Bi Labor: Toward a Model of Bisexual Identity Management in Workplace Environments

A thesis presented to

the faculty of

the College of Arts and Sciences of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

Kathryn L. Nutter

August 2008
This thesis titled
Bi Labor: Toward a Model of Bisexual Identity Management in Workplace Environments

by

KATHRYN L. NUTTER

has been approved for
the Department of Sociology and Anthropology
and the College of Arts and Sciences by

________________________
Christine L. Mattley
Associate Professor of Sociology

________________________
Benjamin M. Ogles
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
The management of a bisexual identity in the workplace is an area that has not received much research attention to date. Despite sociological studies that address identity, coming out, identity management in the workplace, and sexual harassment, a thorough understanding of how a bi identity is negotiated and expressed to others has not emerged. To investigate this issue further, I conducted ten in-depth interviews with college students who identify as bisexual. Using grounded theoretical techniques, the data was analyzed and organized into the foundation of a process model of bisexual identity management in the workplace. The assumptions and perceptions of others, the experience of ambiguity and invisibility, the presence within situated contexts and the lack of a bisexual community combined in varying ways for the participants, but were identified as important by all of them. The participants identified potential consequences to their bisexual identity and most stated they would require a supportive environment to come out at future jobs. Sites of agency and resistance were present throughout the interviews of all participants, highlighting the importance of their voices. To further validate and expand the model, additional research with people of different ages, genders, ethnicities, and geographical locations is anticipated to be influential.
Approved: ________________________________

Christine L. Mattley
Associate Professor of Sociology
For my parents, Doug and Teri Nutter, and my partner, SMP, who make anything possible
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my dedicated advisor, Dr. Christine Mattley, for comments on multiple drafts of this thesis. Her direction, support, and reassurance were key to the execution and completion of this project. Thanks go to committee member Dr. Debra Henderson for her comments on this project and for her consistent and long-term confidence in my work. I would also like to acknowledge committee member Dr. Ann Tickamyer for her suggestions for this project and her willingness to offer assistance. I thank Dr. Robert Shelly for conducting reading workshops, allowing my work to be constructively criticized by my colleagues and for his support of presentations of this work at conferences. Finally, I would like to thank everyone involved in the Sociology Department over the past few years, as faculty, staff, students, and my cohort created a nurturing and inspiring environment.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Relevant Literature</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Theories</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance and Authenticity</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Identity</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Identity</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual Identity</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonheterosexual Identity as Stigmatized Identity</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities at Work and in Organizations</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of Nonheterosexual Identities in the Workplace</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions and Assumptions of Others</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myths about Bisexuality</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Participant Demographics.................................................................................49
INTRODUCTION

“There’s no model, nothing to point to in our common cultural background that supports or ever explains what it feels like to fall in lust or love or both with women and men. What do you do in high school when you like girls and boys? What do you do in a workplace when you talk about your past romantic fiascos and the pronoun-soup gets a little too confusing?” (Weise 1992:x).

Understanding of sexual orientation has changed drastically over time and the expression of certain sexual identities continues to be contentious. Some recent facts regarding same-sex relationships reveal the necessity of a better understanding of sexual identity. Same-sex sexual activity is criminalized in over one hundred countries and is a capital offense in a few places. Several US states had sodomy laws until they were ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2003 (Anderson 2006). “In general, Austria, Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands are the most tolerant countries in the world, and South Africa is the only nation with ‘sexual orientation’ protection in its constitution” (LaFont 2003:244). Equal rights, especially for those in the queer community, has become an important political issue; rights to marriage, employment benefits, and protection from discrimination are only a few of the privileges systematically denied the queer population. One aspect of discrimination occurs because there are no legal protections: the definition of sexual harassment prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, but offers no protection for people who face discrimination based on their sexual orientation (Giuffre 2004). Sexuality is a crucial aspect of any person’s identity, but some information indicates that certain sexual identities should only be expressed when socially appropriate. As the lack of legal protection in some areas shows,
the queer community is often encouraged or required to minimize their “abnormal” sexuality. Sociological understandings of identity aid in the further explanation of sexual orientation.

Although LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) issues are becoming more common in the media, news, and government, research inadequacies continue to exist. Emerging research about sexuality as an identity reveals several important ideas. Generally, sexual identity is separated into dichotomous categories: gay and straight. Research has examined homosexual and heterosexual behaviors and experiences, as well as the formation and development of various sexual identities (Mosher 2001). Although social opinions vary regarding the “morality” or “naturalness” of same-sex sexual and/or romantic relationships, few deny that homosexuals constitute a distinct social group. Thanks to the sociological interest in groups and the growing exposure to gay and lesbian rights movements, theory about sexuality has expanded to include the queer community. However, gaps exist in the academic research and literature regarding sexuality; a thorough understanding of bisexuality constitutes one such gap, despite its inclusion in the LGBT acronym. Research and literature regarding the possibility of bisexuality has grown since the 1970s; however, little attention has been directed toward the management and experience of a bisexual identity (Fox 1995, Paul 1984, Young 1992).

In addition to the identity characteristics revealed by general and specific studies of identity, spatial locations are an important aspect of identity. Differences in behavior at home and at the office reflect how a person’s location influences the expression and management of various types of identity. Sexual identity is often assumed to be a private
experience, thus much sociological research about sexuality often discusses sexual practices and behavior that take place in the home. This research, however, focuses on how sexuality is present in the most public of places: the workplace. The coming out experiences of gays and lesbians have been examined, while bisexual accounts are not as numerous. The current question is this: How does the workplace environment, especially one with potentially negative consequences for outward expressions of non-dominant sexualities, influence the way people choose to present their personal sexuality to others?

To investigate this question, this research takes a grounded theoretical approach to gathering and analyzing data from personal interviews with college students who identify as bisexual. In depth interview questions cover topics from defining bisexuality to how bisexuality has been discussed by others in the workplace. Through careful transcription, then coding, six main themes emerged as essential to the expression of a bisexual identity in the workplace. These six main themes can be organized into the foundation for a process model that identifies the major issues considered by bi people at work.
REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Identity Theories

In general, identities act to define, locate, characterize, categorize, and differentiate the self from others. Identities must respond to quickly changing social contexts and negotiate changes in relationships and networks, using the tools available in particular social structures and situations (Howard 2000). Within sociological identity theories, it is important to distinguish between personal, role, group and social identities. “Personal identities define a sense of location, differentiation, continuity, and direction by and in relation to the self” (Strauss and Corbin 1990:36). These identities can be understood loosely as personality characteristics. Role identities are based on expected behaviors of an identity; examples of role identities include student, mother, and spouse. Role identities are validated when an individual’s behaviors match the behaviors of others within the same group, making them situated identities. Group identity is signified by membership within a group or category and is validated by other members. Social identities are derived from cultural meanings and community memberships; membership in these groups is ascribed by others (Cerulo 1997). The interactions of these identities are the subject of various identity theories.

Howard (2000) delineates two main sociological approaches to identity: social cognition (identity theory) and social interactionism (social identity theory). For a detailed comparison of the similarities and differences between these theories, see Hogg, Terry, and White 1995.
Social cognition, largely influenced by psychology, focuses on the use of cognitive schemas. These schemas, or “abstract and organized packages of information,” explain the categorization systems that are activated when thinking about identity (Howard 2000:368). Identity is influenced by self-schemas as well as group schemas, or patterns of expectations about groups of people that are often based on stereotypes. Schemas are organized into identity hierarchies, which influence attribution processes (judgments of blame or responsibility) and knowledge structures. This approach attributes changes in identity to shifts in role position more often than reacting to the context of the situation (Hogg, et al 1995:263). The social cognition approach suggests that group schemas are important in defining identity, but fails to identify what happens if there is a lack of available group schemas. This approach highlights the influence of role identities, which downplays the agency present in identity negotiations.

An interactionist approach to identity addresses the problems present in cognitive theories. According to interactionism, “identities locate a person in social space by virtue of the relationships that these identities imply, and are, themselves, symbols whose meanings vary across actors and situations” (Howard 2000:371). Interactionists take a situated identity perspective, which values context and environment as important components in the expression of identity. “The responsiveness of social identity to immediate social contexts is a central feature of social identity and self-categorization theory” (Hogg, et al 1995:261).

Social interactionist theories can be divided into two main approaches to identity: those focusing on how social structure shapes identities and those looking at the
construction and negotiation of identity. The structural interactionist approach focuses on role identities and the links between social structure and individuals. Social identity theory addresses this area, because it includes person and society. It incorporates societal and psychological issues by stating identity has two components. Identity has a personal component, one that reveals idiosyncratic characteristics, and a social component, which focuses on group membership (Hogg, et al 1995). These theories attempt to integrate the influence of social structure with the internal dynamics of identity. According to Stryker and Burke (2000), “the two meet at behavior that expresses identities, often at interaction with others” (288).

Burke (2004) further explains the relationship between the individual and social structures with his conception of identity control theory. According to Stryker and Burke (2000), once an identity has been adopted, it must be continually performed in a believable way in order to be validated by others. The process by which people internalize socially acceptable methods of expression and the assumed meaning of symbols is called self-verification. As identified by Burke (2004), the self-verification process is an essential part of identity control theory. This approach may sound psychological, but Burke insists, “the self must be understood as bound to the larger social arena as opposed to being an isolated set of identities” (5). Identity is constructed within the language of the existing culture.

Another vein of the symbolic interactionist approaches focuses on identity construction and negotiation. As identified by Cerulo (1997), there have been three recent trends in the research taking this approach; these include group agency and political
action, individual agency and self-direction, and how new communication technologies have “freed interaction from the requirements of copresence” (386). Social constructionism, then, looks at specific ways that “contextual variations shift identity claims” (Howard 2000:372). Social constructionists like Verkuyten (1997) point out that people do not always define themselves within a dichotomous identity; they actually cross many boundaries when constructing identities. This implies that dichotomies are insufficient when attempting to understand lived experience. Postmodernist perspectives also influence this approach, as these theories attempt to problematize sexual categories and hierarchies (Cerulo 1997).

A focus on identity construction and negotiation can yield various insights about the lived experience of a particular identity: one example of which is how identity responds to stigma (Tajfel and Turner 1979). This body of work suggests that identities interact to determine one’s response to being placed in a stigmatized group. There are four main aspects of identity that are important in stigmatization: group identification, social legitimacy of identity, group permeability, and stability of stigmatization. As originally conceived by Tajfel and Turner, one begins with membership in a particular group, although some aspect of group pride may be necessary to encourage social activism. Legitimacy takes into account how the group is treated by dominant society; if the group has some social power, it may be easier for the individuals within that group to resist stigmatization. Individual mobility (or group permeability) is represented by the question: can an individual exit a supportive group and be socially acceptable to
“normals”? Finally, the stability of the situation influences the experience of stigma because it considers if treatment is likely to change in the future.

Various tools are used in the construction of identity, including language, nonverbal expressions, interactional contexts, media portrayals, and identity talk (Howard 2000). Goffman (1959) collectively called these tools an “identity kit” and suggested that the identity kit determines the performance of identity. For a social interactionist looking at the construction and negotiation of identity, the shared meaning of symbols is extremely important. Identity has shifting meanings, so language plays a central role in identity construction. This language acts to produce identity, especially through the use of identity talk (Snow and Anderson 1987). For example, the coming out process described by gays and lesbians tends to involve some public announcement of identity: these conversations serve to shape the expression of this identity in the future. In their study of homeless men, Snow and Anderson note that identity talk tends to have two sets of norms. The first norms relate to the importance of respecting situated identities and a “strong commitment to basic moral precepts” (1340). The second norms relate to how people fail to uphold these moral ideals (Howard 2000:372).

The identity kit represents the tools that people use to construct their identity, but these tools can be denied to people in total institutions. As Becker (2003) describes, Goffman frequently invented new terms for commonly studied phenomenon in an attempt to study them objectively. Goffman’s new terms were intended to minimized emotional responses to potential positive or negative connotations of the commonly-used language. Despite potential connotations, identity talk and identity kits imply social
norms and some consensus about acceptable behavior for people in a group. This raises an important question: what happens when the norms are ambiguous or there are no norms to follow? Do people adopt norms from other places, or do they create their own? These issues can only be addressed when the performative aspects of identities are understood.

