. It wasn't something that I had in the back of my mind that I was always comparing everything against, it was talked about.

Other partners would communicate their insecurities indirectly through their behaviors. Partner 1 from couple Coffee discussed how she would react when her partner spent time with

friends, which would, “cause a lot of arguments in the beginning.” Couple 1101 also discussed Partner 1’s insecurities related to bi-negativity, which led to her asking for assurance and reassurance in the relationship.

P1: I think in the beginning of the relationship I was always sort of on the lookout for [Partner 2] just going through a phase and deciding to break up with me. I’m not really sure if I ever expressed those opinions to her when I was actually having them. And that’s been more of a thing that we’ve both talked about later on, now that it’s not so much a concern of mine.

P2: There was a time, especially towards the beginning of our relationship, [Partner 1] was worried that she was like, forcing me to be gay. That I didn’t really want to. That’s silly. And I hope she knows that now.

P1: Yeah. I mean [Partner 2] was, and still sort of is, a very malleable individual. Umm like peer-pressure-wise. And so, I [was worried I] had some sort of influence on that. I sort of asked for and needed a lot of assurance and reassurance.

As indicated by this participant, the distal stressor of bi-negative insecurities present in the relationship indeed had an impact on relationship satisfaction. The following section examines the ways in which this distal stressor impacted initial satisfaction for several couples in this sample.

Relationship Satisfaction

To highlight the impact partners’ attitudes had on relationship satisfaction, participants were asked to rate their overall relationship satisfaction in the early stages of their relationships, using an item from the CSI-32 that ranged “not at all” to “completely” (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Two participants rated their relationship satisfaction as “a little,” one rated “somewhat,” seven rated as “almost completely” and four rated as “completely.” Two participants did not report their initial relationship satisfaction. A total of 12 participants across seven couples discussed the impact of their attitudes toward bisexuality on relationship satisfaction in the beginning of their relationship.

Both partners in couple Casey reported their initial relationship satisfaction as “a little” due to their internalized bi-negativity. While they had strong feelings toward each other, they believed they could not be together because of religious teachings emphasizing heteronormative relationships.

P1: When we started falling for each other, it was torture, it was like hell. Because we felt like, there was such an incredible bond between us and we had this connection that seriously, it sounds so silly, but it was like Romeo and Juliet, like cosmic stars align, what I've always hoped I might find some day. But we couldn't have it...we felt like we weren't allowed to pursue it and weren't allowed to enjoy it...that was earth shattering and hard and horrible.

P2: Oh, that was awful. Clearly, I loved her. But at the time, that relationship couldn't even really be a relationship...when you're not out and when you're [trying] so hard not to date, you just live with an anxiety...just awfulness.

Partners in the remainder of couples rated their relationship satisfaction from “somewhat” to “completely”, indicating that they were generally satisfied with the relationship initially despite reported impacts from bi-negativity. Partner 1 from couple Bananashark reported she was “almost completely” satisfied in the beginning of the relationship. She described, however, how her internalized bi-negativity impacted her ability to commit. She even reported various attempts to sabotage the relationship.

P1: Especially at the beginning, it made it almost more difficult for me to commit...I had not come out yet to anyone except a couple of close friends. To me, it was stressful because I saw what it was...I knew that if I went all in, I had to come out to my family...I was putting on some really heavy brakes...I just kept telling her not to do things. I'd be like 'don't kiss me, don't touch me.' And then like a week later, she'd be like "so when is that gonna be fine?" Also, I would ask her these really intense questions all the time, setting her up to dump me.

P2: All these little tests that she was ready for me to fail.

Couple Raspberry did not provide initial relationship satisfaction ratings, but described the impact their attitudes had on the beginning of their relationship. Partner 1 specifically shared how she also attempted to sabotage the relationship by distancing herself emotionally from her partner. Her own fears related to internalized bi-negativity made it difficult for her to

emotionally connect with her partner. She stated, “I feel like I was very distant and I was very much trying to sabotage our relationship, actively. I didn’t realize I was doing it but...I gave her a lot of hurt out of my own fear.” Partner 2 agreed regarding their initial relationship satisfaction, stating, “I felt like things were off.”

The participants’ reports of general satisfaction in the beginning of their relationship despite descriptions of bi-negativity impacting the relationship indicates the presence of additional factors that may hold stronger significance for the couples. The next section highlights some of these factors that lead to participants making the decision to remain in the relationship.

Relationship Viability

For the couples in which partner bi-negativity was a distal stressor on their initial relationship satisfaction, partners engaged in decision making about the future of the relationship. Twelve participants across seven couples discussed the various covert factors that influenced their decision to stay in the relationship and work through the initial relational problems. Such factors included seeing the potential for the future of the relationship and sexual minority identity synthesis.

Relationship potential. Four couples referenced factors regarding the potential of the relationship, which centered around the genuine care partners felt with one another and were grounded in a solid friendship. The strong connection between partners became the driving force for moving forward in the relationship. For instance, couple Always discussed how their connection with each other helped them to be true to their core selves. They each valued finding a partner that met important expectations and aligned with their own values.

P1: She was the first person in my life to set boundaries with me that I respected enough to listen to. That really brought out the best person in me.

P2: She doesn't have a filter and my biggest thing is I don't like it when people are trying to hide something. You're not scheming and I like it.

Finding a partner with shared values rooted in an underlying friendship also was important for couple 1101. Sharing both values and experiences helped them understand one another better, and further created a shared vision for the future.

P1: We were friends beforehand which I think helps. We loved each other just as friends way before we like decided that we were gonna date. We just have a lot of fun together.

P2: And I would also say as well as shared values we have a lot of shared experiences...it helps with the empathy...and we understand each other.

Couple Coffee expanded on the theme regarding visions for the future. They discussed their desire for a stronger relationship in which each of them worked toward better interactions. Partner 2 shared her reason for staying with her partner even though she experienced frustration in the beginning of her relationship due to her partner's controlling behaviors. Partner 1, then, was motivated to address her mental health issues in order to meet her partner's needs.

P2: I wanted to help her because I know that she had more potential than what she was giving me in the beginning. I wanted to help her so she can be the best person she was, and I knew I could help her so I wanted to keep staying and keep pushing even though it was really rough in the beginning, but I knew that eventually it would pay off and it would be better.

P1: Then that pushed me to get help...because I was already going to therapy but sometimes you have to change therapists, change medication...so I guess her helping me made [me] motivated.

For the partners in these couples, their ability to envision a future together after decreasing the general, proximal, and distal stressors helped to move them forward in the relationship.

Integration of a minority identity. Three couples discussed the ways in which moving toward individual-level minority identity synthesis assisted in moving the relationship forward past the initial stressors. For five of the six partners in these couples, the current relationship was their first same-gender relationship; their sexual orientation identity formation occurred alongside the formation of the relationship. As they each sought identity synthesis of their sexual

orientation, they were able to move past the proximal and distal stressors of internalized bi-negativity impacting the satisfaction in the relationship.

Couple Casey discussed how they reached identity synthesis, which then allowed them to commit to the relationship. Partner 1 was confronted with her irrational plans to avoid her growing feelings toward her partner by her therapist. Her therapist pointed out the significant flaws in the plan to maintain heteronormative privilege through relationships with men. After recognizing the flaws in her plan, she reached out to her partner to discuss their future together. Partner 2 also engaged in critically examining her beliefs regarding her sexuality and religion. Afterward, the couple made the decision to fully commit to the relationship.

P1: It was really interesting to me, when my therapist put it that way, 'if you do try to pursue that kind of plan, it is not just affecting you, it's going to affect all these other people too.' In my head, I was being this honorable, selfless, kind, good person, by thinking of this plan because I was just going to do what God needed me to do and I was just going to sacrifice and not be with the person I love because that's how you be righteous and obedient. But when I realized, if I'm pulling all these other people into this, I'm being selfish as hell. That is not honorable, that is not good, that is not having integrity. If I had found a husband to marry, and just fake it through my whole life with him, how is that fair to him? How is that fair to that guy who will never have somebody that loves him fully. And is fully committed to him. And wishes the whole time that they were married that his wife wishes that she was with somebody else. And it wasn't until then that I [realized] that's actually a really shitty plan. I just needed somebody to call me out on it...and so I called [partner 2] ...and it took about 0.005 seconds to decide that we weren't going to cut each other out. Because we already are soulmates, best friends romantic or otherwise. Deciding that we were going to date, it really wasn't just deciding we were going to date. It was deciding if we were going to get married. Like, it had a lot of weight to that decision.

P2: I kind of knew for a long time that those were our three options. I had time to come to terms with that. Part of me moving to [a different state] was [the decision] to cut [Partner 1] out and I know I am not going to do it if I live by you. While I was in [a different state], I was away from all the social pressures to keep going to church...and around the time that she was having this conversation, I had stopped going to church and had the start of a faith transition. That was the only barrier to me, to not be with her. A big part of that was just waiting for her, because I didn't want to push anything on her and have her question later...Because I wanted to be with [Partner 1]. I wanted her to come to her own conclusion. But even still when she called me and told me that, I [told her] I need a couple of days. Even knowing that I wanted to be with her, there were still so many fears that I had. [I was] trying to live that religion and trying to honor my faith and trying to

honor God and once that crumbled there were just pebbles in the way. The big stumbling block had been moved.

Each of these partners individually sought identity integration, but also allowed the other partner the space they needed. Couple Raspberry similarly discussed the space Partner 1 needed to become comfortable with her identity. Had Partner 2 not been patient in this process, they may not have continued forward with the relationship.

P2: I [said] figure stuff out...you go figure out what you need and I'll be here if you need me...if you want to be friends with me, I'll be here. If you want to be in a relationship with me, I'll be here. Just make sure that you're good.

P1: I think that's important though like if she responded any other way, I think I would've stayed away. I think realizing that her care for me was so genuine and that she so genuinely wanted me to be okay and be comfortable with myself. I would always come back.

In order to progress forward in the relationship, partners needed indications that the relationship was worth keeping. These five partners needed to understand and accept their sexual minority identities in order to gain comfort in the relationship. The remainder of participants needed to see the potential for the relationship. Given the nature of the study, all the couples in this sample had these needs met, and made the decision to stay in the relationship to progress forward. As they did so, they engaged in relational emotion work to strengthen the relationship further.

Phase 3: Relational Emotion Work

As individuals develop their self-concept, they engage in emotion work to appropriately match their emotional expression to any given situation (Hochschild, 1979). The ability for individuals to match expressions in this way assists in impression management (Goffman, 1959), allowing for them to meet societal expectations for behavior (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Couples similarly can engage in emotion work together in efforts to create and maintain a shared relational meaning of their couplehood.

In the relational emotion work phase, partners worked together toward a shared relational meaning by strengthening several relational processes. Four processes seemed particularly salient for couples in this sample. Participants shared how they (a) engaged in making meaning of their relationship, (b) reflected on themselves individually, (c) learned about bisexuality from their partner and other sources, and (d) developed commitment. Each of these four processes reciprocally interacted with each other, and together improved the quality of the couple relationship.

Relational Meaning Making

Partners interacted with each other in various ways in order to make meaning out of their relationship. Couples made meaning of their relationships in four ways: (a) metacommunication, in which couples emphasized the importance of communication and discussed their communication styles, (b) negotiating boundaries regarding family, friends, and potential extra-dyadic partners, (c) utilizing various techniques to aid in communication, and (d) making amends and repairs.

Metacommunication. Participants emphasized the power of communication in the process of making meaning of their relationship. Across all eight couples, fourteen participants spoke of the importance of communication as well as how they improved their communication skills with their partners. Recognizing that conflict in relationships is normal, couples worked to improve their communication skills and center it as a primary factor aiding their relationship satisfaction. Couple Raspberry highlight the importance of communication in their relationship, and how they expressed the importance of communication style and approach with each other.

P1: We're actually pretty good at communicating and I think that's why our relationship is really strong...at the beginning we always told each other "I need you to tell me if you're upset," and now we're very comfortable being like "hey, I don't like that you're doing this, it's making me upset," and the other one's like "oh okay, I'm sorry."

P2: Uh huh...that's a pretty strong part of our satisfaction...when we do have a conflict or something, she says her side [and] I say my side, and then we reach a compromise...we always like to say "it's me and her versus the problem, not me vs her...It's like we're trying to fix something together, we're not trying to be right or wrong.

Couples engaged in conversations about their communication styles in order to seek improvements and avoid continued negative communication cycles. Couple Bananashark highlighted the conversations they engaged in regarding the importance of being open and honest about their distress in order to resolve it more quickly.

P1: We've actually had a few conversations though where I was like 'you have to tell me when you are upset about something' because sometimes it will get bigger than I feel like it had to be.

P2: I had issues in my past relationships with talking about [issues]...I always wanted to communicate, and then my ex didn't. We would get into actual fights, screaming matches...we were just always fight about the same things...I would just constantly worry that that's what was going to happen even though it doesn't. It was a hard mindset for me to get out of. So, I'll not tell her something and then write it down or text it to her because that feels safer to me.

Couples also discussed their rules about how to communicate with each other and how to treat each other. Partner 1 from couple Jurassic Park highlighted their rule about how they treat each other. She stated, "it's important for both of us to be on the same page and not doing anything that makes the other person unhappy." Couple Casey had rules about their communication with each other. Partner 2 stated, "we have boundaries [how] we express our anger and how it's okay to talk to each other or not. But it's also okay to ask for space."

As couples came to an agreement on the importance of communication between the partners, they deployed a variety of techniques and strategies to do so. The next section explores the techniques utilized by participants in this sample.

Techniques. Once couples settled into understanding each other's communication styles, partners became skilled at recognizing signs of distress in each other. Together, they worked towards implementing communication strategies that work best for them in order to resolve any

distress that arose in the relationship. General communication skills, such as reflective listening, were utilized in addition to specific techniques the couples implemented to best suit their needs. This section discusses the specific strategies that were highlighted among each of the participants ($n = 15$) and worked best for the couples in this sample. These include using humor, timeouts, and vulnerable self-expression.

Humor. Across four couples, six participants discussed their use of humor during conflict. Humor, when used at the appropriate time, could lift each partner out of the intensity of the conflict and shift the direction to a more productive conversation. Partners seemed to have a clear understanding of what each other needed in order for humor to be effective in these times. Additionally, partners could either accept or reject the attempts to disrupt the cycle.

Couple Casey shared their strategy for using humor during conflict. Partner 2 had a clear sense of what would help improve her partner's mood in these times. They were both aware that humor is not always useful depending on the depth of the issue. However, the partners had a shared understanding that humor can act as an icebreaker during conflict.

P2: There's a video on YouTube...of a rubber chicken singing Despacito by Justin Bieber and she loves it so much. She can't not laugh, [she] is physically incapable of staying mad or upset if she watches that video. There have been some times when I have used that to my benefit.

P1: You don't use it for every situation.

P2: There's some times when [she's] 25% frustrated and can be lifted into a different mood fairly easily and that's a Despacito rubber chicken kind of experience. Yeah not every situation is a rubber chicken situation.

P1: In general, we, we use humor as an icebreaker...if one person is mad [we'll] just make a joke about it...makes you realize that you're being a little bit ridiculous...just break that barrier.

Couple Vegas also highlighted the role humor played in their relationship. For this couple, desire for humor was a way to disrupt the negative interactions during the fight. Partner 2

wished to end the fight and return to a happier mood and Partner 1 accepted this. Even though they were apart following the cycle disruption, the fight dissipated due to the desire for humor.

P2: Once we start laughing, we can't stay mad [at] each other...we always love each other so once we start laughing it all kind of just fades away. The other night we were in an argument and I literally said just stop talking I'm gonna watch M*A*S*H and laugh. And that's what I did.

P1: And I went to sleep. I woke up and we were like not even fighting anymore and about a couple hours after I woke up, I remembered we fought.

Humor for this couple was paired with taking a timeout allowing them to move past the disagreement. Timeouts, discussed next, were used by other participants as a stand-alone skill to change the course of conflict.

Timeouts. Eight participants across five couples utilized the communication skill of taking timeouts during conflictual or difficult topics. That is, if a conversation was becoming too intense, partners recognized they needed to take some time to calm themselves, gather their thoughts, then return to a more productive conversation. Taking timeouts is a communication skill couples therapists often encourage to all couples who struggle with high conflict in their communication patterns (Rosen, Matheson, Stith, McCollum, & Locke, 2003). One of the most important aspects of a timeout is to actively self-soothe and manage thought processes in order to return to each other and continue discussing the issue at hand (Gottman & Silver, 2015).

Couple Vegas described when they implement their timeouts and what actions they take during those moments. Not only do they take a step away from the argument, but they self-soothe by taking deep breaths and regain more rational thoughts before returning to each other to continue talking.

P1: When we're in the middle of a really heated argument I'll just stop and [tell her to] stop. Just breathe. Move around for a couple of seconds.

P2: We'll go walk into our separate corners and then come back and start talking.

P1: That's something we do is we cool off. We walk away. Probably the best thing because usually after I get about a couple blocks I [remember] I don't hate her. I just think I hate her right now.

Couple Coffee also utilized timeouts, but less formally than other participants. Partner 1 shared her reaction to Partner 2 making mean comments to her on purpose. While Partner 1 admitted to feeling hurt by these comments, she understood that they were a projection of Partner 2's individual issues. This recognition allowed her to avoid reactive interactions, and instead provided her partner the space to recognize her pattern.

P1: She says things like in the moment that I know she doesn't mean...she would just say things to tick me off...to piss me off on purpose.

P2: Mhmm

P1: I know that like after a while she'll [say], 'I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say that.' She apologizes so I just let it pass by because I know it's just whatever. She'll regret it afterwards so I just let her regret it.

P2: It's regret that I say it...I feel really bad about myself for saying that. Even though I know that maybe she just brushes it off her shoulder.

P1: Sometimes it does hurt, but I'm just gonna let her think about it...let her think about what she just said.

Using timeouts to manage partner reactivity proved to be useful for these participants.

Taking time away from a heated argument allowed for partners to reconnect with the vulnerable feelings related to the issue at hand. Personally, connecting with their vulnerability participants were then able to express themselves more effectively to their partners.

Vulnerable self-expression. When couples were able to disrupt the negative interaction patterns present during conflict, partners felt more vulnerable. Partners then communicated in an open and honest manner with each other. Eight participants across six couples shared how they utilized vulnerable self-expression to understand each other better. For couple Bananashark, vulnerable self-expression was initiated by warning the other partner of hard truths. They were concerned about the possible reactions to the ways in which they verbalized their concerns.

Warning signals indicated that they would be sharing an important concern and did not want to upset them.

P1: Sometimes we know what we say might be upsetting but it's important to say, and we'll be like, "I need to say this, and I don't know how, and it's going to come out wrong, but it's important."

P2: Which really helps. She always says something and she feels like I'm going to be really upset by it, and she warns me ahead of time, and then I never am. I'm always like "okay, that's fine," and then we can talk about it more effectively.

Without the fear of her partner's reaction, Partner 1 was able to share her true feelings in order to increase understanding in the couple relationship. Couple Casey similarly highlighted how they focused on understanding each other better through approaching communication as a team. If they reminded each other that they are a team against the problem, they could decrease the need for one partner to be "right."

P2: I think we always try to remember and really say out loud to remind each other we're on the same team...We're having interaction because we want to understand better, not because one of us wants to win...it's not about finding a winner. No competition. It's about understanding better.

P1: I would agree... It is more of like a discussion of, and come to a consensus. We're, we're talking with the intent of understanding and moving forward.

Partner 2 of couple Casey further explained a specific technique that she preferred to use to facilitate vulnerable self-expression in the relationship. Through using a communication tactic, each partner could specifically identify the underlying issue that is concerning them.

P2: There's a thing in the field of communication called TRIP goals. And it helps you figure out if you're actually talking about the same thing when you're going over a conflict with somebody. So T stands for topic, R is relationship, I is identity and P is process...So if I eat the last granola bar and she comes to me and is like "hey I can't believe that you ate the last granola bar when we always said that if we were out, first we would put it on the shopping list and now there's no granola bars and you didn't put them on the shopping list. How could you?" She's talking about the process that we had set up is not being followed and that's what's bothering me. Whereas if she comes to me and she's like "I can't believe you would eat the last granola bar when I work so hard and it's really important for me to be able to have the granola bar because of how hard I work." She's talking about her identity.

Utilizing formal communication techniques came naturally to this participant based on her educational experiences. For the other participants, vulnerable self-expression came in the form of open and honest communication. Partner 2 from couple Jurassic Park highlighted this best when she stated, “when we’re talking it’s honest and open sort of communication rather than me just being like ‘I’m angry’.” Utilizing vulnerable self-expression in addition to humor and timeouts, participants were able to navigate several issues that arose in the relationship. Some issues that couples negotiated were boundaries and rules for the relationship.

Negotiating boundaries. As participants normalized conflict and worked toward understanding how to communicate with one another, they began to negotiate boundaries and rules for the relationship. Negotiations regarding boundaries included decisions about their interactions with various support systems as well as choices around non-monogamy. Couples in this sample discussed the boundaries they put in place that served various purposes for their relationships. The most salient boundaries for these couples included those for privacy, safety, managing support systems, and negotiations of monogamy or non-monogamy.

Privacy. Across four couples, seven participants spoke of the decisions they made to maintain their privacy as a couple. When it came to privacy, participants wanted to act in ways that kept certain information about their relationship unknown to others. Not surprisingly, most couples maintained their privacy about the relationship by discussing important topics in specific locations away from others. Partner 2 of couple Jurassic Park highlighted her desire for privacy by stating, “if we’re having a disagreement that we’re trying to resolve, then I don’t necessarily want other people to involve themselves or overhear it.” Therefore, they have chosen to engage in these discussions at her house which provides more privacy than her partner’s home.

Differences in desired privacy levels cause friction for couple Vegas, as Partner 1 preferred a higher degree of privacy than her partner. Partner 2 stated that she was very open with everyone she interacted with, sometimes even sharing intimate details of their relationship. Partner 1 desired a stronger boundary for privacy in their relationship.

P2: She'll yell at me because I'll tell somebody something personal and she'll get all red because I told them something personal and then she'll get mad at me for it. I'm just being open, that's just me.

P1: She will tell you every single fact from the moment we met. Random people on buses have heard her life story. I'm like "shut up!"

Partner 1's ability to be open and honest with her partner allowed her to express her discomfort with the open boundary her partner has regarding private relationship information.

Understanding both of their personality traits, the couple was better able to navigate their discussions about this boundary more effectively.

Safety. Physical and emotional safety was a specific concern for seven participants across five couples. Participants expressed fear about how they would be treated when strangers, or even family members, learned they were in a same-gender relationship. Both physical and emotional safety were concerns when couples were in public spaces. Three couples specifically shared how they decided to keep themselves safe in public situations by avoiding potentially dangerous places and situations. They were aware of geographic locations that are associated with people holding non-accepting attitudes toward same-gender relationships. Couples would then avoid traveling in these locations altogether. Couple Coffee discussed how this impacted their shared love of travel.

P1: We like to go places [and] we joke around...we have to go to the states where it's more accepting.

P2: When traveling.

P1: We [agreed], let's not plan a trip somewhere where we're probably going to get a lot of dirty looks or something.

Couple Jurassic Park highlighted this even further, by discussing their awareness of acceptance in their local community and differences across the country. Fear of possible discriminatory events in perceived non-accepting locations led to them placing a boundary around their relationship. This couple's boundary regarding safety was decreased physical affection toward one another in public spaces.

P2: Walking near the church groups at Uni or for any smaller country town we would go for a day or something, we are a bit more hesitant to be openly affectionate because we are not sure how homophobic or [if] we'll get any discrimination.

P1: Yeah. We were in [small town], couple of weeks ago, just for the day and that's a smaller country town in [area of country] and we didn't hold hands while we were walking down the street just because in a country town there are lots of farmers and we weren't sure if we might run into somebody who'd be openly homophobic and something could happen...In the city we live in, we're not particularly worried if something is going to happen here because it's a larger city with a visible LGBT population. But, depending on where we are it can be a bit more stressful.

The concerns for these couples centered around both physical and emotional safety when in public. When it came to boundaries with family, emotional safety was the primary concern. One way couples kept a boundary around their relationship was to delay disclosure of the relationship. For example, Partner 1 of couple Raspberry was fearful of her family's reaction to her relationship, as it also would accompany disclosure of her sexual minority identity. She made a choice regarding her family's knowledge of the relationship, and communicated her wishes to her partner. Specifically, she wanted her partner to understand that this decision was not an indication of her feelings toward her partner. Additionally, they stress the importance of meeting each other's needs.

P1: I've chosen to not... make [my family] aware of this. They know I'm in a relationship. I won't share certain information with them...That's not personal towards [Partner 2] and I'm completely just making sure that this is a relationship that a hundred percent [I'm] willing to risk for those relationships over.

