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In Between: What the Experiences of Biracial, Bisexual Women Tell Us About Identity Formation

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

IN BETWEEN: WHAT THE EXPERIENCES OF BIRACIAL, BISEXUAL WOMEN TELL
US ABOUT IDENTITY FORMATION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY

BY

MARISSA FLORO

CHICAGO, IL

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For my parents, Paula and Jeffrey

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ABSTRACT

Research on bisexual, biracial women has been scarce; identity development shows not only a gap in the research for this particular population, but shows the lack of intersectional models for approaching identity as a whole. Traditional models of queer identity have used White, gay, cisgender men as the default and coming out as the benchmark goal for identity integration. Biracial identity research, though more holistic, rarely includes intersectionality. Through feminist, queer theory and constructivist grounded theory, this project hopes to challenge traditional models of identity development, give voice and visibility to a continually underrepresented group of people, and explore the question of “What does racial identity development and sexual identity development look like for biracial, bisexual women?” Audio recorded, semi-structured Skype interviews were used to gather data from 15 eligible participants. Through multiple layers of coding, the ongoing interaction between core factors (environment, other identities and experiences, and how others treated them) and emotional meaning-making (internalization and empowerment) emerged as the core process of identity formation, directly from the narratives of the participants. Census and survey data tell us that biracial youth are the fastest growing group in the U.S. and the largest group within the LGBTQ community identifies as bisexual; as such, it is not only integral to include these people in conversations about race and sexuality, but that we challenge the binaries and dichotomies that not only keep bisexual and biracial people invisible, but perpetuate the constructions of race and limiting perceptions of sexuality that keep the status quo of oppression in place for all.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As U.S. communities continue to grow and develop, counseling psychology has attempted to keep up, providing new lenses through which to understand clients and societal forces (Welfel, 2013). As more communities of color and sexual minority groups grow and gain voice, the field has begun to diversify, not only in research, but in mission (Welfel, 2013). The move towards a multicultural perspective in which all communities are included is important, but unfortunately currently incomplete (Collins, 2000, Welfel, 2013). In attempting to explore and research communities of color and sexual minority clients, the two have continued to be researched separately and without inclusion of those who not only identify as non-heterosexual, but also non-White, respectively (Collins, 2000; Dworkin, 2002; King 2011a; Stanley, 2004). Additionally, with interracial individuals constituting the largest growing, current group of children (U.S.Census, 2010) and more youth coming out as bisexual, queer, fluid, etc. (Diamond, 2008; Farr et al., 2014) there remains a strict dichotomous adherence to the approach of identity (Diamond, 2008; Farr et al., 2014; Stanley, 2004). Both multiracial/biracial individuals and bisexual/queer individuals face prejudice and lowered mental health outcomes within their different communities, different than their monoracial or gay and lesbian counterparts (Kerr at al., 2013; King, 2011a; Koh & Ross, 2006; Persson et al., 2015). Historically, men of color and gay men have constituted the majority of research focus of minority communities, and women have had little voice, especially those who claim multiple minority identities (Collins, 2000;

Diamond, 2008; Farr et al., 2014; Julian et al., 2014). The present study hopes to begin to fill the void in current literature by not only giving voice to bisexual, multiracial women, but to explore what the processes of identity development look like for women who do not identify at either ends of dichotomous identities. The terms multiracial, mixed, and biracial will be used interchangeably throughout this dissertation as well as the interchangeable terms of bisexual and queer.

Identity Development Models

Sexual Orientation Models.

Identity development of people of color and non-heterosexual individuals has mainly continued to be approached separately, and without consideration to group differences (Cole, 2009; Collins, 2000; Dworkin, 2002; King, 2011a; Stanley, 2004). Identity development models for sexual orientation have historically been centered on mostly gay/lesbian development and White, middle class, male samples (Diamond, 2008; Farr et al., 2014; Julian et al., 2014; Stanley, 2004). The most cited models consist of developmental stages describing common experiences and situations faced by non-heterosexual individuals (Stanley, 2004). These stage models emphasize the successful completion of stages, working towards “coming out”, or the integration of their sexual minority identity and rejection of a majority culture label (Collins, 2000; Julian et al., 2014; Stanley, 2004).

Historical overreliance on stage models such as Cass’s (1979) has inaccurately represented the fluidity of sexuality and its development, not taking into account individual experience, other identities, and the fluidity of sexuality (Collins, 2000; Diamond, 2008; Farr et al., 2014; Julian et al., 2014; Stanley, 2004). By viewing identity development as a stage process, needing to successfully complete one stage before moving on to another, most stage models do

not cover the broad range of experiences of sexual minority women (Brooks et al., 2008; Collins, 2000; Julian et al., 2014). Such emphasis on the “coming out” process assumes that successful identity development must include a complete integration of identities, outness to others, and overcome any internalized homophobia (Julian et al., 2014; Stanley, 2004). Someone who may not identify as a sexual minority but engages in same-sex relationships would then not be considered fully fulfilled (Brooks et al., 2008; Julian et al., 2014). Non-heterosexual women of color, particularly, may not be able to come out due to multiple factors, including threat to safety and community belonging, therefore limiting their fulfillment and happiness according to historical stage models (Collins, 2000; Stanley, 2004).

There has been little, but important progress in researching the experiences of bisexual individuals (Bradford, 2011; Brooks et al., 2008; Diamond, 2008; Farr et al., 2014; Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1994). Bisexual identity development has been discussed as necessary by a few key researchers (Cass, 1979; Diamond, 2008), but with limited current models that attempt to describe the identity formation process (Collins, 2000). Women in particular are more likely to endorse bisexual identity and attraction than men (Diamond, 2008; Farr et al., 2014). Bisexual individuals are also more likely to experience discrimination by both heterosexual and homosexual communities and have difficulty with self-disclosure, making them more vulnerable to deficit mental health outcomes such as substance use, eating disorders, depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and risky sexual behavior (Bradford, 2011; Brooks et al., 2008; Kerr et al., 2013; Koh & Ross, 2006; Persson et al., 2015). The most cited model for bisexual identity development was constructed by Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor (1994). This model has its limitations by assuming linear progression, theoretical foundation in lesbian and gay formation, and lack of context of other cultural factors (Brooks et al., 2008).

Other alternative approaches to sexuality have emerged as more comprehensive and inclusive of the identity process (Collins, 2000; Diamond, 2008; Farr et al., 2014; Julian et al., 2014; Stanley, 2004). Savin-Williams (2005) utilized the differential developmental trajectories approach, which asserts that sexual development is a valid context for adolescence, regardless of sexual orientation. This approach creates a framework for experience versus life stages and completion (Julian et al., 2014). Brookes, Inman, Malouf, Klinger, and Kaduvettoor (2008) approached bisexual identity in view of cultural and contextual factors, noting that bisexual individuals were affected by the idea of disclosure of their bisexuality, desire for a bisexual community, the multiple intersections of development, and the navigation of these multiple identities. Farr, Diamond, and Boker (2014) utilized a dynamical systems approach to same-sex sexuality in women due to its capacity to reflect the fluidity of sexuality, reconciling both change and stability. Their analysis showed that women maintain a “core” sexual identity orientation despite variability in label and day-to-day fluctuation, displaying stability as well as allowing for fluidity over time and context (Farr et al., 2014). Julian, Duys, and Wood’s (2014) qualitative study framed women’s sexual identity development not as a stage process, but as a phenomenological combination of experiences influenced by social cultural factors and interpersonal relationships.

An important note, since female sexuality has shown to be fluid and have more plasticity than previously thought (Diamond, 2008; Farr et al., 2014), the term “bisexual” has not only changed meanings in current political and community climates, but many women who may have attraction to both men and women may label themselves differently and beyond “bisexual” This is important to keep in mind, as like with the multitude of identities asserted by biracial people (which will be discussed next), women who may not consider themselves strictly gay or straight

may have very different experiences, behaviors, and labels that could be externally labeled as “bisexual.”

Racial Identity Models.

Biracial identity development, similar to the barriers of literature on bisexual development, has historically been embedded within monoracial identity development, assuming same experiences and ignoring the specific experiences biracial people encounter (Collins, 2000; King, 2011a; Poston, 1990; Root, 1998; Stanley, 2004). Current literature on biracial identity has been rooted in the work with Black/White mixed individuals focused on African American racial identity or deficit models of development (Collins, 2000). Biracial identity development was born out of very rigid ideas of race and identity (Collins, 2000; Root, 1998). Similar to the dichotomy of non-heterosexual identity development models, most racial identity models are not only focused on monoracial identity, but determine integration and rejection of majority culture as important to fulfillment (Collins, 2000; Poston, 1990). For biracial or multiracial individuals who have White ancestry, rejection of majority culture would be rejecting their own culture (Collins, 2000; Poston, 1990). Complete immersion into their minority culture would be ignoring this part of their heritage as well as assuming that their minority culture would completely accept them (Poston, 1990; Root, 1998).

There are a few biracial identity models of note, such as Poston’s (1990) model of biracial identity development (Jacobs, 1992; Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990; Root, 1998). Poston’s 1990 five stage model is most used in literature and focuses on the movement through the following stages: 1. Having no group affiliation, 2. feeling pressure to choose a group to identify with and belong to, 3. feeling confusion, guilt, or self-hatred for choosing one group that may reject them or imply a rejection of one parent, 4. appreciating and

acknowledging their multiple communities of belonging, and 5. developing an integrated identity. There are of course, drawbacks to this model. Like with the shortcomings of bisexual literature, Poston's (1990) model asserts that integrated (or out identity) is ideal and that individuals who identify as any other way are not fulfilled or healthy when biracial people may identify more with one culture, eschew categorization all together, or shift between various self-identities and labels (Rockquemore, 2002). There is also an underlying assumption that all mixed race people go through the process of identity in the same way and that these stages are universal. Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) suggest that there are multiple factors that may affect a person's development of biracial identity through their life. Additionally, they attest that though there might be commonalities in development that every mixed race person comes to their own identity in their own process. Current biracial identity development also focuses on individuals who are White and a minority status, versus having two or more minority identities, ignoring the process of navigating two or more very different minority cultures as a biracial person.

More recent and relevant research has begun to approach biracial identity process as not a single, unidimensional process. Rockquemore's (2002) qualitative study looked at the gendered process of racial identity for Black/White biracial women. Rockquemore's (2002) discussion of the differences of a biracial experience as a woman was informed by issues within the Black community and its interactions with White majority culture (colorism, marriage market issues, and more Black men interracial dating). This study highlighted the differences experienced by biracial people not only through gender, but through which communities they belong to or look most like.

Seeing the similarities in experiences of both bisexual and biracial individuals, Collins (2000) created an identity model for bisexual or biracial individuals in recognizing that both

bisexual and biracial identities are “fluid, multidimensional, personalize social constructions that reflect the individual’s context and sociocultural position” that are produced through discourse between minority and majority culture (p. 231). Collins’ (2000) model has four stages: 1. Questioning/confusion, 2. Refusal/suppression, 3. Infusion/exploration, and 4. Resolution/acceptance. This model offers a broader range of what can provide fulfillment to mixed or bisexual individuals, allowing for a third category of identity rather than just an interaction between two communities. However, despite acknowledging the limitations of previous models, this model does not explore the complexities of those who hold multiple minority statuses still, let alone both bisexual and biracial.

Multidimensional Models of Identity.

Two models emerged as being aware of the influences of multiple identities during development (Root, 1998; Jones & McEwen, 2000). Root’s (1998) well-known ecological model addresses what she calls inherited influences (social factors experienced in the home on a daily basis, p. 238) and personality traits within the “macrolenses of gender, class, and regional history history of race” (p. 238). This ecological model was born out of qualitative work with biracial siblings, arriving at the conclusion that not only so multiracial people develop their racial identities in different ways from each other, but that other identities are part of this development (Root, 1998). Additionally, Root (1998) discussed four main experiences expressed by participants that affected their multiracial development: “hazing, family dysfunction, increased racial integration in the structure of society, and other salient identities” (p. 242). This multidimensional, experience focused model is an outlier in the racial identity literature, in many ways. Root’s (1998) model acknowledges and understands that multiraciality development is a complicated and unique process, affected by many things in one’s life. The model also does not

push for stages or for any specific landmark of racial identity development and acknowledges the place for other identities in one's multiracial identity development.

Jones and McEwen (2000) created a somewhat similar multidimensional model of identity, though not specifically focused on biracial or multiracial individuals. Drawn from qualitative interviews with women with a range of identities, the model, like Root's (1998), sees identity development as a product of both personality traits and outside influences. Jones and McEwen's (2000) model sees the personality (or sense of self) as core to individuals, with various identities creating circular orbits around the core, intersecting with each other. Their model includes a sense of difference of salience for each of these identities over time, accounting for fluidity and change over the lifespan (Jones & McEwen, 2000). An additional element was added (Abes et al. 2007) to include a kind of filter created of contextual factors (peers, family, norms, stereotypes, sociopolitical conditions) that allowed for people to also make specific meanings out of their sense of self and identities at any point in their development. This model goes beyond Root's 1998 ecological model and allows for more fluidity and meaning-making of identities to the individual not only over time, but in response to a variety of contextual factors.

These models, though an excellent start to seeing individuals holistically, have their limits. Root's (1998) model, though multidimensional, does not discuss sexual orientation explicitly. Abes et al. (2007) does take into account different types of identities, their intersections, and dynamic salience, but was born out of a small sample of lesbian women, two of which identified as biracial. Even within multidimensional literature, there seems there is still a paucity of those who identify as biracial and bisexual!

Intersectionality Framework

In approaching the issues of intersections of racial and sexual identity, it is imperative to describe the intersectional framework necessary to this project and the understanding of personal narrative. Born out of Black feminist scholarship, intersectionality has become an integral and integrated lens in which to view individual identity not hierarchically, as historically researched, but simultaneously (Abes et al., 2007; Bilge, 2010). An intersectionality paradigm allows for the analysis of the systems of oppression that inform socially constructed identities and how they interconnect, also termed ‘matrix of domination’ (Collins, 2000; Bilge, 2010). By approaching individuals as wholes consisting of multiple identities and intersections, versus separate or additive parts, individuals are given the opportunity to be seen as whole, integrated individuals with varying life experiences of oppression (Bowleg, 2008; Bilge, 2010). For women who identify as bisexual and multiracial, the interlocking experiences of racist, sexist, and homophobic/biphobic oppression create specific narratives that must be heard and given voice.