Performance and Authenticity

Following Goffman’s conceptions of identity, performance is the management or expression of a particular identity. Ideas about performance have been incorporated with postmodern approaches to identity. In an ever-changing world, it becomes useful to see “identities as fluid, multidimensional, personalized social constructions that reflect sociohistorical contexts” (Howard 2000:367). Despite common assumptions, there is not one single identity that people consistently activate over time; in actuality, identities are constructed in reaction to particular situations. Identity has often been assumed to have some core, a part of the self that never changes, a “true” self. Identity crises are defined as situations in which the person has “lost touch” with their “authentic identity.” However, with recent postmodern interpretations, “authenticity is no longer a question of being true to self for all time, but rather of being true to self in context or self in relationship” (387). In actuality, there is no “authentic” identity; the self is constructed by the language of social interaction, which shows that identity depends directly on the situation. The selection of particular language is “influenced by the speaker’s social location” (Holstein and Gubrium 2000:85). In other words, “authentic” identities are completely impossible because people simultaneously experience various identities and
Erikson (1995) suggests that members of minority groups are more likely to be in situations that can potentially compromise their perceived authenticity – these are situations in which people are encouraged to choose between “acting in accord with their self values or in accord with the expectations of powerful others” (128).

Gender Identity

Research and theorizing about gender identity has provided some broad applications of identity theory. The social constructionist approach to identity theory can lend understanding to specific identities; the possible implications of this approach have been most greatly examined when studying gender identity. A few key assumptions have informed recent discourse and enjoyed fairly widespread acceptance. One of the initial aspects of understanding any concept is defining the terms involved: current theorizing delineates a clear difference between sex and gender.

In general, sex describes particular biological characteristics, while gender describes the social and behavioral characteristics deemed appropriate. In greater detail, gender is “the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate” for one’s sex (West and Zimmerman 1987:127). While many people assume that gender is or should be linked directly to objective biological ‘facts,’ both of these terms are actually socially constructed. For example, in the case of a child born with ambiguous genitalia, doctors suggest the child only keep a phallus if it is a certain size. If it is not determined of appropriate size to develop into a “normal” penis, doctors tend to remove it. The general idea is that “females are imperfect by nature, and if this child cannot be a perfect or near-perfect male, then being an
imperfect female is the best choice” (Fausto-Sterling in Kimmel and Messner 2004:344). This custom outlines the way in which even ‘objective’ medical knowledge is understood through a gendered lens.

Various (often feminist) theorists have explored the specific ways in which gender is socially constructed. Lorber (1994) echoes Butler’s suggestion that modernist understandings of identity must be replaced with the idea that identity is fluid and ever changing. Gender is not necessarily related to biological characteristics; people are born “sexed but not gendered” and must be appropriately socialized to portray a woman or a man. “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman…; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature…which is described as feminine” (Beauvoir 1952:267 as quoted in Lorber 1994:296).

This point is important because it shows how gender can organize into hierarchies, where one can be valued over another. Within these hierarchies, hegemonic masculinity becomes the norm at the top of the hierarchy. This is important for the current project because this research explores the parallels between gender and sexual identity and hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity. This strict social organization does not accurately reflect the lived experiences of various people. Gender is more variable than the standardization of gender into the binary categories of man and woman allows. “For biologically speaking, there are many gradations running from female to male; and…one can argue that along that spectrum lie at least five sexes – and perhaps even more” (Fausto-Sterling 2000). To explicate her theory, Fausto-Sterling provides various examples of the variations of intersexed individuals, or people who are born with
reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not match the “typical” configurations of male and female genitalia (Intersex Society of North America website 2008). Her work suggests that these individuals should be classified into at least three different groups. First, some people are “true” hermaphrodites (Fausto-Sterling terms them “herms”), who possess one testis and one ovary. In addition, there are the “male pseudohermaphrodites (the “merms”), who have testes and some aspects of female genitalia but no ovaries; and the female pseudohermaphrodites (the “ferms”), who have ovaries and some aspects of the male genitalia but lack testes” (39). Fausto-Sterling’s (re)conceptualization of gender highlights the inadequacies present when assuming dichotomies. Lived experience occupies much more gray area than black and white – the Intersex Society of America estimates that one or two out of every 1,000 American births will receive surgery to correct “atypical” genitalia. This organization also states that that one out of every 100 births will have “bodies that differ from standard male and female” (Intersex Society of North America website 2008).

Thanks to its constructed nature, gender, like other identities, changes based on context. “[T]o be successful, marking or displaying gender must be finely fitted to situations and modified or transformed as the occasion demands” (West and Zimmerman 1987:135). These ideas highlight the performative nature of identity. Indeed, Goffman (1959) suggests that gender is best seen through dramaturgical analysis, and in turn, views gender as a performance. Gender identity is seen as a necessary function in society, one that is shaped by social interaction and social institutions. Therefore, gender displays are not inherent; they are scripted and learned. These performances are influenced by
gender status (as male or female), thus implying particular gender roles. Expected behaviors change throughout the life cycle, reflecting various forms of socialization. People are not only taught various gender roles, they are socialized into self-regulation of appropriate gender expressions. “Kessler and McKenna (1978) argue that ‘female’ and ‘male’ are cultural events – products of what they term the ‘gender attribution process’ – rather than some collection of traits, behaviors, or even physical attributes” (West and Zimmerman 132). West and Zimmerman insist that “doing gender” is unavoidable in that people cannot resist their categorization into gender categories by others. This approach stresses the social positions implied by certain categories; micro-level interactions can reinforce biological and/or essentialist explanations of difference, in turn reinforcing gender inequality. Social constructionists like Verkuyten (1997) point out that these social constructions have important implications: they shape thinking about gender. In sum, gender identity is best understood as a series of “constructed achievements” for which people are consistently held accountable (West and Zimmerman 1987, Howard 2000).

Examinations of gender identity are crucial when considering sexual identity because the two are inexorably linked. First, assumptions about one identity directly affect assumptions about the other. Current gender performance is assumed to signal sexuality. Wilchins (2004) sees gender identity and sexual orientation as directly linked; she argues that gender stereotypes are a part of all identities “whether they’re gay or straight, trans or feminist, elder or youth” (31). This implies the pervasiveness of gender as an overarching organizing category. Sexuality can be seen the same way: performance
of sexual identity situates one within social structure and power relations. For example, heterosexual people must perform their gender “appropriately” or they risk being labeled gay. Like gender, sexual orientations are organized into hierarchies and assigned different amounts of value; hegemonic masculinity is tied to the appropriate performance of heteronormativity. In these ways, gender identity can serve as a model for understanding other identities, including (if not especially) sexual identity.

**Sexual Identity**

The terms sexual identity, sexual orientation, and sexuality are used interchangeably throughout this work. In this conception, these terms include behavior, relationships, preferences, fantasy objects, community membership, and self-identification.

The history behind the study of sexual identity highlights that it is socially constructed: the meaning of same-sex attraction and behaviors has varied over time. Previously, the sexual dichotomy was based on an illness model found in psychology; the main idea was that heterosexuality was normal and anything outside that was abnormal (Collins 2000). Despite this prevailing negative attitude toward the expression of any non-heterosexual identity, Kinsey completed research that demands comment. With the publication of the first Kinsey report in 1948, scientists and the general public began to have a more accurate picture of American sexual relations (Garber 1995). Although questions persist about the validity of Kinsey’s seven-point scale for identifying sexual identity, the way he discussed American sexualities propelled examinations of sexuality to a new place. Following Kinsey’s findings, other theorists sought to improve upon his
effort at operationalizing sexual identity. The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG), for example, included Kinsey-like measurement scales on multiple aspects of sexuality like fantasies, behaviors, and affiliations. (For detailed reviews of these scales and others, see Klein and Wolf 1985, Burleson 2005.) In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the list of abnormal psychological conditions, encouraging new perspectives on varied sexualities (Fox in D’Augelli and Patterson 1995:48). Although previous conceptions have seen homosexuality as deviant, gays and lesbians have more recently been seen as a subculture (Connell 1995).

Much of the research about sexuality focuses on the development of sexual identity. Many of the existing theories of sexual identity development involve stage theories. There is some empirical support to stage models, especially when the stages are seen as loose, overlapping conceptual categories and not strict, linear certainties. (For an excellent overview of the models of sexual identity development, see Gonsiorek and Rudolph 1991.)

From a social constructionist approach, these stage models too closely approximate essentialist theories. The questionable assumptions of stage theories make them less than perfect models for the current research. The implied assumptions of current stage models include: the development of sexual identity is a linear process, people are discovering their “true” selves through this process, and there is one “ideal” way for the process to end for non-heterosexual people. By implying coming out as the “ideal” outcome of identity development for gays and lesbians, bisexual, transsexual, and transgender orientations are minimized and denied social validity. People who are in the
questioning or experimental phases of identity development are identified as confused in
essentialist stage models. These models are unable to account for the fluidity of sexuality
and how it changes over time. Stage theories fail to include the possible influence of
other people’s reaction to a disclosure of identity; if these reactions are negative, the
coming out process can be potentially harmful.

The social constructionist approach rejects dichotomous thinking and examines
the influence of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity. It suggests that sexuality
varies more than the common dichotomous understanding can explore. Anyone outside
the “norm” should be understood as expressing the natural fluidity and variation present
in the expression of sexual identity. Identity and behavior are not necessarily congruent
(Mosher 2001:167). It is important to emphasize the change in identity over time, and
recognize how sexuality may be fluid at some points and more solidified at others

Sexuality, like gender, is a contextualized performance, making it more fluid in
practice than dichotomous sexual identity categories imply. As Howard (2000) states,
“people manage information about their sexual identity, just as they manage information
about other identities” (377). However, there continues to be a lack of nonheterosexual
scripts, especially when examining identities outside of heterosexual, gay, and lesbian
(Mosher 2001).
Bisexual Identity

Defining bisexuality can be difficult. A singular view of bisexuality is impossible and undesirable; there exist many complexities and ambiguities for those who identify as bi.

[B]isexuality is different for different people, changes and evolves over time, is comprised of a number of sexual and non-sexual variables, lies in the broad spectrum between the exclusive orientations of the two “monosexualities,” and for certain individuals definitely becomes a growth-inducing life pattern” (Klein and Wolf 1985:xv).

The conflict model represents an idea common with traditional approaches to sexual identity: that bisexuality is an incomplete stage of homosexual identity development. The flexibility model shows a different approach; here the idea is to see “bisexuality as the coexistence of heteroeroticism and homoeroticism, as the successful integration of homosexual and heterosexual identities into a dual sexual orientation” (7). Additional difficulty with this definition is revealed by Connell (1995): in lived experience, the gay men he interviewed were “technically bisexual” (154). Most started their sexual development in heterosexual relationships, and many continued to have relationships with women well into their 30s. As this information suggests, various pitfalls can be present when attempting to define bisexuality. Mistakes made by researchers include dualistic thinking and using the Kinsey scale as a basic assumption (Klein and Wolf 1985).

Although bisexuality may appear to be a recent phenomenon, Garber (1995) argues that it has been a part of life for a long time. She identifies various popular celebrities, artists, and stories that indicate a less than strict adherence to heterosexuality.
From the man-boy relationships in ancient Greece to the various male and female lovers had by Mabel Dodge or Mick Jagger, bisexual relationships have been present for a long time, even if people never outwardly identified as such (Garber 1995). This historical lack of identification with a bisexual label does not seem uncommon even today. Thanks to the language used and the insistence upon dichotomies, bisexuality has been minimized and made invisible (Burleson 2005, Fox in D’Augelli and Patterson 1995, Garber 1995). Bisexuality is “an identity that is also not an identity, a sign of the certainty of ambiguity, the stability of instability, a category that defies and defeats categorization” (Garber 1995). This fluidity and ambivalence indicates the possibility that bisexuality has to challenge the binary thinking of dichotomous sexual identity. It also implies that sexual identity can be determined by desire; it does not necessarily need to be ‘validated’ by behavior.

Bisexual people face exclusion from homo- and hetero- sexual communities because they struggle against characterization as one or the other. They are often left out of the history of the LGBT movement; mainstream media as well as the popular press within the queer community tend to ignore bisexual people (Burleson 2005). Even gay and lesbian communities appear to have some form of “biphobia,” as bis continue to be excluded from involvement with a monosexual identity, group, or movement. The inability to join a community can have potentially negative consequences – Burleson suggests that if a bisexual identification is not accessible, people may face difficulty finding support when attempting to resist discrimination. Due to the relative invisibility of bisexual networks, organizing can be difficult. In addition to the lack of bisexual
resources, many bis live comfortably in straight or gay communities, where they prefer not to be ‘outed’ (66). While hetero communities may label them deviant, some homosexual people resent the access to heteronormative privilege retained by bisexuals. It is also important to note that the people who do participate in the organizing for bisexual rights are probably not representative of bisexual people in general – people who identify as bisexual have a wide variety interests and goals.