P2: There's just a lot of understanding between us...And we're very like much giving people so we'll be like 'okay you need to do this, you need this, you need this' and less

on the individual and more on the other person. So, I [think] that's very helpful because we just want each other to be happy and grow.

For this couple, the boundary around family was paramount to their emotional safety. As such, Partner 1's family was unable to provide support to the relationship. For other couples, boundaries were needed with family and friends support systems in order to manage the influence they had on the couple relationship.

Supports. When it came to support systems, couples discussed and implemented a variety of boundaries designed to both protect and support the relationship. All couples reported the presence of at least some friends and family members that were supportive of the couple. Specifically, fourteen participants discussed the clear boundaries the couples created to welcome positive support of the relationship while shielding it against negativity. That is, they opened up their relationships to positive interactions with friends and family, while closing themselves off to negative interactions.

In efforts to facilitate and welcome positive support from family members, partners sought to connect with each other's family members. At least one partner in every couple in this sample discussed the importance of positive interactions with family members. Through symbolic gestures, family members could communicate support for the relationship and each partner. For instance, Partner 2 from couple Casey shared how her family had integrated Partner 1 into their family. "She has been basically part of the family. She's gone on trips with my family members and been to classes with my family members and is as much a part of the family as I am basically." These efforts, then, had a positive impact on the relationship. This participant went on to state the importance of actively fostering relationships with each others' families. "The more effort we make to have good relationships with each other's family members, it helps things go more smoothly between us as a couple."

Friends provided additional support of the relationship. At least one participant in seven of the couples in this sample discussed the support friends provided. Often, support came in the form of processing couple arguments. For instance, Partner 1 of couple Bananashark discussed how she utilized friend support to continue processing disagreements with her partner, even after the disagreement was resolved.

P1: And even after things are resolved I'll still talk to friends about it, and I find that's how I process things. So, I talk things through, not just in our relationship, but with friends. We both have friends that we talk to about our relationship and friends that we don't. And we both are aware of that know who it is.

Awareness of each other's support system was an important aspect of couple Bananashark's boundary with friends. Certain friends could be trusted with information regarding the dynamics of the relationship. Knowing the friends with which the partner is processing couple arguments in turn increases trust in their relationship. Both partners in couple Vegas utilized friend support in the same way.

P2: I run a broadcast...I was able to get a support network so that is a resource I used is just being a broadcaster. So, I would turn on the camera and a whole bunch of people would comment and I'm able to talk to them like if I'm having a long day I'll be like "Man I had a hell of a time with my wife this morning. We were having a bad day." So, I actually get some support just because I'm able to talk. Online support for me. (To P1) You have your friends at the cafe.

P1: Yeah, I went to the cafe and any time I was stressed or mad about her or something really good happened like [Partner 2] got a donation on her stream, I would be able to talk to them and brag.

Some family and friends were not supportive, however, and the couples experiencing non-supportive people created boundaries to protect the relationship from them. Predominantly, participants spoke of how they distanced themselves from non-supportive people. For instance, couple Jurassic Park distanced themselves from Partner 1's father and step-mother due to homophobia.

P1: My biological dad and his wife are quite homophobic. My step mom has told me not to tell people that I'm dating a woman and told me that it's embarrassing for her to know that I'm dating a woman. So, I just don't talk to my dad or my step mom very much because they're not very supportive of the relationship.

Creating a boundary of limited contact helped Partner 1 protect the couple relationship from the lack of support they receive from these family members. Similarly, Partner 2 from couple Bananashark protects Partner 1 and the relationship from her family through limited contact. She is aware of her family's patterns that do not support the relationship currently and could possibly impact the future of the relationship as well.

P2: I come from a very dysfunctional family, which is putting it lightly. I know that I keep [Partner 1] from being around my family because I don't want to be around them. So, I don't want to put her in the position where she has to be around them. I very much like to keep her separated from my family which makes me feel like I don't have to cope with them. We talk about it as far as our future and stuff...having like children and who is allowed to be alone with our children, who isn't allowed to be alone with our children, and how close do we want to be to our parents and our family? We're trying to find a balance where we're far enough away, but if we need to see her mom or her dad, we could. I don't want my children to be around angry people and violence like I was around my whole childhood. My goal is to keep them out of that as much as possible. If I don't bring [Partner 1] to a family party, that feels safer to me than being blissfully ignorant and thinking we can go and everything will be fine.

It is clear for both couple Bananashark and Jurassic Park, there are family members that cannot provide the relational support they would care to receive. For couple Always, friends also were unable to provide the type of support that was desired. While previous friends could have been a positive support at some point, Partner 1 perceived them to be currently a negative influence on her and the relationship. Therefore, she distanced herself from these individuals to protect the values she shared with her partner.

P1: Essentially other people in the LGBT community that I used to be friends with are now doing things that I disapprove of or disagree with and therefore I don't want to be around them anymore. I think they could have been a good relationship support but like I said, there are some things that are happening that we just don't agree with.

Monogamy vs. non-monogamy. Participants also engaged in discussions regarding boundaries related to monogamy. A total of eleven participants across six couples referenced discussions about monogamy in their relationship. At the initial interview, all but one couple had made the decision to be monogamous. Couple Jurassic Park shared their process of deciding to be monogamous.

P1: I brought it up once a while ago if [Partner 2] would be comfortable with having an open relationship or had any immediate desire to sleep with other people just to see what she would be comfortable with...And then she took some time to herself and said to me later on, "thought about a lot of different possible scenarios and I don't think I could be comfortable with it. Maybe one day in twenty years or something but right now I'm definitely not comfortable with it." And that is understandable and I'm really glad you told me your real opinion so that I didn't do anything that hurt. And I'm very happy with doing the same thing that you want and staying in a monogamous closed relationship, and only being with each other because it's important for both of us to be on the same page and not doing anything that makes the other person unhappy.

During the follow up interview, this couple disclosed that they had re-negotiated their decision about monogamy to satisfy Partner 1's desire for sex with men. They engaged in several conversations to set clear rules and boundaries, and continued to revisit them when necessary.

P1: I brought it up first when I asked, "how would you feel if we opened up the relationship and had boundaries and rules and stuff?" And then we talked about it over probably 2 months, before we actually did it. We talked about it for quite a long time before we actually did anything. And we've got some rules and boundaries in place and you know, so far, it's been fine.

P2: There were a couple of little problems with figuring out where the boundaries were. Theoretically, you can say, "yeah, I'm totally fine with this" but when something happens it's like "oh, actually..." So, we've been negotiating and talking and that's where our communication has really helped us a lot. If [Partner 1] has arranged to go and hookup or whatever, I just tell her how I'm feeling. I'll basically say [if] I need validation. And she will validate me. If I'm not feeling happy, or whatever, she's happy to cancel and come see me instead. She keeps telling me that I'm her priority, which is really helping.

P1: Yeah. [Partner 2] comes first. Especially because the guys are people who I don't know well. So, it's not like I'm bailing on a friend or anything.

P2: It's getting better the longer it goes on. The first couple of times, I was still real hesitant and uncomfortable, but I just talked to her about how I was feeling and what was making me uncomfortable. We adjusted a couple of things. We got rid of some of the boundaries we had. So, it's very fluid at the moment.

While this couple made an initial decision to remain monogamous, they were able to remain flexible with their boundaries over time. Couple 1101 similarly provided space in their decision about monogamy to allow for changes over time. Since neither of the partners had engaged in sexual activity with males, they were both aware that they were curious about it. They decided to remain monogamous, but if either of them desired the experience, they could do so without fearing a disruption to the relationship.

P1: We have an understanding that if one of us were to want to go and at least experience and have sex with a guy that we can do that without us being mad at each other...

P2: It's not cheating if it's with a boy. (laughs)

P1: That's not true. (laughs) As long as we don't run off and start dating that person.

Couple Vegas was the least monogamous couple in the sample, and still described their relationship as 99% monogamous. They agreed to open their relationship to sexual partners only, and embraced the fluidity in both of their sexuality to explore and experiment sexually with themselves and others.

P2: Like I said we're 99.999% monogamous. We're going home with each other at the end of the day.

P1: Basically, the rule is she's not allowed to be with anybody by herself.

P2: Well you didn't say that.

P1: Yeah-huh!

P2: You said as long as I come home to you.

P1: Eh. I changed my mind. I just don't want to lose her over it...we could be together with somebody else and be okay and that would be less hurtful for me [than] if you went off by yourself.

P2: I think what happened, one of the things that was a turning point in that realization was when I was a cab driver I made out with some girl and I went straight home and told my wife and I said this happened and we basically talked about it...sometimes things just happen and I'm never gonna leave her over it and if she was at a bar and hooked up with someone, as long as she comes home to me...that was really our realization that we don't want to lose each other over something like that.

P1: I'd really rather be a group than, than a personal one on one

P2: Yeah, a group thing would probably be better but I'm saying these things do happen in life and it's better to have the understanding that we wouldn't let it destroy our relationship over it.

Each of these couples indirectly stressed the importance of increased trust and commitment to the relationship. It appears that these factors needed to be present in the relationship in order for partners to feel more comfortable with non-monogamy. For example, partners in both couple Vegas and Jurassic Park did not participate in non-monogamous sexual activity until after increases in commitment (i.e., engagement, marriage). They also emphasized that their partner is priority over any sexual encounter outside the relationship. It is important to point out that negotiations about non-monogamy for this sample centered around sexual activity. None of the participants in this sample discussed the possibility of polyamory for their relationships.

Repairs. Following important discussions, such as negotiating the boundaries and rules for the relationship, participants engaged in making amends and repairs to the relationship in order to continue improving their relationship. Across seven couples, eleven participants discussed the ways in which they reconnected with each other after difficult conversations. Apologizing and taking accountability was particularly important for this sample. Partner 2 of couple Casey spoke on behalf of both partners, stating that they are both able to take accountability for their actions rather than react in defensive ways.

P2: I think we're both good at taking accountability...letting the other one know that you don't need to go into blaming mode because they've been wrong and they're not gonna be scared to accept it. They're not gonna push it onto you. They're not gonna push it onto somebody else. I think we're both really good at saying, "you know what, I see what you're saying and I apologize."

Couples Raspberry and Jurassic Park both discussed taking accountability as well, with a specific focus on making changes to interactions moving forward in the relationship. Following conflict, they will apologize and make commitments to changes in behavior.

Couple Raspberry:

P1: It will either be an argument where towards the end [we're] still very frustrated and [say], "You know what I didn't realize you were feeling that way but I'm sorry, I'm going to work on it." I think why we communicate so well is we don't just say [things] like, "oh I'm sorry I'll do better" and just move on. We actually make a conscious effort to do better and that's something I really like about this relationship. I'm willing to take responsibility and she's willing to take responsibility and we know what we need to continue to build.

P2: I agree with that.

Couple Jurassic Park:

P1: When I say something that's maybe a bit harsher than I meant to or I think about it and maybe wasn't the nicest thing I could have said to my girlfriend, I will try to bend over backwards to apologize and I feel like [Partner 2] is the same.

P2: And we are conscious to not do that again.

P1: If I say, "I prefer you didn't joke about that," then she'll just stop joking about that...and that goes both ways. If I say something that makes her uncomfortable as a joke, then I'll just try to stop doing it.

Couple Bananashark discussed accountability and apologies as well as plans for improved interactions in the relationship. Additionally, they further sought to reconnect after conflict by spending time with one another. They valued this specific approach in order to return to their couple homeostasis.

P1: So for me, in a conversation if we are trying to fix something, I don't think the conversation is over until we have a plan of what's going to be different and how it's going to be different, exactly what we are going to do, how we will know if it's different. And then also I am really big on you don't get to say sorry unless you know what you are sorry for.

P2: And then once that's decided and we've figured out our plan, after that it's fine, and we move on and we play the Sims, or watch a movie, or do whatever, but after that everything mellows out.

P1: We really try to do something together after that though, that's less intense.

Making amends was made possible for these participants by their engagement in metacommunication, utilization of specific techniques, and negotiations of boundaries and rules. Together, these four processes assisted couples in making meaning of their relationship together, thus creating a couple identity.

Self Reflectivity

A total of thirteen participants across all eight couples discussed the ways in which they engaged in self-reflectivity. Participants emphasized the individual emotion work they engaged in, which involved self-reflection and managing emotions. These processes of cognitive emotion work and looking glass self ultimately helped them adjust their thoughts and feelings associated with bisexuality.

Couple Bananashark:

P1: I guess now I've come to the point where when I stop and ask myself, "are you uncomfortable because of what you've been told your whole life," and it's a very different mindset. So sometimes even if I am uncomfortable, I recognize that doesn't mean that the thing is bad, it's something I've been socialized to think.

Couple Casey:

P1: There's times where I feel intimidated...there's other people that she could choose to be with. But then also thinking the complete opposite with that exact same thought... there's a lot of other people that she could choose to be with and she chooses to be with me.

P2: I started wondering, is it the same? Did she have the same conversations with her [past boyfriends] or is it different? Then as we got further into our relationship, then I understood her and how much I meant to her and the differences...and those ideas started going away.

Couple Always:

P1: Sometimes I feel guilty because I have these biases. And it's not bad to have biases, especially because they're not coming from a place of like "oh I hate bisexuals". No, it's just from personal experiences and that is a valid thing. And I know that. But I do feel kind of guilty because, I mean, I wouldn't have found her profile if it said bisexual. I would have missed this great opportunity if it did, because of that. So, I work-ish. I know that they exist, which is my first point of where I'm going to start changing them.

Each of these participants shared how they address their thoughts and feelings regarding bisexuality and their relationships. Such self-reflectivity required the participants to be honest with themselves. For Partner 1 of couple Coffee, her critical self-reflection included therapy to gain awareness about her emotional responses. As she addressed her anger issues, she also addressed her negative assumptions about her partner's desire to be with men. She then experienced changes in bi-negativity, which further led to decreased insecurities she once held.

P1: I think that reassurance finally stuck in my head. And I went to therapy for a while and I think that helped a lot with reassuring. I honestly think going to therapy changed a lot...made me more secure, more confident. It was more reassuring...and I think also helped a lot that I wouldn't get so angry all the time with the relationship. I don't know if it was just those anger issues that I had that just made things so much worse than they had to be, just dating someone that was bi...it didn't have to be as bad as it was but I was just going through so much...all my problems I just threw them onto her. And my therapist would always tell me, "she's still around even though like you get so angry. She loves you." It just, it helped a lot to just realize [and] calm me down [and] stop freaking out about it...I don't have that insecurity anymore. If she really wanted to be with a guy or someone else, she wouldn't have stuck around, she would've left already. I had to switch around my mentality.

Engaging in individual cognitive emotion work was important for the participants in this sample, as it assisted them in recognizing the ways in which their attitudes regarding bisexuality impacted their relationships. One of the ways participants sought to change their attitudes was through educating themselves about bisexuality.

Learning about Bisexuality

Almost all participants ($n = 15$) engaged in some form of educating themselves about bisexuality. Partner 2 of couple Bananashark emphasized the importance of educating oneself on any topic by stating that "[e]ducation always plays a role, and the more educated you are about any topic the more you understand and the more accepting you become." Partner 2 of couple Vegas further highlighted the importance of partners educating themselves on bisexuality by stating "[i]f you are ever gonna leave somebody cause you hear the word bisexual in their title, then you might want to do a bit of research into what it means to be bisexual." Participants increased their knowledge about bisexuality from their partner ($n = 13$) as well as through their own research ($n = 6$). Education included scientific research and living a life as a bisexual woman.

Knowledge about bisexuality. Partner 1 from couple Jurassic Park increased her own scientific knowledge regarding domestic violence through researching online. She then educated her partner on this important issue.

P1: I definitely have brought up some stuff about our relationship that [Partner 2] had never thought about or read about before...I've found factual information, like the CDC report on inter-partner violence and mental health for bisexual women.

P2: She's taught me a lot about domestic violence for a woman in straight relationships.

Partner 2 of couple Casey also increased her own factual knowledge through taking courses on families. She reported learning a significant amount about diversity in a class that emphasized strengths of diverse families.

P2: I have one class specifically that was focused on the strengths of different types of families instead of just like, "the white families are like this and then the black people are like this and Latinos are like this and anyone else is like this." It was more like "this is a strength of white families, Asian families," and I had never considered that there could be a strength of an LGBT family. That just wasn't even on my radar, but then realizing, in order to be out, you have to have a lot of courage. You have to be vulnerable. You have to be willing to lean on each other because you're not gonna have, sometimes in some cases, the same support as other people. And so, it might not only be bad. There could be positive things too.

Living as a bisexual woman. Other participants shared how their partners helped them understand what bisexuality means to them as a bisexual woman. Partner 1 of couple Jurassic Park understood "the full range of her bisexuality" through her relationship with her partner. Partner 2 of couple Casey came to realize that a common stereotype regarding bisexuality was not always true. Due to her relationship with her partner, she understood that she could be bisexual and fluid in her attractions, but also able to be committed to one partner.

Couple Jurassic Park:

P1: [Partner 2] is the first woman that I've ever been fully in love with. And I've definitely been fully in love with a few men before. So, by being in this relationship, I've learned to experience the full range of my bisexuality in a way.

Couple Casey:

P2: Really in my head before, [I thought] bi people are the ones that can't make up their mind. They'll just take anybody that comes their way. I just had so many negative ideas about what it was to be bi, and now I feel like it is very much a continuum.

Learning about bisexuality and what a bisexual identity means to each partner assisted the participants in this sample in changing their overall attitudes regarding bisexuality. In addition, participants were able to further develop trust and commitment in their relationships.

Developing Commitment

An important component of relational emotion work for participants in this sample was developing commitment. Rosenblatt (1977) defined commitment as a person's intent to maintain a relationship. Every participant in this study discussed how they developed commitment through increasing trust and creating intimacy.

Trust. Rotter (1967) defined trust as "an expectancy held by an individual or a group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon" (p. 651). For participants in the present study, trust was often built through the relational meaning making processes discussed earlier. Additionally, participants increased their trust through recognizing signs that their partner was faithful and loved them unconditionally. For Partner 1 of couple Always, she realized she could trust her partner because of the rules her partner had around sexual activity. This rule helped to maintain and "protect" the sexual health of both partners and eliminated the fear of bringing disease in the relationship. Having this knowledge allowed her to let go of fear she had that was rooted in previous experiences.

P1: I had to learn that and be okay with [Partner 2] going and seeing a friend [and] that wasn't her leaving me...because, I was the type of person that in my previous relationships I was very promiscuous so if I based my own behavior and thought [Partner 2] was going to do the same, I can see how that fear was there for me...but she is not going to want to have sex with anyone if they're not tested. So that would never happen, and I knew that because I had to get tested...and that takes a while!

For couple Bananashark, engaging in conversations about Partner 1's sexual minority identity both highlighted and increased the trust between the partners. Partner 2 was able to react in a way that showed she was not threatened by Partner 1's identity questioning and development. Partner 1 was then able to think about her sexual minority identity without fear of rejection from her partner. She eventually shifted her identity label from "Partner 2" to "bisexual". Rather than use her partner to describe her sexuality, Partner 1 was able to integrate a minority sexual orientation into her overall identity. This individual identity integration then communicated an increase in commitment to the relationship, thus gaining couple level identity integration.

P1: I was already dating her when I started to identify as bisexual. So, I talked a lot of it through with her.... could I imagine myself dating a guy? Which was really good, because I know a lot of people that wouldn't have had that conversation with their partner because their partner would be threatened by it, but she wasn't.

P2: I think that helped our relationship move forward...when it was her identifying as just gay because she was with me, it felt like our relationship was less concrete.

Couple Vegas shared how acceptance of self-disclosures facilitated trust. As they shared aspects of themselves with one another and reacted with acceptance, they increased trust. This then led to even more disclosure and continued increases in trust.

P2: The more that we were open about who we were with each other, the more we realized that we had nothing to hide from each other.

P1: "Oh you're not gonna judge me or hate me because I am this way? Okay. What about this thing about me?" And I can leak a little bit more.

P2: Now we've leaked about just about everything after all these years.

In addition to increased trust, self-disclosure helped this couple to report a deepened intimacy in their relationship. Other couples also spoke of increases in intimacy through various actions and events.

Intimacy. Participants discussed various forms of intimacy in their relationships. Couples created intimacy through a variety of actions and events. Their understanding of intimacy

indicated a multi-faceted definition of intimacy, which aligns with Moss and Shwabel's (1993) definition that "intimacy in enduring romantic relationships is determined by the level of commitment and positive affective, cognitive, and physical closeness one experiences with a partner in a reciprocal (although not necessarily symmetrical) relationship" (p. 33). Participants in this sample highlighted how shared experiences and values, physical affection, emotional support, implementing rituals, and prioritizing each other all helped foster and grow intimacy in their relationships.

Couple 1101:

P2: I would also say as well as shared values we have a lot of shared experiences. We both went to the same high school, which was a magnet for science and technology. And it's [an] extremely high stress environment. A lot of the alumni and staff that, couples who get together in our high school, there's a weirdly large amount of them that end up staying together after high school. It's like if you've gotten through it together, if you've gotten through that high school together, you're okay.

P1: One of the reasons why [our relationship] has been so successful is because we are both very physical people. Not in the sense of anything sexual, more about cuddling and just being there for each other in that way... I think it's played a huge role in how comfortable we are with each other. Our high school friend group was very platonically touchy feely, and I believe that was one of the factors that brought us closer together even before we started dating.

Couple Vegas:

P1: Over the years her standing by me. Between all the stupid shit that we've gone through...and the times something was hard and she was there for me...she was always my cheerleader.

P2: It's been, just memories...a lot of things that we've had to endure together, that we've been willing to endure together and they were all outside forces...just random things throughout our life that have affected our life, but they've brought us closer together than anything in my opinion.

Couple Always:

P1: [Partner 2] and I pretty much have the same values and morals on everything, everything, and that's what I love so much about her...on the really big things, like where we want our lives to go, we are very much in line with each other.

Couple Casey:

P2: We have a habit that every night before we go to bed, there are two things that we [say we] appreciate about each other. And that helps set the tone of like there's always more positivity than like difficulty or like negativity.

P1: We also have a little book that is a “me, you, us” ...it just says random prompts that you write about together that are a combined journal kinda thing. I feel like having rituals and traditions is really big and really helpful.

Couple Raspberry:

P1: We're not the kind of couple like that takes an hour to respond to the other person's message...we're both busy, we both do things and if she goes out, I expect not to hear from her the rest of the night but during the day we're both doing things [and] if I see her name pop up I don't [think] “I'll get to that later.” She's very much a priority and I try to make her feel like she's a priority and I know that's especially important right now.

P2: I appreciate that she makes me feel like a priority because some people don't and that's cool when your partner does.

Participants in this sample developed commitment through developing and maintaining trust and intimacy. Commitment also was fostered through the various relational emotion work processes discussed above. All the emotion work processes then provided the opportunity for these participants to minimize the impact of attitudes regarding bisexuality on relationship satisfaction and often led to a shift in attitudes regarding bisexuality.

Shifting Attitudes

A distinct shift in attitudes seemed to occur as a result of the relational emotion work the couples in this sample engaged in. Additionally, participants were impacted by exposure to people and experiences that did not fit the stereotypes they once believed about bisexual individuals. Being in a relationship with a bisexual person seemed to synthesize knowledge regarding bisexuality in a way that helped participants to shift their attitudes toward more accepting views. A total of thirteen participants across all eight couples discussed how their attitudes shifted over time as a result of these various relational experiences.

For Partner 1 of couple Bananashark, seeing other bisexual people live outside the stereotypes helped her understand bisexuality in a more accepting way. Since she was already in a committed relationship at the time of her sexual minority identity development, this shift in attitudes toward the label “bisexual” was meaningful. Recognizing that there are real bisexual

people who can be happy in committed, monogamous relationships was important to her choosing a label that was meaningful and free of stereotypes in her mind.

P1: Before [identifying as bisexual], I wasn't really identifying as anything and that was a really comfortable place for me because I grew up with all of those labels being so stigmatized...for a while [I] wasn't sure. I knew I wasn't straight, but it took me a while to figure that out. And I knew a lot of people who were bi and I knew the stereotypes but none of those people fit any of those stereotypes. So that was the biggest thing that influenced my thoughts, which was just thinking they're the same as everyone else. And also, everyone I know who is bi that's in a relationship has never been cheating and it's a monogamous relationship...I've become more accepting over time and that still is happening.

