BI+ IDENTITIES AND BELONGING: CONVERSATIONS WITH WOMXN AND NON-BINARY FOLX IN LONG-TERM HETEROSEXUAL-PRESENTING RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT

Bi+ and Belonging: Womxn and Non-Binary Folx In Long-Term Heterosexual-Presenting
Relationships

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The purpose of this study is to explore the different ways in which bi+ womxn and non-binary

folx in heterosexual-presenting relationships find belonging and community in the context of

their bi+ identities. Using narrative interviews and the creation of artwork, the narratives of two

womxn and one non-binary person between the ages of 21 and 27 were asked to discuss their

lived experiences as queer folx in long-term, straight-passing relationships. The result is a

compilation of stories of life-long resistance and joy as they navigate the in-betweens that come

with bi+ identities. This research challenges social workers to think beyond traditional social

work practice, looking to dedicated formal and informal inclusive bi+ supports in communities.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

I used to daydream about what my life would look like when I grew up. Well, I still do, but it's different now. Namely, I used to think that love and attraction would be more- for lack of a better word- straightforward. I didn't understand that the crushes I had on people who were not boys did not negate the crushes I also had on boys. I didn't understand that the binaries I had learned to be true were social constructs. All I knew was that my stomach so physically hurt every time something harmful was said about Trans and queer communities. A pang, deep in my chest, when a passer-by, friend or family member said something homophobic. I would flinch when the church I attended (until I didn't have to anymore) more than once lectured that though it is forgivable, homosexuality is definitely a "sin". Over time I (slowly) realized that as much as I initially resisted, it was because I am undoubtably queer.

Identifying under the bi+ umbrella while also being in a long-term straight-presenting relationship is complicated. I do not fully belong in the straight community and I also don't feel like I fully belong in queer communities- whispers from both inside me and out tell me I am not enough of either. Navigating this limbo of being queer in a straight-presenting relationship is interesting, because I benefit a great deal from privilege. At the same time I feel uncomfortable accessing queer spaces for reasons that include not being accepted as queer once it's find out who I am dating, and worrying about taking up space that isn't mine to take.

I am white and cisgender, identities that provide me with great privilege and both visibility and invisibility in my bi+ identity- phenomena that will be further discussed in later chapters.

I was nearing the end of my first long-term straight-presenting relationship when I stumbled across a non-binary musician named Stevie Knipes who had started a band called Adult

Mom. The first time I listened to their first album *Momentary Lapse of Hapily,* which brings the listener along on their journey of coming out as queer, I am not exaggerating when I tell you I became teary. "it is okay to feel the world! It is okay to kiss girls!", they sang both mournfully and hopefully in their song "Told Ya So", an immensely comforting affirmation of something I knew was true in my head but did not yet feel true in my chest. Like many people, it was music where I first found reprieve from both internal and external forces telling me I do not belong. There were queer artists thriving and singing about very similar feelings I was feeling, but not exactly. Then came poetry, film, photography, memes and a plethora of other mediums that illustrated others' diverse bi+ experiences that spoke not only to themselves, but to anyone who needed to hear from them.

Neck deep in academia now, with an ardour for inclusive change, it's noticeable when narratives are missing in anti-oppressive practice and discourse not only in the field of social work, but in the way mainstream systems were constructed and function. The diverse bi+ community is one of many communities that are under-researched, and poorly represented in the context of both mainstream social work and within the context of 2SLGBT+ communities. This also leads to a lack of affirmation (Jen, 2019). In analysing existing literature, media and online content, bi+ womxn and non-binary folx in straight-presenting relationships are still further under-researched, and under- represented leading to a lack of affirmation (Buxton, 2011).

The purpose of this Major Research Paper is to understand, celebrate and grow the spaces where bi+ womxn and non-binary folx in heterosexual-presenting relationships find community and belonging in the context of their queerness. In doing this, I hope to emphasise the diversity within bi+ communities. Growing the pool of knowledge, knowing and creation by bi+ womxn and non-binary folx is critical to social work if social workers are to properly support the shift of

offering a less binary, generalized approaches. Navigating resources, offering affirming support, and advocating with folx accessing services are all actions where a deeper understanding of bi+ folx would be invaluable. Creating knowledge, social change and advocating through the creation of art is one of the means through which some of this process can happen genuinely, with a great deal of vulnerability and care (Barone, 2011).

A Note on Language

For the purpose of this paper, I want to clarify that the term "bi+" is being used as an umbrella word to include all identities that are sexually and/or romantically attracted to more than one gender. Bisexuality has been defined as by the Bisexual Resource Center as a "diverse sexual orientation, because people within the bi+ community define it in various ways. Some identify as bisexual, while others use pansexual, queer, fluid, or no label at all to describe their attractions to more than one gender." (https://biresource.org/bisexuality-101/, May 2nd, 2020). This definition emphasizes that identifying as bi+ means that attraction is not limited to, nor does it exclude binary attraction. The processes and realities of self-identifying within bi+ communities are completely up to individual persons, and folx participating in this project may identify anywhere within the definition brought to the table by the Bisexual Resource Centre. It is also completely okay if participants do not wish to subscribe to a label or name their sexual attractions. In recruitment, this is made clear to applicants.

Additionally, the term "womxn" in describing the demographic being written about is purposeful. Our Trans sisters and non-binary folx are prioritised in the consideration of this Major Research Paper (MRP), because they have a very long history of being left out of sexuality discourses (Barker et. al, 2012). It is critical to both document and honour their

experiences, and to not repeat what much of the existing literature about 2SLGBT+ communities has done by perpetuating Trans and non-binary erasure (Browne & Bakshi, 2013).

Last, the terms "womxn" and "folx" in this paper are used as a way to resist gender binaries. Alternative spellings of the word "Women" can be traced back to 1700s literature to represent differences in dialect (Peters, 2017), however assigning the following meaning to them happened much later. "Womxn" is a term that is based on the word "womyn", which has existed since around 1975. Initially, this replacement of the words "womyn/womin" was used by (typically white, cisgender) feminists in order to avoid referring to "man" and "men" (Peters, 2017). However, as our understandings of gender identities have grown, the term has shifted to "womxn" in order to move beyond traditional white and Trans-exclusionary feminism (Peters, 2017). Over time, the use of this word may become obsolete, but for now it is the most recent form of resistance to gender binaries, and the fight for the inclusion of complexity in studying gender. Similarly, "Folx" can be used as an umbrella term for people who do not identify with a normative, Western gender, or sexual orientation- with the replacement of "ks" with "x" suggesting solidarity with those who exist outside binary constructions of identity (Peters, 2017).

It is also important to note that though this research is intended to reach and include any Trans womxn, non-binary folx and cisgender womxn who want to participate in the research, intersecting identities are complex and not all experiences and themes about experience can be broadly generalised to a single group. Trans womxn and non-binary folx' experiences of belonging in their bi+ identities can profoundly differ from cisgender womxn's' experiences (Battle & Harris, 2013), and perhaps a follow-up to this project- designed in partnership with and for Trans womxn and non-binary folx- could expand on these differences and present further opportunity to create, commune and belong.

CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

When choosing which theoretical framework to use for this research and analysis, I could not settle on just one, and so there will be more than one influence in the work. Though many authors and educators play a role in supporting each theoretical framework I draw from, I am especially interested in three articles. The first theory driving this research forward, is Queer Theory, particularly Kinnon Mackinnon's (2011) work on how Queer Theory interacts with Anti-Oppressive Social Work. Queer Theory will act as the base theory for this project. However, to fill in some gaps, Espineira and Bourcier's (2016) writings about the importance of Transfeminism as a movement alongside third-wave feminism addresses and deconstructs the binary approaches to not only gender, but sexuality as well. Lastly, I will draw from Baines' (2011) writing on social justice-based anti-oppressive Social Work practice. I will highlight the importance of understanding that larger systems protect and privilege certain people, while the same systems can also be harmful and violent to others. This will provide a more systemic perspective while identifying major themes in the narratives of participants.

a. Queer Theory

This paper will borrow from Queer Theory's openness to the nuance, complexity and inseparability of sexuality, power, desire and subjectivity, challenging "normative" understandings of sexuality, purposefully centering the diversity within and between identity categories (MacKinnon, 2011), and will emphasise the importance of destabilizing the binaries on which society relies when taking up sexual identity categories (Buxton, 2011).

In the context of Queer Theory, sexuality is a social construct to be critiqued. For example, heterosexuality "has been analysed as a patriarchal institution which perpetuates gendered power relations through sexuality" (Carroll, 2012, p. 2)- sexuality any of the above: someone's

attraction to another, intimacy and/or eroticism- and it is Queer Theory's mission to understand what the conceptualisations of these do and mean, nudging over normative assumptions and conceptualisations of sexuality, and examining them critically (Anderlini-D'Onofio, 2009). Carroll (2012) identifies sexuality as a tool in which ideology can be internalised, and emphasises that Queer Theory reframes conversations about sexuality, sex and gender in a reflexive, ever-changing manner that is willing to regenerate and reshape itself with change. While knowledge and understanding continues to grow, "queer theory brings new conceptual frameworks for the analysis of gender and sexuality, frameworks not exclusively concerned with the lived experiences of women" (Carroll, 2012, p. 10). Similarly, desire as interpreted by Queer Theory is also a fluid, flexible construct that may shift and change over time, and can be affected by the contexts and intricacies of people's lives (Anderlini-D'Onofrio & Alexander, 2009). Playing a large role in the structure of Queer Theory, fluidity, complexity and the desire to be continually reflexive are tenets of this theory that call for a deeper, nuanced understanding of sexuality, this will be useful in my intention to design this project more inclusively. It supports not gatekeeping folx who fall outside of Western conceptualisations of normative identities from participating in the research and allows for a richer analysis of social and individual contexts and constructions.

Power dynamics and structures are another form of social construction that Queer Theory sets out to dismantle. Designed to question the binary understandings and constructions of sex, gender and sexuality, Queer Theory acknowledges and is accountable to the fact that it remains "implicated in the production of meaning and identity, and hence are both agents and effects of systems of power/knowledge" (Sullivan, 2003, p.189). Carroll (2012) explains that modern understandings of sexuality are informed by an understanding established by Michel Foucault-

that power is not repressive *or* productive, but repressive *and* productive: normative identities allow for "unmarked" and "naturalised'" status" and "is understood as serving to perpetuate its power as an identity which tends to be taken for granted and to pass unquestioned." (Carroll, 2012, p. 1). In the context of bi+ identities, Anderlini-D'Onofrio & Alexander (2009) argue that even though bi+ identities are left out of discourse and language (both are powerful meaning-making tools), they challenge dominant ideologies about binaries, they perform much of what Queer Theory sets out to do- queer what is assumed to be static, question what is consumed as "normal".

Subjectivity is the space for individuals to interpret their own realities and identities, and the resistance to being labelled by society's binary expectations in the context of gender and sexuality. That being said, although it is true that identities are subjective, our own interpretations and understanding of gender, sexuality, desire and power are shaped by languages, "with the most notable of these languages being the power/knowledge of heteronormativity" (Anderlini-D'Onofrio & Alexander, 2009, p. 210). Sullivan (2003) encourages a social and systemic analysis when utilising Queer Theory, because our understandings and experiences of gender and sexuality are informed by cultural texts, such as "books, films, television programs, magazines, political manifestos, scientific theories, and so on" (p. 190).

One of Queer Theory's most valuable contributions is its commitment to interrogate and overturn discourses of deviance and normativity in historical, political and systemic contexts (MacKinnon, 2011). Queer theorists demand that we ask the question: how do we know what we know about sexuality? Its goal is to unsettle heteronormative conceptualisations of gender, sex and sexuality, and to analyse the "hetero/homosexual figure as a power/knowledge regime that

shapes the ordering of desires, behaviors, social institutions, and social relations" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 51). Historically, Queer Theory has focused solely on binary sexuality while trying to understand and challenge norms, neglecting a deeper analysis of societal contexts such as race, gender, class, capitalism etc. (Edwards, 1998; Gammon & Isgro, 2007), other significant political identities that intersect with queerness. Although it is true that homogeny and sameness across all queer communities cannot be assumed due to great diversity within, this neglect has caused fracturing and differentiating across sexualities (Gammon & Isgro, 2007), rather than a cultural *and* structural deconstruction of identities. However, there has been work done by Queer Theorists that argue that by disrupting gender as a category that is stable and identifying gender as a construct constantly in flux, certain understandings of feminism have become undermined (Caroll, 2012), which has been an important movement toward equity and justice for those excluded from feminist rhetoric (this will be further discussed in the next section: Transfeminism).

As the majority of mainstream Queer Theory and studies have been led by gay and lesbian activists, researchers and authors, bi+ identities and epistemologies have unfortunately long been hidden from the development of queer studies and theorising (Gammon & Isgro, 2007), as have Trans and non-binary identities (Sullivan, 2003). Why? Similar to how Mackinnon (2011) argues that current queer theory fabricates a binary in which sexual minority groups/those who fall under the 2SLGBTQ+ umbrella are, through discourse, constructed as having less power and privilege than heterosexual people, the same could be argued for bi+ folx and gay and lesbian folx. "Binary sexual structures, whether heterosexual or homosexual, actively construct hierarchical boundaries and systems through which particular acts, desires, activities, identities,

and formations are divided and framed as deviant, to be excluded and marginalized" (Gammon & Isgro, 2007, p. 178).

b. Transfeminism

As a critical response to the absence of bi+ and Trans-inclusivity within the confines of queer theory, Transfeminism will play a large role in hopefully dismantling the gate keeping of whose queerness gets to be heard, and whose does not. As this paper is about bi+ womxn and non-binary folx's experiences and the impact their identities interacting with the greater world has on their lives, it is essential to understand the historical implications and the root of feminism as it is understood now, how it came to be, and where there is still work to be done. Each wave of feminism comes about when a group of womxn previously silenced by the previous waves demands their inclusion (Koyama, 2001). Transfeminism is a movement "by and for Trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond" (Koyama, 2001, p. 1), meaning that without the inclusion of Trans folx in feminist advocacy and discourse, there is a deliberate gap in who feminism serves. Though not every womxn and non-binary person's experience is generalizable, what needs to happen for all womxn and non-binary folx's social justice agendas to advance is to stand with each other as a collective. Transfeminism is not a movement to shut down existing movements, but to further develop it by advancing feminism as it is through the liberation of Trans folx and working in tandem with all others (Koyama, 2001).