Bisexuality is made invisible because sexual orientation is based on current sexual behavior or “who we sleep with today” (Gibian 1997 in Stombler, Baunach, Burgess, Donnelly, and Simonds, 5, original emphasis). This assumption invalidates past emotions and actions as well as present feelings and fantasies. This idea contributes to the myth that bisexuality is a phase, a stage that one passes through on the way to a homosexual identity. While this is true for some, research suggests that bisexuality is an identity that can last a lifetime. In a study of socially active bisexuals, the average amount of time people had identified as bi was over ten years. Fifty six percent had started their bisexual activity at least five years before the study. And a total of 82 percent were either very or mostly comfortable identifying as bisexual to others (Burleson 2005:46).

Bisexuality can be problematic to address due to the inadequacies present with language. Because identities (and especially sexual identity) are framed as dichotomous, there can be difficulty in trying to articulate an identity that is fluid. Weise (1992), in the introduction to her book that explores the relationship between feminism and bisexuality, articulately indicates the problem with language.

The plurality of names, and the combinations used, are all attempts, in our clumsy and woman-wordless language, to create this identity, to make
ourselves recognizable. To indicate that we, as feminist and women who recognize the realities of sexism and heterosexism, embrace our queerness, our lesbianism, our woman-loving, and also claim and embrace our openness to men (xv).

This quote by Weise implies more than the difficulty presented by language when trying to accurately describe bisexual lived experiences; it also suggests that there are gender differences. Burleson (2005) identifies the difference by suggesting that “bi women are eroticized and bi men are ostracized” (80). This difference may be attributed to the idea that female sexuality is more malleable over time than male sexuality. For women, same-sex sexual behaviors are socially accepted and encouraged, as long as they are a part of otherwise “normal” heterosexual relationships. Terms such as “bicurious” or “part-time bisexual” are often applied to those women who perform bisexuality for the pleasure of heterosexual men (often their husbands). Despite how other LGBT people may feel about bisexual women, this identity has recently been portrayed as trendy and progressive, and as especially attractive to heterosexual men. While the queer community tends to reject people with a “bicurious” identification, it may be better understood as an example of situational same-sex behavior. Essentially, women who engage in same-sex sexual behaviors for the pleasure of men (be they husbands or other consumers) do not threaten the patriarchal status quo. However, “bi women who are in charge of their own sexuality – a sexuality that might not include a man – are” (84). Burleson presents evidence that many bisexual women are feminists and that many bisexual organizations have feminist female leadership. This suggests that women who self-identify as bisexual tend to see their sexual identity as a place for social activism, while bi men tend to see
their identity as more private. When identifying as such, bisexual men must redefine their understanding of masculinity in a society that stigmatizes male same-sex behaviors. If acceptance can be gained, bi men often feel comfortable in a gay community that has been negotiating hegemonic masculinity for some time (93).

In essence, bisexuality “unsettles ideas about priority, singularity, truthfulness, and identity. It provides a crucial paradigm – in a time when our culture is preoccupied with gender and sexuality – for thinking differently about human freedom” (Garber 1995:90). New and deeper examinations of a bisexual identity have implications for the way we understand various identities. One aspect that needs further study is the ways in which a bisexual identity is expressed in different contexts. As suggested by Ochs (1996), “[bisexuals] carry the weight of constantly having to make the decision of how and when to come out and at what cost” (220). These negotiations are especially important due to the potential for stigmatization.

Nonheterosexual Identity as Stigmatized Identity

I argue that nonheterosexual identities have been historically and systematically stigmatized, so addressing these two issues together is crucial. Studies that involve nonheterosexual populations and issues often reflect some aspect of stigmatization or negative labeling. If these two issues are linked, how do people manage these stigmatized, nonheterosexual identities? Based on existing research, one major aspect of managing these identities is coping with actual and potential stigma. Various coping strategies exist, and the ones garnering the most research interest are explained below.
Goffman’s 1963 work stands out as the essential work about stigma. Although current sociologists have made some alterations to his theory, Goffman’s ideas about stigma continue to have relevance. Stigma is largely associated with one’s social position. Goffman identifies various types and characteristics of stigma that have implications for current understandings of sexual identity; the three main types of stigmas carry varying levels of visibility. First, the ‘tribal identity,’ which includes membership in certain racial, ethnic, and religious groups, can range from highly recognizable to completely invisible. The second type, ‘blemishes of individual character,’ is seen as originating from personal choice. According to Goffman, examples of these stigmas can include “mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, and homosexuality” among others (4). Finally, ‘abominations of the body’ can be conceived as physical disabilities that are usually readily identifiable by others (Goffman 1963).

Other theorists have conceptualized types of stigma in slightly different ways; some suggest that defining stigma as existential or achieved is more useful. Existential stigmas are those that are seen to be pre-existing or inevitable situations and would probably include Goffman’s tribal identities and some physical disabilities. Achieved stigmas are constructed as those targets have brought upon themselves, which would include Goffman’s ‘blemishes of individual character.’ The main idea behind stigma theory is that once stigma have been applied, the stigmatized person will be discredited in the future (Chrobot-Mason, Button, and DiClementi 2001).

Link and Phelan (2001) extend Goffman’s contribution by proposing a more comprehensive definition of stigma. The process of stigmatization begins when human
difference is identified and labeled. Following categorization, the dominant culture attaches negative stereotypes to the labels, effectively creating an “us” versus “them” dichotomy. Up to this point, their definition sounds like many others. Here, however, Link and Phelan suggest two additional steps. As a result of the othering, the members of the minority group experience a loss of status and discrimination. In order for stigmatization to occur, these aspects must all combine in an environment that disproportionately values the dominant group. In essence, for stigmatization to truly occur, the stigmatized must be denied power of some kind (376). Nonheterosexual identity has certainly been stigmatized and Link and Phelan emphasize the potential influence that stigmatization can have on life chances (381).

In emerging research, this lack of power has increasingly been examined from the perspective of the insider. A main question of this work seeks to understand how the target experiences the stigma. The visibility (or concealibility) of the stigma is one essential aspect that affects the person’s experiences and reactions. Another important feature of stigmas is their possibility to overlap; many people experience multiple stigmas at various times. LeBel (2008) suggests that a stigmatized person often describes their experiences as living in “two worlds:” in one world the stigma is minimized or hidden and in another world people feel more comfortable being themselves without the association of the stigma (415).

Research has identified particular strategies used to handle stigma; these strategies represent the performative aspects of sexual identity. Coping with stigma has been described as falling somewhere on a reactive/proactive scale. Reactive coping includes
responses to stigma once it has already been applied, while proactive coping includes strategies employed to avoid a stigmatizing label in the first place. In LeBel’s study, people tended to be more satisfied with a proactive strategy than a reactive approach. More detailed examinations of reactions to stigma yield three broad categories of coping. These include concealment, also called passing, which involves the denial of any nonheterosexual identity and the creation of fictitious heterosexual interactions, and avoidance-withdrawal, where people spend the majority of their time with similarity stigmatized others. These two classifications seem to privilege the reactions of other people, but another category implies additional agency. Another approach to coping with stigma involves becoming a social activist, often in an attempt to discredit stereotypes. This path includes revealing the stigma through a “coming out” process. Each of these types of coping is important to understand for the current research.

The ability to make adaptations to an identity performance allows people to “pass” with others, or give a believable and socially acceptable performance. This is a relational process, built through social interaction. The ability to “pass” has particular meaning when examining sexuality. Passing or concealing is an important aspect of sexual identity for anyone who does not claim strict heterosexuality. Gays and lesbians must constantly navigate various situations including choosing how, where, and when to discuss their sexuality. Bisexual people are often encouraged to identify as gay, lesbian, or hetero in order to acquire the social power that can come with an established community (Collins 2000).
Cain (1991) identifies an emerging trend in both medical and social arenas, where openness about one’s sexual identity is the ideal and healthy way to manage a gay or lesbian identity. To many people in queer communities, passing is seen as problematic. Cain believes this ignores important constraining social factors, implying in his work that people manage information about their sexual identity, just as they manage information about other identities. Although some models of sexual identity development imply full disclosure is the only appropriate resolution of a nonheterosexual identity, research has shown that passing can be a healthy adaptation, especially in potentially dangerous environments (i.e.: for young African American males, Edwards 1996). These variations of expression within various contexts reveal how sexual identity is socially constructed.

Coping by employing the strategy termed avoidance-withdrawal involves a somewhat separatist argument, as it emphasizes the presence of mostly similarly stigmatized others in the social environment. Some research has suggested that people who identify as nonheterosexual share commonalities with people who have a disability of some kind. For both nonheterosexual and differently-abled people, those in their close social networks usually do not share their identity and the stigmatized identity is frequently assumed later in life, in isolation. When this happens, Scheer (1994) indicates that people can be motivated to search for a “disability culture” of similar others. Despite the potential benefits, this coping strategy can prove especially difficult for bisexual people who have difficulty locating bi-friendly groups for reasons previously mentioned.

Coping strategies are important because there are potential negative consequences of stigmatization, including lower self-esteem and less satisfaction and quality of life for
the target (LeBel 2008). Some people respond to stigmatized people with social distance, which can increase the impact of the stigma. On a structural level, stigma can also limit access to resources, like employment, housing, and legal rights. How people choose to manage a stigmatized identity within the workplace environment has many implications.

**Identities at Work and in Organizations**

Organizations can have a large influence on how workers manage identity (Chrobot-Mason, *et al* 2001). They enact this influence through the use of formal rules and informal workplace culture. Acker (1990) proposes a “systematic theory of gender and organizations,” in an attempt to examine how organizations can be gendered in particular ways (140). Behaviors at work are seen as products of “gendered actors,” but they are often more accurately understood as part of gendered organizational structures. For example, Hochschild (1983) identified the ways in which female flight attendants were required to use their gender (and associated sexuality) in the commission of their jobs. Organizations may be perceived by most to be gender neutral, but in actuality they are usually constructed using a man as the universal worker. Men are seen as the primary actors in organizations; masculinity is valued and associated with skill. Women are seen as emotional and community supporters, which are considered to be less skilled positions. This set-up means that workplaces are organized in ways that privilege a male perspective. The argument continues that if the oppression of women can be shaped, upheld, and encouraged by institutions, so can discrimination based on sexual orientation.

As previously alluded to by the work of Hochschild, active (hetero)sexuality is seen as “the enemy of orderly procedures” (Acker 1990:151). Gender-neutral implies
asexuality, but since the worker is gendered as male, heterosexuality is assumed. In an effort to avoid sexualized workspaces, some organizations eliminate women (because the presence of women triggers males’ “insatiable need”). In many all-male organizations, heterosexuality or celibacy is strictly reinforced. This sets up a dichotomous workplace and reifies the division of labor. MacKinnon’s (1982) compelling argument that the “sexual domination of women is embedded within legal organizations has not to date become part of mainstream discussions” (142).

Studies of sexuality in the workplace have traditionally focused on sexual harassment. However, there has been shift: workplaces and other organizations are now seen as having their own gendered meanings and social relations of sexuality. It is not just about sexual harassment policies; instead, the focus has moved to power and domination. Recent studies have examined assumptions about socially appropriate performances of gender and sexuality and how they are shaped by management practices, the organizational logic of job evaluations, promotion procedures, job specifications and the everyday social relations between workers (Acker 1990, Cockburn 1991, McDowell 1999).

Harding (1998) challenges public versus private assumptions about the expression of sexual identity. She states that sexuality cannot be separated from power. Although sexual identity is thought of as private, it “is dealt with as public issue because sexual norms are perceived to reflect the norms of broader society” (1-2). Heterosexual people do not face pressure to keep their sexuality private and many find little reason to – heterosexual displays of affection are not uncommon in public. However, if non-
heterosexual people wanted to act similarly, they would be forced to weigh the potential consequences. Thanks to heteronormativity, straight people face none of this deliberation.

As the issue of heteronormativity suggests, there are topics in addition to the typical sexual harassment issues present in work environments. Work should also be seen as an intimate environment, since it is a popular place to meet romantic partners. In female-dominated jobs, work is especially important for lesbians to access potential relationships. Schneider (1984) found it was common for lesbians to have friends and lovers at work. Heterosexual women were open to sexual relationships at work, but tended to save emotional connection for home and non-work female friends. One of the important questions raised by this work: “In what particular ways did the [romantic workplace] relationship improve or complicate the quality of life with other workers?” (Schneider 1984:459).

