<u>"I NEEDED TO USE MY VOICE AS A BISEXUAL ACTIVIST, NOT JUST AN
ACTIVIST": BISEXUAL COLLEGE STUDENT ACTIVISTS AND THEIR
EXPERIENCES WITH BIPHOBIA WITHIN LGBTQ SPACES ON CAMPUS</u>

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts
Interdisciplinary Studies

Committee:

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Date: _____ Spring Semester 2018
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

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Bachelor of Arts
George Mason University, 2016

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Spring Semester 2018
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DEDICATION

To every bisexual person who ever felt they weren't "enough." *You are.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Black Student Alliance ....BSA
lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer ....LGBQ
lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer ....LGBTQ
Queered Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity................................Q-MMDI

ABSTRACT

"I NEEDED TO USE MY VOICE AS A BISEXUAL ACTIVIST, NOT JUST AN ACTIVIST": BISEXUAL COLLEGE STUDENT ACTIVISTS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH BIPHOBIA WITHIN LGBTQ SPACES ON CAMPUS

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George Mason University, 2018

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The present study focused on bisexual college student activists and their understanding of how their bisexual identity fit within the LGBTQ community on campus. Using the Queered Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, phenomenological interviews with nine bisexual college students were conducted in order to explore: (1) how comfortable students were identifying as bisexual within LGBTQ spaces on campus, (2) in what ways students were marginalized and/or excluded within LGBTQ spaces on campus, and (3) how these experiences impacted students' understanding of their bisexual identity, as well as their involvement and engagement within LGBTQ spaces on campus. These students' experiences yielded powerful findings that provide a greater understanding of bisexual students' unique challenges critical to informing academic and student affairs professionals' ability to better serve bisexual students and promote LGBTQ spaces that are intentionally bisexual-inclusive.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

…I actually started to question myself and think… maybe I shouldn't be in these groups? …It even made me question my identity as bisexual…Should I just not identify as bisexual anymore? Am I being appropriative?

― Sierra

Sierra's experiences as a bisexual activist within lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) spaces on campus is unfortunately not isolated. Bisexual people are marginalized and invalidated within the LGBTQ community, are policed in, and even excluded from, LGBTQ spaces, and are often seen as fence-sitters who need to "pick a side" (Hayfield, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014; Hemmings, 2002). Bisexual college students experience similar challenges participating in LGBTQ spaces and engaging in LGBTQ activism on campus. The challenges that bisexual students experience, specifically within spaces intended to be safe, affirming, and inclusive of *all* LGBTQ students, have negative impacts on them that need to be critically examined in order to promote their social, academic, and personal development and success.

Background

Colleges and universities have increased their emphasis on diversity and inclusion to better support minority-identity students. Many institutions have used campus climate assessments to ensure that LGBTQ students feel safe, welcomed, and included on

1

campus. Rankin and Reason (2008) defined campus climate as "current attitudes, behaviors and standards, and practices of employees and students of an institution" (p. 264). Renn and Patton (2010) noted that campus climate is "mediated by the extent individuals feel a sense of safety, belonging, engagement within the environment, and value as members of a community" (p. 248). Hurtado, Clayton-Pederson, Allen, & Milem (1998) described campus climate as having external and internal components. External components consist of federal and state policies and the sociopolitical climate, and internal components consist of the campus' history of exclusion, diversity and representation on campus, the psychological climate—attitudes between and among student groups--and the behavioral climate, indicated by intergroup relations on campus (Hurtado et al., 1998). Engagement and a sense of inclusion on campus are reported to strongly influence students' academic, social, and personal development and success (Hurtado and Carter, 1997; Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2007).

Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) reported that stereotypes impede minority-identity students' learning, contributing to negative impacts on their academic performance. Additionally, minority-identity students tend to describe their campus climates more negatively than students of the majority on campus (Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008). Pryor's study on visualizing queer spaces noted that a negative campus climate has "important implications for college campuses, particularly those who may rest on their reputation as inclusive spaces" (2017, p. 14). With colleges and universities putting more emphasis on diversity, especially as a tool for recruiting a diverse student population, evaluating the experiences of minority-identity students on campus is

becoming an increasingly important task for institutions trying to maintain their image as a welcoming and inclusive environment.

Despite colleges and universities implementing programs and initiatives, such as SafeZone trainings and workshops, to improve campus climate for LGBTQ students, studies show that college campuses continue to be hostile and unwelcoming for LGBTQ students. According to the 2010 State of Higher Education Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People Report, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) respondents, including students, faculty, and staff, were significantly less comfortable with their overall campus climate than their heterosexual peers (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). Similarly, 55% of LGBQ respondents were more likely to experience harassment compared to 47% of heterosexual respondents. Other forms of perceived harassment and challenges LGBTQ respondents experienced included derogatory remarks, being stared at, feeling ignored or excluded, racial and ethnic profiling, bullying and intimidation, being singled out as representative of the entire LGBTQ community, and fear for physical safety (Rankin et al., 2010). In response to these challenges, LGBTQ respondents were significantly more likely to consider leaving their college or university, avoid LGBTQ areas and spaces, fear for their physical safety due to their LGBTQ identity, and avoid being out as LGBTQ for fear of negative consequences (Rankin et al., 2010). Not all students in the LGBTQ community, however, experience these challenges in the same way.

Bisexual people experience a unique type of marginalization within the LGBTQ community. Bisexual college students in particular experience elevated levels of stress,

isolation and exclusion, mental health concerns, and academic struggles as they attempt

to be engaged in campus communities that do not fully recognize their bisexual identity.

While heterosexism, which positions heterosexuality as the normative sexual orientation,

impacts all LGBTQ people, biphobia, the prejudice against people who identify as

bisexual or do not identify within the "straight/gay" binary, is rooted in both

heteronormativity and monosexism. Monosexism, the idea that sexuality should conform

to the straight/gay binary, and the rejection of people whose sexualities challenge this

binary, impacts bisexual people specifically, and is perpetuated even within the LGBTQ

community (Firestein, 2007; Hayfield et al., 2014; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt, 2015).

Bisexuality as a sexual orientation is unique because it challenges mainstream

heteronormative ideas, while also creating a rift in LGBTQ communities by challenging

homonormative standards of a "right" or "ideal" type of LGBTQ identity (Duggan,

2002). Making the distinction between homophobia and biphobia is critical in

understanding the complicated position of bisexual people within the LGBTQ

community, as well as bisexual students on college campuses specifically.

Significance

Studies related to homophobia and heterosexism tend to focus on the lesbian and

gay community. Bisexual people are consistently lumped into these studies with little

attention to their distinct and unique experiences (Johnson, 2016; Mulick & Wright,

2011). Similarly, research on LGBTQ students in higher education tends to homogenize

LGBTQ students into one group. This leaves the experiences of bisexual students

specifically less understood. However, the experiences of bisexual people are different

from their gay and lesbian peers, and researchers are beginning to understand the importance of disaggregating bisexual people from broader studies (Roberts et al., 2015).

Research on bisexuality is growing. Studies have examined what bisexuality means and how people define it (Berenson, 2001; Flanders, Lebreton, Robinson, Caravaca-Morera, 2016; Galupo, Ramirez, & Pulice-Farrow, 2016;), attitudes toward bisexual people and their experiences with biphobia (Ault, 1996; Bradford, 2004; Callis, 2013; Hayfield et al., 2014; Mulick & Wright, 2002; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2011; Roberts et al., 2015; Weiss, 2004), and the impacts of marginalization and exclusion on bisexual people's mental health (Barker, 2015; Blosnich & Boassarte, 2012; Flanders, Dobinson, & Logie, 2015; Johnson, 2016). Additionally, studies on bisexual college students' experiences in higher education have focused on mental health, academic performance, and perceptions of social support (Eliason, 1997; Kerr, Santurri, and Peters, 2013; Klein & Dudley, 2014; Sheets & Mohr, 2009; Whiting, Boone, and Cohn, 2012). This study aims to fill gaps in this body of knowledge on bisexual students in higher education by examining the challenges bisexual student leaders experiences, specifically in the context of their involvement and engagement within LGBTQ spaces on campus.

Purpose

Disaggregating the experiences of bisexual college students helps to illuminate their unique challenges and needs. Studying bisexual students and their understanding of how their bisexual identity fits within the LGBTQ community as a whole could help to inform academic and student affairs professionals' ability to better serve LGBTQ students by understanding their communal needs, as well as the nuances of each identity

within the community, while also promoting LGBTQ spaces that are intentionally bisexual-inclusive. The purpose of this study was to understand bisexual student activists' experiences, particularly within LGBTQ spaces on campus. Nine bisexual student activists' were interviewed to learn about their experiences in various LGBTQ spaces on campus, guided by the following research questions:

1. How comfortable are bisexual student activists identifying as bisexual within LGBTQ spaces on campus?

2. In what ways, if at all, are bisexual student activists marginalized and/or excluded within LGBTQ spaces on campus?

3. How do these experiences impact their understanding of their bisexual identity, as well as their involvement and engagement within LGBTQ spaces on campus?

Theoretical Framework

Queer theory "specifically addresses societal power structures associated with sexuality and gender and their relationships with other forms of identity…critically analyz[ing] the meaning of identity, focusing on intersections of identities and resisting oppressive social constructions of sexual orientation and gender" (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 620; Jones, 2013, p. 191). Queer theory also argues for the deconstruction of identity categories, "urg[ing] the study of sexuality other than of gay or lesbian or bisexual or straight identity, and of gender rather than of masculine or feminine identity… on the premise that those categories are grounded in inequitable [heterosexist] power structures that privilege some and marginalize others" (Britzman, 1997; Jones, 2013, p. 193). Although queer theory has been underutilized as a theory within higher education

6

literature (Renn, 2010, qtd. in Jones, 2013, p. 195), the adapted Queered Model of

Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Q-MMDI) (Figure 1, adapted from Kasch, Abes, &

Jones qtd. in Jones, 2013, p. 208) utilizes queer theory to reimagine Jones and McEwen's

(2000) Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity.
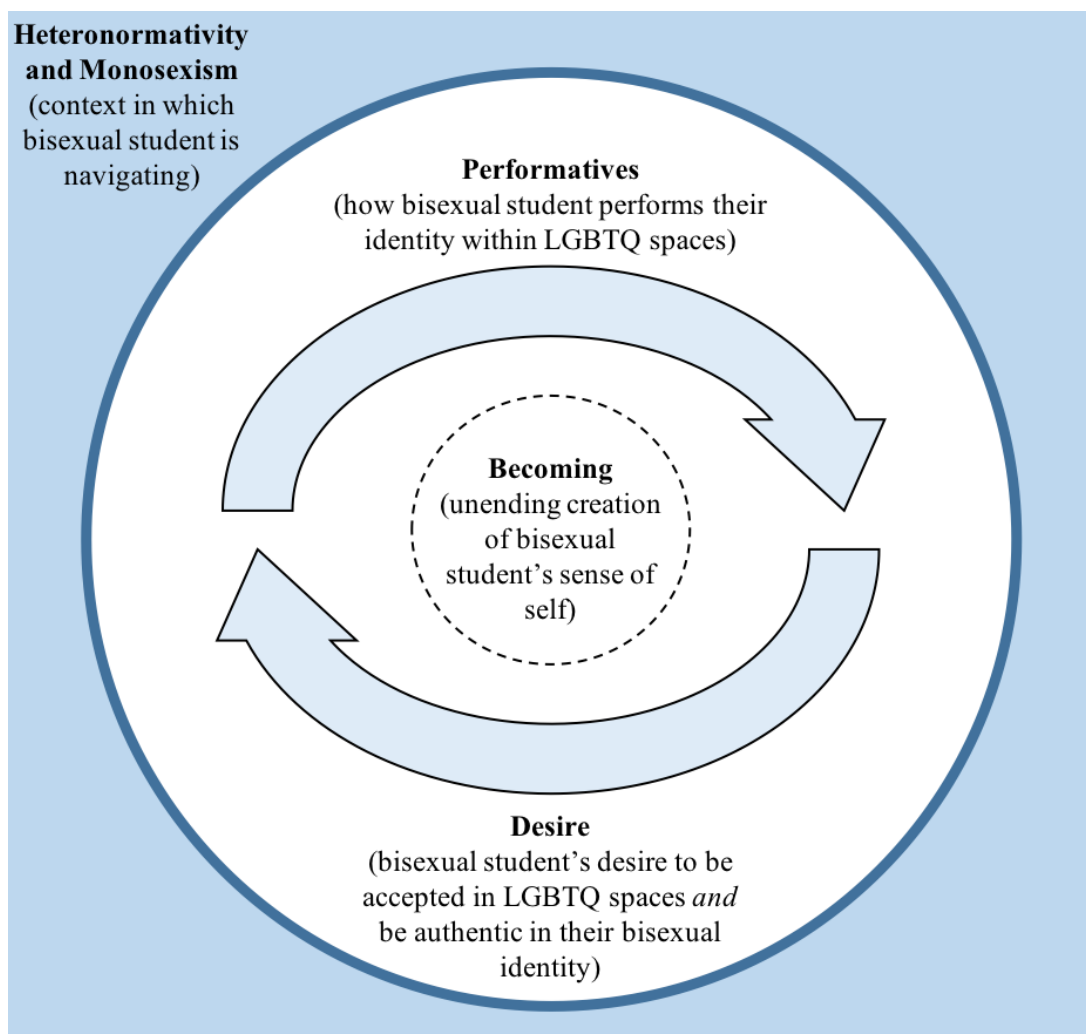
Figure 1: Adapted Queered Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity
Source: David Kasch, Elisa S. Abes, and Susan R. Jones.