In writing this paper, Transfeminism will be used as a theoretical perspective when addressing the exclusion and inclusion of certain bodies in narrative and discourse. All womxn and non-binary folx will be a part of the conversation this paper seeks to have with this demographic. Transfeminism does not only speak for middle-to-upper-class, able-bodied white

folx- which means it also relies on Kimberlé Crenshaw's work on intersectionality of gender, race, class (Espineira & Bourcier, 2016) and also disability. This emphasises the multiplicities of identities, privileges and oppressions that exist and arise within individuals in different contexts. Attempting to address and understand each identity, privilege and oppression individually is not possible, because they are not divorceable from the way they interact with each other (Espineira & Bourcier, 2016).

c. Anti-Oppression / Anti-Oppressive Social Work

Anti-oppressive social work practice (AOP) has been explained by Donna Baines (2017) as an approach to interpret and dismantle social issues using a systemic lens. Its goal is in understanding the relationship between power, privilege and the systems within which power and privilege simultaneously upheld and purposefully withheld. A theory that locates itself as a critical one, it borrows from many other critical theoretical perspectives, including but not limited to feminism, postmodernism, queer theory and anti-racism. At its core, AOP has liberation and a commitment to social justice and change (Baines, 2017), and acknowledges its openness to the ever-changing needs of the people it was created by and for. AOP scholars and practitioners also believe the theory is not static, and there is a constant need for growth- it is greatly politicised, and ever-evolving (Baines, 2017).

One of AOP's unfortunate weaknesses is that it sometimes overlooks the difference in experiences of oppression, especially when discussing race and colonization. A common critique of AOP is that it silences Black, Indigenous and other racialized folx' unique experiences of oppression through racism. Authors Kumsa, Mfoafo-M'Carthy, Oba &, Gaasim (2014) suggest a refashioning of AOP. The creation of an AOP tailored to center Black and other racialized folx

in the social justice and advocacy work (2014). In the proceedings of this project, I will ensure that race is not a forgotten identity when considering oppression and privilege.

One of the core tenets of anti-oppressive practice is the importance of self-reflexivity and positionality. We who live by and practice AOP must use our own "insights, frustrations, disappointments and successes as entry points into improving theory and practice" (Baines, 2017, p. 8). By sharing my own experience as a womxn who falls under the bi+ umbrella, I hope to provide insight into my own experiences, and thus engage with other tenets of AOP, by recruiting others with similar experiences to bring their knowledges and narratives into a collective.

CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Finding critical literature about bi+ womxn and non-binary folx in heterosexual-presenting relationships and where they find belonging in their identities proved to be impossible. In fact, there is no existing literature I could find that specifically investigated this research area. There are very few studies with intentions of understanding long-term queer relationships, and even fewer that seek to study and celebrate bi+ relationships (Reinhardt, 2011). I was able to find some literature about womxn and bi+ communities, but the dedication of social work journals to bi+ communities is quite disappointing. The most success in finding literature about bisexuality was within the *Journal of Bisexualit*y. Much of the other literature I utilized came from other queer journals such as the *Journal of Homosexuality*. A helpful informational resource about bi+ communities that provided useful language and definitions for the context of this research was the organization *Bisexual Resource Centre* (2020). One article I found about students in a graduate Social Work program written by Mary Hilton sought to reveal the lack of conversation about bi+ folx, while also disrupting the heteronormativity within the curriculum (Hylton, 2005) which I found mirrored some of my own experiences as a bi+ social work student in both my undergraduate and graduate program. It feels encouraging to read articles that feel genuine in their intentions of change-making.

The Bisexuality Report: Bisexual inclusion in LGBT equality and diversity, a report written by authors Barker, Richards, Jones, Bowes-Catton, Plowman, Yockney & Morgan (2012) is another thoughtful investigation into the multiplicity and fluidity of bi+ identities. They take great care in discussing as many aspects of bi+ identities and the societal forces that contribute to biphobia, transphobia in the context of bi+ communities, wholistic wellness, social determinants of health and their intersections with bi+ communities and representation. They call all

researchers to action- to consider centering research from both a structural and strengths-based perspective.

There are no bounds to the amount of literature, content, conversation and resistance always happening by womxn and non-binary folx within bi+ communities. There are many bi+ womxn and non-binary folx in heterosexual-presenting relationships using alternative mediums and platforms like comedy, blogs, forums, YouTube, Instagram to create purposeful spaces for themselves and others where they feel they can be fully true to their identities. To name a few:

→ User @gabalexa on Instagram is a bi activist who uses her platform to educate her followers about various issues that impact bi+ communities by sharing her own experiences. She spends much of her time disrupting the idea that bi+ folx (or however they identify) aren't "queer enough", but are valid as they are.

→ @GabyDunn is a bisexual Youtuber whose content mostly revolves around queer topics. She speaks about topics such as gender, consent, polyamory and bisexual visibility, bringing on guest speakers to deepen the conversations.

→ Canadian comedian Mae Martin (she/they) does an incredible job of raising issues that impact people attracted to more than one gender, even basing some of their stand-up routines off their sexuality and gender identity.

→ Reddit forum r/bisexual is a space for "anyone who doesn't quite fit the otherwise binary "straight" and "gay" pattern" (https://www.reddit.com/r/bisexual/, May 4th, 2020) to gather, share memes, ask questions, and celebrate all identities that may fall under the bi+ umbrella.

However, in reviewing the literature available to me through academic channels, alternative forms of knowledges are not currently being highlighted in mainstream, peer-reviewed academic papers or journals.

Throughout this literature review I explore the relevant literature about bi+ communities that already exists in the realm of academia. As I could not find any literature pertaining to my topic specifically, I will also be reviewing literature about the broader aspects of bi+ communities and the impacts social structures have on the lives of people identifying as bi+. Though it is not a firm rule, it is possible some of the themes within general research about bi+ communities may be generalizable to the specific group of people I want to get to know further, to some degree.

I have organized the literature into four major themes, each with their own subthemes: 1) Biphobia and the Erasure of Bi+ Identities, 2) Biphobia and Lateral Erasure of Bi+ Identities, 3) Belonging, and 4) Bi+ Folx In Straight-Presenting Relationships as Complex. These themes are useful to both include and challenge in my own work as I deconstruct where bi+ womxn and non-binary folx find belonging, identifying the gaps where there are gaps, and the strengths where there are strengths.

Biphobia and the Erasure of Bi+ Identities

I want to begin by explaining what I mean when I use the terms "biphobia" and "erasure" in discussing bi+ identities. Biphobia refers to the negative, harmful attitudes, behaviors and societal structures that impact people wo are attracted to more than one gender. Biphobia can manifest in many different ways (ex: denial, invisibility, exclusion, marginalization and stereotypes) and it intertwines with the dominant heterosexist and heteronormative expectations

the world has (Barker et. al, 2012). Erasure of bi+ identities refers to the purposeful and calculated invisibility and exclusion bi+ identities are forced into in terms of supports, representation and acknowledgement. In the following section I outline the most common visible forms of biphobia: denial, invisibility, exclusion, marginalization and stereotypes as a means of guidance through the literature about bi+ identities.

a. Denial

The troublesome reality of identifying as bi+ is that our identities are constantly placed into question by other people, and we are bombarded with messages of doubt from media, friends, family, educators, inappropriate resources and heteronormative systems (Barker et. al, 2012). The process of people growing comfortable with their sexual identities that are non-heteronormative can be complex and will differ in every individual situation. This process of defining one's sexuality is not linear for everyone and can be fluid and change over time. As we live in a society that mainly prioritizes both heteronormativity (the often-unquestioned norm that heterosexuality should be and is the only sexuality) and monosexuality (the belief that one can only be attracted to one gender [Barker et. al, 2012]), there is a mainstream belief that people who identify as bi+ are at a halfway point, a "rest stop" (Buxton, 2011, p. 541) or are "sitting on the fence" (Barker et. al, 2012, p. 19) in their sexuality journeys. Womxn and non-binary folx are especially susceptible to this form of denial. There is a mainstream refusal to believe that bi+ identities are a common reality (Buxton, 2011), not a period of confusion. Certain people experience this denial by society in different ways, and are denied by other societally defined groups, such as family, religious institutions, queer spaces, and supports. Denying both

individuals' identities and access to appropriate bi+-centered resources leads to hostile life environments that have violent and harmful consequences (Gormley, 2018).

b. Invisibility

Bi+ invisibility is a form of biphobia that is a Western colonial insistence on binary understandings of sexual attraction (i.e. the belief that people are only attracted to the 'other gender', also a transphobic understanding of sexual attraction and sexualities), erasing the large proportion of individuals who are attracted to more than one gender (Barker et. al, 2012).

The very assumption that someone is either straight, or lesbian/gay is an active and common manifestation of bi+ invisibility. Mainstream discourse and labelling have a large hand in perpetuating invisibility among bi+ communities. It is crucial that bi+ identities are validated, and to understand that people attracted to more than one gender may not even identify under one of the labels included under the bi+ umbrella. In fact, many people surveyed about their sexualities would rather not subscribe to a specific label, stressing the importance of self-identifying rather than being labelled by others' conceptions of sexualities and what they look like (Barker et. al, 2012).

A form of invisibility relevant to bi+ womxn and non-binary folx in heterosexual-presenting relationships is the assumption of peoples' sexualities based on the physical presentation of their current relationship. Denying people, the right to define or to not define their sexuality by assuming they are straight or lesbian/gay erases many identities that fall both inside and out the bi+ umbrella. When bi+ folx find themselves in long-term heterosexual-presenting relationships, the world treats them as though they are a paradox. They both believed to be not queer enough to be fully queer, but they also are not expected to last very long within

the heterosexual-presenting relationship (Buxton, 2011). Buxton, in a study about womxn in straight-presenting marriages, found the discourse about mixed-orientation couples to be untrue-mixed-orientation marriages do last, despite the pervasive belief they will not (Buxton, 2011). Other forms of bi+ invisibility as a method of biphobia are the doubts being raised over bi+ identities in media, literature, journalism, research studies and the assumption that all bi+ folx are cisgender, white, able and middle-to-upper class (Barker et. al, 2012).

Lack of proper bi+ supports and research is a massive gap within social services aiming to support bi+ folx (Jen, 2019), and reflects the invisibility that bi+ folx experience both within and outside of 2SLGBTQ+ communities. Similar to the research that does occasionally investigate bi+ communities, much of the existing support for bi+ folx is combined with lesbian and gay supports (Jen, 2019). For there to be progress in uncovering the erasure of bi+ identities, there is a desperate need for dedicated bi+ affirming services such as therapy, group counselling, informational resources and sexual education available in the mainstream realm. In a study interviewing mixed-orientation couples, Buxton (2011) found that bi+ spouses were unable to find therapists that were knowledgeable about or who had experience with the unique experience of mixed-orientation couples. Gormley (2018) argues that acceptance of and validation of bi+ identities is barely the minimum that must be attained in supporting bi+ communities. It is crucial that the bi+ dedicated supports work with people to heal from internalized external messages and honor the strength and resilience that they are already exercising. With an emphasis on the resilience that is already happening, it may be a useful practice tool for bi+ identities that "they know more about surviving in the margins than they realize" (Gormley, 2018, p. 244).

Invisibility is not exempt from being a complex concept and phenomenon. Societally, bi+ identities are invisible in cultural, political and research literature (Jen, 2019), which is already sparse. Representation does not often exist within family structures either, as we almost always exist alongside folx of other orientations (Gormley, 2018). This lack of structural support makes it difficult and risky to stand up for one's rights and can place bi+ identities in great danger- violence, workplace discrimination and job loss to name a few (Gormley, 2018). Gormley (2018) writes: "The choice between being seen and being able to eat is one the privileged need not make." (p. 223), but I would argue that this statement fails to acknowledge that privilege is not static, and erases some of the experiences of the bi+ folx who are in heterosexual-presenting relationships. As aforementioned, invisibility can be very harmful, but there are also situations where invisibility comes in the form of temporary safety from systemic oppression.

c. Exclusion

As the mainstream perception and discourse about both gender and sexuality is dominantly binary, there is a great deal of erasure of Trans identities and transphobia that emerges toward Trans and non-binary folx (Barker et. al, 2012). This form of erasure often severs connection between and within bi+ communities, as Trans narratives are often purposefully left out of queer conversation (Garelick, Filip-Crawford, Varley, Nagoshi, Nagoshi & Evans, 2017) and are expected to only conform to the Western normative genders and the Western normative sexualities. This rift is dangerous because it provides dominant transphobic discourses with the space to exercise power over both non-2SLGBTQ+ communities and 2SLGBTQ+ communities, placing people who openly do not conform to societal norms on the receiving end of the fear and violence by those who do. Some findings from research about bisexuality and Trans folx suggest

that the "perceived ambiguity of presented gender and/or sexual identity for individuals who are Transgender and who are bisexual may create unique sources of threat for individuals who are straight" (Garelick et. al, 2017, p. 184).

Bi+ communities are largely left out of research about 2SLGBTQ+ folx. In an audit of research about 2SLGBTQ+ folx, author and researcher Sarah Jen found that "Of 66 empirical articles published between 2009 and 2016, less than one third (28.2%) included bisexual individuals in their samples" (Jen, 2019). Even as helping professions, including social work, expand their understanding of structural oppression and queer theory, we play a large role in historically and currently contributing to the invisibility of bi+ womxn (Hylton, 2005). Prioritising research supports and resources for bi+ communities is necessary in order to undermine biphobia.

d. Marginalization

Marginalization of bi+ folx is also not static and can take multiple forms. It was as recently as the 1970s that attraction to other genders was pathologized, treated like an illness and was written into the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* as "homosexuality" until 1973 (Benack & Swan, 2016). Identifying as bi+ has also been framed as a shortcoming, due to the connection with negative mental health outcomes and the associations with harmful stereotypes (Kerr, Santurri & Peters, 2013).