Schneider’s work highlights the need for change in current conceptions of women workers; women are active participants in office sexual relationships, not just victims of discrimination and harassment. In studying the mythology of the office affair, Schneider identifies two main assumptions that require deeper examination: heterosexuality and power differentials. The ‘typical’ picture of the office affair involves indiscretions between a male boss and his female subordinate (often an assistant). This myth does not approach reality because most affairs happen between coworkers. However, when a ‘traditional’ office affair does happen, the woman involved is more likely to leave her job after the relationship ends. Overall, sexuality in the workplace is much more than simply sexual harassment; information about diverse sexual identities must be included in
research (Schneider 1984). In explaining sexuality in the workplace, it is essential to understand heterosexuality as a cultural construction with “implicit beliefs and requirements for behavior built into our institutional arrangements, which forcibly suggest that all sexual relationships are heterosexual and that women are dependent on men for their economic survival and sexual experience” (447).

Management of Nonheterosexual Identities in the Workplace

The management of nonheterosexual identities in the workplace has been examined by a few studies. Connell’s (1995) study of gay men in the workplace explored the relationship between gender and sexuality while also focusing on the agency of the men in these situations. One assumption made by mainstream society is that gay men lack dominant, hegemonic masculinity. His study of gay men in Australia showed that when gay men entered the workforce, they were able to remain “socially masculinized” (146). Especially in their workplace experiences, they had at least “a moment of engagement with hegemonic masculinity” (146). To maintain aspects of this hegemonic privilege, some of the men had female friends act as hostesses at their parties in order to appear to fit appropriate heterosexual masculinity (155). These men were highly likely to have experience with educating others, either with or without membership in gay social groups. However, their involvement was mostly on a local level, as most of the participants did not see themselves as part of a broader social movement. Connell found three main themes in the narratives of these men: “engagement with hegemonic masculinities, closure of sexuality around relationships with men, and participation in the collective practices of the gay community” (160). These findings seem to echo the major
strategies present for coping with stigma: passing, withdrawing into a similar community, and becoming a social activist.

Another study about nonheterosexual identity attempts to identify the relationship between expressed sexual identity and career trajectories. King and Biro (2006) propose an “LGBT Transformative Learning Model” that offers a way to deconstruct and (re)evaluate identity, behaviors, development. Specifically, King and Biro intended the model be used as a guide to a “sensitivity” training of sorts for counselors – they present case studies of certain clients and suggest how the model would be best applied to improve that client’s quality of life. Their main ideas are important, although not necessarily novel. They identify stage models as linear and terminal, and note that this is not reflected in the lived experiences of their participants (18). They also make an important distinction not found in other literatures; they note that the experiences of a monosexual identity like gay or lesbian is very different from the ones had by non-monosexual people, specifically bisexual and transgender individuals.

As the Connell (1995) and King and Biro (2006) studies show, managing a nonheterosexual identity in public places tends to suggest “coming out”. Coming out is commonly understood as publicly communicating one’s sexual orientation; Mosher (2001) suggests that it is simply the socially visible part of a gay identity (165). Others, however, suggest that coming out should be understood in broader terms: “the term coming out refers to the entire developmental process, including but not limited to disclosing one’s sexual orientation to others” (Fox in D’Augelli and Patterson 1995:52). For the men in Connell’s (1995) study, coming out was actually about coming into a gay
identity, especially as constructed and defined by the gay community. These men associated their coming out experiences with more freedom and satisfaction in expression of their identities.

Work regarding coming out reveals that context and audience matter in the experience of these situations (Mosher 2001). Commonly studied audiences of coming out announcements include family members, heterosexual friends and acquaintances, and other non-heterosexuals. Participants expressed various positive reactions from each group. For the most part, family and other heterosexuals were able to acknowledge similarities between the non-heterosexual and themselves, usually based on other identity categories. This encouraged the non-hetero person to feel comfortable in the situation. When revealing their sexuality to other non-heteros, many people were encouraged to embrace the homosexual aspect of their identity in order to become a member of a community. This group identity also suggests membership in a social movement. While each of these audiences can act to support newly outed gays and lesbians, aspects of these contexts are problematic for bisexuals. While the queer community may accept non-heterosexual aspects of identity, it will not necessarily provide a space for the expression of non-dominant (racial, ethnic, religious, etc.) identities (170). Due to the myths present about non-heterosexuality in general and bisexuality in particular, bis may face additional challenges not experienced by gays and lesbians. Misunderstandings about the viability of a bisexual identity lead many to assume that bisexuality is a phase present in a person who is too afraid to “correctly” identify as gay or lesbian.
Decisions about where or with whom to come out highlight the issue of normative heterosexuality, also called heteronormativity. Adrienne Rich (1980) identifies the problems inherent with compulsory heterosexuality, explaining how the enforcement of it supports male dominance. In her eyes, “sexuality equals heterosexuality equals the sexuality of (male) dominance and (female) submission” (319). Rich focuses on how lesbian experience is largely unexamined. She suggests, “heterosexuality, like motherhood, needs to be recognized and studied as a political institution” (637, original emphasis). To truly understand lesbian lived experience, one must recognize that there is a wide range of possible lesbian experiences, not one prototype. Rich’s analysis reveals that even if homosexual identities are ‘accepted,’ they are seen as one-dimensional stereotypes. Heterosexuality and the expression of these relationships help people to establish their gender. Various theorists and researchers have shown “how the ‘regulatory fiction’ of homosexuality reinforces a naturalized binary distinction between men and women” (McDowell 1996:137). However, little is known about the experiences of those who occupy the space between these dichotomous opposites.

Conclusion

Stein and Plummer (1994) offer suggestions for theorists seeking to examine identities outside the mainstream: “queer” the discipline of sociology by challenging dichotomous thinking.

Queer theorists have attuned us to the importance of looking at texts, but as sociologists we need to look at how identities are constituted in the cultural practices of everyday life, though mediated by texts...what is required is a new paradigm for conceptualizing ‘identity-in-culture,’ developing an understanding of how sexuality, along with gender, race,
ethnicity, class, and generation, is articulated within a terrain of social practices (184-5).

My goal in this research is to better understand the lived experience of bisexual people within the workplace. The expression of bisexuality in the workplace has not been thoroughly examined, although research in the areas of identity, sexuality, stigma, and work clearly informs understanding. For these reasons, this study is exploratory. Considering the complex nature of identity and the sensitive nature of the topic, I determined that private interviews provided the ideal site at which to identify and examine important themes.
METHODOLOGY

Due to the lack of existing research about the expression of bisexuality in the workplace, a grounded theoretical approach provides various possibilities to reveal more about this experience. Charmaz (2006) provides detailed explanations of grounded theory techniques – and emphasizes that this method is a process that involves constant engagement on various levels of research at one time. Although interviewing, transcription, and coding took place concurrently throughout this research, they must be presented separately here. It is important to keep in mind that, in grounded theory, “the data itself is constructed in a highly selective series of actions, and interpreted all along the course of the research project” (Strauss and Corbin 1997:64).

The research interview progressed initially through the use of sensitizing concepts (Blumer 1969) that were derived from the literature; these concepts acted as tentative starting points. This approach allows for the possibility of eliminating some interview questions and emphasizing others (Charmaz 2006:17). The literature cued particular topics, some of which became codes and others of which lost importance. These initial concepts included identity negotiations, boundary maintenance between in-groups and out-groups, and mechanisms of identity expression.

One particular aspect of this process can be seen in the current work. Initially the use of symbols acted as a sensitizing concept: one I thought would prove important. In interviews, I asked participants about symbols they used that could mark them as bisexual. Participants had difficulty identifying specifically ‘bisexual’ symbols. Currently accepted symbols that cue non-heterosexual identity tend to represent monosexuality (be
it hetero- or homo- sexual). Although this (nearly total) lack of available symbols may be significant, it became less important for me to identify different types of possible bisexual symbols as a component of the project.

One issue that was not anticipated to be important came to the forefront when exploring the issue of heteronormativity. The first four participants, when asked about times when sexual identity came up at work, described experiences when other people assumed they were monosexual. The participants’ reaction to these assumptions varied depending on whether they were assumed to be homo- or hetero-sexual: one person expressed discomfort at being labeled homosexual in that situation, while the other three participants stated they would rather that people assume they were interested in members of the same sex. It became apparent that explicit questions regarding these situations and the participants’ reaction to them were important. This provides only two examples of the ways in which this research was conducted as a constantly evolving process.

When conducting grounded theoretical research, it is essential to begin with a theoretically specified sample and continue gathering data until saturation. The homogeneity of the sample is important when beginning to define categories. This research seeks to explore the expression of bisexual identity for young people with some work experience. I am particularly interested in university students, age 18-25, because college is a time when exploration of sexual identity is most likely to occur (Grello, Welsh, and Harper 2006). To access this population, recruitment was targeted in campus residence halls and buildings with large lecture classes. Following IRB approval, flyers were posted that encouraged interested parties to contact the researcher via email to set
up an appointment. Flyers requested the participation of anyone with job experience who currently identified as bisexual. All those who contacted the researcher were interviewed and no additional screening criteria were applied. Ten total face-to-face interviews were conducted; two of the ten participants mentioned that friends gave them information about the study.

Interviews were conducted in a private office and recorded by digital recorder. Analytic notes were taken throughout the interviews, which lasted between 45 and 120 minutes. Interview questions addressed similar topics, including: participant demographics, defining bisexuality, current and past sexual identities, work history, and workplace experiences where bisexuality was discussed. As the research progressed, clarifying questions were added and emphasis shifted towards some topics and away from others. (See Appendix A for the original interview outline.) I attempted to allow the participant to regulate the style and flow of the interview to make them more comfortable. Despite the order, every attempt was made to address each broad topic.

In addition to an appropriate sample, coding is another essential aspect of grounded theory. Coding connects data collection with theory building and gives the researcher a starting point from which to define or explain the raw data. Various types of coding exist; however, three main types of coding are generally used in grounded theory data analysis. In the first step, open or initial coding is used to identify major themes and reduce large amounts of data into smaller pieces. Initial coding can be word-by-word, line-by-line, or event-by-event. As Charmaz (2006) points out, “detailed observations of people, actions, and settings that reveal visibly telling and consequential scenes and
actions lend themselves to line-by-line coding” (50). As the present research attempts to capture the consequences, interpretations, and discussions present when embracing a bisexual identity in the workplace, line-by-line coding emerged as the most useful initial coding type. This initial coding phase revealed various ideas. For example, in one participant’s (Jill) discussion of her workplace experience the following codes are examples of those generated from line-by-line coding: work versus personal environments, positive reaction from supervisors, current opposite sex relationship, problems with current opposite sex relationship, and educating others. While some of these initial codes are related to my initial sensitizing concepts, others emerged strictly from the data.

Following line-by-line coding, axial coding is used to organize and more closely examine the initial codes developed by the first review of the data. The goal of axial coding is to reintegrate the somewhat fractured data that results from the original (especially line-by-line) coding. These concepts are meant to “specify the dimensions of a larger category” and aid the researcher in creating a more comprehensive picture of the situation (Charmaz 2006:61). Ambiguity emerged as an axial code because participants expressed uncertainty in various aspects of their identity, including within their intimate relationships. Axial coding reveals relationships between codes, as well as, suggests additional interview questions to clarify topics (Neuman 2006). The original approach suggested that the lack of a recognized bisexual community (especially within workplace contexts) would figure largely in the expression of this identity. However, the lack of
community actually emerged from lived experience as occupying the overlap between varying contexts, invisibility, and ambiguity.

Selective and theoretical coding happens towards the end of the process, after major themes have been identified. This final step of coding locates additional evidence to support particular codes. At various times in the research process, the researcher reflects upon these emerging codes and creates analytic memos exploring the topics. These memos serve as an additional source of data and provide areas where conclusions emerge. Six main themes came to the forefront, which are to be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections. (For detailed information about grounded theoretical methodology, see Glaser and Strauss 1967, Blumer 1969, Glaser 1978, Strauss 1987, Esterberg 2002, Giuffre 2004, Charmaz 2006, and Neuman 2006.)

Sample

This research was conducted at a small, rural university in the Midwestern United States. Over 98 percent of students are white and most are middle to upper class. Most students live on or near campus and are of “traditional” college student age. As expected from the use of theoretical sampling and the location of the research, the demographics of the participants are fairly homogenous. As influenced by recruitment material, all participants were college students who identified as bisexual at the time of the interview. The age of participants was similar, as mean age was 20.7, with ages ranging from 19 to 24 years. Age when first identifying as bisexual to others varied more than participant age, as there was a range of 13 to 21 years. Mean age when first identifying as bi was 17.4 years. All of the participants in the sample were white.
Participants in the study had previously identified with a variety of sexual orientations before adopting their current bisexual identity: four had identified as heterosexual only, one identified as heterosexual and homosexual at some point in the past, and two had identified as homosexual only. Two participants had unique previous identifications (unsure/questioning and heterosexual with bisexual tendencies), while one participant had always identified as bi.

