

**Holding Multiple Identities: A Phenomenological Look at Intersectionality and Identity
Conflict for Bisexual Black Women**

Elizabeth Fynn

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of

The Chicago School of Professional Psychology

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology

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Dedication

"The most disrespected person in America is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman." -

Malcolm X

To Black women.

May we be given space to express our anger. Our sorrow. Our pain.

May we be taken care of like we take care of everyone else.

May we live radically by cultivating peace, ease, and genuine joy.

To queer Black women.

I hope this gives us the voice we have never had.

I did this for you.

I did this for me.

For us.

Abstract

Identity can be discussed in a number of contexts (McLean & Syed, 2015). There is a scarcity of research that explores the intersectional development of identities. Most research focuses on one aspect of identity with little exploration of other parts of one's identity. However, there are several factors that influence identity and its development. Though there has been more research that focuses on the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community, it rarely focuses on bisexual people, and it is even more rare for there to be a focus on the experiences of Black women that are bisexual. The present study aimed to explore the experience of holding multiple identities for cisgender bisexual Black women. Therefore, the research was done from an intersectional lens by considering all parts of participants' identities. Transcendental phenomenology was used to analyze semi-structured interviews of four bisexual Black women. Analysis of transcribed interviews revealed five common themes: Family, Ridicule and Jokes, Bi-negativity, Religion and Church, and Self-Pride. Clinical implications include a need for clinicians to explore the complicated and invisible nature of what it means to be a cisgender bisexual Black woman, assess clients' identity formation, and sources of conflict that might occur due to holding several identities. Ultimately, these participants revealed the importance of pride in their intersections and all of the ways in which they interact.

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Chapter 1: Nature of the Study

Background

The concept of identity can be defined in a multitude of ways. It can also be described from several contexts such as racial identity, sexual orientation, and religion (McLean & Syed, 2015). Despite this subject being well-researched, there lacks a consensus on how identity is defined and what constitutes as a well-developed identity in various contexts (McLean & Syed, 2015). Both racial and sexual identity development have been explored but there is a dearth of research that addresses the intersection of these processes and how they these identities might experience conflict in their formation. Even though it holds true that culture influences the development of identity, there does not seem to be much focus on the various ways that culture and/or racial identity interacts with sexual identity. This is particularly true for cisgender bisexual Black women (Collins, 2004).

Society, as a whole, places expectations on women but these expectations are manifested in different ways for different cultures. For Black women, the role is to help take care of the household, raise children, and act as a pillar and backbone for the African American community. When a Black woman identifies as lesbian or bisexual, it is seen as stepping outside of those roles and expectations (Greene, 2000). Additionally, the African American community's perceptions of bisexuality are not generally positive or affirming for those in the community that identify as such (Bates, 2010). This combination of societal expectations and negative attitudes towards bisexuality in the Black community can make it difficult for cisgender bisexual Black women to balance and hold their multiple identities. There is a notable lack of research on how Black women navigate holding multiple identities, a necessary step in determining how to

present oneself to the dominant culture and within one's own cultures (Greene, 2000; Henderson, 2009).

Often, LGBTQ+-identified Black people are faced with being forced to choose between racial identity and sexual identity. These messages typically come from heterosexual-identified Black people who voice a need for queer Black people to either choose caring about racism and raced-based discrimination or choose nothing at all (Greene, 1994; Greene, 2000). This likely comes from the notion that alliance with non-heteronormative attractions is a dismissal or rejection of one's Black identity. These ideas are also based on afro-centric notions that heterosexuality is the only sexual identity worthy of acknowledgment. In all, identity development is a complex experience for those that hold several marginalized identities. As described above, these identities and their combinations can be experienced differently due to several factors. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge that a queer-identified Black person is both Black and queer. There is no choosing between one identity over the other when one lives their life authentically.

The lives of cisgender, bisexual, Black women are influenced by several distinct factors that all intersect to create unique experiences in their lives. These concepts include bisexual identity development, racial identity development, gender role expectations for Black women, and African American opinions and perspectives on bisexuality and queer identities. All these factors work together to create a story and a place in society for Black women who identify as lesbian or bisexual (Greene, 1994). A unique form of oppression that bisexual individuals experience is bi-negativity, which can be described as discrimination towards bisexual people from both heterosexual people and those who identify as gay or lesbian (Morrison et al., 2019). This experience is marked by pervasive negative beliefs about bisexuality (Israel & Mohr, 2004).

For the current study, the phenomenon of multiple identities for cisgender Black bisexual women will be examined through an intersectionality lens. This framework focuses on the multiple oppressions that people experience due to the identities that they hold. The concept of intersectionality is vital in guiding this study because it highlights the fact that holding more than one stigmatized identity can result in experiences of oppression and discrimination from more than one aspect of life (Crenshaw, 1989). It is important to examine multiple identities from this lens because it allows the ability to explore more than one identity at the same time in addition to the stigma and oppression that is attached to holding more than one identity outside of the dominant culture (Abes et al., 2007; Bilge, 2010; Collins, 2000). Additionally, using the intersectionality lens provides the ability to explore how much they might shape each other.

Problem Statement

There is a scarcity of research that focuses on the voices and experiences of cisgender, bisexual, Black women, despite this group being at an increased risk to experience more discrimination and oppression from the dominant culture (Greene, 2000). Even though research has found that LGBT people of color have more opportunities to face discrimination and oppression, there is rarely a focus on factors that exacerbate facets of oppression. Nor is there much focus on these factors from the perspective of the marginalized groups.

The interaction of racial, sexual, and gender identities plays a large role in how people's identities develop. The internal conflict that occurs when coming to terms with one's sexuality can be both exciting and overwhelming. This conflict is likely increased for those that identify as Black, or African American and may be exploring their sexuality. Within the African American community, there are messages of heterosexism that are emphasized and expected. These messages cause confusion and conflict for those that deviate from that trajectory. This is

particularly true for those who identify as bisexual because there is a feeling of not fully being accepted by heterosexuals, nor those with monosexual same-sex attraction. Once an individual begins to feel like they may not be heterosexual, they might also experience internal conflict that comes from the messages they hear from the dominant culture (Greene, 1994).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide insight on the experiences of cisgender women holding multiple stigmatized identities of being Black, bisexual, and women. Many identity development models do not discuss how one's various identities interact to form life experiences and worldviews (Floro, 2018). Racial identity and sexual identity develop in tandem, not in isolation (Kim & Epstein, 2018) and providing a space for that development to be researched and discussed is important in creating understanding in how multiple identities are held and what identity conflicts occur for bisexual Black women. The stories and experiences of these women will be collected through interviews in order to capture the essence of this group's dual identities.

Research Questions

The main research question for this study is: What is it the experience of holding multiple identities for cisgender bisexual Black women?

1. How does being a cisgender bisexual Black woman within the Black American community affect identity development?
2. Do cisgender bisexual Black women experience identity conflict as a result of holding multiple identities?
 - a. Is there a pressure to choose one identity over the other?
 - b. How is this conflict resolved?

3. How has the interaction of racial identity and sexual identity influenced cisgender bisexual Black women's acceptance of their multiple identities?
4. How have the Black community's attitudes towards bisexuality influenced cisgender bisexual Black women's sexual identity development?

Conceptual Framework

Phenomenology, specifically transcendental phenomenology, was used to conduct research to capture the essence of the experiences of cisgender bisexual Black women. This type of research aims to describe the lived experiences of a group of people that share a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This approach provides the ability to reveal what is it like to identify as queer, African American, and female and how the intersection of these identities affects one's worldview and approach to the world. Research for this study is grounded in intersectionality theory and focuses on the experiences of typically stigmatized groups. This theory emphasizes the experiences of people who identify with more than one stigmatized group and how that influences the way that society treats these groups (Carbado et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality brings light to the unique struggles that intersecting identities experience so that there is awareness in their multifaceted oppression.

Scope of the Study

This study focused on the experiences of self-identified cisgender bisexual Black women. The term bisexual was determined and defined by each participant. However, in the context of the current study it will mostly refer to those who have attraction to more than one gender. The participants range in age from 31-40. However, the study was open to those 22 years and older in order to gain perspectives from adult women who have held their identities for a substantial enough time to provide details of their experience. Additionally, research has shown that those

that identify as bisexual tend to come out later than others on the LGBT+ spectrum (Gates, 2010; Martos et al., 2015).

Definitions of Key Terms

African American- any person whose lineage falls under the African diaspora and identifies as such.

Bisexual- the participant-identified phenomenon of experiencing attraction to more than one gender, typically in the context of males and females but does not negate attraction to those who may be gender-neutral, fluid, or nonbinary as well.

Black- this term refers to ways that people of African lineage may choose to identify themselves.

Black American- an additional term that may be used to refer to those who come from the African diaspora and choose to identify as a Black American.

Queer- at times this term will be used as an umbrella term that will encapsulate all identities who fall under that LGBTQ+ category.

Women- in the context of the current study, it is important to keep in mind that it will focus on the experiences of cisgender women.

Significance of the Study

The information that was collected and analyzed in this study will provide a voice for cisgender Black women in the LGBT+ community, specifically a voice for bisexual women, a population that is often conflated and combined with the rest of the LGBT+ spectrum (Weinberg et al., 1994). This study is meant to provide insight on the experiences of bisexual Black women and how their race and gender interact with their sexual minority status. This information can be helpful for clinicians who are working with this population to provide more comprehensive and

supportive services. This study will also provide the field with a perspective that is not often discussed or acknowledged. Awareness of the oppressions and the processes that occur for cisgender, Black, bisexual women will guide the field of psychology with a deeper understanding for a group of people that is often overlooked.

Summary

Identity has been researched in various ways but the experiences of how identities interact and affect each other is rarely explored. For cisgender bisexual Black women, racial identity, culture, and sexual identity interact in a way unique manner. For this group, there is oppression and discrimination from the dominant culture that not only affects racial identity but also interacts to have a negative effect on how sexuality is viewed as well. Multiple identities and the experiences that come with this multiplicity can lead to identity conflict for those who are environments that are not encouraging or facilitating to either identity (Corsbie-Massay, 2017; Hamblin & Gross, 2013; Levy & Reeves, 2011). The current study examines the interaction of racial, sexual, and gender identity and how these intersections might work together to create experiences of identity conflict. The study will also examine ways in which this conflict is resolved and how these identities can come together and become synthesized for bisexual Black women. Chapter 2 will present literature related to identity development models, intersectionality, and a discussion on bisexuality and African American views on the identity. Chapter 3 will be a detailed discussion on methodology for this study. Chapter 4 is a deep dive discussion on the results of the study and Chapter 5 is a discussion of the overall study including limitations, reflections, and interpretation of findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will highlight the important concepts needed to better understand the experiences of cisgender bisexual Black women and how the intersection of their identities might lead to identity conflict. The important topics include identity development, intersectionality, and a discussion on the African American's attitudes towards bisexual identities. The purpose of this study is to provide a space for cisgender bisexual Black women to share their experiences and what it is like to hold dual identities of being Black and queer, specifically bisexual.

Identity Development Models

Social Identity

In order to understand the development of various parts of one's identity, it would be helpful to discuss an overarching model that encompasses one's identity in a societal context (Samuels, 2013). Hardiman and Jackson's (1997) social identity model explores the development of one's social group in reference to target groups and agents. Agents are typically dominant social groups that are generally accepted or viewed as the norm by society. For the United States this includes cisgender people, men, heterosexuals, and Caucasians. Target groups are generally groups that experience oppression and exploitation by society like people of color, those with low socioeconomic status, sexual minorities, and people with disabilities. This model provides an overview of how various identities develop from the perspective of stigmatized identities. The social identity model posits that identity develops in five stages that progressively develop as one is socialized and interacts with others. These stages can be applied to both agents and targets group. Additionally, these stages can be experienced at the same time depending on an individual's multiple identities. The current study will focus on the development of targets because it is about the intersectionality of several stigmatized identities.

The first stage of Hardiman and Jackson's model (1997) is called the Naïve Stage which is the state in which every person is born. This stage occurs before people fully understand their position in society. Children in this phase are not aware of the differences that occur between social groups. As children learn about differences and are socialized, they move on to the Acceptance Stage. This is the second stage of social identity development and can be experienced either actively or passively. The main difference between passivity or action in this stage is based on implicit or explicit belief systems. During this stage, an individual is compliant with ideals of the dominant group. People at this stage have accepted the ideologies of the dominant culture and are unlikely to acknowledge oppression of target groups. Additionally, at this stage, people normalize oppression and blame the traits of marginalized groups for their oppression.

In the third stage, Resistance, targets become aware of their oppression and resist the ideals of the dominant group, rejecting the ideals. This is another stage that can be experienced either actively or passively. In this stage, targets are able to identify the oppression that occurs throughout society. Redefinition is the fourth stage. In this stage, a person tries to discover their own identity outside of the dominant group's ideals. This stage is full of exploration and establishing oneself within their own ideal and beliefs. The fifth and last stage is called Internalization. This is when a person has developed a strong sense of self and is able to build relationships with others to address and acknowledge the oppression that the target group faces.

This theory is an integral way of looking at an individual's various master statuses. Intersecting master statuses may develop at different times, so it is helpful to look at identity development from this point of view. It provides a wider and more comprehensive scope of the development of identities and how they may interact for people with multiple stigmatized master

statuses. In the context of the coming out process, a person of color may be in one phase as far as their ethnic group but in a completely different stage as far as their sexual identity. This theory allows for a general and more broad view on the development and progression of various identities and master statuses.

Racial/ Cultural Identity Development

Although Hardiman and Jackson's (1997) social identity development model provides an overview of one's identity based on oppression, it does not explore what racial identity development looks like. Sue and Sue's (2013) racial/cultural identity development (R/CID) model was developed in order to help therapists understand the attitudes and behaviors of culturally diverse clients. This model focuses on the ideals of ethnic minorities as they understand themselves in context of their own culture, the dominant culture, and the oppression that occurs because of the two. Each phase of the R/CID model describes the attitudes and beliefs that a person of color feels about themselves, others of the same ethnicity, people of other ethnic backgrounds, and the dominant culture. These beliefs and attitudes influence each phase of this model and the way in which a person thinks about themselves and dominant culture.

The first stage of Sue and Sue's (2013) model is Conformity. This stage is characterized by a person of color absorbing the racist messages of the dominant culture. Individuals in this phase relate most closely to white culture and because of this, their attitudes and beliefs about themselves are self-depreciating via negative perceptions of physical features that are prominent for their ethnicity. The same can be said for their attitudes and beliefs about others of the same ethnicity where they will most likely try to separate themselves from others who are ethnically similar to them. Additionally, for those in the conformity stage, they are discriminatory to people who are in other ethnic groups as well. Because this stage is characterized with a desire to be

close to White culture, ethnic features and actions that are similar to such are favored in other groups as well. Beliefs about the dominant culture are based on their perceived superiority and are marked with admiration and attempts to be close to White culture by changing one's appearance and acting similar to what society believes the dominant culture acts like.

The second stage of this model is called Dissonance. According to Sue and Sue (2013), transition into this stage is usually progressive and gradual; although at times, a person can be catapulted into this stage if they are faced with a monumental event that brings racism and oppression to their forefront. The main characteristic of this stage is conflict between current views from the previous stage and developing views about the racism and the decreased belief in superiority of the dominant culture. Attitudes and beliefs about oneself in this stage are marked with contention between self-depreciation and newfound self-appreciation. Those who are in Dissonance begin to feel more self-pride in their ethnicity but also feel conflict due to a desire to hold on to old values. This is the case for attitudes and beliefs about those in the same ethnic group and those from different ethnic backgrounds as well. This oscillation between positive values and old views manifests itself in questioning racism and discrimination while struggling to understand the change of perspective. Individuals in this stage question their superior beliefs about the dominant culture and become more aware that White culture is not the only culture one can relate to.

The third stage, Resistance and Immersion, can be described with three main feelings: guilt, shame, and anger. The guilt and shame come from past perceptions and how they contributed to the oppressive systems of society and the anger comes from experiences of racism and oppression. Anger stems allowing oneself to hold the same derogatory values as the dominant culture as well. Progression into this stage occurs once the conflict that occurred in the

prior stage has been solved and there is deeper understanding of racism, oppression, and discrimination. Transition into the Resistance and Immersion stage continues as individuals begin to question why people feel ashamed of themselves and their culture. Attitudes and beliefs about oneself and others in their ethnic group are centralized to self-appreciation and ethnic group appreciation as well. Individuals in this phase are dedicated to learning about themselves and their culture while developing a strong sense of identification and commitment to their racial group. Furthermore, there is conflict of empathy towards other ethnic groups and strong feelings of a desire to continue to judge those from other racial groups. The dominant culture is depreciated and individuals in this stage completely withdraw from the values and culture of White society.

Following the third stage comes Introspection. According to Sue and Sue (2013), there are two main influences that aid in transition to Introspection: the realization of exhaustion that comes from such deep resistance of dominant culture and discomfort in the rigid and inflexible own group views that developed during the previous phase. During this phase, attitudes and beliefs about their blind acceptance of group views in the previous stage translates to self-reflection and exploration of autonomy of their own values. Positive attitudes about their own group values and views are still upheld but there is questioning about more rigid views that do not match personal attitudes. Beliefs about other ethnic groups transition from culturocentrism to a desire to learn more about the oppressions that others have experienced and how they have overcome it. Attitudes towards the dominant culture shift from complete resistance to a realization that some ideals can be useful to hold onto. Anger towards White culture decreases and is replaced with a desire to determine what values are acceptable and make sense. A person

in this phase is moving towards acceptance of themselves and acceptance of useful values of the dominant culture.

The last stage of the R/CID model is Integrative Awareness. Those in this phase have reached a point of security in their ethnic identity. They have learned how to balance their own views with their ethnic group views and dominant, White culture. For these individuals, there is a commitment to decreasing all forms of oppression, racism, and discrimination. Attitudes and beliefs about oneself are now positive, with a strong sense of self-worth and confidence. These individuals have been able to develop positive self-concept that integrates racial pride and autonomy as a person of an ethnic group. In the Integrative Awareness phase, people have developed an appreciation for their ethnic group and all of their values, but it is not done in excess. Beliefs and attitudes about other racial groups are based on appreciation as well. These individuals are able to reach out and learn more about other groups to deepen their own understanding of oppressions to different groups. As far as thoughts about the dominant group, this phase is characterized with selective trust of those who are actively trying to remove racism. There is no longer an aversion to White culture but a more acceptance of those who have demonstrated that they do not wish to uphold oppressive systems.

Hardiman and Jackson's (1997) and Sue and Sue's (2013) models of identity development provide guidelines on the process of developing one's identity in the context of general oppression. The social identity development model focuses on marginalized identities as a whole and the racial/cultural identity development model focuses on the identities of ethnic minorities. While these models do provide insight on the development of identity in the context of oppression, neither highlights the specific process for those who identify as Black. This distinction is particularly important because of the high levels of oppression and exploitation that

African Americans experience throughout society, especially compared to other ethnic groups in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Black Identity Development

One of the earliest models for Black identity development was created by William Cross (1971). Cross's nigrescence model is a series of five stages that depicts African American's transition from self-hatred to self-acceptance. The term nigrescence has Latin roots and can be defined as a process of becoming Black or developing racial identity (Cross, 1994). It was one of the first models that focused on the development of identity for African Americans (Sullivan et al., 2012). Approximately 20 years later, Cross expanded on that model to create a more comprehensive paradigm for the development of Black identity (Cross, 1991). The following summary will combine Cross' original and revised versions of the nigrescence model.

In the updated version of this model, self-concept consists of personal identity and reference group orientation instead of racial preference being an indication of one's mental health functioning (Vandiver et al., 2002). Personal identity is based on personality traits and reference group orientation refers to social group membership such as race, gender, sexual orientation, or any other social group affiliation. The difference between these concepts is that personal identity is a person's feeling of individuality and reference group orientation is a person's preference of their social association. The revised model states that personal identity plays a minor role in Black identity whereas reference group orientation is based on the importance, or salience, and valence of one's race. Consequently, Black people can view race in several ways: no importance with neutral valence, high importance with positive valence, or high importance with negative valence.

The first stage of Cross' Black identity model is Pre-Encounter. In this stage, African Americans believe the values and sentiments of the White dominant culture. People in the pre-encounter stage have low-esteem and negative feelings about other Black people and because of such, Black people have a strong desire to be as assimilated to White culture as possible. The revised version characterizes this stage with two identities: assimilation and anti-Black (Cross, 1991). Assimilation indicates a pro-American reference group orientation with race having little salience for them. Anti-Black individuals are marked by miseducation from negative stereotypes and self-hatred that comes from negative feelings for being African American.

Upon experiencing a noteworthy event that makes a person aware of discrimination due to their race, they progress to the Encounter Stage. This stage is experienced in two phases where they first might be faced with a major event that brings awareness of their differences then begin to reframe their thoughts on their own culture and the dominant White culture. They are forced to recognize that their race has detrimental effects on their life as an American. Sullivan et al. (2012) describes this stage as "a pivot point between the Pre-Encounter and Immersion/Emersion stages" (p. 26). Cross reworked the revised version to refer to a Black person's reexamination of their reference group orientation once they are faced with a life-changing experience. If this event affects a person intensely enough, one moves to the third stage, Immersion/Emersion.

The original theory proposes that this stage happens in two parts with Immersion being the beginning. People who are in Immersion, immerse themselves into being Black by surrounding themselves by other Black people and Black culture. These actions are based on anti-whiteness and as a result there are still minimal positive thoughts about what it means to be African American. As time passes, and anger diminishes, a person transitions to Emersion. At this point, actions are based on a sense of Black pride as opposed to Anti-White sentiments.