Intersecting identities are often also ignored, and negative impacts on bi+ communities are often blamed on socially constructed markers such as race, gender, class, ability and sexuality that fall outside of colonial Western norms (Battle & Harris, 2013). This becomes dangerous, because it inevitably leads to racism, transphobia, biphobia and ableism amidst conversation

about bi+ identities. As I am a cisgender and white womxn myself, his research paper intends to maintain a consistent calling out of systemic oppression that impacts racialized and Trans folx, while also not claiming to be the expert in racialized and Trans experiences. In the context of bi+ research, a white person's experiences for example, may look differently than a Black person's experiences specifically because of privileges and oppressions. Research that takes into account the specificities of certain identities (ex: race) offers the opportunity to understand individual contexts, and then move onto the comparison and inclusive approach that may have the ability to create social change (Muñoz-Laboy, 2019)

e. Stereotypes

There are countless stereotypes that perpetuate harm toward bi+ communities: we are considered "demons, deviants, dangerous, unscrupulous, crazy, wild, out of control, and without reason. We are rejectable, expendable, throwaways, shunned, and excommunicated. We are pressured to conform to any other way of being than our own." (Gormley, 2018, p. 231). Bi+ folx are forced to be on the receiving end of countless more stereotypes, such as being greedy, proliferators of disease, always leaving the relationship they are in for another gender, being promiscuous (Pearl, 2006), being the penultimate fetish, or being interested in "anything that moves" (Barker et. al, 2012, p. 20). These not only exclude and makes bi+ identities invisible, but they denigrate and violently exclude bi+ folx from both outside and within 2SLGBTQ+ communities, often leaving them to find their own means of survival and belonging.

Articles I read about bi+ mental health and wellness were mostly written through the lens that bisexuality is the cause of any mental distress (rather than taking the position that it is the societal conditions and environment in which bi+ folx are forced to live within such as

invisibility and biphobia [Barker et. al, 2012] that impact their mental health). There are a number of pieces of literature that delve into the negative mental wellness outcomes of bisexual folks of all ages (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Jen, 2019; McLaren, Schurmann & Jenkins, 2015; Gormley, 2018), but what I found in my research is that there is are very few conversations and inquiries about growth, solutions, resilience and the constant resistance that bi+ communities demonstrate daily.

A major theme within research about bi+ folx is the pathologization they experience (Barker et. al, 2012). The dominant focus on negative mental health outcomes of bi+ communities frames being a part of bi+ communities as a deficit and preserves existing harmful stereotypes and narratives that bi+ identities are destined to experience mental distress. Without erasing the many individuals' whose mental health diagnoses play a large role in identity and belonging (O'Connor, Kadianaki, Maunder, McNicholas, 2018), I believe it is important to unveil the spaces in which there is stillness in academia that obscures the reality of movement. There are positive outcomes for bi+ communities (Barker, Richards, Jones, Bowes-Catton, Plowman, Yockney & Morgan, 2012), yet these narratives are rarely explored by researchers. While it is important to acknowledge the negative impacts that biphobia, invisibility, a lack of community, familial support and daily violent and harmful messaging toward bi+ communities can have on the mental wellness of members of bi+ communities, my intention in this paper is to celebrate and acknowledge the resistance currently being demonstrated by bi+ womxn and non-binary folx in heterosexual-presenting relationships albeit insistence by the world that they are not worthy of growth or bloom.

Lateral Erasure / Biphobia

Falling within the 2SLGBTQ+ umbrella does not exempt bi+ folx from or negate violence in the form of biphobia and erasure that can come from other 2SLGBTQ+ communities. I would like to make clear however, that blame should not fall on people who fall under the 2SLGBTQ+ umbrella. Rather, when inter-community harm and violence does happen, it is the result of historical trauma and colonial violence- systems built by Western culture to spread hate and fear toward anybody who does not conform to societal norms (Hanna, 2017).

In tandem with the broader erasure of and biphobia toward bi+ identities there is also a reality that I name as lateral erasure. Lateral erasure is when bi+ identities are delegitimised, erased and experience biphobia by folx in 2SLGBTQ+ communities (Welzer-Lang, 2008), while they are assumed by society to be allies to all folks who belong to marginalised gender and sexual identity communities. This can manifest in multiple ways such as being seen as not having chosen a "side", being dishonest about their sexuality, only experimenting (Hartman, 2006) as well as in the same forms of biphobia that Barker et. al (2012) identified in their report on bisexuality: denial, invisibility, exclusion, marginalisation and stereotypes. The recess in which bisexual womxn and non-binary folx in heterosexual-presenting relationships fall are the stereotypes are that they are infidel, they are oversexualised and indecisive (Hartman, 2006), which isolates them from communities in which they feel like they could belong, but do not.

Barker et. al (2012) argue that one possible reason for this dislike of bi+ folx by some lesbian/gay folx may be because they themselves may experience internalised biphobia. Fearing the rejection, loss of community and invisibility they themselves perpetuate: "some people can feel that the existence of bisexuality 'muddies the water' in a way which calls into question the basis on which they have fought for their rights" (Barker et. al, 2012, p. 21).

Do bi+ womxn and non-binary folx feel they have access to queer spaces and supports when they need them? **"**data about bisexuals are usually conflated with those of gay and lesbians" (Buxton, 2011, p. 540), meaning there are so many more questions than answers when the time comes to support bi+ folx. As aforementioned in the previous section, 2SLGBTQ+ supports often claim to be inclusive of each identity they claim to support within the acronym, but fail to properly prepare for the differences in experiences, privileges and oppressions that bi+ folx's lives consist of daily in comparison to lesbian/gay experiences, privileges and oppressions.

Both before and after personal circles are made aware of bi+ folx's identities is an emotionally challenging and isolating time. It is not uncommon for lesbian and gay peers and friends to criticize and reject bi+ identities, feeling betrayed that they are not 'all or nothing' (Pearl, 2006). It can be very lonely, being placed in a position where you feel like you do not fully belong in neither queer spaces, nor heterosexual spaces- especially when the expectation and hope is that community can be found (Barker et. al, 2012). Buxton emphasises the reality of experiences of loss of queer personal circles when someone comes out as bi+ through a quote in her research: "We lost a lot of lesbian friends when she came out bi," [a participant] wrote. "The official politically correct gay community did the very best they could to separate us and convince my wife that she was REALLY lesbian." (Buxton, 2011, p. 533). Gay and lesbian folx trying to convince bi+ folx that they are simply too afraid of 'fully' coming out are harmful tactics that leave lasting negative impacts on wellness (Pearl, 2006).

Historically and presently, bi+ folx have been excluded from or pushed to the margins in 2SLGBTQ+ events such as marches and would be rejected at the door from gay clubs and services, forcing them to lie about their identities at the door if they wanted to participate (Barker

et. al, 2012). Though these actions are now illegal, there is a lingering discomfort in knowing 2SLGBTQ+ spaces can still be unfriendly and cold toward bi+ people (Barker et. al. 2012).

There are also moments where bi+ identities are placed in dangerous situations where biphobia manifests into physical violence. Barker et. al (2012) write about the lack of information colonial systems built to protect people (i.e. police) have about bi+ folx, and the uncertainty and doubt they have toward them. There have been instances of violence directed toward bi+ people reported to police, but the police are not equipped with the knowledge that biphobia can be directed toward a bi+ person regardless of their gender identity and relationship status (Barker et. al, 2012), creating a distrust in systems supposedly built to support them. This is one of the reasons violence of all types (Interpersonal, stranger, online harassment) against bi+ folx goes under-reported.

Specific to womxn and non-binary folx in heterosexual-presenting relationships, spending time in queer spaces can feel complicated. Barker et. al asked a participant in their report about identifying as bi+ while in a relationship with someone of another gender: "People tend to think I'm gay unless they know I'm with an opposite-sex partner, and then they assume I'm straight, which makes me feel invisible. But then, when I say I'm bi, they assume I'm into threesomes" (2012, p. 14), another example of the stereotypes bi+ identities are forced to endure from their 2SLGBTQ+ circles.

Some people who are attracted to more than one gender chose to not identify with the bi+ label at all. Pearl (2006) argues that in the act of labelling ones' sexuality as bisexual, people stand in the way of "meaningful social relationships" (p. 123), and she believes that by dropping the bisexual label, others could not perceive her as locked "into a particular set of behaviors and desires that actually didn't fit me at all. I wanted to explain my sexuality on my own terms, so I

began to search for a label that could offer me more room for exploration and self-construction"
(Pearl, 2006, p. 123). Though this strategy of protecting oneself from harm may not be how
everyone copes with biphobia and erasure, the right to self-identify should be completely
supported by activists, scholars, media, queer folx and is the decision of every individual person.

Whether it is purposeful or not, much of the literature perpetuates binary understandings of
bisexuality by insinuating there is a constant duality in both sexuality and gender. This actively
continues the erasure of Trans and non-binary folx's narratives, and also the reality that bi+
communities are often more nuanced and complex than there being only two colonially
prescribed genders and/or attracted to the two genders. People who are both Trans and identify as
bi+ or are attracted to more than one gender are often doubly invisible and discriminated against,
because they represent the opposite of conformity to the gender binary (Barker et. al, 2012).
Cisgender bi+ identifying folx can be transphobic as well, nobody is exempt from this form of
biphobia (Wilkens, 2016). Trans and non-binary folx are both under the constant pressure to
prove their gender identities to the world, and those who are also bi+ are also supposed to prove
their sexualities (Flanders, Dobinson & Logie, 2017)

Statistics are difficult to rely on in discussing gender and sexuality because it is not
always safe for people to come out, however it was found by Barker et. al (2012) that 19% of the
people who attended the national bisexual conference identified as Trans or genderqueer, and in
a UK study, 33% of participants identified their sexuality as bisexual. These are significant
numbers, and as Gormley (2018) suggests, there may be the possibility of collaboration between
bi+ and Trans movements, because they share a distinct commonality: they both resist and
protest against the narrow ideas related to gender and sexuality.

Belonging

As the purpose of this paper is to understand where bi+ womxn and non-binary folx in heterosexual-presenting relationships find belonging, I sought to find literature to guide the analysis of my interviews with participants. Many bi+ womxn feel lonely, like outsiders (Wilkens, 2016), not feeling like they fully fit in anywhere, while remaining mostly silent about how traumatic that can be (Gormley, 2018). In her work unraveling the complexity of community while being bi+, Marcia Pearl writes "Sometimes my bisexuality makes me feel like a permanent outsider" (Pearl, 2006, p. 124), emphasising how crucial it is for community and friendship networks to exist, simultaneously acknowledging the reality is that these two sources of belonging are what is often missing for bi+ identifying folx.

As humans assign meaning to community and bi+ identities are often invisible, this creates a limbo of sorts, in that wherever society dictates where they belong, there is still no place where they fully belong (Pearl, 2006). One take on belonging and community as a bi+ person by Pearl (2006) is that the changes in relationships over time having an impact on sense of community and belonging: "Most bisexuals spend a majority of [their] time in the community that corresponds with the sex and sexual orientation of [their] romantic partner. As a result, [they] may experience a sense of discontinuity if [they] change partners and [their] partner is of a different sex, or if [they] shift back and forth between two differing communities over time." (p. 124). In seeking belonging, bisexual individuals may sometimes find themselves in a community that almost fits their needs but is a decent compromise in that they are supportive enough that they may find their way (Pearl, 2006). Alternatively, bi+ folx find more than one accepting community, instead they find communities, plural (Thompson, 2012).

There are many articles that investigate the involvement of bi+ folx in various types of groups as a means of finding and feeling belonging (Battle & Harris, 2013; Wilkens, 2016; Barker et. al, 2012; McLaren, Schurmann, Jenkins, 2015; Thompson, 2012). Though there is no general consensus from the literature about group membership, it has been found that while some groups and networks offer safety and spaces where individuals can be themselves, some groups force the fragmentation of individuals' identities (Wilkens, 2016).

Jill Wilken (2016), who wrote about the importance of gathering for older bi+ womxn, discovered that a sense of belonging has notable positive benefits and may reduce feelings of isolation and depression (Wilkens, 2016). Gormley (2018) suggests that bi+ folx need their own gathering spaces- spaces to gather with other womxn who have similar lived experiences can offer feelings of safety and comfort- and offer affirmation, belonging, and unconditional friendship. Higher depressive behaviors and isolation have been found when people feel like they do not belong (McLaren, Schurmann, Jenkins, 2015). This supports Wilkens (2016 emphasis on the need for funders to consider the nature of spaces where these groups are located in the context of age. While disclosing bi+ identities to others always poses the risk of rejection and isolation, some people do find "an increased sense of connection, acceptance and community" (Pearl, 2006, p. 125).
Who feels comfortable disclosing and gathering in which spaces, and why?

Whiteness as A Major Barrier to Belonging

Representation and supports for bi+ folx are almost always centered around white, colonial experiences, which is a disincentive for many racialized folx' involvement (Thompson, 2012). Though there are a handful of articles that tackle whiteness' deep roots both within bi+

communities and the community supports put in place to support them (Battle & Harris, 2013; Thompson, 2012), most of the literature fails to acknowledge how many existing supports, groups, online forums and other means of support claim to be generalizable to all people without considering cultural or even regional contexts (Hylton, 2005). "Whiteness is not only privileged and reified within these contexts, but also within 2SLGBTQ+ communities themselves— manifesting in the lived experiences of queer persons of Color as varying degrees of racial discrimination" (Lim & Hewitt, 2018, p. 319) This must be problematized because it erases all other racialized folx experiences at the same time as trying to disguise racism. Crisp and McCave (2007) stress that processes of self-identification both publicly and privately will vary and differ in relationship to other identities, for example: race.