The experience of being in a relationship was particularly salient as well. Several participants shared how their attitudes regarding bisexuality were changed through participating in a bisexual relationship. First-hand experience helped both partners in couple Raspberry and Partner 1 in couple Coffee understand bisexuality more personally. In couple Always, Partner 2's comfort with her bisexual identity helped Partner 1 to view bisexuality as a spectrum of fluidity rather than a phase. The shift in perspective removed her fear that her partner would leave her for a man like her previous partners had done. Consequently, she broadened her understanding of bisexuality while increasing her trust in the relationship. With more understanding came more accepting attitudes.

Couple Raspberry:

P2: I think mostly with experience I guess...just experiencing it and being able to understand bisexuality cus you're actually participating in it and you're a member of this community. Before, the most that I would experience it was through my friends, but it's just different when you're in it...you understand things more.

P1: I guess I really saw it as more sexualized before I had a serious relationship. Because when I had experience with females in the past it was just hooking up.

Couple Coffee:

P1: Now that she's more comfortable with [her bisexuality] that makes me [feel] okay. I've never had bad attitudes with it, I think it was just because I didn't really understand. But she's helped me understand. I do see it differently now...certain things you don't understand. But, her attitudes towards [bisexuality] helped me understand it.

Couple Always:

P1: I feel much more comfortable with our relationship and much more comfortable with the idea of bisexuality and that it's not threatening. I mean obviously, it's not necessarily a phase. For me, it was a phase that I went through to finally reach my sexual orientation that I'm identifying with now, but I think that's just a spectrum of fluidity and not necessarily phase-like so maybe I shouldn't say that. But I feel like I've become much more open and embraced it instead of fearing it and it being something that I'm threatened by.

As couples cycled out of relational emotion work, their shifts in attitudes regarding bisexuality accompanied their move into the next phase of the relationship. Phase 4 was a period of shared relational meaning, which indicated mutual agreement on the couple identity.

Phase 4: Shared Relational Meaning

In this phase, couples appeared to be settled into their couple identity they negotiated in the previous phase. They have made decisions about their relationship through relational emotion work, and now engaged in processes to perform and maintain those decisions. The processes that maintained their couple identity was (a) wrestling with tensions of bi-erasure, (b) commitment loss fears, (c) commitment maintenance, and (d) impression management. Together, these four processes informed the perceptions of relationship satisfaction among partners. Partner perceptions of relationship satisfaction, in turn, informed the performance of the four couple identity processes.

Wrestling with Tensions of Bi-erasure

Due to the effects of mononormativity, bisexual individuals commonly experience bi-erasure in monogamous relationships (Bradford, 2004). The partners determined the role that bisexuality played in the relationship, which led partners to feeling pressured either to ignore their bisexuality (Rust, 2000) or to put forth significant effort to make their bisexuality visible (Campbell et al., 2017). For the present sample, couples seemed to wrestle with the tensions of bi-erasure in their relationship. Participants discussed the ways in which they wished not to erase

bisexual identities, but also did not actively amplify the visibility of the identity in the relationship.

The participants ($n = 15$) in this sample indicated they did not want to ignore the bisexual partner's identity. Often, partners of bisexual participants were acutely aware of bi-erasure that could occur for their partners. Partner 2 of couple Bananashark highlighted this notion.

P2: A lot of times in relationships, like when a lesbian and a bi woman are dating, it's always a lesbian relationship. I mean that's the overarching name that it's called. And so, a lot of times bisexual women that are in relationships can get erased and I don't want that to happen. I don't want it to be like "oh yeah we're both just into women," because that's not true.

Even so, couples also wished to emphasize other aspects of their individual identities and relationships, such as focusing on the best interests of the relationship or the whole identity of each partner. This focus rises above any one specific aspect, such as a bisexual label, and generalizations are avoided with the focus on the behavior of a person instead of stereotypes. The following quotes highlight how several participants focused on the aspects of the relationship they believe to be the most important.

Couple Always:

P2: I don't like labels a lot because they are very misleading most of the time so, until I get to know you, I don't really make up my mind.

Couple Raspberry:

P1: I'm [Partner 1's name] and I like music. I'm [Partner 1's name] and I'm bisexual. I don't feel like it's something that should even affect my relationship and I feel like if it, if I was in a relationship with someone and being bisexual was a problem that's probably not a relationship that I should be in because there's a problem now. It's just going to be a bigger problem later. Something that's never going to change.

Couple Vegas:

P1: The label part, it becomes less important the longer you're in this monogamous committed relationship. It doesn't matter anymore.

P2: Love is love. Do not let any aspect of anything else stand between that because life is too short and love is worth it.

Couple Casey:

P1: If you have connection then the person is more important than the topic or their characteristics or anything else that's going on.

P2: I don't think that somebody being bisexual automatically makes them a good or bad person.

Couple Always:

P1: I do have a tendency to, not to forget that she is bisexual, but I have a tendency to be like, "lesbian couple things". But we're not a lesbian couple. I'm a lesbian and she's bisexual. I feel bad sometimes because it's sort of like an erasure, but sometimes it's more convenient to say "lesbians" ...than it is to like [say] "lesbian and bisexual couple." I'd typically say if I can help it. If I'm being cautious about identities, I'll say "same-sex couple" or something like that.

P2: She'll be like, "we're in a lesbian relationship, oh I'm sorry, it's a blah blah blah." I don't really care (laughs). We are a couple and it's a relationship. I don't really care about labels.

Couple Bananashark:

P2: I base my opinions on people based off of who they are as an individual person not on a whole persona, a whole hearted like every single bisexual person is this or every single lesbian is like this. I think in the community and in general there's just a lot of separation and people stigmatize people a lot. Straight people do that enough towards us anyways so why do you want to continue to perpetrate that kind of behavior. So, I try to be as open as possible.

Couple Jurassic Park:

P2: I don't think it really influences anything. Even if you're a lesbian...I like who you are as a person not your sexuality. So, I think that's an important part of her identity. It influences a lot of conversations we have, but I don't think it influences the satisfaction of the relationship.

There also appeared to highlight the similarities to other relationships and downplay aspects that imply difference.

Couple 1101:

P1: Most straight couples also frequently have disagreements about like "oh, you looked at her," or "you're dating your best friend who happens to be a boy." So, I don't think its specific to bisexuality.

Couple Always:

P1: We are a same-sex couple and we have the same goals and, often times, values that other couples have. We are really no different other than we can't procreate naturally. (Always)

Through the approaches taken by the couples in this study, bisexuality is neither erased nor purposefully made visible in these relationships. Some partners will honor a bisexual identity through acknowledging attractiveness of multiple genders, or through sexual exploration in the two couples who negotiated non-monogamy. However, the relationships between partners who participated in this sample remained priority. The relational emotion work the couples engaged in increased trust and commitment needed to center the relationship as most important. Further, as the focus is on the relationship itself, bisexuality becomes simply a fact rather than an important topic of discussion. Attitudes regarding bisexuality just “is” and exists in a liminal, or ambiguous, space (Van Genneep, 1960). Partners are committed to exploring what the relationship can become due to the liminality of bi-negative attitudes. The following participants highlight how bisexuality exists in this way.

Couple Always:

P1: I don't feel like [bisexuality] really has much of an effect now. [Partner 2]'s just so casual about it, we might have a few conversations here and there, but it would be like a pebble instead of like a boulder. I don't think her sexuality really has anything to do with my satisfaction with our relationship. Because we don't really ever talk about it, it's just something we both know and not really conversations that we have frequently.

Couple Bananashark:

P2: I don't think it affects how happy I feel in the relationship. It just is. It's not something where I feel that it's going to hurt me in any way. It doesn't make me feel less secure with [Participant 1] and her as my girlfriend. It just is.

P1: To me... it makes the relationship feel more secure and stable. Because I know that thing isn't going to be the problem. I don't have to worry about it, if that makes sense.

P2: Yeah I would agree that it just makes everything more stable, it's not something that's going to be a fight, it's not something that we're going to have to discuss endlessly because that's a hard thing to have to constantly be talking about...about identity and whether or not your partner is comfortable with your identity. That would be a rough thing to have to deal with in a relationship on top of other usual things you might have. It's good that both of us know at the end of the day, that it doesn't cross our mind, we like each other and that's all that matters and as long as we keep our relationship going regardless [of] how we feel about our identities.

P1: So yeah, I feel like it's good that we don't have to worry about talking it out all the time it's just kind of like a fact.

Couple Raspberry:

P2: It doesn't really influence me that much at all. I don't really see my sexuality as influencing how I feel about her. Those are two different things...I see us as being in a relationship...I don't see my bisexuality that often.

P1: It's funny when people say labels don't matter, because when you're in a relationship you don't think about it...you don't think "I'm bisexual." I just think, "I have [a] girlfriend." I only remember when I let someone else know I have a girlfriend...it's weird hearing other people say it or hearing them go back and forth with the word because it's not something that's even really apparent or a big part of our relationship. We're just together. It's not something I think about.

Couple Casey:

P2: If that's part of what makes her who she is then...I guess I love somebody who's bisexual. It just doesn't play that big of a role in how I feel.

Couple Coffee:

P1: I don't feel like that has much to do with our happiness...it's just our relationship...doesn't really affect us. There's more comfort when she says, 'this guy's really attractive,' if we watch tv or something. I don't think there's a lot of influence that has to do with our relationship because it's just our relationship.

For these couples, the liminality of bi-negative attitudes as couples wrestle with tensions of bi-erasure couples frees up partners to focus on other important aspects of the relationship.

Commitment Loss Fears

For eight participants across five couples, periodic fears of commitment loss arose during the shared relational meaning phase. These fears centered around the concern that bisexual partners could leave the relationship for a male partner. Partner 1 of couple 1101 stated, "I always have a concern in the back of my head that one day [Partner 2]'s going to snap out of it." That is, she was fearful her partner would desire the comfort and safety of heteronormativity.

Other participants felt similarly.

Couple Coffee:

P1: I feel like it would bother me more if she left for a man. I think the big problem with being a lesbian in a bisexual relationship, there's no way to compete with a guy...their body is just completely different and everything sexually is completely different. There's just no way to compete.

Couple Always:

P1: If for some reason she ever started dating a woman after me, I would be sad that our relationship ended, but otherwise really wouldn't feel anger towards that. But I would be very angry if she dated a guy. It just feels like a slap in the face. And, I just don't understand what I can't give to our relationship that they can. I feel like men have so much power and I don't want them to have power over my relationship...if anything happened between our relationship, I still would [have] a slight bias towards wanting to date another bisexual person.

P2: Sometimes I'm a little worried that if I go do something with [male friend's name], or I talk about doing something with a guy, she might be a little bit more jealous and I wouldn't want to start an argument about it...However, when I ride with a woman, [Partner 1] tend to get a little bit more jealous.

Couple Bananashark:

P2: I would feel like there was something in our relationship that I couldn't give her, whether or not that would be a child, floating through the world where people of our gender are more judging when you are dating a woman, but if she dated a girl there's no threat that that girl could give her something that I couldn't.

Despite these fears that arose periodically, partners remained committed to the relationship. The ways in which they performed commitment maintenance quelled the fears that occasionally surfaced.

Commitment Maintenance

Every participant in this sample discussed the importance of maintaining the relationship commitment. For some couples, maintaining and growing commitment was an easy process.

Couple Jurassic Park became engaged to be married between their first and second interviews.

Couple Casey wed following the second interview, and couple Vegas were excited to celebrate their upcoming 10-year anniversary.

Couple Jurassic Park:

P1: We got engaged in May! We're not going to get married until the kids are a lot older just for logistics reasons. But it's nice to be engaged.

Couple Vegas:

P1: We're celebrating our 10th wedding anniversary in December. I'm really excited. We wanna do a renewal of our vows.

Other couples engaged in maintenance of their commitment to the relationship and partner in various ways. Couples maintained their commitment by spending time together, respecting one another, and showing affection.

Spending time. Every participant reported that spending time with one another was an important way to demonstrate commitment to their relationship. Given the various constraints each couple faced, they became creative to meet the need of spending time with each other. For instance, couple Raspberry were in a long-distance relationship and utilized technology to increase their time together.

P1: There's a lot of apps now for like doing things far away with your friends or from the safety of your home. So, there's this app that we can both watch movies...when we're together we watch a lot of movies...and you can watch movies and via Netflix and Hulu remotely through the app. You just sign into your account [and] we can watch the same shows together, so we binged watched seasons of tv. We binge watch movies and we're still able to continue that even separated. So, it's nice because I just start seasons while I'm with her and movies while we're not together and it's nice because everything is so accessible now when it comes to technology...it's easier to have a relationship like this as long as you're willing to put in the effort.

Other couples creatively spent time together in order to minimize financial burdens and maximize quality interactions. Busy couples focused on being physically present with one another, taking advantage of free time in their schedules, or scheduling weekly date nights. Trips and attending events, such as concerts, were common. Partners even engaged in role-playing to reconnect with the excitement of the “honeymoon phase” of their relationship.

Couple Bananashark:

P2: I really like spending time with the person I'm dating...even if we're just sitting in the same room and she's doing homework and I am playing video games, that's enough for me, I am happy with that. We don't even have to be talking...we can just be in the same room or something, and she'll be doing things and I'll just follow her around because I want to spend time with her.

Couple Jurassic Park:

P1: Before summer started, we were going for a lot of walks...yesterday when [Partner 2] had a break between her classes I came and saw her at Uni. We mostly try to do stuff

together that's not expensive. So, going for walks around town, maybe going for fast food, going to a movie every couple of months...we see each other every single day.

P2: Yeah, I think a lot of the time we'll plan to watch a movie and just lie in bed and enjoy each other's company.

P1: And have a little movie night with popcorn and stuff.

Couple Casey:

P1: We have a date night every week...that's really helpful to...me feeling like I can connect with her...I know that there is something coming that we do have in place.

Couple Always:

P1: We spend the majority of our free time together and I'm pretty content with that. We really like cuddling...I like cooking with [Partner 2] ...we do a lot of things together, like going out to eat or watching movies together. Generally being in each other's presence.

P2: We like going on little trips too.

P1: Yeah, day trips. Get out of the grad school head.

Couple Coffee:

P1: We both like going to concerts and going out of town. I think that helps our relationship a lot.

P2: We would do stuff to make us feel like the honeymoon, either it's like going on a date or go out to drink. Sometimes we do this thing where we'll go to the bar together and then she'll sit on one side, and then I'll sit on the other side, and then we flirt with each other and we act like we don't know each other.

Respecting partner. Several participants ($n = 5$) across four couples also emphasized how respecting their partner was important to maintaining their commitment. Specifically, partners showed respect to one another by accepting and supporting each other and their identities.

Couple Jurassic Park:

P2: Do I wish that she was only attracted to women? I don't even know what that would look like. I don't even know how to envision that. I guess this sounds silly but I would say her being attracted to both men and women doesn't bother me...It's not like I wish that you wouldn't notice Rudy Goubert's abs...to me she is who she is [and that] is somebody that I love a lot and entirely...so if that's part of what makes her who she is then...I guess I love somebody who's bisexual.

Couple Bananashark:

P2: I guess it hasn't had a huge impact on me in general...I always want [Participant 1] to feel as comfortable as she can, and I would never want her to feel like she has to pretend that she's not bi or have to hide anything.

P1: Yeah. I also had a lot of people...trying to tell me what [label] they thought I was, which was not great. But she never did that.

Couple 1101:

P2: I think if we weren't supportive and accepting, our relationship satisfaction would decrease.

P1: Us being accepting and supportive to each other makes both of us feel accepted and supported.

Showing Affection. Showing affection was another important commitment maintenance process for eight participants across six couples. Couple 1101 mentioned earlier their shared values regarding physical affection in their relationship. Partner 1 of couple Bananashark also shared the importance of physical affection for her. She stated, "I am a very touchy-feely person so it's really important for me to have cuddles."

Other forms of affection were important as well, such as gift giving and using terms of endearment. For instance, Partner 2 of couple Always said to her partner, "I think you're more [likely] to show emotion...and I like buying things for people." Partner 1 recognized that they prefer and embrace different love languages. "Love languages...her way of showing affection is not only gift giving, but also making gifts." Couple Casey utilized terms of endearment. Partner 2 stated, "Usually she [calls me] my love or darling."

Impression Management

Couples engaged in a form of impression management, in which they presented themselves as a couple or individual persons in different ways based on the context of the situation (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934). Doing so allowed them to manage the impressions that others form of them and their relationship, often to further protect themselves or decrease the impact of proximal and distal stressors. A total of fourteen participants across all eight couples discussed the ways in which they engaged in impression management that maintained their couple identity. Partners were proactive about impression management by behaving differently

with each other in private or protected spaces than they did in public spaces. They also were reactive with strangers who ask intrusive questions about their relationships.

Proactive. Couples often anticipated distal stressors in the form of microaggressions, invalidation of their relationship, and potential for violence. To manage these stressors, couples changed the ways in which they physically interacted in public and also how they shared their couple story to others. One couple even sought information about affirmative spaces before they placed themselves in a situation that was possibly uncomfortable.

Couple Coffee:

P1: I don't want to be in a place...if we hold hands or something...sometimes older people are not so understanding of the LGBT community...older heterosexual individuals...I think are not going to be okay with our relationship. I think that is when I act differently. And when we go to a club, where it is mostly straight people and there are guys around, too many guys around...because sometimes they say gross comments. I don't want someone to give us dirty looks or treat us differently because they see us, we're in a relationship together. I just don't want to be treated differently...and sometimes you have to act a different way so that you are not treated differently.

Couple Bananashark:

P2: I think when people see us, they automatically assume that we're dating, but we're not very "gay" in public. Even if we hold hands, that's [only] sometimes...that's not something we do a lot in public. Part of it has to do with where we live, but some of it is our comfort level with PDA we like to show. We'll hug and kiss each other in front of friends or family, or in private we'll sit on each other's laps, but not at the mall. To us, that's a different environment based on how we react. When we go to church, we hold hands and sit close, but we feel safe at church.

P1: We're going to my best friend from the evangelical church's wedding in September. At first, [Partner 2] wasn't going to come because we were [thought it would be] so dramatic...It'll upstage [the bride] if her gay friend is here. But then [the bride] decided that she wanted [Partner 2] to come and she really made a point to invite her. I was like, "we're not having any PDA, we're not dancing." Because I don't want to attract negative attention. It's depressing, but it's keeping safe. [Partner 2]'s like "can we slow dance?" And I'm like, "no, I don't want to deal with it." But I know the group of people, so we can hold hands. That's kind of us in public anyway. She wants to have more PDA than me in public. If she was a guy, I would be more comfortable...especially around kids. I'm always afraid of the dirty looks of people "exposing their children to the world of sin" or whatever. I'm very hesitant in our area.... I'm not at school.

Couple Always:

P1: At night, or if we're passing a group of frat guys that looks slightly drunk, we're not going to be holding hands and kissing...it's more of a safety thing than anything else. Especially now that stories have come out about people being beat up on busses.

Couple Casey:

P1: The way that we talk about our love or talk about our story to people who are still in that religion, is very different. The way we talk about our love, or our relationship or our story to people who are not in it...we filter and we try to justify, [saying] "we really tried, we really tried to be on God's side," because we know what they believe. "But we just couldn't quite do it." We frame it a lot differently when we are talking to those people versus when we are with our good friends.

P2: I was way more physically and emotionally affectionate, especially in public with her, before we were dating. And now I don't want to offend anyone. I want them to be so supportive of us...I don't want to give them any reason to feel uncomfortable and [I] just feel a lot more reserved with other people and with our story and showing affection.

Couple Jurassic Park:

P1: We booked an Airbnb and we actually sent them a message saying, "we're a lesbian couple...you have to tell us if there's any problem with that because we'll find somewhere else to stay."

P2: So, we weren't putting ourselves in a situation where we'd be uncomfortable or whatever for whatever reason.

Reactive. Participants were not always able to anticipate situations in which they would experience distal stressors. When they experienced microaggressions, that often came in the form of intrusive questions or assumptions, they needed to make a decision about how to react. Some participants corrected people's misconceptions, while others ignored the microaggressions or concealed their identities to avoid the burden of educating others about their identity or relationship.

Couple Casey:

P2: We have for instance, consistently with the ring, even with younger people and older people. They're like, "how do you know who's supposed to propose?" And we're like, "if you want to?" And they're like, "but are you supposed to do it?" It's like, "If I wanna!" And then they're like, "well, what's going to happen with the names?" and we're like, "I don't know maybe we'll keep mine." and they're like, "but aren't you supposed to change it?" So, there's just a lot of confusion regarding that instance. And now even if people ask, "are you married, are you engaged?" I'll just say "yeah, my fiancé" if I don't want to get into it and feel like this is going to be a whole thing...so yeah, "Yeah, I have a fiancé, I am getting married next month." I'm going to keep this as vague as possible.

Couple Coffee:

P1: We were walking and this group of guys came up to us and one of the guys was unzipping his pants and saying inappropriate comments.

P2: Something about his penis. Showing us his penis and “have you ever seen a penis” or “do you want to.”

P1: I think [he said] “have you ever seen a penis.” Something like that...and it was a bunch of guys and they were all saying comments...we were just holding hands.

P2: We kept walking.

P1: For some reason everybody wants to know how lesbians have sex. Or how two girls have sex. For some reason, everyone wants to know. Usually it was just guys that would ask...but even girls ask questions now and I am like, “can you not ask these questions?”

It’s weird to ask...I don’t answer them.

Couple Raspberry:

P2: Whenever we go out and people try to talk to us...we tell them we’re in a relationship and they’re like, “oh okay cool like, I’ll still hit on you.” People don’t respect our relationship as much.

P1: There are times I have to tell them that I have a boyfriend...I have to lie...for them to understand. If I’m not in the mood to have that conversation or be hit on or try to enjoy my time with my friends, I’ll be like, “I have a boyfriend.”

Relationship Satisfaction

All partners used the same item from the CSI-32 (Funk & Rogge, 2007) to report their relationship satisfaction at the time of the interviews. While the options ranged from “not at all” to “completely”, participant reports of current relationship satisfaction ranged from “mostly” to “completely”. That is, participants were generally satisfied in their relationships at the time of the study. These high ratings likely were the result of engaging in relational emotion work as well as the couple identity processes that maintained their shared relational meaning. This work paid off for the couples in this sample, leaving partners with a relationship they were proud of and better than expected or experienced in previous relationships.

Couple Bananashark:

P1: I really like our relationship. It’s the first really good relationship I’ve ever been in.

P2: Yeah, I agree with that.

Couple Jurassic Park:

P1: I would rate my relationship satisfaction as very high...this is just the best relationship I've ever been in and the healthiest relationship I've ever been in, so I'm very happy with how things are going.

P2: Yeah, I would have to agree with that. My perspective, it's pretty good, pretty high.

Couple Always:

P1: Until recently my satisfaction would be...on a ten-point scale, at an 11 essentially. But I just started my master's program for social work...So my relationship satisfaction would now be, like a 9.8.

P2: I'm very satisfied.

Couple Casey:

P2: It sounds cheesy, but it's everything that I always hoped that I would find in a spouse is her...she's just everything that I always hoped I would find in a spouse and then was kind of skeptical about.

P1: I feel like we're so perfectly imperfect.

Macro-Systemic Oppressions

The relational process for these couples was impacted by the continuous influence of oppressive societal institutions, such as heteronormativity, mononormativity, homophobia, and biphobia. These arise in various ways throughout each phase of the relationship. Couples appeared to be most concerned about the impact of macro-systemic oppressions in their current phase of the relationship, maintaining their couple identity.

A total of thirteen participants across all eight couples discussed the ways in which macrosystemic processes impacted their current couple identity. These included the fear of potential legal benefits due to the current political climate, microaggressions, erasure of bisexuality, and fighting for integration into the larger LGBT community.

Politics and Legal Benefits

Two participants discussed the fears they held regarding the current political climate in the United States. These participants were worried about what the future held regarding various legalities in addition to their safety in the country.

Couple Always:

P1: So now, what is impacting our relationship is the Trump era. We have had so many conversations about what we are going to do...we want children. We want to raise our children. We were thinking about moving to [country]. I'm really really nervous. I'm worried about the increase in shootings...I think the current political arena in the United States, affects us long-term. I have a hard time, because I'm so worried about what our future is gonna be. And we keep having those discussions, and I feel like it keeps just adding little pieces of bricks on top of my shoulders because I just feel so weighed down. How our future is going to look, if our children are going to be bullied. If our children are targeted. Or how we are going to have children?

Couple 1101:

P1: Societally, I think it will definitely be harder, if we happen to be in a workplace environment in the future that is not so accepting, or that might be a little difficult. Especially regarding to our various legalities...are we actually allowed to get the same benefits? I know the law is pretty clear right now, but who knows what it will be like later?

Microaggressions

As discussed previously, participants experienced several microaggressions when interacting with strangers. Microaggressions also came from family and friends of the couples. Ten participants across seven couples discussed the microaggressions they experienced toward their relationship. There seemed to be an awareness that these microaggressions meant the couples were not normal. Participants voiced a preference for normalcy by minimizing any attention to difference.