Additions to this stage describe two contrasting identities: Intense Black Involvement and Anti-White Attitudes (Cross, 1991). An individual who identifies with Intense Black Involvement is similar to the original description of the immersion phase where the main goal is to surround oneself with Black people and Black culture. Those considered Anti-White vehemently reject everything aligned with dominant, White culture. The increased Black pride of the original model leads to the Internalization stage where a Black person becomes more comfortable with their identity and the discrimination that comes with being Black. In this stage, the feelings of conflict that arise from old views and new views come to a resolution.

Internalization-Commitment is the last stage of Black identity development. This is the stage that leads Black people to actively support Black causes through advocacy and a fight for social justice and change. The updated version of this model combines Internalization and Internalization-Commitment. This amalgamation of stages can be described as a transition from deeper self-acceptance to advocacy of African Americans and their civil rights within the same stage. The final stage of Black identity development model can result in one of three identities that are characterized by positive high race salience: Black Nationalist, Biculturalist, and Multiculturalist. The goal of Black Nationalists is to empower the Black community and do not seek to connect to or emphasize any other cultural identities. Biculturalist identities are characterized by two prominent traits: Black self-acceptance and a dynamic emphasis on one other cultural orientation such as gender, sexual orientation, or nationality. Multiculturalists also focus on two or more important and prominent cultural identities in addition to positive Black identity. The significant difference between Black Nationalists and the other two identities is the desire of the latter to build and development identities outside of their Black race.

This model demonstrates the stages that Black Americans process through as connection to Black identity increases. However, it does not discuss the influences that other aspects of one's identity may have on development such as gender and sexual identity. Additionally, it leaves out any positive family factors that can influence Black identity development such as encouragement to embrace identity. Overall, the nigrescence model explores identity development for Black Americans and the influence of self-concept in reference to one's own race and that of others.

Bisexual Identity Development

Most research conducted with sexual minorities has focused on gay men and lesbians. Cass (1979) developed one of the most well-known homosexual identity development models, but it did not provide insight on the development of bisexual identity, nor did it consider other factors such as race. Although there have been several models that were developed based on Cass's initial model, none of them further explore bisexual identity in as much detail and most of them are based on the experiences and development of those who identify as gay and lesbian. The next section will highlight several bisexual identity models and ways they are similar to and different from one another.

One of the earliest models created that focuses on bisexual identity was developed by Weinberg et al. (1994). This model consisted of four stages that described one's exploration of bisexual identity. The first stage, labeled Initial Confusion, focuses on one's confusion on who they are attracted to. People in this stage may find confusion in their same-sex attraction, their opposite-sex attraction after expressing same-sex attraction, or their attraction to both opposite- and same-sex individuals. An additional source of confusion stems from an inability to identify as either heterosexual or homosexual. The next stage of this model is Finding and Applying the

Label. In this stage, people either discover the term bisexual and apply it to themselves or realize that they truly can enjoy sex with both men and women and identify as bisexual. At times, people in this stage begin to identify as such at the encouragement of people in their lives.

The third stage of the Weinberg et al. (1994) bisexual identity model is Settling into the Identity. People are more comfortable and self-accepting of their bisexual identity at this phase. They are not as apprehensive to self-identify as bisexual and are less concerned with others' perceptions of their sexuality. This established self-acceptance usually is influenced by the support of loved ones. The last stage is labeled as Continued Uncertainty. This final stage is marked by uncertainty in their sexual identity. This doubt typically comes from lack of support from heterosexual and same-sex attracted peers. Many people at this stage experience self-doubt because of the push to identify as either gay or straight.

While this model may be a start in exploring the development of bisexual identity, it does not address the complexities that make up development of one's identity. Even the researchers themselves critique their developmental model as "Very broad and somewhat simplified" (Weinberg et al., 1994, p. 37). Additionally, this model ends with bisexuality in a constant state of uncertainty where one never reaches a point of full acceptance of their sexuality. According to this model, bisexual people will always struggle with the urge to identify as either gay or straight. This is based on dominant culture that a bisexual person may never be fully accepting of themselves unless they identify as monosexual. The last stage of this model insinuates that bisexual people will continue to be uncertain of where they belong and how they truly identify instead of simply accepting their identity as someone that is bisexual.

A study conducted by Collins (2000) focused on the identity development process for people that have duality of their identities. The study focused on the experiences of people that

are both bisexual and biracial. The model emphasizes participants' views of themselves in the context of "other individuals, other groups, and/or their environment" (Collins, 2000, p. 232). The sample was 15 Japanese Americans between the ages of 20 and 40 recruited from the San Francisco area. With a grounded theory approach, information was collected through semi-structured interviews. Information from the interviews was gathered, analyzed, and applied to bisexual and biracial identity development to highlight the duality of the identities and the process that these groups reach a point of positive identities.

The study found that identity development occurs in four phases. Within these four phases, seven tenets were discovered. The first one is that Self-Definition is the key concept of the model. This self-definition is defined by the individual and is subjective, though it can be influenced by objective and external factors. The second tenet is that there are several influences like family, peers, and the sociopolitical environment. The third tenet is that biracial/bisexual identity is a personal construct that is individually tailored to fit a person's experiences and future state. The fourth tenet is that as an individual goes through life, external forces place the individual into different roles based on factors like sex, gender, class, sexuality, and race. Tenet five states that there will be changes in the self-definition and the self-definition will aid in positive identity. The sixth tenet states that social change is inevitable and not static. Because of such, a person will be faced with everchanging information. The seventh and last tenet states that exposure to culture is essential for biracial/bisexual people. All of these tenets influence each of the phases and should be kept as mind while learning about Collins' model.

The first phase is Questioning/Confusion phase where an individual questions their place in dominant culture. They become aware that they do not fully belong in dominant culture nor are they a full member of the minority status group either. This causes a person to experience

dissonance and may lead them to question their place in society. Phase II is called Refusal/Suppression where bisexual or biracial people start to try to define themselves and their identity. They will likely take on the label that their environment has given them but will later reject it as they continue to explore. In this phase, people are trying to socialize and learn about their identities in the context of their environment. This is a period where an individual will take on a label while suppressing the other one. The third phase is labeled Infusion/ Exploration. A person in this phase of their identity development has taken on an identity and label but they are experiencing confusion and guilt. This prompts exploration where people reach out to others and try to learn about themselves in the context of others. People are confused on which group they relate to more and where they belong the most. The fourth phase, which is the last of this model, is called Resolution/ Acceptance. An individual has gotten to a point in their identity development where they have found and accepted a positive part of themselves. They have been able to overcome negative stereotypes and see themselves in a positive light.

While this is another model that ends with a bisexual/biracial person being able to fully accept their identity, it is based on the development of people's racial identity that has been applied to bisexual identity as well. With this model, race theory is used to explain bisexual identity development as well and the model insinuates that racial identity and bisexual identity develop in similar ways. It does not incorporate the separate processes that are racial and sexual identity development. King (2011) used this model to explore identity for six college-based multiracial, bisexual women. Results from that study showed that identity development is much more complicated than the model posits. Although the tenets held true for King's study, the phases were not as applicable to the sample. Collins' model aimed to explain identity

development for two different kinds of dual identities that would have been better served if they were explored in a way that honors both sides of a person.

Tom Brown (2002) developed a model for bisexual identity development based on the Weinberg et al. (1994) model. The first three stages are similar, but Brown's model discusses gender differences that influence identity development for men and women. Because the current study focuses on women's bisexual development, that is what will be highlighted in regard to Brown's model. In the first stage, Initial Confusion, bisexual women might feel a disconnect from the lesbian and feminist community. Disconnect from these communities might lead to behavior such as lack of same-sex partners and sexual inhibition around potential female partners. Though research has shown that women have a higher tolerance for nonnormative sexual behavior than men, identity development for bisexual women might be delayed due to the aforementioned behaviors. This can be minimized if bisexual people are able to connect with a supportive and understanding community.

The next stage is Finding and Applying the Label. This stage is not possible if a person is not exposed to the term bisexual. Furthermore, for someone to identify as bisexual they have to feel like their feelings and their behavior are associated with their own understanding of bisexuality. This self-label might be thwarted if they are not surrounded by people that support use of the term. According to this model, there are several factors that affect the labeling process for bisexual women including fear and stigma of the label, an emphasis of feelings over behavior, i.e., acknowledging attraction to more than gender but not acting upon it, and lack of sexual involvement with more than one gender. In the third stage, Settling into the Identity, continued support is important for a bisexual person to further establish their identity. This support can look like a supportive social network or a significant other. Moreover, this is the

stage in which bisexual people are more likely to seek out relationships and research has shown that as bisexual women become involved in romantic relationships with other women, their identity becomes more solidified over time.

The fourth and final stage is where differences between the Weinberg et al. (1994) and Brown (2002) models occur. Continued Uncertainty from the Weinberg et al. (1994) model is renamed to Identity Maintenance. According to Brown (2002), in this phase, bisexual people continue to self-identify as bisexual and continue to pursue relationships with both men and women. However, every person does not stay in this phase and might regress back to the previous stage due to factors such as long-term monogamous relationships with a particular gender and lack of connection and support from other bisexual people. For bisexual women, having multiple relationships with all genders helps to maintain one's self-identification as bisexual. Additionally, bisexual women are more likely to report changes in their feelings towards any gender during this last stage phase of Brown's model. This model better demonstrates a bisexual person's ability to accept and maintain their identities. It also highlights the importance of community for bisexual people. However, Brown (2002) based this model from older research that used gay men and lesbians as their source of examination. Furthermore, this model ignores bisexual people that are not able to develop and maintain connections to affirming support systems and what that might look like for that group to maintain their self-identification as bisexual.

Bradford (2004) developed a model that considers factors such as cultural attitudes towards bisexuality, establishment of community for their identity, and their experiences on the development of self-concept. The first stage of this model is labeled Questioning Reality. During this phase, people are exploring their sexual identity and how they want to label themselves.

Often times, there is confusion in this phase because they do not feel heterosexual or homosexual and many do not have the vocabulary to identify as bisexual. Once a person is able to figure out how to self-identify, they move on to the next stage which is Inventing Identity. During this stage, people create their own definition of their sexuality and what makes them identify as bisexual. Individuals begin to navigate an identity that is not as heavily influenced by the dominant culture and less dependent on negative perspectives on what it means to be bisexual.

The transition from the second stage to the third, Maintaining Identity, is typically characterized by isolation and feelings of invisibility. Though they have come to terms with their sexual identity, they often feel like they do not fully fit in with neither heterosexuals nor homosexuals and this conflict leads to a loneliness within their identity. People in this phase become more reliant on the communities that they create for themselves that are usually inclusive and open-minded to more than heterosexuality, homosexuality, or bisexuality. Bradford's bisexual identity model ends with the Transforming Adversity stage. Individuals in this stage take on roles of leadership and social action in order to establish their bisexual identity.

This model ends with bisexual people being able to use the adversity that they have faced to help others and take on a social justice role. Though this model considers much more than attraction and sexual behavior, it is another model that is sequential and insinuates that identity development is a linear process that smoothly transitions through various phases. Bleiberg et al. (2005) took a slightly different approach with their layered approach to bisexual identity development. The researchers conceptualize development of bisexual identity as layers of a cake. This insinuates that the phases one travels through build upon each other as opposed to moving through identity horizontally.

The first layer of the cake addresses how people are socialized as heterosexual in a heteronormative world and therefore identify as such. The second layer occurs when a person first realizes that they are experiencing non-heterosexual attraction. This is typically a person's first encounter with homosexuality, whether it is simple attraction or feelings for someone. According to the Layer Cake Model (Bleiberg et al., 2005), the third layer occurs as a person maintains their heterosexual identity but accepts their non-heterosexual attraction and feelings. This behavior is motivated by a lack of community support and desire to avoid coming out. As the fourth layer is added, a person has begun to integrate their heterosexual and homosexual attractions. Eventually a person comes out and identifies as bisexual. This is the fifth and final layer for this model. Though it might be a different take on identity development, it is simple and does not discuss other societal factors such as gender and racial identities.

Knous (2006) explored bisexuality from a completely different viewpoint by examining development from a deviancy theory. The researcher aimed to explore and define bisexuality through a sociological lens. The researcher specifically wanted to explore formation of deviant identity and management of the stigma that comes with deviancy. Based on sociological research on deviant behavior and deviance theory, the researcher developed three stages of bisexual identity development: primary, secondary, and tertiary deviance. This model was based on research conducted with 10 bisexual-identified (or similarly identified like pansexual) people that were located through snowball effect participant gathering.

The first stage of this model is Primary Deviance which involves first attraction to or initial sexual experience with a person that one was not previously attracted to. However, after this initial experience, the person's original identity is still intact, and the deviant identity has not yet formed. Seventy percent of the participants reported attraction to both genders before they

realized that they were bisexual and 57% of participants reported this new attraction as confusing. Knous (2006) described this phase as “the initial act of “curiosity” about attractions to both sexes and a grappling with a confused state of identity” (p. 46).

From a sociological standpoint the second step of bisexual identity development is called Secondary Deviance where people are labeled either by society or themselves. This labeling process usually happens when someone comes out and increases participation in bisexual behavior such as expressing attraction to more than one gender and dating them as well. It is in this step that stigma management starts to become important in order to deal with the out, newfound identity. Stigma management comes in three forms: individual, audience, or collective. A popular individual form of stigma management is passing as a dominant culture identity. A common type is leading a double life where a person is out in some settings and passes as straight in other settings. Disclosure of one’s identity is a form of audience stigma management. It is used to avoid confusion or mislabeling of one’s sexual identity. Lastly, joining support groups is a collective form of stigma management. The current study indicated that all of the participants engaged in various ways of managing the stigma that they were facing. In this study, the participants were not labeled until they came out as bisexual. Additionally, most of them had positive coming out experiences, though a few did not receive as much acceptance from loved ones and friends. Either way, stigma management was essential for all the participants during this step of their identity development.

The last step is Tertiary Deviance and it is characterized by “a rebellion against social prejudice and participation in bisexual community-building, as well as being proudly out as bisexual within the wider gay and straight communities” (Knous, 2006 p. 48). In the study, only approximately 30% of the participants had reached this point in their identity development with

involvement in social or activity groups. Though 80% of the participants had increased their connection to the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community, they had not reached the tertiary step because they were not actively involved in social justice work. In this step, bisexual people do not feel pressure to identify as straight or gay/lesbian, nor do they feel uncertain about the label they have chosen to use. Some limitations of this study include a generally small sample size of 10. All of the participants were white as well which leaves out the applicability to other racial minorities such as Black people and their experiences. Additionally, the study was conducted on a college campus in the Pacific Northwest, an area that is generally more liberal, open, and understanding.

Chun and Singh (2010) developed a model that aimed to consider both racial identity and sexual identity development for bisexual youth of color. The researchers considered several factors to develop this model. These factors include bisexual identity, socioeconomic status, gender identity, ability, racial/ethnic identity, and religious/spiritual identity. They are overlapping to indicate the intersectional nature of identity development. All these factors are encompassed and considered through the lens of one's sociopolitical context. This lens also indicates that the context of one's identities develop changes based on the macrosystem in which they develop. The BYOC (Bisexual Youth of Color) model is more process oriented as opposed to set stages or phases like models that have been explored thus far. This model postulates that "the resiliency of bisexual adolescents of color affects and is affected by these intersections of identities" (Chun & Singh, 2010, p. 436). This model addresses intersectionality in several ways for youth of color that are developing various parts of their identity. Resiliency is also a major component of this model where youth of color can bolster and explore aspects of their identity if

they are given the space and support to do so. The more a youth receives support and community, the more they will develop healthy parts of their various identities.

The BYOC Model provides a complete view of identity development for a person. It also addresses the simultaneous nature of identity development. Because it is a process model, it focuses on all aspects that make up a person's identities instead of one portion such as sexual identity or racial identity. This model helps clinicians to conceptualize the parts of youth that can be further developed and the parts that need additional support to flourish. The researchers also emphasize the importance of support for one's identity to fully develop. Without support or community, identity development might be stifled or ignored.

A more contemporary model that also acknowledges that complexity of identity was developed by Harper and Swanson (2019). The Nonsequential Task Model of Bi/Pan/Polysexual Identity Development was built upon several other models to address holes in identity development models for bisexual, pansexual, and polysexual people. There is no succession of stages or phases, but more of another process-oriented model where different aspects of identity development are discussed as opposed to step-by-step descriptions. This non sequential model aims to address the complexity that is the development of bisexuality by exploring the process itself and the tasks that accompany the process. There are five aspects or tasks in this model that affect the whole person, including the sociopolitical environment. The person and their sociopolitical environment also affect the tasks. Additionally, the researchers propose that not every person has to experience every task of the process and some tasks might even take precedence over others, depending on factors such as support systems or environment. The five tasks are Labeling, Managing Impact of Oppression and Stigma, Coming Out, Community and/or Political Identity, and Salience and Intersection of Identities.

The Labeling aspect of one's bisexual identity development is how a person understands their identity and finds and accepts a label to match their experience. According to the researchers, within this task, there are several smaller tasks like finding a label, rejecting labels altogether, or refining definitions of one's experience. During this part of one's development, questioning and exploring occurs via talking to others or searching on the internet. Some people may identify as one monosexual label then progress to another as they explore different labels as well. Labeling can be an ongoing process throughout one's lifetime where they continue to challenge and refine how they identify.

Salience and Intersection of Identities refers to the idea that a person's sexual identity is not the only part of their identity and that there are other developmental processes that can occur at the same time. For this task, people are also searching for labels of other similar identities such as transgender, asexual, or polyamorous. People are also trying to determine how their sexual identity fits with other aspects of their identity like race/ ethnicity. During this task, individuals look for positive images or role models, in addition to language that is cultural and meaningful as well. One's sexual identity development might affect other aspects of their identity development. The opposite holds true as well as other aspects of identity development affect bisexual identity development. This aspect of the model focuses on the intersection of one's identities and how all parts of one's identity is influenced and affected by the other.

Coming Out occurs when a person has come to understand and label their sexual identity and share it with others. With this task, people can come out for any number of reasons including coming out to oneself by admitting their attractions. People might also come out to various people in their lives for varying reasons. This task also indicates details of coming out such as to whom, why, how to come out, ways to approach potential conflict, and even who one does not

feel safe to come out to. This task is also when people figure how to possibly cope if someone does not have an affirming or positive reaction to their sexuality. There are many other factors that one considers when coming out such as ways to respond to questions, one's narrative they want to share, and what labels they wish to share.

The Community and/or Political Identity aspect is one's understanding of their relation to and connection with community and/or within a political context. This is the aspect of identity development when people determine how they want to build, develop, and maintain their identity within a community and/or a political context. With this task, people seek positive role models within community to maintain relationships. People consider the political connections that they want to make as well. In this aspect of development, individuals are also trying to determine where they belong in heterosexual spaces and if their identity matters in these spaces. If there is continued connection in non queer spaces, it is often for advocacy and political activities. Advocacy can occur for other aspects of identity as well and might even align with cultural identities. Integration of one's queer identity and vice versa is also another important task within this aspect of identity development.

Managing the Impact of Oppression/Stigma is the last aspect of this model. This is when individuals "explore how one relates to their experiences in their sociopolitical context when it comes to experiences of microaggressions, discrimination, oppression, marginalization, stigma, etc." (Harper & Swanson, 2019, p. 354). This is the task where people are learning about the negative attention and reactions to their labels. They are learning how to cope and what it looks like to receive stigma in various aspects of one's life. Discrimination from other aspects of one's identity is also addressed and worked through during this aspect of development. This model emphasizes the importance of the intertwined nature of all five of the aspects that one explores

while developing their identity. This indicates the wholeness of a person instead of focusing on the individual parts of what is explored while developing bisexual identity.

This model is an attempt to be intersectional in their approach to bisexual identity development. It is more encompassing to as it is applied to bisexuality in addition to pansexuality and polysexuality. This model also considers other aspects of identity that influence sexual identity development such as racial, cultural, and affectional identities. Focus on intersectional aspects of one's identity is a strong point of this model because it addresses bi/pan/polysexual person as a whole with several factors that influence development. One critique of this model is that it does not consider the stigma that can occur between those that identify differently within this set of sexualities. While the model does address stigma from within the LGBTQ+ community, it is important to discuss the explicit biphobia that occurs between the sexualities in more depth. Bisexual people and pansexual people also stigmatize each other and their descriptions. Some pansexual people believe that the bisexual label is transphobic and not inclusive of gender expansive people as well. While this may be true for some people, definitions of bisexuality have expanded over the years. The insinuation that trans people are not included when referring to men and women is transphobic in and of itself because trans men and women are men and women and do not need to be separated when talking about attraction and preferences. It might be useful for this model to explore the stigma that arises for bisexual people from other identities within this group as well. Overall, this model is one of the most comprehensive process models for bisexual identity development as the person as a whole is addressed and explored through the five aspects.

Gender Identity Development

Research on identity development for cisgender people is limited. There seems to be even less research on the development of specifically cisgender women's development. However, gender has been studied from several disciplines such as sociology, psychoanalytic theories, and biological theories (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Carter, 2014; Klubeck et al., 2017). Due to the dearth of models that focus on cisgender female identity development, I will briefly review literature that focuses on gender identity in the context of psychodynamic theories and sociological theories.