Cisgender, white men and womxn who identify as bisexual exercise the privilege of having more representation and platforms in multiple ways (Lim & Hewitt, 2018) and also the privilege of invisibility when visibility is dangerous. Not all queer spaces are welcoming to Black, Indigenous and other racialized bi+ identities, and more research must be done to explore the complexities of belonging (Wilkens, 2016; Barker et. al., 2012). In an article examining the sociopolitical involvement of bi+ and lesbian Latinas, authors Battle and Harris (2013) found that this type of group involvement may reduce the weight carried by racialized womxn who experience intersecting oppressions (Battle & Harris, 2013). It must be recognised that the regardless of the values people perceive cultures as prioritising, there are "likely to be multiple meanings attached to 'same-and-other' gender attractions within each group, related to class, religion, generation, geographical location, personal experience and many other aspects." (Barker et. al, 2012, p. 29). Therefore biphobia is not static, and it cannot be assumed to be perpetuated by people from specific cultures or racial groups. It is a socially constructed force

that can be exercised by anyone, with very real consequences. Racialized folx will often experience double discrimination, from both racism and biphobia (Barker et. al, 2012), which highlights the urgency with which there needs to be spaces that are not only by and for white bi+ identities.

Existing literature on belonging focuses mainly on physical communities: spaces bodies can enter. This literature also lacks a critical analysis of how services and groups are rooted in whiteness and fails to propose potential ways to find solutions. My intention is to actively listen to the participants and their specific needs, dependant on history, intersectional identities and context. In this research, although I am interested in physical community, I would like to further explore the reach of digital communities, and emotional belonging via other means. I want to know how valued finding community and belonging online is within bi+ communities, and to understand other less tangible ways folx find ease in their identities, while taking into consideration that not all bi+ bodies are taken up in spaces in the same ways.

Thompson writes about identity politics, and the result of this as only viewing people as having single identities (Thompson, 2012). In their work on racialized bi+ folx, Thompson (2012) discovered that the participants felt marginalised in both their cultural communities, and in 2SLGBTQ+ spaces, feeling the need to leave a piece of themselves at the entrance to both. This can lead to the internalization of the division between racial and sexual identities- "The desire for sameness that identity politics follow becomes problematic, and sometimes oppressive, for those with multiple identities." (Thompson, 2012, p. 427), which can be true, but we must also be careful to not fragment so much that the messaging becomes 'us vs. them' across various racial groups, including white people.

Discussion: Bi+ Folx In Straight-Presenting Relationships

Each bi+ womxn and non-binary person will have a different experience in terms of privilege, oppression and belonging. Buxton writes that the fluidities, complexities and contextualities make for complexities: "complex, multifaceted and multidimensional nature of bisexuality ungraspable by external observation alone." (Buxton, 2011, p. 539) mean that bi+ folx are often left in the constant paradox of both needing to and being able to modify behavior to prove identity (Flanders, Dobinson & Logie, 2017).

Bi+ folx, especially bi+ folx in heterosexual-presenting relationships, are often able to escape judgment and scrutiny as a result of the invisibility, erasure and typically not being seen at all (Gormley, 2018). There are times where for those who have the privilege and ability to, choosing to present as heteronormative is a decision made for safety- to avoid the hostility directed toward bi+ identities who represent the threat of non-conformity (Gormley, 2018). Liberation of bi+ identities looks like "establishing the freedom to express our true natures, despite systemic inequities and damaging stereotypes." (Gormley, 2018, p. 231). It has struck me that a wall has been hit in researching bisexuality- although identifying as bi+ has been linked to negative mental wellness outcomes in what seems like countless studies (linked inextricably to structural oppression), what now? In both research and practice, it is critical to be wary of the dominant discourses and language that is used, to understand who crafted them, why they are still being used, and who is working to change them.

Limitations of the Literature

    a. **Internalized Biphobia and Imposter Syndrome**

Initially, I had suspected there would be more work and research done about internalized biphobia and the impact this may have on bi+ sense of imposter syndrome, especially from womxn and non-binary folx in heterosexual-presenting relationships. This suspicion came from my own experiences as a bi+ womxn who has been in more than one long-term heterosexual-presenting relationship. Though there is no literature dedicated to this theme, I was able to find a few short mentions of similar sentiments.

In Buxton's research about mixed-orientation marriages (2011), she found that bi+ womxn experienced what felt like a heavy burden from guilt about their sexual identities while being married to a partner of a male-identified person. In mixed-orientation relationships there are always forces such as religion, fear of rejection and feeling lonely that weigh on bi+ folx (Buxton, 2011). Bi+ womxn struggle to feel truly seen in their identities while in relationships that appear to be heterosexual (Jen, 2019), invisibility is associated with higher rates of "identity-related confusion or ambivalence, lack of identity cohesion or valence" and internalised stigma amidst bi+ folx." (Jen, 2019, p. 387).

My recommendation to future researchers and authors would be to investigate discourses and messaging that comes from religious institutions, peer circles, families and 2SLGBTQ+ and queer folx that are directed toward bi+ identities. Additionally, it would be interesting to understand how different people internalize different messages, and how.

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGIES

As with my theoretical frameworks, I was unable to choose just one. Narrative Inquiry and Arts-Based research pair well with the research topic, because my goal is to have a rich, well-rounded understanding of three different participants' perspectives and experiences.

Narrative Inquiry and Reflective Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is crucial if researchers hope to dig deep in their research inquiries-quantitative research will never be enough to encapsulate the variety of experiences that exist within communities. One of the reasons narrative inquiry is so beneficial, is because it enforces and emphasizes not only the social, but also the individual and contextual ways of understanding (Butler-Kisber, 2010). This works so well with this research, because participants' experiences were varied and based on their social and individual contexts. My role as researcher was to enter a space of inquiry with the participants as they live, relive and retell the stories that together form their lives, purposefully searching for social and individual contexts. As anti-oppressive practice calls for (Butler-Kisber, 2010), self-reflexivity is a tool and a process that I utilized while conversing with participants (Heron, 2005).

I am a cisgender, white, able-bodied womxn in a long-term heterosexual relationship who identifies under the bi+ umbrella. Many of these intersecting identities that play a role in making me who I am mean that though I make up only a small part of the percentage of bi+ communities, it is people with some or many of the identities I have who have the privilege of being most regularly represented in literature, film, media, television, research and countless other mediums. As such, I am very aware that my experiences may differ from those around me,

and I need to constantly interrogate my assumptions and biases about bi+ folx, because I am not exempt from having them.

It is my responsibility as researcher to understand how power and oppression shape who I am, and how I relate and connect to this topic (Heron, 2005). As I am deeply connected to this topic, and I may feel connected or not connected to what participants share with me, it is important for me to know that my privileges and the power I exercise will work in silent conversation with participants' privileges and power. My way of holding myself accountable was to first, do a lot of self-reflective journaling, and second, acknowledge the dynamics between the participants. I was committed to being transparent about these power dynamics, and I named them in conversation with participants before we began interviews.

When researchers are critical and self-reflexive, it has been found that narrative inquirers with shared or similar experiences with participants are more committed to improve both social and individual experiences, without exploiting the oppression they experience (Butler-Kisber, 2010)- and do not avoid uncomfortable tensions that happen as the research develops. Another reason shared lived experience may lead to a good professional relationship, and therefore a more profound and insightful look at the root of the issue is because these narratives were shared on the basis of trust. Lived experience of the researched oppression provides the opportunity to honor the narratives and declarations of participants.

I like that narrative research uses open-ended interview questions as a gateway to what lies beneath the surface: life histories and journeys toward identities (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Although every single individual comes from different contexts, narrative inquiry provides the opportunity to find recurring symbols and themes within narratives that align with others' experiences.

Arts-Based Research

What draws me most to art-based research is the possibility for one piece of art to touch an infinite number of humans in an infinite number of ways. Art is the perfect complement to narrative research, because it makes possible different embodiments of understanding (Barone, 2011). Although to Western culture the concept of truth is based upon numerical, provable values (Barone, 2011), art is another way to make possible narratives and truths not translatable through words. As I did not have an expected or desired outcome for this research bur rather it is exploratory, there was a freedom for participants to address subtle and nuanced experiences in a way that shines light on what they want to shine light on. Barone (2011) explained the value of this quite astutely: Arts-Based research is a method "through which we deepen and make more complex our understanding of some aspect of the world." (p. 3).

This broadening of conceptions of how we come to know what we know that art-based research encourages insight into social phenomena experienced by some and not others. This may create conditions in which the art persuades audiences into the acceptance that there is more than one truth, and that values and meanings can be fluid, encouraging them to open themselves up into being less individualistic. I appreciate Barone's (2011) argument that it is important to have many different forms of understanding knowledges and complexities. Outcomes from research that values wholistic, fluid and changing meanings allow for a richer and fuller results.

Data Collection

The method I chose to use was two-fold. First, I held semi-structured one-on-one interviews with participants in order to gather as rich and deep narratives as possible (Butler-Kisber, 2010) and second, I utilised Arts-Based creation and analysis to gain a fuller visual representation of participants' experiences, so that the power of this work may speak to a wider audience (Baron,

2011). The participants I interviewed were womxn and non-binary, bi+ / attracted to more than one gender, in long-term heterosexual-presenting relationships, and 20 years or older.

I chose to recruit participants through a mix of snowball sampling, and also by inviting people I know directly who I knew may be interested, as I have ties with the communities I am researching. In my experience as a member of queer communities, many of us know each other. In conversation with my networks (unrelated to my research), people are excited and happy when they are met with the opportunity to challenge harmful dominant discourses about them. This project is designed to celebrate the resilience of the people in the bi+ community.

All recruitment was done over email, and I provided my poster on social media for the purpose of engaging folx. Initially, participants had to be living in the Greater Toronto Area in order to participate in the in-person interviews, but the COVID-19 pandemic moved all interviews to be done in the form of video-calls. This change opened interviews to whoever could be reached by the snowball sample, and with the elimination of travel made it more accessible for some folx to participate.

I informally interviewed three self-identified bi+ womxn / non-binary folx in long-term heterosexual relationships in one-on-one interviews for a no longer than 90 minutes each. At the end of the first interviews, the participants worked to create four-line poetry based on their narratives of belonging, and they then took a week to illustrate four drawings to accompany them, using my artwork as a model (Appendix. A).

Once they finished their artwork, participants had the option of joining me for a one-on-one debrief that lasted no longer than 60 minutes, or to write a few short paragraphs explaining their work. The intention for this second interaction was to gain an understanding of the artwork offering space for the participants to talk about the art they created. The questions involved the

participants describing their art, how they made it, what the art symbolizes and what it means to them. As both interactions were lengthy, and I did not wish to miss any important details, I audio-recorded the interviews. These recordings were then transcribed and used for the purpose of the thematic analysis of the narrative interviews.

My sincere hope was that the narrative interviews would be more conversational than interrogative, in accordance with my intentional use of anti-oppressive practice. I wanted to be as transparent about the research process as I possibly could, and took the following steps to minimize the power dynamic that existed between the participants and I:

→ I offered all the documents that impact participants in advance (the consent form, guiding questionnaire)
→ I sent participants their interview transcripts, and gave them the opportunity to determine what they did and did not wish to be included
→ I accepted feedback on the questionnaire and added any questions that they wished to be asked
→ Participants knew I have lived experience with the research topic, for the purpose of ensuring they do not feel they are being observed 'through a looking glass'

In taking these steps, I hoped to create an environment where participants felt like co-researchers, and that they could contribute as much or as little as they wanted to.

Method of Analysis

My data analysis approach was inspired by Fraser's (2004) work on Narrative and Storytelling analysis. Loosely following the seven phases of narrative analysis she highlights in her article, I used the narratives and the artwork of the participants to understand their experiences, emotions and beliefs. I like that narrative analysis encourages an analysis of not only what was said, but what wasn't, and provides ways to understand social interactions on a micro to macro scale (Fraser, 2004).

The interviews that I conducted are loosely guided by guiding questions, all of which are open-ended to allow participants to decide what they wish to talk about. When it came time to discuss the artwork, I asked participants the three following questions:

→ How did you arrive at the place you did, in ending up with your finished product?

→ Can you please tell me about the colour palette you chose?

→ Describe any metaphors and hidden meanings you've included.

Discussion remained conversational and open-ended, and with this conversation I hoped to gain a better understanding of their processes, and the reflection they did to arrive at their finished product(s).

Phase one was to listen to the participants' narratives, and take notes, understand where we agreed and disagreed, noting the general energy from the interview (Fraser, 2004).

Phase two required the transcription of the recorded interviews, where I transcribed the interviewed, interpreting which words were said, and what filler words did not need to be included (e.g. an overabundance of the word "like"-). Fraser (2004) suggests sending the finished material to the participants so that if they wish, they may amend accuracy where necessary, which I have previously indicated was done, to ensure transparency.

Phase three required the interpretation of each individual transcript and artwork created by participants. This required an analysis of the types of stories, any contradictions, chronology, characterisations and details (Fraser, 2004). Here is where I also had the opportunity to take note of any repeating themes within the individual transcripts, and the use of specific language that may be relevant in participants' own interpretations of their experiences.

Phase four required a broadening of the analysis to include social relationships, impacts, structures and cultural understandings- allowing for a richer, more contextual location of the

narratives (Fraser, 2004). Fraser (2004) explains that phase five is designed to give "attention is deliberately given to references made to popular discourses" (p. 193), examining any metaphors or cultural language patterns that mirror dominant discourses.

Phase six is nearing the end, and this was the opportunity to search for commonalities and differences between participants in both the narrative interviews and the artwork (Fraser, 2004). By creating categories, themes, naming them and locating examples within the lengthy and detailed narratives of participants, I was able to examine themes within the broader narratives that capture specific angles of data in similar ways, even when they are not generalizable to each individual participant (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). It was useful and interesting to note how the "findings" of this research was sometimes "inconsistent, counter-intuitive, surprising and/or anomalous" (Fraser, 2004, p. 195).

Phase seven was the last step, where I must wrote about the "findings" in a way that respected that there are "multiple possibilities for representing stories" (Fraser, 2004, pp. 195-196). Self-reflexivity and re-examination of my own personal biases and understandings of the world was especially valuable here, so I remained aware of how I exercised the power of representing the participants' narratives.

