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WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE: AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCES OF BISEXUAL-IDENTIFYING ASIAN MEN WITH SAME AND DIFFERENT GENDER PARTNERS

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WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE: AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO
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IDENTIFYING ASIAN MEN WITH SAME AND DIFFERENT GENDER PARTNERS

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By

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Lexington, Kentucky

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2021

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE: AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCES OF BISEXUAL-IDENTIFYING ASIAN MEN WITH SAME AND DIFFERENT GENDER PARTNERS

The relationship experiences of bisexual-identifying men of color have been neglected in psychological studies of race, gender, and sexuality. Few studies, if any, have examined the relationship experiences of Asian bisexual men, even though this population's multiple marginalized and stigmatized social identities increase their health risks (Bryant-Davis, 2007; Carter, 2007; Ching et al., 2018). Bisexuality is commonly defined by an individual's intimate partner attraction and/or behavior (e.g., Swan & Habibi, 2018), making relationship experiences fundamental to bisexual identity. More generally, intimate relationships can contribute to and/or pose challenges to psychological well-being (Feinstein, et al., 2016; Whitton et al., 2018), yet relatively few studies on bisexual health and well-being have focused on this central life domain. I approached the current study from an intersectional perspective that considers the symbiotic, interactive, and socially constructed experiences of bisexual identity, gender identity, and Asian identity as it influences relationship experiences. The purpose of the current study was to explore bisexual-identifying Asian men's (BIAM) relationship experiences with same and different gender partners.

Participants who self-identified as bisexual, Asian men, who were at least 23 years of age, and were either permanent residents or citizens of North America, were recruited using social media and listservs and then screened for inclusion using a Qualtrics Survey (Qualtrics, Provo, UT) of demographic information. A final sample of 15 participants of diverse gender identities and diverse Asian identities was selected for in-depth interviews. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using a Constructivist Grounded Theory Approach (Charmaz, 2014). Each transcript underwent initial coding, focused coding, and memo-ing. Consolidation of focused codes under two major topics a) the influence of gender on relationship dynamics and, b) the experience of bisexual stigma and its influence on relationship experiences captured BIAM's relationship experiences with same and different gender partners. When describing the influence of gender on their romantic relationships, participants highlighted compatibility and specific relationship dynamics that were often shaped by masculine gender norms. They also described their experiences of bisexual stigma on their choice of partners, their disclosure and concealment decisions, and their fears and experiences of rejection in their relationships with same and different gender partners. Participants also shared their perceptions of how cultural norms related to their race, religion, and/or ethnic background shaped experiences of gender and bisexual stigma in their relationships. BIAM create and maintain their intimate relationships in a social context of bi erasure, bi invisibility, racism, and gendered expectations. The challenge of coping with socially constructed binaries across identity intersections will be discussed along with the implications for relational health and individual psychological health and well-being.

KEYWORDS: Bisexual, Asian, men, gender, partner, romantic relationships, intersectionality

Cheryl Kwok

(Name of Student)

April 29, 2021

(Date)

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE: AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The relationship experiences of bisexual-identifying Asian men (BIAM) have been neglected in studies of gender and sexuality. Given that bisexuality is commonly defined by an individual's intimate partner attraction and/or behavior (e.g., Swan & Habibi, 2018), relationship experiences are a fundamental aspect of bisexual identity, making the exploration of these experiences imperative. Therefore, understanding bisexual relationship experiences can provide in-depth knowledge about the overall lived experiences of BIAM.

The literature on bisexual-identifying men (BIM) tends to narrowly concentrate on HIV transmission or sexually transmitted infections (e.g., Jeffries, 2014; Montgomery, et al., 2003; Muñoz-Laboy & Dodge, 2007). In their limited focus on sexual behavior, many research studies have perpetuated negative stereotypes of BIM as hypersexual, promiscuous, and risk-taking (Flanders, et al., 2016; Israel & Mohr, 2004). Even in research on sexual minorities, bisexual individuals and specifically BIM are underrepresented (Kaestle & Ivory, 2012; Monro, et al., 2017; Phillips, et al., 2003; Ross, et al., 2017). Across existing literature, researchers have often combined subsamples of gay, bisexual, and/or men who have sex with men (MSM) together rather than conducting separate analyses (e.g., Steinman, 2011). Other studies combine bisexual men's and bisexual women's experiences under the umbrella of "the bisexual experience" (e.g., Dodge, et al., 2016; Flanders, 2015; Mohr, et al., 2017).

Most available studies of BIM also neglect to consider the influences of intersecting identities such as race and ethnicity. Samples are overwhelmingly White, with little representation of People of Color (POC) (e.g., Brewster & Moradi, 2010;

McCormack, et al., 2015; Szymanski & Carr, 2008). The unique lived experiences of bisexual-identifying Asian men (BIAM) are unknown as a result.

What we do know from the existing research is that BIM face stigma-related mental health challenges (Bostwick, et al., 2010; Conron, et al., 2010). This stigma is reinforced and maintained by negative attitudes, stereotypes, and discriminatory behaviors that specifically target individuals with bisexual identities. Bisexual stigma includes bi-negativity, the prejudice and discrimination directed toward bisexual people, and monosexism – the belief that all “normal” sexual orientations are either homosexual or heterosexual, and therefore an individual cannot be genuinely attracted to more than one gender (Firestein, 1996; Ross, et al., 2010).

Early studies found that similar to gay men, BIM experience violence, discrimination, and negative attitudes as a result of their sexual orientation (Herek, 2002; Herek, et al., 1999; Huebner, et al., 2004). They contend with negative assumptions that they are a) confused and indecisive regarding their sexual and romantic preferences, b) untrustworthy, c) less interested in engaging in monogamous relationships and thus are less likely to sustain long-term monogamous relationships and likely to cheat on their partners, and d) sexually promiscuous (Fox, 1991; McLean, 2008; Ochs, 1996; Udis-Kessler, 1996; Zinik, 1985; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Rust, 2002; Zivony, 2014). BIM may be unfavorably evaluated by society based on these stereotypes. These negative stereotypes about bisexual identity intersect with other privileged and oppressed identities based on gender and race, requiring an intersectional approach to understanding BIAM.