Freud was one of the first theorists to posit that gender was a separate concept from biology (Carter, 2014). Freud theorized that gender was acquired as opposed to an innate and destined part of one's identity. The psychiatrist discussed gender differences in his psychosexual stages of development, but he does not mention these differences until the third phase (Grant et al., 2017; Kram-Fernandez, 2017). Due to the widely known nature of this model, it will be discussed briefly. The first phase of Freud's psychosexual theory, the Oral Phase, refers to infants from birth to 18 months. During this phase, infants seek satisfaction and pleasure by putting things in their mouth. Babies are dependent on their caretakers to feed them and because of this, they develop their sense of trust in this period of their lives. Successful progression through this phase will result in a sense of safety and their needs being fulfilled. The Anal Phase comes next where babies receive pleasure by relieving themselves through their anus. This phase lasts from 18 months to three years. Freud argued that children do not discriminate between acceptable and unacceptable gratifying objects and will seek satisfaction from any gender or object. According to Grant et al. (2017), this is due to the indiscriminate manner in which children

at this age seek gratification, is an “inherently bisexual disposition” (p. 1351), that Freud labeled as “polymorphous perversity” (p. 1351).

The third phase is the Phallic phase. Children ages three to six years can determine a difference between males and females. At this stage, boys and girls are faced with different tasks. Due to children’s primary source of satisfaction coming from their genitals, they begin to notice differences between what it means to be male and female. Freud believed that at this phase, boys develop an Oedipus Complex where they want to gain phallic satisfaction by having sex with their mother. They realize that their father is competition and wants to kill them, so they develop castration anxiety. In order to ease this anxiety, boys repress their sexual desires and identify with their fathers. When boys get older, they unconsciously displace sexual desire of their mother onto appropriate sexual objects. This is conceptualized from a heterosexual lens where straight men’s sexual objects become other women, allowing them to safely obtain phallic satisfaction in the future. Successful navigation of this phase establishes the function of his conscious and unconscious mind. Successful completion of this stage also serves as the foundation for gender identity as a heterosexual man.

Freud believed that girls develop similar urges as boys. He believed that girls had strong sexual urges towards their mother as well but realize that they cannot obtain sexual gratification because they do not have the same genitals as boys (Grant et al., 2017). This leads to penis envy because girls realize the power that comes with having a penis. Girls start to see their mother as competition for their father’s sexual attention. To ease incestual desires, girls will displace desires towards other men. Additionally, girls identify with their mothers. Freud believed that this is what led to heterosexual gender identity for girls. The last two phases, Latent (ages 6-12

years old), and Genital (12 through adulthood) are when people start to act out those gender roles that they have taken on in the phallic phase.

Over the years, Freud's conceptualization of gender identity naturally received criticism due to its heterosexual- and binary-based theories of gender development. Though his theory was based on the gender binary and emphasis on what he believed to be markers that indicate gender, he argued that societal factors influenced gender as well. Freud believed that cultural and societal factors influenced both the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind that shape how a person relates to themselves and others. Freud posited that society is what shapes people, their behaviors, and how they express themselves and because of such, society also limits how people identify and express love in relation to gender. Returning to the aforementioned bisexual attraction to caregivers, these attractions become increasingly unacceptable as children get older and this forces children to adapt to more acceptable behaviors by finding opposite sex partners (Grant et al., 2017). According to Freud, cultural norms are the biggest barrier to people exploring their sexual desires and gender expression. This theory combines both sexual and gender identity development in a way that many researchers at the time were not discussing. This theory has not been empirically supported and because of this, reformulations occurred within the discipline (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

In the sociological context, gender is seen as a social construct (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Similar to what Freud believed, sociologists believed that gender differentiation develops from social and institutional practices rather than biological drives. Gender stereotypes shape how genders are treated and perceived in society and this is likely how these stereotypes are upheld and enforced. Additionally, socialization is another theory of gender development that posits that people learn about gender and how each is supposed to behave by how they are

treated as the gender they are taught to assume (Klubeck et al., 2017). Gender socialization is based on repeated enactment of gender stereotypes.

According to Klubeck et al. (2017), gender socialization comes from four potential sources: (1) parental, (2) peer, (3) institutional, and (4) self-socialization. Parental socialization is typically formed through emotional behaviors and can be seen as more harmful to boys than girls because boys engaging in stereotypical girl behaviors is seen as more threatening than girls engaging in stereotypically boy behaviors. Therefore, boys typically look up to their fathers for role models and girls to their mothers as role models. In peer settings, children typically react negatively to gender-variant behavior. Because of such, children are inclined to conform to gender-specific behavior. Institutional socialization is a result of teachers and school staff using gendered language and separating children by their perceived gender, further perpetuating the gender binary. Lastly, self-socialization occurs as children behave in ways that they believe will benefit them. Most times, this means behaving in ways that they are expected to behave based on their assumed gender. However, if this conformity leads to negative self-perception, it can lead to deviance from gender stereotypes and norms. While these theories aim to explain why people adapt and identify as a particular gender, they do not provide insight into the process of gender development. Additionally, these theories are child-focused and do not highlight the process of developing one's gender identity as one gets older.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a term created by Kimberle Crenshaw in her essay, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics* (1989) and is used to describe multiple oppressions. In her original essay, Crenshaw is mainly referring to the oppression that Black women face within

antidiscrimination laws, feminism, and politics. She discusses how Black women face both racism because of their race and sexism because of their sex. According to this scholar, often times, Black women as a whole are left out of the narrative of discrimination and marginalization because the stories of White women or Black men are highlighted but rarely are the stories of Black women are featured. Out of this erasure of Black women's narratives came the term "intersectionality". It was initially coined to discuss this particular group of people but can now be used to describe various groups of people who face multiple oppressions because of their master statuses. People with more than one oppressed master identity tend to have greater levels of psychological disturbances (Follins et al., 2014). For this reason, intersectionality is an important framework to use when examining the experiences of cisgender bisexual Black women.

This theory is essential in understanding the oppression that many populations face. It is influenced by critical race theory and Black feminism (Carbado et al., 2013) and can be studied from a multitude of perspectives that includes race, gender, social class, and sexual identity. Any combination or intersection of these identities can be studied and explored to gain full knowledge on the hardships and oppression that many individuals face. Carbado et al. (2013) discuss the scope of the multiple ways this theory can be applied. Since it was coined by Crenshaw in the late 1980s, it has been applied to many fields and disciplines to further understand the mistreatment of marginalized groups. These researchers discuss the various ways that intersectionality can be understood and applied to other theories. They explore the main ways that this theory can be highlighted and explores. These themes include intersectionality as a work in progress, within and across disciplines, across national boundaries, engaging Black women, engaging Black men, and intersectionality as a social movement.

The first theme they discuss is intersectionality as a work in progress. This means that no method in which this theory is applied can fully discover and explore the depth of oppression that these marginalized groups experience. Within this theory, it is deeply important to continually apply it to numerous disciplines. The researchers explain, “This work-in-progress understanding of intersectionality suggests that we should endeavor, on an ongoing basis, to move intersectionality to unexplored places” (Carbado et al., 2013). This theory should be applied and explored in as many disciplines as possible to fully grasp the scope in which intersectional powers influence society. Discussing differences amongst groups can bring awareness to those in power so they can be mindful of their actions and how they affect marginalized populations. This theory is a constant work in progress because there are many ways it has not been explored or applied.

The second theme that is discussed in this theory is moving within and across disciplines. This means that research can come from many disciplines and the process of developing this research can stem from any number of social science topics. They discuss reasons why this theory may be difficult to study in a wide array of disciplines as well. Additionally, intersectionality has reached disciplines internationally. Not only has it been successful in the United States, but it has also reached Europe as well. This provides a perspective that can be helpful in comprehension of this theory in multiple settings. It is important to know the intersection of identities presents itself on an international level as well.

Moreover, this theory moves to engage both Black men and women. Some scholars argue that Black people and their struggles are overemphasized in research (Carbado et al., 2013). This argument insinuates that Black women no longer face oppression and marginalization from society. Carbado et al. (2013) posit that as long as Black women are continuously conveyed in a

positive light and face systemic oppression, there needs to be continued research on this marginalized group. The same can be discussed for Black men as well. There has been much research that has developed since the progression of this theory. Many researchers have explored how Black men are affected by their race and gender and what this means for intersectionality. The last theme the researchers discussed is intersectionality as a social movement. Looking at this theory from the perspective of social change not only elicits an understanding of intersecting identities but also brings to light the concealed subtleties that can help to create change for these populations.

Identity Conflict

Although both Black people and sexual minorities have experiences that are unique to their identities, the intersection and interaction of these identities likely leads to identity conflict due to the unique oppressions that each group faces. Identity conflict can be defined in a number of different ways such that one identity does not align with another within oneself. Corsbie-Massay et al. (2017) define identity conflict in relation to sexual orientation and ethnicity as “threats to one group identity [that comes] from in-group members of a second identity (p. 1612). Barely any research has focused on identity conflict for the intersection of Black identity and bisexuality. However, there has been research conducted on LGBT exploration and other identities (Corsbie-Massay et al., 2017; Kim & Epstein, 2018; Levy & Reeves, 2011).

Rabinovich and Morton (2016) studied identity conflict and its effects on one’s health. The researchers explored the moderating role of self-perception of one’s identity being flexible versus fixed in relation to identity conflict, self-esteem, and well-being. Results from this study found that self-esteem and well-being were negatively affected when people believed that their identities were fixed yet conflicting. Fixed versus flexible identity can be helpful for those who

can easily flow from one identity to another such as being a mother to one's children but also being a doctor while at work. However, parts of identity such as sexual identity may feel ingenuine if one chooses to flow between labels. Additionally, with the exception of those who are fair-skinned enough to pass as a white person, a Black American is not able to easily change their ethnic identity in order to ease tension about identity conflict.

Another study conducted by Hamblin and Gross (2013) focuses on the conflict that occurs for sexual minorities who are affiliated with a certain religion and try to attend church services regularly. The researchers aimed to explore religious behavior and the psychological well-being of those who identify as gay or lesbian. They measured church attendance, identity conflict, social support, and psychological well-being in 193 participants who were recruited through online announcement of religious organizations. Results from this study indicated that LGB individuals who attend churches that are rejecting of their sexuality tend to have higher levels of depression and anxiety. The opposite was the case as well where those attended accepting churches reported higher social support and lower levels of depression and anxiety. The conflict that occurs for those who attend sexual orientation-rejecting churches likely comes from the messages that are being conveyed during church services. For Black bisexual women, there is the added deep affiliation with religious views that are typically LGB-rejecting. That can add a layer of inner conflict for cisgender women who identify as both bisexual and African American.

Bi-negativity and Biphobia

Much like their gay and lesbian counterparts, bisexual people experience sexual orientation-based discrimination in the form of biphobia and bi-negativity. Although the two concepts are similar, bi-negativity focuses on the illegitimacy of bisexuality and negative

attention that comes with that idea (Morrison et al., 2019). Biphobia, on the other hand, is generally prejudice toward bisexual people that is driven by negative attitudes (Brewster, 2017a). Additionally, while gay men and lesbians generally experience discrimination from their heterosexual counterparts, biphobia and bi-negativity comes from both gay and straight people. This discrimination comes in three forms: perceptions that bisexuality is unstable and nonexistent, interpersonal hostility, and perceptions that bisexual people are sexually irresponsible (Brewster, 2017a; Brewster, 2017b; Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999).

False perceptions that bisexuality does not exist have led both straight and gay people to minimize or dismiss the sexuality (Brewster, 2017a). This perception is an explicit and blatant erasure of bisexuality that diminishes the identity by suggesting that the identity does not exist. This generates an invisibility of bisexuality that causes even more discrimination and negative attitudes. These perceptions also make bisexual people feel like they have to choose between identifying as heterosexual and homosexual based on who they are dating. Messages that monosexual people relay insinuate that bisexual people are simply experimenting, confused about their true identities, using the label as a transition to a monosexual identity, and in denial about their true sexual identity. Additionally, when people are paired, people make monosexual assumptions of individual's sexual orientation where same-gender couples are labeled as homosexual and different-gendered couples are assumed to be heterosexual (Brewster & Moradi, 2010). These assumptions completely leave out the possibility of the bisexual-identified people, further increasing stigma and minimization of bisexuality. In lesbian and gay social circles, bisexual people often feel invisible in their sexuality due to these partner-based assumptions. Furthermore, concepts like "gold star gay" perpetuate the idea that people who have only slept

with someone of the same gender are more desirable and more legitimate than someone who has also had different-gendered partners (Brewster, 2017a).

Interpersonal hostility can manifest itself in a number of different ways as well. Its main trademark is hostility towards bisexual people in ways that make them feel out of place or that they do not belong. Interpersonal hostility can be jokes about bisexuality, gays/lesbians purposely leaving out bisexual people when talking about struggles of the queer community, or even negative reactions and thoughts from friends and loved ones (Brewster, 2017a; Todd et al., 2016). Mohr and Rochlen (1999) found that lesbians that have high anti-bisexual views are also unwilling to be best friends with a bisexual woman. Researchers believe that ideas like this are upheld based on the belief that bisexual women are traitors of feminism because they still choose to engage with men intimately (Angelides, 2006; Bradford, 2004; Brewster, 2017a). However, research has shown that exposure to bisexual people might help to decrease bi-negative ideologies (Lytle et al., 2017; Woodford et al., 2012). This means that if monosexual people are able to be around more bisexual people and develop more positive relationships with them, they might be able to develop more positive thoughts and ideas about what it means to be bisexual.

The last type of bisexual discrimination is perceptions that bisexual people are sexually irresponsible. These perceptions manifest in different ways as well. First, it is an assumption that bisexual people are more likely to catch an STI because of their attraction to more than one gender (Brewster, 2017a; Brewster 2017b; Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999). It is believed that because bisexual people are attracted to more genders than monosexual people, they engage in risky and reckless sexual behaviors. Assumptions like this are stigmatizing and painful for bisexual people that are proactive about practicing safe sex by using prophylactics and getting tested regularly. People also believe that bisexual people are unfaithful, more likely

to cheat, and would unethically date multiple partners at once. Due to attraction to more than one gender, bisexual people are assumed to struggle with being faithful and monogamous in relationships. This makes bisexual people less desirable partners for both heterosexual and homosexual suitors (Brewster, 2017a; Hayfield et al., 2018; Todd et al., 2016). Additionally, these negative ideas lead to difficulty for bisexual people to initiate and maintain relationships with partners as well.

A study conducted by Todd et al. (2016) sought to understand the lived experiences of antibisexual prejudice from family members. The researchers wanted to learn about and explore the experience for bisexual people that have experienced biphobia and bi-negativity from loved ones. The participants were an age-specific subset (18-24 years old) of a larger study. Data was collected through online surveys completed by 156 young adults that identified as bisexual and other polysexual orientations. Analysis of the interviews revealed that participants experienced four types of antibisexual prejudice from family members: interpersonal hostility and invalidation from family, family perceptions of sexual irresponsibility, family perceptions of sexual orientation as instability, and bi-invisibility. The researchers believed that all of these acts of prejudice influenced each other which also created cyclical experiences of prejudice. Even though most participants were out to their families, they were still faced with hurtful discrimination that made it difficult for them to maintain relationships with family members. Additionally, some participants chose to withhold their sexuality based on conversations or conservative ideals. Participants that withheld their sexuality experienced biphobia without their family member even knowing how they identify. This study reveals the balance that bisexual people must make in order to feel safe in their identities. Moreover, it shows that for some

people family is so important that they would rather conceal their sexuality or subject themselves to constant biphobia before they sever ties with family.

There is a lack of research that explores the direct effects of bi-negativity and biphobia (Brewster, 2017a) but there is a great deal of research that indicates that bisexual people have a lower quality of life compared to straight and gay men/lesbians (Bishop & Pynoo, 2020; Brewster, 2017a; Dyar, 2017). Bisexual people are more likely to have substance use struggles, more likely to experience mental health issues such as anxiety or depression, and more likely to attempt suicide. Bisexual people are also less likely to be out to the people in their lives (Brown, 2019). All of this indicates that bisexual people are in need of a place that they can be fully accepted without discrimination, backlash, or negative attention. This rings especially true for bisexual Black women who deal with both discrimination from within the gay and lesbian community and from their Black heterosexual counterparts.

African American Attitudes and Ideologies

There is great diversity within the Black community that creates many cultures and identities (Greene, 2002; Hill, 2013). Because of such, there is no one community but a combination of cultures and communities that come together to create Black people as a whole. The same can be said for Black people within the LGBT+ community as well. Despite this, there are factors that all Black people share: African heritage, the impact of slavery, and ongoing racism and discrimination (Greene, 2002; Hill, 2013; Thomas, 2017). All African Americans come from African descent, and this has ingrained many of the same customs and values in their heritage and way of living. The effects of slavery also affect all African Americans because this group of people was robbed of their dignity, culture, and traditions. Because of the prior two factors, all Black people are affected by mistreatment and oppression by

society. Racism runs deep in American culture and has set up Black Americans to be treated as inferior.

African American queer individuals struggle with alienation from their Black community as well as racism from the LGBT+ community. An additional layer of alienation for Black bisexual people comes from bi-negativity from the LGBT+ community as well. This creates a situation that is difficult to determine who is important to identify with and who will result in the most safety and acceptance. Research mainly focuses on the white queer experience or compulsory Black heterosexism. This eliminates or reduces the voices and perspectives of the population who identifies as both Black and queer. The Black queer experience is marked by racism, classism, and sexism. It is a combination of the way society treats Black people and how Black people perceive non-heterosexual individuals. Sexism appears to affect Black lesbians at higher rates due to their differences from their white counterparts and these values being upheld by homophobia and heterosexism. Homophobia is maintained by religious views and enforced gender roles.

Even though many Black writers and figures talk about acceptance of all identities, there are still many more that deliver messages that there is no room for Black queers in the Black community. Research has shown that African Americans are more likely than whites to hold negative views on homosexuality (Follins, 2017; Hill, 2013). It has been proposed that oppressed groups tend to oppress others who are different due to forced feelings of inferiority. Internalized racism may also play a role in mistreatment of Black queers and even though homophobia is not exclusive to Black heterosexuals, it is most salient for those who are Black and LGBT+. While all of these factors do not indicate more homophobic views from

Black people, they are a demonstration of how oppression and mistreatment can lead groups of people to mistreat and oppress others as well.

A common theme for many ethnicities of color is coming out being seen as a threat to the continuation of one's lineage and heritage (Greene, 1994). African American culture places emphasis and importance on kinship and family. Additionally, extended family relationships, such as family, friends, community members, and important religious leaders are essential for Black Americans and building community (Boyd-Franklin, 2006; Thomas, 2017). Gender roles are a bit more flexible for this community due to women being forced to take on work as Black men have not been able to find employment due to racism and discrimination. The era of slavery in the US also created a depiction of hypersexualization and exploitation for Black people as a whole which has led to stereotypes of promiscuity and lack of morals. Factors like this feed into negative views towards African American gay men and lesbians. There are several factors that uphold homophobic values in the Black community such as Christian religiosity, internalized racism, rampant sexism, and heterosexist ideas (Greene, 1994). This means that Black lesbians are seen as the bottom of the social ladder due to their same-sex attraction. Despite this, Black gay men and lesbians often stay in contact with their families yet conceal their sexual identities. Concealment and alienation often lead to feelings of a need to choose between sexual identity and connection to family of origin and ethnic identity.

Harris (2009) focuses on the marginalization of the LGBT community within the Black community and its history of these practices. Despite the African American community being a marginalized group, there is still further marginalization of those who are both Black and identify as LGBT as well. This is based on thoughts and ideals that have upheld themes of heterosexuality as the norm and can be traced back to racist values that have been internalized

and projected on non-straight Black people. Heterosexist values are ingrained in the Black community because heterosexuality is seen as the norm and what is most common. Those who do not meet these ideals of opposite-sex attraction are seen as different and therefore become subjects of oppression and discrimination from within the group. Straight Black men try to avoid gay men as much as possible in order to separate themselves from men who are seen as feminine and soft. History reveals that white exploitation has led to Black men feeling emasculated and because of such, they want to avoid closeness to men who are viewed as feminine. These ideals, and ones similar, can be traced back to sexual exploitation of Black slaves. Heterosexism and homophobia have great influence on the Black church as well and this has only increased negative views on the LGBT+ community within this setting (Follins, 2017).

Limited research on the experiences of Black queers may lead to the assumption that queers are typically white and Black people are generally heterosexual (Anderson & McCormack, 2010). The lack of research up until the 1980s demonstrated that the combination of identities was not a topic that was deemed as important or worth researching. Increased interest has led to more research but the experiences of Black LGBT members do not have nearly as much research as gay people in general or Black people in general. LGBT+ rights have begun to be addressed and this also led to more opportunities for the queer community. However, it is important to acknowledge that the movement started off focusing on the rights and needs of gay white men. This seems to be a reason why so many African Americans do not address issues that their queer counterparts experience because there is priority placed on the progression of Black people as a whole instead of those who belong to other marginalized groups as well such as the LGBT community. Although the Black civil rights movement helps all Black

people, it does not acknowledge the set of oppressions that the Black sexual minorities experience for various life aspects like increased violence and prevention in adopting children.

As more Black LGBT-identified people call for more attention to the problems that are unique to their group, there seems to slowly be more acceptance and less hate from within the Black community. It is important to be aware that there is still a long way to go but acknowledgment of the small progress that has been made in the African American community is essential in continuing the trend of decreasing the marginalization of the marginalized. In order to address all groups of the African American community, there must be a common goal of equality for all, not just the heterosexual members of the community. Even though it is difficult for some from the community to understand that discrimination does occur outside of race, there has been changes and evolution in this thinking. Black lesbians and bisexual women are as diverse and different from one another as the African American community that they identify with (Greene, 2002; Hill, 2013). There are so many differences and levels of acceptance that depend on the community from which they reside. Despite these differences, internalized racism and heterosexism seem to be the source of homophobic attitudes that guide African American views on gay men and lesbians. It is also worth noting that these notions affect Black women in the LGBT community even more because of sexism and gendered-racial stereotypes.