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS

Each Zoom call began with a deliberate gentleness, ensuring participants and I had the opportunity to catch up with each other, as COVID-19 had prevented us from seeing each other in our usual contexts over the last little while. In order to be able to contextually locate participants in the discussion, I gathered certain demographic information from the participants who will be referred to by pseudonym. In total, three people participated: two self-identified white cisgender womxn, Levi (she/they) and Adora (she/her), and one self-identified white non-binary person, Skye (they/them). They range in age from 21 to 27, and they all name their sexualities differently- what they have in common, however, is that they are all attracted to multiple gender identities. Levi talked about oscillating between using bi and queer in certain contexts but feels most at home using queer as a way to describe their sexuality. Adora prefers to use bi, or bi+, but talked about not feeling the urgent need to label her sexuality. Over the course of their life, Skye has also oscillated between two descriptions of their sexuality- the first being pansexual, the second being queer. At the moment, they're most comfortable with using pansexual. Every participant at this time self-identifies as being in a long-term, heterosexual-presenting relationship of over 1.5 years, Adora and Levi's relationships are monogamous as of right now, and Skye's relationship is monogamous with a few communicated, consensual exceptions. Adora and Skye are dating their partners, and Levi is married to hers. Before each individual interview began, Levi, Adora and Skye all exclaimed how equally nervous and excited they were to delve into the ways in which meaning is assigned to them, their identities and how this impacts their sense of belonging— both feelings I shared with them.

On "Coming Out"

In asking everyone about their experiences navigating the disclosure of their sexuality in the context of their current relationships, I was interested in hearing about the casual, day-to-day disclosures that can occur. Upon reflection, I realised that this question stemmed from my own approach to disclosure- I've never formally or very loudly 'come out'. What I discovered is that not one out of the three participants have ever formally 'come out', either. Rather, they have mostly been indifferent as to whether people know or do not know this part of themselves. Explained and embodied differently by everyone, disclosure seems to happen on a small scale, when asked directly by someone they trust, or through non-verbal communication— often taking the shape of nuanced cues and coyness.

Levi shared that as they are in a monogamous relationship with a cisgender man, they feel that disclosure is simply not something relevant while they are in the relationship they are currently in. "It's not that I think I would be ostracised particularly, I don't worry about being discriminated against, I think I am in a community and a family that would be fine [about it]" they said, reflecting on a conversation they had with their partner about their families before the interview, "My perspective is like, because I'm not actively dating women, or dating anyone— the way that they [their families] know me is in this relationship, I think the relevance of it in this situation extends to me and [my partner].". When asked if she felt the same or differently talking about her sexual identity to her close friendships, Levi paused and said "I have a couple of friends who identify similarly [to the way I do]. I don't know if it's like coded language, but it's been like "I feel you" or whatever. Sort of not just being like "I also identify as blah blah blah", like being a little bit cheeky about it or something.", emphasising the power unspoken understanding, like a subtle nod to people who feel similarly.

Adora told me that she keeps the details about her life close to her chest: "unless I'm nervous and stuff and start oversharing, I usually try to avoid telling people about myself", she says, "I think if somebody asked me, I would probably tell them, but I'm not going to go out of my way to be like "everybody, attention, attention, je suis bisexuelle!". This isn't due to a discomfort about her sexual identity, she is quite happy with this part of herself, but rather it is out of an awareness that it could change the way some people receive her, for example, her family: "I think the only time I would tell them is if I was in a serious relationship with a woman, because then they'd be like "what's going on here?". Instead, she shares bi+ memes on Instagram that make her laugh and jokes around with her friends— some of whom she is out to, others to whom she is not— in an unspoken acknowledgement that she is attracted to more than one gender identity.

Skye shared that in terms of their sexuality, they feel a certain nonchalance: "I've never really been uncomfortable with it. I've kind of been just like "yeah no, I'm pretty gay" and pretty happy about it.". Disclosure about their gender identity, however, feels a little more complicated for them: "that's where like I've never even really *told* anyone. Like I've told a few people, and then it kind of just catches on. People kind of get the vibe, and I kind of prefer it that way because I haven't learned to talk about it much yet.". Although Skye is quite proud and deeply loving toward their non-binary identity, they discuss navigating the disappointments of sometimes feeling uncomfortable sharing this part of themself. They explain that their journey toward feeling at peace with the ebbs and flows that come with being non-binary in a binary world is newer in their life- whereas they've felt at ease knowing they are Pansexual for a long time: "it comes up if it comes up, and I am way more comfortable being like "I like girls and I want to have sex with girls" than I am being like "I am not a girl", haha. But also, one of them is

much more recent in my life than the other, so it's just like getting accustomed to that, and getting used to that myself."

On the Role of Partners

Our partners can be where we find the most safety in vulnerability, but they can also be where queer folx experience sites of violence, too. Being queer and entering a partnership with someone who does not identify as being queer themselves, is complicated. In the title of the study, I purposefully chose the words "heterosexual-presenting" as a way of describing the relationships of participants. This is because I personally believe that if one person in a partnership is queer, this automatically queers the entire relationship by stepping outside socially assigned binaries (both sexual and gender identities), meanings and understandings of what partnership looks like, insisting that the other partner(s) be a(n) accomplice(s) and an advocate with the person they've committed to caring for and growing with. Referring to partnerships where one or more persons in the relationship is bi+-identifying as being "straight" can perpetuate internalised biphobia and does perpetuate systemic erasure of bi+ and Trans identities.

In asking how and if participant's partners are intertwined with their sense of belonging as a person who identifies as queer or as falling under the bi+ umbrella and how they partners support their bi+/queer identities, I wanted to know what their individual experiences of this look like. Mine looks like acceptance, sometimes empty sometimes full, a little lost, unquestioned, separate.

"Oh! It's awesome!", Levi exclaimed, "it's amazing! Like it's been a journey of self-discovery for like both of us, it's been sort of like in development and like in exploration I guess.". Prior to officially dating, Levi realised that she may be queer, and felt "like a bit of a late

bloom in the sense that I was like in my late twenties, and so I mentioned that and he was like "that's great" or whatever, but it never came up that much.". Then in growing together, they felt safer and more comfortable openly discussing it with their partner:

> "the longer and deeper our bond has grown, the more comfortable we are exploring this and it seems very trust based to me. It's not its own thing, it seems like it's very like growing in relationship with our discussions about it. […] I feel very… Not lucky, but that it's what I deserve. It's what everyone deserves. I'm appreciative.".

Levi's partner in a very meaningful and tender way offers an approach to support that feels safe for Levi to fully explore the complexities and nuances of what it means to be a queer womxn in a straight-presenting relationship: "like I don't feel weird, he doesn't make me feel weird about it.". Levi smiled and provided another example of this:

> "he was saying something the other day where- he was so sweet- he was like: "I'm a straight man in a queer relationship!" and I was like "yeah!". He was like "I'm a straight man proudly in a queer relationship!" or something, yeah he's like very cool with it, obviously being cool with it is like the lowest bar you can set but he's also like very accepting and cool, and he'll just be like.. I don't know we'll just be talking, and he'll be like "MY WIFE'S QUEER AS HELL!"

They also took a moment to reflect on how different this development and self-discovery could have looked in the context of a theoretical cisgender, straight man, emphasising how grateful they are to feel as held as they do with their partner:

> "If you think of a lot of- you know not to make this like about straight men, I can imagine it going very differently. Of like, coming out or like revealing something into a relationship, I could either see it being like fetishized or like they would feel tricked or

like a closeted lesbian who like wouldn't admit it- there's all these things that it could be

and I'm just really grateful that he takes it in stride and is just like "alright".

Skye's relationship with their partner is similarly based on a foundation of deep trust, earned by

open communication and growth in partnership, and has been instrumental in their sense of

belonging as someone who is non-binary and Pansexual.

"[my partner] is like the best in the world. Well, I think as far as my gender identity, it's

like [my partner] is how I even discovered that, because they're non-binary. It's not

something that we even really talked about until I brought up what I was feeling, and it

was something that I had sort of gathered and they didn't outright tell me or anything.

And then I started kind of feeling that way because it had never been brought to the

forefront of my mind before. I never really knew anybody who was non-binary and they

are, and their past partner is as well, so I was just kind of opened up to like this whole

other thing where as soon as I found it I was like: "what the fuck, oh god, everything is

changing!". But they have been so helpful, like the whole way with being like: "I

understand. I feel you man. I know it sucks, and if you don't want to talk about it we

won't, and that's okay"."

As for Skye's Pansexual identity, they discussed having had few sexual experiences with women

in the past, but their hope is to change this. Their partner has been wholeheartedly supportive of

Skye's exploration of identity without fetishizing them, and has helped them feel safe in

exploring this, resulting in a comfortable acceptance:

"recently I've really been wanting to have sex with pretty ladies. Uh, and they're [Skye's

partner] like "fuck yeah, go on Tinder and find some pretty ladies to fuck". Because they

know this doesn't interfere with our relationship, and this is something I really wanna do.

Like, I don't want to want us to break up, you know? So that I can do this thing. They're

very, very, very supportive to what I need to do to express myself. […] even if it doesn't

happen with them, or like including them. They're just being fully supportive of what I

need to do outside of us."

Skye identified feeling grateful for the growth and change they weather together, and the

communication and shared trust in all facets of their life: "they've been there to help me figure

out what the fuck was going on, so like from the beginning it's been talked about, and I'm really

happy about that."—

Entering into this research process, I knew very well that no one relationship is the same,

and not all bi+ folx in straight-passing relationships are out to their partners! Adora reflected on

how she feels supported by her partner, explaining that he doesn't play a large role in her sense

of belonging as a person who self-identifies as bi:

"I've never been like "I'm bi", like I've talked about LGBT stuff, I am pretty sure he

knows. I don't think he really cares, because in the context of our relationship it doesn't

really make a difference. But I don't know, I guess I feel awkward talking about it, it's

not really a him thing, it's more of a me thing. Especially because he doesn't know much

about the LGBT community."

She then discussed the importance to her of open communication when her partner says

something that may be harmful toward certain communities (for example, Trans communities),

and the opportunity for her partner to learn and change- calling out the harm, but then calling in

and educating him as he grew up and continues to be surrounded by conservative beliefs that

"other" people: "I would rather talk about it in a meaningful way and have a proper discussion

about it. So, I'm not going to be like okay bye, you're cancelled, because that doesn't help

anybody.". As long as her partner is willing to do the work of learning and changing, Adora feels content in her relationship with him. That being said, she discussed that though he is ambivalent about her sexual identity, he does not actively participate in her sense of belonging as someone who self-identifies as bisexual.

Through these three narratives, it seems that unconditional acceptance by partners of bi+ folx plays a large role in feeling safe in a heterosexual-presenting relationship. Interestingly, I would consider the possibility that before feeling belonging in one's queer identity in the context of a heterosexual-presenting relationship there must be safety. Feeling safe opens the door to feeling comfortable and fully supported, thus allowing energy to be focused on seeking and creating belonging, rather than on survival.

On Queer Spaces, Advocacy and Gatekeeping

For a short time, Adora was involved with and volunteering for her university's Sexual Education Centre (SEC), an university group with a limb that supports and advocates with 2SLGBTQ+ communities, many of the staff being queer themselves. Her experience volunteering with them was cut short after she was made to feel uncomfortable by executives of the Centre who pushed her to come out when she wasn't ready to come out yet:

"when I used to volunteer at the Sexual Education Centre, the execs kept pestering me about um, "so are you bi?" and I was like uh, "I don't know" because at the time I wasn't really comfortable with telling people how I felt. And then they'd ask me like "oh, do you talk about this kind of stuff with your boyfriend?". This is back when I was dating [redacted]. They were like "oh, if you ever feel uncomfortable talking to him, feel free to come talk to us."

At the time, Adora needed silent allyship from other folx in 2SLGBTQ+ communities, not the questioning of her straight-presenting relationship and the pressure to come out.

> "I'm like "fuck off you guys you're being really annoying. I just want to be myself". And they kept inviting me to different LGBT events and stuff, and DnD for LGBT people. Which now, I'm like "that sounds like a dope-ass time". But this was two years ago. I was like "Please. Stop. Asking me. I'm scared!"

The social culture of SEC made Adora feel like in order to fully belong as a volunteer, she needed to be out.

> "At SEC at that time, they were very like "you need to rack up as many minority points as possible to be accepted in this space.". Which I was like: "this beats the point of this space." If you're just going to use my identity to change your image of me and say like oh, I'm better than someone else, or I'm more worthy of acceptance because of that, I'm like "bye", no thanks. Not interested."

Adora also felt anxious about identifying with 2SLGBTQ+ communities because the example set by queer folx working with SEC felt upsetting. She discussed cancel culture, and how she does not want to be associated with that type of environment or approach to social change, but at the time, she thought that all 2SLGBTQ+ identifying folx were advocates for calling out and cancelling people.

> "that's personally one of the reasons I didn't want to be a part of the LGBT community, back when that person from SEC kept asking me about it, because the cancel culture was strong in there. You would be cancelled for being cishet. I remember they used the word "cishet" all the time, like "haha cishets are so stupid" I'm like, "why? Let people live their lives! It's none of my business, just like it's none of your business what my sexuality is."

Adora further discussed the importance to her that after calling someone out about a harmful action or behavior, for there to be an opportunity to call them back in and create the space to educate and grow.

After having left her volunteer role at the Sexual Education Centre and taking some time to heal, now having found a small community of people within which she feels like she belongs, Adora says she would be willing to give organizational culture another chance, if in the future she feels the desire to, or is called to by peers. Not only for simply giving it another go, but to be an accomplice in ending the lateral violence and gatekeeping that can exist within 2SLGBTQ+ spaces.

Levi and Skye both take quieter (albeit firm) approaches to advocacy and gathering, mirroring the quietness they feel in regard to coming out. When asked if they had any involvement with 2SLGBTQ+ movements or organizations, Skye responded:

> "I don't know! I kind of think not? I guess maybe like I talk about stuff sometimes, and like I support a lot of queer communities, but I don't think my activism fits into that. Like I don't feel like an active part of the community even, I guess. Like I do as in I'm a part of it and stuff- but I've always just felt weird and not super comfortable in those spaces, and maybe I just haven't found the right ones, and maybe I haven't tried it in a long time."