Population-based research shows that bisexual People of Color (BPOC) in the United States are subject to more racialization than heterosexual, gay, and lesbian people

(Gates, 2010; Sandfort & Dodge, 2008) This reality underscores the importance of understanding the impact of culture and race on the lived experiences of BIAM. My previous study (Kwok et al., 2020) included a majority sample of Women of Color (WOC) and found that the experiences of POC significantly diverge from those of their White counterparts. Further, the clustering together of POC under one larger umbrella considerably diluted the understanding of specific sub-groups and their individual experiences. A focus on Men of Color, in general, does not reveal the unique lived experiences of specific racial/ethnic minority groups. Thus, it was important in the current study to focus on a specific racial/ethnic group, Asian men.

In sum, much of the existing scholarship tends to stigmatize and sexualize bisexuality wherein a majority of the focus lies in physical and sexual experience while very little emphasis is directed to understanding how identities like gender and race play a role in shaping romantic relationship experiences. Through this study, I aimed to give voice to BIAM and the complexities of their relationship experiences. I sought to address a gap in the existing literature on BIAM and contribute to future research and affirmative psychotherapeutic practices. Given that so much research highlights the difficulties associated with the bisexual identity and how gender, race, and culture interact with sexual identity, I hope that this study elucidates the unique complexities experienced by BIAM in their romantic relationships.

Review of Literature

A systematic review of literature was conducted using PubMed and PsycInfo as well as manual searches through Google Scholar, and University of Kentucky Libraries. Articles were searched for using key words including: “bisexual/bisexuality”, “LGBTQ”, “LGBT”, “relationships”, “relationship experiences”, “relationship expectations”, “partner”, “gay”, “MSM”, “men”, “Asian”, “Asian American”, “People of Color”, “stigma”, “bisexual stigma”, “minority stress”, “well-being”, “health”, “attitudes about bisexuality”, and “behaviorally bisexual”. Finally, the reference sections of obtained papers, as well as PsycINFO-generated listings of works that cite the papers, were examined for additional studies. Any articles that did not pertain to either the experiences of bisexual individuals, LGBTQ+ individuals, and/or romantic relationships were excluded. Further, articles that were not published in peer-review journals were excluded. The search was restricted to peer-reviewed studies in the English language.

After reviewing the 105 published studies (see Figure 1) that included BIM in their samples, I concluded that no study specifically examined BIAM's perceptions of their relationship experiences and how these experiences are influenced by socially constructed and intersecting systems of sexuality, gender, and race. In the following sections of this chapter, I review the literature on romantic relationships and bisexual individuals' health and well-being (see columns 1 and 2 of Figure 1). I then summarize findings on bisexual men and their romantic relationships with a focus on bi invisibility (see columns 3, 4 and 5 in Figure 1). Next, I discuss the influence of masculinity, and I conclude by examining how the intersections of gender, race, and bisexual identity influence the relationship and overall lived experiences of BIAM.