Black Women and Gendered-Racial Stereotypes

Racialized gender is the idea that there are gender-based differences between individuals of the same racial or ethnic group. Racialized gender is influenced by factors including historical images and perceptions, socialization experiences, and gender role expectations (Jones & Day, 2018; Thomas, 2017). Furthermore, according to Jones et al. (2018), gendered-racial stereotypes can be described as “generalizations made about African American men and women that are

derived from their historical and gender-specific experiences of oppression” (p. 453). There are different stereotypes that are placed upon both Black men and women. For Black men these include the Brute Savage or Big Black Buck (wild, highly sexualized, and inhuman), Sambo (subservient, childlike, happy, and entertaining), and an idealized image that is often unattainable by most people let alone Black men (Jones et al., 2018; Thomas, 2017).

Gendered-racial stereotypes that refer to black women include Mammy, Sapphire, Jezebel, and Strong Black Woman (Jones et al., 2018; Jones & Day, 2018; Thomas, 2017; West, 1995). Images of Black women originate from Afrocentric values and a history of slavery and oppression. Women are expected to be feminine, and this typically means soft-spoken, submissive, emotional, and a natural caregiver. However, as previously discussed, due to slavery, Black women were not given the privilege of these soft, positive images. This is because during the era of slavery Black women had to do as much intensive labor as their male counterparts. Additionally, Black women were sexually exploited by being forced to have sex with slaveowners. This history is important to the stereotypes placed upon Black women because survival of these conditions has contributed to Black women being seen as both strong and sexually aggressive. Today, Black women are expected to be aggressive, dominant, rude and loud, and sexually promiscuous. These are the origins of gendered-racial stereotypes for Black women (Thomas, 2017).

Mammy is based off the nurturing caretaker role that Black women were forced to take on during slavery. She is depicted as a dark-skinned, overweight, woman wearing a bandana with broad, African features, such as a wide nose. Mammy was allowed to work in the house because she was seen as asexual and nonthreatening due to her physical features and demeanor. Mammy’s role was to be a domesticate because she took care of her white slave owner’s children

along with any orphaned slave children for long hours with no complaint. She was acquiescent, docile, and willing to devote herself to taking care of the children on the plantation. For Black women of today, the legacy of Mammy has led to this group being perceived as selfless, endlessly nurturing, and supportive. Mammy's imagery has resulted in Black women taking on more responsibilities and roles that entail taking care of others to their own detriment and well-being (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Thomas, 2017; West, 1995). Additionally, internalization of Mammy can lead to some Black women striving to take on a more Eurocentric appearance (Thomas, 2017) or even developing harmful eating disorders (West, 1995) in order to avoid this stereotype.

In contrast to the mild-mannered Mammy is the Sapphire figure. Sapphire is based on legend of an enslaved girl "who sought revenge on slave owners by poisoning them through the food" (Thomas, 2017, p. 205). The legend says that her anger and fear led her to poison the slave owner as an emotional outlet. Black people have always had a complicated relationship with emotional expression, the need to repress strong emotions for safety reasons, and how they are perceived by society. Sapphire is a result of this complex relationship with emotional expression for Black women. They are seen as aggressive and angry with an attitude. This image was popularized and named from a character from a 1950s television show called *Amos 'n' Andy* with the same name (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Thomas, 2017; West, 1995). Sapphire was a large, but not overweight woman with brown or dark brown complexion. She was loud, hostile, aggressive, and argumentative. She constantly emasculated Black men by reinforcing the irresponsible and foolish stereotype that was placed upon Black men. This caricature has resulted in Black women being perceived as obnoxious, bossy, needlessly arrogant, rude, and never satisfied with anything. These negative characteristics make it difficult for Black women who

have internalized this stereotype to express themselves or take on positions of power (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Thomas, 2017; West, 1995). Black women tend to minimize themselves or avoid expressing their emotional experiences to ease others' discomfort in their presence. On the other hand, some Black women have decided to take on the personification as an act of rebellion.

The image of Jezebel also has roots in the era of slavery. White slave owners sexually exploited and victimized enslaved women and justified these horrific actions with notions that Black women had insatiable, almost bestial sexual appetites. Slave owners took complete control over Black women's reproduction and sexuality by forcing a narrative that craved sex and had no control over their sexual desires. Unlike Mammy, Jezebel was typically closer to Eurocentric beauty standards. She was depicted as light-skinned, likely mixed-race, with straight hair, slender nose, and thin lips (West, 1995). Jezebel's purpose was to seduce men and take advantage of their weaknesses. Today, this image is translated into negative stereotypes such as Black women being promiscuous, manipulative, and sexually driven. This imagery is popular in rap and hip-hop videos and propagates the idea that Black women have high sex drives, will stop at nothing to get their sexual needs met, and use their bodies to get their needs met. This highly sexualized image has perpetuated and encouraged sexual exploitation of Black women such as increased sexual violence and victimization and the belief that these women cannot be victimized because of their voracious sexual appetites (West, 1995). Additionally, Black women who internalize this stereotype might engage in early or risky sexual behavior (Thomas, 2017), feel inadequate, or experience performance anxiety (West, 1995).

The Strong Black Woman, or Superwoman, is a modern, seemingly more positive image of Black women (Jones et al., 2018; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Thomas, 2017). This imagery suggests the unwavering strength of Black women. They can take on anything and get any task

done. Through this portrayal of Black women, they are strong mothers, community leaders, hard workers, and psychologically strong. While this positive imagery might be a refreshing change from the previously mentioned stereotypes, this imagery is also harmful to Black women (Jones et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2016). The Strong Black Woman is supposed to be able to handle it all with no help. She is supposed to be able to take on any job and go above and beyond on that job because she has superhuman strength and abilities. However, this is often to the detriment of their well-being. They are not seen as in need of help, compassion, or tender and love and care because of this stereotype. Black women who internalize this stereotype, tend to reject help, become embarrassed or sensitive at any sign of failure or even weakness, and experience lower self-esteem if they do not fit this description (Jones et al., 2018; Thomas, 2017; Watson-Singleton, 2017).

These gendered-racial stereotypes might seem harmless or antiquated given their historical context, but they still affect Black women today. All of these stereotypes have led to ongoing exploitation and mistreatment of Black women by society. These images have deleterious and detrimental effects on the mental well-being of Black as they are seen as various types of women that society typically shuns. Additionally, these stereotypes highlight the need to always approach Black women with an intersectional lens because focusing on one part of their identity might lead to ignoring of the racialized ways that Black women are portrayed and treated by society (Jones & Day, 2018; Rosenthal, 2016).

Experiences of Bisexual Black Women

The extent of research on the experiences on the LGBT+ community neglects the interaction of race and sexual identity. The experiences that African American LGBT+ individuals face are typically different than those of their white counterparts. Research has found

that both queer identities and ethnic minorities, especially African Americans, have faced a great deal of discrimination and prejudice. This is especially true for those who fall in both categories (Kuper et al., 2014). Although research does say that queer people of color face extensive issues that come from both of their identities, very little research focuses on the plight of bisexual African American women.

Research has shown that African American LGBT individuals typically use a wider range of coping skills than white counterparts (Constantine et al., 2005; Follins et al., 2014). An exploration for why this particular population needs to have wide access to coping skills and resources will bring light to issues this group of people faces. Although the type of difficulties Black queers face may seem obvious, a conceptualization of this experience could be informative and eye-opening. Hearing these stories directly from the source is an additional way to understand the interaction of ethnic identity and sexual minority status. Despite there being similar identities, Black queers have many differences in their experiences as well (Dudley, 2013). The themes are likely the same, but the manifestation of these themes will likely be different for Black women.

A study conducted by Bowleg et al. (2008) sought to explore the psychosocial factors of the coming out process for Black women who identify as either lesbian or bisexual. Ninety-five participants were recruited during a Black lesbian weekend retreat and ranged from ages 18-68 years old. Additionally, the researchers supported their quantitative data by conducting semi-structured interviews with 19 of the participants. The researchers measured self-esteem, social support, and active coping as psychosocial factors and level of outness (to whom the participants disclosed their sexual orientation). Researchers also measured the participants' Black identity in

relation to their lesbian or bisexual identity and which seemed more important for participants to identify.

Results from this study demonstrated that those who rated higher on the psychosocial factors were more likely to be more out to their people in their lives and more able to discuss their sexual orientation with those who know. Furthermore, the results from this particular study revealed that the women who believed their racial identity was more important than their sexual orientation were significantly less likely to be out and talking about their sexual identity to others. These results highlight the struggle that occurs for those who identify as an ethnic minority, specifically Black, and lesbian or bisexual. Although both identifies are meaningful, at times they interact in ways that forces one identity to be less salient than the other. In this case, when racial identity is deemed more important than sexual identity, there is less disclosure and less discussion with loved ones.

Summary

This study aims to explore the intersectional experiences of bisexual Black women and because of such, there were several topics that were explored in the literature review. It was essential to explore and discuss identity formation for social identity, racial identity, bisexual identity, and gender identity. Though there is a paucity of research that focuses on cisgender identity development, the literature touched on the topic briefly. It was important to discuss each part of the identities separately before discussing the targeted group as a whole. Important topics included bi-negativity and biphobia, Black American attitudes and ideologies, and gendered-racial stereotypes that Black women experience. There is a gap in research that focuses on the experiences of bisexual women that are Black and because of such, there was limited

information on the topic. It is my hope that this study will add to that body of research and inspire others to explore this group as well.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Method

The following section will highlight the research design section and methods. There will be an overview of the research questions and how they helped to gather information to gain insight on the targeted population. This section discusses the various aspects that affected data collection, data analysis, and any obstacles that might have arisen as data was collected.

Research Questions

The main research question that was sought out throughout the study was: What is it the experience of holding multiple identities for cisgender bisexual Black women? This question explores the intersection of sexual, racial, and gender identity, and how they influence one's worldviews (van Manen, 1990). Other research questions included: Do cisgender bisexual Black women experience identity conflict as a result of holding dual identities? Is there a pressure to choose one identity over the other? How is this conflict resolved? Furthermore, questions like: How has the interaction of racial identity and sexual identity influenced cisgender bisexual Black women's acceptance of their multiple identities? And how have Black people's attitudes towards bisexuality affected cisgender bisexual Black women's sexual identity development? These research questions aimed to provide insight on what the intersections of racial, sexual, and gender identities for cisgender bisexual Black women are (van Manen, 1990). Research questions also highlight how this group navigates their identities, and the possibility of identity conflict. Furthermore, these questions guided the creation of the interview questions and were the structure in which the interview questions were created. Since the study used transcendental phenomenology, the research questions asked the "what", or the textural description, and the "how" (the structural description) (Moustakas, 1994) of being bisexual Black women.

Research Design

The study was qualitative in nature, specifically utilizing a transcendental phenomenological design. Phenomenological research typically uses between 3 and 15 participants (Creswell & Poth, 2017). For the current study, a sample set of four women agreed to participate in the interviews. Phenomenology was used to capture the essence of the experiences of cisgender bisexual Black women. This type of research shines light on experiences that a particular group has experienced. Through transcendental phenomenology, the essence of being a bisexual Black woman will be revealed. With this research method, the ability to reveal what is it like to identify as bisexual and African American women is important to gain as much information as possible. Moreover, how the intersection of these identities influences one's worldview and how one approaches the world will be explored as information is gathered from participants.

Population and Sample

Inclusion criteria for this study was as follows:

1. Participants must identify as bisexual.
2. Participants must be out to at least one important person in their life.
3. Participants must be cisgender women.
4. Participants must self-identify Black, African American, or Black American.
5. Participants must be at least 22 years old but no older than 99 years old.
6. Participants must have been born and raised in the United States.
7. Participants must be able to read, write, and speak English fluently.

All four of the participants for this study are cisgender women who self-identify as both Black, African American, or Black American and bisexual. All the participants were raised in the

United States and speak, read, and write English fluently. Participants ages ranged from 31 to 40; though the study was open to ages ranging from 22 to 99 years old. This criterion was to ensure that they have had time to develop thoughts and feelings about their sexual identity and how their intersecting identities might have interacted throughout their lives. Research has indicated that those who identify as bisexual tend to self-identify at later ages than those who identify as lesbian or gay (Gates, 2010; Martos et al., 2015). Furthermore, it is likely that cisgender women will have had different experiences from transgender women and because of such, the study decided to focus on experiences of cisgender women in order to ensure saturation of similar experiences.

Potential participants were recruited through social media and the snowball method. I posted an IRB-approved research study announcement that included information about a research website and contact information. Additionally, family and friends shared my posts to expand who the posts reached. Participants were also recruited through various online pages, groups, and listservs that were geared toward Black people, Black women, and LGBTQ+ people with hopes that more interested participants would see the posts. Ultimately, four women contacted the researcher and scheduled times for interviews.

Procedures

There was a research website that prospective participants could review to be informed of the study, the background of the researcher, and ways that they could get in contact with the researcher if interested in participating in the study. The research website also included resources for participants if they wanted ways to connect to other people that share any parts of their identities or ways to address any mental health crises. Data was collected through comprehensive, semi-structured interviews with a protocol of questions. Interviews are the best

way to gain information to capture the common themes of a shared group such as the experiences of bisexual Black women (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). The interviews were conducted via Zoom, an online video chat system and were recorded through the system with knowledge of and consent from the participants. The system creates separate files for the video and audio of the recorded material. I chose to keep these files separate and password-encrypted them both. In these interviews, questions about sexual identity and their interactions with racial and gender identity were discussed. Privacy was ensured by wearing headphones during the interview in order to create an environment of safety and ability to freely self-disclose. Interviews were also conducted in a private, closed-off room to further ensure privacy. Interactions with participants were warm and welcoming in order to further create an environment of safety.

Data Analysis

To analyze the transcribed interviews, I used Moustakas' (1994) modified version of van Kaam's method of transcendental phenomenology to determine textural descriptions, structural descriptions, and synthesis of the textural-structural descriptions. The first step I decided to take for data analysis was to engage in epoche or bracketing. Before my first interview, I journaled to make myself aware of any expectations that I had based on my own experiences as a bisexual Black woman. I wrote down any thoughts that came to my mind and reflected upon how those thoughts would affect my approach to interviews. Furthermore, I made sure to explore any assumptions or personal experiences that might have influenced how I approached the information in the interviews. I did this through self-reflection and reminding myself the importance of finding themes that were not tainted with my own subjective experiences. This was important in order to have a fresh mind every time I reviewed the data.

In Moustakas' modified version of the van Kaam method, the first step, Listing and Preliminary Grouping, was to go through each interview transcription and find "significant statements" (Creswell & Poth, 2017). These statements provide understanding of the participants' experiences as bisexual Black women. Moustakas (1994) called this process horizontalization. I went through each interview and highlighted statements that felt important and gave insight into participants' experiences. The next step in this method, Reduction and Elimination, is to determine invariant constituents. Moustakas suggests a two-step process that helps to determine invariant constituents. The first step is to determine if a statement "contains a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it" (p. 121). The second step is to determine if a statement is "possible to abstract and label it" (p. 121). It was also important to keep in mind any repetitive or vague expressions that should be eliminated. With these steps, I determined which horizons were the invariant constituents.

The third step of this process was to cluster the related invariant constituents into themes, labeled Clustering and Thematizing. These themes are the core of the experience of holding multiple identities as bisexual Black women. The last step of this method is called validation. The invariant constituents were validated by checking them against the complete interview. If the themes were not explicitly expressed or compatible with each transcription, then they were not relevant and were removed. From the themes that remained, I described and talked about the individual experiences of each participant. They did not all have the same themes but there were several similarities that seemed important to discuss. This is a departure from the van Kaam method but is still aligned with phenomenology. I did this so that the individual themes would have a chance to shine without influence of their similarities to the other participants. Once each person's lived experience was discussed, I progressed to discussing the common themes that

arose from all of the interviews. I thought it was important to highlight both differences via individual themes and similarities of the women's experiences before talking about the composite textural, structural, and synthesized descriptions. The individual thematic descriptions were discussed for each participant and then for the combination of the interviews as well.

Following discussion of the shared themes, the next step was to discuss the themes from the context of their composite texture. The textural description came from all of the participants' experiences, making it the composite textural description. This was done by following Moustakas' modified van Kaam method by taking the themes that arose after identifying the invariant constituents and describing the "what" of the participants' experiences as bisexual Black women. I took thematic responses and used them to create the composite textural description. Once that task was completed, the next step was to engage in imaginative variation. Moustakas defined this as "seek[ing] possible meanings through the utilization of imagination" (p. 97). This led to the composite structural description where the "how" of the participants' experiences were revealed. The last step of transcendental phenomenology was to combine the textural and structural descriptions to develop the synthesis of meanings. This combination was the essence of holding multiple identities as bisexual Black women. The essence will be discussed in much greater depth in the results section of this text.

Trustworthiness

Researchers Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that the trustworthiness in qualitative research studies is met with four major criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. For credibility, or internal validity, I attempted to member check the thematic descriptions of each participant by sending each one the portion that applied to their individual experiences. However, only one participant responded with feedback. This feedback was

incorporated into the final analysis. As recommended by Korstjens and Moser (2018), I also utilized prolonged engagement by spending time getting to know participants and their experiences. I asked follow-up questions, spent time building trust with participants during interviews, and immersed myself in the data. For transferability, I created thick descriptions based on the interviews. These thick descriptions were the themes that were discussed and later transformed into composite textural, composite structural, and synthesis descriptions. Confirmability and dependability were maintained using an audit trail. I kept digital records of all my notes, ideas, reactions, and theories as I analyzed data. As ideas changed and themes formed, I saved each step so that I could go back to previous thoughts and ideas. This ensured that I was both neutral in my analysis and remained consistent with standards for transcendental phenomenological methods.

Instrumentation

There were no additional instruments that were implemented for this study besides the interview questions that were utilized to conduct the semi-structured interview. These interview questions were created based on the research questions and what I thought were the best ways to explore those questions. The main questions were the same for each interview but follow up questions varied based on certain responses and what the participant felt comfortable sharing. To reduce bias from myself as a person who shares the same identities as the participants, interview questions were open-ended to allow for participants to share details and aspects of their lives that are important to them and their intersecting identities.

Assumptions

While deciding on participants, it can be assumed that although African Americans are not a homogenous group, participants will likely have similar experiences even if they identify

their race differently such as African American, Black, or Black American. Despite the heterogeneity of the Black community, it is assumed that people that fall under the LGBTQ+ umbrella will have similar experiences of discrimination and mistreatment from both the dominant culture and members of the African American community due to their identities. Additionally, it is assumed that the age range of the participants will aid in richness of the targeted experience. Although it is difficult to confirm, it is assumed that each participant was honest throughout interviews, and they were not sharing what they believed what the researcher thought was important. This assumption is more difficult to dispel due to the nature of the study and the ability to identify what information is truthful and what is not. Furthermore, the chosen method is assumed to be the best for this type of study because it will focus on the targeted group to provide space for their lived experiences to come to light via formal research (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994).

Ethical Assurances

Before data was collected, the institution IRB granted approval. Furthermore, this process must consider the possible ethical issues that may arise while discussing topics as sensitive as racial, sexual, and gender identities. Discussing such experiences could potentially cause participants to become upset about what has transpired in their lives. These identities typically face discrimination via racism, sexism, homophobia, and/or biphobia that could potentially be upsetting or cause emotional dysregulation. Because of the nature of the topic, there was extra effort put forth to make potential participants feel as comfortable as possible. Participants were informed of the shared identities with the researcher so that they knew their story was being shared with someone in the community. I went over informed consent with the participants so that they were aware of the research and how the interview would be used in the study.

Additionally, they were given space to ask questions before they gave verbal consent before the interview started. Furthermore, subjects were informed that their participation was completely voluntary, and they could withdraw at any point they wanted to. After the interview, participants were provided resources that they could access even after completing the study so that they could easily find additional support if discussion of their experiences became upsetting later.

Data was saved on an online, password-encrypted database to ensure that no one had access to the information except myself. Additionally, any file connected to the research was password-encrypted as well. Files included demographic sheets, consent forms, audio from interviews, and transcripts of the interviews. In order to securely contact participants at a later time, contact information was kept separate and password-encrypted so that participant information was not easy to match information to each person.

Summary

Transcendental phenomenology was used to explore the experiences of four participants. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews via an online video chat platform. Moustakas' modified version of the van Kaam method was utilized to analyze the transcribed interviews. A deviance from that method was that I discussed each participant's individual themes separately, then discussed the shared themes before discussion of the composite textural, composite structural, and synthesized essence. This was to give space for similarities and differences to shine for their individual and collective experiences.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of holding multiple identities for cisgender bisexual Black women within the Black community. The intersection of gender, race, and sexual orientation were examined to learn about how intersectionality might influence the development of bisexual orientation for cisgender Black women. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore identity development and conflict for the participants in the context of the following research questions:

1. What is it the experience of holding multiple identities for cisgender bisexual Black women?
2. How does being a cisgender bisexual Black woman within the Black American community influence development of one's bisexual identity?
3. Do cisgender bisexual Black women experience identity conflict as a result of holding multiple identities?
 - a. Is there a pressure to choose one identity over the other?
 - b. How is this conflict resolved?
4. How has the interaction of racial identity and sexual identity influenced cisgender bisexual Black women's acceptance of their multiple identities?
5. How have the Black community's attitudes towards bisexuality influenced cisgender bisexual Black women's sexual identity development?