Couple Vegas:

P2: So many people are confused when I say I have a wife and they're like, "wait, you have a wife?!" [They think] a trans woman is supposed to have a guy [partner]...I've actually had trolls wait around 3, 4 hours sitting there silently just to see her show up and they're like, "wow, she is real, you weren't lying when you said she was coming!"

P1: It shocks people. They're like, "you exist!" And they wanna poke me like, "are you real?"

Couple Casey:

P1: If you're in a bisexual relationship, you notice when you go somewhere and they ask who your groom is.

P2: They're little micro-reminders that are "you're not normal."

Couple Raspberry:

P1: People will be like, “oh you’re just waiting until you find the right guy.” Or, “it’s just a phase in your life, it’s a college thing for you guys.” We’re moving in together soon, so it’s weird when I bring that up to my friends because they’re like, “what? You guys are living together? That’s weird.” But in the past when I brought up potentially moving in with a male partner, they’re like, “good job, I’m glad that your relationship is so strong.” It’s responded to differently.

Couple 1101:

P1: If we’re holding hands in public and we get stares, even if those stares are more positive in support, I don’t even like that. To me it’s just normal. I would rather not get any attention with that.

In extreme circumstances, microaggressions indicated a lack of respect for the couples’ relationships. When people, especially men, would learn of the participants’ identity and relationship, they would disregard it and push the boundaries of social norms. Partner 1 of couple Raspberry provided an example of this.

P1: I don’t feel like our relationship has taken seriously in comparison to other relationships that I’ve had with males. I go out and I tend to attract men, but when I’ve said I had a boyfriend, they’ve taken that more respectfully than me saying I have a girlfriend. When I say that I have a girlfriend they’re like, “oh hot, lets still talk”...They don’t really see that as an actual solid relationship, so it’s an interesting dynamic...and also seems like people are more intrusive when it comes to questions about my relationship...questions that they would never ask me with my boyfriend, they would’ve never asked me but they feel comfortable asking me now that I have a girlfriend. Some of it is questions that I wouldn’t even think to ask other people...it’s completely inappropriate questions. Questions where if I flipped that around, they would be offended. And I don’t think that there’s a realization that it’s, not okay to pry when it comes to certain details of people’s lives.”

Erasure of Bisexuality

Sometimes, participants’ experiences with microaggressions resulted in erasure of bisexual identities. Friends and family would make assumptions about participants’ identities based on their binary understanding of sexuality. Partner 1 of couple Bananashark shared her experience with disclosing her relationship to her family, and the assumptions they made of her sexual orientation due to the gender of her partner. She stated, “I was just like, ‘I have a girlfriend.’ And then they all just assumed that I was lesbian.” Erasure of same-gender relational

processes also permeated one participant's education. Without representation in both media and textbooks, she was left without a clear script for what her relationship could look like.

Couple Jurassic Park:

P1: So one of my friends, his little sister I think used to identify as bisexual and now she identifies as a lesbian...she came to a Christmas party and a New Year's party at the end of last year and she was also a bit drunk and she was like, "you're a lesbian now, just admit it, just be a lesbian now." And I was like, "I'm not a lesbian, I'm still attracted to men."

Couple Raspberry:

P2: There's a lot of under representation for us, because anyone you see in social media and billboards, you see male-female relationships, so the fact that you never see a gay couple or a lesbian couple in the media kind of sucks...I was telling her that I was writing a paper yesterday on couple communication, effective or non-effective, and my textbook its talking about males and females and they'll sprinkle in same-sex couples, but I literally just wrote a whole paper on communication between a female and a male and I can't even relate to that.

Integration into LGBT Communities

One couple specifically discussed the struggles bisexual individuals often face when participating in the larger LGBT community. For Participant 1 of couple Jurassic Park, her voice was amplified as a bisexual woman in the community when she was in a relationship with a female. She did not receive the same platform in the community during her previous relationships with men. Because of her relationship with her current female partner, she felt she was able to educate others in the community about bisexuality with more credibility.

P1: Sometimes, people will say something that's just a little bit off that shows that they maybe don't have a great understanding of bisexuality, or don't have a great opinion of its and... I can help improve attitudes by being more open about bisexuality.

P2: Being in a relationship with a woman long term gives me the ability to say things about bisexuality with that credibility.

P1: Yeah, build credibility because I'm not one of those bisexual women who ends up with a man. So, I can say things and people will...people in the LGBT community will give credibility to what I say because I am in a relationship with a woman. So, I can sort of say my opinions, and I do have some pretty strong bi opinions...it's not necessarily a privilege or anything that I'm dating a woman, but it's a little bit more of a platform.

Chapter Six: Discussion

The present study expands the research on bisexuality by gaining further understanding of relational processes as it relates to dyadic perspectives of satisfaction in intimate relationships. Existing research has articulated the relational difficulties many bisexual-identified people experience (Campbell et al., 2017; DeCapua, 2017) that differ from heterosexual, gay, and lesbian individuals (Dobinson, Macdonnell, Hampson, Clipsham, & Chow, 2005). Participants in the present study echoed the difficulties found by other researchers, and also discussed the satisfaction they derived from engaging in several relational processes.

Specifically, this study sought to answer two research questions using symbolic interaction theory and minority stress theory as guiding theories. The first question examined the individual and relational processes that affect the impact of attitudes regarding bisexuality on relationship satisfaction in female same-gender relationships. The second research question explored the processes that aid in managing this impact in order for couples to remain satisfied in the relationship. The findings highlighted an emerging process model that supports and extends previous research suggesting bisexuality in relationships is more complex than simply accepting or rejecting cultural understandings of bisexuality (Hayfield & Lahti, 2017). The emerging process model acknowledges this complexity, as it consists of four phases that couples move through to create a shared meaning of their couple identity. This emerging model is grounded in the interplay of identity and social relationships. Additionally, each individual partner and the couple unit are influenced by societal processes, including heteronormativity and mononormativity (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings for each research question in light of the guiding theoretical perspectives and in conjunction with existing research. Several aspects of the

emerging model are consistent with existing literature, which will be briefly discussed in each section. The primary focus of discussion in this chapter will center around the key findings that expand the literature. The key findings that address the first research question include how each partner brings their attitudes regarding bisexuality into the relationship, and their choice to stay in the relationship in light of the impact of bi-negativity on relationship satisfaction. The key findings that address the second research question include engaging in relational emotion work, and creating and maintaining shared relational meaning. I will additionally provide clinical implications, implications for research and future directions, and limitations of the current study.

Influence of Attitudes Regarding Bisexuality on Relationship Satisfaction

The first goal of the study was to understand the impact of attitudes regarding bisexuality on perceptions of relationship satisfaction. The first key finding indicates that participants in this study specifically emphasized the formation of their attitudes regarding sexual minorities broadly, as well as bisexuality specifically, prior to the formation of the relationship. Each partner entered the relationship with these pre-formed attitudes, which then impacted retroactive reports of initial satisfaction in the relationship. The second key finding suggests that partners then made decisions to stay in the relationship that were informed by a desire to overcome systemic oppressions that impact the bisexual partners' identities as well as the relationship. In this section, I will focus on the unique processes within bisexual relationships that contribute to the existing literature.

Bringing Bi-Negative Attitudes into Relationships

Individual level experiences previous to the current relationships appear to be important to the formation of bi-negative attitudes, as indicated by Phase 1 of the process model. Participants discussed how various identity categories, family relationships, and societal

structures provided the foundation for developing attitudes regarding sexual minorities. For approximately half the participants in this sample, these factors overlapped with the formation of the relationship, as the current relationship was their first same-gender relationship. These experiences had implications for the presence of bi-negativity at the start of a relationship, which in turn had an impact on relational satisfaction during that time. This section explores how the combination of factors, including social location, sexual minority identity development, disclosure experiences, and previous relationship, impacted the attitudes regarding bisexuality each partner brought into their relationships. At the end of the section, I will provide an overview of the contributions the present study provides to the existing body of literature.

The majority of participants in this study were young, educated, white, sexual minority women, which have been associated with less bi-negative attitudes (Bradford, 2004; Cox et al., 2013; Dodge et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2010). While these participants were mostly accepting of bisexuality at the time of the study, findings suggest the intersection of family of origin, culture, and religion had a significant impact on initial attitude development during the formative years.

Ben-Ari (1995) suggested that parents of sexual minority individuals often lack sufficient understanding of homosexuality and often hold stereotypes. Participants in the present study suggested family members also lack adequate understanding of bisexuality, which led to holding stereotypical views of the identity and lack of sufficient support that is important to sexual minorities (Oswald, 2002). Participants of all sexual orientations in the current study often heard stereotypical beliefs regarding bisexuality from their families of origin, which were rooted in religious and cultural norms that emphasized heteronormativity. If these messages are grounded in conservative interpretations of religiosity, families sent clear messages about which relationships are acceptable and unacceptable (Feinstein et al., 2016). Bisexual individuals were

perceived by family and religious communities to be confused or more sinful than gay or lesbian individuals because they could choose to be in heterosexual relationships.

Family, cultural, and religious messages about bisexuality impacted the participant's sexual minority identity development through a process of looking-glass self (Cooley, 1902). Family and other important people connected to participants' cultural and religious communities are considered significant others in their development of a self-concept (Stryker, 1959). Participants consider how they are perceived by the significant others in their lives, interpret the reactions those people have to interactions with them, then develop a self-concept using the interpretations (Cooley, 1902). The monosexual partners in this study ultimately developed or maintained a lesbian identity. Findings suggest that family attitudes were one factor among many that led to these participants to choose a monosexual label over bisexual. Participants may have done so because a monosexual label was more accessible for family members to understand and was less risky in terms of losing family support.

Many bisexual partners developed internalized bi-negativity from the messages received from their family, culture, and religion. Research suggests that bisexual people who hold negative attitudes regarding bisexuality may face barriers to developing a positive self-concept (Li et al., 2013), as their sexual minority identity is centered around negative expectations, or stereotypes, of a bisexual identity (Stryker, 1980). As a result, some bisexual people choose to conceal their sexual minority identity or avoid disclosure due to assumptions of hostile or invalidating reactions from others (Li et al., 2013). Several participants in the current study supported this literature, reporting delayed disclosures to friends and family. Concealing one's identity can cause just as much stress as disclosing, so bisexual people must decide between the proximal stressor of concealment and the distal stressor of disclosure (Meyer, 2003; Pollitt et al.,

2017). The distress from either stressor can cause difficulty in forming intimate relationships (Israel & Mohr, 2004).

Both the monosexual and the bisexual participants seemed to test their disclosure in LGBT communities, particularly on college campuses, which offered new opportunities for continued exposure to new perspectives. The bisexual participants encountered some specific bi-negative attitudes within these communities, which has been documented extensively in previous research (Ross et al., 2010; Todd et al., 2016), but generally were accepted by people in the communities. Through a process of looking glass self (Cooley, 1902), all participants discussed how interacting with other bisexual people specifically resulted in challenging some of their pre-existing bi-negative attitudes. Exposure to bisexual people has been associated with more positive attitudes and greater willingness to engage in romantic or sexual relationships (Feinstein et al., 2016). This seemed to be the case specifically for the monosexual participants in this study, as they entered into relationships with bisexual females prior to their current relationship. Some of these participants reported negative experiences in their previous relationships that reinforced existing bi-negative attitudes, while others expressed their avoidance of generalizations based on past experiences with bisexual partners. There may be additional factors, such as personality traits or mental health, that mediate the role of generalizations and attitudes. Future research on these factors would expand the literature on attitudes regarding bisexuality.

Previous research suggests that bisexual individuals often have difficulty forming relationships with monosexual-identified people who hold negative attitudes regarding bisexuality (Bradford, 2004; Gorna, 1996; Israel & Mohr, 2004, McLean, 2008b; Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1994). Research has documented the rejection bisexual women face from

potential lesbian partners (Li et al., 2013; Rust, 1993). On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that monosexual individuals who believe bisexuality is a stable sexual orientation may be a stronger indicator than their tolerance of bisexuality in relation to their willingness to date a bisexual partner (Feinstein et al., 2016). It may be that the monosexual participants in this study had reached the conclusion of bisexuality as a stable identity, perhaps through individual cognitive emotion work (Hochschild, 1979), thus creating the opportunity to form the relationship. Further, findings indicate that attitudes regarding bisexuality are not entirely positive or negative. Each partner may be able to hold a mixture of positive and stereotypical understandings of bisexuality at one time. Future research could benefit from investigating the complexity of such an experience.

Many aspects of the findings related to Phase 1 have been separately documented in previous research studies, largely from individual perspectives of bisexual individuals. The present study contributes to the body of literature by providing a relational understanding of the combined effects on formation of bi-negative attitudes. Further, this study extends the research to demonstrate the tension bi-negativity causes specifically during the formation of the relationship.

Choosing to Stay

Minority stressors, such as internalized bi-negativity held by bisexual individuals and prejudicial beliefs held by their partners, impacted the participants' thinking about the viability of their intimate relationships. This process is evident in the second phase of this model. While this experience is not necessarily unique in bisexual relationships, bisexual people are faced with oppressive structures such as mononormativity and monosexism in addition to heteronormativity. In order to be in a relationship, bisexual people need to navigate these oppressions interpersonally with partners. The participants in the current study described how

they chose to stay with their partners in spite of needing to negotiate the added stressor of bi-negativity in their relationships and social networks. They chose to face these oppressions directly, working toward reported relationship satisfaction. In order to make this decision, they likely saw the benefits that would result from engaging in this difficult process. These benefits included stronger mental health for partners as well as increased satisfaction in the relationship. In this section, I will discuss the impact of attitudes regarding bisexuality that are present within the couple relationships. I will additionally expand upon the decision that each partner made regarding the future of the relationship, followed by an overview of the study's contribution to the existing literature.

Some participants discussed the impact of positive attitudes regarding bisexuality on their relationship satisfaction in this phase. The monosexual partners who held positive, or even ambivalent, attitudes regarding bisexuality provided a safe space for the bisexual partner's identity to be seen in the relationship, without an over-focus on the identity itself. Findings from Ross and colleagues (2010) suggested that supportive friends can facilitate self-acceptance of a bisexual identity. The findings here suggest supportive monosexual partners can also facilitate self-acceptance among the bisexual partners. Bisexual individuals felt accepted by their monosexual partners, so they also felt more satisfied in the relationship. Important relational work could then be directed to other aspects of the relationship. Even further, partner support likely helped to minimize the impacts of proximal and distal stressors on mental health for bisexual individuals, which has been documented in other studies (Feinstein, Latack, Bhatia, Davila, & Eaton, 2016; Mereish et al., 2017).

Most couples reported some degree of bi-negativity at the beginning of their relationships. Bi-negativity ranged from passive beliefs about common stereotypes of bisexuality

to significant insecurities grounded in several stereotypes. The most common stereotypes included beliefs that bisexual partners would cheat, desired multiple partners, or would suddenly decide to leave the relationship for the safety of heterosexual relationships. Each of these stereotypes have been documented in previous research (Gustavson, 2009; Li et al., 2013; Toft & Yip, 2018).

Klesse (2011) discussed the common experiences of bisexual individuals in which they are faced with bi-negativity during their attempts to build romantic relationships. The presence of stereotypes, or bi-negative attitudes, among couples in the present study caused tension in the early stages of the relationship. The monosexual partners who held bi-negative attitudes showed prejudice against their bisexual partners, thus adding a distal stressor to the relationship (Klesse, 2011). Most often, they expressed insecurities, fearing their bisexual partners were not fully committed to the relationship. Li and colleagues (2013) suggested that attitudes regarding bisexuality impacted peoples' thoughts and behaviors in intimate relationships. The monosexual partners who held bi-negative attitudes argued with their partners, attempted to control who their partners spent time with, and made passive-aggressive comments about bisexual people.

The bisexual partners who held bi-negative attitudes added the proximal stressor of internalized bi-negativity to the relationship (Li et al., 2013). This proximal stressor was a sign of lack of self-concept regarding their sexual orientation identity (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; Li et al., 2013), which often resulted in reinforcing their partners' fears that bisexuality was not a stable identity. Since partners became a significant other (Stryker, 1959), the bisexual individuals engaged in a process of looking glass self (Cooley, 1902). They imagined how their partner perceived their sexual orientation identity, then interpreted their partner's reactions to their interactions around their bisexual identity. The bisexual partners then used the interpretations to

continue developing their self-concept (Cooley, 1902). Thus, couples engaged in a negative feedback loop that reinforced bi-negative attitudes in the beginning of their relationship. The result of this negative feedback loop was increased distress, thus decreased relationship satisfaction.

All the couples who were interviewed made the decision to remain in the relationship despite the impact of bi-negative attitudes on their initial satisfaction. Given the inclusion criteria for participation in the study, this makes sense. However, there are likely times when couples choose not to continue with the relationship. Thus, all partners reflected on the viability of the relationship, deciding whether or not it is worth the energy to work through the impact of bi-negative attitudes. Rusbult and Buunk (1993) suggested that interdependence theory may explain decisions to stay or leave a relationship. They found that lower perceived quality of alternative partners and a greater investment in the relationship or partner are both associated with stronger commitment, thus with the decision to remain in a relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). For the couples in the present study, bi-negative attitudes clearly had a negative impact on their relationship satisfaction early in the relationship, but both partners were invested in the potential future of the relationship. They believed their relationships could be better, so they committed to staying and doing the work to achieve that goal. More research is needed on the couples who make the decision to leave the relationship to further understand the impact of bi-negative attitudes on relationship satisfaction.

Partners choosing to stay is the second key finding from the present study, and is a significant contribution to the literature on bisexual relationships. Participants indicated that this is a crucial process in the initial phase of the relationship. Each partner implied that there needs

to be something worth staying for. The benefits of moving into the relational emotion work phase need to outweigh the proximal and distal stressors within the relationship.

Managing the Impact of Attitudes Regarding Bisexuality on Relationship Satisfaction

The second research question investigated the ways in which couples managed the impact of attitudes regarding bisexuality on relationship satisfaction. The emerging process model indicates that couples utilize several relational processes that assist in the management of this phenomenon. The first key finding that addresses the second research question is that partners engaged in heavy emotion work together which helped to shift their attitudes and created a couple identity. The couples additionally engaged in ongoing maintenance processes based on their shared relational meaning that supported the couple identity, which is the second key finding related to the second research question.

Some of the processes in both of these phases are similar to those found in several kinds of relationships, while others appear to be unique to bisexual relationships. These findings are consistent with researchers' claims that bisexual individuals experience similar problems in building and maintaining intimate relationships as those of other social and sexual identities, as well as unique issues to bisexuality (Hayfield & Lahti, 2017; Klesse, 2011). This section explores each of the key findings, including the processes discussed by the participants that aid in managing and negotiating the impact of attitudes regarding bisexuality on relationship satisfaction. I will specifically emphasize on the processes unique to bisexual individuals and relationships.

Engaging in Relational Emotion Work

After the couples made the decision to remain together, they engaged in several individual and relational level processes that helped them quell the impact of attitudes on

relationship satisfaction. These processes are shown in Phase 3 of the model. Previous research supports the present findings that utilizing communication skills (Gordon & Chen, 2016), developing commitment (Jamieson, 2011; Layder, 2009), engaging in self-reflectivity (Vater & Schröder-Abé, 2015) and negotiating boundaries and rules (Carlson, Hanson, & Fitzroy, 2016; Goldberg, 2013; Kurdek, 2007) are common processes found in several heterosexual and same-gender relationships. Thus, bisexual relationships are similar to other relationships in many ways. The participants of this study discussed additional emotion work processes that appear to be unique to bisexual relationships, which is consistent with previous assertions by bisexual researchers (Klesse, 2011). In this section, I will briefly discuss the similarities to other relationships using existing literature. I will primarily focus on the unique experiences for bisexual individuals and their partners, and how the findings of the present study both support and extend the existing literature. At the end of the section, I will highlight the specific contributions of this key finding.

One of the most salient relational processes highlighted was that of negotiating monogamy or non-monogamy. Neither of these relationship styles are inherently unhealthy or healthy. In this dissertation, it is the intent to not disparage any one type of relationship and to reveal the fluidity in many non-monogamous relationship forms. While the majority of couples in the present study were monogamous, they engaged in conversations about this choice for the relationship. Previous research has indicated that these negotiations can be difficult for many partners (Li et al., 2013; McLean, 2004), which was supported by the present findings. The findings in this study further supported previous research that suggests bisexual individuals in relationships are predominantly committed to principles of trust, honesty, and communication

(McLean, 2004). Even the partners who negotiated external sexual partners were adamant about communicating insecurities and made adjustments to their arrangements as needed.

Despite the societal depictions of bisexual individuals as hypersexual and incapable of monogamy, non-monogamous arrangements are not unique to bisexual people. For example, swingers and polyamorous couples engage in non-monogamous relationships. What is unique to bisexual relationships, however, is the nuance in the negotiations that include systemic oppressions including mononormativity and compulsory monogamy. The mere existence of bisexual attraction, or a desire for more than one gender, is always culturally in tension with traditional relational ideals rooted in ‘compulsory monogamy’ (Hayfield & Lahti, 2017; Toft & Yip, 2018). ‘Compulsory monogamy’ is the socially constructed norm that perpetuates the non-negotiable understanding that loving, healthy, and commitment relationships must be monogamous (Toft & Yip, 2018). Research on bisexuality, however, suggests that bisexual individuals are capable, willing, and most often prefer monogamous relationships (McLean, 2004; Ross et al., 2010).

Rust (1996) suggested that bisexual individuals may be more open to non-monogamy; thus, they are more likely to engage in non-monogamous relationship arrangements. For some, non-monogamy was a way to fulfill their attractions to multiple genders (McLean, 2004). Unfortunately, this also reinforces the stereotypes regarding bisexual individuals as sexually promiscuous (Li et al., 2013). Thus, making decisions about monogamy and non-monogamy in bisexual relationships involves complex negotiations. The stereotypes associated with bisexuality and monogamy include societal oppressions that other relationships do not need to manage. In the current study, the ways in which the participants negotiated this decision were linked to the attitudes held by each partner. It is interesting that the participants specifically made negotiations

for sexual activity with men but not with women. They emphasized continued emotional monogamy while leaving room for sexual exploration outside the relationship, providing the bisexual partners the opportunity to fulfill their multi-gender desires.

Engaging in self-reflectivity and learning about bisexuality were two other processes that are unique to bisexual relationships. Self-reflection on attitudes regarding bisexuality specifically is a way to engage in cognitive emotion work (Hochschild, 1979). Cognitive emotion work involves attempts to change thoughts, ideas, or images in order to change the feelings associated with them. Evocation is the act of bringing cognitive focus to an initially absent feeling that is desired, and suppression is bringing cognitive focus to an initially present feeling that is undesired (Hochschild, 1979). For bisexual individuals and their partners, evocation can include reflecting on the positive aspects of the bisexuality. Partners can direct focus to the bi-negative insecurities they felt initially in the relationship (i.e., suppression), or to the commitment and trust that may not have been initially present (i.e., evocation) due to the bi-negative insecurities. One or both of these processes played an important role in shifting attitudes as well as developing a strong couple identity.

Learning about bisexual identities and relationships are likely an important aspect to each type of cognitive emotion work. Researching bisexuality individually as well as engaging in conversations about the meanings partners ascribed to bisexuality led to increased understanding about bisexuality for each partner. Eliason (2001) has suggested that a lack of information was the primary source of bi-negative attitudes and other research has documented the impact of education on decreasing bi-negativity (Dyar et al., 2015; Perez-Figueroa, Alhassoon, & Wang-Jones, 2013). Specifically, factual information is important to believing bisexual individuals are secure in their sexual orientation and do not lack commitment in their relationships (Perez-

Figuroa et al., 2013). While previous research found no connection to personalized information and decreased bi-negativity (Perez-Figuroa et al., 2013), it may be that the person who provides the information is important to changing attitudes. The findings in the present study suggest that personalized information from the significant other of an intimate partner was particularly meaningful to shifting attitudes regarding bisexuality.

The findings of the present study contribute to the existing research on dynamics within bisexual relationships in several ways. First, the findings demonstrated how couples engaged in similar processes to many other couples, with additional aspects that address the nuances of bisexual oppressions. Second, couples engaged in additional processes that specifically address bi-negative attitudes, such as learning about bisexuality. Third, each of the similar and unique processes merged together to shift attitudes toward increased acceptance as well as to create a couple identity with shared relational meanings.