Intersectionality also plays a role in acknowledging who is part of a group, how inequality comes into play, and what are the similarities between categories (Cole, 2009). Following these questions, although this study focuses on specific identity development, discussion of other identities will be discussed and encouraged. Intersectional research also aims to analyze the macrosociological levels of systemic oppression and inequality that inform individual experiences (Bilge, 2010). Although participants’ responses cannot be predicted, mentions of inequality will be explored and recorded to shed light on the systemic issues at play.

With intersectionality, also comes postmodern/post-structuralist feminism which is important to discuss here as a way in which to view this project and current research (Bilge, 2010). In understanding the postmodern view that differences between social categories and

groups should be stressed and not glossed over, it is imperative to view these within-group differences and inter-group differences together (Abes et al., 2007). This project consequently aims to distinguish the unique experiences of each participants as well as the disparities perceived and lived between participants' different identities through carefully constructed questions, analysis, and discussion informed by intersectional and postmodern consideration.

Purpose

In seeing the similarities between the bisexual and biracial identities as Collins (2000) did, and knowing that women experience mixedness and bisexuality different than male counterparts (Diamond, 2008; Rockquemore, 2002), it is important to explore the dynamics of these multiple identity processes for women (Brooks et al., 2008). Bisexual women in general face increased risk for certain mental health outcomes and current research on non-heterosexual women of color show lower levels of mental health and well-being than their White, sexual minority, female counterparts or their Black, sexual minority, male counterparts (Balsam et al., 2015; Calabrese et al., 2015). These very real consequences of minority stress (Calabrese et al., 2015) and discrimination (Persson et al. 2015) for bisexual women of color necessitate understanding the social forces and processes that bisexual, biracial women face systemically and individually, which in turn inform identity.

The lack of research on biracial women who identify as bisexual highlights their continued systemic invisibility and mainstream society's focus on unidimensional experiences of identity. Since there has yet to be much research linking these two identities together as a specific narrative for women, this hopes to begin a conversation about the ways in which we view identity formation for those women who hold multiple identities, outside of commonly dichotomous categories. This hopes to answer the overarching question of "what does racial

identity development and sexual identity development look like for mixed, bisexual women?"

In viewing this question from an intersectional and postmodern standpoint, participant narratives will shed light on this broad topic by tapping into key questions of concern: what do these two identities look like for, how does society see, do these identities shift, do setting affect identities, and how does being a woman interact with them?

Grounded Theory

In aligning with intersectional and feminist research ideals, qualitative methods have been shown to provide an opportunity for participants to describe their experiences in their own words, a way to measure and create concepts from a group itself, and, for the purpose of this specific study, a "rich description of the multiracial experience" (p. 232, Collins, 2000).

Grounded theory is a qualitative method that has been used to allow for concepts and themes to emerge from participants' own narratives, rather than from the researcher's personal opinions, motives, or hypotheses (Merriam, 2009). Thus, a theory may be developed from these emergent themes. Additionally, grounded theory focuses building theory from every day world situations and focuses questions on process, like the experiences and reflections on identity.

To honor both intersectional and grounded theory ideals, great care and consideration will be taken in the construction of the research and survey questions so as to not force participants to compartmentalize their experiences or assume any processes for the sake of the current study. In following the needs for future research described by multiple researchers (Collins, 2000; Brooks et al., 2008; Farr et al., 2014; Julian et al., 2014; Stanley, 2004), great care will be taken to better identify societal and cultural factors at work in the process of self-identification for mixed, biracial women. Additionally, as the primary investigator holds both a biracial and fluid sexual identity as a cisgender woman, the primary investigator will not only

reflect on her own experiences in order to acknowledge her own biases, but employ an outside auditor who can provide further analysis and objectivity to the research questions at hand.

CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Biracial Identity Development

Classic Biracial Models.

In order to understand the different ways in which identity development has been portrayed for biracial, bisexual women, it is important to review both the classic literature that separated bisexual and biracial identity into different formation processes, as well as current literature that is beginning to conceptualize identity development as intersectional.

Traditional biracial identity formation models followed monoracial identity models that are stage-like, linear, and focused on integration of identity (Root, 2000; Stanley, 2004); many models have been created, as alluded to in chapter one (Jacobs, 1992; Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990). Poston's (1990) model continues to be the most referenced amongst these models. His five-stage model begins with the personal identity stage where a biracial person does not align with any group and sees themselves as separate from any such group. In the second stage, the mixed race person is pressured by personal, environmental, and social factors to identify with a certain group. Next in the enmeshment or denial stage, confusion, guilt, and/or self-hatred may begin to emerge if the individual feels rejected from their chosen group or potentially disloyalty to a parent. In the appreciation stage, the mixed race individual attempts to explore both of their racial backgrounds in an attempt to embrace their mixed heritages. The final fifth stage, aptly titled integration, the mixed race person accepts being biracial. This model implies that all mixed race people experience the same process and that an

“integrated” biracial identity is ideal, further implying that those who do not identify in this way have an unhealthy racial identity.

Jacobs (1992) reported the findings of a study with biracial Black/White children are assigned doll-play tasks. These dolls had a range of skin and hair, light to dark skin, and size to represent different ages (some dolls also had Asian features to give children the opportunity to display acknowledgement of race outside of the Black and White racial dichotomy). Participants were asked to pick dolls that looked like themselves, their families, whom they would prefer to play with, and whom they would like to look like when they were older. The participants were then interviewed to describe their choices for each task. Building upon this initial study with Black/White biracial children and doll-play, Jacobs (1992) proposed a three-stage biracial identity development model. In the pre-color constancy first stage, children chose dolls that were close to their own skin color but made a range of choices in selecting dolls that resembled their family members, or in Jacobs’s (1992) words, “color constancy has not been attained, so color can be explored with no firm classification into social groups by race” (p. 200). The second stage, post-color constancy, begins roughly at 4.5 years old when children grasps the meaning of color, the fact that skin color is inflexible across the lifespan, and cultivate ambivalence around their racial identity. This ambivalence, Jacobs (1992) described, is imperative for children to navigate conflicting pieces of identity and cultivate a better sense of self. This ambivalence was displayed when children chose White dolls over Black dolls, suggesting an acknowledgment of social prejudice based on skin color. The final stage, biracial identity, between 8 and 12 years old, is defined by the mixed child understanding that race is determined by parentage and not skin color, allowing themselves to identify as biracial because of their parents and not their skin.

Kich (1992) formulated a three-stage biracial identity development model as well, based

on initial work as well. Building upon fifteen semi-structured interviews that explored the fifteen White/Asian participants' navigation of their sense of self and biracial identity, Kich (1992) argued that biracial individuals navigate "transitions from a questionable, sometimes devalued sense of self to one where an interracial self-conception is highly valued and secure" (p. 305). From 3 to 10 years old in the initial stage, mixed people begin to acknowledge being both Asian and White, though not wholly each race either, creating conflict between their self-image and others' perceptions. This conflict spurs individuals towards the second stage, spanning from 8 years old through adolescence into young adulthood, and focusing on the fight for acceptance. As these adolescents begin to create relationships and are asked about their heritage by others, their awareness of their own difference heightens. The final stage is defined by an assertion of a biracial identity and stable self-acceptance. Kich (1992) notes that this self-acceptance must be self-defined, not impacted by the definitions of others, and created from the interaction between social and individual definitions of race and group belonging.

Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) hypothesized a six-stage model of biracial identity development that spans from preschool to adulthood. Initially, between three and five years old, children begin to become aware of phenotypical differences between family members such as skin color, facial feature shape, hair type and begin to cultivate awareness of race. Parents' sensitivity and reactions could potentially impact their biracial children's racial awareness. Additionally, environmental contributors like community homogeneity or diversity may also impact the biracial child's sense of being part of or outside a racial group. In the second stage, biracial children begin attending school with preconceived ideas about group norms and attributes. Others' treatment of biracial children (such as the question, "What are you?") prompt them to then respond with words and terms they have heard or been taught by their parents.

Additionally, the diversity of the children's school environment and accessible role models could also impact the terms that children use to describe themselves. Certain events or circumstances in preadolescence, like exposure to racism, could promote further acknowledgment of how physical characteristics are attributed to certain racial groups. According to Kerwin and Ponterrotto (1995), youth then begin to describe groups by social categories instead of phenotypical characteristics, further identifying their parents with distinct racial communities instead of physical characteristics. As biracial children enter into adolescence, they then face typical developmental adversities as well as pressures from society. As teenagers pursue group membership and form their identity, pressures may also mount for the biracial youth to identify with one racial group, forcing the decision to negate or strengthen connections with one parent and their racial heritage. This pressure could be compounded by the U.S. social pressures of aligning with the parent of color, mediated by extracurricular group participation like teams or clubs, or challenged by interracial dating as they begin to date. In entering young adulthood, biracial youth potentially continue to reject one racial background and embrace the other. With maturation, mixed youth may become more secure in their identity and therefore less susceptible to others' expectations of how they should identify and more secure in being mixed race. Exploration and integration of their racial identity continue to occur throughout adulthood, underlining the lifelong process of being able to understand various communities and function well in different circumstances.

Together, these early models of biracial identity development provide an initial step towards understanding identity development. However, these models are stage-like and linear, leaving little room for flexibility and dynamism across the life span for biracial individuals. Additionally, these models focus on "integration" as the final stage, which values a certain type

of self-perception over others; indeed, if “integration” and assertion of biracial identity were ideal, those who identify any other way (e.g. Black, Asian, White, no racial labels, etc.) would not be considered as reaching self-acceptance or in the final stages of these models. Finally, these models also do not take into account the importance and impact of other identities, especially important for the biracial, bisexual, female population at hand.

Current Biracial Models.

Born out of research with biracial siblings, Root’s (1998) ecological model of racial identity development proposes a much more holistic approach to identity development than classic stage models. Root (1998) stated that multiple factors outside of a linear stage model affect how mixed race individuals identify themselves. Additional factors like generation, gender, regional history, personality characteristics, etc., contribute to a mixed race person makes sense of their experiences, copes with adversity, and forms their racial identity. Above and beyond linear processes, Root (1998) proposed that mixed race identity can be flexible over time, circumstantial, simultaneous, and could or could not overlap with how others label them. Additionally, this ecological model takes into account both micro and macro lenses, including gender, regional history of racial conflict, and social class as the macro lenses. These lenses “filter the meaning of situations and experiences to which people are exposed” (p. 238). The micro lenses such as social environments where one interacts with others, inherited factors that one is born into, and personality characteristics can contribute how mixed race people react or make decisions.

Renn (2000) applied an ecological lens as well to a sample of 24 mixed college students, finding the two emergent themes of the “notion of space and the impact of peer culture” (pg. 405). The data showed that public space was influential upon mixed students’ internal

construction of their biracial identity (Renn, 2000). The creation of a space for mixed students was contingent upon the desire for such a space and students' willingness to identify as mixed. In consequential work, Renn (2004) proposed an ecology of student development model, consisting of four overlapping contextual systems. Based off of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) human ecology model, Renn discussed various systems and their relevance to mixed students. In short, the microsystem is the basic environment for mixed college students, including academic spaces. Peer culture and various microsystems create the mesosystem. The exosystem consists of different settings that could include the individual, or could not. Finally, the macrosystem is the overarching sociocultural climate that influences the mixed college student in broader ways (King, 2011b; Renn, 2004).

In attempting to integrate multiple identities together in conceptualizing identity development, Rockquemore (2002) utilized interviews with 12 Black/White women and 4 Black/White men to explore how gender impacts the process of biracial identity construction. Various themes emerged specifically for the experiences of Black/White individuals. Underneath the theme of racialized negotiation with Black women, female participants discussed negative interactions with Black women due to physical appearances (mainly skin color but also hair texture, body shape, facial features) and consequential perceptions of the participants (Rockquemore, 2002). These negative experiences were discussed in relation to the scarcity of Black male partners and participants' self-evaluation of their attractiveness in relation to their own mixedness and other biracial women, causing some female participants to internalize negative messages about Blackness (Rockquemore, 2002). The male participants, on the other hand, did not echo these negative experiences with Black women, but felt generally accepted and even more desirable (Rockquemore, 2002). The second broad theme that emerged was racial

socialization by parents, specifically for those female participants who were raised by a White single parent; female participants had received racialized messages about their Black fathers from their White mothers (Rockquemore, 2002). Male participants, on the other hand, had not generalized their White mother's messages about their fathers to all Black men, perhaps due to their shared gender with their Black father (Rockquemore, 2002). This model of course is extremely illuminating for the identity development of Black/White individuals, but does not include other identities and is not applicable to other mixed race individuals.

Bisexual Identity Development

Classic Bisexual Models.

Like classic biracial models, early bisexual identity development was conceptualized as stage-like processes. Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor (1994) proposed the first model specifically for bisexual identity development. The model consists of four stages tracking individual's journeys from heterosexuality to bisexuality and emerged from interviews with 49 men and 44 bisexual women. The initial stage, initial confusion, describes participants confusion at their own same-sex attractions and have difficulty acknowledging these feelings (Weinberg et al., 1994). Next, individuals find and apply the label, perhaps having positive experiences with both men and women while also being confronted with negative experiences of stereotypes and attitudes towards bisexuality (Weinberg et al., 1994). Weinberg et al.'s (1994) third stage describes individuals as they setting into their bisexual identity, accepting their feelings and becoming more comfortable with their sexuality, commonly with the help of support. In the fourth and final stage of Weinberg et al.'s (1994) model, bisexual individuals continue to experience intermittent confusion due to lack of social validation, representations, and community.