All the participants were able to share their experiences as bisexual Black women and how it might have influenced the development of their bisexual identity. Each participant was asked a

set of questions that would help me as the researcher understand their upbringing in context to religion, demographics of the neighborhoods in which they grew up, and the messages they received about queer identities as they were exploring sexuality. Questions also explored coming out processes, the notion of possible identity conflict, and ways that Black culture and ideologies have influenced self-perception as a bisexual woman. When necessary, I asked follow-up questions and clarified thoughts that were unclear. Interviews lasted between 40 minutes and an hour and 45 minutes. Pseudonyms were created for each participant. There is a table of compiled information in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Information

Pseudonym	Age	Self-Described Racial/Ethnic ID	Out to Family?	Age First Questioned?
Kendra	31	Black and Jamaican American	No, only to close friends	18 y/o
Morgan	35	Black Multiracial	Yes	28 y/o
Anaya	40	Black	Yes	18 y/o
Jade	31	Black	Yes	22 y/o

Kendra's Lived Experience

Kendra is a 31-year-old participant who is from the northeast region of Illinois. She self-identifies as Black and Jamaican American. Her highest level of education is a bachelor's and her yearly income is between \$60 and \$100K. Though she does not attend church regularly, she considers herself a Christian. Kendra first started questioning her sexuality in college and has only come out to a small number of people in her life including some close friends and

teammates on the various sports teams in which she participates. At the time of the interview, she was not out to her family. During the interview, she did become tearful but was able to self-regulate and complete the interview with enthusiasm and full engagement.

An Emotional Response

Early in the interview, Kendra demonstrated a strong emotional response to the conversation as she teared up while responding to interview questions. It is difficult to determine exactly when she started crying but it became quite evident that the content of the interview evoked an emotional response when we were talking about religious aspects of her life. After a reminder that she could disengage, ample inquiry, comfort, and space to regulate herself, she was willing to continue with the interview. Throughout our conversation, she continued to be tearful but reported that it was because it is difficult for her to stop crying once she begins. However, she was able to coherently express her thoughts and experiences. Eventually she did stop crying and was able to continue to fully engage in the interview.

Coming Out. Or Lack Thereof

Kendra revealed early in the interview how she is not out to most people in her life. As we spoke and conversed, there have been several factors that affected Kendra's coming out process.

Family

Early on, it became quite evident how important Kendra's family is to her even though she is not out to them yet. She stated, "For me it's still a hot topic. Like my immediate family doesn't know." Her family is the most important source of support and because of their significance in her life, her biggest apprehension in fully coming out is her family's reaction. As we discussed why she has chosen not to come out to her family, she responded, "Part of why I don't feel this need for everyone to know is just like kind of general fear of reactions and how

people treat you.” Upon reflection of how she thinks about possible rejection from family members compared to other people in her life she stated:

Friends, fuck em, you can drop em, but family, that’s blood... you can’t- you could- but you can’t really ditch family, in my mind, I guess... with family it’s like, I don’t know. I think it’s a tougher hurdle for me to get over.

When asked how she believes her parents would react to her sexual identity she retorted, “I genuinely don’t know... I feel like they’ll get over it at some point.” She also commented on observations of more distant family members’ reactions to other family members that might be gay, “First the immediate family and just nervous there but then the greater family. I already know how they talk and act at weddings like, ‘so and so’s gay’.” Overhearing these discussions amongst family members has made her apprehensive to be more open about her own sexuality.

She stated:

I think you pick up on those little remarks that people make. Whether it’s about strangers or the only person in my family that I feel like kind of is or maybe was out about it [being gay]. Just to kind of hear the little gossipy birds- the older generation- and how they kind of look and judge... I’m kind of like for the larger family, they don’t even need to know.

Her family’s reactions are more important to her than any other people in her life such as friends, teammates, or strangers. After further inquiry on the source of this anticipated fear that her parents would perceive her in a negative manner if she comes out, she stated, “I think for me it’s the internal [internalized messages]. I do care to some extent... but it’s less hurtful to me if it’s a stranger that has that reaction... to not be accepted by my family is what I think what would hurt the most for me.” It seems as if even though her immediate family has never expressed negative

thoughts or sentiments about queer identities, she still fears that her family would not be accepting of her sexual identity.

Church/ Religion

While she believes her parents will eventually get over her sexual identity if she were to come out to them, Kendra also spoke about the role of religion in her apprehension in coming out to extended family. She continued on to talk about her grandmothers' involvement in the church and how that religious involvement would possibly influence how older family members would react to her sexuality, "My grandmothers are more established in church... so I feel there's a little bit more of that head shaking like 'what are you doing?' type of a thing". Her grandmothers' involvement in the church makes her even more hesitant to come out to her family. She fears that they will judge her, perhaps even more harsh than family that are not as involved in religion such as her parents.

Furthermore, Kendra shared that in college as she was exploring her sexuality, she was also exploring religion and church. She stated, "So I think right around the time I really truly started kind of questioning and wanting to explore or feel like 'Hey, I'm looking at a female and... she's kind of attractive', it was probably around college and that's also around the time where I started exploring religion." She discussed sermons and "shows" that led her to believe that church was not accepting of queer identities. As she described these shows, she stated, "Some of the things they would do is put on a show and have someone walk in rainbow clothes. And then, oh, they're being saved and making a clear image [that] this person is gay." In response to these shows, she commented, "You're clearly giving us imagery and messaging that would suggest that because that person is gay or doesn't want to reproduce with someone of the opposite sex, that something is wrong with that."

The messages that Kendra received from the predominantly Black church that she was attending left her feeling like her new forthcoming attractions were wrong or sinful. As she discussed how this affected her self-perception, she shared, “I think as I’m questioning my sexuality, it made me question- I don’t want to say like my health- but ‘Is this a healthy feeling?’ Or ‘is this a normal thing that I’m going through?’” This led her to eventually stray away from attending church. She reflected, “You know for me I think that was a little bit of a deal breaker with church.” It was at this point in the conversation that Kendra was more obviously tearful. Her emotional response to the content of the conversation indicates how painful messages of sin and damnation can be for queer identified churchgoers, especially ones that are just starting to explore their sexual identity. She described the process of exploring religion and her sexuality at the same time as “two combatting forces.”

Lack of Representation/Connection

As the interview progressed, Kendra discussed a lack of connection to the LGBT+ community and how that might have also influenced her self-perception as she was initially navigating her own sexuality and desire to come out. In reflecting back to when she was first questioning early in college she shared, “I think it’s kind of like a lot of things in life. You’re kind of looking for role models. You’re looking for people to show you like, ‘This is what the future where you’re headed looks like.’” For Kendra, seeing some sort of representation would have made coping with her newfound feelings easier. She stated, “I don’t think that I was around community, the LGBTQ community, to really understand or to seek and educate myself around how I’m feeling.” This exposure might have helped her to sort through her feelings and made her feel less alone as well. The theme of exposure to the queer community is discussed in greater detail later in this section.

Roles and Expectations

The presence of roles and expectations also made themselves obvious as the interview progressed. Kendra discussed roles and expectations in the context of her family and society.

Family Roles

Kendra talked about a desire to continue to stay in the roles that she has been placed in her family's dynamics. Her thoughts are as follows:

You know, I was kind of like a golden child growing up, like always getting good grades and always having my shit together kind of thing. So, I think there's a little bit of, I don't know, just not being perfect that kind of scares me, I guess.

This statement indicates that identifying as anything but heterosexual is seen as imperfect or defective. In the context of her family, to keep the status quo of her family dynamics, coming out seems to be a step that only needs to be taken if she has found a partner that is suitable to introduce to them. She stated:

They probably have certain hopes that I'm not looking to crush ... I don't wanna come out when I'm not established. I would rather be like 'hey warning I like women' and kinda introduce someone that's important to me. Instead of just like 'hey I like women.'

She referred to this thought process as "bringing a finished product home". Before she can find a worthy partner, it does not seem worth it to come out to her family and potentially experience emotional distress because of possible rejection. For Kendra, coming out to her family and feeling most comfortable doing so would mean that she has found a partner that she sees worthy of introducing to her family. She does not want to come out "for no reason", and this thought process is perhaps to legitimize her sexuality identity and her preferences.

Societal Expectations

As she continues to come to terms with her sexuality, Kendra also shared expectations that are placed upon her, such as the labels of femme or stud, in reference to her discomfort in navigating curiosities from Black peers. “Then, I feel from there I start getting put into buckets. ‘So, are you like femme? Or are you stud?’” These questions make her feel pressured to disclose her sexuality to a group of people that might ridicule or make fun of her. The theme of ridicule will be discussed in greater detail later in the text. Furthermore, questions about her ability to have a family and children also cross her mind as she is figuring out if seeking relationships with women is worth it:

As [you] think about your future, your potential hypothetical future with someone and if it’s with a female, for me I kind of struggle to say ‘Can I still have the things that I want? Can I still have a family? Can I still? Is this normal? Can I bring this person back to my family?’

While she is still navigating the road to acceptance of her sexuality, she is also aware of the pressures that are placed upon women to have children and create a family. At the point of the interview, she was not decided on what she wanted for herself, but those questions still arise as she is figuring out her sexuality and her future. She declared, “Let me figure out my life and where I wanna be before I worry about bringing more life into this world or adopting and bringing someone into my family and home.”

Fear of Persecution/ Ridicule

Throughout the interview, Kendra discussed jokes about sexuality that she has overheard, witnessed, and experienced being directed towards her. These jokes left her feeling

uncomfortable with disclosing her own sexual identity or being openly out in spaces where some people are aware of her sexual identity.

Anticipated ridicule has made it feel almost impossible to know when the right time will be to come out to her immediate family. As she references these jokes she stated, “it kind of puts you as an outlier [within the Black community] to some extent”.

Kendra shared an observation of jokes about queer identities made by Black peers. She reflected:

depending on your gender, beyond that there's, you know, more or less kind of, I don't want to call it shame but just you know the types of jokes and things that you hear... there's a lot of males in the African American community that joke about calling each other gay in a negative connotation.

This idea is discussed several times throughout the interview. In Kendra's experience, queer identities have been the target of persecution and ridicule in the Black community. Many times, these jokes came from people that she has spent extensive time with such as fellow athletes on the various sports teams in which she plays. This anticipated ridicule has created uncomfortable situations for her because she is not out to everyone in various settings. Even though many of the jokes she has overheard have been about gay men, she stated, “I feel like it's a little bit challenging to navigate that and even though I identify with bisexual, it's like I'm a woman that also likes other women.” This statement also speaks to the fact that there may be an invisibility to her sexual identity that makes it easier to conceal her attraction to women. Even if she is in a situation where someone is making jokes about queer identities, she can choose to avoid disclosure. There is also an underlying assumption that since she still maintains attraction to men as well, she can continue to be in these spaces without outing herself too much.

Slow Progression to Self-Acceptance

Even though Kendra is not out to everyone in her life, she is slowly becoming more comfortable with her sexuality and her attraction to women. She shared two main factors that have helped with this acceptance which are education and exposure to the LGBTQ+ community. When asked what has helped her to come to term with her sexuality thus far, she responded, “I think for me it’s like the combination of factors. So, like educating myself... [and] seeing it and just being around people who are lesbian, who are gay, who are queer, who are transgender.”

Education and Exposure

Being able to see other queer identities has been a helpful factor in Kendra’s journey to self-acceptance. She shares that not only has she been educating herself and learning more, but she has been exposed to more identities that fall under the LGBTQ+ spectrum as well. She discussed how before approximately two years prior to the interview, she had little understanding of the LGBTQ+ community due to isolation. She stated, “I think it’s kind of easier to isolate yourself and just kind of like feel things and not know what they are and not understand that other people are going through something similar.” Increased exposure to people in the queer community has helped Kendra to normalize her own feelings. In continuing her thoughts on what has helped her come this far with acceptance of her sexuality she replied, “I think there’s the education and then there’s seeing it. So, like, knowing people who identify in those worlds and just kind of doing that over time has made me feel more comfortable, more like it’s okay.”

Though she is not out to everyone in her life, she has successfully come out to close friends and their support has helped her to feel more comfortable with herself as well. She stated, “Just by coming out to my really close friends I think it’s helped a lot because I can talk about things. Or I can let that burden off my shoulders.” In being able to share her experiences with people that

have not been judgmental, she has received validation that her sexuality is not sinful or wrong. She has learned that she can be accepted by significant people in her life.

Overall, the intersections of Kendra's identities are marked with uncertainty that stems from how people will react to her sexual identity. She has not fully come to terms with her sexuality which has resulted in her withholding this identifier from her family. Kendra's multiple identities are influenced by her family's expectations of her being able to have a family of her own in addition to the context in which she is able to fully be herself. Since she is only out to close friends, trust seems to be important for her to feel comfortable coming out in any given setting.

Morgan's Lived Experience

Morgan is a 35-year-old self-identified multiracial Black woman who currently lives in the west suburbs of Chicago but is from the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. Her yearly income is \$40K and her highest level of completed education is a Bachelor's. Morgan does not currently have any religious affiliations but did go to church regularly as a teenager as a way to connect and spend time with peers at the time. She first realized that she was bisexual around the age of 28 and came out shortly after she began dating a woman for the first time. She is out to everyone in her life and is currently in a long-term committed relationship with a woman.

Coming Out

Though Morgan did not realize her non-heterosexual attraction until she was almost 30, her coming out story is not linear. She was able to choose to come out to her mother first, but she was essentially forced out on a larger scale based on people's assumptions of a picture posted on social media.

Family Acceptance

Morgan's story is a bit different from Kendra's. Though she came out in her late 20s, she has received full acceptance from most people in her life, including her immediately accepting family. She came out to her mother first and was met with encouragement of her newly discovered attraction. When she first came to her mother with her attraction to a particular woman, "She [her mother] was like 'It's okay, it's okay.' And I was like 'Okay, then it's okay' and she was like 'Yeah, it's okay'". Though her mother could have had an internal reaction that she did not express, Morgan felt accepted and encouraged to further explore her new feelings. She shared similar reactions from other family members such as her siblings as well. Even her extended family like her cousins were accepting. Once she was fully out, she shared how her mother and grandmother affirmed, "We always knew." A statement that made Morgan laugh since she was not aware of her own attraction to women until she was almost 30. She reflected, "I feel completely blessed and joyful that people in my family were loving and accepting because I've heard horror stories of other people."

Even though Morgan came out later in life, she was still met with immediate acceptance from family members and most friends. Morgan shared how her mother always encouraged an open relationship with her where she could go to her if she ever felt like she may have feelings for women. She explained, "My mom is a social worker and is a very free-spirit, so she would talk to us about having feelings like that and always tell us like 'if you ever feel like that you can always come to me'". This reassurance to explore and express one's sexuality is particularly atypical for Black parents and families. However, this encouragement might have been bolstered by the combination of the diverse and generally accepting community that Morgan grew up in and her mother being a social worker. That invitation for open communication made it easier for

Morgan to talk to her mother when she found herself truly attracted to a woman for the first time in her late 20s.

Forced out by Social Media

After having a conversation with her mother and deciding to further explore these feelings, Morgan discussed how the rest of her coming out experience was forced due to people's assumptions based on a picture that she was tagged in on social media. It was a picture of her and the same woman that she initially found herself attracted to at a formal wedding. She shared how at the time that the photo was posted, she thought nothing of it. Morgan declared, "I loved the picture. She did as well. And she posted it on Facebook and tagged me in it." Once people in her friend's list made their assumptions she stated, "Coming out was odd because I didn't really control that part. It was like somebody opened a door and saw me in the act." Morgan discussed how some people's reaction to her female wedding date were "weird for me because obviously not everybody was accepting, and they had the weirdest questions. I didn't know if I owed them an answer and what not." Some of the questions that she received included: "Who pressured you into this?" and "Is she controlling you?". It is worth noting that at the time of her coming out, she had moved to the Chicagoland area within the past year and because of this recent move, people she knew from her hometown were most shocked while people that she recently met in Chicago assumed that she had been out and queer for some time. In remembering her forced coming out story, she stated:

It had been less than a year since I had moved to Chicago so everybody in [home state] knew me as one person ... then in Chicago I'm learning that the more I talk to people that I associate with because we play [various sports], they have created a story of me

completely all on their own, based on just that picture and who they've seen me around since then.

In addition to mixed reactions from people from different points in her life, she talked about a lack of support from her best friend. "I think the most disappointing person was my best friend.", she stated as she reflected upon negative reactions to her coming out. This will be discussed in greater depth in the next section.

Religion/ Church

Morgan's coming out experience and perception of queer identities was influenced by religion and church as well.

Best Friend's Response

Once Morgan was essentially forced out of the closet, she shared that her best friend, who grew up in a strict, religious household, had difficulty in accepting her sexuality. After formally coming out to her best friend, she responded by saying, "you know you're my best friend and I love you, but I don't love your lifestyle". This statement is similar to the popular phrase *Love the sinner, hate the sin* that is typically used as a way for Christians to express love for a queer person (or any way of living that is seen as "sinful" for that matter) in every context except their sexual identity. Remarks like this were disappointing to Morgan and caused a rift in the friendship. Her best friend initially ignored her sexuality. Morgan shares how she initially minimized her sexual identity, "there was a period where she still didn't really acknowledge me being bisexual. She just was like 'I don't know. Maybe it's a phase... I know it's really cool right now to be gay'." Not only was this thought hurtful to Morgan but statements like this also affirm the erasure of bisexuality and the narrative that it is a steppingstone to eventual monosexuality.

Over time, Morgan noticed more acceptance from her best friend once she moved out of the religious household in which she grew up. She stated, “She was brought up in a pretty strict household, religious household. So, I think once she had moved and really started just doing things, like, on her own. Suddenly that opened up. She was more open to things.” Her best friend was able to see people in the LGBTQ community as regular people instead of focusing on the perceived sins of the identities. In a conversation they had after time passed, she reported that her friend realized, “Huh, you know there’s a lot of people that identify as [queer] and they’re really good people and they’re not doing anything but like going to work, coming home. Watching the same shows that I watch.” Though Morgan does not know exactly how her friend currently feels about her sexuality, she believes that she is more accepting than she initially was when she first came out.

Messages in Church

Despite Morgan growing up in a generally accepting and diverse community, she still received mixed messages in the predominately Black church that she attended regularly as a teenager. She talks about these differences of perspective as follows:

In my household it was never something that I feared of, like, telling my parents or what not... I did not know that I was queer. But I never got the impression that even if I was curious about that that my parents would be upset or disappointed in it. But definitely in the church I felt like you would be [judged] because they would talk about it.

Morgan defined her observations of the clergy’s views on queer identities as “mixed signals”. She explained, “We welcomed everybody but we’re gonna cast demons out. We’re gonna cast that devil out, if you do come here, knowingly queer or gay or anything.” These were mixed signals because she discussed assumedly gay members of her church that were in active positions

such as the choir director. Additionally, Morgan observed some of her own friends engage in ridicule and mockery of the assumedly gay choir director. She stated that none of them knew his sexuality, but they all assumed that he was gay. She remembered, “I had some friends that would go hard in making fun of him. Not to his face, mind you. But they would go hard, and it made me uncomfortable, and I wish I would have said something.” Years later once she realized that she was bisexual, Morgan felt apprehensive to come out to some of these friends due to their behavior when they were teenagers. “Subconsciously, when I felt like ‘Okay this isn’t just an experimental thing. I feel like I really like women’, I was more afraid to tell them and their reaction, rather than my own family.” Even though she received generally positive reactions about her newly disclosed sexuality, she still felt apprehension in coming out to the group of church friends from her adolescence.

Negative Experiences as a Queer Black Woman

Morgan shared several factors that have influenced her perception of the intersection of various her identities. As the interview progressed, it became obvious that these factors seem to make her more aware of herself as a Black woman that identifies within the LGBTQ+ community.

Jokes/ Ridicule

Although Morgan has had general positive reactions to her sexuality from those closest to her, she also shared negative experiences from Black peers that can make it difficult to navigate some spaces. Morgan also plays on several sports teams where her sexuality has become a topic of discussion and a target of jokes. She stated, “Sometimes they will say something about my sexuality that will be inappropriate, and I’ll be like ‘what?’” Despite playing on a coed team, she shared, “It’s a lot of Black men that usually do challenge it”, though she does hear jokes from the

women on her team as well. Morgan apprehensively shared how a woman on one of her teams jokes that she “carries around a dick” After reflecting upon which part of her identity she has felt the most stigma, she reported that it depends on the environment:

I feel like I can get a challenge of being Black and a woman. And then you know out there [playing sports] it’s like suddenly my sexuality is a point of topic out of nowhere... When I go out in this other world where we’re all playing sports, then it was like my sexuality was challenged.

In Morgan’s experience, her sexuality is frequently challenged as a Black woman. She stated, “I feel like especially when it’s a Black woman that identifies as anything within the LGBTQ [community], there’s people that try to challenge that.” These challenges often look like questions about true preference, i.e., finding the right man, jokes about widespread attraction to every person, and references to hyper amounts of sex and sexual partners.