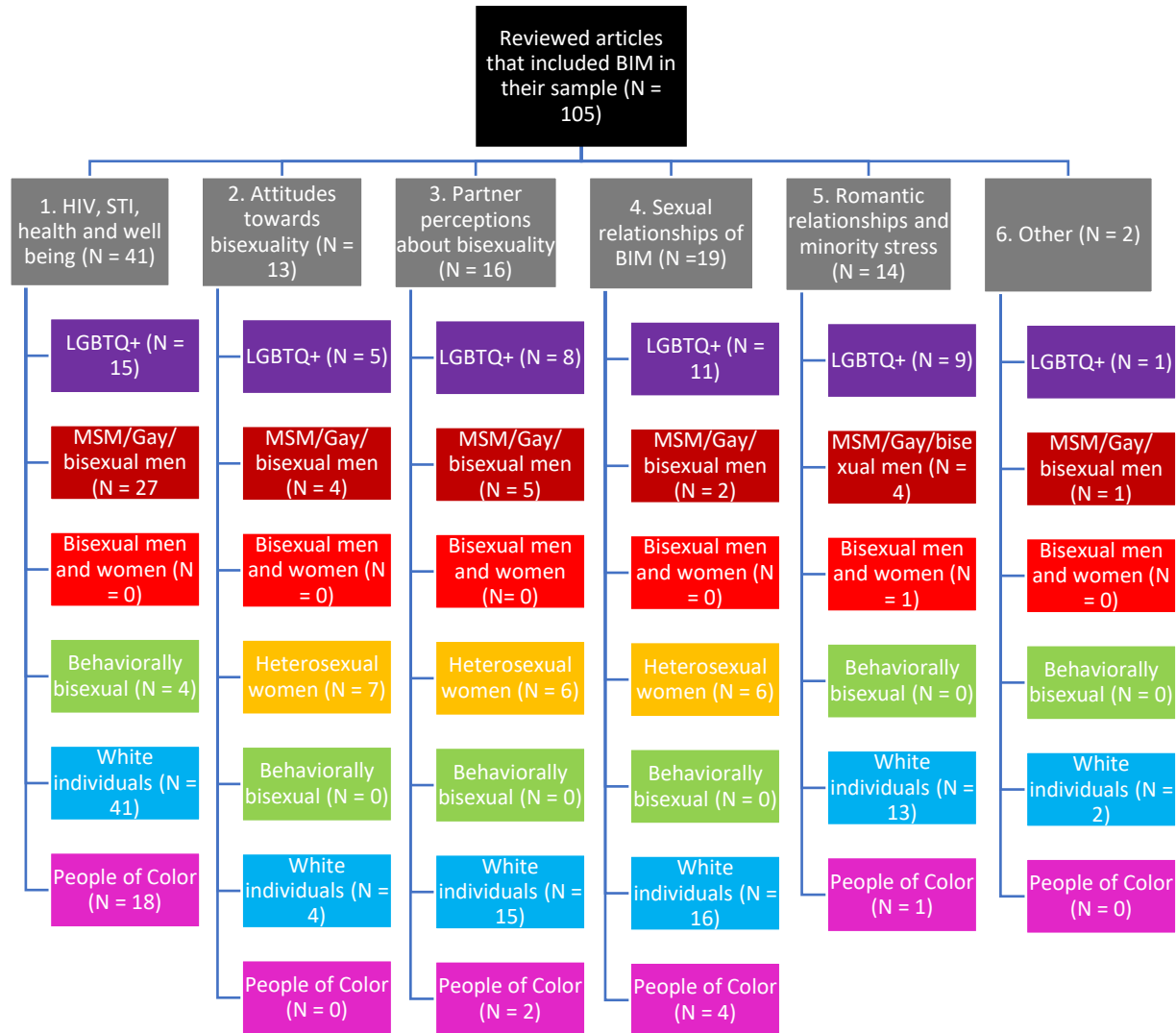


Figure 1: Breakdown of Existing Research

Relevant Terminology

For this study, we adopt Eisner’s (2013) definition of *bisexuality*: “attraction to people of more than one sex or gender; attraction to people of genders similar to our own, and to people of genders different from our own; or attraction to people of multiple genders” (p. 19). *Bisexual stigma* includes negative attitudes, stereotypes, and discriminatory behaviors targeting bisexual people (Swan & Habibi, 2018). *Binegativity*

reflects negative attitudes toward bisexuality (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999), including hostility toward and intolerance of bisexual individuals. *Bi invisibility* operates through three key mechanisms: the absence or silencing of bisexual voices; assumptions that bisexual individuals are gay, lesbian, or heterosexual depending on the perceived gender of their partner; and the complete inclusion of bisexuals under the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) umbrella rather than as an independent sexual identity (McLean, 2018). *Bi erasure* has been tied to individuals' experience of antibisexual prejudice both within and outside of the LGBTQ community (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; McLean, 2015; Nutter-Pridgen, 2015; Yost & Thomas, 2012). *Biphobia* is the irrational fear, distrust, or dislike of individuals who do not choose to identify as homosexual or heterosexual and thus do not identify as being on either side of the dichotomy of sexuality (Dworkin 2001). Finally, *internalized biphobia* is the process through which bisexual-identifying individuals internalize the attitudes of biphobia (e.g., irrational fear, distrust, or dislike of bisexual-identifying individuals) into their self-view (Ochs, 1996).

Gender identity is a person's internal sense of being a man, a woman, or a person of another gender. Because gender identity is internal, it is not necessarily visible to others (Bockting & Cesaretti, 2001). Levitt (2019) defines *genders* as either “sets of personal qualities within a culture associated with physiological sex or sets of qualities that evolve in reaction to limitations of existing genders.” (p. 275) *Cisgender* individuals are those whose gender identity and expression are congruent with what society generally expects based on their assigned sex at birth (Hooks, 2015). *Transgender* is an adjective and considered an umbrella term that describes a wide range of people with varying

identities (Bockting & Cesaretti, 2001). Some transgender individuals are binary-identified, meaning that they identify as women or men. *Transgender men or trans men* are individuals who were assigned female sex at birth and identify as men (Budge, 2013). Some transgender individuals identify as *nonbinary*, meaning that they may see themselves as having aspects of both masculine and feminine genders, may not identify with any gender or may identify with a gender other than man or woman. In this study, we define *same gender partner* as an individual whose gender identity is the same as that of the participant (e.g., cis man, trans man) while *different gender partners* are those individuals whose gender identities are different from the participant (e.g., nonbinary, cis woman, trans woman).

Over time, the definition of *race* has ranged from biological and genetic explanations (e.g., Lehrman, 2003; Rushton, 1995) to understanding it as a form of socio-politically constructed hierarchies (e.g., Haney López, 2000; Spickard, 1992). On the other hand, Phinney (2000) defined *ethnicity* as a dynamic, multidimensional construct that refers to an individual's identity in terms of a subgroup that claims a common ancestry and shares culture, race, religion, language, place of origin, or kinship. The understanding of both *race* and *ethnicity* is complicated by the fact that definitions of race and ethnicity have shifted over time, trending toward greater acknowledgment of these as socially constructed and evolving concepts and toward more critical evaluations of how these constructs are operationalized, used, and reified in research (e.g., Helms et al. 2005; Quintana 2007). Therefore, for this study, *racial/ethnic identities* were operationalized as sociodemographic categories that were self-identified by participants.

Romantic Relationships and the Health and Well-Being of Bisexual Individuals

Studies have shown that bisexual individuals generally suffer from poorer mental, physical, and sexual health when compared to their gay, lesbian, and heterosexual counterparts (Barker, et al., 2014; Gonzales, et al., 2016; Gorman, et al., 2015; Guasp & Taylor, 2012; Jorm, et al., 2003; San Francisco Human Rights Commission, 2011). Feinstein and colleagues (2016) studied how romantic relationship involvement acted as a minority stress buffer for gay/lesbian individuals versus bisexual individuals ($N = 577$; of which 335 identified as gay/lesbian while 242 identified as bisexual). For bisexual individuals, relationship involvement was associated with an increase in symptoms of an anxiety disorder (e.g., social anxiety disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, PTSD). The researchers posited that the cause for this increased stress and poor mental health in bisexual individuals in relationships may be the result of their bisexual identity becoming invisible as well as having to navigate the coming out and disclosure process.

In a study of racially diverse sexual minority youth ($N = 248$) that assessed the associations between relationship involvement and psychological distress, Whitton et al. (2018) found that bisexual-identifying participants ($n = 70$) reported higher psychological distress associated with being involved in romantic relationships compared to gay/lesbian youth in romantic relationships. (No demographic information regarding the race of, or even number of BIM was provided). Overall, romantic relationship experiences play a significant role in the lives of bisexual-identifying individuals and may impact mental health and well-being. However, we do not currently know how relationship experiences specifically influence the lived experiences of BIAM.