This draws attention to the reality that not all 2SLGBT+-designated movements are designed to be inclusive of all queer identities. That being said, even when movements are designed to be inclusive of all queer identities, they may not always attract all queer identities, and that's okay.

Similarly, Levi discusses not being one to join groups or organisations in general: "I'm not super "join-y", that might just be me, I just don't feel like that's relevant to me right now. […] I don't know. I don't feel like I'm yearning for anything that I don't have in that respect.", but they also stressed the critical nature of having organised queer spaces because they are desperately needed and important to many folx. They explored what they think could happen if they were to dip their toes into queer spaces, asserting their queerness as someone in a straight-presenting relationship:

> "maybe this is not true, but I feel like if I were to go to a queer event and I was like "Hey! This is my situation", I don't believe it would be like totally chill. This is my feeling around it. I think there's precedent for that belief too. It's also not to say that my identity should not be taken up in the same way as like someone with a much more marginalised identity- but I think there's an image of "the queer community" where it's like "we're all here, we're all queer!", but there is a lot of bullshit too that I can see. […] But I also think that I was dating a woman, I would be taken up as gay"

Levi continued to reflect on the expectations that exist of bi+ folx by other 2SLGBTQ+ identities, discussing pervasive biphobia and its impact on some queer spaces.

> "I'm bi and I'm dating a man- like that meets the definition of being bisexual- that's like "in the list of options" but it doesn't feel like it. It feels like if you're not with a woman then you're not bi which doesn't make sense. Like by definition it doesn't really make sense."

On Imposter Syndrome

It wasn't necessarily named as imposter syndrome by each participant, but the little voice in the back of one's mind saying "I am not enough" is familiar to each of them. There was no

question designed to ask about imposter syndrome, but the concept showed up on its own throughout the entirety of the narratives, as I had a hunch it would.

> "I don't feel like I should feel like I should go to queer events and stuff, because you know, I have never experienced the oppression or judgement. and like I could. I know that I could. I know I would be welcomed there like.. I think people who go should go. Like all of that. But I don't know, I'm just like… I don't really feel like… I should, or like want to or something. I don't know.".

When asked why they don't feel like they should attend queer events, Levi thought about why, discussing their privilege and not wanting to take up space that could potentially be more valuable for someone else, not wanting to jeopardize the safety of spaces for other people:

> "I think about queer spaces as like "safer" spaces, and I'm like "I'm safe with regards to that: all the time". Like I don't feel like I need it? In the same way that I see other folx really needing it as a survival community space. I don't know if that makes sense. I think that because I'm so privileged, I feel so like... not guilty about it… I don't know. Especially being in a hetero-presenting relationship, there's just so much privilege that it feels a little funny to be like identifying with this [queerness] as well."

They then went on to talk about how discourse has a real impact on the internalisation of biphobia, using the term 'gold star lesbian' as an example:

> "The pervasive belief behind that is "if you're with men, you aren't really queer". If you're a cis woman with a cis man you're not really queer. I also think there's a belief, not only with straight people but also with queer people, I don't know there's just so many things I've read about people who are like "I thought I was bi but I was actually gay" and I love that for them, but I don't think that's my journey. It might be, like who

fuckin' knows, maybe! But that's a narrative I hear a lot, not without critique, but I think the subtext is sort of saying "you'll figure it out one day" […] There's this belief too that you're not bi, you're just confused. Or you're in denial or something."

Skye discusses imposter syndrome as both a thing of the past, and an ever-evolving phenomenon of the future. When asked directly about whether they experience imposter syndrome, they said:

"I felt it my whole life, up until I realised, I don't need to date a girl to like girls. […]But I think now I'm like- I don't know, the way I dress and present myself will I think be an ever-changing thing for what's comfortable and what I want to be seen as. But I don't think it's a terrible issue right now, at least"

However, this unwelcome feeling resurfaces occasionally when they're in a space where they are forced into judgement by others:

"I feel like people just see what they see, and there's a lot of speculation of "are you sure that you're really that?" and " I feel like you're really this" and I feel like there's way too much stereotyping and roles to fit into that I always feel really grossed out by and I don't like.".

This incessant questioning of their identity by others can lead to questioning the validity of their identity- Skye named as imposter syndrome before I could ask them directly about it:

"Maybe this is internalised and me feeling imposter syndrome and worrying about the way I'm viewed, and stuff. But I feel like my biggest issue with it is more from like inside the [queer] community where I'm like "I don't know, does this seem right? Are you more gay than me? I don't know!".

Adora discussed the feeling she has sometimes when she has to mask her bi+ identity from her family: "when you try so hard to convince other people you're straight, you end up falsely

convincing yourself, and then that creates inner turmoil. You're just like "What? Where am I? Who am I?". Though this is painful, this isn't how she feels the majority of the time. In fact, it was only recently that she discovered not all womxn are attracted to more than one gender.

" I also thought that like, everyone liked girls. Well not just girls, but like, boobs. I mean, I used to joke about it but I also couldn't understand how someone couldn't find women attractive. I was just like "no, I'm straight! I just... everybody likes women... Have you seen women?"

A conversation with a friend who was heterosexual about kissing womxn made Adora come to this realisation: "I was like "so some girls actually really don't like girls? What? And I was kind of mindful, I was like I guess I am gay then, like I must be! This isn't standard procedure for all people!".

Adora then discussed the weight that binaries and the limitations that "you're either lesbian, or you're straight" perpetuated by both queer communities and those who are cisgender and straight have on her, and other people who are bi+ identifying:

"I'm not bi curious, I like women. I feel like being fully hetero or fully gay/lesbian has more weight than being bi or something in between. And people only see that, if that makes sense. Pair that with being in a hetero relationship, they're like "bi? Please."

She then acknowledged how much it means to be seen she when folx in 2SLGBTQ+ communities affirm and support her bi+ identity:

"I know there are people in the LGBT community that are very like "hey, you're valid no matter what your relationship status is. If you feel like you're bi, and that's what you think your identity is, then that's what you are, and you're valid.". Every time I see stuff like that, I'm like... thank you."

On Representation

Representation of bi+ womxn and non-binary folx rarely exists in macro media (mainstream film, television, news, literature etc.) but there exists a microcosm where inclusive queer media and content is seemingly endless. Skye discussed finding solace in micro media, but never having felt represented in macro media:

"I guess I do feel represented in my personal life, and the people I surround myself with. And also on the internet, 'cause maybe that's just like what I've chosen to follow on the internet or what- but I've found like a lot of really fantastic queer artists and small businesses and things like that that make me feel really nice when I get to connect with them and see them. But like in broader media, I don't think that's something that I feel like ever really comes up – like I don't watch TV and see someone where I'm like: "they're like me!" ever.

Levi remarked:

"I don't really feel represented in the sense of like, I'm trying to think of someone in my position [...] of like [someone being] in a hetero-presenting relationship who is just like comically quietly queer, basically. I don't know that I've ever seen that."

She goes on to discuss how existing macro media tells stories of tumultuous journeys and relationships, and how it would be nice to see queer narratives that aren't dramatized and framed as constantly struggling. However, in her personal experience, she doesn't feel this underrepresentation has a negative impact on her identity: "It probably would be great to have it, but I don't feel like I'm lacking it."

Adora's experience is similar: "I don't feel represented. I watch anime, and anime is.. the times that there are gay people, it's very sexualised." she said, reflecting on the macro media she

consumes. Recently, she's stumbled across an anime that does have some queer representation without fetishization, and she realises how valuable healthy queer representation is to younger generations who are consuming macro media like anime: "I wish I had had more of those shows growing up, because then it would have been less confusing."

On What It Means to Feel Seen, on what It Means to Belong

Here we are. The million-dollar question. Where do bi+ identifying womxn and non-binary folx feel seen? Where do they feel like they belong? Every answer was so different, and so meaningful. After finishing all three interviews and reflecting on all their meanings, I realized that feeling seen could possibly be synonymous with belonging.

Levi

In general, Levi finds belonging in the woods, her husband and with friends so close, they're considered family:

> "I think that there's like levels. In like an environmental context, if I'm in like the woods or the forest, I feel very much like I'm whole. […] I just feel like I'm very much at home. Like, I feel homesick for that place. Also, with people that I belong with, like I have this amazing group of friends that I've had since I've lived in Toronto for the past ten years, and they really feel more like family than friends. They feel like my brothers and sisters. It's just a really lucky community. I feel like when I walk into a room with them, I feel like I'm going into my house. I just feel so totally held by them, which is really awesome."

In the context of her bi+ identity, she said: "I feel most seen in my marriage, that's kind of it, and I'm fine with that […] I think it's the only place that I would feel lonely without acceptance in", sharing that she's content as things are. Her response to where she feels like she belongs in a queer context was really lovely, and resonated with me:

"I think the same places I belong anyway, with my friends and in my relationship. I feel like in my head and heart and mind I feel at home with my sexuality. And the places I don't are like maybe self-imposed… but like general community I don't know that I don't belong, I just don't go… I mean, I don't know if there is anywhere I don't belong, I've just never found out.. I can't report back and say I tried to go here and was rejected and like this is my experience. I just don't know.

Skye

Belonging for Skye looks like gathering with artists, they find belonging in places where they feel free to create:

"definitely with artists as a whole, regardless of what their artform is. Always with artists. Also, just like to how you're beginning the question, I haven't really found that I've felt like all that immersed in the queer community […] but yeah, like always creating with people who want to create or taking in art with people who want to take in art. Just in creative spaces."

On queer belonging, they talked about moments of wholeness in feeling content with their identity as a whole:

"this is something that comes up in my life for all different reasons, where I'm just sitting and I have a moment of realisation and gratefulness for my body and myself and how I feel and how I dress or whatever it is. It's really cool to get to feel that on your own, too. I feel like that's something that usually happens in an interpersonal kind of thing. But to just be alone, and yourself and be like "ahhh this is great, I'm in my own company and feeling happy!"

They also discuss Toronto as a place they feel they can fully celebrate and live comfortably as who they are: "I guess if I could give it like a physical setting… In Toronto. I think I always feel like I belong."

Adora

When asked where she feels seen, Adora answered: "I mean, I don't think I am seen. Other than like, for example, you and [three other people]. Damn, it's like all my other female friends are bi too", she says laughing. She feels like she belongs with her dearest friends, but that's about it: "I don't often feel like I belong. I don't mean that in a bad way. I think it's an Aquarius thing? I don't know, even when I was little, I was always kind of the odd one out, especially at school.".

She took a minute to reflect on belonging and its importance to her:

*"*I feel very much like the outsider, but I don't really have an issue with that. It gives you freedom when you're on the outside."

Art as Reflection, as Resistance, as A Love Letter

This segment is just as important as the narrative interviews. I wanted participants to take some time to sit with their thoughts after discussing their in-betweens, as this is heavy and tiring to consider and think about. Designed as a reflective and change-making activity, each participant journaled and drew what surfaced for them after the conversation around their bi+ and queer identities. The results are colorful (both literally and metaphorically), emotional, thoughtful and deliberate works of art that demonstrate resistance- whether it was intentional or not, counter-narrating the expectations, stereotypes and internal dialogue they are subject to on a daily basis.

Artwork #1 – By Levi

embracing my queerness

feels like sitting under-
water at a pool party

I can hear friendly voices,
muffled but near
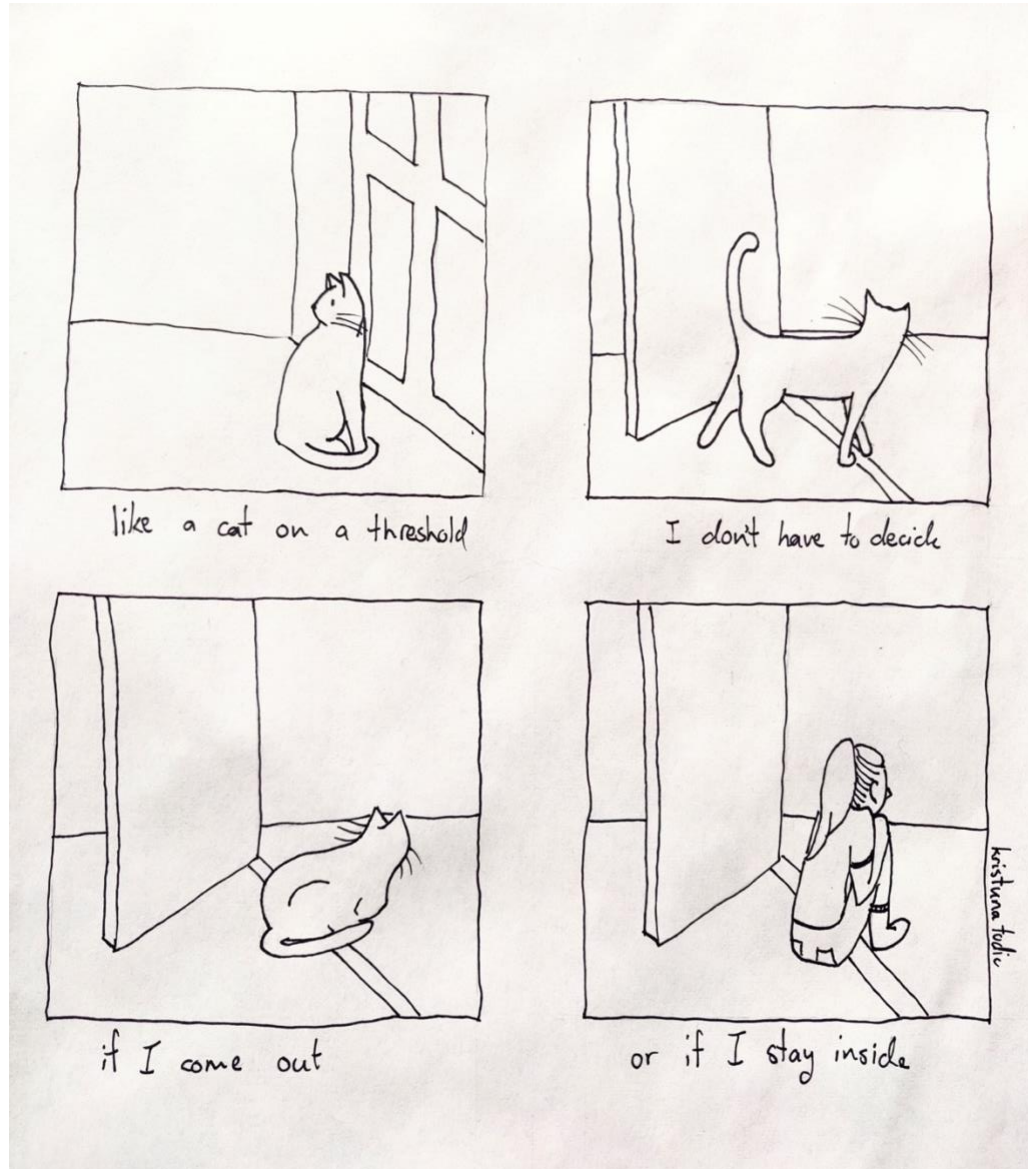
I feel held, light,
safe, and secret

"The conversation we had about my queer identity, and how I choose to keep it private from all but a select few, brought up a lot of feelings for me. I felt at first ashamed of my decision, feeling like a "bad queer" for being private about something which so many have fought for the chance to be outwardly proud of. I tended to that feeling with care, and came to the understanding that (for me) being private and keeping my queerness to myself isn't necessarily something to be shameful of — it can be something that is good for me. That privacy can be a fortress of safety.