The Q-MMDI uses the four key tenets of queer theory: heteronormativity, desire, performativity, and becoming. Heteronormativity (context) establishes heterosexism, and monosexism by extension, as normal, with "men being masculine and sexually attracted to women, and women being feminine and sexually attracted to men" (Jones, 2013, p. 198), creating a normal/abnormal binary that marginalizes identities that deviate from the norm. Monosexism positions being attracted to only one gender as the norm, therefore marking bisexuality as abnormal.

Queer theorists describe performativity (social identities) as "the process in which individuals create their social identities through the behaviors of their day-to-day lives… to argue that identity occurs as an ongoing process of expression and enactment, rather than as an end product of development" (Butler, 1990, qtd. in Jones, 2013, p. 199). These performatives allow students to perform, or display, their identity in ways that allow them to either challenge and resist heteronormativity and monosexism, or to conform.

Performatives allow students to "redefine and reinterpret how and whom they understand themselves to be through desires that motivate the actions they take, and the self-expressions they make" (Jones, 2013, p. 205). This desire (filter) that influences the ways students perform their identity is more than a want—rather, it is a "compulsion and an incompleteness that needs fulfillment…a quest for a socially and intelligible, or 'accepted,' identity that is also authentic" (Butler, 2004 qtd. in Jones, 2013, p. 202). The desire for acceptance while also feeling authentic in the way bisexual students perform their identities does not always coexist as neatly as one would like—for example, a student's desire to be accepted may come at the expense of their authenticity, or a

student's desire to feel authentic in their performatives may come at the expense of their acceptance within a particular space.

Desire shapes students' unending creation of their sense of self: their becoming (core). Queer theory argues that "individuals' identities are endlessly transforming into some new form, meaning, or interpretation of identity…[both] the product and the process of resisting heteronormativity" (Jones, 2013, p. 203). Therefore, a student's sense of self is "an act of unending creation," allowing varying levels of control over their desires, and therefore their performatives, "reflecting changes in personal agency over the other elements of the model" (Jones, 2013, p. 210). As the becoming core expands, students exert more control over their desires, and as a result, their performatives. Likewise, as the becoming core contracts, students exert less control over their desires, and as a result, their performatives.

Becoming, desire, performatives, and context all come together to provide an understanding of the ways bisexual students perform their bisexual identity based on their desire to be accepted and authentic within the context of monosexism within LGBTQ spaces on campus. Rather than developing a model specifically for students who identify as LGBTQ, this model "queers" the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, "foregrounding gender and sexuality…to complicate the meaning and interpretation of intersections of identity" (Jones, 2013, p. 204). This model is especially relevant because it provides a framework to understand the ways bisexual students perform, and therefore shape their understand of, their bisexual identity. Additionally, it helps to explain the

external and internal influences that drive the ways students perform their bisexual

identity in ways that either resist or conform to heteronormativity and monosexism.

Conceptualizing Key Terms

For this study, bisexual is used as an umbrella term for any non-monosexual

orientation, including but not limited to, pansexual, polysexual, fluid, and queer. Bisexual

researchers have used several definitions of bisexuality to reinforce that there is no one

way to be bisexual, and that bisexuality can encompass a diverse array of feelings,

behaviors, experiences, and abilities to be romantically or sexually attracted to genders

(Eisner, 2013, Nutter-pridgen, 2015; Tucker, 1995). "LGBTQ spaces" is used as a catch-

all term to describe campus spaces intended to be inclusive and affirming of bisexual

identities. These include formal spaces established by and funded through universities,

such as LGBTQ centers, as well as organizations led by and for students, such as LGBTQ

student organizations. Additionally, for this study, LGBTQ spaces expand beyond formal

spaces and student organizations that are specifically centered around LGBTQ identities,

and include other spaces that work to support LGBTQ students, including Women's

centers, Diversity and Inclusion offices, race-based organizations, and gender-based

organizations.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The present study is informed by a synthesis of literature broadly focusing on negative stereotypes, attitudes, and perceptions around bisexuality, and its impact on bisexual people. Additionally, research on bisexual students' challenges on college campuses is incorporated in this synthesis in order to understand bisexual marginalization and its impact on their understanding of their bisexual identity, as well as their involvement and engagement within LGBTQ spaces on campus.

Biphobia within the LGBTQ Community

Biphobic attitudes and microaggressions permeate straight, lesbian, and gay communities. Several studies report that bisexual people are evaluated more negatively compared to other groups (Herek, 2002; Yost & Thomas, 2012). Sarno & Wright (2013) found that bisexual people reported experiencing microaggressions more frequently compared to their lesbian and gay peers. MacDonald (1981) found three central themes when examining the beliefs that people held about bisexuality: bisexuality as a temporary phase, bisexuality as a transitional state to identifying as gay or lesbian, and bisexuality as an attempt to deny a true gay or lesbian identity. Although MacDonald's study was conducted over 30 years ago, these assumptions are still perpetuated today, reinforcing the widely held belief that bisexuality is not a valid identity on its own. Many bisexual people feel as though they are expected to choose between being either gay or straight. Often times, bisexual people are assumed to be gay or straight depending on the context in any particular situation (McLean, 2008a; Sarno & Wright, 2013).

Studies show there is a difference in attitudes around bisexuality within lesbian and gay communities compared to heterosexual communities. While heterosexual people do perpetuate biphobia, often times, their lack of understanding around the nuances of bisexuality makes it possible to deduce that their biphobia is misplaced homophobia. Eliason (1997) found that most of the undergraduate heterosexual students in her study believed that bisexual rights and gay and lesbian rights were the same. Additionally, a majority did not perceive bisexual people as gay or lesbian people afraid of coming out, and did not believe that bisexual people had the best of both worlds. Therefore, Eliason hypothesized that these stereotypes may be more common in lesbian and gay communities. In research published by Mulick and Wright (2002) reporting on the prevalence of biphobia in heterosexual and gay and lesbian populations, they found that 53% of heterosexual participants reported mild biphobia compared to 87% of gay and lesbian participants.

Attitudes around bisexuality as an invalid identity are common within lesbian and gay communities (Mitchell, Davis, & Galupo, 2015; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999), stemming from the idea that bisexual people do not "pick a side" in order to avoid homophobia and maintain their access to heterosexual privilege (Bradford, 2004; Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009; Herek, 2002). This is relevant when analyzing tension between the bisexual community and gay and lesbian communities, particularly in the context of LGBTQ activism. Bisexual people tend to feel unwelcome in and excluded from gay and lesbian communities (Balsam & Mohr, 2007), which can inhibit them from being involved in LGBTQ activism. The challenges bisexual people experience in lesbian and

12

gay spaces stems from the difficulty in easily placing bisexual people in either the in-group (gay/lesbian- assumed to be supportive of LGBTQ people and causes) or the out-group (heterosexual- assumed to be hostile towards LGBTQ people and causes) (Ochs, 1996), as well as fear that bisexual people delegitimize the movement (Duca, 1991).

In examining binegativity within both heterosexual and lesbian and gay contexts, it is important to distinguish its gendered implications. Negative bisexual stereotypes manifest in different ways for bisexual men compared to bisexual women for various reasons, including expectations of masculinity and femininity, representation in media, and historical context.

Several studies on heterosexual attitudes of bisexuality show that bisexual men are generally viewed less favorably, especially by men, compared to bisexual women (Eliason, 1997; Herek, 2002; Yost & Thomas, 2012). Bisexual men are often invalidated and dismissed, assumed to be gay men who are not ready to come out. This could be attributed to some gay men commonly experiencing bisexuality as a transitory state during their coming out processes (Zivony & Lobel, 2014), or the perception that men being attracted to more than one gender violates gender roles and strips them of their masculinity, and therefore, their ability to be involved with women (Yost & Thomas, 2012). Bisexual men are also perceived to be more likely to spread STDs compared to bisexual women (Spalding & Peplau, 1997), and are almost completely unrepresented in mainstream media and academic research outside of this context.

In the aforementioned studies on heterosexual attitudes of bisexuality, bisexual women were viewed more favorably, especially by heterosexual men. This could be due

to bisexual women being hypersexualized in mainstream media as easily accessible (Nutter-pridgen, 2015). Bisexual women are seen as overly promiscuous, untrustworthy, and willing to indiscriminately have sex with everyone due to a perceived unfulfilled desire to need all genders all the time (Rust, 1995). Bisexual women are also perceived to be incapable of staying committed in monogamous relationships (McLean, 2008a). Similar to bisexual men, bisexual women are also invalidated and dismissed as bisexual. Often times, bisexual women are accused of being straight women taking the opportunity to experiment sexually before settling down with a man, or wanting attention and being performative for the heterosexual male gaze (Nutter-pridgen, 2015; Yost & Thomas, 2012). The assumption that bisexual men are really gay and bisexual women are really straight projects a phallocentric notion that bisexual people are either hiding their feelings for men or are performing for the gaze of men (Callis, 2013; Eisner, 2013).

Many lesbians in particular believe that bisexual women are fence-sitters, either actually straight and just having fun for the moment, or actually lesbians who do not have the courage to come to terms with their true lesbian identity (Roberts et al., 2015). In many cases, lesbians who once identified as bisexual contribute to this invalidation by projecting their experiences with bisexuality as a transitional phase to lesbianism on all bisexual women (Hemmings, 2002; Rust, 1995). In two studies by Paula Rust, 79% of lesbians said bisexuality was a transition to lesbian identity, and 65% believed bisexual women were more likely than lesbians to want to "pass" for heterosexual (1993, 1995). Additionally, 60% of lesbians reported they believed bisexual women were incapable of being as committed to other women compared to lesbians, while 53% believed that

bisexual women who were committed to women would leave when the relationship got tough (Rust, 1993).

Several bisexual women from the 1991 Bisexual Community Needs Assessment noted that they were referred to as "traitors" for identifying as bisexual (Duca, 1991). This showed up often in LGBTQ women's spaces, which tended to be synonymous with "lesbian women-born women only" spaces, excluding bisexual women, as well as transgender women and other woman-aligned people that benefitted from a women-only space (Hutchins & Guidroz, 1993). Nearly all of the participants who identified as bisexual women from the 1991 Bisexual Community Needs Assessment were heavily involved in predominantly lesbian communities. Several of these bisexual women noted that they were condemned or excluded, asked to leave lesbian groups, and were discouraged or outright prohibited from speaking at conferences (Duca, 1991). Similarly, a bisexual woman from the 2012 Bisexual Community Needs Assessment shared experiences being labeled "lesbian lite." Another bisexual woman who worked at an LGBTQ organization reported being consistently read as straight, often receiving questions regarding how she got a job for the organization as an ally (Burleson, 2012).

Lesbian and bisexual women in particular have a long and complicated history. Rust reported that 73-83% of lesbians did not trust bisexual women politically. Additionally, lesbians were twice as likely to be more suspicious of bisexual women than they were of other lesbians (1993, 1995). This has had an especially negative impact within the context of political solidarity between lesbian and bisexual women. During the 1970s, lesbians began separating themselves from Second Wave Feminist movements

that were largely run by heterosexual women because they felt as though their experiences were not being represented. For example, Second Wave feminist groups such as the Redstockings argued that lesbianism was a cop-out, and dismantling patriarchy needed to happen within heterosexual relationships. Contrarily, lesbian groups such as the Furies and Radicalesbians argued that lesbianism was political, as it prioritized women over men in every aspect of their lives (Berson, 1972, Radicalesbians, 1970).

By the early 1980s, lesbianism was a political identity rather than a sexuality. Political lesbianism had shifted to women simply abstaining from sex and relationships with men. Lesbians being sexually and/or romantically attracted to women was merely a bonus, since the main concern was creating solidarity among women (Rust, 1995). Lesbian separatists did not necessarily stop being attracted to men, but rather were encouraged to choose not to act on those attractions until patriarchy and male supremacy were dismantled (Udis-Kessler, 1995). Lesbian separatists believed that lesbianism was the ultimate protest against patriarchy, and therefore, bisexual women were choosing to be complicit in the struggle against male supremacy (Armstrong, 1995). Therefore, tensions between lesbian and bisexual women were inevitable since lesbians were so vocal about bisexual women "infiltrating" the movement (Rust, 1995). There is a lack of research examining whether or not the tensions between gay and bisexual men have been as historically hostile as the tensions between lesbian and bisexual women, but bisexual people, regardless of gender identity, experience marginalization because of their bisexual identity within LGBTQ spaces.

Impact of Biphobia within LGBTQ Spaces

Studies show that instances of bisexual marginalization from the lesbian and gay community tend to be more hurtful and isolating for bisexual people than when they are from the heterosexual community. Participants from both the 1991 and 2012 Community Needs Assessment reported that they expected more acceptance from the gay and lesbian community than from the heterosexual community (Burleson, 2012; Duca, 1991). The biphobia that bisexual people experience within LGBTQ spaces is especially detrimental coming from a community that shares similar experiences of marginalization because of their sexuality. This marginalization has proved to have negative impacts on bisexual people in multiple ways, including creating a fragmented sense of sexuality (Sarno & Wright, 2013), internalized biphobia (Rust, 1995), identity confusion (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004), difficulties coming to terms with and accepting their bisexual identity (McLean, 2008a), and cynicism toward and disengagement from lesbian and gay communities (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Burleson, 2012).

Internalized Biphobia

Several researchers have studied the impact that biphobia had on bisexual women's internal sense of self, and the benefits and challenges they experienced identifying as openly bisexual within LGBTQ spaces.

Bisexual women who engage in activism as openly bisexual strive to affirm that bisexuality exists and is a valid identity, because they exist and therefore so does their identity (Nutter-pridgen, 2015). Some bisexual women believe that bisexuality means less rigidity, and for them, coming out as bisexual is the ultimate liberatory step because

it allows for agency to define what bisexuality means for them. Bisexual women who are open about their bisexual identity reported feeling "natural and healthy," having a "healthy awareness of oneself," appreciate a more "open form of sexuality," and experience "a greater expansion into loving the person and not only the sex of the person" (Rust, 1995, p. 211). Many bisexual women who had experienced biphobia in LGBTQ spaces went on to spearhead major bisexual-based organizations that focused specifically on bisexual issues (Bradford, 2004).