Bisexual Stigma and Romantic Relationships

Bisexual individuals experience unique challenges when it comes to dating and maintaining committed relationships. These challenges are at least partially the result of the stigma associated with bisexuality. In their pursuit of intimate relationships, bisexual individuals contend with heterosexual individuals' attitudes that are more negative towards them compared to towards lesbian and gay people (de Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Eliason, 1997; Yost & Thomas, 2012). Bisexual individuals experience stigma from the LGBTQ community as well (Mohr & Rochlen, 1999; Mulick & Wright, 2002) as they are perceived to be promiscuous, untrustworthy, unstable, and confused (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999; Ochs, 1996; Scherrer, et al., 2015; Todd, et al., 2016; Zivony & Lobel, 2014). As mentioned above, bisexual individuals are stereotyped to be less likely to be monogamous than heterosexual individuals and more likely to have a sexually transmitted disease (STD) than heterosexual, gay, or lesbian individuals (Herek & McLemore, 2013; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Spalding & Peplau, 1997). BIM, in particular, are perceived by heterosexual individuals to be less capable of maintaining a long-term relationship compared to heterosexual and gay men (Zivony & Lobel, 2014).

These negative attitudes towards bisexual individuals often result in a reluctance to enter into a relationship with a bisexual partner. Eliason (1997) found that heterosexual individuals were very unlikely (52%) and somewhat unlikely (25%) to have a sexual relationship with a bisexual partner they were attracted to. In samples of gay men and lesbian women, nearly one-third reported being unwilling to date a bisexual person (Mohr & Rochlen, 1999). In a study of heterosexual women and men's ($N = 155$) attitudes towards bisexual men and women in the context of a different-sex or a same-sex

marriage relationship, participants tended to pair bisexual individuals with other bisexual individuals which the researchers interpreted as a bias against mixed-orientation relationships (e.g., between bisexual and monosexual individuals) (Breno & Galupo, 2008). Similar to these older studies, more recent literature has also found negative attitudes towards bisexual individuals and a lower willingness to engage in romantic or sexual activities with a bisexual partner (Feinstein et al., 2016; Hertlein et al., 2016; Katz-Wise et al., 2019).

Given that negative stereotypes about bisexual individuals often focus on assumptions about infidelity and the inability to maintain a long-term, committed relationship (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Feinstein et al., 2014), heterosexual women, unsurprisingly, show increased insecurity in relationships with bisexual men (Armstrong & Reissing, 2014). In a study of attitudes towards sex, dating, and relationships with bisexual partners, Armstrong and Reissing (2014) collected data from a sample of 720 individuals (347 men and 373 women) of which 699 identified as heterosexual. Results showed that heterosexual women endorsed high levels of insecurity towards relationships with bisexual men, reported having concerns about being able to sexually fulfill their partner's needs, and perceived that their partners would be unfaithful and/or that their partners were actually gay. They also found that female participants were worried about engaging in relationships with bisexual men which increased as the level of hypothetical commitment to the relationship increased (Armstrong & Reissing, 2014). These women felt that a male bisexual partner may "become gay in the future, that they would be unable to fulfill all of their partner's sexual needs, and that their partner would cheat on them with, or leave them for, a man" (p. 244). The study found that female partners were

concerned that they would feel more jealous of a partner's male friends than his female friends. On the other hand, Feinstein et al. (2016) found that heterosexual women who believed that bisexuality was a stable sexual orientation (as opposed to a phase) were more willing to date a bisexual man.

In tandem with the findings regarding bisexual stigma, qualitative research found that partners invalidate the bisexual identity of their partners by claiming that bisexuality is not a stable sexual orientation or by pressuring their bisexual partners to change their identity to represent their current relationship status (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009; Ross et al., 2010). In sum, available studies have focused predominantly on understanding how heterosexual and LG (lesbian-gay) individuals perceive being in a relationship with bisexual individuals. These studies have documented the stigma and bias that undermine a positive view of the romantic relational capacity of bisexual individuals. Yet, little to no scholarship has specifically focused on understanding the experience of relationships from the perspective of BIAM.

Masculinity and Bisexual Men's Romantic Relationships

A growing body of research posits that the gender of a bisexual individual's partner has a significant impact on an individual's relationship experiences (Feinstein & Dyar, 2018). In a study by Kwok et al. (2020) that interviewed 12 bisexual women, results showed that gender played a strong role in determining overall relationship experiences. Bisexual women reported that their experiences of traditional gender roles varied based on their partner's gender. This exploratory study found that women perceived that they tended to enact a "feminine" role when in relationships with men and

more fluid or flexible gender roles when in relationships with women. Most likely the relationship experiences of BIM are also shaped by their partner's gender.

To date, very little empirical research has investigated BIM's perceptions of gender roles in relationships (Pennington, 2009; Rieger, et al., 2013; Rosenthal, et al., 2011; Steinman, 2011). Upon examining existing research on the bisexual experience, those examining the role of gender predominantly focus on women (Steinman, 2011). Little research has been done that explores masculinity in relation to male bisexuality (Steinman, 2011). Proving one's masculinity or manhood is most commonly associated with having sex with, and conquering women and this gender role expectation is closely linked with 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Steinman, 2011). As noted by Yost and Thomas (2012), engaging in sexual behavior with individuals of different genders is a gender role violation for men. Bisexual identity or behavior, more specifically same-sex desires, and behaviors, are foundationally at odds with hegemonic masculinity (Burleson, 2005; Mahalik et al., 2003; Parent & Moradi, 2009).

Hegemonic masculinity is ascribed to the White, wealthy, able-bodied, cis-gender, heterosexual man. Thus, to engage in sexual behavior with more than one gender is to deviate from masculinity as defined and prescribed. Studies have found compulsory heterosexuality to be restrictive wherein any man engaging in any behaviors outside of those prescribed by hegemonic masculinity is cast out by society (Anderson, 2005; Duran et al., 2007). Duran and colleagues (2007) found that gay-identified men could engage in more behaviors associated with heterosexuality and still be seen as gay while heterosexual-identified men who engaged in same-gender sexual behavior were no longer

seen as straight. In general, the social norms associated with hegemonic masculinity prohibit same gender sexual behavior for men (McCormack et al., 2015).