A Scary Encounter

While most of the pushback that she experienced has been lighthearted and easy to brush off, Morgan shared a pivotal story that made her aware of how her identities intersect in the Black community. She described an incident where she was in a popular, mostly queer neighborhood in Chicago, where her and a female friend were approached by Black men. One of the men expressed interest in her friend but the friend was not interested in the attention. As a way to avert the men’s attention, her friend told the men that Morgan was her girlfriend. Morgan described their reaction to the rejection as follows, “They got so mad. They started pointing their anger towards me like, ‘Oh man, all of the good Black women are being taken because they think we messed up. What you been telling them?’” Though she talked about this incidence in a joking manner, it became evident that she was uncomfortable and scared for her safety in that

moment. She recalls, “Their anger was so focused on me that I initially thought, ‘I’m about to get beat up’. They came so close to me.” The women were able to diffuse the situation and avoid additional confrontation, but she states, “The stuff they were saying still resides. Like, I can pull up that memory because I really thought that I’m about to get beat for being gay. I’m about to get beat and it’s not even real [the fake relationship with her friend].” This incidence gave Morgan the impression that, “There’s men out here that are very upset and it’s very pinpointed and finite who think- ‘You guys are taking our Black women’”. As she continues to reflect on that incident she stated, “It’s like they don’t even recognize that I’m Black too. But at that point, I wasn’t a Black woman. I was just gay and taking women from them.” As she discussed that incident, it was obvious how much it affected her. Morgan’s imaginary relationship with her friend was perceived as a threat to these men and this perceived threat led them to become aggressive towards her as if she was not a woman as well. This type of aggressive behavior towards Black women highlights how this group is often stripped of femininity by society when they are seen as a threat, whether perceived as too strong, too loud, or too outspoken. Even though neither woman was doing anything inherently wrong, they were faced with aggression because of rejection and a perceived limit in the amount of accessible Black women.

Experiences in the Workplace

In some settings, Morgan’s sexual identity has no bearing on how people perceive her. Even though she did have some negative experiences, her coworkers had no reaction to her coming out. She remembered:

It’s odd because that same picture [the one that outed her], people found out at work ‘cause there was a few people that I was friends with at work and they were like ‘Oh I didn’t know’ and like ‘Oh okay.’ And then to my knowledge that was the end of it.

However, she discussed an instance where she was reprimanded at work with no basis or examples of a perceived “attitude”, an issue that happens often for Black women in the workplace. She shared, “I had to come into my supervisor’s supervisor’s office to chat about attitude.” As the conversation unfolded, the supervisor struggled to provide examples of the aforementioned attitude. Morgan described herself, “If anybody knows me, I really don’t have one. I’m pretty happy-go-lucky most of the time, easy going... You really have to push a button if I get an attitude.” Morgan walked away from that conversation with no additional information about her perceived attitude. She wanted to share feelings with her direct supervisor about the interaction and stated, “I just let them know how upset I was. And then I have that scrutiny of the stereotype of being a Black woman.” She described her experiences as a Black woman in the workplace as follows, “When I’m at work, I feel like people try to challenge me being Black like the attitude thing and I once had somebody tell me my hair was wild.” Challenges at work present themselves as feedback about her perception of her appearance and how she communicates.

Overall, when Morgan came out, she received a mix of reactions and opinions. Most people in her family accepted her without question, while others in her life challenged her recently revealed sexual identity in varying ways. Morgan’s proximity to religion and the Black church also influenced her coming out story as she felt apprehension in coming out to her church friends from high school and her religious best friend initially dismissed her sexual identity. Additionally, once she was out to everyone, she has experienced jokes and ridicule from Black peers that are typically easy to ignore; though at times, the jokes are offensive or insulting. Her coming out story has helped her to find out about herself in ways that she otherwise would not

have been able to. These experiences have made Morgan proud of the intersections of identity. She has developed a sense of pride in herself and all the ways that her identities intersect.

Anaya's Lived Experience

Anaya is a 40-year-old woman who grew up on the west side of Chicago but currently lives in a northern suburb of the city. She identifies as Black, has completed 2 years of college, and has a yearly income of \$86K. She does not currently have any religious affiliations but grew up attending a Baptist church. Anaya started questioning her sexuality in college, though she shared that it was never really a question and more of an active effort to date people that she found interesting and attractive. Even though she had been involved with both men and women throughout her life, she initially identified as a lesbian for many years before self-identifying as bisexual. Anaya has a 7-year-old daughter and at the time of the interview, Anaya was in the middle of a divorce from a man and shared that she planned on staying single once the divorce is finalized.

Earliest Sexual Experiences

Anaya shared that her first sexual experience was with a girl in her pre-adolescence, but she reported that those experiences had no influence on how she identified. She stated, "I didn't consider myself to be a lesbian because I still liked boys outwardly, but we were experimenting behind closed doors." As she realized that she was attracted to women, she was just beginning college. Though she had dated male peers before realizing her attraction to women, she did not label herself as bisexual, or lesbian for that matter, until years later.

Fluidity in Self-Identification

Anaya is unique in that she expressed fluidity in her sexual identity. She referred to herself as a lesbian many times in the interview. After learning more about her experiences, it

became evident that some influence on fluidity of her identification came from Black lesbians and their disdain for woman that were involved with more than other women.

Lesbian or Bisexual?

Throughout the interview Anaya referred to herself as a lesbian several times. She talked about her initial attraction to women becoming obvious once she got to college, but she did not immediately label herself. She stated, “It was never really a thing in college... I had a couple of same sex relationships in college, and it was fun, but it was new. It was short lived because we were young or whatever.” Anaya did not label herself as a lesbian until after college, “I decided to be a full-time lesbian, and I was very happy with it.” Even though I did ask how she identifies during the screening process, I wanted to clarify and inquire about when she began to identify as bisexual. She stated, “I don’t know that I ever considered myself bisexual until I was a little bit older.” She talked about identifying as bisexual once she began dating a woman that she described as “bicurious”. In this relationship, they both agreed to not date other women besides each other. She shared:

We kind of had this thing where we agreed to not date other women. When me and my ex broke up, I did not date any other women. I didn’t have sex with any other women. Probably 10 [years], I don’t know, something like that. It was a really long time. So, I was dating men, but she would still come and visit. I would go visit her and we were in a relationship when we were together. And when we were apart, we both dated men.

This fluidity in her relationships and partners led her to identify as bisexual as time passed. She had a long-term, long-distant relationship with a woman, and she was dating men at the times that her and her girlfriend were not together. While she dated this particular woman, Anaya also

realized that she enjoyed being able to be dominant in relationships with feminine women and submissive in relationships with men or masculine women i.e., studs. She stated:

I kind of weighed my personalities and I needed to be submissive on one side and then I needed to be dominant on the other side and so all of that came out of that last relationship with that woman. That I'm more of aggressive because I didn't even know that I liked feminine women and then I realized that I quickly became what they call aggressive femme.

These are characteristics that she likely would have not discovered in dating cisgender men or studs because she is naturally more submissive in relationships with masculine people. For Anaya, being bisexual gives her versatility in the roles that she takes on in relationships as well.

Pressure From Black lesbians

Additionally, Anaya discussed pressure from Black lesbians to identify as lesbian. She recalled, "There was a huge stigma with lesbians. They did not want to mess with anyone that dated or had sex with men." This stigma forced Anaya to hide the fact that she has dated or is attracted to men as well. She reflected, "If you were not a lesbian, they did not want to deal with you." Because of this, Anaya chose to withhold this information from any woman that she was dating unless directly asked. When asked to discuss her experiences of lesbians and their disdain for bisexual women in greater detail, she responded, "It was usually studs that didn't feel comfortable. They didn't wanna compete with men. And it's like 'I don't wanna be with a woman that is having sex with a man. She can bring me back anything.'" These thoughts perpetuate beliefs that bisexual people are careless and sexually promiscuous. They also breed a sense of shame that bisexuality is somehow wrong or a part of one's identity that should be hidden.

Coming Out

For Anaya, coming out did not seem to be a big deal. She chose someone close to her to come out and when she did come out, she chose not to label herself, but to simply share that she was dating a woman. Throughout her coming out process, she was met with both acceptance and pushback along the way.

Coming out for the First Time

The first person that Anaya came out to was her best friend while she was visiting home from college. She recalled, “I felt like she wasn’t- well I don’t care if anybody was gonna judge- but I just kinda figured that she would understand.” In addition to her feeling comfortable with coming out to her best friend that particular day, she observed that her best friend had a matching outfit with another girl at a fish fry that they attended. Although she does not remember exactly how the conversation went, she did recall that neither of them labeled themselves. They both simply shared that they were each dating women at the time. She stated, “It was just a thing. There was no on/off switch. It was just what I’m doing.” She was able to share the information of dating a woman without the necessity of labeling herself in any way.

Coming out to Family

However, she did not receive the same positive reaction when she came out to her parents at 19-years-old. There was pushback that she worked to overcome by simply continuing to date who she wanted. When Anaya came out to her parents, she was dating a woman that was significantly older than her and already had a pre-teen daughter. After coming out to her mother she recollected, “My mom decided that she was going to disown me.” Eventually her mom became more accepting and even embraced the daughter of one her major girlfriends. In thinking back on her mother’s progression, she stated:

It's so funny, my mom- when I was in this long-term relationship- became a grandmother to her child. Like we sent her down there for spring break and my mom was happy to have her. They were getting their nails done and taking walks and all of this stuff... "I don't even know how the switch shifted on that one.

When she came out to her father, his main concern was her ability to have children. She stated, "He was like, 'well what about grandkids?' I was like, 'my uterus still works. You may just have a daughter-in-law instead of a son-in-law.' He was wonderful." Although his main concern was grandchildren, he did not express desire to disown her. When she incorporated her first long-term girlfriend into her life, she talked about how much her father loved her partner, "My dad loved her."

While in a long-term relationship with a woman, Anaya discussed pushback from her girlfriend's family as well. She reported, "Her family was a little bit- her mom was like our obstacle. Her daughter's father was intimidated and kind of upset that I lived there that I was actively doing the job that he should have been doing." In a different part of the interview she remembered, "Going to things with her family. Her cousins and aunt was a lot more open but her mom was married to a minister." In another relationship, she shared, "I remember my ex-girlfriend's aunt was not very comfortable with our relationship." She later talked about how her girlfriend's aunt eventually expressed approval of their relationship by saying, "Ya know, it's okay if y'all are some freaks." This sort of statement indicates that engagement in same sex dating behavior is seen as "freaky", abnormal, or hypersexualized by those that are assumed to be heterosexual in the Black community.

Being out in a Christian Environment

Not only did she experience pushback from both her own family and the family members of the women that she was dating, but she also discussed working for a minister that regularly expressed his disapproval of her dating preferences. She stated, “I did work for a minister... It wasn’t him, it was his [business] partner. His partner was this white, cisgender Christian who was very straightlaced. When my boss hired me, this man told him to fire me ‘cause I was a lesbian.” Additionally, she shared:

He [her minister boss] would say stuff like ‘I really wish that you dated men’, because that’s what he believed. But he was accepting of her. He was accepting of her daughter, who I would sometimes have to bring to work with me and he was a nice guy. He was nice to her. He was nice to me even though I conflicted with his beliefs.

Her Christian boss and his “straightlaced” business partner represented different people on the spectrum of acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities. One side that is completely against non-heterosexual people and another side that is willing to tolerate but will still express disapproval. This half-acceptance seems to be common within the Black community. Once she broke up with her girlfriend at the time and began dating men, her boss praised her for her difference in choice of partners. She stated, “He found out that I was dating men, he was like ‘thank you Jesus. All of the praying worked.’” Naturally, she informed him that his prayers, in fact, did not work. However, his desire to pray away her sexuality conveys the message that sexual identity is a trait that can be addressed or fixed through the power of prayer.

Pride in One’s Identities

Despite experiencing judgment, pushback, and dismissal of her sexual identity from several people in her life, Anaya declared, “It made me very unapologetic about who I was. I was

never insecure about it.” She made this declaration after discussing housing discrimination that she experienced while trying to find a home for herself, her long-term girlfriend, and the girlfriend’s daughter.

Pride in Sexual Identity

Throughout the interview, she makes several statements similar to the one just quoted. Anaya never allowed others’ judgment of her or her partners make her uncomfortable or apprehensive to be her authentic self, even in spaces that were not welcoming of her as someone that identified as lesbian. In reflecting upon others’ perceptions and reactions to her sexual identity, she shared, “I don’t know how long it took them to accept it. I didn’t really care. I didn’t keep the time on it. But I was who I was and very unapologetic about it; still am.” When she was met with the possibility of her mother disowning her, Anaya chose to stand firm in her dating preferences because she wanted to live life exactly as she saw fit. When she was faced with her mother disowning her, she stated:

I didn’t really care what other people thought about my relationship with her [her girlfriend at the time] and about me taking care of her child. I just didn’t. I didn’t care. Which is why when my mom said what she said, I was like ‘Oh. Okay’ I’m not gonna change because you’re trying to threaten me with cutting me out of your life. ‘Okay.’

Her willingness to possibly lose connection with her mother demonstrates how proud she is of herself and how unapologetic she has chosen to live her life as a queer woman.

Pride in Black identity

Furthermore, Anaya shared pride in her identity as a Black woman as well. When asked about parts of her identity that feel more stigmatized by society, she responded:

Being a Black woman. Bisexuality doesn't have anything to do with it. You know my marital status doesn't have anything to do with it. Just being a Black woman, period.

Because I am often called difficult or angry or whatever because I don't allow people to disrespect me.

Undeterred by her experience of stigma in the context of being a Black woman, she no longer feels pressure to minimize herself. She discussed in detail what it has been like for her to be a Black woman in the workplace where she has experienced judgment from both White and Black coworkers. In discussing pride in her identity, she stated, "I'm very proud of who I am. I am very proud of the work that I do. I don't see any reason to dull myself down." However, she did not always feel as comfortable being herself in places that do not embrace Black identities.

She shared how in her 20s, she often minimized her blackness in order to be taken more seriously or accepted in different settings. She stated, "There've been times in the past where I've felt like I had to shrink my blackness to be heard or to be acknowledged... When I wanted acceptance and all of that, I would shrink certain parts of me that were inherently black." As she got older, she felt the need to shrink herself less and is her authentic self in all settings, around whoever is in her environment.

Anaya's identity development does not seem to have been affected by important people in her life. She talks about the importance of religion and church in her childhood, "I grew up with my grandmother. We said the lord's prayer every night before bed. She made us say grace and things like that." However, that did not stop her from dating whoever she wanted and identifying as whatever she wanted to identify as. In holding multiple identities, Anaya's biggest source of conflict came from within the LGBTQ+ community. She shares that throughout her 20s, when she was dating Black lesbians, they expressed disdain with Anaya's attraction to men.

Due to stigma surrounding women that are attracted to both men and women, Anaya identified as lesbian for many years. Instead of a conflict between her racial identity and her sexual identity, there was pressure to identify as monosexual from the Black lesbians that she was dating, causing another type of identity conflict.

Jade's Lived Experience

Jade is a 31-year-old participant who is from the west suburbs of Chicago. Jade is a Black woman that typically presents as masculine, though she does not identify as a stud. Her highest level of completed education is a master's and she currently earns \$50K a year. Jade does not have any religious affiliations though she did attend church occasionally throughout her childhood. However, her mother developed a stronger connection to church and religion in her adulthood. Jade shared that she did not actively question her sexuality until she was around 22-years-old. She first avoided this exploration a bit earlier in life when feelings came up at approximately 15-years-old. She is currently out to everyone in her life and has been married to a woman for three years.

Apprehension to Explore Sexuality

Before Jade even came out, she observed and experienced several factors that influenced her desire to further explore her sexual attractions to non-male peers.

Observation of Black Peers in High School

As a teenager, Jade's desire to come out or even explore her sexuality was influenced by observations of Black peers in high school. As a teenager, exploring her sexual identity did not feel like an option due to her own observations of peers' reactions to others that came out in high school:

I went through a phase where I didn't really, wouldn't say question my sexuality, I just kinda avoided trying to figure things out for as long as I could. I was like 'you know I'll just won't really worry about this'. 'Cause I wasn't really sure and it wasn't something that I knew how to or felt comfortable with addressing so I was just like, 'It's kinda there but we don't have to get into that right now'.

As a teenager, Jade had a sense that she might not be heterosexual but chose to ignore that sense in order to avoid possible negative attention from peers. She shared her memories of peers' responses to people coming out as a teenager, "In high school, there was always some sort of backlash [when someone came out]". Although she did notice rumors and other negative attention towards her White peers as well, the attention did not seem as pervasive. Because of this, she shared:

It was more so known amongst the other Black students and just having all of that kinda really reinforced like, 'I don't know if this is the case [being queer], but I know I don't wanna address it right now.' Because obviously it seems like this is something that Black people don't do going off of all of the stuff I'm hearing in the hallways.

The negative attention that queer identities received in high school made Jade feel like queer identities were othered by Black peers, an experience that she did not want for herself as a teenager.

Furthermore, during the time that Jade decided to avoid her possible attraction to other female peers, a friend asked her out. She shared, "Around that time, I even had a girl ask me out and I gently rejected her because I was really uncomfortable with how she did it and didn't want people to find out about me dating a girl." She also described that she felt deceived when her friend asked her out because, "It was this weird third-person scenario where she made herself

sound like a guy instead of saying she was interested in me.” Jade’s friend tried to gauge her interest in her by pretending to set her up with a fictitious male friend. She found out that it was her friend when she finally asked her out. She reported, “I didn’t feel particularly weird about my female friend having a crush on me. I just didn’t like that she wasn’t upfront. If it wasn’t for all of that, I would’ve possibly explored then.” In that moment, she chose to reject her friend instead of exploring her possible attraction to non-male peers. Deception played a role in her decision, but it was likely influenced by her observations of other peers that chose to explore their sexuality as well.

Lack of Bisexual Representation

Not only did queer peers receive negative attention once they came out in high school, but Jade noticed a lack of peers that consistently identified as bisexual. She shared, “As far as being bisexual, there wasn’t much talk of that because almost everybody who identified as bisexual later came out as gay.” Even though there were peers that initially came out as bisexual, they later came out as gay. This change in labels gave her and other peers the impression that bisexuality was a transition for gay men and lesbians. This transition from bisexual to homosexual might also strengthen common beliefs that bisexuality is a phase that will eventually lead to a monosexual identity, whether gay/lesbian or heterosexual.

The development of Jade’s sexual identity occurred in her own time. Though the age in which she came out was not much later than other participants, when she first had thoughts that she may not be heterosexual, she actively chose to not further explore. Additionally, a lack of other queer representation in media made it difficult for Jade to see a clear picture of what bisexual looks like, especially for Black women. She shared:

Even just like media depictions from earlier years, they didn't really show a lot of- they showed like virtually no Black bisexual people, let alone bisexual women. But they barely showed lesbians and non-flamboyant gay Black men so the rumors [in high school] and the media experience that definitely can play a role as far as representation, lack of depictions all of those things. It can play a role in how someone who's kind of at that coming-of-age time in their life really sees themselves and understand what's going on and that all of this is normal.

As Jade navigated high school and her sexuality, she did not have models or examples to relate to and learn about healthy depictions of bisexuality. This combination of a lack of media representation and observance of Black peers' negative reactions made it challenging for Jade to explore or even think about her sexuality outside of heteronormative values.

Family Tension

In addition to Jade's observations of her peers' thoughts on queer identities and a lack of representation, as she got older, her mother adapted more religious values that led to tension in the family when her older sister shared that she was dating a woman. She stated, "When my sister said that she had a girlfriend... it turned into even bigger backlash than anticipated... it caused a major rift in my family dynamic." Jade detailed a domino effect that started with a family meeting called by her mother. She shared, "My mom called a family meeting and to this day we only had one single family meeting. Basically, she said that she failed as a parent and wondered where she went wrong then started to cry." Additionally, Jade's mother forced her sister to join a church. Furthermore, after her sister's disclosure, her mother reportedly made homophobic comments regularly. This behavior came to a pinnacle that led to her sister wanting to move out of the house. The issue was that "my sister owned the house that my mother and I

lived in.” Due to this extenuating circumstance, Jade and her mother were court-ordered to move off of the premises. Hostility, negative reactions, and aggressive language led to a major break in her family relationship. She shared, “The damage that happened to my family dynamic is still felt to this day.” Jade witnessed her family infrastructure fall apart after her sister disclosed dating a woman. This was much more than her mother disowning her sister. It led to a strained relationship between Jade, her sister, and her mother. It also led to a scramble to find housing that almost resulted in homelessness. The outcome of her mother’s behavior was much more disruptive than simply disowning her sister.

Years later, as she finally gave herself space to explore her own sexuality, that same family tension ran through her mind again. As she considered further exploring her identity, she thought about the drama that unfolded with her older sister. The series of painful events that led to longstanding tension in her family made it incredibly difficult for Jade to decide when it was time for her to come out. As she recalled the time in her life when she was trying to figure whether or not to come out, she stated:

I couldn’t help but think about all of the homophobic statements and actions that would be a result. Would I be forced to go to church excessively too? I also wondered if I disclosed my relationship- we were together for 9 months at this point- would I also get kicked out?

At that time, Jade had an established same-sex relationship that was meaningful for her, but she still struggled to determine if and when it would make sense to come out to her mother and potentially recreate the same drama from years earlier.

Coming to Terms with Sexual Identity

After years of stifling and ignoring her sexuality, Jade finally felt more comfortable to allow herself to explore her sexuality and eventually come out to the people in her life.

Finally Allowing Self to Explore

According to Jade, several factors influenced her decision to finally explore her sexuality. As she progressed through college, she felt like her peers would have more mature reactions to people coming out. Moreover, she shared, “I just felt like from a maturity standpoint, a lot of people were past trying to shun people for being homosexual or exploring their sexuality in general.” Now that she was in college, she felt more comfortable with her peers and their ability to possibly accept her exploration. She had a different set of friends and peers and because of that, norms were different amongst this group of people. Throughout college, she thought to herself, “I always had just kinda thought that I wasn't just into men.” Even though she had actively avoided exploration for several years, she still had a feeling that her attraction was not only to men.