In contrast, Bradford's (1997) model proposed a four-stage model from homosexuality to bisexuality based on interviews with 10 men and 10 bisexual women. The four stages are titled as follows, questioning reality and struggling with doubt, searching for meaning and inventing identity, maintaining identity and encountering invisibility and isolation, and transforming adversity through social action (Bradford, 1997). Both the models proposed by Weinberg et al. (1994) and Bradford's (1997) models ignored environmental influences on development and did not integrate race or other identities into this process (King, 2011b).

Interestingly, Collins (2000) proposed a bisexual or biracial identity model (though unfortunately, not a model for people who identify as both biracial and bisexual) based off of the interviews of fifteen Japanese American mixed individuals. This model followed traditional linear format with four stages. Initially, biracial or bisexual people are confused as others begin to ask questions or they begin to feel same-sex attraction (Collins, 2000). Next, biracial or bisexual people suppress or refuse identity pieces, taking the labels and words that others use to describe them (Collins, 2000). The third stage consists of people immersing themselves in their minority communities in order to assist in their confusion about choosing one identity. Collins's (2000) final stage asserts that biracial or bisexual people then reach a stage of resolution and acceptance where they are freed from the stereotypes, self-devaluation, and confusion of the previous stages.

Current Bisexual Models.

Along the lines of more current, flexible and holistic approaches that have surfaced in biracial research, bisexual development research has also expanded. Savin-Williams (2005) proposed a framework instead of a theory using a differential developmental trajectories approach, which asserts that sexual identity development is a valid context for adolescence,

despite one's sexual orientation. In direct opposition to the idea of paring life down into stages, four main ideas emerged through the differential developmental trajectories approach. The first idea focuses on the idea that non-heterosexual women have comparable development to other women. The second idea recognizes that the difference in psychological development for non-heterosexual women is due to stigma and prejudice around same-sex desire and attraction. The third idea acknowledges that despite shared experiences of prejudice, non-heterosexual women have a range of experiences. The fourth idea asserted that nonspecific descriptions and group averages may not be relevant when applied to an individual (Savin-Williams, 2005).

In critiquing the classic stage model of approaching female sexuality and wanting to take into account “contextual factors such as homophobia, discrimination, and oppression” (pg. 191), Julian et al. (2014) utilized a phenomenological study with ten female participants who identified as non-heterosexual to explore identity formation (racial demographics not reported). Four themes emerged from the data. First, feeling different from others was a common theme for the majority of participants, above and beyond age, race or cultural background. Second, the lack of information, resources, or self-awareness pervaded the interview data, with participants reporting difficulty in navigating their sexual identity and seeking out knowledge in response. The third theme was how these female participants placed themselves in the context of culture because of their gender. Lastly, contextual relationships with others emerged as an important theme, drawing attention to the impact of the perceptions of others and the desire for group acceptance.

In the same vein of recognizing that female sexuality may not be the same as male sexuality, and seeing non-heterosexual women as moving through similar identity formations (regardless of labels of “lesbian”, “bisexual”, etc.”), there has been a shift in thinking about

female sexuality (Dworkin, 2002; Farr, Diamond & Boker, 2014; Savin-Williams, 2005).

Moving away from a homosexual and heterosexual dichotomy lens that also believes “sexual orientation is innate, biologically driven, and stable over time” (pg. 1477), Farr, Diamond & Boker (2014) acknowledged that female sexuality “unfolds through multiple developmental pathways, has multiple manifestations, and may have multiple determinants” (pg. 1477). Using a dynamical systems perspective with a sample of 33 mostly White and well-educated non-heterosexual women, Farr, Diamond & Boker (2014) found that bisexual women display a “core bisexual” sexual orientation regardless of any particular label and experience variability in attraction. Their results also highlighted that though lesbian women also had a “core lesbian” orientation, that all women experiences changes and variability in same-sex attractions, though not necessarily behaviors.

These more current models, though recognizing the ideas of fluidity and contextual factors and moving away from the emphasis placed on coming out and stage-like development, still do not take into account the effects of race and other identities on development (Brooks, 2008; Dworkin, 2002; Stanley, 2004). As Brooks et al (2008) discussed, most research on non-heterosexual women has largely used White samples, ignoring the unique connections between multiple oppressions that exist for women of color who are also non-heterosexual. Brooks et al (2008) used CQR methodology to analyze the semi-structured interviews of fourteen bisexual women of color, including three biracial/multiracial participants. From these interviews, the importance of contributing factors and multiple identities emerged. The important factors emerging from the data were identified as internal self-concept, community membership, sexual identity management, partner relationship issues, and family and social reactions. Under the

multiple identities category, participants discussed the challenges in negotiating these multiple identities and strategies in negotiating these identities.

Current Intersectionality Research

Biracial/Bisexual Women Research.

There have been a few notable researchers who have looked at the specific intersection of biracial and bisexual identity for women, though not specifically on what identity formation looks like for this population (Dworkin, 2002; Israel, 2008; Stanley, 2004; Thompson, 2000). Stanley (2004) discussed the unique challenges and issues faced by biracial lesbian and bisexual women. Stanley (2004) identified that family, friends, and racial and sexual communities affect biracial sexual minority women based on their treatment and support, acknowledging that prejudice may come from both monoracial groups as well as heterosexual and queer groups. Stanley (2004) also discussed the issue of visibility and invisibility, the difficulty in navigating disclosure, and the skills gained in having to negotiate multiple identities in multiple communities. Stanley (2004) also linked this to the importance of labeled identities and status for biracial sexual minority women and how passing as members of majority racial or sexual groups has both negative and positive elements. Stanley (2004) then provides suggestions for clinician working with this population, focusing on the importance of understanding and appreciating individual identities but also the client holistically.

In seeing the lack of research focused on biracial, bisexual, bicultural women, Dworkin (2002) also lamented the assumptions made by both classic racial and sexual identity models. Dworkin (2002) specifically mentions the additional dimensions of religion, age differences, politics, and feminism in the role of identity formation, saying how each category also impacts how women see, label, and disclose their own identities. She also discussed the idea that while

multiple oppressions may cause multiple stresses for biracial, bisexual women, multiple identities may also cultivate multiple strengths. These elements emerged from interviews with mixed race women and some White women, though demographics and specific sample number of interviews were not reported.

Two researchers discussed this specific intersection in regards to their own lives (Israel, 2008; Thompson, 2000). Thompson (2000) discussed the confusion present when confronted with limited racial options on forms despite being “very aware that I was both Chinese and white” (pg. 172). Echoing the findings of Dworkin (2002), Thompson (2000) discussed the impact of feminism on her identity and world view and how her multiple identities helped inform each other and provide strengths in responding to others’ prejudicial questions about her identities. Thompson (2000) described the necessity for community for bisexual, biracial women, who often find themselves marginalized in multiple spaces. Israel’s (2008) personal narrative has more of a story-telling dimension, weaving in her own sense of self with the treatment of others to construct her biracial and bisexual identity. Israel (2008), much like Thompson (2000), discusses the impact and importance of feminism, the desire for and lack of community, and the ongoing process of navigating spaces and internal construction of identity. Both Thompson (2000) and Israel (2008), mixed Asian/White bisexual cisgender women, discuss how their identities intersect and inform each other and reflect on how their identities call for the challenge of binaries and strict social categories.

Only one researcher has looked at the specific identity development process for biracial, bisexual women (King, 2011a, 2011b, 2013). By applying Renn’s (2003) ecological model to understanding the identity development of six multiracial/biracial, bisexual college students, King (2011a) discussed three major emergent themes. King (2011a) discussed how the

participants displayed “trying on” identities specifically thanks to the college context, with the “influences of family, friends/peers, and school determin[ing] when and how the participants tried on these identities” (pg. 446). King (2011a) named the second theme as “negotiating self”, where participants discussed navigating and negotiating their identities in a physical, emotional, or psychological context and the consequential struggles therein. The final theme, “finding fit”, described how participants found a sense of belonging in college that was not present in their previous environments King (2011a).

In response to the aforementioned Collins’s (2000) biracial-bisexual identity developmental model, King (2011b) utilized the same sample as the previous study (King, 2011a) to determine if Collins’s (2000) model could be used for female participants who identified as both biracial and bisexual. King (2011b) found that while the tenets of Collins’s (2000) study, “self-definition, personal construction of identity and positive identity” (pg. 106), was supported by data, the model itself was not. The first phase of questioning and confusion was supported to some degree, though most participants had navigated through multiple challenges and had already resolved their identities in ways that were both positive and acceptable (King, 2011b). For the second phase of refusal and suppression of Collins’s (2000) model, the majority of participants did not take on the labels prescribed to them by other, as Collins (2000) had predicted, but were using labels that fit how they viewed themselves at that time. For the third phase of infusion and exploration (Collins, 2000), participants did not attempt to blend in with their environments or over-identify with their minority heritages providing no support for this phase either (King, 2011b). In terms of Collins’s (2000) fourth and final phase of resolution and acceptance, participants did not completely shed the confusion, stereotypes, and

self-devaluation that were idealistically described, but rather participants expressed self-acceptance and belief that their identities would continue to evolve and change (King, 2011b).

Since Collins's (2000) model did not fit the data, King (2011b) proposed four elements to consider when conceptualizing identity development for biracial, bisexual women. First, King (2011b) discussed how participants expressed confusion about their identities early on and that further awareness was propelled forward by the messages from other people and settings. Next, King (2011b) discussed how participants explored and asked questions about identity dependent upon the openness of their environment, communities, and the people around them. Transitioning to safety was the next element, and as King (2011b) discussed, college provided participants opportunities for "safety and space for a more comprehensive exploration of both racial and sexual identities" (pg. 114). The final element consisted of participants' acceptance of their identities and acknowledgment that these identities might still continue to change and evolve (King, 2011b).

In a third study, using the same sample as previous studies (2011a, 2011b), King (2013) analyzed the mixed messages that six multiracial/biracial, bisexual college students discussed from a contextual theoretical framework. Split into three categories of family, friends/peers, and school, King (2013) described the different messages that participants received and their consequential impact on identity development. As King (2013) described, "family upbringing played an integral part in how the participants viewed themselves growing up" (pg. 313). Participants described how they heard mixed messages about race as well as sexuality, or none at all, which then affected their own perspectives on their identities later in life. These participants' narratives underlined the positive impact of visibility of non-heterosexual people, positive open-mindedness of guardians, and clear conversations in families about race (King, 2013).

The impact of friends and peers was large, especially in regards to sexual identity development; support and acceptance, as well as ridicule and exclusion, from peers had huge effects on the participants' navigation and development of their own identities (King, 2013). The final category of school consisted of participants describing how the school setting was influential in how and when they explored their racial and sexual identities, dependent upon the climate, politics, and demographics of the school.

King's (2011a, 2011b, 2013) work, as the only researcher to explore the experiences of biracial and bisexual women, still has its limitations. First, all three articles (King, 2011a, 2011b, 2013) seemed to be based off of the same six participants, judging by the reported demographic information. This is a small sample, especially considering the three separate studies focusing on development, messages, and environmental influences that have emerged from it. Further replication and additional samples are needed in order to validate the various assertions of King's (2011a, 2011b, 2013) work. Second, this sample also is specifically limited to individuals currently in college, a very specific developmental age and an experience that not all biracial, bisexual women may encounter. Third, though this sample consisted of self-identified women, issues of gender were not discussed and King (2011a, 2011b, 2013) herself acknowledged this. King (2011a, 2011b, 2013) also stated that other identities (religion, social class, etc.) were not discussed and "may have offered an even deeper insight into the participants' stories" (2011a, pg. 115). Alas, even in acknowledging the importance of intersections for biracial and bisexual women, King's (2011a, 2011b, 2013) work did not address those outside of sexual orientation and race!

Intersectional Models of Identity Development.

In response to one-dimensional models of identity development, a few researchers have

begun to recognize the multiple, intersecting identities (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Reynolds & Pope, 1991). Though these models were not born specifically out of biracial and bisexual samples, they provide a multidimensional approach to identity development.

Reynolds and Pope (1991) proposed the Multidimensional Identity Model, allowing for dynamic decisions for understanding oneself under four broad options. Some individual may decide to identify with only one aspect of their identity Reynolds & Pope (1991). This can be done passively by allowing society or one's specific community or family group to determine which aspect this should be or actively, by making a "conscious choice of self-identification" (pg. 178). Another option for individuals is to embrace all aspects of themselves by living and moving through separate and sometimes disconnected worlds, potentially only showing one identity in one community and another identity in a different corresponding community (Reynolds and Pope, 1991). The final option is for people with multiple identities to create a new group for themselves, recognizing that their specific intersection is a specific experience independent of each individual identity, and not feeling the need to parse or dichotomize their own identities (Reynolds and Pope, 1991).

Jones and McEwen's (2000) suggested model was complex and included both internal and external factors create the self. The model, born out of interviews with ten individuals with various demographics, describes the evolving creation of identity and the impact of dynamic contexts on the salience of multiple identities at one time including race, sexual identity, culture, and social class (Jones & McEwen, 2000). These intersecting identities orbit a core sense of self, consisting of personal attributes, qualities, and characteristics (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Surrounding this atom-like structure are various contexts such as family, sociocultural elements,

and experiences, affecting each identity dimension dynamically (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

Abes et al.(2007) built upon the work of Jones and McEwen (2000), adding a meaning-making filter to the model. This new model (Abes et al., 2007) “portrays in two dimensions the interactive nature of the relationships among components of the identity construction process: context, meaning making, and identity perceptions” (Abes et al., 2007). This additional meaning-making filter provides a deeper depiction of how students perceive their identities and what the relationships between these identities look like (Abes et al., 2007).