However, it is important to note that bisexuality, unlike homosexuality may have more possibility for aligning with dominant ideas about masculinity (Steinman, 2011). Pascoe (2011) posits that through the discrediting of others, men attempt to achieve and demonstrate their masculinity, a process that requires constant attentiveness and performance (Steinman, 2011). By referring to another man through a stigmatization discourse (e.g., 'fag'), one reinforces one's own claim to masculinity (Pascoe, 2011). It burdens the receiver with the feminized and subordinate status of 'the fag'. Thus, perhaps in comparison to gay men, bisexual men may be more likely to bolster their own performance of masculinity by conforming to the pressures or ideals of heteronormative, hegemonic masculinity, especially in relationships with different gender partners.

Further, the interconnectedness between the stigmatization of non-hegemonic masculinity and non-heteronormative sexual behavior may explain why men experience higher levels of binegativity than women (Arriaga & Parent, 2019; Eliason, 1997; Herek, 2002; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999; Sarno et al., 2020). Thus, through critical analysis of the role of masculinity as dimensions of social power, bisexuality scholarship can gain in-depth conceptual insight into the bisexual male experience (Steinman, 2011).

Adherence to traditional masculine roles requires avoiding emotional expressiveness and self-disclosure which are thought of as feminine qualities (Burn, 1996; O'Neil, 1981). Men are expected to be "tough", withhold their emotional feelings and, have a lower capacity for intimacy (Ludlow & Mahalik, 2001; Vogel, et al., 2007; Vogel & Wester, 2003). Though we may assume that BIM also have similar difficulties

as heterosexual men when it comes to emotional expressiveness within relationships, there is little evidence to substantiate this claim. A study by Elder and colleagues (2015) investigated the sexual self-schemas and masculinity ideologies of 20 bisexual men. Results suggested that participants deviated from the heteronormative models of masculinity and showed strong motivations to emotionally connect to their partners. For instance, they expressed a desire to engage in sexual relationships only once they felt a sense of mutual commitment and understanding, which deviates from heteronormative sexual ideologies and hegemonic masculinity (De Gaston et al., 1996; Halloran, 1995; Komarovsky, 1976; Pennington, 2009; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003). Participants experienced women as generally receptive to their emotional expression, but gay men were not (Elder et al., 2015). This difference in context and behavior highlights BIM's distinct experiences with different gender partners. It also suggests that BIM may experience themselves as masculine depending on the sex and sexual orientation of their romantic and sexual partners (Elder et al., 2015). For most men in this study, same gender encounters consisted of less emotional expressiveness, while interactions with women allowed for an extended range of emotional expression. A limitation of this study was despite the sample of both White and Men of Color, little attention was given to the influence of race/ethnicity and culture on masculinity norms and ideologies. Clearly, a deeper investigation of BIM's perceptions of masculine norms and gender roles as they shape relationship experiences is needed. Thus, understanding how BIAM perceive the role of their partner's gender in their same and different gender relationships is the central aim of the current study.

Romantic Relationships and Intersections of Race, Masculinity, and Bisexual Identity

Intersectionality assumes marginalized, oppressed, and privileged identities result from socially constructed and interconnected systems of power that shape individual lived experience (Crawford, et al., 2002; Crenshaw, 1991; Parent, et al., 2013). In addition to oppression and marginalization related to their bisexual identity, BIAM are subject to oppression and marginalization based on their racial identity, and privilege or oppression based on their expression of their gender (Chun & Singh, 2010).

These intersections of identity form an important context for relationship experiences. In Kwok and colleague's (2020) study, 8 of 12 bisexual-identified women who identified as WOC explicitly described how culture and race shaped their relationship experiences. For these women, it was not only important for their partners (irrespective of gender) to actively advocate for and acknowledge their cultural, racial, and ethnic differences in their relationship, but they also shared that a potential partner's race determined whether or not they entered into the relationship at all. The four White women in the study did not consider their racial identities to be significant in influencing their lived experiences, thus emphasizing the saliency of race in the lives of the WOC.

Gender, race, and sexual identities are social constructs that position individuals and communities in social hierarchies that shape lived experience (and as Levitt, 2019 points out, these identities and lived experiences are also enacted in a specific historical time period). Through masculinity norms, men learn that social power is positively associated with a collection of masculine ideals specific to their cultural identities (Brooks & Good, 2001; Levant, 1995; Martin, 1990; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). It is

important to recognize that traditional masculinities are culturally defined and differ depending on specific cultural backgrounds. Typically, men from across cultures do not share a unified notion of what it means to be a man or what defines masculinity (Grundy, 2012; Herek, 1986; Kaufman, 1994; Nicholson, 1997).

Often, Men of Color (MOC) face the dilemma of having to navigate Euro-American expectations of masculine behavior that may differ from their racial minority cultural expectations (Stokes, et al.,1998). For example, Black men are less likely to emphasize economic and status achievements as indicators of masculinity and more likely to emphasize expressive, nurturing, and communal behavior (Harris, et al., 1994; Hooks, 2004; Hunter & Davis, 1992, 1994). If given the opportunity, MOC may embrace the unique cultural values of their ethnic background and resist White, hegemonic masculine prescriptions for being tough, hard, and domineering (e.g., Wade, 1998; Wester, 2008).

Asian American Culture and Masculinity

Asian Americans, as a community and socio-political identity, comprise of over 52 different ethnic groups (Hune, 2002). Therefore, to accurately define "Asian American culture" often proves difficult as it fails to capture the heterogeneous nature of varying cultures within Asia. However, for this study, we understand Asian culture through Helms' (1993) lens.