For the most part, participants did not have experience with the “real world” of work. Participants had experience in student jobs at the university or in temporary and part-time work, often experienced during breaks from school. (For a summary of job types, as well as other detailed participant demographics, see Table 1.) This lack of long-term employment is likely related to the high proportion of middle- and upper-class students at this university. These are the students who have the ability to see their jobs as optional ways to earn spending money and not as necessities to survival.

Although recruitment materials encouraged participation from those of any gender, nine of the ten participants were female. This aspect of the sample may suggest there is more freedom of expression for femininity or that there are more rigid standards for hegemonic masculinity. It could also be related to the idea that bi women are eroticized and bi men are ostracized, as discussed earlier (Burleson 2005). While the bi man in this research did have experiences that were unique from the bi women, many of the issues he identified were consistent with the themes in the interviews of the bi women.
### Table 1

**Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Age first identified as bisexual to others</th>
<th>Other sexual orientations</th>
<th>PT/FT</th>
<th>Type of work experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Hetero w/ bi tendencies</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>University teaching assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabelle</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>University security aide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Server/cashier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Homo</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Publishing house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Substitute teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Hetero, Queer</td>
<td>PT breaks</td>
<td>Fast food service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Homo</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>University newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Unsure/questioning</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Server</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gigi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Community newspaper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS

Six main themes associated with bisexual identity expression in the workplace emerged from the process of coding: perceptions of others, ambiguity and invisibility, differing contexts, the lack of a bisexual community or movement, agency and resistance, and the consequences and potential future implications of the previously mentioned issues. When constructing a bisexual identity in the workplace, these are the tools, or frames, present in the lived experience of bisexual people. It is important to note that these findings suggest the possible aspects of identity negotiation for (mostly) female college students, aged 18 to 24, with experience in part-time and temporary work situations often related to the university. The experiences of this fairly homogenous sample forms a valuable base for further grounded theory research.

When examining any particular identity, especially an unfamiliar one, many people begin with the perceptions and assumptions they have previously formed about members of a certain group. People seeking to negotiate a bisexual identity frequently discussed the influence that certain assumptions from others had on the expression of said identity. The development of the themes did not necessarily build linearly from here, and the presentation of the next themes is not meant to imply a particular order or configuration. Instead, the next three concepts overlapped and intertwined to form the foundation of bisexual identity management in the workplace.

All participants identified some aspect of ambiguity with their identity. Their discussions often focused on how the ambiguous nature of bisexuality had profound consequences for their daily life. From the relationships formed or avoided with gays and
lesbians, to the issues that arise within a romantic relationship when one is attracted to both genders but in a relationship with only one person, to the responses of those in larger society: bisexual people made various negotiations in interaction. The myths and misunderstandings present about bisexuality are not the only issues bisexual people in this sample considered when choosing to come out at work. Other concerns, especially those surrounding workplace social contexts, come to the forefront of personal experiences. Who is in the current situation: are they friends or simply colleagues? Should they have access to personal information about one’s romantic life? Does the work culture support diverse sexual identities or does one risk their job if they were to come out? The answers to these questions about the environment play a large role in the negotiation of a bi work identity.

Throughout the discussion of stereotypes, definitions, and ambiguities, bisexual people expressed their agency in work situations in various ways. Sometimes they chose active resistance to injustices, sometimes they chose public declarations of sexual identity, sometimes they used their bisexuality to their advantage, and sometimes they just tried to “forget about the whole thing” (as stated by participant Jason). Despite their individualized responses, participants shared the experience of becoming a social activist of sorts. In addition to agency, participants discussed the consequences of all five of these themes for their current and future sexual identity in the workplace. These included the consequences of declaring a bisexual identity and possible future implications of a bisexual identity, as seen by the participant.
Perceptions and Assumptions of Others

The first main theme to emerge was the influence of the perceptions of others, or the reactions of other people. Participants identified the ways in which assumptions, myths, misunderstandings, and potential reactions shaped the expression of their bisexual identity in the workplace. As indicated earlier, passing is one aspect of the performance of sexuality; it is important in this situation because one of the concerns of the bisexual person is how their sexuality appears to others. Whether people are attempting to appear heterosexual on purpose, or they are simply assumed to be heterosexual, the issue of passing causes a variety of reactions from bisexual people. As one might expect, a number of the participants (eight total) chose or happened to benefit from passing at some point. However, one of the surprising aspects that emerged for these participants is the fact that many (four total) actively tried not to pass in most situations, possibly as a way to manage a stigmatizing identity.

Myths about Bisexuality

There are many beliefs and ideas about what bisexuality is; Burleson (2005) identifies thirteen major ‘myths’ of bisexuality. In addition to these myths, bisexual people frequently face stereotypes, assumptions, and complete ignorance when it comes to their sexual identity. Participants discussed a number of these rather public concerns during the course of their interviews. The most popular myths identified by the participants centered around two main themes. The first theme suggested that bis are over-sexual, sexually “easy” and “up for anything.” Seven of the participants highlighted these ideas, especially when they discussed the ways in which they had been in
successful monogamous relationships or faced the assumption that they would have difficulty with monogamous relationships. One participant relayed the following narrative when asked about past romantic relationships in the workplace.

One situation really stuck with me. There was this woman in her 30s I worked with for while, that I had a crush on. We worked together a lot, so we kinda became friends. She told me after a few months that she was a lesbian, but I didn’t really say anything about how I felt about it. I mean, I let her know I was cool with it, but not *too* cool with it, you know? (Laughs.) I had talked about past boyfriends I had, although I made it clear I was single at the time. A couple weeks before I came back to school, I just decided to tell her I liked her one day and see if she wanted to hang out sometime. She said, basically, in a nice way, that she didn’t date bisexual women because she never knows when they’re going to ‘flip’ back to guys.
Q: Is that what she called it? ‘Flip?’
Yeah, she said “flip” and I was kind of like, so I’m either with you or I’m banging someone else, kind of thing? (Susan).

The second group of myths that came to the forefront surrounded the perception that bisexuality is rare in the population. This idea also extends myths that bisexuality represents a conscious choice, which is related to the implication that the choice is made in the effort for a person to appear trendy or avant-garde. This perception of choice often encourages outsiders to believe that bisexuality is simply a phase that one passes through, especially on the way to a homosexual identity. This myth results in discrimination from the larger queer community, as bis are sometimes seen as homosexuals attempting to maintain heterosexual privilege (Burleson 2005).

*Passing*

When considering its use with regard to sexual identity, passing is a term most often associated with homosexuals. In general, passing is a situation that occurs when a
non-heterosexual person is assumed and treated by others as a heterosexual. The general assumption is that it would most advantageous to the non-hetero person to pass as straight in ‘mainstream’ society, especially when considering the additional social power associated with heterosexuality. However, bisexual people experience passing in ways that have not been thoroughly investigated in research. Considering the range of possible bisexual identity expression, bisexual people have varying amounts of access to heteronormativity.

All participants felt pressured to act straight at some point in their work lives, if not by immediate others, than by society at large. The performance of heterosexuality (when a bisexual person is dating someone of opposite sex) is assumed to be easy, natural, normative, and advantageous, especially due to the additional acceptance associated with being heterosexual. However, passing could be seen as “performing the absence” of homosexual identity. This implies that it is not ‘natural’ for bis to act straight – bisexual people must put effort into performing the absence of part of their bisexual identity (the part that likes same-sex partners).

While exploring this issue of passing, a question arose that had not been a part of my original interview questions: because passing emerged as common for bisexual people, I wondered how participants felt about being categorized into one group over the other. Due to the evolution of interview questions encouraged by grounded theory, not all participants were asked to explore this issue. Of the eight people who were asked the question, four said that they would rather that people assume they were gay or lesbian.
Three participants said they would prefer people assume they were heterosexual, while one said they had no particular reaction to what people assumed they were.

For example, when one participant was asked if she ever discussed her significant others or dating partners at work, she responded as many might expect. She expressed that she has little reaction when people assume she is heterosexual, but would prefer that people not assume she was a lesbian.

While I worked over the summer I had a boyfriend, so whenever relationships would come up in conversations with coworkers, I would talk about him. There were really tough times with us, so I would go in to work and be upset and talk about it. Nothing came up about bisexuality. People probably assumed I was straight because I was talking about my boyfriend, but we didn’t really get into a discussion about it.

Q: So, when you talked about your boyfriend at work, people may have assumed you were straight. How do you feel about that? It really doesn’t bother me….although I wonder, if the tables were turned, if I had a girlfriend at the time, if people were assuming I was lesbian, if I would care. Honestly, I probably would. But I think that I was socialized to believe that I was straight for years of my life. It is the norm in some people’s minds, that is how people should be, and it ‘makes the most sense’…I don’t know why I don’t mind if people think I’m straight…I would think that might block my chances with a guy if something didn’t work out with my girlfriend. Like, “Oh, I thought you were a lesbian.” (Natalie).

Natalie’s statements suggest that she worries her bisexual identity might limit her available (male) dating partners. This view implies that any amount of non-heterosexuality is socially undesirable and could mark the person as stigmatized.

While Natalie’s feelings were echoed by two others, a total of four other participants expressed that they would rather have people assume they were gay than straight.
I’m not exactly sure why I don’t want people to just assume I’m straight…I mean, I’m not just another stupid hetero who doesn’t understand that there’s a lot more variation than most people think. I feel like having people assume I’m a lesbian means they also assume I have some kind of political consciousness. I know it’s just another stereotype, but I’d rather people think I’m smart and a little different than oblivious to my advantages (Susan).

These findings are initially counter-intuitive because one often assumes that the identity with the most social power would be activated in a particular situation. One possible explanation for this finding advocates a change in the common view of stigma as fixed and oppressive. Although a traditional, liberal approach to stigma suggests its negative implications, the current work echoes newer studies that suggest the possession of stigma may act as a site of resistance (Collins 2000). Stigma can provide the power to organize, connect, and define. Standpoint theorists especially focus on this possibility for agency and resistance (Lorber 1994). The preference of people in this sample to be identified as gay over straight could also be related to the desire to educate others often described by participants. If bisexual people are assumed to be hetero, they would lose the necessity to teach others about their “minority” status position. “When it comes to the bisexual community, no ‘gay basher’ stops to ask exactly where someone falls on the Kinsey scale. No one is only half-bashed because he or she is bi” (Burleson 2005:19, original emphasis). This statement suggests that bisexual people realize and react to the potential stigma they receive in positive and negative ways.

In some stage models of sexual identity development, coming out is seen as the appropriate resolution to the process of the formation of any non-heterosexual identity. This is seen as the best way to manage the stigmatization that one acquires by identifying
as non-heterosexual. However, it is important to note that stigmatization and devaluation from society are not inevitable. In addition, my research implies what other recent studies have: that “passing” (not disclosing a nonheterosexual identity) can be a healthy adaptation (Mosher 2001). Passing, when seen as the situational use of an identity, can be a self-protective mechanism, not strictly a process of denying a hetero- or homo- sexual core identity.

Issues of passing are especially salient for bisexual people because the world is constructed into two dichotomous opposites: hetero and homo. This participant valued the fact that his bisexual identity did not fit into these two strict categories.

It’s a little bit different for bisexual people because they don’t have that – they’re either only straight or only gay – but I don’t know if it’s easier because they can put on a persona that they are straight if they’re in a situation where they’re not comfortable sharing that about themselves. I think it’s harder for people that are only gay or lesbian [versus people who are bisexual], that’s just the way I would perceive it (Jason).

Due to the frequently evoked features of identities, there are situations where a person is not consciously debating passing versus coming out. Because identities are a part of who we are, people were sometimes involved in what I call “accidental outings.” These were situations in which a person’s bisexuality was discussed with people that they had not voluntarily self-disclosed to. One participant (Elizabeth) had come out to her supervisor and later overheard that supervisor talking to another employee about her sexuality. Also included here were instances when the person self-disclosed in situations where they did not expect to do so. For example, when asked if there was ever an occasion when she had accidentally outed herself, one participant responded:
I think, as a student, at the university I attended prior to this one, in the classroom setting. I was taking a course in anthropology and we discussed sexuality and that was one of the times I ‘came out’ and didn’t even think about it. We were discussing it, that and the fact that there were other individuals that weren’t heterosexual. So it was nice, it felt more comfortable talking about my sexual orientation. That’s probably why I said something because we weren’t taking for granted that everyone there was heterosexual. And in that space you can talk about your experiences, there were a lot of people that were sharing their experiences, so I thought, ok…It was a really good experience (Natalie).