While openly identifying as bisexual in LGBTQ spaces may be liberating for some, others find it incredibly challenging. Because bisexual women have historically been perceived to be untrustworthy and not completely invested in the LGBTQ community, group members tend to be more skeptical of their identity. McLean (2008a) found that this makes bisexual women less likely to participate in organizations where they could feel rejected or invalidated. Bisexual women report feeling the most comfortable in bisexual-specific spaces and the least comfortable in spaces dominated by lesbians (Burleson, 2012). Flanders et al. (2015) found that bisexual women were often tasked with navigating LGBTQ spaces where they cannot come out without their identity being viewed as valid and legitimate.

Research shows that bisexual women often feel discouraged from identifying as bisexual due to fear of being shamed, being deemed illegitimate, or being perceived as protesting lesbian identity by proclaiming they are only "half bad" (Ault, 1996; Heldke, 1997). Therefore, bisexual women felt as though they needed to hide a part of their identity in order to blend in or feel accepted. Blending in may mean bisexual women

falsely "hang on to the lesbian label" because of its strong ties to feminist and LGBTQ activism (Hartman, 2006, p. 72), not challenging assumptions when falsely identified as a lesbian by others (McLean, 2008b; Rothblum, 2010), or choosing to refrain from labeling themselves at all (Crowley, 2010). Bisexual women who claim a lesbian identity may feel like they have to identify with the "more oppressed part" of their identity to fit in (Lingel, 2009; Sarno & Wright, 2013; Udis-Kessler, 1995), often causing bisexual women to feel the need to define, explain, and justify their bisexuality (Flanders et al., 2015), and constantly act differently in different contexts in order to feel included (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; McLean, 2001, 2008a; Sarno & Wright, 2013) at the expense of feeling authentic in their identity. Bisexual women may consider themselves to be bisexual, surround themselves with other bisexual women, and go to bisexual groups sometimes, but still will not publicly identify as bisexual because of the possibility that their opportunity to date lesbians, be involved with the activist work that lesbians do, or have access to the resources that the larger lesbian community has will be compromised (Seif, 1999). Hiding one's bisexual identity can cause bisexual people to feel ashamed of their bisexuality (McLean, 2008b), and may discourage them from participating in LGBTQ spaces because they do not feel fully accepted (Balsam & Mohr, 2007).

Bisexual Mental Health

Studies have shown that bisexual people struggle with mental health issues at higher rates compared to their gay, lesbian, and heterosexual peers (Human Rights Commission of San Francisco & Ulrich, 2012). Multiple studies reported that bisexual people experienced higher levels of depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues

when compared with their heterosexual and lesbian and gay peers. For example, Fredriksen-Goldsen, Kim, Barkan, Balsam, and Mincer's (2010) study found that bisexual individuals experienced higher levels of poor mental and physical health. Conron et al. (2010) found that bisexual individuals were two to three times more likely to experience frequent tension, worry, and sadness than heterosexual individuals. Jorm et al. (2002) reported that bisexual individuals experienced higher levels of anxiety and depression compared to heterosexual, lesbian, and gay individuals, and Oswalt and Wyatt (2011) found that bisexual people also had the highest rate of being formally diagnosed with depression as compared to heterosexual, lesbian, and gay individuals.

Several studies also reported that bisexual people, especially bisexual women, experienced higher likelihoods to engage in self-harm and experience suicidal ideation (Balsam, Beauchaine, Mickey, & Rothblum, 2005; Conron, Mimiaga, & Landers, 2010; Jorm, Korten, Rodgers, Jacomb, & Christensen, 2002). Warner, McKeown, Griffin, Johnson, Ramsay, Cort, & King (2004) found that more than half of bisexual women in particular had considered or attempted suicide at least once. Bisexual women in particular have been reported to be more likely to struggle with substance abuse, including binge drinking, smoking, and illegal drug use (Conron et al., 2010; Robin, Brener, Donahue, Hack, Hale, & Goodenow, 2002), as well as intimate partner violence (Conron et al., 2010). Additionally, bisexual individuals have been reported to receive less support from both family and peers than heterosexual, gay, and lesbian individuals (Jorm et al., 2002), potentially impacting their ability to disclose their bisexual identity (Warner et al., 2004).

Within higher education settings, LGBTQ students experience challenges unique to them, as they are often considered one of the least accepted groups on campuses (Rankin et al., 2010). In an effort to create safer and more inclusive campuses, colleges and universities tend to view LGBTQ students as one homogenous group, relying on narrow ways of understanding and supporting LGBTQ students (Talburt, 2010). Similar to the aforementioned research on the stressors and challenges bisexual people face more generally, bisexual college students have been reported to experience more mental health issues compared to heterosexual, gay, and lesbian college students. For example, Blosnich and Boassarte (2012) found that, compared to their heterosexual, gay, and lesbian peers, bisexual students experienced the most stressors, including physical assault, sexual assault, family problems, intimate partner violence, discrimination, and self-harm and suicidal ideation, stemming from a lack of community and double discrimination from both heterosexual and LGBTQ groups.

Bisexual college students in general were also reported to be more likely to engage in self-injurious behavior, as well as experience suicidal ideation and attempt suicide (Oswalt & Wyatt, 2011; Whitlock, Eckenrode, and Silverman, 2006). Oswalt and Wyatt's (2011) study found that bisexual students were more likely to have been formally diagnosed with depression than heterosexual, gay, lesbian, and unsure students. Other research determined that bisexual college students found it more difficult to make friends, felt excluded from social groups, and had a lack of social support in general (Whiting et al., 2012). Additionally, bisexual students have been reported to experience higher levels of confusion in their sexual orientation, contributing to them being less likely to disclose

their sexual orientation and less likely to be connected to the LGBTQ resources on campus (Balsam & Mohr, 2007). Oswalt and Wyatt (2011) found that bisexual students were more likely to suffer academically, receive lower scores on exams and projects, and overall lower course grades compared to heterosexual, gay, and lesbian peers.

Consistent with research around bisexual women and mental health (Barker, 2015; Flanders et al., 2015), bisexual college women in particular experience similar challenges. Klein and Dudley (2014) described bisexual college women's experience as living in a "double closet," fearing disclosure of same-sex relationships to family and friends and disclosure of other-gender relationships to their lesbian peers. Similarly, when Kerr et al. (2013) compared the mental health trends of lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual undergraduate women college students, they found that bisexual college women had the most mental health concerns out of all three groups.

While many studies show that bisexual people often report mental health issues at higher rates than their gay, lesbian, and heterosexual peers, it is important not to pathologize bisexuality. One study examining bisexual people and their experiences utilizing mental health services found that 94.8% of participants experienced some level of stress that was directly connected to bisexual issues, yet only 30.9% of participants reported that they sought out mental health services specifically around these bisexual issues to some extent (Page, 2004). Few studies explicitly interrogate or aim to examine the extent that biphobia and monosexism impact bisexual people's mental health, and therefore it is difficult to assert that bisexual people report mental health issues at higher rates solely because of the challenges they may experience identifying as bisexual.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

To gain a deeper understanding of bisexual student activists' lived experiences, a phenomenological research approach was used. Phenomenological research makes meaning of participants' universal experiences around a particular phenomenon, "reduc[ing] individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). Utilizing a phenomenological approach allowed me to capture the essence of biphobia experienced by nine bisexual student activists within LGBTQ spaces on campus in order to identify: (1) bisexual student activists' level of comfort identifying as bisexual within LGBTQ spaces on campus, (2) the ways, if any, that bisexual students activists are marginalized and/or excluded within LGBTQ spaces on campus, and (3) how these experiences impact their understanding of their bisexual identity, as well as their involvement and engagement within LGBTQ spaces on campus.

Participants

In order to encourage a diverse array of bisexual experiences, the initial pool of potential participants was gathered through targeted sampling using social media networks, including Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. A digital flyer (see Appendix A) was posted and tagged with relevant hashtags to reach as many potential participants as possible. The flyer included three criteria required in order to participate in the study. First, each participant identified as being attracted to more than one gender, whether that meant they identified as bisexual, pansexual, polysexual, queer, or fluid. Most contemporary bisexual literature notes that people who identify as being attracted to more

than one gender tend to have similar, but not exactly identical, definitions, and that using bisexuality as an umbrella term is the most useful way to encompass variable definitions and experiences (Barker, 2015, Flanders et al., 2015; Galupo et al., 2016). Second, all participants were either current undergraduate students or had graduated within the previous academic year. I primarily interviewed students who were currently enrolled undergraduate students, but also included two students who had graduated within the last academic year as their experiences were still recent enough to be relevant to the study. Lastly, all participants described themselves as activists, defined as being involved in at least one LGBTQ organization "work[ing] for social change and equality for LGBTQ people on campus" (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011, p. 345). This encompassed a variety of student experiences, such as being involved in an LGBTQ or other identity-based organization as a general member, or identifying as a student leader for a diversity or identity-related office on campus.

Interested participants were instructed to complete a survey, which included the Informed Consent (see Appendix B), along with a pre-screening survey including demographic information and several questions that instructed participants to briefly describe their experiences as bisexual student activists on campus (Appendix C). This sampling strategy yielded 185 interested participants who completed the pre-screening survey. After reviewing and filtering out participants that did not meet the criteria, 44 eligible participants remained. I reached out to all 44 eligible participants, seven of which agreed to participate in the interview. Consistent with much of the existing literature around bisexual people and the larger LGBTQ community being predominantly white,

24

the sample of interested participants included no bisexual students of color (Chan, 1992; Eliason, 1996; Greene, 1996; Morales, 1992; Rust, 1996). In order to ensure a racially diverse sample, purposeful snowball sampling was employed, encouraging the seven initial participants to reach out to other students, particularly bisexual students of color, who were eligible for and may be interested in the study (Creswell, 2007). Through purposeful snowball sampling, two bisexual participants of color were identified and agreed to participate in the interview.

Data Collection

Participants' locations varied, spanning across the country, so in-person interviews were not possible with all of them. Therefore, phone interviews were conducted with each participant to maintain consistency. The interviews were roughly 45 minutes to one hour, following a semi-structured approach allowing me to focus on relevant themes from the literature, while also giving participants enough flexibility to deviate from those questions to share their stories. Each interview began with collecting demographic information for each participant, including their sexual orientation, gender identity, racial and ethnic identity, and pronouns. The interview protocol (see Appendix D) was framed using existing literature regarding bisexual people's experiences within LGBTQ spaces within a general context, as well as a higher education context, and its impact on how bisexual people navigated and made sense of their bisexual identity within these spaces. The interview questions were grouped into four main themes: (1) the nature of their activism on campus, (2) their experiences as bisexual student activists on campus, (3) the impact these experiences had on their engagement in on-campus activism, and (4)

how they sustained their activism. Asking these questions gave insight into the LGBTQ spaces they were involved with, the challenges they experienced identifying as bisexual in those spaces, how those challenges impacted the ways they showed up in those spaces, and why they persisted in their engagement despite these challenges.

<u>**Analysis**</u>

Interviews were recorded with permission of each participant in order to accurately capture their experiences, and then transcribed in order to analyze the findings. Once transcribed, data was reviewed and organized by what Creswell (2007) terms "significant themes" using Moustakas' (1994) process of horizontalization. These significant statements were then organized into two broad themes, or "clusters of meaning" (Creswell, 2007). These clusters of meaning included biphobia within LGBTQ spaces, and impact of biphobia within LGBTQ spaces. Significant statements within each cluster of meaning were organized and reorganized to develop sub-clusters to draw deeper and more specific connections between participants.

<u>**Participant Backgrounds**</u>

Morgan (they/them) identifies a white, genderqueer, bisexual student at a large, public university. Stepping into their senior year, Morgan has been involved in several activist student organizations throughout their time at their university. They are heavily involved in a general activist organization, mainly focused on addressing how the administration handles instances of bias on campus. Morgan was also involved in two Feminist student organizations affiliated with the Women's center, and frequented the

LGBTQ Center on campus. Most notably, Morgan founded an organization on campus specifically for bisexual students.

Rylee (they/them) identifies as a white, genderqueer bisexual student at a private women's college. Having graduated a year prior to participating in this study, Rylee reflected on their experiences being involved in an LGBTQ student organization on campus. As someone who identifies as part of the trans community, Rylee's activism focused primarily on transgender rights and activism, especially with "more and more women's colleges trying to figure out exactly how to best serve transgender students." Rylee was also passionate about research around LGBTQ issues, and took lead on most of the administrative tasks that kept their LGBTQ organization afloat.

Mack (they/them) identifies as a white, nonbinary woman-aligned, bisexual student at a large, public university. As a senior, Mack recently became involved with the LGBTQ organization on campus, but quickly transitioned into a leadership role serving on the executive board. Their on campus activism focuses primarily on outreach and advocacy on campus, while educating the student body on LGBTQ identities and issues. Mack also developed a large social media platform, educating the general public specifically around bisexuality and bisexual identities. Additionally, they are a freelance writer, and also hold an off-campus job.

Sierra (she/her) identifies as an Asian, cisgender bisexual woman at a large, public university. As a junior, Sierra is heavily involved in activism on campus. She is involved in the LGBTQ organization, and works closely with the Feminist organization advocating for gender-neutral housing and restrooms. Additionally, Sierra engages in

activism as the philanthropy chair for her Asian sorority. Sierra shared that activism was a full-time commitment, rather than a hobby, for her.

Gabriel (he/him) identifies as a white, bisexual, cisgender man at a large, public university. As he wraps up his last semester as a senior, Gabriel reflected on his heavy involvement in the LGBTQ community on campus over the years. Gabriel served on the executive board for the LGBTQ organization, and worked in the LGBTQ center on campus as well. He has been SafeZone trained more times that he can count, and recently became a certified SafeZone trainer. Gabriel's activism tends to focus on educational efforts, particularly educating students, faculty, and staff on how to be better allies to LGBTQ students.