According to Helms (1993), individuals perceive themselves in relation to a specific racial group. For Asian Americans, racial identity is specific to the United States and is based on socio-political and geographical origins rather than a shared cultural heritage (Chen, 2004; Helms & Cook, 1999). The exploration of Asian American history

through the lens of Asian American men uncovered a racialization process that is often intertwined with the construction of gender and thus demands an intersectional perspective (Shek, 2007). Though Asian American men may be affected differently by changes in American society with respect to gender, especially according to their level of acculturation, they face additional challenges (Sue, 2001). They are not merely exposed to the values of the majority culture but are subject to traditional Asian cultural values embedded in racism and stereotyping. For example, Asian American men are made to oscillate between collectivist, Asian relationship values where men are given higher status, restrain strong emotions as a sign of maturity, respect authority, and consider modesty a virtue while being acculturated into individualistic, Euro-American, egalitarian relationship values where expressions of assertiveness and emotions are considered more emotionally healthy, where self-aggrandization is respected, and where men challenge others in areas of disagreement (Chang, 1996; House & Pinyuchon, 1998; Leong, 1998; Sue, 2001).

Asian American masculinity is a concept that has commonly been externally defined by social expectations, racism, and racialized gender expectations (Chan, 2001; Chan, 1998; Espiritu, 1997) and can often lead to negative self-evaluations due to a failure to live up to others' expectations. Thus, within the framework of hegemonic masculinity, Asian American masculinities are subordinated (Shek, 2007). A few recent studies specifically focused on the experiences of Asian men in the context of masculinity (e.g., Phua, 2007). Other studies expanded this exploration to include LGBTQ-identifying men (most commonly gay men). In a study on gay Asian men, Han (2006) found that the widely accepted, euro-centric view of masculinity resulted in

participants feeling “inadequate” within the larger gay community in the realms of physical beauty, sexual desirability, and power, often being expected to adopt “submissive” roles when in relationships with White men.

In studying the intersections of race and queer identity, a few studies began to capture the positionalities of queer Asian men within the larger context of masculinity (e.g., Chan, 2016). Despite the increased emphasis on understanding the experiences of gay Asian men, or bisexual MOC, I found no study that specifically focused on the experiences of BIAM within the contexts of masculinity, gender role socialization, and the intersections of race, gender, and sexual identities. Furthermore, I could find no empirical studies that explored the influence of or BIAM's self-perceptions of gender, race, and sexual identity, and masculinity in the context of their romantic relationships with same and different gender partners.

Conclusion

The review of the literature above demonstrates that what is missing is an in-depth understanding of the relationship experiences of BIAM with a focus on understanding how their romantic relationships with same and different gender partners are shaped by intersecting contexts of sexuality, gender, and race. A large gap exists in research specifically related to BIAM's relationship experiences, a fundamental context for understanding their overall lived experience. The current study aims to construct an in-depth account of these experiences in a sample of BIAM, thus contributing foundational knowledge on which other studies can build. To address this gap in the literature, I examined the relationship experiences of BIAM by posing the research

question: *“What are the relationship experiences of bisexual-identifying Asian men with same and different gender partners?”*

At present, we know very little about how BIAM negotiate gender and hegemonic masculinity in their relationships with same and different gender partners. Thus, the current study draws on critical analyses of the role of masculinity, sexuality, and partner gender as important social contexts for understanding BIAM’s relationship experiences. Data addressing this question has the potential to inform effective and culturally competent approaches to therapy with BIAM.

The following chapters provide the elements of my dissertation research study. Chapter 2 provides information about the design and methodology of this study, including a rationale for the use of a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach. Details regarding the targeted sample, participant recruitment, data collection, data management, and data analysis are also included. Chapter 3 presents the research results, and Chapter 4 provides a discussion of these results.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of BIAM's intimate partner relationships with same and different gender partners. Specifically, I was interested in the lived experiences of gender and sexuality as they intersected with race/ethnicity. I used a Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) approach which is described in this chapter. I also describe participant recruitment, interview protocol development, research subjectivity and reflexivity, data collection procedures, and the data analytic process. All study procedures were reviewed and approved by the University of Kentucky internal review board for research with human subjects before commencing the data collection.

Constructivist Grounded Theory Approach

The Constructivist Grounded Theory Approach (CGTA) is an appropriate choice for answering the research question because of the shared goal of understanding the lived experiences from the perspective of those who live them (Schwandt, 1994; 2000; Ponterotto, 2005). That is, the importance of the participants' perspective is the focal point of the data collection and analytic process (Mills, et al., 2006). CGTA allows psychologists an entry into the intensive work of empirically gathering and analyzing initially ill-structured, qualitative data and then making sense of them (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008).

At present, the most popular approach to grounded theory in counseling psychology appears to be CGTA (Charmaz, 2000; Rennie, 1998). Charmaz (2014) posits that CGTA is subjective to time, space, and circumstance and is not separate from its origins. The three central tenets for the constructivist paradigm are: 1) that the researcher

is a part of what is being observed, not apart from it, 2) facts and ideals are interconnected, and 3) views are multiple and subject to interpretation (Charmaz, 2014). The constructivist paradigm subscribes to the idea that reality is constructed in the mind of the individual and is not merely an external, singular entity (Ponterotto, 2005). It maintains that meaning is hidden and must be brought to the surface with thorough contemplation (Schwandt, 2000; Sciarra, 1999). This can be accomplished through interactive researcher-participant dialogue that results in the co-construction of qualitative findings (Ponterotto, 2005).

A fundamental characteristic of CGTA is that categories or concepts are generated from and are grounded in the data rather than directed by the researcher's hypotheses (Hallberg, 2006). CGTA uses iterative strategies of going back and forth between the data and the analysis and keeps the researcher constantly interacting with the data and emerging analysis (Charmaz, 2014). These strategies help the researcher to maintain the focus on the participants' perspectives.

Given that there are a limited number of empirical studies that explore the intimate partner relationships of BIAM, and that no research specifically exists on how intersecting identities shape perceptions of relationship experience, an exploratory and discovery-oriented methodology such as CGTA is appropriate. The major focus of my study was to understand how bisexual identity, race, and gender intersect to influence the romantic relationship experiences of BIAM with same and different gender partners. Thus, I aimed to use an inductive, systematic analytic approach (CGTA) to develop a framework that sheds light on these intersections and their influence on the lived experiences of BIAM.