Although many of these outings were not intentional, the people who shared these experiences were not upset that others knew about their bisexual orientation. While some participants claimed no immediate reaction, others found it to be a positive, liberating, or empowering experience.

Ambiguity and Invisibility

The second theme emerged throughout all the interviews at some level; each participant mentioned how ambiguity and/or invisibility influenced the construction of their bisexual identity. Codes materialized that addressed ambiguity in various forms: ambiguity in the definition of bisexuality, in the language used to describe it, in personal relationships with same and other sex partners, in social perceptions, and in sexual scripts for obtaining dates. While some participants resented the ambiguity surrounding a bisexual identity, others celebrated their additional freedom to sample a variety of scripts. This ambiguity within bisexuality can lead to problems in communication between partners, isolation from queer community, and the perpetration of myths. However, ambiguities also reveal sites of resistance because the ‘rules’ of bisexual identity expression have not yet been codified.
**Definition**

Participants who identify as bisexual had ambiguous definitions of bisexuality, mostly because they either had no experience with bisexuality at all, or they had seen veiled allusions and one-sided representations of it. When asked to define bisexuality, participants explained a wide variety of characteristics, behaviors, and experiences. Their answers reflect the confusion of categorization that Collins (2001) identified for both biracial and bisexual individuals.

One thing that many people did agree on was how bisexuality, and sexuality in general, is fluid. Fluidity was mentioned as an essential characteristic by seven of the participants when asked to define bisexuality. Some focused on how their desires, behaviors, and self-labels have changed over time, while others detailed their rejection of dichotomies. The participants constructed bisexuality as occupying the gray area of the sexuality spectrum, the (large) space between homosexuality and heterosexuality. When asked to define bisexuality, one participant said,

> Honestly, I think that an individual who self-identifies as bisexual has sexual feelings and/or desires towards both their identified sex or gender and the opposite sex or gender (even though I don’t like dichotomies). I would also say that it doesn’t just have to be about sex, it can also be about wanting to be in a loving relationship with the plethora of the sexes. It terms of bisexuality, I want to think of sort of a sliding scale, very fluid…It’s like how in society we have very much male or female, it’s either heterosexual or homosexual. I think bisexuals are those individuals that either say, those [dichotomies] don’t really exist, or if they do, they’re cultural categories and recognizing that there’s always this sort of in between (Jill).

Another participant highlighted the difficulty of negotiating the “in between,” although her response contains humor.
I think that I try to encourage people to recognize that it’s identity politics. That, most people pick a team and for bisexuals it’s really really hard because people say pick a team and you don’t want to play teams. (Laughs.) And so, you’re either for or against - and that reinforces dichotomy - or you’re somehow cheating and you have to pick or you’re invisible (Kathy).

Some participants identified the importance of embracing this ambiguity to a point because nothing in life is black and white. As the participants in this research show, bisexual people are not necessarily equally attracted to different genders; some people do have a preference for one gender over the other. As is made clear by the fluidity involved with bisexuality, people are rarely completely gender-equal in their desire, attraction, fantasy, and behaviors. For these reasons, it is difficult if not impossible to identify “the” ideal type of bisexuality. For example, as stated by one participant,

I like females more. If I had to clarify, I’d say I’m a lesbian bisexual. So, when I talk about it, I talk about my girlfriend, mostly. So I guess I can be perceived as being a lesbian, but most people do know that I’m actually bisexual (Elizabeth).

Language, Symbols, and Scripts

Language, symbols, and scripts link micro and macro levels of analysis – these tools of social interaction shape social structure and vice versa. As the difficulties present in defining bisexuality reflect, the lack of language and accepted symbols have various implications. One main concern for bisexual people is that if it continues to be unexplored, there will be no understanding of how to perform bisexuality in normative ways. The influence of social norms on identity cannot be ignored, as has been explored with identity talk (Snow and Anderson 1987). Without established methods of constructing an “appropriate” bisexual identity in the workplace, people continue to face
the possibility of discrimination and misunderstanding on public and private levels. As people gain experience with different aspects of identities in different situations, they will modify their future performances with the feedback they receive.

For example, one participant discusses the confusion present when trying to self-define her bisexual identity. It is true that many identities are difficult to define, but hetero- and homo-sexual identities have fairly well known norms. The language is appropriately configured to express monosexuality. This participant explains the lived experience of the ambiguity and lack of language.

Many times I’ve said that I’m heterosexual with bisexual tendencies…Just because when people ask, I’ve only been in maybe one serious relationship with a woman and the majority of my life I have dated men. And then now currently, I’m in a long-term monogamous relationship with a male who identifies as a heterosexual. So, it gets complicated to try to explain that I’m attracted to other women, but I’m in a monogamous relationship…I mean, there’s all kinds of connotations with bisexual identity – that they’re promiscuous, that they have a boyfriend and a girlfriend – and to explain it I say, currently, if you want to label me, I’d be heterosexual because I’m in a heterosexual relationship, but I have bisexual tendencies because I’m attracted to women sexually. I guess that would be another way of identifying myself (Gigi).

There is also a lack of more general symbols associated with bisexuality. As discussed in the methodology section, symbols were anticipated to be a main component of this work. However, the most mentioned aspect of symbols was the difficulty in locating bisexual symbols of any kind. In addition to the lack of common bisexual symbols, the type of work environment may have limited the use of symbols not directly associated with work. As one participant stated when asked about symbols,

I didn’t really have any. I mean, I had to be in uniform and I couldn’t really carry anything with me (Jason).
As this participant suggests, the capability to use symbols was limited in part-time and temporary work situations. When conceiving the project, I anticipated more traditional work environments – places where workers expected to stay in their position long-term and had their own personal workspace. This personal space allows for the display of pictures, stickers, and awards not necessarily related to work. However, the college students who responded to this study had not necessarily entered jobs that demanded personal commitment or identity investment. The nature of the work experience may have contributed to the limited use of symbols to mark any aspect of personal life.

In addition to symbols that can mark sexuality, there are scripts for the expression of sexual identity, as well. Scripts have especially been investigated in cases where people are disclosing a non-heterosexual identity and are commonly referred to as coming out narratives. Sexual scripts about heterosexual dating practices are common throughout academic research as well as everyday media. However, there is a lack of scripts about how to manage identity when there is attraction to both same and opposite sex partners. For bisexual people, the script for the announcement of their sexual identity is ambiguous or nonexistent. Without acceptable scripts, bisexual people were free to express themselves in the ways they chose. When asked how she made the announcement she was bi at work, one participant replied:

Well, in the past I’ve jokingly said it and I think sometimes humor catches people off guard and they ask questions. I feel more comfortable approaching it that way (Gigi).
Consequences within Relationships

What does this ambiguity mean for lived experience? Whether participants discussed ambiguity of definition or the invisibility of a bisexual community, they indicated that they experienced consequences within intimate relationships. One of the most common consequences discussed by the participants was the difficulty in gaining acceptance from an opposite sex partner. Five out of the seven participants with previous heterosexual relationships said that former or current hetero partners expressed some level of discomfort, ignorance, intolerance, or confusion about their bisexual identity. The two people who had had same sex partners did not express similar reactions in these relationships. The following participants detail some of the situations encountered within heterosexual relationships.

And trying to explain it on a personal level, to my partner, because he often wonders, does this mean you are not out yet? And I try to explain, no, I’m in love with you and I want to be in a relationship with you. Now if you happened to be a woman that would be the same thing. It’s hard for him, because for the majority of society, you have one or the other (Emily).

I think one of the reasons why I don’t make it more public is partly because of my partner and his feelings - he still has some issues with how I identify myself, so it’s sort of out of respect I’m not more public about my sexual orientation (Gigi).

Heterosexual people may have more difficulty in relationships with bisexual people because they only know the norm. People with experience in same-sex relationships probably have more experience passing, so they are able to relate to the bi person more readily. Further focus on this area could reveal additional information about how ambiguity is present in the lived experiences of bisexual people. As the differential
experience of bisexual people in relationships with opposite and same sex partners shows, the context of the situation plays an essential role in the outcome.

Situated Contexts

The theme of situated contexts highlights the performative, contextual aspects of identity that have already been discussed in previous literature. What kinds of environments are present in the workplace? How do these situations influence the expression and experience of sexual identity? One main question of this research is to determine when, why, and how people make the decision to reveal their bisexuality to others. Coming out has various positive and negative implications – most people with a non-heterosexual identity manage the expression of this identity “depending on their discretion and involvement with various audiences” (Mosher 2001:169). In other words, context and audience are important in coming out decisions. My findings echoed this idea. Ambiguous language, symbols, and scripts (or the complete lack thereof) contribute to coming out decisions as available tools. The following contextual issues frame the use of those tools and what identity they will be used to create.

Work Versus Personal

A majority of the participants (eight) echoed the importance of work versus personal contexts when asked to describe their reason for coming out or passing. It was popular for participants to attribute their identity negotiations to the differences between a work environment and a more private one. In general, participants planned on maintaining completely separate work identities, identities that did not include the expression of any sexuality, bi or not. Although they intended to avoid discussing private
matters altogether, some participants found that the boundaries between work and home were not as concrete as they had originally thought. When another person in their work environment reconstructed the workplace in more personal ways, participants often revealed aspects of their “private” identities.

Five of the participants choose passing as a way to negotiate their bi identity. They simply did their best to fit in with others and avoided discussing romantic relationships. These participants generally voiced the opinion that it was unprofessional to have personal conversations at work and they chose not to disclose their identity, even if other people did. The ease with which participants were able to offer convincing performances was impressive – none of these participants where questioned about their sexuality by coworkers without mentioning it first.

Q: Are you out with your coworkers?
Close friends of mine, who also happen to be my co-workers, I’ve talked about it with them. But usually, most people just assume...when I started at the paper, I was already in a long-term relationship [with a man], so most people just assumed. But a lot of my close colleagues, I’m out with. What about your supervisors?
I am out with one of them, but besides that I don’t discuss those personal issues (Natalie).

I try not to use gendered terms at work (Jason).

Q: Are you “out” at work?
No, actually. I would say that I’m very ambiguous. I’ll say that I’m in a relationship, but I try not to talk about my personal life when it comes to teaching. I might give personal examples, but I don’t ever explicitly say, my boyfriend, my girlfriend. So, no, I don’t, the topic just doesn’t usually come up, so it’s not discussed (Kathy).

Three participants did not anticipate revealing their nonheterosexual identity, but some aspect about the context made them feel especially comfortable. In other words,
someone or something about the situation was able to break the typical work/personal boundary. In some cases, another participant initiated the breakage of the boundary and the bi person was able to cease their performance of strict heterosexuality. In other situations, the bi person was motivated to cross the work/personal divide to make a deeper connection, even if they initially expected to remain closeted.

Q: Was your bisexuality something that you were planning on talking to people at work about?
Not really. In the working environment, we’re just focused on our job at that point. At the time this happened, we were casually closing the restaurant, there’s no reason for me to need to hide it because I’m not in the presence of customers and I’m not going to be reflecting the company at all. The customers could be like, ‘Oh, no! LGBT!’ I feel like I shouldn’t express those kinds of things around the customers. I don’t know why… Q: I was going to ask if there was a reason why you thought it shouldn’t be talked about…
I feel like work shouldn’t be a very personal thing, it’s just I’m doing my job and if you want to know more about me we can talk about it. It’s just not really that important because I don’t have a connected friendship with everybody; they’re just my co-workers. A few of them I did make friends with, and we would talk about it, but it’s not a question on the interview. It’s not something that is externally important to everybody that they would actually be comfortable enough asking…but if someone were to ask me, I’d be fine in telling them. It’s just not something that anybody feels it’s necessary to know (Susan).

It is possible that participants who renegotiated their identity expression based on someone else changing the definition of the situation were able to do so thanks to the nature of work environment they occupied. The participants in this sample may have found it easier to feel comfortable because they did not perceive as immediate, apparent, or severe consequences. As previously stated, participants were working in a part time job, usually one they did not anticipate keeping as a career. In most situations, participants reported little to no contact with higher-level supervisors and a high
probability of finding work elsewhere. Without the responsibility of a full time position, participants may have felt more able to “test the waters”.

Friends Versus Colleagues

One of the noteworthy features of the context is who populates the situation. This context is similar to the work/personal context, although it focuses less on the environment and more on the people in it. Five of the participants discussed the distinction between friends and colleagues. In general, friends were defined in ways that privileged them to personal information, while colleagues were seen as people they interacted with at work, often on a regular basis. Two of these participants also articulated an additional category that included coworkers who had become more like friends than colleagues: work-friends. These work-friends were people who were originally encountered in the workplace and were later found to have similar characteristics to the participant. This conditioning of friendships in the workplace could be related to the nature of work because these participants were more likely to work with other college students who were close to their age. Participants decided to reveal their sexuality, but only because the people in their work environment became more than colleagues.