Casey (he/him) identifies as a white, pansexual, transgender man, who was often perceived by others as a masculine-leaning bisexual or lesbian woman, at a large, public university. At the time of the interview, Casey shared that he was still figuring out his identity, and often used "bisexual" and "pansexual" interchangeably to describe himself. As a junior, Casey is involved in multiple organizations on campus engaging in diversity and inclusion work. He works for the Diversity center on campus, and serves as an LGBTQ Educator educating students on LGBTQ identities and facilitating SafeZone trainings. Additionally, Casey is involved in the LGBTQ organization on campus, and is deeply invested in organizing around access for trans students, specifically working with the administration to tighten up policies around anti-trans bias and advocating for gender-inclusive restrooms.

Jeremiah (he/him) is a Black, bisexual, cisgender man at a large, public institution. Jeremiah is not directly involved with any LGBTQ organizations on campus, but is still passionate about LGBTQ issues in the Black Student Alliance (BSA) on campus. Currently, he serves as the president for the Black Student Alliance, and has held several previous leadership roles in the organization through the years. Additionally, he works closely on a council designed to promote collaboration between all of the identity-based organizations on campus, which is how he stays connected to the happenings in the LGBTQ organization.

Emma (she/her) is a white, bisexual, cisgender woman at a large, public university. As a junior, Emma is involved in both the LGBTQ center, as well as the LGBTQ organization. With the center, she engages mostly in volunteer work to support the center's efforts. With the LGBTQ organization, she focuses more on educational efforts, educating students on the complexities of identities within the LGBTQ community. Additionally, she occasionally engages in social activities with the LGBTQ organization, such as attending Pride festivals and other protests.

Lastly, Ashlynn (they/them) identifies as a white, non-binary woman-aligned student at a large, public university. As a junior, Ashlynn is just starting to get their feet wet with activism on campus. This past semester, they went through the SafeZone training program to become a trainer, and often facilitates dialogue on topics around sexuality and gender for sociology and women's studies courses. Additionally, they are involved in the LGBTQ organization on campus, which is very centered on direct action activism, as well as a student organization for aspiring teachers who are passionate about

diversity, inclusion, and social justice, focusing on educational inequity issues, such as

the school-to-prison pipeline.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Given the methodology employed, this study yielded rich findings grounded in the individual and unique stories of the participants. The participants all varied in background and context, as shared through their backgrounds in the last chapter. All participants identified as being attracted to more than one gender. Eight identified as bisexual, and one as pansexual. Seven identified themselves as white and two identified as people of color. Of the participants of color, one identified as Black/African-American, and one as Asian-American. In terms of gender, two identified as cisgender women, two as nonbinary and woman-aligned, two as genderqueer, two as cisgender men, and one as a transgender man. Several participants also noted that they used they/them pronouns for themselves, and will be referred to as they/them in this study. At the time of the interviews, eight participants were currently enrolled at a college or university, and one was a recent graduate. All participants were involved in a variety of organizations and offices on their respective campuses, including LGBTQ and other identity-based student organizations, diversity centers on campus, including women's centers and LGBTQ centers, and Greek life.

Every participant experienced some degree of marginalization because of their bisexual identity within LGBTQ spaces on campus. As a result, they all described negative impacts on their ability to engage in LGBTQ spaces in the ways and to the extent they wanted to.

Biphobia within LGBTQ Spaces

Participants identified various experiences with biphobia within LGBTQ spaces on campus, contributing to feelings of invisibility, marginalization, and exclusion.

Bisexual Invisibility

Participants expressed that there was a consistent lack of overall bisexual representation within LGBTQ spaces on campus. Six participants noted that their LGBTQ spaces were demographically homogeneous, and frequented predominantly by cisgender gay and lesbian students. Participants often felt singled out as one of few, if not the only, bisexual student within these spaces. For instance, Miles shared that out of fifty dues-paying members in their LGBTQ organization, only three identified as openly bisexual. Similarly, Jeremiah was one of only four members who identified within the LGBTQ community in the Black Student Union, the largest student organization on his campus. Participants also felt that their LGBTQ spaces upheld very particular depictions of what queer identities should look like, and bisexuality often did not fit into those depictions. Casey described his LGBTQ organization as "cliquey…heavily lean[ing] towards lesbian and/or masculine-centered people" and acknowledged that those who did not fit in that depiction often avoided that space.

Consistent with the lack of demographic representation, all participants noticed a lack of bisexual representation within the programmatic efforts done by the LGBTQ spaces on campus as well. Participants shared that the programs offered were either completely exclusive of bisexuality or inadequately represented bisexuality to the same extent as other identities. Participants expressed that bisexuality was often "lost

somewhere in the middle," "not talked about," and "definitely not targeted towards people that identify as anything other than gay or lesbian." Rylee noted that attending a women's college with a strong history of LGBTQ activism often meant that the programmatic "focus [was] really on lesbians and their needs and their politics." Like Rylee's experience in their LGBTQ organization, participants shared that many LGBTQ spaces focused on the needs of the students who most often frequented that space, erasing students' identities who were in the minority. Jeremiah, as one of the only bisexual students in his predominantly heterosexual Black Student Union, had a very different experience. He shared that most of the programming done in his Black Student Union was centered on race, but the few times the Black Student Union did program around Black LGBTQ issues and identities "largely discuss[ed] gay, lesbian, or transgender issues." His LGBTQ organization, however, was no better when it came to bisexual-specific programs, focusing on the intersections of being Black and "LGBT," but never touching on the intersections of race and bisexuality specifically.

When describing programmatic efforts offered by LGBTQ centers on campus, five participants shared that the offices focused heavily on L, G, and T, but completely erased the B. Gabriel and Emma described a "jump" in their LGBTQ centers' focus over the years, specifically from marriage equality to transgender activism given the shift in the political climate, with little specific attention to bisexual issues. Morgan noticed that although there was a significant number of bisexual students engaged in LGBTQ activism on campus, bisexuality

was at the very bottom of the list for what the [LGBTQ center] was giving information about or giving resources on. They basically had no information, no pamphlets, no events on bisexuality, no anything… A lot of the events were very lesbian, gay, and transgender specific, which of course is wonderful because we need all of those things, but I just always noticed this lack of any bisexual representation or awareness… They just completely missed out on the bisexuality part.

Overall, there was a general frustration with the lack of bisexual representation present in LGBTQ spaces, resulting in participants often taking matters into their own hands. Participants shared experiences hosting bisexuality programs and events, organizing panels and other educational opportunities around bisexual identities, history, and issues, and creating bisexual-specific spaces. Participants noted that as bisexual students, if they wanted bisexual programming, they had to advocate for or hold the programs themselves.

Bisexual Marginalization

Every participant identified examples of bisexual marginalization within LGBTQ spaces on campus. Six participants argued that they often were exposed to people, ideas, and stereotypes that challenged the legitimacy of bisexuality, and often felt invalidated within LGBTQ spaces. Participants felt "not queer enough" and that the stereotypes that permeated throughout LGBTQ spaces reinforced that "bisexuality itself was never enough." For example, Casey felt that he was typically perceived as "a stereotypical 'college bisexual woman' who was just kinda messing around with sexuality," often

categorized as either "a lesbian [who] hadn't come out" or "straight and exploiting the idea of being bisexual." Bisexuality was also frequently dismissed as a valid identity. For example, although Sierra made it explicitly clear that she identified as bisexual, she was disregarded, "essentially treated as straight anyway," and was consistently met with comments dismissing bisexuality as valid from fellow students within the LGBTQ organization. Because bisexuality was typically not seen as a legitimate identity, participants found themselves feeling the need to prove they were "queer enough" to belong. Jeremiah shared:

> You really, really have to have evidence of you dating men and women, because it's always called into question… Bisexuality is definitely a challenge…because people can wrap their head around gay and lesbian identities, [but] generally, the misconception or stereotype about bisexual people is that they're just experimenting… They're either gay or straight… It's something temporary… It's just a transition…

Students were not the only ones who challenged the legitimacy of bisexuality. Morgan shared that student affairs professionals within their LGBTQ center made similar comments invalidating bisexuality, and were dismissive of bisexual students' complaints:

> One of our members [in the bisexual organization] went into the LGBTQ office …and someone at the front desk made some scathing comment to them about bisexuality as a valid identity…so we ended up going to the Director and he didn't want to offer as much support as he would have, I guarantee it, if we had gone in and been like "we're this group for gay men," or "we're this group for

lesbian women," or "we're this trans rights group." I guarantee we would have been met with more seriousness if we weren't coming in and saying "there's a bunch of bisexuals here, so please don't joke about our identities.

Most of the invalidation participants experienced was connected to the idea that bisexual people could more easily "pass" as straight. For instance, Mack recalled an interaction that occurred in a women-only LGBTQ/Feminist organizations' Facebook group that was dismissive of a couples' bisexual and queer identities because they presented as a heteronormative couple:

> …I will never go to a…meeting ever because I don't want to deal with it. It's just so much shit. There was a story recently that's been going around… "This is a Queer Family" was the tag line… and it got shared [in the Facebook page]. In the article, it's a bisexual man and a queer woman, and they have a child together, [and] there were people in the comments that were saying "this isn't really a queer family because they're heterosexual". I was like "but they aren't because they don't identify as heterosexual..." and they were like "but they're still *het*".

Interactions similar to what Mack described occurred often within LGBTQ spaces, and were especially common for participants who were in relationships that could be perceived as reinforcing heteronormativity. For example, Sierra, who was dating a cisgender man, felt that there was a sense of "animosity or distrust [toward] cis women dating cis men." She shared that students within the LGBTQ organization would "use microaggressions…implying that [she] wasn't affected by these issues" because of the gender of her partner. Emma noticed a stark contrast in how she was treated in her

36

LGBTQ center depending on the gender of her partner. She felt completely dismissed, and described feelings of "discomfort" and "shame" when she was in heteronormative-presenting relationships. Contrarily, she felt validated and supported by her peers in the LGBTQ center when she dated women:

> When I was dating a guy and I wanted to introduce him to my friends, it was obvious that he was not totally comfortable because the people [in the Center] didn't want to meet him. If I brought a girl by, then they were much more excited about it, so it definitely feels like being a lesbian would be more accepted in that group.

While these experiences were common for participants who were in heteronormative-presenting relationships, they were not exclusive to them. Ashlynn received similar comments despite being in a queer-presenting relationship. They were consistently met with comments such as "you're going to leave your partner for a man," "bisexual people are greedy and can't decide what they want," and "bisexual people are not actually gay if they have a heterosexual partner." Most of the comments Ashlynn received were from who they referred to as "gold-star lesbians:"

> I get most of the flak from the gold star lesbians who don't like men and don't want to be associated with a girl who had dated men before… There's a good number of [gold-star lesbians] on campus that are very proud of the fact that they've never been with a man…and they're just very self-righteous about that, like it makes them a superior person to someone who has…[and] puts them a step

above someone who previously could have identified as straight or bisexual, which is like yikes…

Perpetuating the misconception that bisexuality reinforces heteronormativity impacts more than just those who are in heteronormative-presenting relationships. Ashlynn's experience in particular exemplifies that even when bisexual people are in "acceptable" relationships, it is still assumed that they will eventually leave for a more heteronormative-presenting relationship. This notion was commonly used as an excuse to invalidate, marginalize, and even exclude bisexual identities within LGBTQ spaces.

Bisexual Exclusion

Five participants provided examples of what I categorized as exclusion from LGBTQ spaces. Participants often felt discouraged from sharing their experiences as bisexual student activists. They shared that they did not feel like their "voice was as strong" or that they "had the authority" to speak up within LGBTQ spaces. Rylee described the ways their LGBTQ organization centered lesbian voices, and how often bisexual women were excluded from the conversation:

We were told we [could] only talk about the effects on our lives being attracted to other women or femmes because "no is oppressed for being in a heterosexual relationship…" We were accused of internalized homophobia… or being the reasons lesbians are fetishized and making lesbians look bad…that bisexual women were the reason why straight men thought that lesbians were sexually available…I never understood it, but it came up a lot… If you didn't seem like you were a lesbian, or could be confused for one, then your position was a lot

weaker. Your opinion didn't quite matter as much. You were less likely to be one

of authority in the group. Your loyalty to the community was more likely to get

questioned. You were more likely to get accused of your ideas being part of the

problem. Any time something came up, and you talked about it from the

perspective of not being a lesbian, you were more likely to be told that your need

to bring that up was part of the problem of why progress wasn't being made.

Participants also shared experiences compartmentalizing parts of their lives,

especially their relationships, in order to feel included within LGBTQ spaces. For

example, Emma shared:

I would like to be able to be more open about [my relationships], but I feel like I

can't talk about guys that I've dated… so a lot of times I keep my personal life, if

I'm dating a guy, separate from the life that I have with activism…

Additionally, she noticed that she, and many bisexual friends of hers, chose not to

bring their other-gender partners to activist events because "people obviously don't like

seeing a 'heterosexual' couple at events like that, even though one or maybe both of them

is part of the LGBT community."

Ashlynn's experience exemplified the ways participants often felt excluded and

policed by fellow students in regard to how bisexual people were allowed to show up and

engage in LGBTQ spaces. For example, Casey recounted having his pansexuality

invalidated when he was referred to as an ally by students within his LGBTQ

organization:

Last year when the Westboro Baptist Church came… I didn't wanna join the
protests that were happening, because I knew I didn't have the mental ability to,
so I walked through the space and there were a few people from [the LGBTQ
organization] who asked, "where are you going?!" I was like "oh, I can't do this
today…" And one of them was like "well that's a shitty thing to do as an ally…"

Similarly, Rylee explained that when they were perceived to be a lesbian, they
could participate within their LGBTQ organization in the ways that they wanted to with
minimal pushback from other students. That changed, however, once they started dating
someone who didn't present as a woman, to which students within the LGBTQ
organization reminded Rylee that they "had no business being an activist unless [they
were] actively dating another woman" and instructed them to "take an allyship position."