Furthermore, she discussed an instance where she danced with a woman at a party and did not feel uncomfortable or ashamed in doing so. She stated:

I went to a party and was dancing with a girl that was very obviously a lesbian. It [the dancing] wasn't in a trying-to-get-male-attention way and I'm just like ‘You know what, this is fine’. It just kinda made me want to explore a little more.

It was seemingly the first time that she interacted with a woman in a way that could have been interpreted from a queer perspective and she did not reject or avoid the ease that came with it. Over a year after that small realization, a female friend told her about a crush that she had on her. In response to this information, she recalled, “I don't know, just for some reason I didn't feel

weird about it, which had happened in the past.” This was a person in which she had developed a close friendship throughout college. This friend had also recently come out to her as bisexual for the first time. When Jade was given the opportunity to safely explore her sexual identity with a friend that was also exploring her own sexuality, she thought to herself, “Maybe this is the point in my life where I can just explore this. Kinda check it out and see where see where things go.” She had finally given herself permission to explore the feelings that she ignored for a number of years.

Coming out

Jade discussed that she came out to friends once she started dating her friend. She remembered, “That’s a comically odd story because there wasn’t an express ‘oh yeah, I finally felt comfortable enough to tell them I was bi.’ It was like, ‘Oh, by the way I have a girlfriend now.’” The first person she came out to was her best friend who expressed surprised in the news that she was dating a woman. In response to her best friend’s surprise, Jade retorted, “She seemed surprised naturally because like I said I didn’t really say anything about my sexuality. Everyone just kinda assumed I was straight.” Once she came out, her best friend was accepting and even showed interest and excitement in her new relationship. The other person she came out to was a gay man. This friend was accepting as well. After so many years of stifling her sexuality and trying to hide the non-heterosexual parts of herself, she was received with understanding and excitement from friends.

After being in a serious relationship with the same woman for several months, Jade was faced with the decision of whether to come out to her mother. As previously discussed, she had already witnessed severely ruptured family dynamics because of her older sister disclosing her own relationship with a woman years earlier. As she tried to determine if coming out was worth

it, she thought, “Do I wanna put myself through this again? Am I gonna have the same type of backlash? Am I gonna be the one to have to move out?” Eventually Jade did come out to her mother and although she did not have much of a reaction that night, she shared that, “It’s just something that’s still a struggle with now.” Although disclosure of her sexual identity and relationship did not result in the same kind of tension as her sister, there is still distance in her relationship with her mother. As she discussed her mother’s thoughts on her sexuality, she shared, “My mother still hasn’t accepted the fact that I’m bisexual nor has she accepted my marriage. So, it’s unfortunately like this odd balancing act that I have to do, and it can be incredibly stressful in various situations.” Jade chose to live her life as she pleased, even if that meant tension between her and her mother.

Erasure of Bisexual Identity

Jade has experienced erasure of her bisexual identity multiple times in her life. This erasure typically occurs in the context of her masculine presentation and her long-term relationship with a woman.

Experiences as a Masculine Bisexual Woman

Throughout the interview, Jade discussed her experiences as a bisexual woman that dresses masculine. Based on her appearance, many people make assumptions about her and her sexuality. In reflecting upon any experiences where she needed to minimize parts of her identity, she retorted, “In more recent years, it’s a little more difficult for me to “pick an identity” because I dress a lot more masculine now.” When asked to expand on that statement, she shared, “Since I present myself masculine in most situations, people assume that I’m a lesbian any way, even though I’m not but, whatever. People just kinda assume that any way.” In Jade’s experience, people make several assumptions about her based on her masculine presentation. This is an issue

that is rarely discussed in conversations about bisexuality: masculine presenting bisexual women. As she shared her experiences as a woman that dresses masculine, she stated, “So many people just assume that all masculine women are lesbians, even though that is not true.” Due to other’s assumptions about her sexuality and gender, Jade has had “to do a lot of correcting.” These corrections are typically about her gender, because she has been misgendered, or her sexual identity, because people assume she is a lesbian. She continued to say, “There’s nothing wrong with being a lesbian but that’s not how I identify.” Furthermore, when Jade discussed her apprehension in exploring her sexuality in high school, she also talked about assumptions that others make when people come out. Even before she came to terms with her sexuality, she felt like she did not fit into others’ expectations of queer identities. She shared, “The lesbian had two different looks. You fell into one look, or you fell into another. It was like well ‘I don’t really wanna fall into anything.’” These expectations that she had to align with others’ expectations of various queer identities likely led her to further distance herself from her non-heterosexual attractions.

Assumptions Based on Partner

Jade has also experienced people making assumptions of her sexuality based on her long-term partner who is a woman as well. She discussed ways in which people have projected their partner-based assumptions onto her, “Like, I’ve legit had someone say to me like, ‘Oh, well, like, you’re a lesbian, you have a girlfriend.’” In these situations, Jade shared that she has no problem correcting someone to let them know that she is bisexual. In these situations, she usually receives responses such as, “Well you have a girlfriend now so NOW you’re a lesbian.” Though she has disclosed her sexual identity in these instances, people continue to assume that she will eventually identify as lesbian based on her relationship with a long-term female partner. These

assumptions are likely bolstered because of her masculine presentation as well. Now that she is married to a woman she stated, “I feel like now that I’m married, rather than just dating that person, I feel like it’s just more likely to be said.” People in her life, particularly Black peers, have projected their images of what they believe is a cisgender queer woman onto her instead of accepting her identity and how she chooses to identify.

Overall, ideas of backlash and pushback were prevalent throughout Jade’s early exploration of her bisexual identity. These negative reactions created a feeling that her heterosexual Black counterparts were not accepting of queer identities. Early in the possible development of her sexual identity, she chose to ignore feelings that would foster exploration of her sexuality because she did not want to have negative attention from her peers. When she was in college and witnessed her mother’s negative reaction to her sister’s female significant other, that same apprehension arose for her again. After reflecting about her identity development, she shared, “I’ve worked through all of these things at this point but... it was a lot of different struggles and trying to embrace the identity that I’ve kinda muted all along.” Eventually, Jade reached a point where she actively chose to be free and live her life as she sees best.

Shared Themes of Multiple Identities

Family

All the participants spoke about their families in some capacity. While each of them had different experiences in context to their families and their sexuality, the significance of family became clear as I analyzed interviews. Even though some participants’ families were not accepting or understanding of their sexual identity, all the participants have maintained relationship and connection with their families.

Kendra's family is so important that she has decided to withhold her sexuality identity from them. Even though she is uncertain of how they will react to her coming out, she would rather wait for an ideal situation i.e., finding a suitable partner to introduce to her parents, before she comes out. It seems like from Kendra's perspective, her parents would be more accepting of her sexuality if she has an established relationship and still can build a family and have children. Additionally, Kendra has observed extended family make comments about queer identities and because of these observations, she does not feel it is necessary to come out to them. In reference to her extended family, she shared, "They get together and they talk smack like 'So and so got in trouble doing this.' And if you're the parent of the one who's gay they're probably over there gossiping about your kid while you're not looking. I think there's just a little bit of that in the family, that for the larger family, I'm like 'Yeah, they don't even need to know.'" Though she would like to come out to her immediate family when the time is right, she does not plan on sharing her sexuality with her extended family. This demonstrates the importance she places on her family unit.

Morgan's experience is different in that she has come out to her family and was received with open arms. She talked about her mother's free-spirit attitude that made it easy for Morgan to go to her mother when she found herself attracted to a woman for the first time in her late 20s. Her mother gave her encouragement to explore her newfound attraction and once she fully came out to the rest of her family, she was met with positivity and acceptance. For this set of participants, her family's immediate acceptance is exceptional. Her response to this anomaly is as follows, "So very lucky and happy that my family was like 'we don't mind.'" Her family's views on queer identities had no influence on her self-actualization or coming out process

because she was received with warmth. Additionally, their acceptance of her sexuality likely strengthened her own self-esteem and self-confidence in her newfound sexuality.

In Anaya's experience, her parents, particularly her mother, were not accepting of her sexuality. Anaya's story is unique because she identified as lesbian for many years before identifying as bisexual. Anaya shared that when she first came out to her mother, she was going to disown her. Her father, on the other hand, was more concerned with Anaya's ability to bring him grandchildren. Despite her parents' mixed reactions to her sexual identity, she was still able to forge a relationship with both of her parents. Her parents' thoughts on her sexuality had no effect on her self-concept. She wanted to be with whomever she wanted because "I didn't see any difference in myself."

Jade's story demonstrates a type of strained relationship in which many queer people are acquainted. Although her mother is not accepting of her sexuality, they still have a relationship. Her mother did not disown her, but she also does not acknowledge the presence of Jade's bisexuality. This demonstrates a type of parent/child relationship that is silently distant because of the lack of full acceptance. Jade shared:

She ignores the fact that we have a small, fractured family so feeling like I can't include my wife in things makes a huge difference. Between that and the fact that my mom has not accepted my marriage sucks. And honestly I feel like I can't fully be myself around her.

Though they have an ongoing relationship, for Jade it does not feel welcoming or warm. Despite her family seeming to be an important part of her life, she is not able to have the type of connection or acceptance that she would like. Jade's family dynamics highlights a narrative that many Black queer people experience. A relationship where part of an individual is not

acknowledged and ignored in order to preserve the image one wants of their child or family member. For many Black queer people, they are not fully disowned but experience a splitting where family chooses to ignore their sexual identity.

Ridicule/ Jokes

Though many times ridicule and jokes can be seen as lighthearted in the context of sexual identities, all four of the participants shared how that affected some part of their coming out process or self-concept. Over time, all the participants learned how the Black community generally perceives queer identities.

In context to the Black community and queer identities, Anaya summed up the observations that all the participants shared in their respective interviews:

That [being called gay] was like the number one major insult when kids are being bullied, especially in the Black community back then. Because it wasn't about being poor, 'cause everybody at that point was saying 'poor' but it was the other differences. These differences that Anaya was referring to were sexuality and behavior that Black people believed indicated sexual identity. As a child, Anaya observed how classmates treated those they perceived as different, likely because they believed those classmates were gay or lesbian. She recalled, "There were kids that were teased because the boys maybe were effeminate, or the girls were a little bit more masculine and so I always got the bulldagger comment." Before she could even conceptualize what it meant to be gay, she had already witnessed peers being teased for appearing to be gay.

When Morgan was attending church as a teenager, she too observed friends make fun of a man that they believed to be gay. This was an older age range than Anaya's experiences, but the jokes were still the same. They were targeted towards someone they believed was not

heterosexual. In addition to her church friends making fun of a gay man, she recalled a trans girl that was teased in her high school. As she reflected upon all of the exposure she had to diverse sexualities and gender presentations (she also mentioned a “crossdresser” that lived in her town), she stated, “So we grew up around it but I really think we didn’t know how to handle it other than just like ‘okay’”. Jade experienced similar observations. As discussed in her story, she witnessed jokes, rumors, and ridicule of classmates that came out in high school. These experiences sent her messages that queer identities were to be teased and ridiculed by Black peers.

Because Kendra is not fully out in most spaces, when she overhears jokes directed towards queer identities, it breeds a feeling of discomfort. In reference to how these jokes make her feel, she stated, “it kind of puts you as an outlier to some extent.” This negative behavior makes her feel othered without her peers’ awareness of her sexuality. She shared how it makes some spaces difficult to navigate as well. Furthermore, Morgan shared experiences in which she has been teased as a bisexual woman. Some have even jokingly declared that she carries around a phallic object, as if to insinuate that her attraction to women indicates a masculinity. Due to security in her sexuality, she can hear these jokes with no bearing on how she views herself. But, unfortunately, the same cannot be said for Kendra who is still grappling with her sexuality and how she identifies.

Bi-negativity and Biphobia

Another shared experience all of the participants encountered in their journey of identity development is bi-negativity and biphobia from various people in their lives. This manifested in various ways such as hypersexualization of bisexuality, the erasure of one’s bisexual identity

depending on who they are partnered with, and ridicule and persecution from Black monosexual counterparts.

The bi-negativity that Anaya experienced occurred mostly with lesbians in the Black community, specifically studs. In this context, stud is a term that is used in the Black community to describe a cisgender Black lesbian that typically dresses or present herself as masculine. Anaya encountered several women that expressed dislike for women that engage with men as well. She described the consensus that Black lesbians express as “You gotta be one or the other.” This type of bi-negativity delegitimizes bisexuality and also perpetuates bisexual erasure. Anaya even discussed a relationship that she had with a “bisexual stud” where the woman was embarrassed of her desire to be the more submissive partner. As Anaya described the woman’s apprehension, “Because that perception if you were a stud or a butch in the Black community, that’s what you had to be. You couldn’t switch hitter. Not publicly.” This led to a sense that she must erase her bisexual identity to be accepted by the women in which she was involved. Though it might not have been the goal of the women that Anaya encountered, she knew that in order to build relationships with Black lesbians in particular, she would have to leave out parts of her dating history or omit her sexual identity.

Within the Black queer community, there are clear expectations that are based on one’s gender presentation and sexual identity. This is something that Jade discussed and experienced as well. She experienced the other side of this bi-negativity as a masculine-presenting bisexual woman. She discussed erasure of her sexual identity from the assumptions that people make about her based on her gender expression. Her experience as an out bisexual woman is a bit different from the other participants because she now presents as masculine “in most situations, people assume that I’m a lesbian any way.” This adds a layer to her sexual identity that there is

no hiding or withholding parts of her identity because of other people's assumption. It also adds a layer of bi-negativity that is not often discussed in the context of bisexuality: gender constructs and expression and bisexual identity.

Every participant mentioned hypersexualization of bisexual women as well. Morgan's thoughts on this are as follows, "I tell people all the time like it's weird people will hypersexualize people in the [LGBTQ+] community." She discussed how her best friend initially made inflammatory and hurtful comments about bisexual people such as, "Hey, be careful because your community has the most STDs". Although it seems like it was coming from a good place, it is a thought that perpetuates the idea that bisexual people engage in reckless sexual behavior that will lead to contracting sexually transmitted infections. Increased sexual behavior was also referenced by Anaya and Jade in their interviews. They have both heard comments that insinuate that bisexual people are more likely to a) have more reckless sex and b) sleep with more people than others because of attraction to more than one gender. Morgan's experiences echo those thoughts as well. Jade shared hearing comments such as, "You're switching between being gay and straight. You're just ho-ing about this place." Comments like this insinuate that bisexual women are both indecisive about their sexuality and have no discriminant preference in who they choose to date or otherwise engage with intimately.

Kendra stated that her experiences as a bisexual woman in the Black community are easier compared to queer men because "men like women on women action". This is another type of hypersexualization where bisexual women's attraction is seen as present for the sake of the male gaze. Anaya stated, "When men hear that you're bisexual, they automatically think they're gonna get a threesome." Often times, men see women's bisexuality as a way to exploit and take advantage of their attraction to women for their own attention and sexual pleasure. As Morgan

shared, “If I say something about being bisexual around men, they take that as like either a challenge or they decide I just haven’t met a man before.” Not only do ideas like this minimize women’s bisexual identity, but it also views sexuality from a heteronormative lens where people explore sexuality until they have found the right person of the opposite sex.

Church/Religion

All the participants talked about the presence of religion and the negative context in which queer identities were perceived. This context influenced either one’s coming out trajectory or the way their loved ones reacted to their coming out. All the participants shared similar experiences in which the presence of religious affiliation resulted in someone rejecting their sexuality. Religion plays a major role in the African American community and has been the source of rejection and demonization of queer identities for many years.

Kendra talked about questioning her sexual identity at the same time that she was exploring religion for the first time in college. Growing up, she did not have a specific connection to church because her parents had different religions. This meant that she was exploring religion on a deeper level for the first time. She talked about some of the messages she heard while attending predominantly Black churches and how they turned her off of going to church regularly,

[The sermon is] clearly giving us imagery and messaging that would suggest that because that person is gay or doesn’t want to reproduce with someone of the opposite sex that something is wrong with that. And it’s been said vocally. You know for me I think that was a little bit of a deal breaker with church.

These messages seemed to make Kendra uncomfortable as she was and still is in the exploration phase of her sexual identity. Jade experienced a similar timeline. Jade shared that she did not

grow up going to church either, but her mother did adopt a deeper religious connection in her adulthood. As she slowly began to allow herself to acknowledge her non-heterosexual attraction, she was exploring her own religious views and connections. Proximity to these ideologies, made it difficult for Jade to think about even exploring her sexuality let alone coming out. For Jade, coming out to her mother seemed daunting because she had already witnessed a negative reaction when her sister started dating a woman. In thinking about her mother's reaction to that, she stated:

She took a real turn towards being way more religious/ conservative type thing. So, when my sister said that she was dating someone [a woman], it caused a fair amount of backlash and it turned into even bigger backlash than anticipated.

The introduction of religion and conservative beliefs made it even more difficult for Jade to initially come out to her mother. For Kendra, her experiences with religion made her question the normalcy of her attraction to women. She shared, "It made me question... is this a normal thing that I'm going through?" The damning messages that she received in church made her feel like she was wrong in her attraction.

Morgan also shared that although her family did not have religious affiliation growing up, she began attending church on a regular basis to spend time with friends. In the predominantly Black church that she attended, she observed other church member's response to people that they believed to be gay. Morgan talked about these similar experiences in which religion and church played a negative role in her coming out experience. Though it did not influence her own identity formation, it did make it more difficult to navigate these spaces that hold more traditional values. Years later, she realized the judgmental tone of the messages that she received in church made her apprehensive to come out to her church friends that she made as a teenager. Anaya, on the

other hand, did grow up attending a Baptist church regularly. She talked about her grandmother's regular involvement in church. Despite this regular involvement, she shared that, "I have a spiritual connection, but I just don't do organized religion anymore". Furthermore, she experienced judgment from an employer that expressed disapproval of her same-sex relationship at the time. When she started working for a minister, she stated, "So he [her boss' business partner] was not accepting." Typically, an employer does not express disapproval of employee's sexual identities, but the casual nature of church jobs gave space for her boss to do so.

Self-Pride

Despite the participants receiving pushback, judgment, and negative attention based on their intersections, they have chosen to take pride in who they are. They seemed to have used the adversity they faced as a motivator to live their lives how they see fit, even if that meant that they could not please everyone in their lives. These women seem to utilize self-pride in their intersections as a way to protect themselves from the adversity they have all faced as people that belong to several stigmatized social groups.

Throughout the interview with Anaya, she proudly declared how she has chosen to live her life despite negative reactions to her sexual identity. She has received judgment and pushback from many people in her life and despite that negativity, she is proudly who she wants to be. While talking about her experiences working for a deeply religious minister, she stated, "I really didn't have a whole lot of patience for people questioning what I like because it just didn't make sense. Like, why does it matter who I lay down with?" She made similar statements several times in response to people's negative perception of her sexuality. After talking about experiences of housing discrimination while trying to find a place to live with her girlfriend at the time, she stated, "But it made me very unapologetic about who I was. I was never insecure

about it.” At least three of the participants made statements similar to Anaya’s in their respective interviews. While talking about the intersections of her identities, Morgan stated:

I love all of the intersections about me. Whether it’s... it can present as rough at times, but you know the most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. But at the same time, I love it. And I love celebrating it and I love celebrating other Black women and I love celebrating the LGBTQ community and being a woman.

This quote seems to be applicable to all of the participants that spoke about their journey to accepting and loving all of their intersections. Despite being subjected to harassment and scrutiny, these Black women choose to love and celebrate themselves. They have been able to use the adversity that they have faced from their communities and transform it into a motivator to be exactly who they want to be. In response to inquiries about how Jade had been able to overcome identity conflict, she reported:

Part of it was just time and a lot of personal reflection and just really taking time and seeing what and who makes me happy, brings me joy. Where are my positive influences coming from? Things like that kinda helped me sort out what’s actually important to me and what may be important to somebody else and not necessarily to me. And that’s what I kinda had to do to get through that.

Jade, who has experienced ongoing dismissal of her sexuality from her mother, worked to determine what is important for her in order to find pride in herself and her identities. Even Kendra, who is still working towards full acceptance of the intersections of her identities stated, “I think the more accepting I am of myself and just being okay with things and not worrying about the negative reactions, probably the better. But I’m still on that personal journey, so getting

there.” She is aware of the importance of releasing other’s opinions and reactions from her own self-perception in order to reach a point of full identity integration.

The Composite Textural Description

The composite textural is the “what” of their experiences. What did these women experience in relation to their identities? And how would they describe it? Based off of the themes that were described in the results section, the experience of bisexual Black women is marked with conflict that comes from different sources in one’s life. A big source of identity conflict came from the participants’ families. Three of the four participants either anticipated or received backlash because of their sexual identity. Despite this, they keep ties to their family unit. These continued ties indicate the importance of family, particularly within the Black community. This is especially true for Anaya and Jade, though their end results are different. Anaya’s mother threatened to disown her when she came out. However, over time, Anaya shared that her mother became accepting of her sexuality over time. Despite initial negative reactions, Anaya continued to have a working relationship with her mother. Jade, on the other hand, still has not received full acceptance from her mother. However, she still has a full relationship with her mother. This demonstrates the importance of connections in the Black family and the balancing act that is needed in order to maintain that connection. Furthermore, Kendra who is not out to her family, has chosen to conceal her sexuality with anticipation that her family will reject her if she comes out. This is a balancing act as well. Kendra has decided that she wants to wait for an optimal situation before coming out to her family to ensure that there will be minimal pushback, therefore minimal need to balance out one’s true self and connection to family.