Participant Recruitment

Purposive sampling allows the researchers to be flexible and reflexive as they make decisions about sampling in response to emerging findings during the course of data collection and analysis (Emmel, 2013). This process is based on the iterative nature of qualitative research (Guetterman, 2015). The central phenomenon that provides the focus for this study is the relationship experiences of BIAM, and the goal of the research study is to describe and interpret these experiences without generalizing beyond the sample of informants (Maxwell, 2012). To recruit a sample of diverse BIAM, I followed Robinson's (2014) framework: (1) setting a sample universe, (2) selecting a sample size, (3) devising a sampling strategy, and (4) sample sourcing.

Setting a Sample Universe

The first key component of this framework is to define the sample universe or target population of the study. To delineate a sample universe, an inclusion criterion, or the specific attributes that participants must possess to qualify for this study was specified. To participate in this study, individuals self-identified as (a) bisexual (as one of their sexual identities), (b) Asian men (cis or trans), (c) were at least 23 years of age, (d) had been in intimate-partner relationships with both same and different gender partners for at least 4 months duration, (e) spoke fluent English and, (f) were either permanent residents or citizens of North America (i.e., Canada or the United States of America). An exploration of intersecting identities allowed for a more complex and holistic analysis of BIAM's experiences in their social and cultural context.

Sample Size

To study the lived experiences of a diverse sample of BIAM, the idiographic aim was maintained to ensure that each participant was given a voice and each interview was intensively analyzed (Guetterman, 2015). Saturation, or the point in data collection when additional data contribute no new aspects of a conceptual category, ultimately determined when data collection was complete (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Saturation ensures that interview studies achieve an adequate sample for content validity (Francis, et al., 2010). Specifically, in CGTA, saturation is required so that the studied phenomenon (e.g., relationship experiences of BIAM) can be thoroughly captured so that a theoretical framework has the *possibility* of emerging (Charmaz, 2006). Working within a CGTA paradigm, the sample size was flexible (Glaser, 1978) and was assessed throughout the research process. Ultimately, fifteen interviews were determined to be an adequate sample size for reaching saturation in this study.

Devising a Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling is used to identify individuals who may have a unique, different, or important perspective on the phenomena in question (Mason, 2002; Trost, 1986). Purposive sampling strategies are non-random ways of ensuring that specific cases (in this study, individuals) within a sampling universe are represented in the final sample (Robinson, 2014). More specifically, homogenous purposive sampling focuses on individuals who share similar traits or specific characteristics (Etikan et al., 2016). For this strategy to be used, participants are typically similar in terms of demographic information (e.g., age, culture, or life experiences) to focus on the precise similarity. Thus, I used this sampling strategy by constructing specific inclusion and exclusion

criteria to acquire a sample of BIAM who had had relationship experiences with both same and different gender partners. Further, since BIAM are severely underrepresented in existing research that focuses on intimate partner relationships, purposive sampling guaranteed that voice was given to this marginalized minority community and guaranteed a diverse sample.

Sample Sourcing

Once I decided on my sample universe and chose a provisional sample number, and sampling strategy, the next step was to source or acquire participants from the real world (Robinson, 2014). Participants were sourced through advertising, incentivizing, and addressing ethical considerations (Robinson, 2014).

Advertising. Participants were recruited using advertising in the form of flyers and recruitment emails (see Appendix A and B). Since the sample was located across Canada and the United States, advertising included print and online advertising methods (e.g., flyers, email, social media). To reach BIAM who may not have access to the internet or who would not see the study flyer online, I distributed flyers to venues where sexual minority men frequently visit including community events (e.g., pride festivals), bars, service organizations, and community centers.

Based on the initial screening survey, participants were predominantly recruited through online postings to websites such as specific Facebook groups and other social media websites (e.g., Instagram, Tumblr, Reddit, Twitter) for sexual minority and Asian-identifying individuals. Hamilton and Bowers (2006) highlight the costs and benefits of using the internet to publicize research. The fundamental benefit is wide outreach to different populations. A disadvantage of using internet recruitment is that the sample is

often skewed towards individuals from higher SES and education levels. To counteract the potential skewness, I also employed snowball sampling techniques by asking participants to forward study announcements to acquaintances or friends who might qualify for participation. Heckathorn (2002) found that these methods are particularly useful when individuals are unlikely to respond to advertising. It is well established that BIAM exists as a minority group within the LGBTQ+ community and society at large which made recruitment difficult. Thus, purposive and snowball sampling in tandem were useful in recruiting this harder to access, marginalized population.

Incentivizing. When recruiting people into an interview study, the key question of whether or not to offer them financial incentives for participation arises (Robinson, 2014). Robinson notes that the benefits of incentives are that they increase the likelihood of participation while the downside is the potential for fabricated information to gain money. To account for these potential risks, participants were informed that the incentive received was merely to compensate them for their time. Since participants represent a severely understudied minority group, it was important to make clear during the recruitment and informed consent processes that the purpose of the study is to further understand the experiences of BIAM and to ultimately contribute to affirming practice and socially just society. Highlighting the importance of their lived experience to understanding relationships was key in motivating participation. To ensure as much as possible that participants were authentic, and genuine in their narratives, they were asked to turn on their video during the interview to increase rapport and openness. Further, participants were asked to describe their accounts using examples from their personal lives to illustrate these lived experiences.

Self-selection and research bias. Self-selection bias during participant recruitment is inevitable in interview-based research as voluntary participation is central to ethical practice (Robinson, 2014). It was therefore important that the researcher remained aware of the possibility for bias and kept in mind the possible impact on findings and generalizability. Therefore, to account for self-selection bias as well as researcher bias, I was continuously engaged in memo-writing and reflexivity throughout the process of recruitment, data collection, and data analysis.

Memo-Writing

Memo-writing is often used in CGTA as an analytical tool through which researchers record notes (e.g., thoughts, observations, ideas) on interviews, codes, and theoretical categories throughout the research process (Charmaz, 2014). I engaged in recording written memos throughout the study, beginning with the recruitment process, until the final stages of data presentation (results and discussion). Memos contained my impressions about the participants' experiences and my reactions to these narratives. They were also used to systematically question some of my pre-existing ideas in relation to what had been asked in the interview. After a few interviews, I also began making and recording comparisons among these memos.