Summary

Classic models of biracial and bisexual identity development are typically one-dimensional, stage-like and linear, focused on an ideal stage of either coming out or integration, and lack room for fluidity. For biracial, bisexual women, these models are ill equipped to describe their lived experiences. There have been attempts at approaching biracial and bisexual identity with more inclusivity and fluidity, by beginning to look at the impact of gender, seeing sexuality as more fluid, and recognizing the similarity between biracial and bisexual experiences. There only exists one researcher’s body of work that attempts to see the development of these identities in women together; however, her work did not explore any identities outside of sex and race and used a very limited sample. Other researchers have begun to approach college student identity with a holistic nature, recognizing that not only do identities overlap, intersect, and inform one another, but that multiple contexts, meaning-making factors, and factors contribute to how people see their own identities. However, these approaches solely focus on individuals currently in college and lack nuance or discussion of sexual orientation outside of lesbian or heterosexual participants, continuing to perpetuate bi-invisibility. The present study hopes to weave these bodies of work together by exploring how biracial, bisexual women see their own

identity development and how they make sense of it while addressing the aforesaid limitations by expanding sample demographics, including questions about multiple identities.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This chapter will describe the various methods utilized for this project. Participant recruitment and demographics is reported. Data collection and analysis procedures will be described. Finally, the researcher will discuss the importance for her personal disclosure of identities.

Participants

Participants who identify as women, whether that be cisgender, transgender, or otherwise (femme, genderqueer, etc.), were included as long as they also identify themselves as women. Though transwomen and cisgender women experience gender in different ways, the experiences of being, and being treated as, a woman is core to this study's purpose. Participants who identify themselves as biracial, multiracial, interracial, mixed, etc. were included in the project. Participants who identify as multiethnic within the same race were not included (e.g. Filipino and Korean, Jamaican and Haitian) since the majority of segregation history of groups has been focused on race, not ethnicity (Root, 1992). Additionally, all participants had one parent who identifies as White and one parent who identifies as non-White. Finally, participants also had to be as bisexual, queer, pansexual, fluid etc. and not a part of the mono-sexual gay or straight communities. All participants were above the age of 18 and spoke English. Table 1 shows the pseudonyms and basic demographic information (as defined by the participants themselves) for reference for participants' quotations.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Participant	Gender	Race	Sexual Orientation	Age
Anna	woman	Colombian/White	queer	21
V	woman	Malaysian/Chinese/White	queer	23
Emma	woman	mixed with African descent	pansexual	22
May	cisgender woman	White-passing/mixed	queer	27
June	woman	mixed Black	bisexual	24
Tia	woman	biracial/Black/White	queer	27
Fernanda	femme	mixed race	queer	23
Amber	woman	Scottish/Irish/East Indian	bisexual	21
Alice	genderfluid	half White/half Asian	bisexual	19
Sophia	no label	hapa/mixed	no label	21
Michaela	femme	Hispanic/White/mixed	queer	22
Melody	woman	half White/half Puerto Rican	bisexual	34
Layton	woman	mixed	heteroromantic	21
Ada	gender non-conforming femme	of color/mixed	queer	23
Jaclyn	woman	half Asian/half White	bisexual	18

Procedures

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, specific recruitment within Facebook groups that cater to women of color identifying as bisexual, queer, pansexual, fluid etc. Participants were asked to participate in audio taped, semi-structured interviews that lasted between an hour and two hours, either in person or over Skype. The interview questions (see below) were centered on the main themes of how participants see themselves, how they think

society sees and treats them, and how their various identities interact with each other, if at all.

Interview questions were created from an intersectional standpoint, with the intent of exploring the participants' experiences without assuming their responses. Interview questions were chosen to elicit reflection upon identity and factors in identity formation within the participants, specifically around racial and sexual identity. Interview questions were screened by a dissertation peer group, dissertation committee, and research team to check for ease of understanding, focus of the study, and any other potential issues participants may face.

Data Analysis

In following the essential constant comparative method of data analysis of grounded theory, data collection and analysis was conducted simultaneously (Merriam, 2009). This process allowed for the identification of categories, characteristics of these categories, identification of core categories, the links between the categories and their defining characteristics. In line with this method, the researcher transcribed each audio recording after each interview and then reviewed these transcripts along with the notes and observations she made through the interview. The researcher made sure to make notes on the data, participant reflections, potential themes, and tentative ideas and hypotheses that potentially were of use for subsequent data collection and thematic analysis.

As this process unfurled, the researcher coded emergent themes from an open perspective to a more narrow approach using open, axial, and selective coding methods. Open coding focused on flagging potentially significant data. Axial coding grouped related concepts into categories. Then selective coding identified salient themes within these categories (Merriam, 2009). These different methods allowed the researcher to identify core categories, which informed the final theoretical model, grounded within the interview data. The researcher also

utilized a diverse team in an attempt to confront personal bias and prejudice and gain multiple perspectives while coding. The team consisted of a biracial Latina/White heterosexual woman, a heterosexual female bicultural Latina adoptee, and a White, gay male.

Researcher Background, Experiences, and Bias

The researcher is a doctoral candidate in Counseling Psychology who identifies as mixed (Filipina, Eastern European, Italian), fluid, and a cisgender woman. The researcher has an interest in identity formation, especially the experience of intersectionality, and has had much experience being trained on diversity and multicultural issues within clinical practice and research work. The researcher has had multiple experiences that have informed both or either of her “bi” identities and their ongoing formations. The researcher has an interest in identity fetishization- treated like a sexual object- for being biracial and bisexual. These experiences continue to form the researcher’s identities and biases. Before all interviews, the researcher disclosed her identities to participants, her background in diversity and multicultural training, and her student status in order to provide participants with perhaps, not only comfort in speaking to someone who shared identities with them, but to be transparent about the biases that the researcher may be bringing into the study. During interviews, the researcher refrained from disclosing any personal anecdotes or experiences, so as to avoid directing the conversation in any particular direction that was not of the participants’ own desire. After interviews, the researcher looked over her notes and tried to acknowledge any personal bias or interesting themes so as to not influence the emergent themes in coding.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

In this chapter, data gathered in response to the research questions will be presented in the form of three core elements, two common meaning-making responses, and the ongoing and cyclical process between these two categories. Broadly, participants discussed the various ways in which they saw their identities currently, how they have seen them develop, and what they think contributed to this development. Participants also discussed why they have chosen certain labels above others. Participants discussed the various communities they feel a sense of belonging to, or the feeling that they do not belong to any one community at all. Participants also narrated how they are perceived and treated by others, the messages they received about their identities, and how and if their identities related to each other. The following sections will discuss the common themes that emerged from the interviews conducted along with data from participants to further represent their experiences.

Core Elements

In discussing how participants saw their own identity development, commonalities were found across participants' narratives that can be broadly grouped together as the following: environment, how others treated them, and other identities and experiences. These core elements, emergent themes, and frequency within these themes are displayed in Table 2 and discussed below.

Table 2: Core Factors: Emergent Themes

Core Factor	Emergent Theme	Frequency
Environment	Region	10
	Messages about Race	10
	Messages about Sexuality	8
	Messages about Gender	5
Treatment of Others	Family	10
	Peers	15
	Community	10
Other Identities & Experiences	Salient Identities	9
	Informative Experiences	7

Environment.

Region. Multiple participants identified region as being an important factor in their identity development. Seven participants discussed the importance of location in regards to race, in how people read them racially, how people treated them, and how the participants then in turn reacted and labeled themselves. Seven participants discussed the specific impact of college on their identities, specifically as a place that felt like a safe place to explore their identities. Further, three participants discussed the importance of region in exposure to other kinds of people and ideas of sexuality. Two participants specifically labeled region as important in the prejudice they experienced. Three participants discussed specifically how urban settings felt the most comforting to them.

As mentioned, seven participants reported that location was key in how people saw them racially, and how they in turn then identified themselves over time. Sophia stated,

I think also my identity has changed- my racial identity has changed a lot –since coming to the east coast for college because being raised in the Bay Area there’s obviously a lot of Asians in North America for many generations so there are a lot of mixed-Asian ethnicity people in that area as well. I went to school with a lot of people like that so it

was never a focus of my identity. [...] I never thought of myself as being like an Asian girl first and foremost. I just saw myself as me and everyone else as themselves, and that was a normal thing. But on the east coast there was a lot less diversity and [...] especially the town that my school was in, it was predominately White, wealthy, older people.

Similarly, participants reported that when they would go to other countries where they had ethnic ties or none at all, they would be faced with a different type of racial schema construct, different kinds of communities, and their place within these looked different than in their home community. For Anna, she actually felt that being both in the U.S. and Colombia felt similar, stating, “when I’m here [in the U.S.], I feel like I’m, outcast is too strong of a word, but don’t quite belong [...], whereas in Colombia, I still don’t really feel that way cause I’m still like half American, half White.” Six participants specifically discussed college in general as a setting that was important to their identity development. Some discussed college as a specific place that fostered reflection and certain kinds of identity work. Some, like Tia, discussed how college also allowed for meeting other LGBTQ people or becoming involved with LGBTQ groups, which provided “a greater sense of community and [...] more people to talk to.”

Messages about Race. Ten participants discussed how early and continued messages from their families shaped their early conceptions of race. Specifically, nine participants discussed the importance of their non-White parent’s relationship with their racial identity and how it impacted their own perception of race. Multiple participants described how their parents had experienced racism or trauma within their racial community, which in turn affected the messages of race within the household. May and June are sisters and described the impact of their mother’s relationship with her race. From “color blindness” at home to “learning Black hair,” both sisters discussed how their mother’s traumatic experiences and her consequential distancing from her race affected their own sense of Blackness. As May described,

Because of the trauma that my mom and her mom and like all of my aunts on that side have [...] about their Jamaican identity, where they [...] don't even want to acknowledge that slavery happened in Jamaica, they would rather reference the various European backgrounds that they feel that they have in their heritage.

Other participants mentioned how the racism from others affected their parent's racial identity and the consequent racial messages in the home. Melody stated, "my Dad had a lot of problems with racism when he moved to the U.S." and that,

He was told that, if he taught me Spanish as a child, I would have an accent like him and since I was light enough to pass as Italian, he wanted me to have a better life. So, the fact that I don't speak Spanish and I'm White, I don't feel like I belong hanging out with Puerto Ricans.

Similarly, a few participants discussed how navigating being multiracial was difficult because of the lack of messages from their parents about race. As Ada discussed, messages of race were lacking in her home, which affected her racial navigation moving forward. She commented,

Growing up we assimilated enough where my family was just seen as White and I knew that I was Latina and I knew that my grandma was from Mexico. But like, I was never told I was a person of color.

Together, most participants discussed how their minority parent's messages about race affected growing up as multiracial, no matter their racial backgrounds. However, there were a few outliers. Tia described how she was mainly raised by her White mother and grandmother, grew up in a predominantly Black neighborhood, and went to an "African-centered" school. Though her mother, peers, and school supported her Black identity, it was difficult to hear messages about White people that contradicted her lived experience with her mother. Tia reflected,

It was really confusing (laugh) because in school there was a lot of obviously [...] of negative feelings about, you know, Europeans enslaving Africans, you know at home I have you know, this very loving mother, White mother, White grandmother, [...] who really took care of me, but then at school, its like you know, for a child you're kind of learning like White people are evil (laugh) um, or like in a way they can't be trusted um, so it was confusing. But obviously the people who I felt were caring for me most were my White family members.

All of the participants identified the importance of their non-White parent's racial identity and experiences on their own navigation of race growing up. Participants of all racial backgrounds recognized that racism, trauma, or lack of connection in their parents' lives made it difficult to feel connected to their cultures and feeling rooted in their racial and ethnic communities.

Messages about Sexuality. Eight participants discussed the various messages they received about non-heterosexual sexual orientation, mostly heteronormative and anti-LGBT. For example, Anna described how the messages from her parents affected her sexual orientation development for some time. As she discussed,

My parents, being mildly homophobic assumed, that maybe if I was more attracted to women than just men that I was just lesbian and it didn't work as far as [...] being more attracted to women but still attracted to men like that [...] and then I identified pretty strong with that for a while.

For Anna, the messages from her parents and culture affected how she saw her sexual identity.

Alice saw the messages from her mother's Asian family as a barrier in navigating her sexual identity. She described,

Asian culture is like a very specific way of being raised and like that how I was raised [...] so that's like why it was a lot harder to um, come to terms with like being LGBT identified [...], that's something that like- I mean it wouldn't say it's not accepted in my mom's family but it's definitely like weird to tell [...], I see that as like [a factor] causing it.

Though most participants who described the messages from their families about sexuality as negative, there was an exception. Sophia discussed the messages in her family around being gay as open-minded. Sophia represented her family as liberal and her two grandmothers as gay, allowing for her to explore her sexual orientation without feeling confined to be attracted to one particular gender. As she discussed,

I have been raised very liberally as well and [...] I have two grandmothers that are gay. [...] Being gay was never like a looming issue for me and I never thought of myself as, "I

only like men” or “I only like women”, so I think that’s why I say I’m on a spectrum, because I [...] can feel genuine attraction to almost anybody depending on who they are.

Overall, the majority of participants who discussed the messages about sexual orientation described them as negative and prejudiced.

Messages about Gender. Five participants discussed specific messaging around gender in their families that affected their perceptions of gender and themselves. The messages were mixed, some participants describing messages about womanhood as empowering and proud, other participants describing messages as confining. As May described, “I was definitely brought up to be proud of being a girl in very specific ways- like very kind of like girl power, Spice Girls kind of (laugh) feminism, which is like great entry point.” May mentioned that she was proud of her womanhood and that it was an identity that she thought of “deeply.” In contrast, Anna felt “insecure about [her] identity as a woman for a long time” because of the messages she received about gender and gender roles from her father. As she narrated,

I think with my Dad being really traditional Catholic and stuff like that, made me kind of feel insecure about my identity as a woman because I was always someone who was supposed to wear like pretty dresses, you know, like tights to church be really, complacent and polite and so on and so forth, like he always told me that I needed to learn my place as a woman.

As will be discussed in later sections, though all participants did not necessarily discuss the explicit or implicit messages they received about race, sexuality, or gender during their childhood, the treatment of others provided a picture of how the participants saw their communities and in turn their identities.

Treatment of Others.

Family. Ten of the participants discussed how their family treated them as important to their ongoing identity development and experiences. Though most participants discussed specific

treatment about sexuality, some talked about around race and ethnicity. Most of these anecdotes focused on treatment from family were represented as hurtful and negative, with a range of reactions and language. There were a few notable exceptions where participants were treated positively by their families in regards to their sexual orientation, which was impactful for the participants' identity development and exploration.