Every participant felt some degree of biphobia within LGBTQ spaces intended to
be inclusive of their identities and voices. The ways in which participants were made to
feel invisible, marginalized, and excluded had significant impacts on their abilities to
navigate and participate in these spaces to the extent and in the ways that they wanted to.

Impact of Biphobia within LGBTQ Spaces

Every participant indicated that the challenges they experienced as bisexual in
LGBTQ spaces on campus had a negative impact to some extent, including challenges
openly identifying as bisexual within LGBTQ spaces, internalized biphobia, and activist
burnout and disengagement.

Discomfort Identifying as Bisexual

Six participants expressed some degree of discomfort openly identifying as bisexual at some point during their involvement within LGBTQ spaces on campus, and navigated their bisexual identities within these spaces in several ways. Participants shared that they often felt more comfortable identifying as gay, lesbian, or queer, but not specifically as bisexual. Ashlynn, for example, often identified as a lesbian rather than bisexual within LGBTQ spaces, as to "avoid the additional stigma." Similarly, Jeremiah and Sierra shared similar thoughts around feeling as though openly identifying as gay and queer, respectively, would have been easier than identifying as bisexual.

Participants also chose not to identify as anything, often avoiding disclosing information about their sexuality in general. Rylee recalled experiencing so much biphobia that they stopped identifying as bisexual completely, and instead "chose not to answer questions about [their sexuality]." Rylee was one of several participants who frequently allowed people to make assumptions about their sexuality, and failed to correct inaccurate ones.

Internalizing Biphobia

Six participants described having negative feelings about their bisexual identity, due to internalizing the biphobia they experienced within LGBTQ spaces on campus. Some participants described feeling ashamed of their bisexual identity. For instance, Emma felt "a little bit of shame identifying as bisexual," and always felt "on edge" in LGBTQ spaces. "I still feel like I can't quite be myself within the LGBTQ community," she said, "I'm still on the defense a little bit." Emma's feelings exemplified several

participants' experiences struggling with the tension between their desire to be accepted and their desire to be authentic within LGBTQ spaces. Participants felt that they needed to hide their bisexual identity in order to remain engaged in LGBTQ spaces. For example, although Rylee felt they "[weren't] really able to stick up for [their bisexual identity]," they were willing to "bite the bullet and go with it to be a part of [the] community." Ashlynn was not open about their bisexual identity either, and felt guilty for "doing a disservice to the rest of the bisexual community as a whole by being out as a lesbian instead of out as bisexual." Mitigating this tension caused Ashlynn a great deal of stress, especially because they felt that they were contributing to pre-existing bisexual invisibility and "hindering the [coming out] process of other bisexual people."

Participants shared that the biphobia they internalized had negative impacts on their understanding of their bisexual identity, and the ways their identities fit within the context of the LGBTQ spaces they were involved in. Casey's "insecurity" about their pansexual identity within LGBTQ spaces caused him to be hyperaware of his social performatives to avoid being perceived as "some flippant bisexual ally." Similarly, Gabriel's bisexual identity "held him back" from getting to know other students in his LGBTQ center, inhibiting his ability to engage with other LGBTQ community members to the extent that he wanted to. "A lot of people have various LGBTQ identifiers on them, and because I don't have as many, I felt like I didn't necessarily belong," Gabriel shared, "I'm only bisexual, ya know?" In line with Gabriel's experience, some participants questioned whether they had the right to participate in LGBTQ spaces as bisexual. Sierra shared:

…It even made me question my identity as bisexual. It made me think… Maybe I

shouldn't be in these groups… Should I just not identify as bisexual anymore?

Am I being appropriative?

Most participants failed to achieve their desire to be accepted and authentic.

Instead, participants' desire to be accepted clashed with their desire to be authentic in

their bisexual identity. Participants who were driven by their desire to be accepted

commonly suppressed their bisexual identity and internalized the biphobic attitudes

around them, and often caused them to reflect on their positionality within LGBTQ

spaces.

Burnout

Seven participants described symptoms of what scholars define as burnout.

Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) highlight three components of burnout: exhaustion,

cynicism, and feelings of inefficacy. Each participant who described feelings of burnout

experienced at least one of the aforementioned components. Participants' burnout

stemmed from two main causes: simply existing as a bisexual person dealing with

biphobia within LGBTQ spaces, and their overcommittment to LGBTQ activism on

campus.

Exhaustion. "Exhausted" was used by five participants to describe their

involvement in LGBTQ spaces. Most were incredibly involved in multiple spaces

engaging in activist work around diversity, inclusion, and social justice within LGBTQ

spaces. Many were involved in more than one organization, held multiple leadership

positions on campus, and were employed both on and off campus. Sierra, for example,

made it a priority to "make activism a full-time focus rather than just a hobby," and

43

Emma believed that "being an activist isn't totally something that you can ever really separate yourself from [because] it's not something you can just do part-time."

As a result, they often felt overwhelmed and stretched thin. For instance, when listing all of his activist involvement, Casey noted that he "really, really love[d]" what he was doing, but "all of them [were] exhausting," and Mack was "always tired," and described activism as "simultaneously energizing yet exhausting." Similarly, Morgan said they "strained… overexerted… drained… and exhausted [them]self mentally and physically with how much work it was to be an activist on campus… especially taking front leadership stances in a lot of [organizations]."

For many, their overcommittment to activist involvement was related directly to a sense of responsibility to combat bisexual invisibility, marginalization, and exclusion within LGBTQ spaces. For example, Morgan was driven to create and maintain a bisexual-specific organization on campus to meet the demand for a bisexual-specific space in response to the lack of resources provided by the LGBTQ center. "I needed to use my voice as a bisexual activist," Morgan shared, "not just as an activist." Similarly, despite Jeremiah not feeling completely comfortable about his bisexual identity, he still felt responsible for correcting homophobic and biphobic comments by educating peers about bisexual issues:

> I feel like if I wasn't [educating people], I would be like doing a disservice to my organization, as well as myself. I'm used to it, but being a student leader, you're constantly looked at to educate… Yes, I am trying to educate, but I'm trying to empower others to do the same too… It's annoying…like sometimes someone

will say something that I didn't catch, but other people did… and they'll be like "why didn't you say anything?" and I'm like… "Why didn't you?" Like… why do you want me to constantly be the professor? …or constantly be the bad guy?

These experiences highlight the ways participants were often pigeonholed as the sole spokesperson for bisexual identities. Participants noticed that it was their responsibility as bisexual student activitss to educate around and advocate for bisexual students within LGBTQ space, while also navigating the biphobia they experienced within those spaces.

Cynicism and Depersonalization. Several participants described developing a level of cynicism or mistrust toward the LGBTQ spaces. This cynicism was often coupled with the exhaustion they experienced navigating biphobia. Rylee, for example, shared that the biphobia they internalized within their LGBTQ organization caused them to develop "a lot of anxiety around LGBT-oriented groups" and "took a lot of damage to [their] ability to trust LGBT organizations." Similarly for Emma, the biphobia she experienced caused her to distance herself from lesbian, gay, and bisexual activism, and instead focus exclusively on transgender activism. Because she did not identify as transgender, transphobic resistance did not impact her sense of self as much as the biphobia she was consistently experiencing. "It's easier for me to put myself into that activism without thinking about how people's opinions of transgender people will directly affect me," she noted, "but when it's you standing up for your own rights, that's when that takes more of a toll on your mental health because it's much more personal."

Maslach et al. (2001) terms the process of "distancing oneself emotionally and cognitively" from one's engagement in their work as "depersonalization" (p. 403). Emma was one of several participants whose cynicism for the LGBTQ spaces caused them to distance themselves by scaling back their involvement temporarily or permanently disengaging. Distancing oneself from LGBTQ spaces was very common among participants, and was often a combination of exhaustion from navigating biphobia compounded with the toll it took to be heavily engaged in LGBTQ activism. Seven participants experienced disengagement from their activist involvement to some degree, from skipping out on events every now and then, to completely separating from LGBTQ spaces on campus. Some temporarily scaled back from activism every now and then "before it start[ed] to weigh" as one participant explained, but still remained fairly engaged in their activist involvement. For example, when Sierra needed to "recharge," she would "decide not to go to specific one-time events that [she] didn't really have a hand in." Similarly, Ashlynn sometimes felt the need to make up excuses to get out of participating in specific events hosted by the LGBTQ organization.

Others completely disengaged from the LGBTQ spaces they were involved in. For example, Casey constantly experiencing biphobia within his LGBTQ organization drove him to build a community with students who had also disengaged from the organization for similar reasons. Similarly, Morgan described how the exhaustion of dealing with biphobia in their Feminist organizations compounded with the exhaustion that came with being an activist lead them to distance themselves from the Feminist organizations:

the stress that comes from just *existing* as a woman in the world… *existing* as a genderqueer person in the world… *existing* as an LGBTQ person in this world… is difficult enough, and then when you add the activism on top of that… it's really draining… It was a very big decision to… pass on my leadership roles to other people because it was taking too much of a toll on me. When I left, a lot of the members [of the Feminist organizations] were basically like "screw you…" as if [I didn't] care and I was abandoning [them]… That was the reason I ended up leaving that group… Activism was everything they did... It was their bread and butter… It was their day and night, and they couldn't seem to take a step back and see that people have other things going on and had to take care of themselves…

Morgan highlighted the complicated position that many participants were in. The biphobia that fueled them to take on the responsibility of being "bisexual activists" was also what exhausted them, causing them to ultimately distance themselves from the LGBTQ spaces and activism they loved.

Feelings of Inefficacy. A few participants struggled to feel effective and accomplished in the work they were doing within their LGBTQ spaces, either resulting from or contributing to exhaustion and/or cynicism. For example, Sierra's burnout stemmed from being stressed and frustrated from "balancing all of these responsibilities pretty much on [her] own." She described being "discouraged" because she felt that "no one really care[d]" about how much work she invested in her LGBTQ activism. Similarly, Rylee was very passionate about LGBTQ issues and wanted to continue to be engaged with activism with their LGBTQ student organization, but the biphobia, as well

as the identity policing, they constantly experienced made them feel that their involvement was pointless. In response to being frequently referred to as "only an ally," Rylee stated:

> …Even if you don't believe them, you still kinda back off… Why try so hard for something when they don't want you? They don't want your effort. They don't want your support… So why try? I didn't feel like my voice was very necessary. I didn't feel like it was worth it for me to push for something that I wasn't really contributing that much to. I still want to try with activism in general because this is still important to me… but I didn't need to interact with those groups anymore, and so I stopped.

For many participants, disengaging from LGBTQ spaces was an act of self-care against the burnout they were experiencing. However, not every participant was willing to do that, despite being fully aware that it would be best for their own wellbeing.

Self-Care and "Martyr Syndrome"

Five participants expressed conflicting feelings around balancing disengagement as an act of self-care and their sense of responsibility in regard to their commitment to activism. Often, students experienced "martyr syndrome," the discouragement of engaging in self-care. Often, this discouragement is rooted in self-care being framing as an "indulgence" (Gorski, 2015, p. 707). For example, Mack recognized that the extremely high expectations they set for themselves prevented them from engaging in self-care to the extent that they should have. "I fully recognize that I could take a break if I needed to…like I wouldn't disappoint people if I [did]," Mack explained, "…but there's

also something in me that's like [I] shouldn't take a break [because] there's people out there doing more than [me]." Similarly, Emma recognized when she was starting to feel burned out, and would consciously scale back or choose not to engage in an event or conversation as a result. With that, however, came feelings of guilt:

> It's definitely stressful for me when I hear somebody say something problematic, I just don't have the energy to get into another debate or another discussion with somebody, so I just let it fly, but then I feel guilty about that…There is a little bit of guilt that comes with that when you're not standing up for people's rights 24/7, but that's practically impossible unless you just want to completely exhaust yourself.

Jeremiah described himself as a "public servant" who consistently prioritized the experiences of his peers over his own wellbeing. He shared that when he is engaging in activism, he is "mostly worried about other students…that they're getting what they want out of it…that they are inspired, motivated, and educated," often forgetting to think of himself. Jeremiah understood that he has "prioritized [his] leadership roles over going to school and being a regular student," which has had an extremely negative impact on his classes and grades, but continued to be more invested in other students' experiences and education around diversity, inclusion, and social justice.

While most students struggled to find a healthy balance between self-care and activism, Morgan and Sierra in particular, however, learned the importance of prioritizing their self-care in order to stay committed. Morgan shared they "[had] to learn that you cannot take care of other people…or be an advocate or activist for other people…if you

are not your priority." They even noticed that their mental health drastically improved once they "[weren't] constantly putting other things and people before themselves." Similarly, Sierra shared that she could not "fully bow out" because she took on the responsibility of being an activist:

> Even if I have to sometimes take a break or scale back, it's not like I'm going to stop being a queer woman or stop being Asian. The problems that I face as a result of my various identities are going to keep happening regardless, and to other people too… At the end of the day, these problems are ongoing, and they're not going to end or get better unless activists get to work.

> Sierra noted, though, that while "a lot of the issues that we primarily work on affect our selves, and goes in hand with the burnout," there is "no such things as a perfect activist" and that taking a break sometimes is okay. While she admitted that her learning process is ongoing, she acknowledged that "if fighting for these issues is causing mental distress, and you're fighting yourself for yourself, that kinda defeats the purpose."

Participants tended to be dismissive of their burnout, despite its negative impacts. Their bisexual identities were so salient to them that they felt it their duty to be committed to LGBTQ activism at all costs, often at the expense of their own wellbeing.