I’m very comfortable talking to close friends at work…but not perhaps with coworkers who I don’t interact with much; I don’t think it’s necessary to talk about it. I’m not uncomfortable, but it’s never come up in conversation, so we don’t talk about it and I don’t bring it up.
And when discussing an earlier work experience in a retail clothing store: In my department, I was very much out with the other people who worked in the same area as me. But again, these were my people that I worked with quite a bit, who were about the same age…
Q: Closer friends, then?
Yes, absolutely. And then really the rest of the people were not close and so it didn’t come up in conversation (Susan).

Another participant echoed this distinction when asked if she was out at work. Her answer suggests that her outing was not exactly intentional, but once it had happened, she was not upset by her accidental announcement.

Yeah, I’m out at work, but it kind of happened slowly, just because….it’s like if you keep talking with people it might come up. I don’t know how to say it, if I should just blurt it out one day or wait until it came up in conversation. Eventually I did come out with my coworkers, fairly recently. It hasn’t really come up with the head boss, but the shift managers are younger and we’ve kinda became friends – coworker friends, you know? With the head supervisor, it didn’t come up because the topic of the conversation was work. Pretty much, if people I know fairly well talk about relationships, I will come out to them about being bi (Emily).

For the most part, participants who were interested in coming out at work did so by starting off slowly. If they were with someone they trusted, participants tended to casually mention their bisexuality to gauge reactions.

Q: How do you “make the announcement” that you’re bi to other people?
It depends on the actual topic people are discussing. Like, “I have a girlfriend.” And “Well, so do I and I’m bisexual and blah blah.” That would be, if it was appropriate. I usually start off with, “I have a girlfriend.” And expand from there depending on the topic of the conversation (Elizabeth).

The above distinctions made between personal friends and work colleagues, as well as recent findings, suggest that the extent to which someone forms, maintains, and expresses a bisexual identity depends heavily upon support and experience from their social contexts. If people have established close bonds within their work context, if they know they will be supported, if others disclose personal information at work, they are
much more likely to come out voluntarily. Even in situations where their outing was unintentional, the participants in this research did not experience negative consequences for making their bisexuality public. In nearly every coming out situation described by the participants, there were aspects of the situation that were explicitly supportive.

Explicitly Supportive

Organizational culture

Organizational cultures were initially a focus of this research. I anticipated identifying both the explicit rules found in employee manuals and the unspoken rules of the organizational culture. Was the workplace supportive of diversity? Were people free to disclose a non-heterosexual identity without penalty? However, because participants were temporary, part-time workers, they did not fully integrate into workplace culture, making many of these questions moot. Only one participant alluded to how organizational culture influenced identity, and this was in answering a question posed about future plans to express her bi identity. This quote combines ideas about organizational culture, implications, consequences, and potential future identification.

Q: How comfortable do you feel in expressing your bisexuality at work? I think it might depend on the type of work…and my employers. If they seem friendly to such expressions. Obviously, if I’m going into the military or something, I don’t want to bring that up. If it were a requirement that I express it, or reveal it, then I would be fine with that (Jason).

Aside from this quote, the research did not reveal much in the way of work culture. This is an area for future study, especially as new samples are chosen to extend grounded theory.
Presence of other LGBT people

The presence of other LGBT people and queer allies may be the largest factor in influencing others to come out at work, in the sense that it may be the most predictive of bis coming out. This theme echoes the findings of Collins (2001) that suggest the “composition of their community and peers determined the degree of comfort and security they experienced” (237). As one participant suggests, the presence of other LGBT people makes her decision appear obvious.

For example, both me and my cousin are bisexual; there were many other people that worked there that were bisexual or gay. Some of them were people that went to my high school, certainly there were older people there, too. But, just out of conversation and getting to know people, I told stuff about me, they told stuff about themselves. I came out and I don’t think there’s anything in that situation that would have made me choose not to tell people (Isabelle).

Another participant explained a detailed narrative of her announcement, which revealed the importance of other queer people in the environment.

Q: Did you discuss being bi with any of the people you worked with? There’s a couple people I know that I work with who are gay and one night I was closing with two people – you have to lock the doors, restock the whole place; there’s a lot you have to do – so the supervisor was in the back, going through the paperwork, while we’re closing down. It’s myself and one of my friends, Jeff, who has a boyfriend, someone that some people would call ‘typically gay.’ We bonded instantly – actually, he was my trainer. This guy is so awesome; I love him. Then there’s another guy, John, who is straight, I don’t know if this is important, but he hit on me or whatever once in a while. So, we’re all just kinda closing, and for whatever reason the topic of threesomes came up and I personally have been involved in a threesome – once - and I kind of put in my two cents. So, John looked at me, like, ‘What is going on?’ And they asked me if I was a lesbian. And I was like, ‘No, I’m bisexual.’ And it was really funny because Jeff is just like, ‘Oh my gosh, I love bisexuals!’ (Laughs.) It was a funny moment. That was probably the only moment when I actually said it
to anyone at work and it really didn’t seem to affect anyone. I don’t know if John ever said anything to anybody else (Amy).

These three different situated contexts emerged from the interviews as important. As participants defined their environment as work or personal and their coworkers as colleagues, work-friends, or friends, it changed the way they expressed their sexual identity. Explicitly supportive contexts made decisions about coming out easier for the participants, as they tended to face less consequences in these situations. Although the workplace culture did not emerge as an important part of the situation, the presence of other LGBT people in the environment were highly predictive of participants’ more outward expressions of bisexual identity. The importance of queer-friendly people in coming out situations suggests that a community can be helpful. Despite the coalitions of LGBT people in the workplace, bisexual people find it difficult to recreate this supportive social group outside work environments.

Lack of a Bisexual Community

As previously outlined, bisexual people face a lack of social acceptance in both hetero and homosexual communities; their exclusion from these groups increases the potential for institutional discrimination and decreases their access to resources. The lack of a bisexual social movement links the invisibility felt by many bisexual people with the importance of situated contexts. Participants describe their isolation from movements were they anticipated acceptance.

When I was about 17, I started to identify as a lesbian. Then I met the guy I’m with now and realized that I was very attracted to him. I had become
friends with the small group of gay kids at my high school, but they totally started ignoring me when I started dating Ben (Natalie).

I think a big issue…[is] the lack of a placement [for bis] between the gay community and the straight community. We’ve been unable to find full support from either side. In the case of my co-worker, he was very supportive and excited that I was bisexual. However, not all gay men and women are that supportive. They don’t find it to be a valid identity or sexual orientation. I have a lot of questions; like, if I want to be with a girl, and she knows that I’m bisexual, will she be unhappy that I like guys? I might lose my chance at a meaningful relationship. I think that bisexual women would prefer to date other bisexual women because of the way that some lesbians label them (Amy).

The lack of community involvement and support seems particularly astute for bi women. According to Burleson (2005), 59 percent of the bisexual women responding to his survey “found the straight world welcoming,” while only 25 percent felt welcome in the lesbian community. In contrast, 60 percent of bi men felt welcome in the gay community and 52 percent felt welcome in the straight world (20). As the following participant suggests, the lack of community results in a lack of understanding, which breeds confusion at the least and discrimination at the worse. When asked why she chose not to reveal her bisexual identity at work, this participant responded with issues blending issues of context and the lack of community.

The topic never really came up. It really didn’t seem appropriate, I didn’t have any close friends, it just wasn’t something that was necessary. It was mainly that people just didn’t bring it up, so I didn’t talk about it. It was also that the environment has parents with kids around all the time. In this society, it’s not a positive thing to a lot of people, so if they are shopping at a high-end clothing store, and there’s a girl, who’s not straight, waiting on them, ‘I don’t want my kids to be around that.’ I felt like I had to make myself a little more conservative when I was there. It’s just about being conscious about the way that other people can perceive people who are bisexual (Elizabeth).
A mainstream bisexual social movement could raise social awareness, helping all people reduce the discomfort present in contentious social situations. To address the potential discrimination, ambiguity, and misunderstandings, these movements could focus on the acceptance of fluid and changing sexual identities, including bisexuality.

Agency and Resistance

Agency and resistance were persistently exhibited by the participants in response to each issue encountered, especially if it was negative or discriminatory. Participants did not view themselves as victims, but as actors in their particular social situations. In response to stigma and discrimination, bisexual people have “developed strategies to manage their difference from the mainstream” (Collins 2000:224). From the lack of bisexual communities to the ambiguity related to the identity, each participant identified ways in which they reacted to and actively managed these issues. As previously explored, reactions to stigma can be framed in three ways: passing, spending most of one’s time with people who have a similar stigmatized identification, or becoming a social activist. On some level, each participant became an activist in some way. Their reactions encourage a focus on bisexual people as actors in the construction of their identities.

Despite the lack of strictly bisexual symbols, participants found sites of resistance and spaces to express themselves within the workplace, even in situations where they did not have traditional avenues of identity expression. Two of the participants offered examples of ways they signaled their identity using queer symbols.

Where I work, we wear sweaters or a polo and on mine I had the rainbow flag, not the bisexual flag, I had the rainbow flag because most people know that more. Just because I didn’t know where to get a bisexual flag. So that’s what I have to express it outwardly, I guess… Say, if someone
has a problem, and they are LGBT, then they have a visual, like, hey that’s someone I can go talk to - they’re either an ally or someone else who is understanding (Elizabeth).

Another participant stated:

On some of my shoes, the shoelaces on the right foot, I have rainbow laces. We weren’t allowed to do anything else because of the uniform. Everything had to be [company] stuff.
Q: So, there was a strict uniform, but you still found a way to express yourself?
Exactly (Isabelle).

In addition to using symbols known to signify the queer community, participants detailed various ways that they were able to resist myths and other stereotypes related to their sexual identity. For example, one participant defined bisexuality as normal, advantageous, and socially progressive.

I think that a bisexual is normal. I think that a person who identifies him or herself as heterosexual is a person who is completely incapable of considering the same sex as being attractive or desirable in a sexual and romantic manner, same thing with homosexuals. They cannot identify members of the opposite sex as being desirable. I think that bisexuals are normal and we see people as individuals and either as prospective partners or non-prospective partners (Elizabeth).

Another participant’s explanation reveals how her behaviors and beliefs act to signal her rejection of the myth that bisexual people are necessarily non-monogamous.

I can either not see gender at all, or I can acknowledge it and not care. And I can be attracted to both at the same time and have a monogamous relationship with somebody. I find a lot more comfort with a monogamous relationship than anything else. I know a lot of people see bisexuality as somebody who needs to be with a man and woman at once, which makes absolutely no sense to me if you’re talking about a monogamous relationship. If I could deal with sharing myself then I probably would. I just prefer monogamy because I’m jealous easily (Jill).
Some participants began to question their sexuality in high school and found little support; however, six of them were able to find supportive people and small groups in college. These participants outline the ways in which they were able to form a bisexual identity without mainstream bisexuality movements.

I thought about my sexuality and kind of questioned everything at like 16 and really got into it once I was in college. And I met a lot of people who were going through the same process. Because my high school was tiny and nobody really talked about sexuality at all, I had no one I could really identify with. I got to college when I was 18 and just really started exploring it a lot more. And then I came to the decision about who I am, on a sexuality level, fairly recently, since I’ve been 19 (Susan).

One of my friends, who I met here [in college], I met through a couple friends who are in [an all-inclusive queer student group]; I became friends with them. A couple of them identified as bisexual, so we started talking about what that meant to them. We talked about it often. One of those people was the first person I really said it to (Amy).

Many of the participants discussed the necessity of educating others as an important part of their bisexual identity. Whether on a personal level or as a career goal, many people felt responsible to dispel myths, increase equality, and offset the consequences of having no bi community.

Q: Is there anything else you can think of to show how you do, or maybe how you don’t, discuss your sexuality?
I think when I teach a lot of time when we talk about sexual orientation I’m very much encouraging my students to be open minded it and sexuality in general. I think because we exist in a society where it’s very much about whether you’re gay or straight, I emphasize very strongly that I don’t believe in that. Sometimes it catches my undergrads off-guard (Jill).

The only way that I will generally discuss it [being bi] is if I’m working on a program. The other week we actually did one that was on LGBT Valentines because we were trying to give students a broader idea of possible sexualities. I expressed my own Valentine experience. Also, for the beginning of this year, I actually did a ‘meet your SA’ event and I
included picture of me and my girlfriend on there. I presented to the residents that I’m your SA and this is part of me (Isabelle).