Six participants discussed their families as saying homophobic or biphobic things. Some mentioned that things had gotten better or that their parents were trying to understand their identities, but continuing to say hurtful or offensive things. This was true for Amber who described her mother as trying to learn to be supportive, but still said things to Amber that were hurtful. As Amber put it,

She's trying a lot of the time but she still says things [...] like "no parent wants their child to be gay, that's not something" [...] and she was very adamant that when I came out to her that I shouldn't [tell] anyone else because it wasn't any of their business and I think that was coming from a good place and also coming from a place that she didn't want to be embarrassed [...] or that she didn't want to have to explain it to her friends and her family. But [...] I wouldn't go to her if I had any problems within the community.

In addition to difficulties with her parents about sexual orientation and sexuality, May discussed how her parents were attempting to understand her chosen identity as a 'woman of color', but continued to be either unsupportive or not fully grasping her experience as mixed Black woman. May discussed how her parents had a hard time understanding how she moved through the world and was treated differently because of her phenotypic features. May described their resistance to her chosen term as well as her Jewish father's attempts at understanding, which instead came across as minimalizing and color-blind. As she states,

I came to understand my racialization through sexual objectification and exoticization. And I was explaining these things to [my parents] ... And they were like, "oh, that happens to you? We don't remember that. Like who did that to you? Like what do you mean that happened? Like what do you mean that's racism?" and I was like "I talked to

you about this at the time and I can't believe you don't remember it was so fundamental to my first year experience in residence, um and like you have no recollection and you're not interested in validating my [...] experiences" [...] And then you know my dad started going "well like I do understand what it is to be racialized because I'm Jewish", and I was like "dad, shut up"(laugh).

For May, the continued denial or well-intentioned minimization from her parents made it difficult for her to feel supported by her parents in both her racial and sexual identity development.

As mentioned above, not all participants had families who treated them negatively because of their sexual orientation. For three participants, they saw their families' treatment of them around their identities as positive, allowing them to explore and identify as they wish. For Michaela, her mother's open messages and continued support allowed for Michaela to be open as

well. As Michaela described,

My mom did a really good job, um, being really open when I was growing up [...] I remember playing Life with her and she was, like, I'm going to be a woman today and going to marry a woman and we're like, "Mom you can't do that!" and she was like, "Yes, I can and a lot of people do and you gotta just accept" (laughs), or she was, like, "I'm going to be a man today", and we would be like, "Mom you can't be a blue [player] in Life and she was like, "I can and you know what, if I ever just, like, was man, like, it would be okay" and [...] how it doesn't matter and you just [...] care about someone else (laughs) like, it made me more open.

All of these participants' anecdotes underline the impact of their families' treatment and support of their identities, whether they felt open to exploring or found difficulty in navigating.

Peers. Overwhelmingly, many of the stories about being treated by others were from the participants' peers. All fifteen participants mentioned specific stories about how they were treated by their classmates, coworkers, friends, and/or partners. Nine participants described negative treatment from others around their identity, while eight participants described positive interactions with peers- the two categories not necessarily mutually exclusive. Specific stories of

prejudice, racism, biracism, biphobia, and homophobia were told. discussed being fetishized because of their mixed race status and/or their bisexual identity by cisgender men.

The nine participants who discussed negative treatment from peers had a wide range of stories to tell. From biersure to verbal abuse, these participants discussed how peers' words and actions impacted their sexual orientation development and identity formation. For V, who grew up outside of the U.S. and in a very religious family and school, when she came out she experienced a lot of online negative treatment from past peers. She stated that she received "a lot of pretty unkind messages and emails from the people I knew before basically, I think they were hoping to scare me straight (laugh) by saying you're going to hell". For Alice who was out as bisexual during her senior year of high school, she shared a hurtful experience where she had "put like a bisexual sign on [her] locker [...] and it was graffitied on." For Anna, sometimes treatment of peers turned physical. As she recalled "I've had encounters with people where I can remember one time me and my friends got egged and we got people like yelling homophobic slurs at us".

Eight participants specifically discussed being fetishized or sexualized because of being a bisexual woman, biracial woman, or both. For three participants, this manifested in jokes or sexual advances from male partners or peers. As Layton described, "the guy I'm seeing right now always jokes about how [I'm] a quarter Black, like kind of excited (laugh) and he'll just [...] be like "ebony and ivory" and stuff like that. But nothing like rude." Melody, June, and Michaela described how male peers would show interest in them because they were bisexual, "asking [them] to have a threesome" or asking them to "kiss their friend."

For other participants, treatment from others was much more obscene. For May, sexualization from men was direct, intrusive, and offensive and how she began to see herself as racialized. As May described,

Being sexually harassed constantly and being asked all the time about the color of my nipples and like other partners offering to like other people that they can touch my breasts because they're not like a White person's breasts and like people touching my hair in the street, like I have big curly hair. [...] men have dug their hands in my hair in public and asked me like...whether they can fuck me. And my White friends don't experience that. I came to understand my racialization through sexual objectification and exoticization.

Similarly for Sophia, being specifically half-Asian was sexualized by White partners she would have and how this made her feel “dehumanized”. She stated,

When I date white men, um, like in one relationship in particular, it was very like, he said he had a fetish and that he would always point out my ethnicity or bring it up in certain ways, like if I was with his brothers, they would bring it up, and it was like just very apparent that like no matter what I did or how he got to know me, he would still think of me like in the context of my race. When that is like just like how I do not want to be defined- not that in any way that my race is bad thing, but you want to be thought of for your accomplishments and your attributes, independent of what you look like.

Specific biphobic comments and experiences were mentioned by participants as well.

From the sexualization comments above to assumptions about promiscuity, experimentation, hypersexuality, and it being “just a phase,” participants discussed much biphobia from others and how this impacted their identity development. For Layton, she recounted how she had been treated by others,

My grammy has said stuff about being a phase, I see it on Facebook all the time. I see it all the time, friends of mine sometimes, well like you know, and jokes about it, and they think that being bisexual isn't a thing or like you know like, you're just a slut, you know, you're more of a ho because you do more than just dick.

For the eight participants who discussed positive treatment from their peers, their narratives specifically mentioned open-minded groups of people that were also people of color, also mixed, and/or also queer. For many participants, learning from and being around by other

“queer femmes of color” was very important to their sense of support and being understood. As Ada described when discussing the mass shooting of LGBTQ people of color in Orlando, queer femmes of color were her main supports. “I’ve witnessed a lot of us having each other’s backs in really, really beautiful and important ways. And I say queers, I mostly hang out with queer femmes of color, so that group specifically has been really important to me.”

Community. In regards to the participants’ respective greater communities, whether that be the LGBTQ community or their racial/ethnic communities, nine participants specifically mentioned negative experiences and treatment of others. Being mixed was sometimes the difficult part about fitting into racial groups and communities. As Tia discussed, “growing up, [she] identified as kind of just Black because that was the community that [she] was raised in” but “was kind of viewed as more of a light-skinned Black person and [she] didn’t like being labeled that way” because it made her feel “like an ‘other’, [...] like an outsider within the Black community.” Emma also felt “ignored and misunderstood” in Black spaces though still acknowledged. In trying to describe the feeling, she reflected,

Even though like I said earlier, I still feel like my identity is acknowledged and appreciated, not looked down upon or anything [...] I still feel like the elephant in the room but the elephant who’s invisible? It’s so weird. I feel like, visible and invisible at the same time.

Participants felt similarly in LGBTQ spaces, either unwelcome or ignored. Emma mentioned feeling the same in queer spaces because she’s “also [...] the only person of color in the room.” Ada discussed similar feelings in all of her respective communities,

I feel really uncomfortable in very White spaces because I feel like my Mexican identity is like not valued or noticed. And then I feel uncomfortable in Latina communities if I am like the only light-skinned or White-passing Latina because then I like I feel like I don’t deserve it- like I haven’t earned the right to be in that space. And I think a lot of LGBTQ spaces I also don’t feel welcome or I feel welcome, but I don’t feel respected in when it comes to hearing my voice and having my thoughts heard if I’m- if it’s mostly gay men

um, especially White gay men or White gay and lesbian cisgender people who don't have a great racial analysis and like queer background or queer understanding.

Ada's words echo much of the difficulties that participants faced in their communities when they were not inclusive or intersectional. More of this will be discussed in the meaning-making that participants then underwent in their identity formation.

Not all participants were negatively treated within their communities. Five participants specifically mentioned feeling a sense of belonging in LGBTQ groups or spaces in or since college. V discussed co-founding and drawing support from "a support group for queer women" in college while Tia mentioned gaining "a greater sense of community and I guess more people to talk to" from the LGBTQ groups she was a part of in college as well.

Other Identities & Experiences.

Identities. Nine participants discussed the importance of their other identities to the conversation of identity development as well. These identities of course covered a wide range, with many participants identifying as having mental health concerns, through other participants discussing religiosity's role in their identities, to what it's like being a low-income queer woman of color. These participants all made it clear that to discuss their growth and feelings without these other pieces would not create a whole picture.

For Fernanda, being in between mainstream sizes and plus sizes was a salient identity when discussing connecting with the queer community. As she discussed,

The thin queer community like [...] thin queer femmes sometimes I feel very excluded from because, like I'm part of so many groups and they're like 'oh my god you should like shop here, like you should do this' and I'm like 'I cannot fit into anything in that store' (laugh) and it's like very annoying [...] and then with the people that like I've outright said that to, they're like 'oh' as if they didn't realize it or think of it or whatever that is. But that is something that I think about sometimes.

Melody as well discussed feeling on the outsides of the little person community in addition to feeling on the outside of the LGBT community. She reflected,

I have dwarfism. I'm a little person but I'm proportionate and I'm 4 foot 10, which is as tall as you can be and be a dwarf, so it's like I'm short enough that its, I understand why this is the height where it's still classified as dwarfism, like I can't reach things and it's a pain in the ass but, I'm also tall enough to pass as just a short adult so, I don't want to go to little people conventions or stuff because I don't really feel like I belong in that community but at the same time, I do.

Melody and Fernanda's words display how participants' other identities echoed or intersected with how they were being treated by others or the ways in which they felt barred from certain communities. Other participants felt that other identities were thrown into question because of their racial and sexual navigation.

V discussed how she had been outed by an uncle, which caused much turbulence with her parents who are missionaries. V discussed how her sexual identity development was affected by her earlier religiosity and now in turn, cannot see how to integrate the two now that she's out. As she discussed,

I became a lot less religious mostly because- maybe I'll feel differently sort of as I move through life, but I think especially with the version of Christianity that I grew up with, I don't think its necessarily possible to combine being the sort of Christian I grew up with, with being an out and proud gay person.

For Michaela, being low-income was hard to define as just an identity but also an ongoing experience. She shared that being low-income, "shapes [her] whole experience. There's never a point where that isn't shaping, like, what [she's] doing, um, in terms of, like, how many work hours I put in or [...] what's important in my life." For Michaela, being low-income was unbelievably present in her life as she tried to navigate school and social systems from going on mandatory field trips during work hours to figuring out where she was going to live to having to

find communities that would help her with resources when her university could not (or would not).

For multiple participants, gender was an important identity to discuss. Whether it was in regards to their gender identity development, their newly formed questions of gender, or awareness of how being a woman affects their experiences of being biracial and bisexual, gender was an important piece of the narratives.

Along with four other participants, Ada discussed her ongoing gender identity development. As she stated,

I don't know where my gender is going but like right now it feels like being a woman and being gender non-conforming is what I am right now, you know? But I think within the past five years is when all of these identities have shifted and fallen into place and grown. And like, within the past five years I've found the language to articulate what makes the most sense to me

For Fernanda, her femme presentation was purposeful and expressive. Through her femme presentation and use of makeup, she stated that she was reclaiming femininity as a way of identifying herself in this particular moment. As she stated,

Being a queer femme is just sort of like being in the now, [...] expressing my femininity and like being a badass bitch like now (laugh) you know, and like whatever that means to me in this moment in time. And like, it's [...] super related to like reclaiming [...] makeup and perfume and like actively expressing interest and also like actively queering these interests. Um, because I think that the history of makeup and perfume and fashion has been like really taken away from women and really taken away from femmes in general.

Both Michaela and Sophia identified that their more feminine presentation played a role in the male attention they received and how they were treated. As Sophia discussed,

As a woman and being so outwardly feminine, you know, I have long hair and I wear make-up and dresses and heels, things like that and I am part of a sorority at my school, I think while I ascribe to those feminine attributes physically, there's definitely negative repercussions to that, just because [of] male privilege, just being treated differently by men, especially in the workplace.

Multiple participants also identified the difference in being a bisexual woman of color and not a bisexual man of color. As Layton stated,

I think it's different like if you're a man, I totally think it's different it shouldn't be, again, it shouldn't be. But it is and I think it has a lot to do with masculinity and how men view [...] other men and stuff. [...] It's still hard for guys because girls get drunk and make out at a party, they're just good friends whatever, if guys get drunk and make out at a party they're gay and they're never gonna live it down at school, you know, which isn't fair to them at all. So I think it's totally different, especially when you add color in there. If you're gay and black you're fucked.

Experiences. For five participants, going abroad through school or traveling was a transformative experience racially. These participants discussed how seeing the different racial schemas, social norms, and perspectives completely altered their views of race. As Emma described in doing a research project on race while she, “studied abroad in Senegal in West Africa and [...] learned more than [she] could have ever thought about racial identity while [...] there and about how much race is constructed in culturally specific contexts in every single place.” For Sophia, traveling abroad was much more of a scary reminder of how others read race. As she recalled,

I was studying in a Scandinavian country that is very, very homogenous, and I experienced a lot of racism when I was over there that just really shook me because, while I have experienced microaggressions, or people trying to talk to me in Chinese, things like that here, I was like physically shoved into walls on the street and called an Asian tourist and followed.