That is how I came to this comic, where I depicted my feeling of queerness as akin to that of sitting at the bottom of a swimming pool. I chose specifically to set the poem/comic at a crowded

pool party, with loved ones nearby, to show that although I may be alone with this, I feel supported and know that loved ones are there if I need them, just an arm's reach away. The feeling of being underwater on a sunny day, and looking up through the water to see the sun bouncing off the water's surface, is one of the best feelings I know: the muted sounds above, but the complete and utter solitude of that underwater place. That's how being queer feels to me. Safe, secure, and private. Sunny, warm. Alone."

Artwork #2 – By Adora

Panel 1: like a cat on a threshold

Panel 2: I don't have to decide

Panel 3: if I come out

Panel 4: or if I stay inside

"When I was thinking of what to do originally, I was thinking about making a comic about friend crushes I've had and calling them friend crushes because I couldn't admit to myself that I had a real crush on them. But like it wasn't vibing with me, it just didn't sit right. And then, I guess both of these pieces I just started drawing anime, or like, animated stuff, or cats… And I realised that both of them, the biggest thing that I was thinking about was getting over the pressure of picking something. Because I know before we talked about being an outsider and like not finding a place- and I realised I like that. I like being in the middle. Like a cat on a threshold. I'm both inside and outside. So if you want to say inside the closet, outside the closet. Or inside one group, or outside another. And no one can make me pick a side. It's up to me. I think the cat drawing is more about my own internal feels about it- l'm like "there's no pressure. You do you, Adora." And I'm like "okay, thanks Adora. I appreciate that Adora".

Artwork # 3 – By Adora

"But then the anime one, I guess partially, especially anime and anime stuff- there's already people shitting on you for liking it- and like that feeling of like "leave me alone" and like the pressure from people to label [myself] feels like a similar form of antagonism. I guess that one is more of a reply to people like that. Like this guy's hot, this shapeshifter is hot, she's hot. All they have in common is they are all badasses"

Artwork # 4 – By Skye

"i struggled a bit to arrive at my end result. after our conversation i felt inspired but none of the words that i wrote seemed to feel right. after a few days of trying to write and arriving mostly at frustration i decided to simply begin and draw. i created a variation of the first three panels and

the words were nearly the same, simply rough, confused thoughts. i began to relate to the battle of softness, love, and acceptance vs frustration and confusion. i leaned into the way that i see, feel and interact with the world around me as this is intrinsically tied to my queerness. the first three frames are essentially idealized self portraits through my perception of my interactions with navigating who i am and who i love.

the first frame is a self portrait captured in real time, where i was when i began to draw. i had been sitting, staring and searching my head for daydreams, unfortunately coming up short, and confused.
the second frame is a memory.

the third frame is a memory crossed with a visual representation of how it feels at times to try and analyze my own sense of belonging in relation to my queerness.
the fourth and final frame is an projection of all that i see. perhaps more truthfully what things really look like when i ask myself where and how i belong as a pansexual nonbinary person.

the colours that i chose to represent the vibrance that i find in my own turbulence. though things may be dripping and melting all around me, it is bright, almost so much so that i can taste it. this is how i see myself. this is how i see the world around me. sometimes.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

I went into this research hoping to hear from bi+ womxn and non-binary folx on where they find belonging and community, knowing that three people's narratives would only give me a glimpse into the worlds of people who are often left to navigate in-betweens. The outcome of this work has been the uncovering of a few lives' experiences, thoughts and feelings in doing just that: navigating in-betweens. Although this is an academic research project and paper, it was really important for me to write in my natural voice while disseminating the data. Writing in a professional, but conversational way feels more genuine to the content, true to my interactions with participants, and digestible for people who are outside the realm of academia but have an interest in this project.

Belonging to these three participants looked differently for each of them. Levi finds it in community with their friends, partner, in the woods, when they're connected with land. Adora doesn't feel like she belongs, usually. Skye discussed belonging with creatives who make art together. What was striking was that when asked about where they felt they belonged in a queer context, their answers mostly mirrored the responses of where they belonged broadly. Levi said she finds belonging in the spaces she finds it normally. Adora said once again, she feels like she's often on the outside looking in. Skye talked about Toronto, the city where their friends and community of artists and like-minded people can be found, emphasizing that their pansexuality is inseparable from their non-binary identity. This may not be generalizable to every bi+ identity, but amongst these three participants, belonging they seek in the context of bi+ identities is inseparable from the belonging they seek outside of a queer context.

This project confirms that belonging can be found in community with groups of people, in individual friends, in partners, in media sources (both social and educational) curated by media users followings (ex: Instagram and Twitter), that there can be preference for informal community over formal, Western organized queer communities, and acknowledges that anywhere someone feels like they belong is valid and meaningful.

Something I found quite striking that every participant was quite in tune and in touch with not only their own internalized biphobia and the impacts biphobia and erasure has on their lives, but also of the social discourses and structures built to erase bi+ identities outside of their own, something that was really inspiring and hopeful. In discussion, there was some conversation about survival and tiredness stemming from external sources constantly battling with their own versions and forms of resistance, but this was in tandem with the awareness of others' intersecting identities, privileges and oppressions. Among the three participants was a profound desire to refute these stereotypes and social expectations, and a dedication to resilience and self-acceptance fueled by the knowledge that their own bi+ and queer identities are valid, but so are all other bi+ identifying-folx. All three participants made sure to stress Trans inclusion when discussing how they define their attraction to more than one gender, and the importance that Trans folx are a part of bi+ discourse and narrative. What I found is that this awareness and resistance is another site of belonging: a certainty regardless of what mainstream discourse is spewing- that their bisexuality, pansexuality and queerness is true and valid and enough.

What felt the most special to me was to have such a beautiful outcome in terms of the method. Creating art together, apart was something really amazing because even though the conversations between participants happened on a one on one basis, the themes: "resistance",

"celebrating ones' identity as a bi+ person in a straight-presenting relationship" and.

"unconditional self-love" were woven through each participants piece. I was floored at how

much thought, care and vulnerability Levi, Skye and Adora offered this project and their

artworks. In creating journal comics together, I was hoping for participants to have a moment to

reflect internally on how they felt after having a conversation about an identity that is sometimes

heavy- an identity they carry with them everywhere. This was an opportunity to externalize some

of these often unshared, weighty thoughts, colors and emotions into a form of knowledge that

they could direct toward anyone they wanted: themselves, other bi+ identifying folx, close loved

ones.

Art is a beautiful medium that can often be tangibly shared, while still remaining abstract

and up to the interpretation of the audience. No matter the skill level of the artist, creating a

visual version of your narrative can evoke understanding or connection in ways that narrative

interviews can't always attain or capture. Artwork places control entirely into participants'

hands, centering the direction and pieces of their journeys that they want to center. Artwork is a

method of reflection and an opportunity to process internal thought processes, sometimes

offering catharsis. Artwork is political and meaningful, and as seen in the participants' work, it is

a visual opportunity to counter harmful and unwanted narratives. It resists the concept of

concrete, generalizable truths, and emphasizes nuance, context and connection- and what is

connection if not a love letter. Artwork is a love letter.

A realization I encountered throughout this research, is that all of the participants

(including myself) have curated tiny worlds on social media that are centered on social justice.

Many accounts we 'follow' closely include queer activism and queer content. This creates a

microcosm of community (whether we know the people behind the accounts or not) that also believe in resisting heteronormativity through art, essays, poetry, activism, education and information sharing. Although it is not representative of societal norms, it is quite easy to saturate one's timeline with content that is so affirming of bi+ identities that for brief moments it's easy to forget other people may not be consuming as much queer content, or share the same fervor for social change. Instagram, for example, has an algorithm that caters to users by suggesting similar content to what users show interest in. This means that if a user consumes some bi+ content, Instagram will suggest more bi+ content by other bi+ creators. In the same vein, if a user never seeks out bi+ content, the likelihood they will be offered bi+ content is slim. This came to ahead when discussing bi+ representation, when Levi, Skye and Adora individually all at one point said they do not feel represented in mainstream media (film, television, books etc.), but that they do feel represented in the micro mediums they consume and prioritize (Instagram accounts, memes, Twitter, blogs, artists, lesser-known TV).

Strengths

To me, the greatest success of this research was the excitement felt by other bi+ and queer womxn and non-binary folx to continue participating in work that highlights diverse queer experiences. When I posted the recruitment poster on my Instagram page, the response and the sharing of the poster was (pleasantly) surprisingly fast and vast. I feel so grateful and moved that participants were so excited before, throughout and after the interview process, and were willing to be so open with sharing their most intimate thoughts on belonging and queerness through art. As all three participants knew me personally, there was a strong foundation of trust, creating a space where we were able to have meaningful and reciprocal conversation. I am grateful that

there was gender representation outside of cisgender womxn, because bi+ identities are often intertwined with and extend to gender identities outside of cisgender folx.

This was also an experience that taught me a lot about these three people, and from each of them I learned and took with me the wisdom they had garnered over time. Most notably was the joy and contentedness they found in finding solace in themselves- resisting dominant discourses by simply rejecting them and knowing better. That not every bi+ identity feels bereft of belonging, always. Some feel it fleetingly, some don't at all.

Limitations

Although it is disappointing, almost every limitation in this study was anticipated. First, there was a time frame to follow, and I feel that this limited the number of people I could interview. Second, due to COVID-19, I was unable to interview participants in person as I had anticipated. This would have provided for a more personal, tailored-to-the-needs-of-the participant experience, and I could have supplied snacks and art supplies. Similarly, another limitation was that I was unable to pay for participants' time- the small scale of this project meant there was only one person (i.e. myself) to complete the entire research process, including funding, of which I had none. I think that this project would make a really great collaboration with other bi+ researchers, who share a similar interest in celebrating bi+ identities and community. I would have really appreciated working on this with someone so that we could make this a larger-scale project that potentially could qualify for funding. Additionally, the format of this MRP required so few pages that I feel that this analysis is not as rich or profound as it could be, regardless of the profound narratives that participants shared with me, and that feels disappointing.

Most importantly, no self-identified Black, Indigenous or other racialized folx inquired about participating in this project. This may be because the people who follow me on Instagram (where I posted the recruitment poster) are mostly White. All three participants were white, and I critique this because White folx are always the ones with platforms dedicated to us, and our structures are almost always shaped by whiteness. In the future when I continue this work, I will work much harder to recruit Black, Indigenous and racialized folx, not for the sake of tokenism, but so that this work reaches more people in a more honest and representative way. Although this research is representative in other ways, this collage the participants and I created on belonging is just not representative of any racialized experiences. When I continue this work on a larger scale in the future, I need to do better. White voices are the ones who are most often heard, and this work needs to pass the microphone to Black, Indigenous and racialized folx who want to participate in adding to this knowledge.

Implications

One of the questions I asked participants was whether or not they participated in 2SLGBTQ+ advocacy or organizations. This curiosity stemmed from wondering whether these spaces serve everyone's sense of belonging in the same way- which I found the answer is seemingly: no, they do not. Although I was not quick enough on my feet to figure out why this is the case for each participant, I was able to identify the need for more casual queer spaces that aren't as exlusive as some can be. A more inclusive, quieter community and an active affirmation that bi+ identities are valid may feel more comfortable for bi+ womxn and non-binary folx in long-term heterosexual relationships.

What was really striking was each participant's awareness of the harm bi+ identities are subject to daily, and their ability to look outside themselves when discussing what is and what is

not important to queer folx. They were all very self-reflexive, taking the time to acknowledge their own positionalities and preconceptions of other people and careful to speak only for themselves and from their own experiences. Participants are utilizing the theoretical frameworks used in this MRP in their day to day lives, whether they have named them as such or not. Transfeminism, AOP, and Queer theory have all intertwined themselves within the participants, and they are all committed to learning and growing as more information becomes available. This was encouraging to see, because I tend to consume media and am surrounded by people who are closely tied to social justice and advocacy, and sometimes I am not sure if I've created a microcosm of discourse that is not representative of the mainstream discourses surrounding social issues. It also emphasizes the need for social workers to give bi+ folx more credit where credit is due- and no matter the context or service know that service participants and volunteers and are experts of their own experiences.