In sum, participants dealt with potential difficulties like ambiguity and invisibility in various ways. Their reactions suggest the elimination of dichotomies and the validation of identities all along the spectrum of possibilities. Issues of resistance and agency are important in queer studies, especially those recently emerging with postmodern influences. A common reaction to (actual and potential) oppression included social activism. Participants resisted stigma by categorizing themselves using a positive identity and ignoring labels placed on them by others. No matter what choices they made about identity expression, themes of agency and resistance ran throughout their stories.

Consequences and Implications

Whether outings are voluntary or accidental, revealing a nonheterosexual identity has various possible consequences. What follows are the consequences of managing a bisexual identity in the workplace, as identified by the participants themselves. Participants framed these consequences around the entire process, not just around the issues of ambiguity or context in particular.

A lot of times the quote un-quote norm is if you’re a girl, you’re with a guy, if you’re a guy, you’re with a girl. So, if there’s a discussion of relationships, of someone who is not in a heterosexual relationship, is kind of put in an awkward place. They don’t know the reactions of the other people; many people will have very negative reactions. Reactions that may make people in a non-heterosexual relationship feel they aren’t liked or that something bad is going to happen to them (Emily).

You know the news thing about employers looking at MySpace? My mom freaked out and said, you need to clear all that stuff off of MySpace, and I haven’t changed a thing about my sexuality. She’s worried that because I am bisexual, I might not get a job. That worries me, but that’s why I’m
taking the precautions that I’m taking with my future internship. I keep it on the low right now until I’m for sure that it’s not going to have any bad repercussions on me. I don’t believe that should be a cause for firing someone. I’m not trying to hurt anybody; I’m just being me (Amy).

Potential future implications of a bisexual identity represent how the participants project their identity into the future. Most participants anticipate facing many of the same issues they do now, including the effects of contexts.

I think that when I have a “real job” I’m gonna be able to control what I teach and my research a little more. I’ll be more likely to have time to be an active participant in the community. I would be more comfortable, I think. Right now, it’s sort of a personal issue with my partner and negotiating that. I’ll be more comfortable in the future with how I identify myself (Jill).

Q: You already touched on this, but how comfortable do you feel expressing your bisexual identity at work?
Up to now, good. But, obviously there are still discriminatory rules still within the insurance industry. So, I don’t know how they’ll react. In [this state], there isn’t a law against firing someone for their sexual orientation, I’m a little hesitant to share that at this point.
Q: What do you think will have to happen for you to be comfortable?
If I get there and I see that they are open about it. I know that they are going to say it, but I want to see it for myself. When I see that they are ok with nonheterosexual people and they aren’t like, we’re going to fire them and get them out of here, then I’d be more willing to come out. I don’t know how they treat people in a nonhetero relationship because I haven’t asked. If I see that this is ok with them, then I’m going to go ahead and share that part of me. I would like to talk about my relationships; if they can, why can’t I? (Gigi)

Q: If it isn’t a requirement to reveal your sexuality and you were in a similar work situation, do you think you would still do so?
I think so. It’s more about, if it comes up, I’ll talk about it. But, I don’t feel like there’s a reason to just out myself. I think that would be awkward. But if it’s already a part of the discourse, then OK (Jason).
Conclusion

The final question of the interview asked participants if they had anything else to add to their interview. While this is not necessarily a scientific question, this question yielded large amounts of data. Six of the ten participants stated that they had been thinking about what they wanted to say about bisexuality since we had scheduled the interview. Eight thanked me for doing this research and five said they had looked for a place to discuss their bisexuality in the past. Many were tired of answering inappropriate, personal, or insulting questions about their lives. Their comments underscore both their agency and the obstacles present in expressing a bisexual identity at work.
DISCUSSION

This research dovetails with existing literature and extends it, especially in the areas of bisexual identity and work studies. Many of the themes that emerged parallel the findings of existing work, presenting the possibility of interview comparisons. Gender and sexuality, for example, were found to be related and intertwined at various sites. Thanks to this relationship, this work has shown how overlapping and intersecting identities can mean different treatment. Another main contribution of this work is the way it highlights the construction, negotiation, and performance of sexual identity – this idea is not simply an academic concept, it is present in the lived experience of the participants. Despite a fairly demographically similar sample, there were wide variations of experience within this homogeneous sample. This research can lead to the better understanding of bisexual identity, providing bisexual people additional acceptance and non-bisexual people education. This work shows that heteronormativity is not helpful, in fact, it limits expression for everyone, not just queer people. The implications for building better social movements towards equality are many.

Howard (2000) concludes her review of social psychological identity theories with suggestions on how to further studies of identity. Her suggestions include employing rigorous research methodologies best suited to building theory. She states that identity studies must recognize how “our everyday lives and the social structures of our larger cultural environments form a context to which our identities must respond” (388). Finally, Howard advocates for the redefinition and relocation of identities to a place that focuses on the potential for agency and social action. This research took Howard’s
suggestions as a goal and finds these suggestions reflected in the findings. Two of the six major themes mentioned by participants throughout their interviews reflect the goals suggested by Howard, specifically that identity is completely grounded in context and has multiple sites of agency. The theme of resistance and agency emerged as especially important because it cut across all other themes.

The current research suggests other implications for understandings of identities, most of which reinforces existing identity literature. The social interactionist approach, with an emphasis on identity construction and negotiation, highlights the interactional component of identity, making language and symbols, as well as the situation itself, important. As suggested by West and Zimmerman (1987), identity performances can be seen as “constructed achievements.” Bisexual people recognized the potential difficulties present in defining their sexual identity and searched for ways to respond. The participants expressed the inappropriateness of using dichotomies to express lived experience and instead highlighted how their identity occupies the gray areas between opposites.

As work regarding bisexuality has suggested, participants viewed their bisexual identity as a valid, legitimate identity, albeit much more fluid than the traditional understanding of dichotomous sexual identity. Although some people do adopt a bisexual identity in transition to a homosexual identity, participants viewed their bi identity as fairly stable. This finding suggests that stage models of sexual identity development are inadequate for explaining the experience of non-monosexual identities. As bis embrace the gray area between dichotomous sexual identities, mainstream society will continue to
gather at the poles. As social sanctions continue for expressions outside the two norms, people will negotiate their identities in particular ways. These participants revealed that there are many ways to “do” bisexuality, emphasizing the way a bisexual identity undermines these dichotomous categories of sexuality. In a society that values the expression of a singular, consistent identity as authentic, the shifting expressions of bisexual people appear problematic. This reveals that sexual identities are politicized categories; despite attempts to avoid classification, others will continue to place labels.

Through the use of identity talk, participants redefined normalcy, especially in their resistance to myths. People may exercise additional caution in workplace environments due to the possibility that they could face possible discrimination; due to the previously mentioned misunderstandings and difficulty in language this decision seems advantageous. Chrobot-Mason, et al (2001) suggest specific ways for workplaces to be more inclusive: welcome same-sex partners, do not assume everyone is hetero, do not tolerate homophobic jokes, and enforce anti-discriminatory company policies. Based on the responses of the participants in this study, these suggestions seem to offer steps in the right direction.

This work extends existing literature by identifying those less investigated aspects of identity. The stories told by participants suggested that they performed the absence of identity, where they purposively distanced themselves from a particular stigmatized identity. While it has been assumed that bis perform heterosexuality without effort, it may be more accurate to view their performance as an expression of their ambivalence to their own self-identity. In the past, some have focused on the oppression and victimhood

It is true there is no singular experience of bisexuality, as there is no identity with one common experience. However, the possibility for cross-sample comparisons does exist, which is suggestive of generalizability. Other forms of media by bisexual people (from interviews published under the Bisexual History Project to anthologies of works by bisexual people) could be explored and coded in similar ways. Using established grounded theoretical techniques would aid in the location of similar themes.

It is important to mention that the sample was self-selected; while this is not necessarily a problem, certain characteristics of this particular sample should be recognized. The people who participated had an existing bisexual identity that they named as such. This research sample could not access participants whose behavior, fantasies, or relationships only suggested bisexuality. While ten people is a small sample size, the rich data gathered from through in depth interviews yielded many important insights. And when considering this research as a first step of a grounded theoretical project, this limitation fades. The small, self-selected sample is actually ideal because the goal is to explore a homogeneous group with similar characteristics.

To further continue this research, one must identify the next steps needed to extend this work. The interview questions would remain similar; I anticipate beginning with the same initializing concepts and adding the emergent themes that were discovered. This would allow the examination and comparison of themes found in different
homogenous samples. Possibilities for samples are numerous, but there are a few that could fit ideally with this work.

Age would be the first participant characteristic for further study. Participants of the same 18-24 year age range, but were not in college, would be an important sample. While these participants would still be in the expected age range to be experiencing increased responsibility and independence from parents and caregivers, they would likely have different work experiences than their college educated peer group. They also would not have the increasing access to support networks present in a college setting. This sample would likely have limited levels of work experience and short amounts of time spent at their current positions, but could be anticipating more long-term commitment to their employer. This expectation of long-term employment could have a large impact on potential discrimination and subsequent identity negotiations. It would be interesting to see how this difference in expectation influenced the expression of bisexual identity for similar aged participants, especially when considering this sample may have more commitment to their work identity.

Samples that included people of various ages would also be informative. For example, older people are more likely to have long-term, stable work experiences. These environments can be very different than the ones experienced by part-time, temporary, or new employees because older people have had more time to establish friends, enemies, individualized work spaces, and organizational cultures. Because it is more likely that these jobs are seen as more permanent, older people are more likely to have experiences with human resources departments, various training methods, and enforcement of the
rules. They may also face increased potential consequences if they reveal a stigmatized identity. Older people would offer the opportunity to examine the change in workplace contexts over time, both throughout the personal life course and as historical responses to changes in society and public opinion. Samples of various generations would be most helpful for this aspect of the research question.

Gender, ethnicity, and location are other sample variables that could prove informational. Based on the suggestion of a gendered experience of bisexual identity, a sample of male bisexuals could reveal sites of common interest for a larger group of bi people. As suggested by the earlier analysis of gendered institution, it may also be useful to examine the different places that men occupy within organizations, and how these positions influenced the expression of their identity. For example, men are more likely to occupy higher status in the hierarchy of more traditional, permanent workplaces than women, but younger men may not be able to take advantage of the same opportunities as their older counterparts. Samples of urban participants and those with more ethnically diverse backgrounds, in addition to those of varying age and gender, could speak to the universality of experiences. How do varying group identities influence the process of managing sexual identities at work? For example, do certain cultures, geographical locations, ethnicities, or other identities discourage involvement in sexual identity social movements? These issues highlight the importance of the intersectionality of identities.

The study of these various samples would be in the interest of further expanding the potential process model of workplace bisexual identity negotiation developed by this research. Any steps toward a greater understanding of bisexual identity, how it is
managed, and how it is influenced by and negotiated within the workplace has important implications. From the general dichotomous assumptions about sexual identity to the more specific myths perpetrated about bisexual people, this research has the ability to improve equality for everyone.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW OUTLINE

Please select a pseudonym that I may use to refer to you during this interview.

How old are you?

Do you identify with a sex/gender? If so, what?

Please explain your definition of “bisexual”.

Do you currently identify as bisexual?

    When did you begin to identify yourself as bisexual to other people (approx age)?
    Who were some of the first people you spoke with about identifying as bisexual?
    How do you talk about your bisexual identity now? How do you bring it up, if you do at all? How long do you wait, how long have you known the person before you talk about it? Does it matter?
    What other sexual orientation(s) have you identified with (to others)?

What is your current occupation?

What is your most recent work experience?

Please describe the organization you work(ed) for:

    What was the main goal of the organization?
    What were the main goods or services provided?
    How big was the organization (local, multinational…)?
    What was the management structure like (co-op, employee owned, franchise/chain, family-owned…)?

    Please describe your position within the organization:
    What were some of your job duties?
What was your work environment like (sit at desk, with cubicle, on feet, inside/outside)?

How many hours did you work in a typical day?

How long were you involved with this organization?

Have you discussed your bisexual identity with people at work?

Are you “out” with customers? Co-workers? Supervisors?

Why or why not?

How do you talk about your sexuality/love life at work?

How do you “make the announcement” that you’re bisexual to the groups above? What do you say? When? Where? Which groups are first?

Do you use any symbols to express your bisexuality at work? Certain clothes, hair, buttons, pictures…

How comfortable do you feel expressing/discussing your bisexual identity at work?

Is there anything you’d like to clarify or add?