Though a minority, three other participants disclosed the impact of gendered violence/sexual assault in their identity formation. Anna shared that she was “assaulted at one point which kind of made [her] lean more towards lesbian and kind of not wanting to do much with men, but then when [she] recovered from that then [she] really identified as queer.” V lamented her reluctance in sharing this identity, since she did not want this to fuel homophobic

ideas or narratives that people are gay or part of the kink community because of sexual trauma, both in and outside the queer community. She stated,

I usually will very much like go through extreme lengths not to disclose that part of my identity because I don't want to further the stereotype that the only reason that one woman would be into another woman is because something happened to them, right? And I think sometimes, there have been some points in conversation with other queer people, usually it won't be about me, but in general other people will be like, "oh I wish that like that wasn't the narrative and how frustrating it is and why can't people accept why there are other reasons why" and then this slightly difficult feeling that's like "oh no I'm one of those people furthering this narrative".

These additional and important identities and experiences were important to the participants to mention in how they see themselves and their racial and sexual identities develop.

Meaning-Making

Though all participants did not explicitly discuss their feelings, emotional process, or reactions to the above core elements, all participants discussed how these elements affected their growth and development in some way. These reactions can be separated into outward and inward meaning-making reactions, though by no means are the categories mutually exclusive for participants; most participants expressed feelings in both categories. Table 3 displays the emergent themes and their frequency within these two categories.

Table 3. Meaning-Making: Emergent Themes

Response	Emergent Theme	Frequency
Inward	In-Between/ No Belonging	7
	Internalization	9
Outward	Choosing own labels	12
	Disclosing purposefully	6
	Creating own supports	15
	Cultural markers	9

Inward.

Feeling “in-between” or without belonging. Seven participants discussed how their different experiences and the treatment of others and communities made them feel in between and/or without belonging, sometimes with multiple identities, sometimes with just one. For five participants, they both described how the feelings of being in between continued to pop up for them in multiple dimensions. For Melody, whether it was identifying as a little person, a cancer survivor, a bisexual woman, or a Hispanic woman, she couldn't feel a part of the community and she lamented, “I don't know if I just keep ending up in the middle of things or if it's something I do to myself.” Echoing this sentiment, Fernanda also realized during the interview that she had never felt belonging anywhere. She reflected, “I don't really feel like I belong. I've never really felt like that I guess, which I'm only just realizing now.” She further shared that she felt “resentful” about this and “weird. It's like a weird feeling, and like also feeling like, ‘oh god will I ever feel like that’. Like is there like a city that's also warm that's also just filled with queer Latinas that are mixed race? (laugh).” Similarly, Emma reflected on her lack of belonging and her desire for mixed race visibility and community,

My whole life I feel like maybe I have 10 fingers, I have 1 finger in, like never completely anywhere. And even before I understood that much about race like understood- even before I understood race the way I do now, I still felt in between groups I just didn't know why. I didn't understand all the mechanisms of it but I knew I felt that, I mean I felt that as a small child in grade school I felt between groups. Um, and sometimes I worry that I mean also, I look around media and I see so few narratives of mixed people and so few mixed people in the media and like I said one of the reasons I went to a woman's college and I'm so grateful for was I can go there and see women and I'm a woman you're a woman, we can connect on and be inspired by each other, and I still look for that in terms of my racial identity, I'm still looking for that I'm still looking for those spaces where I can look up and see faces like me in that sense. Um, and I don't know if I'll feel like I belong to many groups or spaces until I find a space where I see that.

For other participants, particular identities were still very much in flux and they didn't feel like these specific identities had a place of belonging. As Ada reflected about her gender identity, she was continuing to navigate that for herself and did not necessarily feel open to discussing it with her community. As she stated,

I don't really talk about gender identity cuz that's still something that's like kind of weird and something that not everyone I talk to completely acknowledges just cuz like I'm not sure about it. And I do make it known that I'm not sure of it. So like, I mean basically a lot of like what a my friends think well okay were not gonna think about it until you're 100% sure about it. So I don't know if it's a good or bad thing per-say but it's something I don't really talk about but I kinda don't want to talk about it too much until like I've figured it out.

Internalization. Seven participants expressed how they felt barred from communities, some echoing the messages they received from others and some internalizing the need for cultural markers in order to be in the community. For example, as Layton succinctly stated how she was not “Black enough or [...] not gay enough,” multiple participants expressed similar messages. Others also questioned their claim to race and racial spaces because of their parents' relationship to race or how they were perceived by others. As Amber described her mother's experience of being South Asian and the racism she experienced, Amber felt like she couldn't claim her South Asian heritage because of her mother's purposeful distance from this community. She then shared, “sometimes I feel like because I didn't grow up within the culture and my mum wasn't a very big part of the culture, sometimes I feel like it's disingenuous to say I'm part of the community.”

Cultural markers of skin color, hair type, language, and queer signs were important to participants when deciding if they belonged or not. While both Asian and Latinx participants brought up language as a cultural marker, multiple Latinx/Hispanic participants discussed not

feeling “Latina enough” because they could not speak Spanish, or speak it well. As Ada described,

I think my racial identity makes it harder for me to identify with like, Mexican or Latinx communities because I’m not like, Latina enough often, um, to feel comfortable or welcome or like my Spanish isn’t perfect and I didn’t grow up speaking Spanish so that’s always been a real challenge for me. So like for example the Latino Center on campus at my university for undergrad, like I wouldn’t really walk in there and feel at home.

Skin color was touched upon by participants of all backgrounds, especially how dependent racial perceptions were on being “tan.” As Melody described,

I’m pretty pale for being half Hispanic and, so I pass for White, but I’m not just White so it’s like I don’t feel like I fit in, or, I feel like I shouldn’t just be a part of the White community, but then I don’t fit in in the Puerto Rican community.

Skin color, hair texture, and corresponding privilege was discussed almost exclusively by Black/African American participants. June discussed how as a lighter-skinned person, she had a “privilege that other Black people don’t have but I have that because I have lighter skin. Or like on the street, I’m not gonna be like targeted or chased by the police um, because like I’m- have light skin.” Tia shared that she felt her lighter skin made her feel less connected to other Black people. She shared that in Black spaces she would,

Sometimes [be] wishing that my skin was a little more you know, a little darker just to like not stand out so much or people even assume because I do have a lighter skin tone and people assume I probably have a White parent and so I didn’t have the experiences they did and so it creates this disconnect.

In terms of markers for the queer community, multiple participants discussed how they thought they didn’t fit in or others couldn’t tell they were queer. Sophia described how other queer women at her school changed their appearances when they came out, making Sophia’s more feminine presentation seem straight. As she discussed,

With a lot of my queer or gay friends, they identify me as straight, like I don't know, they would not appreciate me, who is someone who is outwardly, femininely, dates men, and has sex with men to try and be a part of the community. I think they would just not understand, um, yeah, especially at the school I go to [...] girls that I had classes with my first year, and now, they are like totally different people, they dress only in masculine clothes, their hair, speak differently, but when I knew them in their first years they were more feminine appearing like I am, so I think it's like an either or situation for the those communities.

Other participants discussed how they felt like they were less accepted in the gay community because of having a male partner or attraction to men. Melody shared that she had internalized messages about bisexual people, stating "I'll admit too when I was 18 I wouldn't have dated a bisexual, and I think I got that from the community because why would I think that?" She further reflected on her own sense of not belonging in LGBTQ spaces thinking,

Maybe that's my problem, [...] why I feel like I don't fit in is because I'm not fully any of it you know. And I should be as bi, I mean I should be fully part of the LGBT, I mean we're one of the letters, but we're not, you know we're not seen as the same thing.

Outward.

Choosing Labels. For twelve participants, choosing very specific labels for their sexual, racial, and/or gender identities was extremely important to how they wanted to be seen, treated, and located by others based on their identities and communities. Participants had multiple reasons for their choice of labels, from wanting to be as specific as possible about which communities they belong to, to being inclusive of all their identity pieces, to not wanting to seem non-inclusive to non-binary folks, to wanting to be vague on purpose. Though there were multiple reasons for choosing labels, participants seemed to feel empowered in choosing labels that fit their needs internally and projected an accurate representation of themselves to those they came in contact with.

For five participants, being as specific as possible was important to their own sense of

location within communities. As Layton described about her choice of label, heteromantic,

I think for me [...] I know there's so many terms and stuff but finally I've like found where I fit. Like, um, like bisexual even in itself is a very broad term and [...] I'm like romantically attracted to men but not to women, but I'm sexually attracted to both, right. And again, it's fluid. Like I don't know for sure, but like for right now that's what feels right to me because it's what makes sense to me and I have a place now.

Four participants also discussed choosing their labels to be vague on purpose, providing a location within communities but keeping a sense of privacy to their particular lives as well. Ada and May discussed this dual purpose from different, but overlapping viewpoints. Ada described her label choice as vague for the following reasons,

So I really like both queer and gender non-conforming for the way they give me privacy. Um, so it acknowledges that I am other, but it's not giving anyone who asks about my identity, like details about my personal life. Um, which feels really important especially in terms of my gender identity, um, it's super private and it's not something I want the average stranger to know anything about that's not their right or need. Um, so like that broad terms of saying I'm gender non-conforming or I'm queer is a nice way of like finding community and like other folks who identify as such without disclosing much information to like the average population.

May saw her use of purposeful vagueness as being in direct opposition to heterosexism. As she described,

Queer definitely feels right to me now and queer has like always felt right to me. Um, especially because queer is like one of those great words that you can use to locate yourself politically, but also in a way that obfuscates you to like super straight people who would otherwise demand specifically to know who it is you want to fuck.

She eloquently drew a similar comparison to her mixedness and her choice of racial label, saying that she has chosen racial terms that still locate her outside of binaries and within a community, but flies in the face of White supremacy. As she elaborated,

I'm racialized in a way that's like "oh you're exotic and it's my right as a White person to question you a lot about who you are", and like that's White supremacy because "I'm a White expert, I deserve to know everything about you". Um, so looking back, I didn't use woman of color, when people asked me I would often like very cheekily say "I'm gray"

because I'm Black and White and that was my way of kind of obfuscating, but now I'm really insistent on woman of color.

For four participants, their choice of labels were meant to be “inclusive,” knowing that the term

bisexual may have binary connotations, excluding trans* and nonbinary folks. As Tia described, I use the word queer because it's more of an umbrella term. I've dated men and women and everyone in between um, so I think rather than choosing, you know, a more specific label, I like queer because its all-encompassing and I think that I um, that identifies me best.

Choosing umbrella terms purposefully was not only to rebel against systemic prejudice and binaries, but also to fight prejudice within minority communities as well. Anna echoed Tia's reason behind her choice of the label queer as well, but added that,

I kind of like the ambiguity there to be honest, because I feel like [...], not so much now, but when I was younger I kind of felt, kind of an indirect biphobia, not anything that was directly aggressive, but I felt like people in the queer community would be less accepting and inviting if I told them, straight up bisexual, versus just queer. Which is kind of like, if they were like more, or less, less accepting of that, they would probably just like project lesbian onto that.

Disclosing Purposefully. When participants were generally asked about when they would disclose their identities to others, six participants shared that they disclose their identities purposefully. Reasons to disclose covered a wide range of motivations, but generally participants disclosed to another person purposefully to either determine if the relationship was safe or worth investing in or to assert their identities in a space that would assume or dismiss them if they did not.

Four participants discussed disclosing purposefully and early in interactions with others in order to determine if that relationship was safe and worthy of investing in. For Alice, identifying herself was important not necessarily for it to be known, but to be accepted. As Alice explained,

I generally [...] disclose my sexual identity pretty quickly when I meet people because I don't want to be [with] people that aren't accepting of it at all. I just kind of throw it

out there, but I mean like I don't make it a big deal. I just like refer to it being relevant in conversation. Just because [...] I don't want to be known for my sexual identity, I just want it to be part of my identity, but I want to know I'm accepted for that identity. And so I try to like have it be known pretty early on.

Two participants discussed disclosing purposefully in order to assert their identities in spaces that otherwise would assume their identities incorrectly. For Melody and Ada, they made sure to assert their identities in spaces. As Melody described,

I definitely assert it when people assume I'm White, or if they assume I'm straight [...] it hasn't come up where they've been like, assumed I'm gay and I have to correct bisexual, probably because I think people just assume you're straight by default.

As a note, the idea of safety was extremely important to most participants, with six participants saying that they didn't feel they could disclose freely for fear of not being safe. Participants noted that they would prefer to disclose their identities in one-on-one situations, preferably if the other person also held a minority identity. Participants also noted that they knew when not to disclose because of how others expressed themselves, the words they used, or the political and/or religious views they shared. As Sophia described,

So like, if we are talking about race, [...] like even though I am closer to [my White best friend] than anyone in the whole world, it's very apparent to me that she doesn't understand racial issues, I guess, its hard for White people to understand their privilege, and for White people to appreciate another person's experience, you can tell that they will never really know what it feels like to be in those shoes [...] I'll talk about my race a lot more with like other half Asian people than I would someone who is White, or I will talk about sexual identities more with someone who I know comes from a more liberal background [...] some of my friends who [...] are very Christian, for instance, things like that, so, if I have like clues about what they think about the world or other people then I just wont instigate with them. [...] I have friends who like are Trump supporters and to me, that's very scary but at the same time I would never get into a conversation about politics with them. I would just appreciate the friendship or the spaces that it's comfortable in and not try and delve into topics that um, I know that we would not agree on, I guess.

Creating Own Supports. With the negative treatment, prejudice, and lack of community most participants felt, all participants actively sought to create their own supports and find

groups or communities where they felt welcomed and appreciated for their identities. For most participants, this was in the creation of their friend group, choosing to be around people who were either parts of their communities or allies to them. Seven participants specifically mentioned female or femme spaces or groups as support systems, with five participants discussing the importance of queer femme spaces and friends as supports. As Emma described her support system,

Well a lot of them can identify in some of the same ways that I do, like they identify as um, queer or something else, another identity that is not straight. A lot of them are people of color, a lot of them are women [...] I feel like we are coming from similar, relatively similar perspectives and that's why I feel so comfortable telling them things.

For seven participants, they had sought out online communities as a support network for their various identities (perhaps to be expected since all recruitment for this project utilized identity specific Facebook groups). This was true for Tia, who said "I also have several friends [...] that I really just met kind of through like queer community um, groups. Mostly online, so like meetup.com there was a, like a queer women's group that I've made quite a few friends through."