Another source of identity conflict came in the form of jokes and ridicule towards the LGBTQ+ community from Black peers. Most participants talked about hearing or witnessing

this negative attention when they were younger. Anaya talked about how being called gay was the ultimate insult as a child because it made that child different from their peers. As teenagers, both Jade and Morgan discussed hearing peers make fun of queer people. These jokes might have seemed innocent at the time, but it led to feelings that people that are not heterosexual are too different from mainstream ideals to be accepted or taken seriously. Though they may not have noticed, it likely led to discomfort in their own potential non-heterosexual attraction as well. Furthermore, Kendra talked about jokes from peers that she has overheard as an adult that conveyed messages that her sexual identity makes her different from her Black peers. Though these various jokes may have seemed lighthearted or all in good fun, they did have an influence on the participants coming out processes.

Each participant shared ways in which they have experienced identity conflict that originated from parts of one's identity that the Black community would deem as undesirable. The participants shared a sense of being othered once they came out to various people in their lives. This sense demonstrated itself via ridicule and jokes, bi-negativity, dismissal of one's queer identity, and overall judgment from the people around them. This othered sense continues as they are in settings or around people that are not accepting of parts of their identities. Even though the participants have been in spaces when one part of their identity might match their setting such as in the presence of LGBTQ+ people, they are still met with people wanting to place them in a separate category. Despite belonging in these various settings, the participants were still inherently separated based on the minority parts of their identities. In the presence of heterosexual members of the Black community, they experienced being othered as women that are bisexual. In the presence of lesbians, participants were othered because they do not identify as monosexual. While being able to integrate into settings might be easier for these women based

on their gender identity, the intersections of their sexual identities and racial identity act as barriers to full acceptance into these groups. This is one way that identity conflict has manifested itself for the participants.

In relation to the queer community, specifically Black lesbians, participants have received feedback that their attraction to and interest in more than one gender is wrong for various reasons. Despite there being a place for bisexual people on the LBGTQ+ spectrum, participants received messages that their sexuality is a steppingstone to monosexuality or something to be hidden. Hence, being othered. Participants were forced to create space for themselves by hiding their identity or consistently stating their bisexual identity to people that make assumptions. For Kendra, the participant that is not out to everyone, these messages told her that her sexuality is abnormal and a feature to be hidden unless she wants to face harsh scrutiny.

Participants faced being othered because of a lack of gender roles that are typically set in place in heteronormative relationships. Within the Black community, even some same-sex relationships are seen from a heteronormative lens where one partner is expected to be masculine and the other partner is expected to be feminine. For women that are bisexual, these gender roles might be more difficult to enforce, therefore placing these women on the outskirts of what is seen as acceptable queer behavior.

In addition to a sense of being othered, the participants also experience a pressure to be monosexual. This pressure comes in different forms such as an insinuation that they are a lesbian if they are currently in a relationship with a woman, messages from lesbians that bisexual women are more likely to have an STI, and expectations placed upon them as Black women. These pressures lead to erasure of their bisexual identity. This happens both within the queer

community and with heterosexual people as well. The participants have experienced being othered in various parts of their lives and because of such have been faced with judgment and dismissal of their identity. In being othered, their intersections are not acknowledged. They are not seen as a whole person.

The Composite Structural Description

The composite structural is the “how” of their experiences. What emotions and feelings were described as they talked about their experiences? In what context did they describe these feelings? The participants shared a sense of being othered by those in dominant culture. This sense led to feelings of rejection and shame. For Kendra, the participant that has only come out to a small number of people, shame and self-doubt seem to be prevalent feelings. She has experienced shame when she hears people making jokes or uncomfortable statements about people that are not heterosexual. There also seems to be a feeling of shame that stemmed from messages that she heard in church as she was initially exploring her sexual identity. Those messages made her feel like her attraction to women was abnormal or odd. Shame has also driven her desire to conceal her sexual identity from her family. She is not certain how her family will react, and she does not want to possibly experience tension or even being cut off when she does come out.

Being othered has also led to feelings of potential rejection from the Black community. As at least three of the participants said, they are Black women first. Meaning they found connection to and developed their identity as Black women before they even identified and explored their sexuality. Development of their queer identity came later and because of this, the feelings of rejection are stronger from the Black community. Because the racial and cultural connection was already present before participants came out, rejection from other Black people

is particularly painful. As time passed and the participants were able to learn to accept themselves and take pride in themselves as bisexual Black women, they have reached a point of knowing the importance of self-pride. They were able to transform their negative experiences into a motivator to take pride in themselves despite the pushback that they have experienced. That is the synthesized essence for this group of women: a journey to self-pride and full self-acceptance. Three of the participants have gotten to that point and the fourth knows the importance in getting there if she wants to live a carefree life as the person she knows she is.

The Composite Textural-Structural Description- The Synthesized Essence

The essence combines the composite textural and the structural descriptions. This combination provides context on what participants experienced and how they felt about these experiences. The participants all had a sense of being othered and this sense led to feelings of rejection, shame, and self-doubt. However, these feelings dissipated once they allowed themselves to live fully and freely. All their experiences resulted in a pride in themselves that developed because of the difficulty they faced to find peace in the context of their identities. Even though all of the participants have experienced some sort of negative reaction to their sexual identity, they all spoke about how much they currently live life as they see fit. They no longer feel a need to conform to what others expect of them and no longer feel pressure to conceal parts of their identity. Even Kendra, who is on her journey to fully accepting her sexuality identity as a Black woman, discussed the importance of disregarding the opinions of others.

Summary of Findings

Analysis of interviews demonstrated that bisexual Black women's experiences are not a monolith. Though all of them had shared essences that are trademark characteristics of their

experiences as bisexual Black women, these essences manifested themselves in different ways. The participants also perceived their experiences differently. Additionally, each participant conceptualizes and thinks about their sexuality in varied ways. Despite these differences, the essence of a bisexual Black woman's experiences within the Black community include: the significance of family, ridicule and jokes about queer identities, bi-negativity, religion and church, and self-pride. Even though the four participants shared different coming out stories and experienced different reactions from the various people in their lives, they shared several common themes in intersection of their identities. All these women also indicated a path to complete self-acceptance and self-pride despite being othered through judgment from those within the Black community and even those within the queer Black community. This eventual self-pride seems to be a protective factor to counterbalance the overall sense of being othered as bisexual Black women.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study aimed to shine light on the experiences of potential identity conflict for bisexual Black women. Though there has been more research that focuses on the experiences of queer people of color, research is limited on the intersection of this population. This study focused on the experiences of four bisexual Black women. Although each woman had different factors that affected their coming out process, self-perception, and identity formation, there were several common themes that arose: Family, Ridicule and Jokes, Bi-negativity, Religion and Church, and Self-Pride. While each participant might not have perceived these themes the same, they all talked about some aspect of each one and its influence on their stories.

Interpretation of Findings

The participants' experiences were aligned with much of the literature. Naturally, they all experienced biphobia and bi-negativity as bisexual women. This biphobia and bi-negativity seemed to have been fueled by gendered-racial stereotypes. The discrimination and mistreatment that these women faced was based on Black ideologies and negative stereotypes that are placed upon Black women. The women heard jokes about hypersexuality and sexual promiscuity that are similar to the Jezebel stereotype that was discussed in the literature review. They were immediately sexualized due to their attraction to more than one gender and because of such were seen as sexual objects. Though ideas of assumed threesomes, multiple relationships, and struggles with monogamy are not exclusive to the experience of Black bisexual women, the addition of the Jezebel imagery to perpetuate those notions are exclusive to this group. Bisexual Black women are up against hyper sexualization of their bodies because of their sexual identity and gendered-racial stereotypes. This unfortunate experience is unique to this group and is

supported by literature discussing bisexuality and Black stereotypes. This also highlights the importance of exploring intersectionality for people with more than one minority identity.

Some participants talked about their experiences as Black women in society as a whole and how they have been perceived by dominant culture. They shared experiences of negative perceptions such as loud, obnoxious, and with an unwarranted attitude much like the Sapphire image that was previously discussed. Two participants shared their experience of being perceived as an aggressive Black woman and how that affected the treatment they received, specifically while in the workplace. Even though the study focused on the intersections of their identities, while at work, their most salient characteristic is their racial identity and the negative assumptions that are made based off of that. The participant Morgan shared that she is usually mild-mannered and calm in the workplace so receiving feedback about a perceived attitude was frustrating and likely invalidating to her personality. For Anaya, the Sapphire trope caused her to minimize herself and all the things that made her a Black woman but as time passed, she took pride in herself and all of her characteristics and decided to be her true self no matter how she is perceived.

Additionally, participants that did receive negative reactions from their families after coming out, still maintained connections to their family. This demonstrates the importance and significance that is present for the Black family. Even when faced with feedback that their sexuality was not fully accepted, therefore they were not wholly accepted, they chose to sustain their relationship with family members. Furthermore, though their family members did not fully accept them because of their sexual identity, their family is still willing to allow them in their lives. Detached yet maintained familial connections demonstrate that even though they do not fully embrace bisexuality, they are willing to tolerate and maintain the relationship as long as

their sexual identity is not mentioned or discussed. This allows for both parties to be in each other's presence without addressing the proverbial elephant in the room which is rejection of one's sexuality. This behavior is also an erasure of bisexuality where identities are not discussed even if they are in long-term relationships.

Clinical Implications

One major implication that this study revealed is the idea that the intersections of one's identities are layered and multifaceted. The participants each shared similar thoughts that the layers of their identity are both complicated and invisible. However, this invisibility does not apply to race for most Black people. Clinicians need to know the importance of providing space to explore how intersections of one's identity is experienced. While this group will naturally have overlapping similarities to other Black people when it comes to racial discrimination, the addition of other parts of one's identity will influence how those issues manifest themselves. Clinicians need to keep in mind that these clients are experiencing judgment, discrimination, and scrutiny from dominant members of their various social groups i.e., White, men, and both straight and gay identified individuals. Clinicians should take time to explore how these experiences might influence self-perception and identity formation. Additionally, clinicians should also take time to assess for connection to parts of this population's identities and its influence on identity formation.

Additionally, conflict came from many sources for this group of people. As the researcher, I thought conflict was going to be between one's racial identity and their sexual identity. But after gathering and analyzing data, it became obvious that conflict can come from any part of one's identity such as struggles to decide how to identify within the LGBTQ+ community and roles that are placed upon Black women. While conflict did look different for

each participant, Black ideologies did have an influence on each participants' experiences. Clinicians should work with these clients to find protective factors that feel good to them. Since the Black church has historically been a source of support for the Black community, clinicians should assess this population's involvement in church and discuss their experiences before encouraging one to find connection to these establishments. While not all bisexual Black women have had hurtful experiences in the context of religion and church, it is important to explore the messages they received if involved in church. Moreover, meaning-making might also be a helpful way for this population to develop a protective factor. Most of the participants were able to use their own negative experiences as a way to reach a point of identity integration and self-pride.

Furthermore, it would be helpful for clinicians to explore ways in which this population can build community. This community should be welcoming to all parts of their identity so that they do not continue to experience erasure of various parts of their identity. It would be important to assess what their current community and source of support looks like and how to bolster any sources of support that feel important. Additionally, it is essential to assess for the importance and presence of family and what those experiences are like for this population. Family and connection to such is important for Black Americans so exploring this particular type of conflict is recommended so that clients have space to grieve the loss of the relationship they used to have with family. Even though they might have a continued relationship with family members, this relationship might be characterized with tension and denial of one's sexuality. Therefore, clinicians should be equipped with helping clients to balance these familial relationships if they are going to be maintained.

The last recommendation is that clinician explore gendered-racial stereotypes with their bisexual Black clients. If they have been exposed to any of these negative tropes, it is likely compounded with biphobia and bi-negativity. Bisexual people are seen as highly sexual and that might have an influence on this group if they are also aware of the Jezebel stereotype as well. Additionally, the Sapphire image is likely to affect Black women generally but if they are in spaces where they are forced to negotiate parts of their identity, it would be valuable for these clients to process and explore the ramifications of negative stereotypes being placed upon them due to the intersection of their identities.

Limitations and Future Research

While the study focused on the experiences of bisexual Black women, there were notable limitations that might have affected results. First, the study had a sample size of only four participants. While this is an acceptable number for a qualitative study (Creswell, 2017), it is important to keep in mind that results may not be as generalizable as studies with larger sample sizes. Furthermore, social media and snowballing were used to find participants. This led to all the participants being close in age. There was a nine-year age-range, with two of the participants being the same age. This is likely due to the snowball method that was utilized. It is assumed that people reached out to their own social circles in order to inform others of the study. Due to the limited age range, hearing stories of Black women younger than 31 and older than 40 was not possible. This lack of variability particularly leaves out the experiences of bisexual women that are much older. Additionally, the entire sample size currently lived in the greater Chicago area. Limited geographical location may highlight the ideologies of a certain region as opposed to thoughts that might be widespread.

Another limitation of this study is the time in which participants were contacted and data was collected. Recruitment occurred during a global pandemic and in the middle of heightened racial and social unrest. Though I posted my dissertation announcement in several social media websites and people in my friend's list were willing to share it several times, it was difficult to find additional participants, and this might have been due to the aforementioned social climate at the time. Additionally, even though interviews were conducted via Zoom, the social climate could have affected participants' capacity to discuss struggles of their intersections, especially since the focus of the study is on the race and its influence on negotiating identities. However, the amount of information and openness from the participants indicated that although they might have been affected by the social unrest, they still had capacity to fully engage in the interview and its content. All four participants were willing to share vulnerable parts of their experiences in order to provide a full picture.

Future research would still focus on the experiences of Black queer people. Due to the lack of inclusion of this group, I will continue to give Black queer experiences a voice and opportunity to share their stories. Additionally, in regard to the current study, future studies would have a much larger sample size in order to ensure richness and explore transferability of the themes that arose. Moreover, this study utilized participants from the Chicago-area. It would be important and beneficial to open up participation to women that are from other parts of the country. Rural and southern areas of the U.S. typically hold more conservative views, and it would be interesting to see how these themes manifest themselves for bisexual Black women in regions of the United States that hold more conservative views.

Only one of the participants was not fully out to everyone in her life and expressed several factors that influenced this choice. It would be beneficial to focus on this experience of

concealing one's sexuality and the journey one takes (or does not take) to finally coming out to loved ones. I am interested in discovering what factors help women to come out to their families and what makes them more comfortable in being out despite the possibility of pushback. The topic of masculine bisexual Black women came up twice while collecting data, once from an actual participant, and another from a participant that shared her experience of being with a masculine bisexual Black woman. This seems to be an area of research that is untouched or minimally touched. Future research will explore this intersection and the experience of identifying as a bisexual woman that presents in a masculine manner.

Strengths

A major strength this study has are my shared identities with the participants. My own personal connection to these narratives demonstrates that I was not listening to and looking at these women with a critical eye but with deep care with a goal that their voices would be heard in a way that feels good to them and their stories. Because of my shared identities, I was able to bring a curiosity and passion that others might not have had. Furthermore, my shared identities and willingness to share this with the participants seemed to have made them more comfortable in sharing the parts of their story that might have vulnerable or sacred to them. I was able to gather a wealth of knowledge and information from different viewpoints in the journey of identity negotiation, identity formation, and acceptance. The last strength of this study is the passion that I have as the researcher. This project has been a labor of love and if I lacked passion for providing voices for those that historically have not had a voice, I do not believe the participants would have felt as comfortable sharing their stories. I wanted participants to feel like their story was going to be used to help advance research on Black perspectives in the LGBTQ+

community. My own experiences made me aware of how important it was to be gentle and attentive with the participants, an experience that is likely rare for them.

Reflection

Learning about and hearing the participants' lived experiences was deeply meaningful for me. They were all willing to share parts of their lives that felt vulnerable and sacred. As someone with the same intersections, I related to so many aspects of the participants' lived experiences. It made me reflect upon the commonalities that occur in different narratives with similar origins. Though each participant is in different parts of their coming identity processes, there were several similarities that were discussed throughout this text. Mindful self-disclosure throughout the interviews seems to have made the participants more comfortable with sharing their own stories because they knew they were with a researcher that would not judge or take their experiences out of context. Though it is not always possible, it seems to be helpful for participants when they are aware that they are sharing their story with someone similar to them.

While I did enjoy my own connection to each person's story, halfway into my first interview, I self-reflected and realized how much I was not bracketing because of my own assumptions on similarity of their experiences. I noticed that I was not asking as many follow-up questions that I could have because of my relation to their experiences. Once I realized this, I made an active effort to ask follow-up questions and clarify any thoughts that I felt myself making assumptions about. In future research settings, I would like to make sure that I am bracketing my own experiences, so that I do not miss opportunities for people to share their experiences in their own words. In order to gather information better in a more objective manner, I need to actively bracket myself so that I am present with participants' experiences instead of filling in blanks based off of my own experiences.

Conclusion

This study discussed identity conflict bisexual Black women in the context of the Black community. Though ideologies, ideas, and the community as a whole are not a monolith, there were several themes that came about for the four participants. Each participant has their own unique story that was highlighted and detailed. They had their own themes and individual factors that influenced coming out and the perception of their intersections. Common themes were then found across interviews and were as follows: Family, Ridicule and Jokes, Bi-negativity, Religion and Church, and Self-Pride. All of the participants talked about each of these themes in some capacity. These themes play a role in identity conflict for the participants and helped them to realize the importance of self-pride in their identities.

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Appendix AInterview Questions

1. Where did you grow up?
 - a. What type of community was it?
 - b. What were the racial demographics of your neighborhood?
2. Did you have any religious affiliation growing up?
 - a. Did you go to church regularly?
 - b. If so, what was the racial makeup of the church you attended?
3. How did culture, specifically black culture, shape your view on LGBT+ identities growing up?
 - a. Was there any change in your view on LGBT+ identities once you came out?
 - b. What changes did you see once you came out or realized that you were not straight as well?
4. When did you start questioning?
 - a. When you were questioning your sexual identity, what messages did you receive that may have affected your self-perception or desire to come out?
5. Tell me about your coming out experience.
 - a. Who did you first come out to?
 - i. What made you choose that person?
6. Having several intersecting identities, have you ever experienced inner conflict? Have you been able to overcome it? If so, how?
7. Is there any part of your identity that feels more stigmatized for you? Why is that?

8. Tell me about any experiences you have had where you felt like you had to choose different parts of your identity.
9. Have you ever experienced biphobia or homophobia from other black people? Tell me about that.
10. Tell me about your experiences as a cisgender, bisexual black woman.

Appendix B

Oral Consent Script

Hello, my name is Elizabeth Fynn. I am a doctoral student at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology. I am conducting a research study on the experiences of cisgender, bisexual, Black women and what it is like for this group in the African American community to hold stigmatized identities.

I am conducting this research as part my dissertation requirement for the Clinical Psychology department. After I have told you more about the project, you can decide whether or not you wish to participate. Your participation is completely voluntary and you can decide to stop participating any time during this project without any penalty.

Let me explain what you will be asked to do. An approximately 60-90 minute semi-structured interview will take place in order to gather information. During the interview, I will ask questions about your coming out process, what it has been like for you as you came to terms with your sexual identity, and any inner-conflicts you may have experienced due to ties to African-American culture. Other relevant questions may be asked during the interview as well. Interviews will be audio recorded but no identifying information will be recorded.

In this study, you might experience emotional distress or general discomfort in discussing the topic. There are helpful resources on the research website if you are interested. Participants that choose to engage in the study will be able to add to a body of research that lacks information about the experiences of those that identify as black, bisexual, cisgender women. There is a risk of invasion of privacy or breach of confidentiality that will be taken care of conducting interviews in private settings so that no others can easily hear the interview. Although you may

not directly benefit from participation in this study, it will allow those like you that are directly affected by these experiences to give their input on what it is like to hold these several identities that are typically stigmatized.

During the study, I will collect information such as age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education level, religion, and contact information. This information will be used by me for the purpose of the study. Identifying information will be kept separate from the interview information and will be destroyed once the study is completed. Data will be stored in a locked box located in my home that is accessible only to me while the study is being conducted and completed. Participants will be given a pseudonym and any information obtained during interviews will not be personally identifiable in the written portion of the study. All data collected through audio recordings will be immediately and permanently destroyed once it is transcribed. Other data will be stored in the same locked box stored in my home that is accessible only to me for five years per the guidelines of The American Psychological Association. After five years, any other data collected, such as field notes, will be shredded. Once the study is completed, results will be posted on a research website where participants will be able to access them.

Are you still interested in participating?

IF you have any questions, please feel free to ask them now. If you have questions later, you can contact me at efynn@ego.thechicagoschool.edu or via phone at 708-571-3316. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr. Braden Berkey, for any concerns or questions that you may come up for you at bberkey@thechicagoschool.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact the Chicago School of Professional Psychology at:

325 N. Wells

Chicago, IL, 60654

312-467-2343

irb@thechicagoschool.edu

Do you have any questions? Is there anything you would like me to clarify? Do you consent to participate in this study?

Appendix C

Demographic Questions

1. Education level- What is your highest level of completed education?
2. Geographical location- Where do you currently live?
3. Age- How old are you?
4. Ethnicity- What is your ethnic identity?
5. Religion- Do you have any religious affiliations?
6. SES- What is your yearly income?

Appendix D

Screening Script

Do you identify as bisexual?

Are you out to at least one important person in your life?

Are you a cisgender woman?

Do you self-identify as black, African-American, or black American?

Are you at least 22 years old but no older than 99 years old?

Were you born and raised in the United States?

Can you read, write, and speak English fluently?

IF you have any questions, please feel free to ask them now. If you have questions later, you can contact me at efynn@ego.thechicagoschool.edu or via phone at 708-571-3316.

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