Creating and Maintaining Shared Relational Meaning

The result of the individual and relational emotion work processes was a couple identity based on a shared meaning about their relationship. In order to maintain the couple identity that couples worked hard to create in Phase 3, they engaged in processes in Phase 4 that were both similar to other relationships and unique to bisexuality. For instance, many couples worked to maintain their commitment and intimacy in various ways, such as showing positivity, respect, effective management of jealousy, and willingness to sacrifice for the good of the relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Stafford & Canary, 1991). In this section, I will discuss the processes that are unique to bisexual individuals and their relationships, which include impression management and liminality of bi-negativity. At the end of the section, I will summarize the contributions of this key finding to the existing literature.

One process the couples in the present study discussed was impression management. This is a process that many same-gender couples engage in as they are exposed to distal stressors of prejudice and discrimination. Experiencing discrimination required couples to engage in impression management to remain safe in their communities (Otis, Rostosky, Riggle, & Hamrin, 2006; Rostosky, Riggle, Gray, & Hatton, 2007). This may mean partners avoid physical affection in public or avoid locations that are perceived as unsafe or unaccepting. Bisexual couples, however, must manage the impressions they give to others in relation to bisexual identities. This impression management often came in the form of choosing to share a monosexual identity label that they perceive to be more acceptable in public spaces, thus concealing their bisexual identity in certain contexts (McLean, 2008b)

The findings of the present study suggested that one of the processes that was significant to maintaining a couple identity was regarding the visibility of bisexuality in the relationship. Previous research suggests the ways in which bisexual couples negotiate their relationship erases bisexuality and further reinforces notions of heteronormativity and mononormativity (Lahti, 2015). In a study that investigated how bisexual women and their partners used discourses of romantic love and enduring relationships, Lahti (2015) argued that couples stressed sameness to heterosexual and monosexual same-sex couples, as did couples in the present study. Lahti (2015) argued that, while couples seemed to easily center their relationships within these discourses, tensions arose when their relationships did not fit the mold. Through discourses on sameness, bisexuality also easily became erased, which Lahti (2015) referred to as the “imaginary third.” Their negotiations around their couple identity included questions about how similar or different their relationship was to others, and if their relationships were traditional or equal (Lahti, 2015).

The couples in the above study desired equality in their relationships. To do so, they distanced themselves from traditional relationships based in gendered hierarchies, therefore moved away from sameness discourses (Lahti, 2015). As they negotiated around their differences from other relationships, the partners discussed the role bisexuality played in their relationship. Couples in Lahti's (2015) study experienced tensions due to questions of exclusivity and relationship viability. Findings from the current study echoed that these tensions can arise. The participants discussed how they navigated the intermittent fears regarding whether or not the bisexual partners were going to leave for a male partner. Previous research suggests that bisexual partners who leave for someone of another gender is conceptualized as worse than leaving for someone of the same gender (Li et al., 2013). The need to navigate these fears concerning the loss of commitment are unique to bisexual relationships, given the bisexual partners' attraction to multiple genders.

In the present study, another factor spoke to the complexity about the visibility of bisexuality in the relationship. The couples wrestled with the tensions of bi-erasure and placed bi-negative attitudes in a liminal space (Van Gennep, 1960) within their relationship. The liminality of bi-negativity decreased its impact on relationship satisfaction so they could focus on other aspects of the relationship that are perceived as more important. Findings from a study by Toft and Yip (2018) suggested that since bisexual individuals rejected ideas of sexual exclusivity in their attractions, they de-emphasize the gendered nature of attractions. Increased emphasis, in turn, can be turned to other aspects of a partner, such as their individual characteristics and qualities (Toft & Yip, 2018). Other research additionally suggests that a focus on sameness may, in fact, decrease bi-negativity. The Common Ingroup Identity Model suggests that emphasizing the commonalities of individuals who experience same-gender attractions can create a shared

understanding the de-emphasizes the differences among sexual orientation identities (Feinstein et al., 2016). Unfortunately, this can result in unique bisexual oppressions being ignored, therefore mononormative discourses are reinforced and bisexuality erased.

Hartman-Linck (2014) argued that bi-visibility is more salient as an internal process rather than a relational one. The act of engaging in bisexual displays serves an important function for bisexual individuals, namely creating feelings of wholeness or authenticity of their identity. Thus, keeping bisexuality ‘alive’ in relationships may be more important internally for bisexual partners (Hartman-Linck, 2015). This may be especially true if their partners have affirmed their bisexual identity at some point in the relationship, which are suggested by the findings of the present study. If the distal stressor of partner rejection is decreased, the bisexual partners can strengthen their self-concept further through individual displays of their bisexual identity.

The key finding related to Phase 4 contributes to the current body of literature by expanding the understanding of similar and unique processes bisexual couples use to create and maintain their couple identity. Specifically, the findings of the present study suggest that impression management in social settings is both an individual and relational process that can result in bi-erasure. The findings also expand the understanding of the visibility of a bisexual identity within an intimate relationship. Couples place any remaining bi-negative attitudes in a liminal space, which manages the impact bi-negativity has on their relationship satisfaction. As a result, the bisexual partner’s identity is neither fully erased nor fully visible.

Clinical Implications

The current findings present an emerging process model that describes the ways in which bisexual couples manage bi-negativity in their relationship to increased their relational satisfaction. The model suggests several implications for clinicians who work with bisexual

individuals in relationships. In conjunction with various other research on bisexual individuals in relationships, the findings in the present study suggest that clinicians must be culturally informed of various issues related to bisexuality (Bradford, 2004; Fox, 2006; Li et al., 2013; Obradors-Campos, 2011; Rostosky et al., 2010). It is a mistake to assume that clinicians who are gay or lesbian-positive will also be affirming or knowledgeable about bisexual identities (Li et al., 2013). Clinicians, therefore, must do their research on various aspects of bisexuality, including the oppressions the face in society as well as their intimate relationships. These relationships are influenced by oppressions, but partners work together through a variety of processes to build strong relationships that protect against oppression. It is imperative that clinicians educate themselves to adequately address multiple oppressions that can arise while also facilitating the formation of healthy relationships among couples with at least one bisexual partner.

In order to balance these two important clinical goals, clinicians could benefit from using a Narrative Therapy approach (White & Epston, 1990), which maps onto the theoretical underpinnings of the present study. Narrative therapists are particularly adept at addressing dominant discourses that oppress minorities through a lens of co-constructed meanings. Deconstructing the dominant discourses, such as monosexism and compulsory monogamy, that influence the formation and maintenance of bi-negative attitudes could be an important step in neutralizing the impact of the attitudes on the relationship. Couples who create a narrative about the meanings of bisexual relationships around heteronormative and mononormative discourses are likely to experience lower relationship satisfaction (Klesse, 2011). Thus, if they are able to work towards an alternative narrative that de-emphasizes these dominant discourses regarding bisexuality, they can create a shared relational meaning for their relationship.

In order to deconstruct dominant discourses regarding bisexuality, clinicians likely first need to create a safe space for each partner to communicate their attitudes without defensive reactions from the other (Li et al., 2013). Specifically, clinicians can teach communication skills related to reflective listening and “I” statements that can aid in partners sharing their assumptions and expectations regarding bisexuality and the role it plays in the relationship. Through facilitating discussions about each partner’s formation of attitudes regarding bisexuality, clinicians can process the power dynamics of gender, heteronormativity, and mononormativity on the relationship. Couples can then engage in the processes presented in this emerging model with an increased critical understanding of the structures that oppress their relationship.

In order to effectively facilitate these discussions, clinicians must also actively and regularly engage in self-of-therapist work that challenges the automatic biases that are supported by a monosexist society. Clinicians can deconstruct their own understandings of bisexual identities and relationships in ways similar to those described above. McGeorge and Carlson (2011) provided several self-of-therapist questions that heterosexual therapists can consider to aid in exploring heteronormative assumptions, heterosexual privilege, and a heterosexual identity. By changing some of the language, these questions could also be used to explore mononormative assumptions, monosexual privilege, and a monosexual identity. An example is, “what did my family of origin teach me about monosexual and non-monosexual identities and relationships?” Engaging in this critical self-reflection would allow for clinicians to create space for more positive aspects of bisexuality to be highlighted (Rostosky et al., 2010).

Research Implications and Future Directions

The emerging process model derived from the present findings suggest that bisexual relationships are not entirely rife with minority stressors. Rather, there appears to be positive

experiences within relationships, such as feeling accepted and creating a couple identity based on a shared meaning for the relationship, in addition to the minority stressors that have been documented elsewhere (Bradford, 2004; Klesse, 2011; McLean, 2008b). The process model presented here highlights these experiences and provides evidence of increased complexity and nuanced understandings of bisexual relationships. Partners utilized similar processes present in heterosexual and monosexual same-gender relationships regarding communication and commitment, as well as unique processes to bisexual relationships in order to make important decisions related to managing the impact of bi-negative attitudes on relationship satisfaction.

The findings further imply that there is more complexity to experiences of bi-erasure in relationships than what has been previously presented in research (Lahti, 2015). Participants indeed highlighted the impact of bi-erasure on identity, but also suggested that minimizing bisexual displays did not always impact the relationship in negative ways. De-emphasizing the role of bisexuality in the relationship allows room for other important aspects of the relationship, such as intimacy, trust, and commitment. Thus, bisexuality can exist in a liminal space without complete denial of identity nor centering it as the most important aspect of identity.

Future research would benefit from investigating each of the processes presented in the model, which would aid in understanding how to support partners in making important decisions regarding their relationships. Specifically, it would be important to understand the factors that may lead to partners choosing to leave a bisexual relationship. These factors may include high levels of bi-negative attitudes including perceiving bisexuality as an unstable identity (Feinstein et al., 2016), or social identities including age or race (Cox et al., 2013).

Future studies should also explore how the model may apply to couples with various social locations. The present sample consisted only of female partners in monogamous

relationships. Researchers should investigate the model in relation to male same-gender relationships and other-gender relationships. The model would gain additional credibility through applications to partners of all ages, races, ethnicities, socioeconomic status, and education levels. Including couples who are non-monogamous to future research could add additional clarification to the process of negotiating non-monogamous relationship arrangements.

Given the importance of education in decreasing bi-negative attitudes (Feinstein et al., 2016), educators should disseminate the emerging process model that demonstrates the complexity of bisexual relationships. Education based in this model along with other research would help to dispel common myths and stereotypes regarding bisexual individuals and their relationships. Public health agencies can also provide education in addition to providing healthy depictions of bisexual relationships (Ross et al., 2010). Increasing the positive and accurate descriptions of bisexual relationships would likely result in decreases in bi-negativity as well as an increase in willingness to enter into relationships with bisexual partners (Feinstein et al., 2016; Li et al., 2013; McLean, 2008b).

Limitations

The sample of the present study is mostly homogenous, which means there is a lack of sufficient diversity. It is unclear how the process model applies to couples of varying ages, races, ethnicities, and education levels. The average age of the participants in the sample is young, which likely influenced their self-reports of attitudes regarding bisexuality. It is likely that the participants were more accepting of bisexuality because of their age. During a member check with a group of sexual minority women in a metropolitan area, several women who were in older generations were adamant against dating bisexual women. These women experienced previous

relationships in the past in which bisexual women were strongly influenced by heteronormative ideals, during a time that was even less accepting of sexual fluidity than the present society. These reports may provide initial support for the present process model, but more research is needed for couples of all ages.

Additionally, the sampling criteria required participants to be in relationships at the time of the study. Therefore, little is known about the processes that may lead to couples choosing not to stay together. While it would be difficult to conduct conjoint interviews with people who decided to terminate the relationship, individual interviews may provide the opportunity to gain an individual-level perspective on the relational processes. The dyadic interviews in the present study may have had an impact on how partners described their attitudes were. Adding individual interviews may have allowed for more honesty regarding perspectives of the various relational processes, but ethical issues could arise (Reczek, 2014).

Lastly, the present sample provides an understanding of these processes in female same-gender relationships. Gender has been shown to have an influence on attitudes regarding bisexuality, with females generally holding more positive attitudes than males (Molina et al, 2015). It is unclear how the model would apply to male same-gender couples, or even gender minorities.

Conclusion

This study presents an emerging process model that outlines several individual and relational processes that couples utilize to manage the impact of bi-negativity on relationship satisfaction. By interviewing partners together, this study illustrates the co-constructed meanings of bisexuality in their relationship in light of macrosystemic oppressions. Symbolic interaction theory and minority stress theory together provided a useful lens with which to highlight four

phases couples move through over time. The processes present in each of these phases demonstrate the impact that attitudes regarding bisexuality have on relationship satisfaction among female same-gender couples, as well as the ways partners negotiate the impact to minimize this impact. The emerging process model provides several implications and possibilities for future research.

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Tables

Table 1: Sample Demographics

Table 1

Sample Demographics

	Couple Name (Length of Relationship)	Age	Race	Sexual Orientatio n	Education	Religion	Income	
1.	1101 (2 yrs, 11 mo)	P1	19	White	Unknown	Some College	Jewish	\$0- \$29,999
		P2	19	White	Bisexual	Some College	Unitarian	\$0- \$29,999
2.	Always (1 yr, 3 mo)	P1	24	White	Lesbian	Bachelor's Degree	None	\$0- \$29,999
		P2	25	White	Bisexual	Bachelor's Degree	None	\$0- \$29,999
3.	Casey (1 yr)	P1	26	White	Bisexual	Bachelor's Degree	Ex-Mormon	\$30,000- \$39,999
		P2	25	White	Lesbian	Bachelor's Degree	None	\$0- \$29,999
4.	Bananashark (9 mo)	P1	22	White	Bisexual	Some College	Evangelical Left	\$0- \$29,999
		P2	23	White	Lesbian	Associate's Degree	Christian	\$0- \$29,999
5.	Coffee (4 yrs)	P1	24	Hispanic	Lesbian	Associate's Degree	N/A	\$0- \$29,999
		P2	22	Hispanic	Bisexual	Some College	None	\$0- \$29,999
6.	Raspberry (1 yr, 6 mo)	P1	23	Hispanic	Bisexual	Some College	Undetermined	\$30,000- \$39,999
		P2	21	Mixed Race	Bisexual	HS Graduate	Non-Religious	\$0- \$29,999
7.	Vegas (12 yrs, 10 mo)	P1	32	White	Bisexual	HS Graduate	Atheist	\$0- \$29,999
		P2	34	White	Bisexual/ Pansexual	GED	Atheist	\$0- \$29,999
8.	Jurassic Park (1 yr, 1 mo)	P1	23	White	Bisexual	HS Graduate	Christian	\$0- \$29,999
		P2	25	Australia n	Lesbian	Bachelor's Degree	None	\$0- \$29,999

Note. yr/s = year/years, mo = months

Table 2: Typology of Categories and Subcategories by Participant and Couple

Major Categories and Subcategories		1101	Always	Casey	Banana shark	Coffee	Raspberry	Vegas	Jurassic Park
Partner		1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Sexual Orientation		U	B	L	B	L	B	B	B
Pre-Relationship Factors									
Intrapsychic, Interpersonal, and Institutional Factors		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sexual Orientation Identity Development		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Disclosure Experiences		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Previous Relationship Experiences					X		X		X
Relationship Formation									
Bi-negative Insecurity		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
General Stressors		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Relationship Satisfaction		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Relationship Viability		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Relational Emotion Work									
Relational Meaning Making									
<i>Metacommunication</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Techniques</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

<i>Negotiating Boundaries</i>										
Privacy	X	X	X					X	X	X
Safety				X				X	X	X
Supports	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Monogamy vs. Non-monogamy	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Repairs</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Self-Reflectivity	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Learning About Bisexuality	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Commitment Development	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Shifting Attitudes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Shared Relational Meaning										
Couple Identity Processes										
<i>Wrestling with Tensions of Bi-erasure</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Commitment Loss Fears</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
<i>Commitment Maintenance</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Impression Management</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Relationship Satisfaction	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Macro-Systemic Oppressions	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Note. U = Unknown, L = Lesbian, B = Bisexual, P = Pansexual

Table 3: Representative Quote by Major Categories and Subcategories

Table 3

Representative Quotes by Major Categories and Subcategories

Pre-Relationship Factors	
Intrapsychic, Interpersonal, and Institutional Factors	“Just coming from a white middle class traditional family we lived in a white middle class traditional suburb, with white middle class traditional people, and I know, if I would have grown up somewhere else, even if there was just a little bit of diversity, in color of skin let alone, like sexuality I feel like that contributes to it as well. And if everybody is the exact same, then you aren't exposed to other stuff. You just, you don't even know that it exists.” (Casey P2)
Sexual Orientation Identity Development	“So, I grew up in the evangelical Christian. I thought that being any kind of like gay, lesbian, bi, trans, was like disgusting and terrible and I was very homophobic when I was younger. So then when I started having feelings myself for girls I knew, it was very scary and I was like ‘eww’ And I just like suppressed it really hard and for a while I thought I was asexual.” (Bananashark P1)
Disclosure Experiences	<p>“I was so scared to come out to anybody. My dad’s [religious faith] and my mom’s [religious faith] and I thought they were going to disown me...so when I first came out to my family, I came out as bisexual first. But I think for me, bisexuality, labeling myself as bisexual when I was a teenager was, more of a transition term for me because it was easier, it was more accepted. Because it still has that connection to the normative heterosexual identity.” (Always P1)</p> <p>“When I first came out, I had a boyfriend for a while and then during our relationship, I realized I was attracted to women. Then, when we broke up I came out as a lesbian for a couple of months before I realized that bisexual was a label for myself personally and started identifying as bisexual...I think part of it had to do with I didn’t like the negative stigmas and associations around bisexual women and so I was kind of like, I can remove myself from that...” (Jurassic Park P1)</p> <p>“My mom was kind of like, ‘How is it that you like both? Are you sure? Maybe you’re just confused, maybe you don’t know what you’re doing.’” (Coffee P2)</p>
Previous Relationship Experiences	“Every girl that I had ever dated who had labeled themselves as bisexual, they ended up either cheating on me or leaving me for a guy. And I just wasn’t very happy about that, so I was worried that

it would happen again...my personal experiences with dating people that were bisexual just didn't end well. So now I have this sort of confirmation bias about how I feel, felt about people who identified as bisexual." (Always P1)

"I guess I really saw it as more sexualized before I had a serious relationship, because when I had experience with females in the past it was just hooking up...I didn't realize that you could have a relationship just as strong if not stronger than the [other] relationships I had until I got into it." (Raspberry P1)

Relationship Formation

Bi-negative Insecurity "When I first started dating her [I had] a lot of insecurity that she might leave me for the opposite sex and...that would just make me really uncomfortable at first. I felt like I wasn't good enough for her...there was that part of her that was missing [men] and there's nothing I can do about it...But it was always mostly with a guy, like I'm not good enough for you." (Coffee P1)

"Once I learned that she was like "I'm not a lesbian," I was like, "Oh okay." I was worried, at first, that she'd leave me for someone else...it was a lot of fear based like, "Is she going to leave me? Who is she going to leave me for? Will I have to share her?" (Always P1)

General Stressors P1: "I feel like if you bottle stuff up, like at the beginning we both did. We didn't know how to talk to each other yet or how communicating with each other. We were still learning each other. I think we would bottle it up and then we would explode on something that was so small that became so big."
P2: "It just delayed the inevitable. You can choose to try to fix it now or fix it later and then there's going to be resentment there from not fixing the problem earlier." (Raspberry)

"We didn't always know each other and we didn't know things that we'd say would like trigger another person's response."
(Bananashark P2)

Relationship Satisfaction P1: "When we started falling for each other, it was torture, it was like hell. Because we felt like, there was such an incredible bond between us and we had this connection that seriously, it sounds so silly, but it was like Romeo and Juliet, like cosmic stars align, what I've always hoped I might find some day. But we couldn't have it...we felt like we weren't allowed to pursue it and weren't allowed to enjoy it...that was earth shattering and hard and horrible."

P2: "Oh that was awful. Clearly, I loved her. But at the time, that relationship couldn't even really be a relationship...when you're not

out and when you're [trying] so hard not to date, you just live with an anxiety...just awfulness." (Casey)

Relationship Viability

P1: "She was the first person in my life to set boundaries with me that I respected enough to listen to. That really brought out the best person in me."

P2: "She doesn't have a filter and my biggest thing is I don't like it when people are trying to hide something. You're not scheming and I like it." (Always)

P1: "She was the first person in my life to set boundaries with me that I respected enough to listen to. That really brought out the best person in me."

P2: "She doesn't have a filter and my biggest thing is I don't like it when people are trying to hide something. You're not scheming and I like it." (1101)

P2: "I wanted to help her because I know that she had more potential than what she was giving me in the beginning. I wanted to help her so she can be the best person she was, and I knew I could help her so I wanted to keep staying and keep pushing even though it was really rough in the beginning, but I knew that eventually it would pay off and it would be better."

P1: "Then that pushed me to get help...because I was already going a lot to therapy but sometimes you have to change therapists, change medication...so I guess her helping me made [me] motivated." (Coffee)

**Relational Emotion
Work**

Relational Meaning
Making

Metacommunication

"Conflicts are bound to happen but in a relationship it's how you deal through conflict... how you decide to move past it because if you have a conflict there's one party who's not satisfied and there's another party who thinks it's okay but how you guys build together on that conflict says everything about your relationship." (Raspberry P2)

P1: "We've actually had a few conversations though where I was like 'you have to tell me when you are upset about something' because sometimes it will get bigger than I feel like it had to be."

P2: "I had issues in my past relationships with talking about [issues]...I always wanted to communicate, and then my ex didn't. We would get into actual fights, screaming matches...we were just always fight about the same things...I would just constantly worry

that that's what was going to happen even though it doesn't. It was a hard mindset for me to get out of. So, I'll not tell her something and then write it down or text it to her because that feels safer to me."
(Bananashark)

Techniques

P2: "Once we start laughing, we can't stay mad [at] each other...we always love each other so once we start laughing it all kind of just fades away. The other night we were in an argument and I literally said just stop talking I'm gonna watch M*A*S*H and laugh. And that's what I did."

P1: "And I went to sleep. I woke up and we were like not even fighting anymore and about a couple hours after I woke up, I remembered we fought." (Vegas)

P2: "I think we always try to remember and really say out loud to remind each other we're on the same team...We're having interaction because we want to understand better, not because one of us wants to win...it's not about finding a winner. No competition. It's about understanding better."

P1: "I would agree... It is more of like a discussion of, and come to a consensus. We're talking with the intent of understanding and moving forward." (Casey)

Boundaries and Rule Making

External- Privacy "If we're having a disagreement that we're trying to resolve, then I don't necessarily want other people to involve themselves or overhear it." (Jurassic Park P2)

External- Safety P2: "Walking near the church groups at Uni or for any smaller country town we would go for a day or something, we are a bit more hesitant to be openly affectionate because we are not sure how homophobic or [if] we'll get any discrimination."

P1: "Yeah. We were in [small town], couple of weeks ago, just for the day and that's a smaller country town in [area of country] and we didn't hold hands while we were walking down the street just because in a country town there are lots of farmers and we weren't sure if we might run into somebody who'd be openly homophobic and something could happen...In the city we live in, we're not particularly worried if something is going to happen here because it's a larger city with a visible LGBT population. But, depending on where we are it can be a bit more stressful." (Jurassic Park)

External-Supports "We share a lot of um, as far as like how we feel like we should treat other people and the kind of boundaries we should set with how other people treat us." (Casey P2)

“And even after things are resolved I’ll still talk to friends about it, and I find that’s how I process things. So, I talk things through, not just in our relationship, but with friends. We both have friends that we talk to about our relationship and friends that we don’t. And we both are aware of that know who it is.” (Bananashark P1)

“My biological dad and his wife are quite homophobic. My step mom has told me not to tell people that I’m dating a woman and told me that it’s embarrassing for her to know that I’m dating a woman. So, I just don’t talk to my dad or my step mom very much because they’re not very supportive of the relationship.” (Jurassic Park P1)

External-
Monogamy vs.
Non-monogamy

P1: “We have an understanding that if one of us were to want to go and at least experience and have sex with a guy that we can do that without us being mad at each other...”

P2: “It’s not cheating if it’s with a boy.” (laughs)

P1: “That’s not true. (laughs) As long as we don’t run off and start dating that person.” (1101)

P2: “Like I said we’re 99.999% monogamous. We’re going home with each other at the end of the day.”

P1: “Basically the rule is she’s not allowed to be with anybody by herself.” (Vegas)

Repairs

P1: “So for me, in a conversation if we are trying to fix something, I don’t think the conversation is over until we have a plan of what’s going to be different and how it’s going to be different, exactly what we are going to do, how we will know if it’s different. And then also I am really big on you don’t get to say sorry unless you know what you are sorry for.”

P2: “And then once that’s decided and we’ve figured out our plan, after that it’s fine, and we move on and we play the Sims, or watch a movie, or do whatever, but after that everything mellows out.”