Intersectional Biphobia within LGBTQ Spaces

Participants shared that they did not experience biphobia in a vacuum. Not only did they identify as bisexual, but many also identified with other marginalized identities, and shared how these intersections impacted the ways they experienced biphobia. In this section, I discuss the ways racism, sexism, and transphobia intersected with biphobia.

50

Biphobia and Racism

Every participant noted that the LGBTQ spaces they were involved with were predominantly white spaces, and that few LGBTQ students of color frequented them. For example, Mack shared that their student organization had two Black members on the executive board, and that they were the only two Black members, even though there were roughly fifty members total. Rylee shared that the general LGBTQ student organization was very hostile to LGBTQ students of color, reflective of the "racial tension and mistreatment of people of color on campus." Because of this, LGBTQ students of color typically branched off and created their own organizations, creating "a lot of diversity in the organizations," but "tended to be a little combative among each group." Rylee recounted an instance when the general LGBTQ organization was intentionally exclusive of an LGBTQ student of color organization:

> There was a discussion group to finalize and approve some petition, and the general [LGBTQ] group didn't invite the Afro-Caribbean Trans Women group specifically. Some members showed up because they heard about it on campus from other sources, and when they tried to communicate that there were parts of the agenda that they didn't feel comfortable with, they were actually removed from the meeting.

Rylee was not the only participant who called out their LGBTQ organization for being dismissive and exclusive of LGBTQ students of color. For example, Emma recalled going to a meeting for the Feminist organization on campus, where she witnessed several white women being openly dismissive of a woman who was sharing

her experiences at the intersections of being Black and bisexual. Similarly, Casey acknowledged that his LGBTQ organization also struggled with recognizing intersectionality, and noted that the culture of his organization put the expectation solely on LGBTQ students of color for organizing around racial justice issues. "[The LGBTQ organization] has created a lot of very happy little spaces that they are all comfortable in," Casey explained, "so when issues of racism come up, they do the typical thing and post a statement about it and that's the extent of what they do."

As participants of color, Jeremiah and Sierra had different experiences compared to white participants. Jeremiah explained that he did not frequent the LGBTQ organization or the LGBTQ center because it was "a very white space." To him, "a lot of things [within the LGBTQ center] felt whitewashed…and deterred a lot of students of color." He explained that he experienced many challenges as a Black bisexual man within the LGBTQ community, the Black community, and even the Black LGBTQ community. He felt that black students' understanding of LGBTQ identities "literally stop[ped] at gay," and that Black gay men within the BSA often "turn their nose up when [he] say[s] that [he] is bi." Contrarily, within LGBTQ spaces, he felt like he had to constantly educate white LGBTQ students, especially around issues of race. Jeremiah shared that he frequently had to challenge white LGBTQ students who "[took] on a lot of theatrics of Black LGBTQ people, and really tr[ied] to pass that off as their own." He struggled getting white LGBTQ students to understand that identifying within the LGBTQ community does not inherently make one anti-racist.

Sierra experienced similar frustration in her LGBTQ organization because she felt dismissed in both her bisexual identity, as well as her Asian identity. When recounting her experiences working with white LGBTQ activists within the LGBTQ organization, she explained that:

white allies were very performative and overcompensating [when it comes to racial justice]…in this really awkward way that ends with them speaking over people of color…they were trying so hard not to be racist that it was…well, racist.

Both Sierra and Jeremiah noted that there seemed to be a lack of space specifically for LGBTQ students of color on campus. Sierra's campus did not have an LGBTQ students of color group, and explained how LGBTQ students of color, particularly Black LGBTQ students, tended to work more closely with the race-based organizations, which mirrored Jeremiah's experience. Because there was no space that recognized the intersections of sexuality and race, bisexual students of color were at a greater risk for overcommittment for needing to be engaged in multiple spaces in order for both of those identities to be recognized.

Biphobia and Sexism

Participants shared that sexism permeated LGBTQ spaces in a variety of ways. For example, Morgan often experienced blatant sexism from the gay white men who were "aggressively in charge of meetings" in the LGBTQ student organization. "There were a lot of very passionate male activists," they explained, "and often... [they] would completely take over…and this space [was] supposed to be somewhere where we can *all*

have these discussions." Similarly, Emma noted that "a lot of people tended to avoid [gay white men in the LGBTQ center.]"

Participants also shared that there tended to be implicit expectations for how one should present themselves in regard to gender, masculinity, and femininity. Many participants described the LGBTQ spaces as centered around masculine or masculine-leaning identities and gender expressions, and that those who presented more femininely were often intimidated and felt "not queer enough." Sierra described her LGBTQ organization as "homogenous[ly] white and queer-coded," conflicting with her "stereotypically feminine" and Asian identity. Casey noted that his campus "very much has a depiction of what queer is," and bisexuality, especially coupled with even the slightest traces of femininity, did not fit in that depiction.

Casey, Jeremiah, and Gabriel had very different experiences as men within LGBTQ spaces on campus. Gabriel described himself as an effeminate man who "doesn't necessarily hold up ideals of masculinity." He recognized that he is often "coded as a gay white man," but noticed that once he corrected people and told them that he identified as bisexual, "there was a shift in how [he was] looked at" because people struggled to believe that as a bisexual man, he could be with a woman. Similarly, Jeremiah felt that members of his Black Student Union really struggled with the idea of a bisexual man. "A lot of Black people, who I guess are slightly progressive, are totally 'okay' with people being gay," he explained, "but when you introduce, especially a man, being bi… It becomes a problem, because they can't wrap their mind around it."

Because Casey presented in a way that aligned with the "queer aesthetic…of button-ups and backwards hats" on campus, he was significantly less impacted, but noted that his ex-girlfriend's experience was especially negative due to her femininity. During the interview, Casey also acknowledged several times that many of his experiences were impacted by him often being perceived by others as a masculine bisexual/pansexual woman, rather than a man. Casey, Jeremiah, and Gabriel's experiences highlight the challenges of being bisexual men. For Jeremiah and Gabriel, their bisexual identity was invalidated and not taken seriously, and their peers struggled to understand how women could be attracted to them. On the other hand, Casey's pansexual identity was less likely to be questioned, but often at the expense of his identity as a man.

Sexism manifested in various ways within LGBTQ spaces, ranging from explicit examples of intentionally sexist comments and actions from men, to the prioritizing of masculine-centered identities at the expense of participants who presented more femininely. Participants also described biphobia's significant gendered implications.

Biphobia and Transphobia

Several transgender and nonbinary participants described the challenges they faced navigating their gender identity within LGBTQ spaces. Four participants described instances of subtle transphobia within the LGBTQ spaces they were involved in. For example, although Rylee identified with the transgender community as a genderqueer person, they felt they were constantly policed for identifying as bisexual rather than pansexual:

…People who identify as pansexual and people who didn't were telling me it was transphobic to identify as bi because it meant you weren't attracted to trans people… There was an assumption that you should change the way you identified if you weren't transphobic. It's always fun having people tell you that you're somehow managing to be to be transphobic against yourself…

Mack's LGBTQ organization had a very strained relationship with the transgender organization on campus due to previous history with transphobia, which put the responsibility on Mack to mend that relationship because they were nonbinary. Similarly, as the only transgender student working for the diversity office, Casey felt solely responsible to educate people on trans issues. Both Mack and Casey felt elevated levels of responsibility for educating their peers around their trans identity in addition to their bisexual and pansexual identity.

Morgan shared that they, as well as other trans students who also identified as bisexual, felt that "their trans identity [was] being recognized by either the Women's Center or the [LGBTQ] Center, but their bisexual identity [was] still mocked and made fun of and rejected." Although many participants shared that the programming done by the LGBTQ spaces on campus shifted to focusing on transgender activism, bisexual participants who identified under the transgender umbrella struggled to find spaces where both their bisexual identity and transgender identity were recognized together as of equal importance.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

In many ways, the findings supported existing understandings of bisexual marginalization within LGBTQ spaces and that marginalization's impact on the ways that LGBTQ students make meaning of their bisexual identity. Other themes, however, complicated existing research and necessitate further research. In this chapter, I discuss the findings in the context of existing scholarship, offer recommendations based on the findings, propose areas for additional research, and disclose appropriate limitations and positionality.

Biphobia within LGBTQ Spaces

Students in this study identified multiple ways that they experienced marginalization within LGBTQ spaces on campus. Similar to previous findings (Mitchell, Davis, & Galupo, 2015; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999), participants often felt invalidated by lesbian and gay peers. Participants described feelings of pressure in "choosing a side," and were dismissed as "actually gay" or "actually straight." Participants' experiences being invalidated in their bisexual identity were rooted in the association of bisexuality with heteronormativity. Confirming the research of other scholars (Bradford, 2004; Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009; Herek, 2002), participants who were in heteronormative-presenting relationships were often accused of having "straight passing" privilege, leading to participants not feeling marginalized enough to be in LGBTQ spaces. Reflective of Balsam and Mohr's (2007) work, participants also felt that they, as

well as their voices and experiences, were unwelcome in and excluded from LGBTQ

spaces.

Impact of Biphobia within LGBTQ Spaces

Consistent with the Q-MMDI, students in this study described several negative

impacts attributed to their marginalization within LGBTQ spaces on campus. Most

notably, students described being hyperaware of how they were perceived in LGBTQ

spaces. The QMMDI connected participants' experiences navigating marginalization in

the *context* of monosexism and heteronormativity within LGBTQ spaces.

Heteronormativity and Monosexism (context in which bisexual student is navigating)

Performatives (how bisexual student performs their identity within LGBTQ spaces)

Becoming (unending creation of bisexual student's sense of self)

Desire (bisexual student's desire to be accepted in LGBTQ spaces *and* be authentic in their bisexual identity)
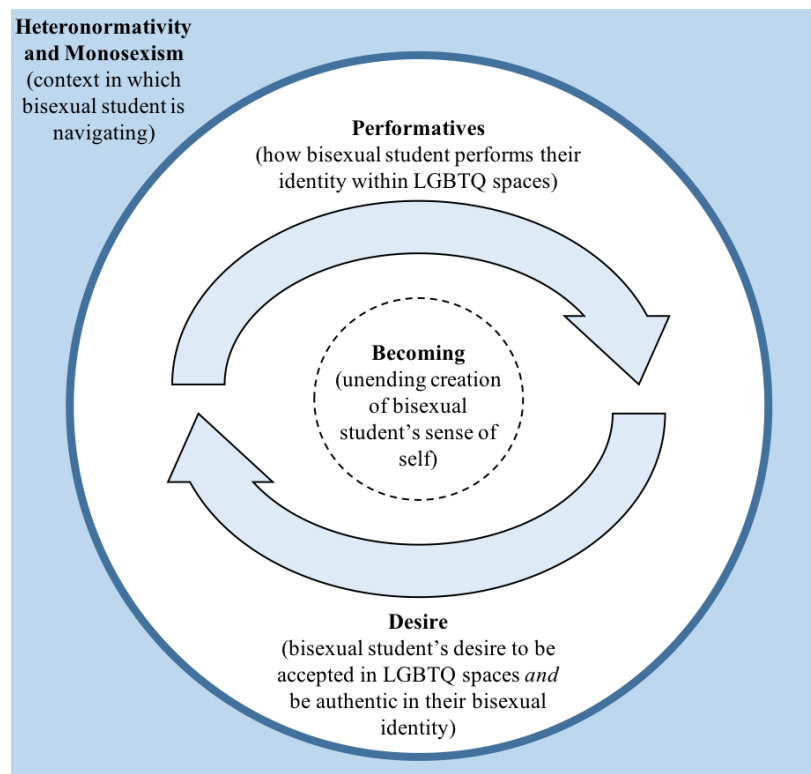
**Figure 1: Adapted Queered Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity
Source: Developed by David Kasch, Elisa S. Abes, and Susan R. Jones.**

Every participant at some point struggled in their "quest for a socially and intelligible, or 'accepted,' identity that is also authentic" (Butler, 2004 qtd. in Jones, 2013, p. 202). Students frequently grappled with the conflict between their *desire* to feel accepted and their desire to feel authentic in their identity. In response, participants often shifted how they navigated LGBTQ spaces by performing their identity in different ways depending on which desire was more salient to them at the time. A number of researchers (e.g., Balsam & Mohr, 2007; McLean, 2001, 2008a; Sarno & Wright, 2013) have also commented on this phenomenon.

Additionally, consistent with existing literature exploring the ways bisexual people act differently in different contexts in order to feel included, students reported intentionally identifying as an identity other than bisexual (vis-à-vis the work of Hartman, 2006; Lingel, 2009; Sarno & Wright, 2013; Udis-Kessler, 1995), not challenging assumptions when falsely identified as gay, lesbian, or straight (e.g., McLean, 2008b; Rothblum, 2010;), or concealing aspects of their bisexual identity that are perceived to conform to heteronormativity (e.g.,Crowley, 2010; Klein & Dudley, 2014).

Feelings of inauthenticity had negative impacts on participants' *becoming* process outlined in the Q-MMDI. Most participants' experiences indicated they had a contracted becoming core— they had less control over their desires, and therefore, less influence on how they performed their identities. Similar to previous findings (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; McLean, 2008b), participants who felt the need to hide their bisexual identity often experienced feelings of guilt and shame, and many chose to disengage from LGBTQ

spaces because of their inability to fulfill their desire to attain authenticity and acceptance. Feeling included was important to participants, especially for maintaining access to the LGBTQ community on campus. Several participants, however, exemplified an expanded becoming core—they had more control over their desires, and therefore, more influence on how they performed their identities. Consistent with previous findings, these students took on the responsibility to affirm bisexuality as a valid identity (as shared by Nutter-pridgen, 2015), by educating peers, combatting bisexual visibility, and even creating their own spaces (consistent with Bradford, 2004).