This may mean having a roster of non-"traditional" queer services and supports that are inclusive of bi+ folx who are in heterosexual-presenting relationships. This may also mean founding and creating spaces like this in partnership with people with lived experience. All participants identified a nervousness in entering existing queer spaces because they felt they were not built for or inclusive of their identities, and circumstances. It would be really valuable for there to be some alternative avenues, where bi+ folx in heterosexual-presenting relationships can simply be- without fear of rejection or intrusive questions about their identities from either the heterosexual community or 2SLGBTQ+ communities. Examples of this could be an Instagram page dedicated to bi+ identities and their artworks, essays, poetry and educational tools. It could look like a bi+ and Trans dedicated non-traditional therapy practice, where one on one support is available, but the organization is wholistic in what it offers. The space could have

a coffee shop, affordable community gathering space, hosting art workshops and poetry nights. Removing the formality and commitment of time to an organization may make it more accessible for some bi+ identifying people to find places they feel like they belong. Social workers must commit to non-judgmental affirmation of bi+ folx in heterosexual-presenting relationships, and to the deconstructing of imposter syndrome that is widely felt within this group of people.

Social workers who make it their life's work to practice anti-oppressive social work have the responsibility to counter the narratives about bi+ folx, and to hear each individual's history as unique and look forward at their futures together, no matter what that looks like. The simplest way a social worker can be a strong accomplice to bi+ womxn and non-binary folx in heterosexual relationships is to simply be transparent about who your social work supports. In the context of therapy, provide information on how your practices are bi+ friendly. If they are not, provide the names of therapists who are. If a service user tells you they identify as bi+, do not investigate as to whether or not they should be in a relationship with the person they are with unless that is what the participant wants. Let the service participant lead.

Building and advocating for spaces that might look less "traditional" or exist outside of what is viewed and understood as "social work" could be a step toward bringing the right approach to working with and including bi+ folx in queer narratives. While the work toward a mainstream paradigm shift continues to be fought for, there must be spaces (whether they be in person or online) for bi+ folx to feel safe and seen, no matter their relationship status.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

In this study, I explore the diverse experiences of bi+ womxn and non-binary folx in heterosexual-presenting relationships, hoping to focus on honouring and celebrating their contentedness with their identities, and the resistance they demonstrate on a day to day basis- counter-narrating the existing literature about bi+ folx that often stereotypes and pigeon-holes them. Through both narrative interviews and the creation and analysis of art, the three participants and I successfully discussed and processed topics that touch many bi+ folx, such as imposter syndrome, coming out, bi+ representation, the role of partners, and how each of these themes manifest differently for everyone.

After speaking with these two womxn and one non-binary person about their experiences and thoughts on this topic, I discovered that the only places they truly feel discomfort in their identities and experience imposter syndrome comes from the reception by and judgment of those who doubt and deny their identities. Otherwise, they find joy, liberation and contentedness in honouring themselves as bi+ and queer folx. It was such an honour to work with a group of participants as insightful and so open to vulnerability as they were. Without them this project wouldn't be what it is.

There is absolutely an opportunity to more deeply delve into the world of heterosexual- presenting relationships, and how bi+ womxn and non-binary folx navigate their relationships, friendships and the spaces they feel comfortable being a part of. Purposely investing in knowledge creation by bi+ womxn and non-binary folx for bi+ womxn and non-binary folx is a means of clearing a path toward a world where bi+ identities are prioritised and affirmed.

It would also be valuable to explore the other in-betweens of queerness through other similar projects, for example asking the same thesis question about bi+ cisgender and

Transgender men who are in heterosexual-presenting relationships. Perhaps asking the same thesis about lesbians who have not yet 'come out' (no matter what this looks like to them). There are many more types of in-betweens people who identify themselves with 2SLGBTQ+ communities live with, which means there is an abundance of learning that can continue to be done in this sector.

Artwork # 5 -- By Autumn

Alternative answers: where I am, as I am (?)

Artwork #6 – By Autumn

I WILL CELEBRATE MYSELF,   QUIETLY QUEER.

(IS IT ENOUGH   TO BE QUIETLY QUEER?)

I worry a lot that I am not queer enough to be able to say: "I'm queer".
Some days I feel like I am, other days I'm not so sure.
No matter what, though- there's a voice in the back of the head of the voice in the back of my
head that talks back to the one that tells me I'm not enough.
That tells me it's worth celebrating myself.
Even if it's just for me.

Bi+ Identities & Belonging: Conversations with Womxn and Non-Binary Folx In Long-Term Heterosexual Presenting Relationships

Are You:

Woman-Identified or Non-Binary?
Attracted to more than one gender?
In a long-term heterosexual-presenting relationship? *
Interested in creating art as a means of change making?
20 years old or older?

If you answered yes to each of the above questions, you may be interested in volunteering in this study that seeks to understand where woman-identified and non-binary folx in long-term, heterosexual-presenting relationships find, experience and create identity and belonging.

* Participants in both monogamous and consensually non-monogamous relationships are encouraged to inquire!

Participation includes:
1 one-on-one informal interview over a video call
art-making (with guidance) individually
1 one-on-one video call to debrief.

If you are interested in participating in this study / If you would like more information, please contact me!

Autumn Fazari (B.S.W., M.S.W Candidate)
Faculty of Social Work
Email: autumn.fazari@ryerson.ca

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Ryerson University Ethics Board
[REB 2020 – 054]

Ryerson University

Consent Agreement

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please read this consent form so that you understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

Bi+ Identities and Belonging: Womxn and Non-Binary Folx In Long-Term Heterosexual-Presenting Relationships.

INVESTIGATORS: This research study is being conducted by Autumn Fazari, an MSW student of the department of Social Work at Ryerson University. The research is supervised by Dr. Ken Moffatt Professor, School of Social Work.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Autumn at autumn.fazari@ryerson.ca or her supervisor at kmoffatt@ryerson.ca

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: This study is designed to investigate and understand where womxn and non-binary folx in long-term heterosexual-presenting relationships find, experience and create identity and belonging. The study will require three (3) eligible participants to participate in one on one interviews with the researcher and collaboratively create art based on the topic.

Successful participants will be:
→ Womxn-identified or Non-Binary
→ Identify as bi+ / be a person attracted to more than one gender identity
→ Currently in a long-term heterosexual-presenting relationship of over 18 months*
→ Interested in creating art as a means of sharing one's narrative
→ 20 years old, or older

*Participants in both monogamous and consensually non-monogamous relationships are encouraged to inquire!

As this research is being completed toward the completion of a degree, the results of the project will contribute to a thesis.

1

WHAT PARTICIPATION MEANS:

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

Pre-Screening

→ Once you've emailed with interest, I will ask a few questions to ensure you are a good fit for the project. This will be done through email.

→ The purpose of the pre-screening is to determine that participants meet the eligibility requirements.

Post-Screening

→ Phone calls will be conducted in a closed, private room.

→ Expected duration for the first phone interview is 90 minutes, and the second phone interview will be 60 minutes.

→ The first phone call will be used for the informal interview (consisting of guiding questions that have been provided before the interview). Most questions will be open-ended.

- o Sample questions:
    - ▪ Do you feel like right now there is a space in your life where you feel viscerally accepted as bi+?
    - ▪ Tell me about how you do or do not feel seen as a bi+ person in the relationship you are currently in.

→ **Participants will have 7 days to complete 1-3 four-line poems, and 1-3 images to accompany them (Guidance/Instruction will be provided) to be a part of a small zine.**

→ The second phone call will be used to debrief the artwork created on the topic of the research.

→ Art supplies are to be provided by yourself. You can use paint, pencil, or pencil crayons on plain white paper.

Research findings (both the Major Research Paper AND the collaborative zine) will be available to participants online and will be personally emailed to participants by the researcher at the time of completion.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

The results of this research offer opportunity for bi+ female-identifying folx in long-term straight-presenting relationships to celebrate their resilience, resistance, belonging and community. The intention is to highlight the difference in experience, celebrate the similarities in where belonging is felt and found, and offer affirmation to those who experience similar realities.

I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU AS A PARTICIPANT:

Potential risks in participating in this study include the inability to provide the promise of complete anonymity due to the nature of the artwork and the dissemination involved.

2

Potential mild emotional distress/anxiety may also occur while responding to the interview, as the subject matter may be uncomfortable to talk about, recollecting moments where their identities were not celebrated or even processing current internalized homophobia or lock of acceptance of their identities by others around them.

Should the participant begin to feel uncomfortable, they may skip answering a question or stop participation in the interview either temporarily or permanently. If you decide to withdraw all materials associated with your participation including interview transcripts and artwork will be destroyed.

If you feel stressed or anxious due to the content of the interview and wish for additional support a list of supportive agencies will be provided to you for counselling.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

All documents, recordings, records and data identifying participants will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be assigned but participants may also choose to decide to use their real name in published material. This will be decided before the interview process.

All documents, recordings, records and data will be retained in a secure, encrypted folder on only one computer. Length of retention will be until the paper is published, after which it will be destroyed.

Participants will be audio-recorded for the duration of the interview. Participants have the right to review and edit the transcripts. The recording will be stored in an encrypted folder on only one computer. Only Autumn Fazari will have access to the raw and transcribed recordings, no other persons but the interviewee will have access to the interview. Once the audio recordings have been transcribed, the audio recordings will be destroyed.

All data will remain confidential unless participants disclose information that requires the researcher to report to legal authorities (i.e, duty to report child abuse, professional duties to report, etc.).

If you choose to have your artwork included in the zine, your confidentiality cannot be ensured due to the public nature of a zine and the nature of the artwork. You are not required to submit your artwork to the zine, submission to the zine is voluntary. If you wish to be identified as the creator for the zine we can use your name on the zine.

All data will be stored on the Ryerson Google Shared Drive, since it is secure and encrypted, minimizes the risk of data being accessed by unauthorized individuals, and facilitates the sharing of data without need for transportation or duplication of data. Only the lead researcher (Autumn Fazari) and her supervisor Ken Moffatt will have access to the data.

Raw audio files will be deleted immediately after transcription. Transcripts will be deleted once the Major Research Paper is published in August 2020.

3

DATA DISSEMINATION

All data collected with the participants' consent will be used for the MRP's thematic analysis, and the artwork created will be turned into a small zine. The zine will be accessible to both online and attached to the MRP. Participants will be shown/given instructions as to where they can access the MRP in the digital repository (https://digital.library.ryerson.ca/islandora/search/*%3A*?f[0]=mods_extension_degree_department_ms%3A%22Social%20Work%22), and the zine will be shared via email.

INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION:

Participants will not receive payment for participation.

COMPENSATION FOR INJURY:

By agreeing to participate in this research, you are not giving up or waiving any legal right in the event that you are harmed during the research.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:

Participation in this study is ENTIRELY voluntary. Participants do not have to answer every question or complete every question or complete every aspect of the research.

After publication, participants' data can not be removed from the document. Participants must alert the researcher before **May 30th, 2020** if they do not wish for their data to be used.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you can skip that question. You may stop participating at any time. If you choose to stop participating, you may also choose to not have your data included in the study. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not in any way influence your future relations with Ryerson University or the investigator (Autumn Fazari) involved in the research.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY:
If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact.

Autumn Fazari
Email: autumn.fazari@ryerson.ca

Ken Moffatt
Email: kmoffatt@ryerson.ca

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This study has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5042
rebchair@ryerson.ca

Bi+ Identities and Belonging: Womxn and Non-Binary Folx In Long-Term Heterosexual-Presenting Relationships.

CONFIRMATION OF AGREEMENT:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to participate in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement. You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

_____
Name of Participant (please print)

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

I agree to be audio-recorded for the purposes of this study. I understand how these recordings will be stored and destroyed.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

I consent to use my prose and visual art in a zine. I will be identified by pseudonym.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

I consent to using my full name on the zine.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

6

Guiding Interview Questions

~

Demographic questions:
Age:
Race:
Pronouns:
Pseudonym:

- o   To get us started, how long have you been in your relationship?

- o   Can you tell me a bit about your relationship?

- o   Where do you feel like you belong, more generally?

- o   Is there anything else you wish for me to know at the start of the interview? Or for you to know form me? Do you have any questions before we start?

~

- o   If you label your sexual identity, what would you name it?

  - ▪   If you don't label your identity, how would you describe it?

  What is it like to navigate the decisions around the disclosure of your sexual identity? And how does this impact feelings of belonging?

- o   How does your partner support your bi+/queer identity?

- o   What role (if any) do they play in your sense of belonging as a bi+ person?

- • Where is being seen in the queer context important to you? Where is it not?

  - o   Tell me about where you feel most seen as a bi+/queer person

    - ▪   How do you feel other identities assigned to you / you've assigned to yourself interact with your attraction to more than one gender?

  - o   Where do you / do you not feel represented (in media/conversation/embodied space/internet space)?

  - o   How do you feel your bi+ identity is taken up and viewed by 2SLGBTQIA+ communities? How has it changed over time?

- Do you think it would look different if you weren't in your current relationship? How?

o Are there any queer organisations / movements that you are actively a part of? Do you feel fully included within them?

o Describe the most memorable moments of growth / shifts / change / challenges toward self-acceptance you've experienced. This can be small, large, informative, validating, etc.

o Describe what has been the most affirming of your bi+/queer identity.

- This can be person/experience/space anything!

o In the context of your bi+/queer identity, where do you feel you most belong? Where do you feel you do not?

APPENDIX E. ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER

Ryerson University | **Research Ethics Board**

To: Autumn Fazari

Re: REB 2020-054: Bisexuality and Belonging: Woman-identified Folx In Long-Term
Heterosexual-Presenting Relationships

Date: March 27, 2020

Dear Autumn Fazari,

The review of your protocol REB File REB 2020-054 is now complete. The project has been approved for a one year period. Please note that before proceeding with your project, compliance with other required University approvals/certifications, institutional requirements, or governmental authorizations may be required.

This approval may be extended after one year upon request. Please be advised that if the project is not renewed, approval will expire and no more research involving humans may take place. If this is a funded project, access to research funds may also be affected.

Please note that REB approval policies require that you adhere strictly to the protocol as last reviewed by the REB and that any modifications must be approved by the Board before they can be implemented. Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication from the Principal Investigator as to how, in the view of the Principal Investigator, these events affect the continuation of the protocol.

Finally, if research subjects are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research.

Please quote your REB file number (REB 2020-054) on future correspondence.

Congratulations and best of luck in conducting your research.

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