P1: “We really try to do something together after that though, that’s less intense.” (Bananashark)

Self-Reflectivity

“There’s times where I feel intimidated...there’s other people that she could choose to be with. But then also thinking the complete opposite with that exact same thought... there’s a lot of other people that she could choose to be with and she chooses to be with me.” (Casey P1)

“I have a lot of anxiety and I hate conflict, so if I can sort something out without bringing it up, I will, so I work with “is this a me problem or is this an us problem?” And then later on even if it was just something within myself, I’ll bring it up and what was going on

Learning About Bisexuality	so that way we're on the same page and we know what's happening in each other's heads." (Jurassic Park P2)
	"If you are ever gonna leave somebody cause you hear the word bisexual in their title, then you might want to do a bit of research into what it means to be bisexual." (Vegas P2)
	"I guess I learned more of what other people think about bisexuals...I think one of the main issues [Partner 1] was worried, because [she] thought that [she] had competition on both sides...So, I became more aware of how people perceive, I guess worry about bisexuals because they always think that they're going to be hit on or harassed in some way just because there's a possibility that they're going to like somebody like." (Always P2)
Commitment Development	P1: "We're not the kind of couple like that takes an hour to respond to the other person's message...we're both busy, we both do things and if she goes out, I expect not to hear from her the rest of the night but during the day we're both doing things [and] if I see her name pop up I don't [think] 'I'll get to that later.' She's very much a priority and I try to make her feel like she's a priority and I know that's especially important right now." P2: "I appreciate that she makes me feel like a priority because some people don't and that's cool when your partner does." (Raspberry)
Shifting Attitudes	"I've never had bad attitudes with it, I think it was just because I didn't really understand. But she's helped me understand. I do see it differently now...certain things you don't understand. But, her attitudes towards [bisexuality] helped me understand it." (Coffee P1)
Shared Relational Meaning	
Couple Identity Processes	
<i>Wrestling with Tensions of Bi-erasure</i>	P1: "If you have connection then the person is more important than the topic or their characteristics or anything else that's going on." P2: "It feels fairly neutral but maybe that's a positive that's hiding (laughs). I mean correct me if I'm wrong, I think we both have this idea that like you can be like physically attracted to someone but not romantically attracted to them necessarily. Like we still feel secure in our relationship even though we could still notice that there are other human beings who are attractive." (Casey) "I feel like at this point, because I'm so content with who I am, and our surrounded by people we're surrounded by like we both have really good support systems, it's not, it's not something that I like

think about ever. I don't feel like us being bisexual is any factor to either of us anymore. (Raspberry P1)

"I don't feel like that has much to do with our happiness...it's just our relationship...doesn't really affect us. There's more comfort when she says, 'this guy's really attractive,'" if we watch tv or something. I don't think there's a lot of influence that has to do with our relationship because it's just our relationship." (Coffee P1)

*Commitment Loss
Fears*

"I always have a concern in the back of my head that one day [Partner 2]'s going to snap out of it." (1101 P1)

"I would feel like there was something in our relationship that I couldn't give her, whether or not that would be a child, floating through the world where people of our gender are more judging when you are dating a woman, but if she dated a girl there's no threat that that girl could give her something that I couldn't." (Bananashark P2)

*Commitment
Maintenance*

"We would do stuff to make us feel like the honeymoon, either it's like going on a date or go out to drink. Sometimes we do this thing where we'll go to the bar together and then she'll sit on one side, and then I'll sit on the other side, and then we flirt with each other and we act like we don't know each other." (Coffee P2)

P2: "I think if we weren't supportive and accepting, our relationship satisfaction would decrease."

P1: "Us being accepting and supportive to each other makes both of us feel accepted and supported." (1101)

*Impression
Management*

P1: "We booked an Air B&B and we actually sent them a message saying, 'we're a lesbian couple...you have to tell us if there's any problem with that because we'll find somewhere else to stay.'"

P2: "So we weren't putting ourselves in a situation where we'd be uncomfortable or whatever for whatever reason." (Jurassic Park)

P2: "Whenever we go out and people try to talk to us...we tell them we're in a relationship and they're like, 'oh okay cool like, I'll still hit on you.' People don't respect our relationship as much."

P1: "There are times I have to tell them that I have a boyfriend...I have to lie...for them to understand. If I'm not in the mood to have that conversation or be hit on or try to enjoy my time with my friends, I'll be like, 'I have a boyfriend.'" (Raspberry)

*Relationship
Satisfaction*

P2: "It sounds cheesy, but it's everything that I always hoped that I would find in a spouse is her...she's just everything that I always hoped I would find in a spouse and then was kind of skeptical about."

P1: "I feel like we're so perfectly imperfect." (Casey)

**Macro-Systemic
Oppressions**

P2: “So many people are confused when I say I have a wife and they’re like, ‘wait, you have a wife?!’ [They think] a trans woman is supposed to have a guy [partner]...I’ve actually had trolls wait around 3, 4 hours sitting there silently just to see her show up and they’re like, ‘wow, she is real, you weren’t lying when you said she was coming!’”

P1: “It shocks people. They’re like, ‘you exist!’ And they wanna poke me like, ‘are you real?’” (Vegas)

Figures

Figure 1: Integrated Theoretical Model

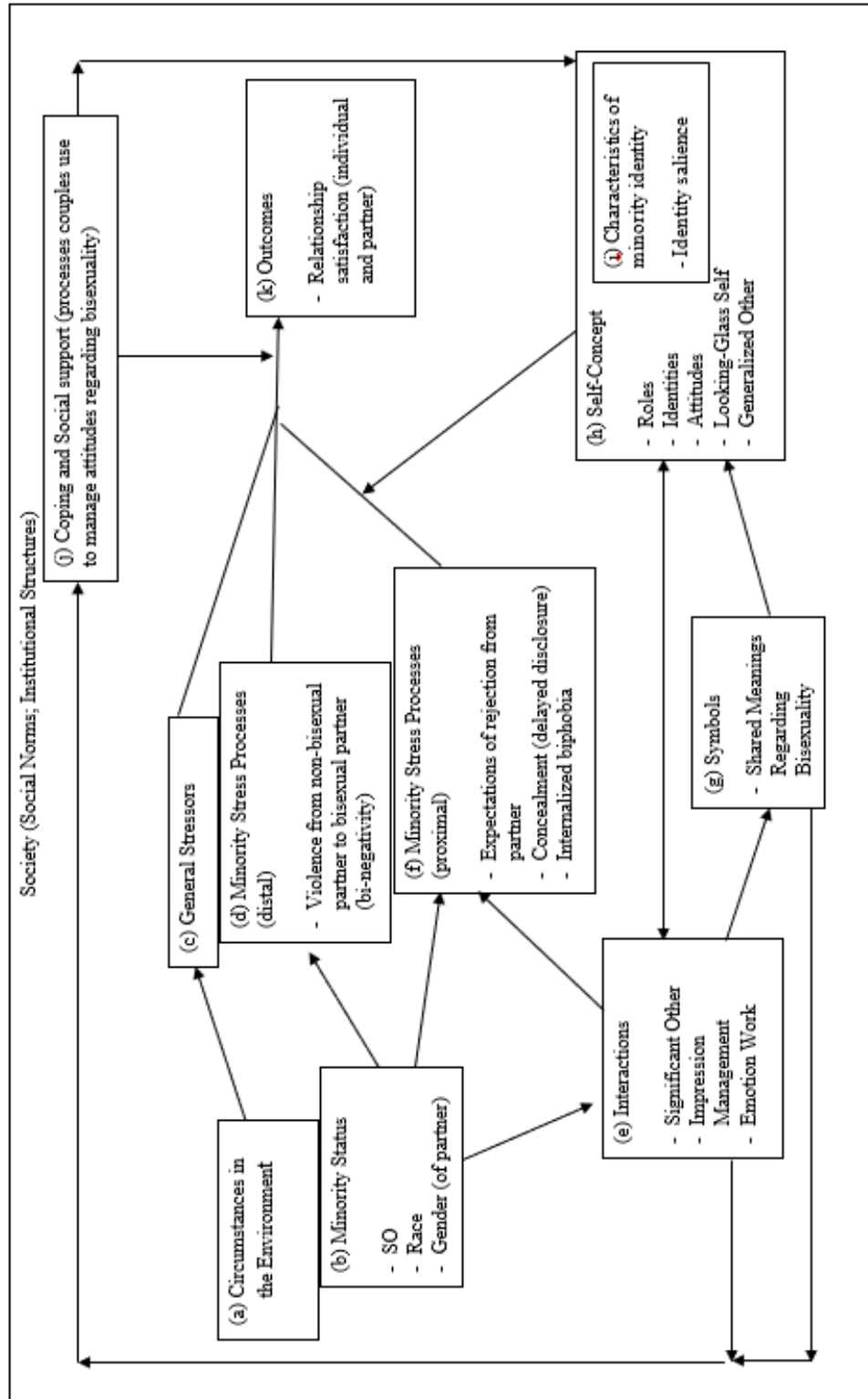


Figure 1. Integrated theoretical model. Adapted from Meyer's (2003) Minority Stress Model.

Figure 2: A Process Model of Relationship Satisfaction in Bisexual Intimate Relationships

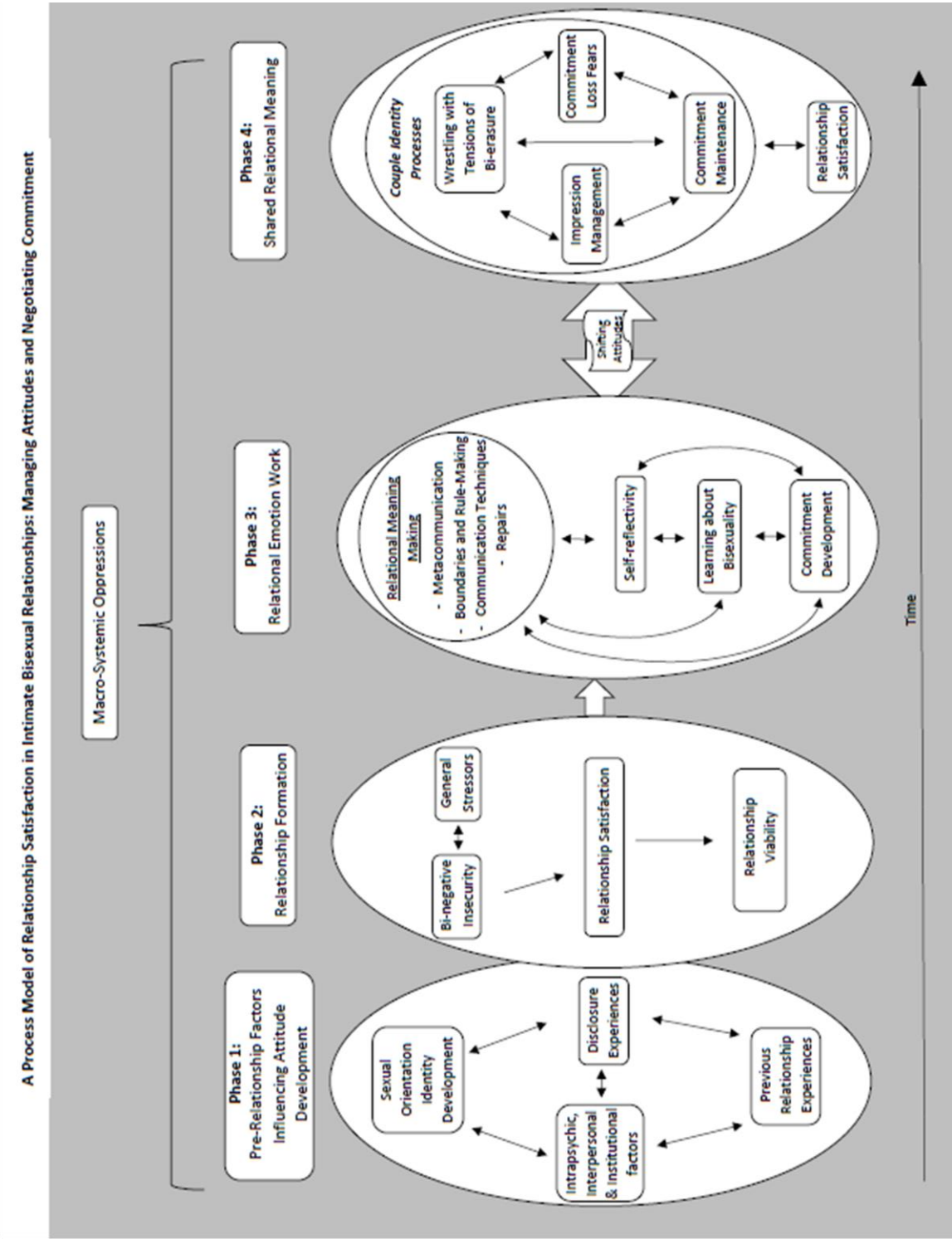


Figure 2: A process model of relationship satisfaction in bisexual intimate relationships

Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

#23320673.0

Relationship Satisfaction in Bisexual Couples

IRB Approved at the Study Level
Dec 05, 2018

A study investigating the impact of attitudes regarding bisexuality on relationship satisfaction among female same-sex/same-gender couples.

Are/Do you:

- Identify as female?
- In a monogamous relationship with a self-identified bisexual female?
- Over the age of 18?

Consider taking part in this study!

In this study, both you and your partner will complete a survey and given the option to enter to win a \$50 Amazon Gift Card!

Select couples who indicate interest will be interviewed at a later time, and will earn a \$25 Amazon Gift card for participating in a 60-90 minute interview.

Scan QR code below to access the survey



Contact:
Mary R. Nedela, Doctoral Candidate
Human Development and Family Science
mnedela@vt.edu

Survey Link: https://virginatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8nQe5fRtZlmpPqol
Survey Link: https://virginatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8nQe5fRtZlmpPqol
Survey Link: https://virginatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8nQe5fRtZlmpPqol
Survey Link: https://virginatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8nQe5fRtZlmpPqol
Survey Link: https://virginatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8nQe5fRtZlmpPqol
Survey Link: https://virginatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8nQe5fRtZlmpPqol
Survey Link: https://virginatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8nQe5fRtZlmpPqol
Survey Link: https://virginatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8nQe5fRtZlmpPqol
Survey Link: https://virginatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8nQe5fRtZlmpPqol
Survey Link: https://virginatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8nQe5fRtZlmpPqol

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear _____,

My name is Mary Nedela, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Human Development and Family Science at Virginia Tech. My research, teaching, and clinical interests are related to the relational experiences of bisexual-identified individuals and their partners. I am contacting you because I would like to share some information with you regarding my dissertation and would like your assistance with publicizing my research study.

My study is a two-part, mixed-method design focusing on the impact of attitudes regarding bisexuality on relationship satisfaction among female same-sex couples. It involves first collecting survey data from both partners in relationships in which at least one partner identifies as bisexual, or finds the label “bisexual” meaningful to their identity. I plan to interview select couples who agree to follow up interviews, which should last around 60 minutes. The potential findings of this study will provide a deeper understanding of the impact of attitudes on relationship satisfaction for these couples, as well as highlight the processes in which couples negotiate such an impact.

I would like to request the following:

1. To post my recruitment flyer on your social media page(s);
2. To post my recruitment flyer in your facility;
3. To have my recruitment flyer circulated within your potentially interested networks.

This research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Virginia Tech.

If you would like to learn more, please feel free to contact me. I have included an electronic copy of my recruitment flyer for your convenience, and would be happy to provide you with printed copies as well.

Thank you for taking the time to consider supporting this research.

Sincerely,

Mary R. Nedela, MS, LMFT
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Human Development and Family Science
Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, VA
Phone: (810) 602-0190
Email: mnedela@vt.edu

Appendix C: Informed Consent

RESEARCH SUBJECT CONSENT FORM

Bisexual Relationships: A Mixed-Method Investigation of Attitudes Regarding Bisexuality on Relationship Satisfaction

Protocol No.: 18-700
WIRB® Protocol #20182268
18-700

Sponsor: Virginia Tech

Investigator: Erika Grafsky, Ph.D.
840 University City Blvd
Suite 01
Blacksburg, VA 24060
United States

Sub-Investigator(s): April Few-Demo, Ph.D., and
Mary Nedela, M.S.

**Study-related
Phone Number(s):** Erika Grafsky
540-231-6782 (24 hours)

Mary Nedela
(810) 602-0190 (24 hours)

April Few-Demo
540-231-2664 (24 hours)

You are being invited to take part in a research study. A person who takes part in a research study is called a research subject, or research participant.

What should I know about this research?

- You will be provided with an explanation of this research.
- This form sums up that explanation.
- Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- If you don't understand, ask questions.
- Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact that partner attitudes regarding bisexuality may have on relationship satisfaction among female same-sex couples in which at least one partner identifies as bisexual, or finds the label “bisexual” meaningful to their identity. Further, this research seeks to understand how partners negotiate the impact attitudes regarding bisexuality may have on the couples’ relationship satisfaction. Results and findings will be used to inform family researchers and therapists. About 200 subjects are expected to take part in this research.

How long will I be in this research?

We expect that your taking part in the survey portion of the research project will last approximately 15-20 minutes. If you are interested in the interview portion of the study, the interview will last approximately 60 minutes. The date and time of the interview will be chosen by you and your partner. The length of time between the survey portion and the interview portion could be anywhere between 1 and 10 weeks depending on study progress, university holidays, and scheduling availability.

What happens to me if I agree to take part in this research?

If you agree to the survey portion of this study, you will be asked to complete the survey separately and will be asked to provide a code unique to you as a couple at the beginning of the survey. Couple codes will be chosen and shared among you and your partner so that your responses can be linked. For your protection, it is suggested that these couple codes do not include any identifying information, which can include names, birthdates, place of birth or residency, phone numbers, etc.

The survey will be completed electronically, which you will be given the link to. You may choose to complete a paper-version of the survey if you wish. Questions in each version are the same. The beginning portion of the survey asks you to confirm your eligibility for the survey with a series of questions. Then, you will be asked questions regarding your demographics, relationship, attitudes regarding bisexuality, relationship satisfaction, and attitudes regarding gender identity.

Following completion of the survey, you will be asked if you are interested in participating in follow-up interviews. If interested, you will be directed to an external survey link to provide an email address and phone number to be used to be contacted. You will then be given an opportunity to provide an email address or mailing address to be entered into a drawing for one of two \$50 Amazon gift cards, also using an external survey link. You will also be given an opportunity to enter the drawing if you complete the paper version of the survey, or if you do not complete the survey. Drawing winners will be selected at random at the end of the data collection.

If you provide your information for follow-up interviews, each partner that has provided contact information will be contacted to discuss the aims of this portion of the study. If you are the only partner who has provided contact information, you will be asked to discuss participation in the interview stage with your partner, then contact the researcher in return. If no contact has occurred from you within one week, the researcher will follow up via telephone. Interviews will

be scheduled only after both you and your partner have verbally consented to participating in the interview process. You and your partner will be given the choice of in-person interviews at the location of your choice, or electronic interviews via videoconferencing. The date and time of the interview will be determined in conjunction with the researcher. Prior to the start of the interview, each partner will be provided with the link to this informed consent and will be required to agree to informed consent separately once more in order to continue. Your electronic consent for the interview portion will be confirmed prior to the start of the interview, then re-confirmed verbally at the beginning of the interview.

The interviews will last approximately 60 minutes and will be recorded with an audio recorder. During the interview, you will be asked about your attitudes regarding bisexuality and the ways in which you negotiate the impact of such attitudes on your relationship satisfaction. For your participation in the interview, you and your partner will be provided compensation in the form of a \$25 Amazon gift card. You will also be asked if you would be willing to be contacted in the future for follow up questions or clarifications.

What are my responsibilities if I take part in this research?

If you take part in this research, you will be responsible to:

- Provide responses to demographic and survey questions as you feel comfortable and willing to share.

If you participate in the interview portion:

- Meet with an interviewer from the study team at the agreed upon time in the agreed upon location of your choosing.

Could being in this research hurt me?

It is expected that you will experience minimal risk from participating in this study. Potential risks include:

- Risk of Breach of Confidentiality: The only people with access to identifying information will be the interviewer and the co-investigator. The protection of participant information will be taken seriously during all phases of the study and after the study. Confidential study information is not discussed outside of the research settings unless prompted by you, the participant.
- Risk of Disclosure of Personal Information: Personal identifying information is not required in this study, but such information may be shared during the course of the study. If any identifying information is provided throughout the study, the researchers will ensure privacy and confidentiality by removing any identifying information from collected data.
- Risk of Emotional Discomfort or Distress: You may experience emotional distress (i.e., distress that occurs as a result of personal experiences) as a result of participating in the survey or interview. Such distress may be due to the nature of identifying as a sexual minority, discussing your experiences with discrimination, and/or relational distress with your partner. If at any time you are distressed by the survey questions, you may discontinue/withdraw at any time without penalty. If at any time you appear upset or distressed as a result of the interview questions, the interviewer may ask you about it to be sure you want to continue. Debriefing will occur following the interview process to

ensure that you are ready to leave. Any expenses accrued for seeking or receiving treatment will be the responsibility of the subject and not that of the research project, research team, or Virginia Tech.

- **Risk of Damaged Family Relationships, Anti-Gay Violence, Harassment, and Discrimination:** If a participant's confidentiality is compromised, there is the potential risk of violence, discrimination, and/or harassment. The fear of, or experience of, family and/or community homophobia is a serious consideration as disclosure may increase stress and strain family relationships. Disruption may originate from either the person who is the recipient of disclosure or by another person who becomes aware of one's sexual orientation through the original disclosure recipient. This stress could then be furthered through a lack of resources given their geographic location and/or other demographic information.
- **Risk of Damage to Financial Standing, Employability, Housing, or Reputation:** If a participant's confidentiality is compromised, there is the potential risk of the participant experiencing discrimination and marginalization as a result of others knowing they identify as a sexual minority. This, in turn, may lead to the financial or work-related discrimination, including a failure to hire, firing, or a change in job position, responsibilities, or privileges. Although there are non-discrimination laws, others' knowledge of one's sexual orientation may lead to unintended consequences. A more general effect may be damage to one's reputation, which might permeate a variety of personal and social boundaries.

In addition to these risks, taking part in this research may harm you in unknown ways.

Will it cost me money to take part in this research?

Taking part in this research will not cost you any money.

Will being in this research benefit me?

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to you may include reflection upon your attitudes regarding bisexuality and relationship satisfaction. Others may benefit in the future from the information learned.

What other choices do I have besides taking part in this research?

This research is not designed to diagnose, treat or prevent any disease. Your alternative is to not take part in the research.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

Your private information will be shared with individuals and organizations that conduct or watch over this research, including:

- The research team
- The Institutional Review Board (IRB) that reviewed this research

We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

We protect your information from disclosure to others to the extent required by law. We cannot promise complete secrecy.

Who can answer my questions about this research?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think this research has hurt you or made you sick, talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page.

This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at (800) 562-4789, help@wirb.com if:

- You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.
- You are not getting answers from the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone else about the research.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

What if I am injured because of taking part in this research?

If you are injured or get sick because of being in this research, call the study doctor immediately.

Can I be removed from this research without my approval?

The person in charge of this research can remove you from this research without your approval. For example, you may be removed from the study if you are unable to keep your scheduled appointment, or if there is current domestic violence occurring within the relationship. We will tell you about any new information that may affect your health, welfare, or choice to stay in this research.

What happens if I agree to be in this research, but I change my mind later?

If you decide to leave this research, contact the research team so that the investigator can remove your information for analysis.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

For taking part in the survey portion, you will be given an opportunity to enter into a drawing for one of two \$50 Amazon gift cards. The drawing will occur after all data has been collected. The email address provided for the drawing will not be linked to your survey. You will be notified by email address, and the gift card will be sent electronically to the email you provide. If you begin the survey but do not complete, you will still be given the opportunity to enter the raffle drawing by emailing mmedela@vt.edu.

For taking part in the survey portion, you and your partner will be given a \$25 Amazon gift card at the time of your interview, sent electronically to the email of your choice. One gift card will be given per couple. If you and your partner begin the interview but are unable to complete, you will still be given full compensation for participation.

Statement of Consent:

Your continuing on to take the survey notes your consent to take part in this research.

Appendix D: Qualtrics Survey

Investigating the Relationship Between Attitudes Regarding Bisexuality and Relationship Satisfaction

Q1 Thank you for your interest in this study. This survey is phase one of a multi-phase dissertation study under the supervision of faculty in the Human Development and Family Science Department at Virginia Tech.

Informed Consent Information

This survey is for same-sex female couples in which at least one partner identifies as bisexual, or finds the label "bisexual" meaningful to their identity. We are interested in learning the impact that attitudes regarding bisexuality has on relationship satisfaction. To be eligible for the study: 1) both partners must be over the age of 18, b) at least one partner must identify as bisexual, c) both partners must identify as female, d) be in a monogamous relationship, e) be in a relationship for at least 6 months and f) both partners must complete the survey separately.

This survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Your responses will be completely confidential. Each participant will be given an opportunity to enter into a drawing for one of two \$50 Amazon gift cards. You will have the freedom to withdraw from the project at any time without being penalized in any way.

In order to increase the likelihood of your participation being confidential, we encourage you to participate only if you are in a private location where you can ensure your confidentiality. One strategy is to clear your browsing history once you have completed the survey by going to your internet history, choosing 'Clear Browsing data,' and confirming your choice. While these instructions should help with most browsers on computer and mobile devices, we encourage you to use a search engine to determine your specific browser's instructions if these prove insufficient.

This research project has been approved, as required, by Western Institutional Review Board (WIRB) of Research Involving Human Subjects. The submission of the web survey is indication of your voluntary consent to participate. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact Dr. Erika Grafsky at egrafsky@vt.edu. You may also contact WIRB if you have more questions about your rights as human subject participants at help@wirb.com or (800) 562-4789.

You may review the full [Informed consent](#) in addition to reading the above before agreeing to participate in the study.

Do you consent to participation in the survey portion of this study?

- Yes (3)
- No (4)

Skip To: Q3 If Thank you for your interest in this study. This survey is phase one of a multi-phase dissertation... = No

Skip To: End of Block If Thank you for your interest in this study. This survey is phase one of a multi-phase dissertation... = Yes

Q3 You are not eligible to complete this survey. Thank you for your time.

Skip To: End of Survey If You are not eligible to complete this survey. Thank you for your time. () Is Displayed

Q4 To determine your eligibility, please answer the following questions:

Q5 Are you 18 years of age or older?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q10 If Are you 18 years of age or older? = No

Q7 Do you identify as female?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q10 If Do you identify as female? = No

Q6 Do you or your partner self-identify as bisexual, or find the label "bisexual" meaningful to your/their identity?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q10 If Do you or your partner self-identify as bisexual, or find the label "bisexual" meaningful to your... = No

Q8 Are you in a monogamous relationship with your partner?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q10 If Are you in a monogamous relationship with your partner? = No

Q9 Have you and your partner been in a relationship for at least 6 months?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q10 If Have you and your partner been in a relationship for at least 6 months? = No

Display This Question:

If Are you 18 years of age or older? = No

Or Do you identify as female? = No

Or Do you or your partner self-identify as bisexual, or find the label "bisexual" meaningful to your... = No

Or Are you in a monogamous relationship with your partner? = No

Or Have you and your partner been in a relationship for at least 6 months? = No

Q10 You are not eligible to complete this survey. Thank you for your time.

Display This Question:

If You are not eligible to complete this survey. Thank you for your time. Is Displayed

Q49 If you are interested in being entered into a drawing for one of two \$50 Amazon gift cards, please click on the following link and enter your information:

<https://goo.gl/forms/rm5fcZwpDC9YffNg2>

Skip To: End of Survey If If you are interested in being entered into a drawing for one of two \$50 Amazon gift cards, pleas...() Is Displayed

Display This Question:

If Are you 18 years of age or older? = Yes

And Do you identify as female? = Yes

And Do you or your partner self-identify as bisexual, or find the label "bisexual" meaningful to your... = Yes

And Are you in a monogamous relationship with your partner? = Yes

And Have you and your partner been in a relationship for at least 6 months? = Yes

Q12 Please provide the following demographic information.

Q13 What is your age?

Q14 What is your race?

Q15 What is your ethnicity?

Q16 What is your sexual orientation?

Q17 What is your gender identity?

Q18 What is your religious affiliation?

Q19 What is the highest form of education you have completed?

- Some High School (1)
- High School Graduate (2)
- GED (3)
- Some College (4)
- Associate Degree (5)
- Bachelors Degree (6)
- Masters Degree (7)
- Post Graduate Degree (8)

Q20 What best describes your employment status?

- Full Time (1)
- Part Time (2)
- Self-employed (3)
- Unemployed (4)
- Retired (5)
- Other: (6) _____

Q21 What is your total annual personal income?

- 0-\$29,999 (1)
- \$30,000-\$39,999 (2)
- \$40,000-\$49,999 (3)
- \$50,000-\$59,999 (4)
- \$60,000-\$69,999 (5)
- \$70,000-\$79,999 (6)
- \$80,000-\$89,999 (7)
- \$90,000-\$99,999 (8)
- \$100,000 or higher (9)

Q22 Do you have any biological children? If yes, how many children do you have?

- Yes: (1) _____
- No (2)

Q40 How long have you been in your current relationship? (Please indicate the number of months and/or years)

Q41 What is your relationship status with your current partner?

- Dating (1)
- Engaged (2)
- Living together (3)
- Married (4)
- Other (5) _____

Q23 At what age did you first disclose your sexual orientation?

Q24 What identity did you disclose at this time?

Q25 When did you disclose your sexual orientation to your current partner?

- Before the relationship began (1)
- After the relationship began (2)

Display This Question:

If When did you disclose your sexual orientation to your current partner? = After the relationship began

Q26 What was the length of time that elapsed between when the relationship began and the time of disclosure?

Q33

	Not at all (1)	A little (2)	Somewhat (3)	Mostly (4)	Almost Completely (5)	Completely (6)
In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q42 Please select one answer for each statement below.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
When we disagree, my partner or I use physical aggression. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My partner engages in frequent arguments with others outside our relationship. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I sometimes become afraid of my partner. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My partner tells me who I can spend time with outside of our relationship (e.g., family and friends). (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I tell my partner who she can spend time with outside of our relationship (e.g., family and friends). (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My partner becomes jealous when I spend time with others. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometimes I need to defend myself against physical harm during arguments. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Our arguments frequently escalate towards physical violence. (8)	•	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My partner controls our finances. (9)	•	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q37 Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Q39 If you are interested in participating in the interview portion of this study, please click on the following link to enter your contact information:

https://virginiatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_7PwlttYAyrbzIX3

Display This Question:
If You are not eligible to complete this survey. Thank you for your time. Is Displayed
And Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Is Displayed
Or If you are interested in participating in the interview portion of this study, please click on th... Is Displayed

Q38 If you are interested in being entered into a drawing for one of two \$50 Amazon gift cards, please click on the following link and enter your information:

<https://goo.gl/forms/rm5fcZwpDC9YffNg2>

Appendix E: Interview Schedule

Tentative Interview Schedule

I will be asking you questions regarding your experiences as a couple in relation to attitudes regarding bisexuality and the impact these attitudes have on your relationship satisfaction. Please know that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers to these questions and that your responses will not be identified with your name.

Each of you have completed the survey that asked several questions about your attitudes regarding bisexuality. I am going to ask you questions about your relationship...

Q1 ...But first I'd like to start by asking each of you to share your overall attitudes about bisexuality.

Probe for understandings of what it means to be bisexual, understandings of stereotypes, (e.g., *What are each of your understandings about what it means to be bisexual? What are each of your understandings of common stereotypes of bisexuality or bisexual individuals?*)

Q2 What or whom has influenced your attitudes or understanding of bisexuality?

Probe for change in attitudes over time (e.g., *Has either of your attitudes regarding bisexuality changed over time? In what ways?*)

Q3 How do you think, if at all, various aspects of your identity, such as age, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, and education influence your thinking about bisexuality?

Probe for influence of intersection of identities, perception of influence of partner's identities (e.g., *How do you think the intersection of each of these aspects of your identity (or your partner's identity) influence your (your partner's) attitudes regarding bisexuality?*)

Q4 To what extent do you believe that you share beliefs or attitudes about bisexuality? Can you share a story this mutual understanding?

Probe for agreement and disagreement (e.g., *How might the way that you think/feel about bisexuality be different from your partner's understanding? Can you share a story where this difference was clear to you? Or both of you?*)

Now I would like to ask you questions regarding your relationship satisfaction.

Q5 How would each of you describe your relationship satisfaction?

Probe for factors specific to current relationship (e.g., *What things do you associate with how satisfied you are with your relationship? Which of these factors are most important to this relationship and why?*)

Q6 What outside things impact how you may feel about your relationship as a couple?

Probe for factors outside the relationship (e.g., *How might family, work, societal, or other influences impact how you feel about your relationship? What outside forces are supportive of your relationship? What outside forces make it difficult to be in a relationship?*)

Q7 How do your attitudes regarding bisexuality influence how satisfied you are in your relationship?

Probe for direction of influence (e.g., *Would you say that each of your attitudes has had a positive or negative impact on your relationship satisfaction? Why?*)

Q8 How does your partner's attitudes regarding bisexuality make you feel about yourself?

Q9 How does your partner's attitudes regarding bisexuality make you feel about your relationship?

Q10 How do you think your partner's bisexuality may influence how satisfied and/or happy you are as a couple?

Probe for impact on maintenance of relationship satisfaction (e.g., *Does your partner's bisexuality make it harder to be happy in this relationship? Does it hinder the maintenance of relationship satisfaction for each of you?*)

Q11 What do each of you do when you are not as happy or frustrated about your relationship?

Probe for implementation of the strategies and strategies specific to managing attitudes regarding bisexuality (e.g., *Tell me about how you have used these strategies? How do you implement these strategies? Which strategies are specific to managing attitudes regarding bisexuality?*)

Q12 What resources do you use that help you feel happy in your relationship?

Q13 What advice would you give other couples who may be experiencing dissatisfaction in their relationships due to disagreements regarding what it means to be bisexual?

Q14 What would you like therapists and other professionals know about relationships with bisexual individuals?

Probe for helping (e.g., *What would you like them to know about how to help such couples improve their relationship satisfaction?*)

Those are all of the questions that I have. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts as well as the intimate details of your relationship with me. Do you have any feedback for me or anything else you'd like to add?

DEBRIEF

*When recorder is turned off hand each partner a resource list.

Q1 *Are either of you having any strong emotional reactions right now? If so, are you feeling ok to leave? (If not, process for a short period and give time to decompress, separately if requested. Provide resources.).*

Q2 *Do you have any suggestions to improve the overall interview process?*

Q3 *Were there any questions I did not ask that you think would be helpful?*

Q4 *Can I contact you if I have any follow up question and to confirm my overall findings with you?*

Q5 *Do you have any final questions?*

Appendix F: Follow Up Interview Schedule

Thank you for meeting with me once more. I will be asking you some additional questions regarding your experiences as a couple in relation to attitudes regarding bisexuality and the impact these attitudes have on your relationship satisfaction. Please remember that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers to these questions and that your responses will not be identified with your name.

Q1 In what ways do who you are, where you come from, where you live influence your first impressions about what bisexuality is/ thinking about bisexuality?

Prompt: Does your culture/race/age/religion play a role in that impression? If so, please tell me how those things influenced how you thought about bisexuality before your relationship with __ began.

Q2 At the beginning of your relationship, in general, how satisfied were you with your relationship?

Prompt: Using the same scale from the initial survey, rate your satisfaction level in the initial stages of your current relationship.

Not at all A little Some-what Mostly Almost Completely Completely

Follow up prompt: How would you describe how you felt in your relationship in the beginning? Was it an easy relationship to fall into or was it challenging? Tell me why you think about the early days in that way.

Q3 If you once held negative attitudes about bisexuality, how did you work through it to stay in this relationship?

Prompt: If you know that your partner was a little nervous about you being bisexual, how did you work through it to stay in the relationship?

Q4 If you can, tell me about a time when you felt that you needed to protect your relationship from family members, friends, or others? (Prompt: A friend who may not be supportive of your partner). How do you, as a couple, protect your relationship from outside factors?

Q5 In what ways did you learn about what it means to bisexual from your partner?

Q6 All couples have an identity, a shared history and routines by being and growing together. At this point in time, how would you describe how you see yourselves as a couple? How would you describe how you believe others see you as a couple?

Appendix G: Selected Memos and Member Check Meetings

10/11/18- What am I not thinking about?

After meeting with my first couple (1101), I am wondering what factors I am not considering that may influence this process. For instance, this couple talked about how similar their overall development was- all very similar experiences. This is likely to set up relationships to be on a level playing field from the start, especially since they were friends before partners. P1 also talked about her identity development process and that it was difficult for her- perhaps has an impact on overall attitudes about sexuality (internalized homophobia?). First same-gender relationship for P2- so P1 feared, more in beginning than now, that she would “snap out of phase” and go back to men. Fear about returning to men related to being “threatened”. Impact of attitudes on relationship satisfaction may not be present- after time the identity isn’t a factor in relationship satisfaction- it becomes about the relational dynamics. Verbal and nonverbal cues to discuss relational dynamics- differences in preferences (addressing ASAP or needing space)- talk about differences when calm- created more understanding of needs when upset, providing that for each other- asking for what is needed- creating environment to say what needs to be said (in person or using technology).

11/18/18- Early relationship is different than the relational dynamics now

Couple “Always” highlighted another key to this emerging model- the early relationship looks different than the relationship now. This should be explicitly asked in future interviews. Gender and gender roles could play a role in displays of physical affection.

1/29/19- Shared identity process

With couple “Casey”, both partners shared their SO identity development process which significantly impacted their attitudes and relationship satisfaction. Accountability was brought up in this interview. Communication could be emerging as a prominent theme.

2/1/19- Age matters

Discussed the study today with a women’s group at a local LGBT center. Several women present were over the age of 40 and discussed their strong desire to avoid relationships with bi-identified women. 3 women specifically shared their experiences with bi women in the 70’s/80’s that did fit the stereotype of “just a phase”/“will leave for a man”. Their experiences gave them the message that bi women cannot be trusted- being vulnerable enough to be in a relationship with bi women was not an option. The bi women who did this, however, were understandable in their actions, as homophobia was much more pronounced at the time, along with heteronormativity. It was easier, if women were bi, to go along with the norm. The women present at the group who were under 40, especially those in their 20’s, discussed the fluidity in sexuality being more of an option (less homophobia and heteronormativity, although still present). The younger the generation, the more accepting attitudes are present.

2/2/19- Exposure and intersectionality regarding assumptions

Experience and being exposed to bisexuality influences attitudes- especially to combat heteronormativity. Definite age cohort differences regarding acceptance of, and attitudes regarding, bisexuality. Across generations, though, remains rigid gender roles and assumptions for how to act. I am starting to think about the need to separate trust into categories: 1) about bi identity and 2) in the relationship. Evidence is helpful.

2/22/19- Open and honest communication

Communication continuing to be significant factor. Starting to think that couples who stay together work through their issues about attitudes regarding bisexuality then it is no longer an issue or impacts the relationship. The longer couples are together, the less sexual orientation impacts the relationship and how satisfied each partner is in the relationship. Other factors become more important.

3/1/19- Length of relationship matters

First couple to discuss the positive effects bisexuality has on relationship in regards to sexual behavior- while they are monogamous, they do engage in group sex occasionally which, while creating some distress momentarily at times, has led to open and vulnerable conversations about their boundaries and needs in the relationship- ultimately making them closer. This couple may be an “outlier” in many ways: This is the oldest couple interviewed so far, and have been together the longest (12 years, married almost 10); P1 is trans and discussed several coming out events.

P1 expressed that many bi people were actually pansexual. My own biases regarding differences in these two labels made me feel frustrated with this participant when she made this statement. I refrained from asking further questions about this or making any statements during the interview because I did not want to divert the interview. Upon further reflection, this participant’s statement came from her own biases as well. There is considerable overlap between these two identities, which is implied by the statement.

3/5/19- What are people not saying?

I am trying to conceptualize what couples are not saying about their attitudes- largely they are not saying largely negative things about bisexuality beyond passive agreements with some stereotypes at various points in the relationship. This could be because of age, religion (or non-religion), female gender- all these intersections make bisexuality more acceptable.

3/5/19- Communicating values or vulnerability

Jurassic Park couple got me thinking about values communication. Or at least communicating underlying meaning, wishes, desires in an open and honest way. I seem to remember at least a few other couples hinting at this process when discussing bisexuality, but also any topic, causing distress in the relationship. Or perhaps it’s more about vulnerability when communicating?

3/14/19- Member Checking with Dr. Few-Demo and Dr. Grafsky

Dr. Few-Demo: So, as therapists, your profession is to analyze communication. How do you break down these pieces? Of movement. If we were to do a process model of how the individuals communicate about the mixed orientation. Is it about the mixed orientation or is it about daily kinds of things that bleed into it? I'm trying to get a sense of how to capture this. If it's all about talking, how do we break these into segments so we can say "this is something that occurs at this part of the relationship." This is all introspective because they're thinking back upon this. Or "this is the method or strategy for resolving an issue. I don't want to monopolize.

Dr. Grafsky: No. I was just thinking of what the idea is of the trigger or transgression that occurred. I think that's part of what we need to think about in terms of mapping this process. The word that popped up for me without looking at the transcripts is the idea of triggering an insecurity. What is happening that the insecurity about the mixed -- related to the identity -- is triggered? I'm wondering. Maybe it's not insecurity. Maybe it's something else.

Mary: I think at least one couple mentioned the insecurity piece. I think it's in the Always transcript where they mentioned insecurity. So, I think it's there.

Dr. Few-Demo: So, what does that look like? Is it eyes that stray? Is it a certain behavior that's done? Affection toward -- this happens in a lot of relationships where someone strays in affection. I was dating a cis-gendered heterosexual male who was very jealous of my close relationships with my gay male friends. Really jealous. With hand gestures and contact and things. So, that would be a trigger to start a conversation about "is that guy really gay?" There's an insecurity that I'm not providing enough focus with this relationship. I'm wondering if there's something in how these women talk about a trigger and the rationale behind that insecurity. You might have to go back to them.

Mary: That's what I was thinking. I think friendship is one of the factors, especially with male friendships. That's a particular concern for some of these couples. The concern is that they'd leave for a male, not a female. The concern is not there for females. It's there for men.

Dr. Few-Demo: I want to know why that's so important.

Mary: It's important because they can't compete with men. That's what they're saying. "I cannot compete with a male. They do not have what I have. I can compete with a female. I know what I offer against a female, but I can't compete with a man."

Dr. Few-Demo: That's weird. It's buying into the heterosexual way of framing relationships. I think that's fascinating. It even enters into this discourse, the dance that these women are having with one another. It's not more fluid. I don't know if you can say that for all of the women, but is it these stereotypes. Do they mention stereotypes?

Mary: Yeah, needing to have both genders as partners, being promiscuous, cheating. Those ones mostly.

Dr. Few-Demo: So, that's important to track. What are the -- you have to understand the mindset of these participations, couples, partners as much as possible. You need to get a source of where the bi-negativity is linked. Who throws the shade, so to speak?

Mary: Right, and I think that's something that's different now than the beginning of their relationship. Many of them didn't believe the stereotypes anyways. I think it's exposure to a bisexual individual in a different way than the stereotypes than have been put on them. Once

they were exposed to a person who reassured and developed trust over time and had a communication piece, it became a nonissue. At the time I had talked to them, it wasn't a part of their relationship. The bisexual identity wasn't a part of their relationship other than a partner sharing a picture of a male and saying he's attractive. It's keeping the identity alive in the relationship.

Dr. Few-Demo: Interesting. What does keeping the identity alive in the relationship mean?

Mary: Sort of like an honoring like "I know you're bisexual. I'm not going to erase your identity in this relationship."

Dr. Few-Demo: And that's something the partners are doing?

Mary: That's something one partner did. It'd be interesting to see if some of the other partners did. This speaks to the personality of that one partner. This is the couple from Australia. They were very easy going and they came into the relationship not having a lot of negative stereotypes about bisexuality anyways. It's much more normalized in that society. I think that's an influence as well.

Dr. Few-Demo: How do they know when something is resolved? Like a trigger or jealousy. How do they know the argument is over? Communication about this is over. How do they know when they've moved on? Do you get a sense of that from the transcripts?

Mary: I have a bit of a sense of that. I need to check if it's clear in some of them. From what I remember, it's when they've both said their piece and they acknowledge each other's perspective. They make a plan moving forward for how to do things differently. How to communicate things differently with each other or their plan for engaging with friends. What's their plan for whatever it might be. They have an agreed upon plan for moving forward. It's like establishing rules and boundaries.

Dr. Few-Demo: So, when do they do that? The boundaries and the rules. I'm trying to characterize it. I'm curious about the rules and the boundaries. I don't know how best to ask the question about boundaries. How are boundaries known and discussed in the relationship? And this is any kind of relationship. You all know we're looking at bisexual relationships, mixed orientation relationships, for now. But how are boundaries established and communicated?

Dr. Grafsky: It might help you to think about the idea of "crossing the line." That helps you get a sense of some boundaries. It helps you get a sense of "that's okay, but this is not okay." That's an indication of a boundary.

Mary: I was thinking of asking questions about line crossing. How do you know where the line is? How do you communicate that line and know when it's been crossed? Some of those questions. I didn't ask more explicitly about those questions, so it's probably not in the transcripts. I can go back and ask them about those things.

Dr. Few-Demo: You should take a log and go back and ask those questions before you do them so Dr. Grafsky and I can go back and look at those questions. I think the whole "rules and boundaries" thing is important. The other thing you mentioned really struck me about keeping the identity alive in the relationship. Regardless of your orientation, I think it's something you think about. It makes me think of keeping the identity alive in your head. When we think about analyzing and looking at your data, it's not just about keeping your identity alive, but things like

boundaries might show up where it's not keeping it alive. Maybe that's where the insecurity is. Maybe the insecurities pop up when there's an indication that their identity is not being kept alive, or that the stereotype is keeping over and not the trust that they've shared with each other. That's where you need to start putting your analyzing mind to connect the dots.

Dr. Grafsky: Yeah, so we're asking you to think about how these people are constructing and affirming the couple identity. How do they affirm it in their interactions that they have over time? In terms of rigor, I think that since it is just 8, going back to them would be a good thing to do.

7/13/19 – Member Check with Dr. Few-Demo

Dr. Few-Demo: Do you sense bi-negativity in the lot or the sample? It's not necessarily reflected in your table -- not table. In a way, it's a table. You kept it very sanitized in a way. You know? These are big extractions opposed to the nitty gritty of what these people are dealing with. We start off dealing with pre-relationship factors. There's a lot of factors that influence how they envision themselves and each other. People are making decisions about disclosing and not disclosing and when they disclose. Working through it is like unpacking and replacing narratives about bisexuality and what that might mean in terms of stability or safety. And I don't mean physical safety, but safety in knowing that your partner won't leave. Or knowing you'll be okay if the partner does leave. I know the participants didn't speak to this, but where is the wrangling, where is the working through? What are we working through? Is it through bi-negativity or through insecurity? Ambiguity? Is it that? At the same time, we want to honor these relationships and not place them in a negative light, but relationships aren't perfect. It might also be because we interview them together. It's fine. You end up with a shared relational meaning out of this. That's the perfection of interviewing them together. You have moved into this. Let's get back into the nitty gritty of the working through phase. What is it that they're working through?

Mary: That's a fair point. I kept it more sterile because I was aware of the limitations of the sample group. I was try to keep it more generic, I guess you could say. I started thinking just now that it was clear for a lot of them that the attitudes impacting the relationship satisfaction in the beginning was negative. Maybe that should be more clear in this part of it. They were clear that in the beginning of the relationship, it did have a negative influence. One of the things I've been wrestling with is that their shared relational meaning now is an avoidance. Maybe it's not an avoidance, but they're not talking about it as much as they were because they've already talked about it. It was negative, they did the working through, and now they're at the point where they're focusing on the relationship, the partner, and their future. They've built the commitment and the trust so now they don't talk about it. It's unclear whether the bi-negativity is gone. It's more neutral now than it is positive.

Dr. Few-Demo: Yeah. It's sort of like a liminal space. It's sort of sexy in a way! And I'm sure there has to be something in the communication literature that speaks to this. We may have to define this. It's a space where we don't talk about what we know anymore. Maybe I can talk to a communication scholar and ask what that's called. What is it when couples get to a place where it's not really ignored but you just don't talk about it? It's the elephant in the room that you don't talk about. I want to know what that's called.

Mary: I don't know but that's been something I've been trying to figure out! That's an important point. I think that's where I shifted my idea of keeping bisexuality alive. I had coded that or erasing the bi identity. I don't think it's that straightforward. I have role of bi identity in relational meaning. I'm thinking about that as -- when you're in a relationship for so long, it doesn't matter anymore. It's about the person. It's there. It's known and not hidden, but it's not talked about because it's not important. We don't need to keep it alive but we're also not erasing it. It's a weird between stage.