Cultural Markers. In connection to feeling barred from communities due to cultural markers, participants also made sure to choose, display, and enact cultural markers to make their identities known. From saying their name with an accent, to disclosing having a female partner, to being tan or showcasing natural hair, participants chose to enact certain markers that highlighted their identities and placed them within location to others.

For Ada, she chose to say her name with an accent in certain spaces; she described, "So if I'm in a space that feels very Latina, I'll just say it the way its meant to be said and then that's some sort of acknowledgment that I'm not just White or not all White." Fernanda reflected on

how her masculine- presenting partner acted as a queer marker for her now that she no longer has short hair. She reflected,

I used to have short hair after having long hair for a really, really long time. Um, and so like I guess that's one example. [...] I've also been in a relationship for 3 and half years um, like in a queer relationship with somebody who is more queer masculine presenting.

The Process of Identity Formation

Though these core elements and meaning-making categories emerged from the data, these experiences were by no means mutually exclusive. In addition to the factors and responses to these factors, participants also commented on the process of identity development as a whole. Multiple participants discussed how they felt firm in one identity, but unsure in another. Others discussed how one identity has remained constant, but others have been fluid. Others discussed how some identities intersected and informed each other, while still others said that they were separate. Many participants identified that their development was ongoing, and would probably change in the future. Additionally, how participants made meaning of the different core elements, they then enacted change on those core elements later, making the process cyclical and ongoing. Table 4 shows the themes that emerged from the participants' about the process of identity formation and the frequency of each theme.

Table 4. Process of Identity Formation: Emergent Themes

Emergent Theme	Frequency
Static & Dynamic Intersections	15
Ongoing Process	9
Cycle of Formation	13
	15

Static & Dynamic

All participants discussed the difference in their identities over time, though their identities did not necessarily develop at the same pace. Participants discussed how they were firm in their gender identity, but continued to develop their sexual identity with more experiences and knowledge while others discussed being in the midst of their gender exploration. Some participants discussed feeling firm in their racial identity earlier than their sexual identity. Some participants discussed being faced with new racial identity navigation despite having experienced sexual identity formation already. For Ada, these identity processes and their different trajectories were informed by messages, experiences, and peers over time. As she discussed,

I didn't articulate [being queer] out loud for a few years but [a high school program] helped me get a start in understanding. Um, for mixed-race, I would say my senior year of college I had a friend who was mixed race who loved talking about her race and we talked about race a lot and the more I like thought about her racial identity the more I was like "oh, well like, I also have parents who are two different races". [...] It took me a long- like most of my life to realize my family is biracial because they don't look it very much. And for, um, gender non-conforming woman... I had a partner for three years who identified as gender non-conforming, um so that was like where I really got like a better understanding of what that meant for someone and kind of like to got to see it grow and shift in time.

Intersections

Eight participants specifically saw their identities as intersecting, while four saw them as separate. Multiple participants like Fernanda saw their identities as intersecting, though systems and stereotypes attempted to separate them. As Fernanda described,

I think sometimes in the city that I live in like being queer and being mixed race can sometimes feel a little separate, only because I think that like women of color um, and like femmes of color are always assumed to be straight for some reason and like queerness is specifically reserved for White people. Um, so I guess that sometimes it can feel separated in that like I feel others kind of put that separation on me. But for me, I feel like its just very integrated and intertwined.

For Amber and three other participants, identities were separate. As Amber described, “[her identities] kind of separate like kind of [from] each other because I don’t think any of them necessarily influenced each other.” A few participants acknowledged that both processes exist for them, that their identities are unique and distinct, though difficult to separate from each other. For Emma, she discussed how they all happen at the same time, but perhaps they stay separate in her head because she has yet to find a place where all can exist and present themselves. She reflected,

I feel like even though they might manifest all at the same time, [...] they feel a little bit compartmentalized to me in my head. And maybe that’s because I don’t show the full part to necessarily every person or I don’t show all the parts to every person. So maybe [...] maybe the reason they feel compartmentalized is partly because I did that myself (laugh). [...] I don’t think I’ve ever been in an environment where I feel like I could express myself as fully as I could.

Racial, sexual, and gender identities of course do not exist in a vacuum, and multiple participants discussed other identities that were in flux. For Michaela, she recognized that her identities developed at different paces and that they were informed by her other identities and experiences, especially when she reflected on the experiences of identity development of others. As she discussed,

I was recognizing, like, how poor my family was (laughs) [...] recognizing that, like, that has a lot to do with [...] coming from Mexico and [...] fragmentation of, like, family that happened then [...] and them being especially in not the best circumstances [...] and then, like, understanding those two connections and that they’re so tied to each other [...], but they seem very independent from coming out as bi and, like, I think I always understood, like, the bond of, like, femininity, womanhood, and, like, now, like, queerness and how that [...] it’s not tied with, like, my understanding of my, like, Latino and my, like, low-income background. It, like, seems very independent of that especially because I don’t have the same experience that [...] a lot of my gay Latino friends have in terms of [...] coming from really religious families, um, which is, like, a source of community for [...] especially a lot of, like, low income communities of color and, like, I understand that, um, and that’s also hard working through, um, but I haven’t had that same experience.

Ongoing Process.

Twelve participants discussed in some way how their identity formation is not over, that it is ongoing and they may see themselves differently in the future. For participants like Ada, they reflected on how their identities have shifted over time and how their identities or how they think about their identities may shift in the future. As Ada discussed,

I think these identities aren't stagnant and won't stay the same. Um, fully I think I'll always be queer, obviously I'll always be mixed race. And I don't know where my gender is going, but like right now it feels like being a woman and being gender non-conforming is what I am right now, you know? But I think within the past five years is when all of these identities have shifted and fallen into place and grown. And like, within the past five years I've found the language to articulate what makes the most sense to me.

Cycle of Formation.

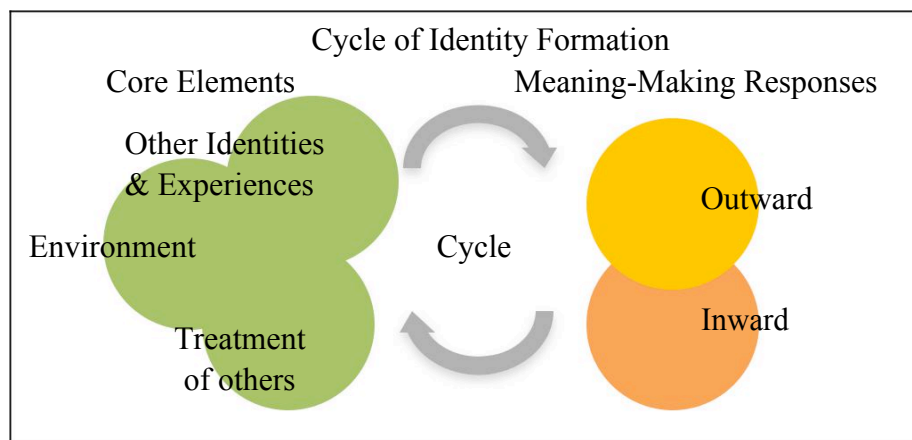


Figure 1. This figure shows the cyclical nature between the three core elements and the meaning-making responses of participants.

Though not explicitly stated, the narratives of all fifteen participants underlined the idea of the cyclical relationship between the core elements and their meaning-making responses. Whether through the messages and/or treatment of others, many participants discussed turning inward or outward in response, and then consequently seeking out environments and people that were affirming and supportive. For most, this cycle was most apparent in the cyclical relationship between treatment, response, and creation of support system. For Alice, she sought

out allies and supportive friends, after being in an environment that did not affirm her identities.

She remarked,

I've always been like surrounding myself with like allies [...] and I think that's not an accident um [...] I mean in a way I like I chose my environment [...] I wouldn't want to be around people who aren't accepting, and its kind of different in high school when you're forced to be with these people everyday but like in college there's so many students you can like kinda like choose where you want to be.

This cyclical nature could also be seen in participants' choice of relocation, choosing cities that their identities would be accepted, creating a new environment for themselves, or in Amber and V's cases, choosing not to go to places that they wouldn't feel accepted in. Amber said, "to be honest I feel like I could never go back to Dubai. Um, that's someplace where I'm not comfortable, it doesn't feel like it's a safe place for me I guess"; V also reflected that she wouldn't feel comfortable going back to her high school, stating, "I don't really feel like I could go visit my school and really be welcome, [...] like I'm not even entirely sure we would be allowed on the sort of campus if people knew we were coming."

This cycle could also be seen in the area of passing and disclosure. Dependent upon the treatment and messages of others, participants then decided to pass or disclose their identities in the hopes of receiving affirmation or avoiding prejudice in the treatment of others. For May, she discussed how she would sometimes share certain identities that others would see as more accessible, for self-preservation, in the hopes of affecting how others treated her. As she discussed when describing people's questions about her hair,

There have been a lot of times where people have said like "why is your hair like that" and I'll be like "I'm Jewish", because I think people ...- White people I'm talking about exclusively here- are very willing to make a mental leap like "oh she's Jewish, Jewish people are sometimes from the desert so that's why she's like a little bit brown". They don't know the words of 'Ashkenazi' and 'Sephardic Jews', but they understand that they exist um, and so I think that a lot of the time I must pass as a Sephardic Jew to people if I disclose my Judaism, and so like Judaism is like absolutely a privilege on that front too.

Summary

Overall, the interview data provided rich information in response to this project's overarching research question, "what does racial identity and sexual identity development look like for mixed, bisexual women?" From these participants' perspectives, development was ongoing, and for some, development of these two identities intersected. Though participants differed in seeing how their identities developed, all fifteen participants identified the importance of other identities and experiences, their environment, and how they were treated by others as impactful. Participants made sense of these factors, either turning inward or outward, though these two responses were by no means mutually exclusive. Most participants reported both meaning-making responses and then their consequential effects on the core elements, e.g. creating new supports, choosing their own labels, deciding not to disclose if feeling unsafe.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This final chapter will discuss multiple aspects of the study and its' meaning for future work. Major findings and their relation to existing literature will be discussed. Implications for future clinical practice, prevention, and research will be described. Limitations to the study will also be considered and how future studies could expand upon these sample limitations. Finally, the chapter will close with a conclusion.

The present study explored how bisexual, biracial women saw their own identity formation through questions about their identity labels, identity development, experiences, community, disclosure, messages, and gender. Participants discussed multiple factors that contribute to their identity development; these common factors were broadly grouped into the following three categories: environment, how others treated them, and other identities and experiences. Environment consisted of multiple pieces for participants, ranging from the impact of certain regions and urban areas to the political and religious views of communities, families, and schools. Also within the environment, multiple participants discussed the implicit and explicit messages of race, sexuality, and gender that they received from others. The next common factor, treatment of others, was further divided through participant discussion into how their families, peers, and communities treated them. Finally, salient identities and informative experiences created the last common factor, other identities and experiences. Participants had two different kinds of meaning-making responses to these factors, sometimes both at once or both for different identities. Participants both explicitly and implicitly discussed how they

reacted inwardly, feeling in between communities, not belonging at all, or internalizing the messages and treatment of others. Outward responses manifested broadly into participants choosing their own labels, disclosing their identities purposefully, creating their own supports, and intentionally displaying cultural markers that implied their identities. Additionally, participants discussed that their identities were still changing and expected them to continue to change in the future. Data also showed that depending on their meaning-making responses, participants affected change on the common factors, creating an ongoing process between the common factors and consequential meaning-making response.

These findings show that development for these participants had no set stage progression and did not portray success as coming out or integrating their identity. This of course contradicts the findings of classic stage identity development in both racial (Jacobs, 1992; Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990) and sexual identity literature (Bradford, 1997; Cass, 1979; Weinberg et al., 1994). Additionally, these stage-like models were one-dimensional and multiple participants discussed how their identities informed each other or intersected. In contrast to Collins's (2000) biracial/bisexual identity model, not only did development not take the shape of neat categorical stages, but development looked different for bisexual and biracial identities for some participants. Many participants compared their different identities, feeling more rooted in one, while still navigating another. And in direct opposition to Collins's (2000) final stage of resolution and acceptance, multiple participants did not shed themselves of the stereotypes and internalization of being either bisexual or biracial; many participants discussed an ongoing process of recognizing messages they had internalized or experiencing confusion dependent upon new life experiences, settings, or treatment of others.

Findings were more parallel to the current non-heterosexual female literature (Farr et al., 2014; Julian et al., 2014; Savin-Williams, 2005). Participants had a range of experiences, though shared experiences of prejudice created perceived difference in psychological development, as found in Savin-Williams (2005) work. Much of Julian et al.'s (2014) findings were supported as well, with participants discussing feeling different from others, wanting to seek out information due to a lack of resources, and the importance of contextual relationships. Though participants did not endorse having a "core bisexual" identity, since a few participants discussed identifying with the lesbian community for some time before falling in love with a man, the fluidity and variability of female sexuality, as discussed by Farr, Diamond & Boker (2014), was expressed by participants. Despite this overlap of sexual orientation findings between this study and current bisexual literature, singular focus on sexual orientation falls short of the experiences discussed by participants. Some participants did see their identities as separate, but most participants saw their sexual identities as intersecting and irremovable from their experiences of being biracial women. Participants reflected on the exclusivity of White LGBTQ spaces and the homophobia in communities of color and religious communities, indicating the importance of including race when thinking of sexual orientation and making these aforementioned models (Farr et al., 2014; Julian et al., 2014; Savin-Williams, 2005) incomplete for biracial, bisexual women.

A similar relationship emerged when comparing this study's findings to current biracial literature (Renn, 2000; Rockquemore, 2002; Root, 1998). Much of Root's (1998) model of racial identity development was upheld by this project's findings. Participants did indeed recognize multiple factors to their development, displayed fluidity of identity over time and circumstance, and took into account social environments and regional history. However, participants specifically referenced how they perceived their sexual orientation was informed by culture and

that being bisexual made participants feel excluded in certain racial groups or communities. Root's (1998) model, though comprehensive, still does not take into account this relationship between sexual orientation and race. The ecological approach of Renn's (2004) four overlapping contextual systems, though broad and supported by this project's findings on the importance of environment, does little to help understand identity development as a process when considering the internal meaning-making that this study's participants showed. Finally, though the African-American mixed, bisexual participants of this study discussed the significance of physical characteristics within Black communities, participants did not support the idea that the worst prejudice they experienced came from other Black women (Rockquemore, 2002).