Activist Burnout and Sustainability

One important finding complicated understandings of bisexual people in regard to their disengagement from LGBTQ spaces. Participants reported often disengaging from LGBTQ spaces due to the biphobia they experience within these spaces, consistent with research on bisexual people's experiences within LGBTQ communities (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Burleson, 2012; Duca, 1991). However, participants' disengagement from LGBTQ spaces was not solely attributed to biphobia. Participants' tendency to stretch themselves thin across multiple organizations and leadership positions often resulted in activist burnout, manifesting as exhaustion, cynicism and depersonalization, and feelings of inefficacy (Maslach et al., 2001). Their sense of obligation to stay committed to their work, combat their own invisibility, and advocate for the bisexual community came at the expense of their physical and mental health, and commonly contributed to their disengagement. Most participants struggled with engaging in self-care and sustainability

practices in relation to their involvement in LGBTQ spaces. This burnout eventually led to every participant disengaging from LGBTQ spaces, both temporarily and permanently.

Intersectional Biphobia

Another interesting finding validated the need for a deeper and more intersectional understanding of the way bisexual people experience biphobia. Participants recognized that their bisexual identity intersected with other aspects of their identities, and impacted the ways in which they experienced biphobia within LGBTQ spaces. Other forms of marginalization, such as racism, sexism, and transphobia, permeated LGBTQ spaces, shaping the ways students understood the biphobia they experienced in the context of their other identities. As expected, biphobia had gendered implications within LGBTQ spaces, aligning closely with existing research (e.g., Callis, 2013; Eisner, 2013; Yost & Thomas, 2012; Zivony & Lobel, 2014). Male participants who expressed femininity were dismissed as actually gay, while female participants who expressed femininity were perceived as straight and dismissed from LGBTQ spaces. Participants also shared their experiences with other intersections of their identities. Additionally, several participants reported that white gay men frequently made sexist comments at the expense of women within LGBTQ spaces. Similarly, transgender and nonbinary participants' identities were often hypervisible in LGBTQ spaces, but transgender and nonbinary students were still at risk for experiencing subtle transphobia in relation to their bisexual identity.

Participants of color were more likely to feel racially isolated, resulting in a fragmented sense of identity in terms of race and sexuality. Participants viewed their

bisexual and racial identities as intersecting and connected, yet the spaces they were involved in were divided across different axes of identities, leading to what Thompson (2012) described as the "internalization of this division" (p. 420). Most research on LGBTQ populations is overwhelmingly focused on white participants/experiences (Chan, 1992; Eliason, 1996; Greene, 1996; Morales, 1992), and rarely focuses specifically on bisexual students. However, Vaccaro and Mena's (2011) study on burnout in queer students of color exemplifies the ways that queer students of color struggle to find spaces on campus that are able to encompass the intersections of their multiple identities.

Similarly, Pryor's (2017) study yielded similar results, with multiple queer students of color sharing that they did not feel their racial identity being represented or supported within LGBTQ spaces on campus, while their sexuality was not represented or supported in the spaces they felt most comfortable as people of color. The two aforementioned studies focusing on LGBTQ students of color broadly, coupled with studies focusing on the intersections of race and bisexuality (Collins, 2004; Chun & Singh, 2010; Thompson, 2012) validated participants experiences as bisexual students of color feeling caught in a complicated position marginalized as bisexual in a largely monosexual space, and as nonwhite in predominantly white spaces.

Participants described their experiences feeling unable to bring their whole selves to LGBTQ spaces. Therefore, the marginalization they experienced, and their subsequent burnout, was not always attributable solely to their bisexual identity. Participants struggled to find spaces that holistically encapsulated and supported their entire identity

beyond just their sexuality, and stretched themselves thin among multiple spaces that supported their individual identities as separate entities.

<div align="center">**<u>Recommendations</u>**</div>

A better understanding of bisexual students, the challenges they encounter, and the ways these challenges influence how they perform their identity at the expense of their acceptance or authenticity is required in order to create and maintain LGBTQ spaces on campus that are safe, affirming, and inclusive of bisexual students. From exploring participants' stories, several recommendations emerged: (1) reconceptualizing heterosexism, (2) combatting the Traditionally Heterogendered Institution (3) increasing bisexual visibility, (4) challenging biphobia within LGBTQ spaces, (5) supporting bisexual-specific spaces, and (6) understanding bisexual students' identities beyond just sexuality.

Reconceptualizing Heterosexism

Monosexism is typically studied as interpersonal interactions, rather than as a systematic extension of heterosexism. While the everyday biphobia and marginalization bisexual people experience is important in understanding their complicated experiences within LGBTQ spaces, a structural analysis of monosexism is desperately needed as well. Monosexism continues to be contested within the LGBTQ community, primarily by the lesbian and gay community, but debates exist even within the bisexual community.

Contention around monosexism stems from two main reasons. First, the "–ism" suffix is off-putting to some, implying that monosexism is structural, and, therefore assumes that people who identify as gay or lesbian have privilege over bisexual people.

Privilege requires power, and, because lesbians and gay men are still oppressed by heterosexism, they are, therefore, incapable of systematically oppressing bisexual people. Monosexism "grouping lesbians and gay men with their oppressors" is commonly used to push back against the term. I argue, however, that this is the way that intersectionality works. As a cisgender bisexual woman, I, as well as cisgender lesbians and gay men, am grouped with cisgender straight people along the axis of my gender identity. White LGBTQ people are grouped with heterosexual people along the axis of their racial identity. Similarly, gay and lesbian people are grouped with straight people along the axis of their monosexual identity. Understanding how aspects of intersecting identities can afford institutional advantages in ways that marginalize others is the key point in intersectionality theory.

Second, monosexism is too often conflated with the everyday interpersonal exchanges of biphobia. Shiri Eisner (2013, February 8) made these important distinctions, noting that "monosexism is a structure that first and foremost comes from heterosexism and the patriarchy…allow[ing] us to consider monosexism as a structure that affects everyone instead of just bi[sexual] people" while biphobia is "one specific result of monosexism." Analyses of monosexism as an extension of, rather than separate from, heterosexism, allows for a more nuanced understanding of how we are *all* socialized to perpetuate monosexism, not necessarily *just* gay and lesbian communities.

Programmatic efforts centered on educating and reeducating students, faculty, and staff on what heterosexism includes and how heterosexism manifests itself in ways that excludes more than only cisgender white gay and lesbian communities is essential in

reconceptualizing monosexism as an extension of, rather than separate from, heterosexism. These educational opportunities will expand students, faculty, and staff's understanding of heterosexism to include monosexism, as well as other systems of oppression that impact LGBTQ people, such as racism, sexism, and transphobia, and how all these systems are interlocked to uphold a hierarchy, and therefore cannot be analyzed separately.

Combatting the Traditionally Heterogendered Institution

Colleges and universities often view LGBTQ students as one homogenous group, reflecting the ways society views the LGBTQ community as a whole. This results in homogenizing LGBTQ students' needs as well, despite research validating bisexual students' unique experiences to gay and lesbian students. In attempts to incorporate a greater emphasis on measuring diversity to showcase an institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion, especially as a recruitment tool, colleges and universities homogenize marginalized groups of students on campus in order to more easily "measure" diversity. Yet homogenous understandings of marginalized communities of students "[flattens] out the bona fide differences among students in support of a common language that travel[s] well within institutional circles" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 185). While many diversity professionals try to remain critical and intersectional, they are "on a slippery slope that ends in watered-down understandings of diversity" which "often serves as a surrogate for intersectionality" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 184).

Since monosexism is an extension of heterosexism, it is important to understand the ways that colleges and universities uphold heterosexism within their institutions.

Drawing from Iverson's (2007) concept of the Traditional White Institution, Preston and Hoffman (2015) developed the Traditionally Heterogendered Institution in order to understand how colleges and universities "operate in a way that continues to sustain and reaffirm traditional hierarchies of gendered and sexual oppression, regardless of the various policies, regulations, and diversity programs in place to support LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff" (Preston & Hoffman, 2015, p. 65). In analyzing the Traditional White Institution, scholars have noted that colleges and universities "continue to operate in a system that has historical and contextual connections to traditional hierarchies of racialized oppression," further marginalizing and excluding students of color, despite diversity programs and initiatives intended to promote diversity and inclusion (Iverson, 2007; Preston & Hoffman, 2015, p. 65).

Colleges and universities uphold the tenets of the Traditionally Heterogendered Institution by viewing all LGBTQ identities as uniform, failing to create spaces for a range of LGBTQ identities to allow students with multiple intersecting identities to exist as their whole selves, despite their efforts at LGBTQ inclusion (Preston & Hoffman, 2015). Analyzing the ways that colleges and universities have "historically been shaped by and for cisgender, straight individuals" (Pryor, 2017, p. 4) helps to explicate how LGBTQ campus resources and diversity initiatives continue to uphold heterosexism, and by extension, monosexism, excluding bisexual students.

While it is understandable why colleges and universities use broad categories, such as "students of color" or "LGBTQ students," to categorize underrepresented populations on campus, that cannot be the lens through which academic and student

66

affairs professionals support students on campus. Rethinking how students on campus are relabeled for the purposes of administrative fluence and creating more granularity that allows students to bring their "whole self" to every space on campus is critical in understanding bisexual students' multiple identities, challenges, and needs.

Increasing Bisexual Visibility

Bisexuality was largely underrepresented or completely unrepresented within most LGBTQ spaces participants were involved in. Programming around the needs of a monolithic LGBTQ identity further marginalizes bisexual students within spaces intended to be inclusive of them. Using a narrow lens of understanding LGBTQ identity homogenizes their experiences by flattening their differences, ignoring the ways LGBTQ people are marginalized within the community along other axes of oppression. Westbrook's study on gender-blind organizing within LGBTQ spaces found that failing to include women in their programmatic efforts inhibited women from taking advantage of those spaces (2009). "Providing resources without attention to how a [particular identity] could be (unintentionally) excluded from using them" (Westbrook, 2009, p. 379) deters bisexual students from utilizing LGBTQ spaces, and finding an LGBTQ community on campus. Centering programs and resources in ways that exclude bisexual students contributes to feelings of invisibility, discouraging them from being involved. Participants' main source of burnout stemmed from a sense of responsibility for combatting their own invisibility. LGBTQ centers and organizations promoting bisexual visibility takes the responsibility off of bisexual students to represent themselves. Examples could include incorporating bisexual-specific education in SafeZone and ally

trainings, hosting educational programs, panels, and presentations on bisexuality, incorporating bisexual flags along with rainbow flags in physical LGBTQ spaces, and "Out and Proud" lists that allow for students to identify openly bisexual-identifying students, faculty, and staff.

Challenging Biphobia within LGBTQ Spaces

Every participant experienced biphobia to some degree within LGBTQ spaces on campus, ranging from subtle and unintentional microaggressions to explicitly biphobic comments and ideas, most of which went unchecked. Failing to hold students accountable for the biphobia they perpetuate creates a culture within LGBTQ spaces in which biphobia is deemed permissible and tolerated. Student affairs professionals must commit to advocating for bisexual students in the midst of biphobia within LGBTQ spaces by: (1) educating students, faculty, and staff on biphobia, what biphobia looks like, and how biphobia is harmful to bisexual students who frequent LGBTQ spaces, (2) identifying and challenging biphobic rhetoric from students, faculty, and staff within these spaces, whether intentional or unintentional, and (3) holding students, faculty, and staff who continuously promote biphobic rhetoric within these spaces accountable by taking actions that may result in being prohibited from participating in those spaces. Committing to these practices reinforces that LGBTQ spaces are in fact inclusive and affirming of bisexual students' identities, and that LGBTQ spaces refuse to tolerate actions, comments, and ideas within that space that do not align with that commitment.

Supporting Bisexual-specific Groups and Organizations

Several participants reported disengaging from LGBTQ activism and certain LGBTQ spaces, and often found or created new spaces as a result. Bisexual people report feeling the most comfortable in bisexual-specific spaces (Burleson, 2012) and express a desire to find community with people "like themselves" (Westbrook, 2009, p. 378). For example, Morgan's experience feeling dismissed and devalued when their LGBTQ center's Director refused to support their bisexual organization exemplifies how important it is for student affairs professionals to validate spaces created to resist monosexism and provide a safe space free of biphobia. Academic and student affairs professionals need to listen to bisexual students and their needs, provide, encourage, and promote the opportunity to have bisexual-specific groups and organizations, and offer them an equal amount of support as they would any other LGBTQ group or organization.

Understanding Bisexual Students' Identities Beyond Just Sexuality

Participants understood their bisexuality through multiple lenses, as many held other identities that impacted the ways they experienced biphobia. Queer theory examines heteronormativity and its relationship not only with sexuality and gender, but other forms of identity as well (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Jones, 2013). Therefore, it is not enough to generalize all bisexual students' needs, as other identities they may hold add nuance to the ways in which student affairs professionals should support them. Similarly, transgender and nonbinary participants also felt that their gender identities complicated their bisexual identity and their ability to fit within LGBTQ spaces on campus (Beemyn, 2003). Student affairs professionals must not fall into the same trap of homogenizing

bisexual students the way LGBTQ students often are. Understanding intersectionality, and how racism, sexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and other systems or oppression are interlocked and connected, is critical in supporting bisexual students who hold a variety of other identities that complicate the way they experience biphobia. Additionally, being conscious of and making a commitment to identify and challenge racism, sexism, heterosexism and monosexism, cissexism, and other systems of oppression makes LGBTQ spaces safer, more inclusive, and more affirming for *more* than just bisexual students, but *all* LGBTQ students and *all* of their identities.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. First, while nine participants is sufficient for phenomenological research (Polkinghorne, 1989), this sample is not large enough to generalize all bisexual students activists' experiences within LGBTQ spaces on campus. A larger mixed methods study would provide more generalizability, as well as a larger variety of student voices in order to assess how common biphobia is within LGBTQ spaces.