Dr. Few-Demo: Yeah, I think it's -- I don't know. It's not necessarily ambiguity or ambivalent. It's like a liminal space where the focus isn't on the individual as it is on the relationship. At the same time, maybe it's the desalinization -- I don't know the right word -- of a once salient identity in favor of the relationship identity. You definitely have to lead with that negativity kind of thing. That has to be in here. If the majority are wrestling with it, you have to have the ugly with the good or people will say you're not balanced. Then people will be a little upset that you're bringing it up, but relationships are emotional. It's in confliction. That's just a part of it that we're trying to capture. Here's the thing, Mary. How does what we're discussing contribute to the literature? How is it different than what's out there? Is it?

Mary: I don't think there's anything like this in the literature is the thing. I don't think it's different. I just don't think it's there. There's understanding of what it's like to be in lesbian relationships or straight relationships or whatever, but there's not really an understanding of what the processes are for relationships with bi folks, particularly around this topic. I think it's new. And it's not even -- I was talking to Dr. Grafsky about this. It's not even like it's mind-boggling and completely new. There's a lot of the same communication stuff that would be talked about in any other relationships. It's the same in a lot of ways. There are also a lot of things because of the bi-negativity that need to be worked through in a different way.

Appendix H: Conceptual Phases

Pre-Relationship Factors

- Previous relationships
- Societal influence
- Identity Development
- Intersectionality
- Development of attitudes
- Personality
- Insecurity
- Disclosing



Beginning of Relationship (RQ1)

- Insecurity
- Need for control/power
- Assumptions
- Attitudes impacting relationship satisfaction (negatively)
- Communicating attitudes



Working Through Phase (RQ2)

- Communication
- Shifting attitudes
- Negotiating power, boundaries, rules, expectations, obligations
 - o Support from external resources
- Developing understanding, trust, respect, commitment
- Reflecting on self
- Educating and learning from partner
- Accepting influence from partner



Shared Relational Meaning (RQ2)

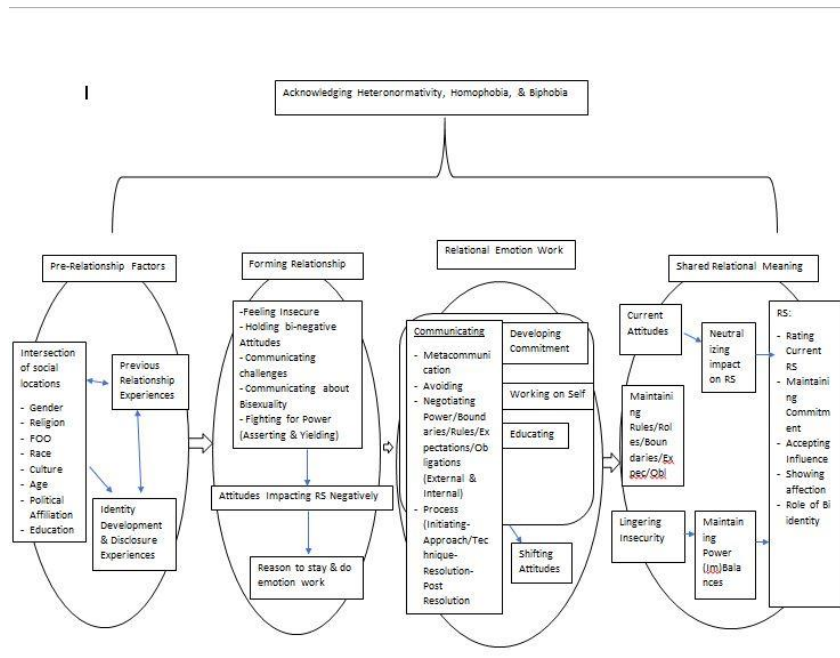
- Current attitudes
- Focus on relationship and partner
- Balancing autonomy and togetherness
- Role of bi identity
- Relationship satisfaction



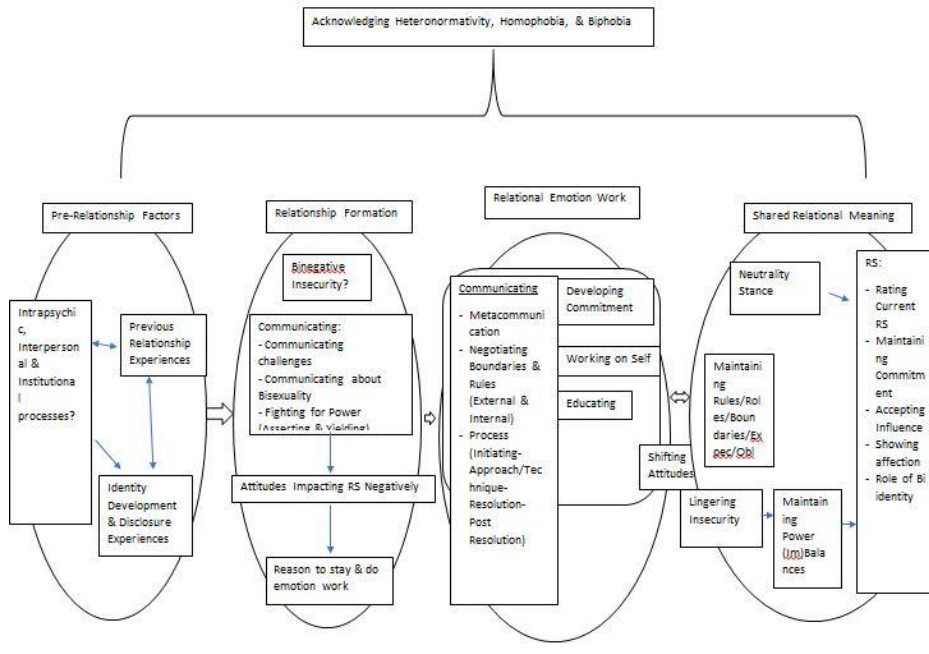
Heteronormativity,
Homophobia,
biphobia, bi-erasure

Appendix I: Diagram Iterations

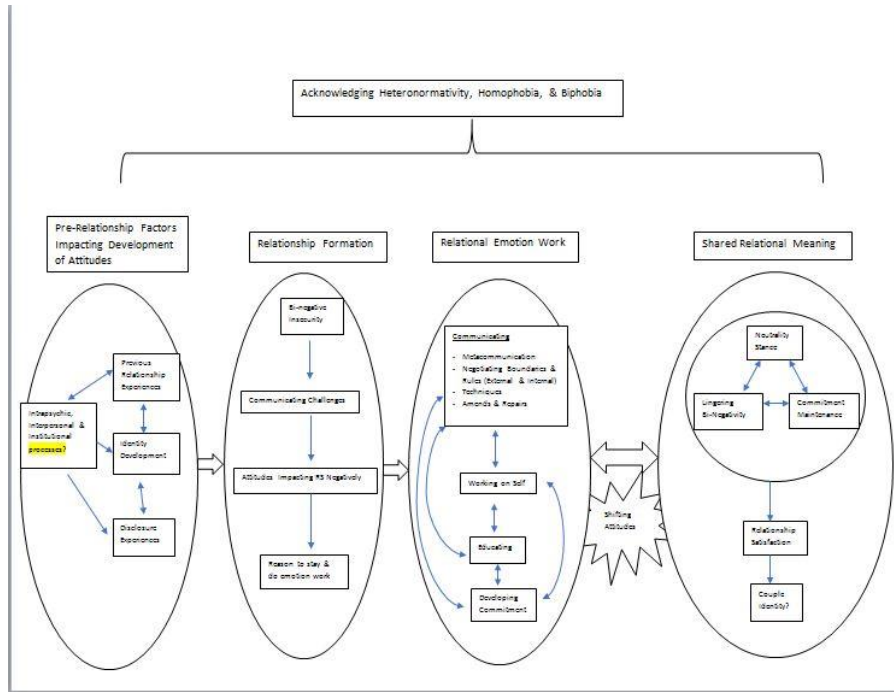
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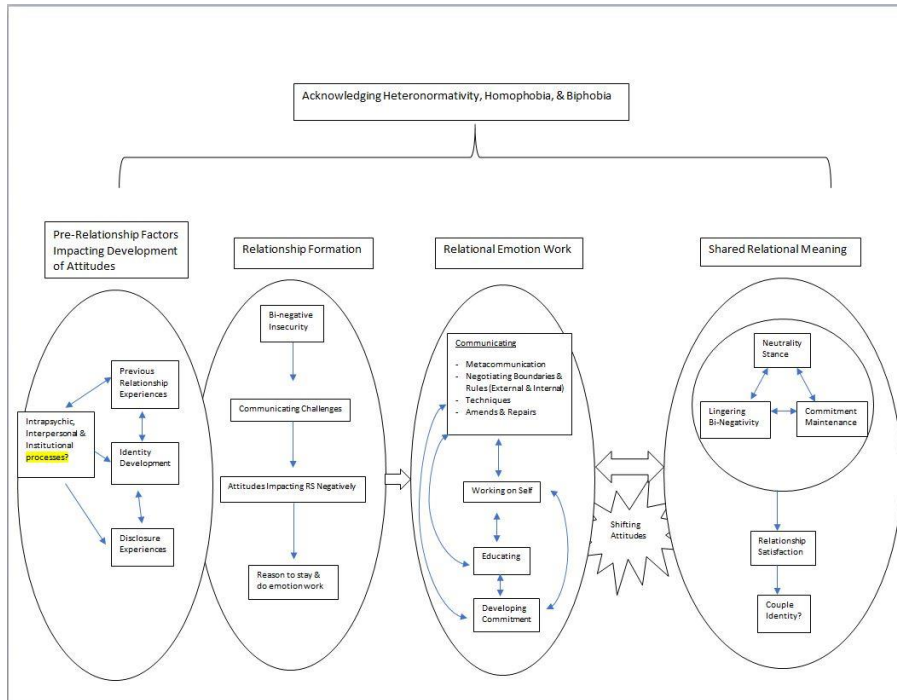
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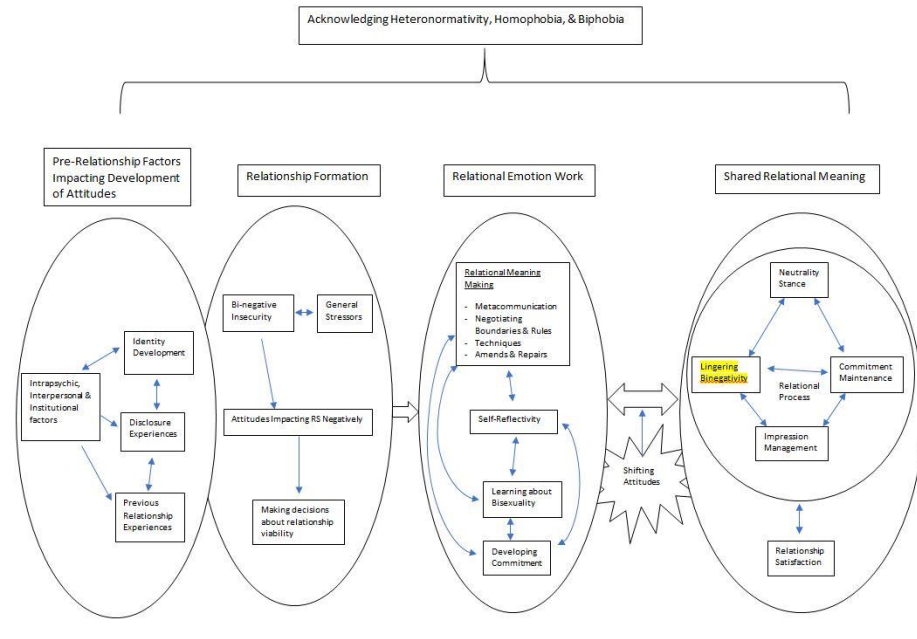
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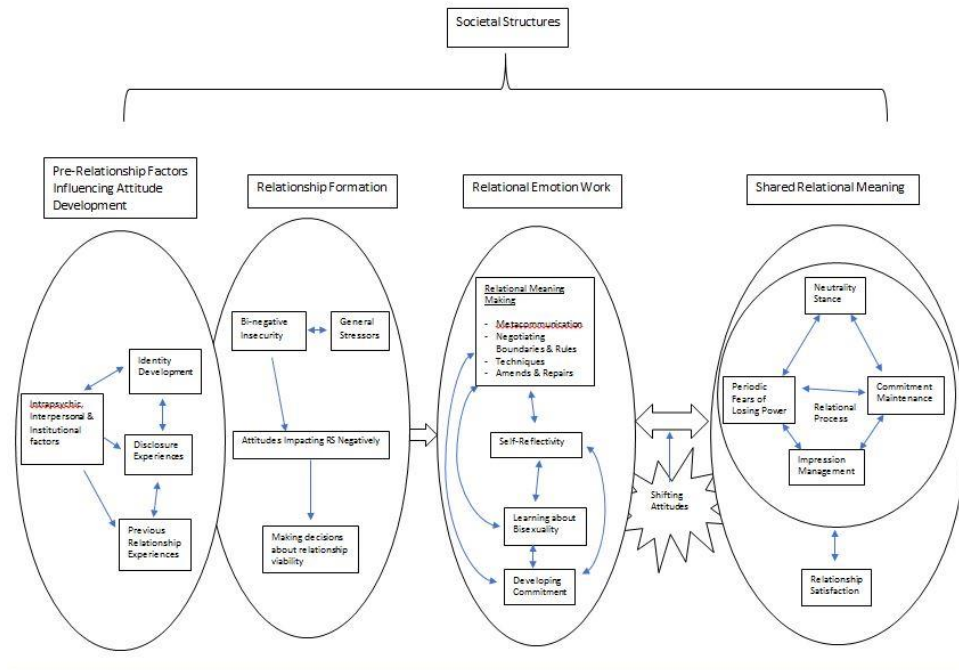
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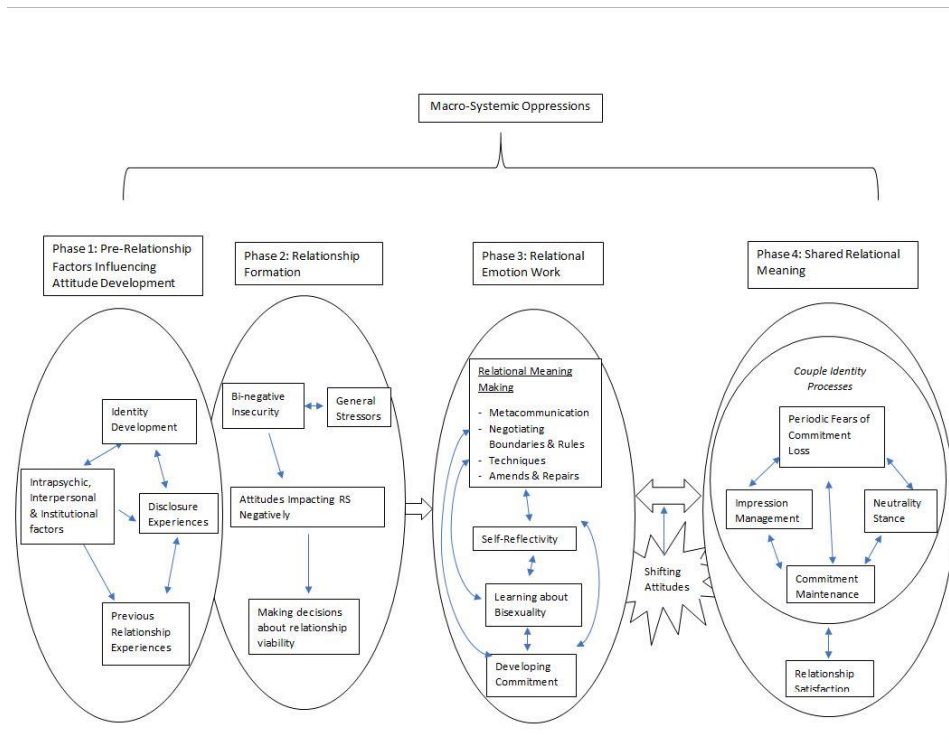
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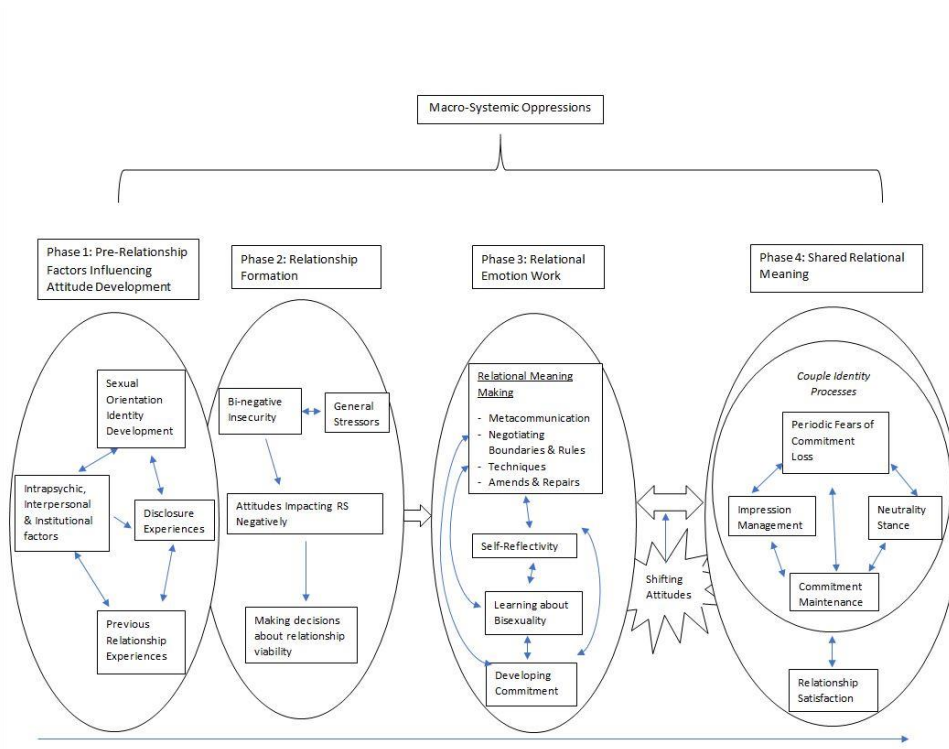
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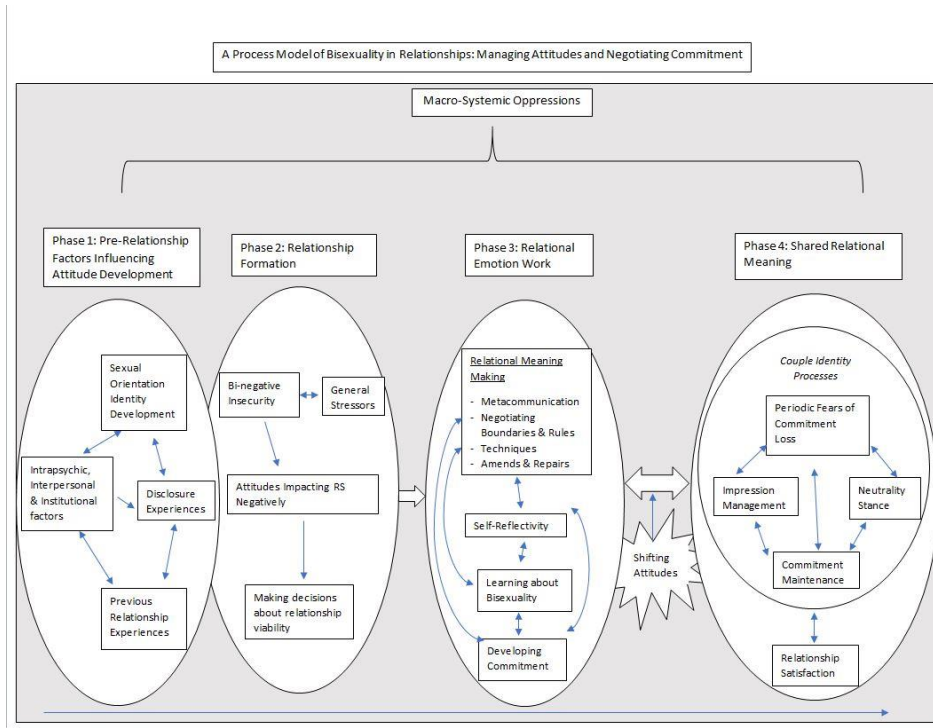
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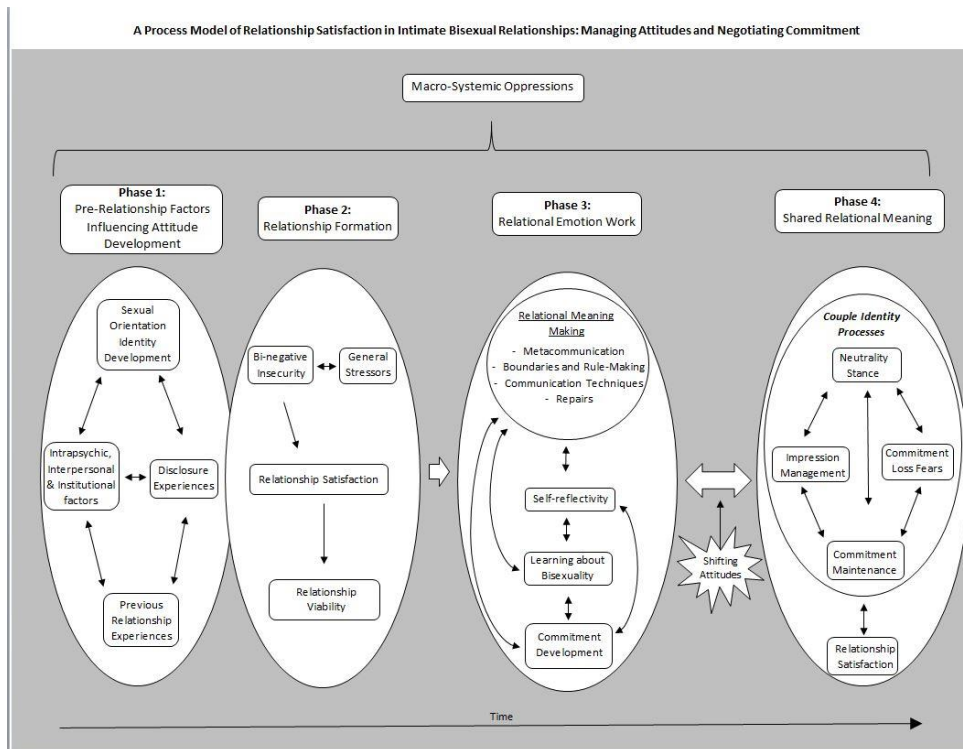
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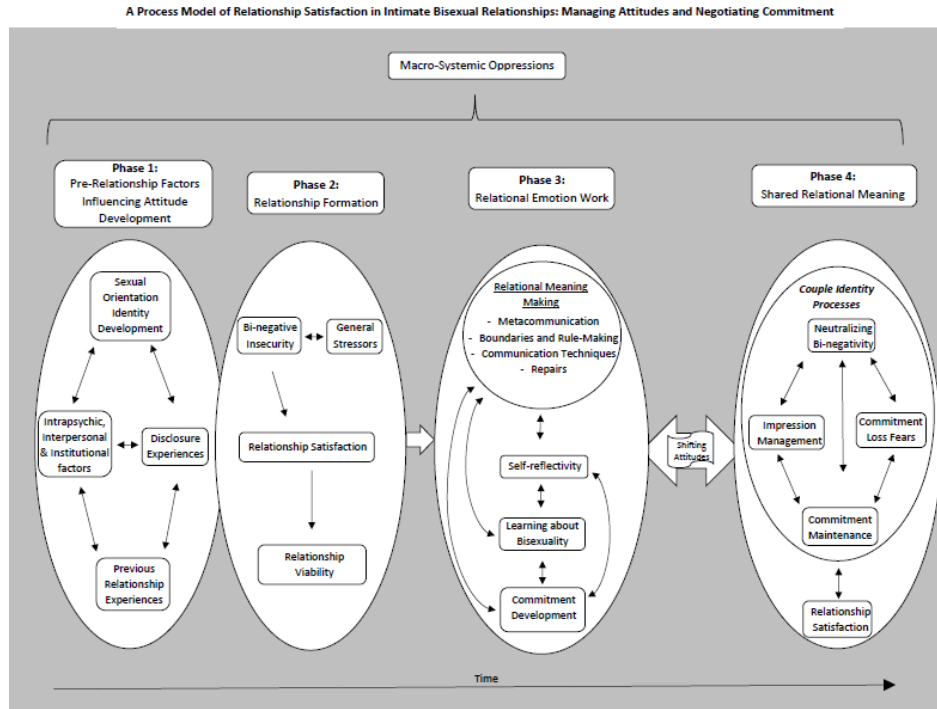
Iteration 9



Iteration 10



Iteration 11



Final Model