The present study's findings aligned much better with the intersectional work of Dworkin (2002) and Stanley (2004). Many of Stanley's (2004) findings were highlighted in the data; participants acknowledged the impact of the treatment of their families, friends, and communities. Participants discussed the decision-making required in order to navigate spaces and disclose their identities or choose to pass as a majority community member. Participants also acknowledged the prejudice from both minority and majority racial and sexual communities. Additionally, as Dworkin's (2002) work discussed, some participants did indeed discuss the impact of religion and their identity as a feminist as important in their identity development.

The findings of the present study supported much of King's work (2011a, 2011b, 2013) on biracial, bisexual women as well, though not all of her findings. Though participants discussed "trying on" identities internally before disclosing to others, continually negotiated their selves, and saw college as a place that had more freedom to explore than previous contexts (King, 2011a), not all participants found college to be a welcoming place where they felt a sense of belonging. Within King's (2011b) conceptualization of identity development in response to

Collins's (2000) biracial/bisexual identity model, not all of her four elements of development were supported. Some of this study's participants did discuss the effect of the environment and the treatment of others, discussed college as a time of expanded exploration, and acknowledged that their identities might still change and evolve. However, not all participants' expressed confusion about their identities early on; a few discussed feeling rooted and certain in their bisexual or biracial identities as children, though King's (2011b) assertion that the messages from other people and settings propelled further awareness was supported. King's (2013) exploration into the mixed messages that biracial, bisexual women received was also somewhat supported. Like the current study, she categorized the messages origins into family, peers, and school, though the current study showed that region and religious communities also had an impact on the messages that participants received.

In acknowledging the limitations of these studies (see Chapter 2), this present's study's expanded sample and questions about gender and other identities did as King (2011a, 2011b, 2013) predicted, and deepened the discourse on identity formation. When asked about their gender and its impact on their identities, participants had a range of responses above and beyond what was discussed in King's (2011a, 2011b, 2013) conceptualization of identity. Some participants recognized that their in-between feelings of race and sexual orientation were similar to their feelings of being genderqueer, non-conforming, or without gender label. Some participants acknowledged the role that gender played in bisexual stereotypes, commenting on the difficulty facing bisexual men and the experienced fetishization of not only being a bisexual woman, but also being a biracial woman. Gender was also prominent in participant interviews as much of the peer prejudice they received was from cisgender, White men. Beyond gender, multiple participants discussed the importance of their mental health, social class status, political

and philosophical ideology, international experiences, sexual assaults, etc. and how this impacted their lived experiences as well as their identities.

The participants' perceptions of their multiple identities, contributing factors, and how they cultivated meaning, supported much of Abes, Jones, and McEwen's (2007) intersectional model of identity development. Congruent with Abes et al.'s (2007) model, participants identified multiple identities that intersected at times and whose salience shifted over the life-span. Participants also discussed the impact of contextual influences like family, peers, prejudice, and sociopolitical conditions like the model proposed. Further, participants did indeed filter these identities through meaning-making, dependent upon the aforementioned contextual influences. Most participants did not discuss a core personality mentioned in the model, nor did all participants see their identities as intersecting. And though the model (Abes et al., 2007) makes room for meaning-making, it does not show how participants consequentially enact change in their internal or external worlds, unlike the present study's emergent model.

Implications

Future Research.

Since the findings of this study further question the relevance of classic stage theories (Bradford, 1997; Cass, 1979; Jacobs, 1992; Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990; Weinberg et al., 1994) in being too categorical and not intersectional enough for people of color and biracial/bisexual individuals, future research should not continue to base conceptualizations of identity off of these models. Current sexuality research should focus on expanding their samples to include people of color, especially biracial individuals. Gender should be explored explicitly in future research looking at intersectional identity, as well as

making room for other identities and experiences, which was salient for many participants in the present study.

Building off of this study's findings of an ongoing process between common factors and meaning-making, expanded samples would provide more information about identity development. This study specifically recruited a female-identifying sample that had one White parent. Further research should explore what identity development looks like for multiracial individuals without White heritage. As a few participants discussed in terms of their own sense of gender, further identity exploration using samples of non-binary, biracial, bisexual individuals would potentially explore the limitations of socially constructed binaries and perhaps lend further insight into how people outside of identity dichotomies construct and make sense of their identity. Additionally, since a few participants acknowledged that bisexual men are seen and treated different than bisexual women, further research with bisexual, biracial men would lend more insight into how identity formation looks.

Implications for Clinical Practice.

This study may be beneficial in developing cultural competence for clinicians who work for biracial, bisexual female-identified clients. While the research implications have already been touched upon, these implications have potential emotional and psychological effects as displayed by participants. Some participants explicitly discussed their mental health concerns, their curiosity into how this connected to being a bisexual and biracial women, and the positive impact of therapy. Creating an open and non-judgmental space where participants can unpack microaggressions and prejudice, explore their identities, and express their emotions would be extremely beneficial (Hudson, 2015; King 2011a; Stanley, 2008). Small gestures of allyship like rainbow stickers, safe space designations, and culturally diverse décor or information should be

displayed since participants frequently discussed how they would not disclose their identities if they felt unsafe. Similarly, displays or self-disclosure of religiosity or conservative political views should be given considerable thought as some participants voiced their discomfort or lack of safety amongst individuals who discussed conservative religious and political views (Dworkin, 2002).

As with any other minority clients, assumptions should not be made about how bisexual, biracial female clients see themselves, interact with others, or experience their identities (Stanley, 2008). Great effort should be put into understanding the intersectionality of identities, making room for ambivalence, confusion, and dynamism (Hudson, 2015; King 2011a; Stanley, 2008). An understanding of the fluidity of female sexuality and racial identity development would be essential in working with this population (Brooks et al., 2008; King, 2013; Stanley, 2008). Further knowledge or acknowledgement of the challenges facing biracial and bisexual women, like fetishization and lack of belonging, would be integral as well. Building upon this study's findings, clinicians would benefit from exploring the client's environment, treatment from others, and other intersecting identities in order to understand contributing factors to identity development. Encouraging clients to think about how they have made sense of these different pieces would also provide space for reflection and further identity work (Stanley, 2008). And finally, allowing for clients to create their own meanings and construct their own identity could be an empowering, corrective experience (King 2011a; Stanley, 2008).

Implications for Prevention.

In thinking about clinical work with families with biracial and bisexual children, clinicians should encourage parents/guardians to reflect on the messages they are explicitly and implicitly sharing with their children about race, sexuality, and gender (King, 2013). Books and

other media depicting multiracial families and individuals as well as same-sex families would be beneficial in providing representation for biracial, bisexual youth. Since participants discussed how their minority parent's relationship with their race was impactful, clinicians should also encourage minority parents to reflect upon how they see their own race and ethnicity (King, 2013). Interracial couples should also be given room to consider their race and ethnicity and the ways in which they want their culture and traditions to be shared with their children. Specifically in terms of sexuality, participants discussed fear or rejection around disclosing to their parents. As such, clinicians should provide psychoeducation around sexuality to parents and provide resources for further information and communication skills.

Since multiple participants discussed their peers or school setting within their interviews, school counselors and clinicians working with biracial, bisexual students could also draw benefit from this study. Beyond the clinical suggestions already presented, encouraging teachers and staff to be aware of messages of racial and sexual binaries in materials and addressing students would be helpful (King 2013). Advocating for administrations to take swift action against homophobia and biphobia and lobbying for safe spaces, organizations like Gay Straight Alliances, and allowing for fluidity in traditional gendered practices (e.g. Homecoming King and Queen) would allow for bisexual students to feel more safe and accepted.

Along this vein, multiple participants discussed their college experience in terms of safety, community, and expanding their perceptions on identity. University staff in charge of LGBTQ resource centers, religious centers, centers of color, and women's centers should attempt to be as inclusive as possible in their mission, signage, resources, and services provided (Abes et al., 2007; King 2011a). Multiple participants reflected on how LGBTQ spaces felt too White, mono-sexual, or cisgender; university staff would do well to diversify the types of discussions,

events, and intended audience within LGBTQ resource centers (King 2011a). Some participants also discussed feeling invisible or excluded in college centers of color or student run racial/ethnic organizations. University advising faculty or staff should similarly attempt to encourage dialogue about biraciality, stereotypes around cultural markers like skin color and language, sexual orientation, and inclusion of mixed students within these spaces (King 2011a). Some participants also discussed the impact of certain courses, assignments, and experiences in college. Following the rich experiences of some participants, faculty should begin or continue to design assignments and coursework that encourage reflections on one's race, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Abes et al., 2007; King 2011a). As mentioned in Chapter 4, a few participants also specifically mentioned how studying abroad shaped their sense of race and self; making abroad experiences accessible for students of all social classes and majors would help continue this trend. Participants also discussed the impact of religious organizations and the difficulty in navigating college while being low-income. If universities have social justice mission statements or truly want their students to succeed, attempts at making spaces more inclusive and providing more financial support should be prioritized (Abes et al., 2007; King 2011a).

Limitations and Future Directions

Though fifteen participants were interviewed for this study, a larger sample would deepen and enrich the findings through replication. Additionally, grounded theory asserts that a sample should expand until saturation has occurred. Though saturation was reached within this study to allow for specific themes and processes to emerge, further interviews would potentially add data towards more complete saturation.

This sample was equally divided between participants of Asian, Black/African, and Latinx descent, but did not include participants with salient Native American identities or Middle

Eastern identities. The data would absolutely benefit from this additional representation of these other cultures as certain differences emerged between racial/ethnic groups. Five of the participants were living outside of the United States at the time of the interview, and five of the participants were not initially from the United States. The data from these individuals allowed for much cross-cultural consideration. A larger sample that included more mixed, bisexual women abroad would potentially enrich the data further.

This study's sample was also very well-educated, with all participants either currently being in college, had graduated already from college, or had finished or was currently attending graduate school. Additionally, many of the participants had taken specific courses or had educational interests in intersectionality, social justice, race relations, or queer issues. As the ease of recruitment displayed, all participants were very interested in engaging in discourse about race, sexual orientation, and other issues like feminism, mental health, social justice, politics, and media representation. As such, the complex and reflective ways in which participants discussed their experiences and identities may very well have been affected by their education. Future research should attempt to diversify the educational attainment of samples in order to control for these factors.

Participant average age may have also been a potential limitation to this study. A few individuals discussed the importance of their generation's openness to LGBTQ issues and the increasing awareness about race relations, mixed people, and interracial relationships. Consequently, younger generations of mixed, bisexual women may be navigating their identities differently than older generations. A sample with older participants, and indeed perhaps even younger participants, could shed light on this potential issue.

Connected to generational issues, the accessibility and utilization of the internet was an interesting piece through the project from recruitment to data collection to how participants connected to others and how they received information. Recruitment took an astonishingly quick two weeks, thanks to social network recruitment. Many participants discussed how social networks, specifically Tumblr and Facebook, acted as a way to inform themselves of identity issues and connect to other queer women of color. As such, those queer, biracial women who do not have access to the internet or do not engage in social networks were not included in this study and may have very different experiences of gaining resources and connecting to others. Future samples should be recruited using multiple avenues, making sure not to limit recruitment due to technology literacy or access.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the identity development process for biracial, bisexual women. As the number of biracial/multiracial youth increases and bisexual people continue to account for the majority of LGBTQ community members, it is increasingly imperative to include these individuals in discussions of identity, especially since they experience unique prejudices, challenges, and mental health risks. Traditionally, identity development literature has been focused on one identity at a time, utilizes stage progression models, and sees an out and integrated identity as ideal. In response, more current identity development research has focused more on fluidity, common themes and experiences, and contextual factors. Despite a handful of exceptions, current identity work still largely avoids intersectional issues, using mono-racial or mono-sexual samples. In an effort to attend to these voids, the current study explored how biracial, bisexual women saw their identity development, the messages they received, their communities and supports, their perception of gender and other identities, and how they

navigated disclosing or passing. A continual process between three common factors (environment, treatment of others, and other identities and experiences) and meaning-making responses (inward and/or outward) emerged from the data. These findings contribute valuable information for research, clinical practice, and prevention focused on this unique and invisible population.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe yourself.

What about those specific terms feel right for you?

(Why not other labels?)

Have you always identified this way?

(What made you change your mind?/What about these labels have felt right for you over time?)

How would you have described yourself in the past?

(When did you first identify in a certain way?)

Did your identities develop at the same

time? (How?)

(Are they separate in any way?)

Where did you learn what _____ means?"

(Who/what/where gave you these messages?)

2. Who makes up your support system?

(What makes them supportive?)

(Are there certain people who don't feel supportive?) (How so?)

3. How are you treated by others?

(Do people acknowledge/appreciate your identities?)

(Who does not acknowledge you?)

4. Where do you feel like you belong?

(What makes this space/those people feel supportive?)

(Are there certain communities you belong to?)

(Why these communities?)

(Where do you feel excluded from?)

(What makes you feel that way?)

5. When do you disclose your identities to others?

(What makes you feel comfortable to out yourself?)

(What makes you feel like you cannot disclose?)

(Have you ever felt the need to pass?)

6. Are there other dimensions of your life and identity that are important to this conversation?

(You were eligible for this study because of your _____ identity. We have not talked a lot about it yet, did you have anything to add about it?)

(What haven't I asked yet?)

(What would you like to tell me that we haven't covered?)

(What would you recommend I ask the next participant?)

(Is there anything you would like to ask someone else who identifies in these ways?)

7. What was this interview experience like for you?

After:

(What is your age?)

(Are you interested in reviewing our first analysis of your transcript? If so, next steps)

(Are you interested in receiving the final product of the dissertation? Confidentiality)

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