Second, this study focuses particularly on bisexual student activists' experiences within LGBTQ spaces on campus, so bisexual students who were not actively involved with LGBTQ spaces or did not identify as activists were excluded. Upon reflection, this narrowly tailored sample criteria excluded the experiences of bisexual students who were not involved with LGBTQ spaces and the biphobia they may have experienced in other spaces on campus. Bisexual students may not have access to LGBTQ-specific spaces on their campus, may be engaged in LGBTQ activism in other identity-based organizations

70

that they do not consider "LGBTQ spaces," or either choose not to engage in, or completely disengaged from, LGBTQ spaces for their own reasons. Including these bisexual students may have provided insight on the extent that they experienced biphobia within other contexts, and provided context for why they were not more involved in LGBTQ spaces on campus specifically.

Third, participants were from a variety of geographic contexts throughout the United States. A sample over such a wide geographical area inhibits the ability to examine cultural context and how that impacts bisexual student activists' experiences within LGBTQ spaces on specific campuses in specific places. Focusing on universities in a particular state or region would have allowed me to gain an understanding of how culture, political climate, and demographics of that particular state or region influence the extent that bisexual student activists experience biphobia within LGBTQ spaces.

Fourth, the diversity of the sample was lacking in several areas. Despite my efforts to attract a racially diverse sample, it was still predominantly white. It was not until I realized that only 40 out of 185 participants (21.6%), who completed the pre-screening survey identified as people of color, and only five (5.5%) identified specifically as Black or African American, that I employed purposeful sampling to recruit students of color. Considering that bisexual people of color are commonly absent from existing research on bisexuality, purposeful sampling from the beginning of the recruitment process would have allowed for a more intentional sample with more racial and ethnic diversity. Additionally, participants' ages ranged from 20 to 24, all identifying as traditional college students who went to college immediately after high school. Although

beyond the scope of this thesis, it would be interesting to examine the extent that non-traditional bisexual college students engage in LGBTQ spaces and their experiences within those spaces.

Lastly, although applying the term "limitation" to this final point is severe, my own bisexual identity as both person and researcher may have impacted this study. Most participants were gathered through a digital flyer that I shared from my personal Twitter page, on which I very openly identify as bisexual. Additionally, the two people I recruited through purposeful sampling learned I was bisexual from the person who recruited them. Throughout interviews, many participants seemed to assume that I shared similar experiences, often ending their statements with phrases such as "ya know what I mean?" Participants may have felt more comfortable sharing their stories with someone who identified as bisexual rather than someone who identified as gay or lesbian.

Implications for Future Research

As discussed in chapter one, researchers are starting to understand bisexual people's unique experiences (Johnson, 2016; Mulick & Wright, 2011; Roberts et al., 2015). A greater emphasis on how bisexual people understand and make sense of their own identities in the context of monosexism and heteronormativity, rather than how others perceive the validity of bisexuality, is important in centering their voices to amplify their own experiences. Additionally, further research on bisexual student activists' experiences within LGBTQ spaces may provide additional context to understand the relationship between bisexual student activists' disengagement from, or

unwillingness to engage with LGBTQ spaces, and the biphobia they may experience in these spaces.

In regard to the scholarship around bisexual people and mental health, I briefly mentioned in Chapter Two the dangers of pathologizing bisexuality. More intentional mixed-methods studies that examine bisexual people's mental health and their stressors provides opportunity to examine the extent that their bisexual identity specifically contributes to their understanding of their mental health.

Research on bisexual peoples' experiences within LGBTQ spaces must also unpack the role that activist burnout plays in their disengagement from these spaces. In order to move toward a more heterogeneous understanding of LGBTQ students, research disaggregating bisexual students allows for a better understanding of their experiences, challenges, and needs within LGBTQ spaces on campus. This provides academic and student affairs professionals a framework in which they can inform the way they support bisexual students.

CONCLUSION

This study began with a personal interest in examining (1) bisexual activists' level of comfort identifying as bisexual within LGBTQ spaces on campus, (2) the ways, if any, that bisexual activists are marginalized and/or excluded within LGBTQ spaces on campus, and (3) how these experiences impact their understanding of their bisexual identity, as well as their involvement and engagement within LGBTQ spaces on campus.

Nine bisexual student activists who were engaged in LGBTQ spaces on campus shared their experiences within LGBTQ spaces on campus. From their stories, several themes emerged that captured the essence of the biphobia they experienced, and the ways it impacted them. Each participant experienced biphobia to some extent within the LGBTQ spaces in which they were involved. Participants shared that bisexuality was invisible, bisexual students were marginalized, and bisexual voices and experiences were policed in and excluded from LGBTQ spaces. Each participant reported that biphobia had a negative impact on them to some extent. Participants were constantly shifting the ways they performed their identities in an effort to negotiate their desire to be accepted and their desire to feel authentic. Participants experienced negative impacts on their understanding of their bisexual identity, often feeling discomfort openly identifying as bisexual and contributing to internalized biphobia.

Participants' ability to be involved in LGBTQ spaces to the extent that they wanted to was also negatively impacted. Each participant experienced at least one component of burnout. Participants described feeling exhausted, often separated

themselves from the LGBTQ spaces they were involved in, and felt unaccomplished and inefficient in the activist work they were doing. Their burnout was a combination of biphobia and their overcommittment to activism that often stemmed from combatting the biphobia they were experiencing, and often lead them to disengage from LGBTQ spaces. Participants were often conflicted about engaging in self-care at the expense of their sense of responsibility to remain committed to LGBTQ activism.

In addition to biphobia, other forms of marginalization were common within LGBTQ spaces, including racism, sexism, and transphobia. Participants all noted that their other identities influenced the ways they experienced biphobia within LGBTQ spaces. Participants of color often struggled finding spaces on campus that understood both their racial and bisexual identity. Participants' experiences closely aligned with the gendered implications of biphobia documented in previous research, with masculinity and femininity heavily impacting the ways participants experienced biphobia. Additionally, instances of sexism among men within LGBTQ spaces was common. Lastly, participants who identified as transgender, genderqueer, and nonbinary described instances of subtle transphobia.

Though this study has several legitimate limitations with regard to conceptualization, the study did contribute to a growing body of knowledge about bisexual students and their experiences on campus. I did find that biphobia was very common within LGBTQ spaces on campus, which had negative impacts on participants' understandings of their own bisexual identity, as well as their ability to be engaged and involved in LGBTQ spaces on campus. Based on this finding, and my desire to serve the

larger community, I provided several recommendations, ranging from structural change such as reconceptualizing monosexism and combatting the Traditionally Heterogendered Institution, to changes implementable by academic and student affairs professionals such as increasing bisexual visibility, challenging biphobia within LGBTQ spaces, supporting bisexual-specific spaces, and understanding bisexual students' identities beyond just sexuality. As such, this work can be utilized, hopefully, to move forward the conversation about bisexual activists' unique challenges on campus, particularly within LGBTQ spaces, and serve as a framework to provide a more adequate understanding of how best to support bisexual students.

Participant Recruitment Flyer

Do you identify as a person who experiences attraction to more than one gender, such as bisexual, pansexual, polysexual, fluid, or queer?

Are you a current undergraduate student activist inolved in at least one student organization working for social change and equality for LGBTQ students on campus?

IF YES,

you are eligible to participate in an interview about the challenges that bi+ students experience participating in LGBTQ spaces on campus.

If you are interested in participating,
please complete this five minute demographic survey:
goo.gl/1LiH4m

If you are selected to participate, the interview will take about one hour. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the study investigator, Jayna Tavarez, at jtavarezbiresearch@gmail.com

APPENDIX B

<u>Informed Consent</u>

Research Procedures

This research is being conducted by Dr. Angela Hattery and Jayna Tavarez at George Mason University. The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges that bi+ activists experience within LGBTQ student organizations on campus. If you agree to participate, you will first be asked to complete the demographic survey below, which will take less than five minutes to complete. If selected as a participant, you will have the opportunity to participate in an interview that will take approximately an hour. With your permission, I will audiotape the interview. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide, and will be used for transcription purposes only. If you choose to be audiotaped, I will transcribe the interviews, and interview transcripts will be sent to you to read and clarify anything if necessary. If you choose not to be audiotaped, I will take notes instead, and those notes will be sent to you to read and clarify anything if necessary. If you agree to being audiotaped but feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, I can turn off the recorder at your request. You may also stop the interview at any time. During the interview, you will be asked about your LGBTQ activism on campus, your experiences as a bisexual person on campus, the challenges you have experienced as a bisexual person, and how you sustain yourself and engage in self-care.

Risks

There are minimal risks associated with this study, although I am asking you to share some personal and confidential information about your experiences. You do not have to answer any questions you are uncomfortable answering, and you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time for any reason.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to you other than to contribute to research around the challenges bisexual student activists experience on college campuses.

Confidentiality

The data in this study will be kept confidential. Interview transcripts will be locked on a password-protected computer in my office at George Mason University. While it is understood that no computer transmission can be perfectly secure, reasonable efforts will

be made to protect the confidentiality of your transmission. A pseudonym will be chosen for you after transcription and your college/university will not be named in order to protect your identity. Only Dr. Hattery and I will have access to your name and email address that are collected for interview contact.

Participation

You must be 18 or older to participate. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. There is no penalty for not participating in this study. There are no costs to you or any other party.

Contact

This research is being conducted by Dr. Angela Hattery and Jayna Tavarez at George Mason University. Dr. Hattery may be reached at ahattery@gmu.edu and Ms. Tavarez may be reached at jtavare3@gmu.edu for questions or to report a research-related problem. You may contact the George Mason University Institutional Review Board office at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

APPENDIX C

Pre-screening Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this short demographic survey. This section is intended to collect demographic information from interested participants. We will not use any of the information you provide us to identify you in the study. You are free to withdraw from this any time.

1. How do you describe your sexual and/or romantic orientation?
2. How do you describe your gender identity?
3. How do you define your racial and/or ethnic identity?
4. How old are you?
5. What year are you (freshman, sophomore, etc.)? If you're a recent graduate, please specify when you graduated.
6. Where are you currently enrolled as a student? (Note: Your institution will be kept confidential and will not be linked to your interview.)
7. How long have you been/were you involved in LGBTQ activism on campus?
8. How many hours per week on average would you estimate you spend on activism?
9. Please briefly describe any challenges you have experienced as a bisexual student activist on campus.
10. If you would still like to participate in the interview process, please insert the email you would like to be contacted at.

Thank you!

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Part 1: Background

1. Talk a little bit about the LGBTQ activism you do.

    a. Are there particular LGBTQ issues on which you focus most intently? Why are these issues particularly important to you?

    b. Can you describe some of the work that the LGBTQ organizations on your campus do? (Prompt with: Educational? Direct action? Social?)

    c. What forms does your activism tend to take within the organizations you're involved in? (Prompt with: "Protests? Demonstrations? Educational campaigns? Teach-ins? Direct action?")

2. How did you initially get involved in doing LGBTQ activism?

    a. Were you involved in LGBTQ activism before getting to college or did you first become involved in activism during college?

    b. What do you think made you want to take action when many people know homophobia exists but don't take action? What is it about you that made you feel like you needed to get involved in creating change?

    c. What keeps you involved in your activist work? What drives you to do it now? Where does your commitment come from?

Part 2: Biphobia

1. To what extent do you feel like your identity is represented in the programming done by the LGBTQ organizations on campus?

2. To what extent do you feel comfortable identifying as bisexual in the LGBTQ organizations on campus?

3. In what ways do you feel like your bisexual identity affects how non-bisexual people in the LGBTQ community on campus see and/or treat you?

    a. How has it affected your experience as a student?

    b. What impact do you believe it has had on your ability to effectively engage in LGBTQ work?

    c. Has it had any impact on your life outside of your activism?

4. Have you witnessed or experienced racism, sexism, or other forms of oppression or bias within the LGBTQ student organizations on campus?

a. Do you feel that any of your other identities affect how people in the LGBTQ community on campus see/treat you?

b. FOR ACTIVISTS OF COLOR: What have been your experiences working with white LGBTQ activists?

Part 3: Impact on Wellbeing

1. Has your participation in activism had any sort of negative impact on your well-being? (Prompt with: "Your psychological or emotional well-being? Your physical well-being?") If so, how, specifically, has it affected you?

    a. To what extent are these negative impacts on your wellbeing specifically related to the ways your bisexual identity affects how nonbisexual people within the LGBTQ organizations on campus see/treat you?

2. Has the impact on your well-being ever caused you to scale back or disengage from activism at least temporarily?

Part 4: Activist Sustainability

1. Given the challenges that you face as an activist, what helps keep you going?

2. How do you attend to your own well-being as it relates to your LGBTQ activism? Have any self-care strategies made you a better activist? If so, how?

3. What benefits would you say you derive from your participation in LGBTQ activism? (Academic benefits? Psychological or emotional benefits? Social benefits? Professional benefits? Other benefits?)

4. Have you ever had mentoring or training on how to cope with the emotional, physical, and psychological toll that doing LGBTQ activism can take on activists?

    a. If so, what was the nature of the mentoring or training? Has it been effective?

    b. If you could attend a workshop on how to sustain yourself as an activist, what would be helpful to learn at that workshop?

5. What do you know now that you wish you knew back when you first started getting involved in LGBTQ activism on campus?

6. Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

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BIOGRAPHY

Jayna Tavarez graduated from George Mason University in 2016 with a degree in Integrative Studies with a concentration in Social Justice and Human Rights with a minor in English. As an aspiring student affairs professional, she has worked in multiple University Life departments at George Mason, including Housing and Residence Life, LGBTQ Resources, and Career Services, and is the current Vice President for the Graduate and Professional Student Association (GAPSA). Jayna's research interests include the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality particularly in the context of college student development and higher education. She hopes to one day pursue a doctoral degree in order to continue amplifying the voices of underrepresented college students.