As a part of data analysis, I wrote conceptual memos about the initial and focused codes that I developed (Charmaz, 2014). These memos allowed me to record my thinking about the meaning of codes, and to record my thinking about the dynamic nature of participants' experiences. In these memos, I made comparisons between data, participants, and codes to find similarities and differences, and modified questions in the

remaining interviews (e.g., to make a question more precise or clear, or to add follow-up questions to enrich the data further).

Reflexivity

To ensure trustworthiness and consistency through perspective management in data collection and analysis (Levitt, et al., 2018), my positionality was considered through each step of the research process. Through this process, personal biases, interests, and assumptions that may influence the approach to research inquiry were explored (Charmaz, 2014). CGTA emphasizes the importance of reflexivity that allows the researcher to engage in personal reflection. Therefore, I needed to identify and understand my subjectivities before engaging in this proposed study. I did this by introspecting about my pre-existing ideas regarding BIAM and their intimate relationships.

A facet of reflexivity is acknowledging the influence of my identities when examining data as well as recognizing my motivation for conducting this study. Identifying as an Asian, heterosexual, cisgender woman who is currently in a relationship with a heterosexual, White, Austrian man, I understand that while I possibly share some common experiences with my participants in terms of ethnicity, I have limited and socially influenced ideas about BIAM and their relationships. This process of reflexivity was further enriched by the consideration of my advisor, Dr. Sharon Rostosky's identities and how they influenced her perspective on the data. As a White, bisexual, cis woman who is currently in a same gender relationship with a White, lesbian woman, she shared with participants a bisexual identity and relationship experience while differing in experiences related to gender and race/ethnicity. These similar and different experiences,

further illustrated below, became important points of reflection and discussion as we sought to understand the participants' lived experiences.

As data collection progressed, it became evident that my sample included a vast array of different Asian identities (e.g., Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Korean, Indian, Vietnamese, Filipino, etc.) Thus, it was important to identify and emphasize that being Asian can encompass various different sub-cultures. Though participants and I shared a common experience of being Asian, it was imperative for me to examine my own biases about the Asian experience, one that was rooted in the experience of being a Chinese-Indian woman. Throughout the research process, I continuously asked questions about participant's narratives without jumping to conclusions and checked-in with them about both our similar and our dissimilar Asian cultural experiences.

My motivation for this study was further influenced by my prior study of bisexual women's relationship experiences which has guided the design of this study with the hope of shedding light on the experiences of underrepresented BIAM. As a woman of color living in the United States, I have experienced firsthand the effects of my cultural and ethnic heritage and how they play leading roles in my identity development and in turn, my romantic relationships. To ensure a deeper understanding, my own cultural/ethnic background was taken into consideration in choosing the specific subgroup of BIAM. This shared cultural history also served to support participant buy-in and trust during the recruitment process. I sought feedback from participants to accurately portray the participants' stories without letting my preconceptions, perceived similarities, or biases influence my execution of the research.

Despite a shared identity of being Asian, participants and I differed with respect to gender identity, and potentially educational background, socio-economic class, and religion. Thus, it was important for me to approach data with cultural humility, especially in relation to same gender relationship experiences, masculinity, and bisexuality. Through this lens and my own experiences with Asian culture, I identified my pre-existing ideas about BIAM and their relationships to be centered around the influence of culture on romantic relationships. More specifically, I expected men to readily fall into patriarchal, traditional gender roles and believed them to enjoy the resulting power that came with this gender role socialization. Further, witnessing how religion played a significant role in determining relationship guidelines, I assumed participant religious identities would play a large role in Asian men's lived experience. Similarly, due to the typically taboo position of queer identities in Asian cultures, I anticipated fewer men to be "out" to parents and community. Finally, due to a large number of immigrants from countries like China and India, I anticipated recruiting more men from these countries or cultural backgrounds in the sample due to an assumption that we have shared experiences.

Participants

Table 1 displays the demographic information for each of the 15 self-identified BIAM who participated in this study. Seven participants self-identified as bisexual (only), four participants self-identified as bisexual and queer, two self-identified as bisexual, queer, and gay, one participant self-identified as bisexual, queer, and pansexual and, one participant self-identified as bisexual, queer, asexual, gay, and pansexual.

Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 44 years old. Thirteen participants were US citizens while two were permanent residents in Canada. (see Table 1).

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Name*	Gender Identity	Ethnic/Racial Background	Age	Sexual Identity	Religions/Spiritual Identity	Citizenship/Residency	Longest relationship with same gender partner	Longest relationship with different gender partner	Current relationship Status
Kevin	Trans man	Biracial; White and Chinese; third-generation Asian American	44	Bisexual	Believes in a higher power	US citizen	1 year	6 months	Relationship w/ same gender partner
Pencil	Cis man	First-generation Vietnamese in Canada; immigrant from Vietnam	33	Bisexual/queer/gay	Buddhism	PR** of Canada	3 years	2 years	Single
Kabir	Cis man	First-generation Pakistani American	25	Bisexual	Muslim/Agnostic	US citizen	8 months	7 months	Single
Ahmad	Cis man	First-generation Bangladeshi American; immigrant from the UK	35	Bisexual/queer	Muslim	US citizen	2 years, 3 months	5 years	Relationship w/ different gender partner

Table 2 (continued): Participant Demographics

Bill	Cis man	Multiracial; White and Chinese Indonesian; immigrant from Indonesia	23	Bisexual/queer/pansexual /	Agnostic/Atheist	US citizen	1 year	1 year	Single
Kay	Cis man/nonbinary	Multiracial; Chinese Jamaican and White; fourth-generation Asian American	26	Bisexual/queer/gay	Culturally Jewish/Agnostic	US citizen	2 years	1 year	Single
Sam	Cis man	First-generation Pakistani in Canada; immigrant from Pakistan	35	Bisexual	Muslim	PR of Canada	8 years	2 years	Relationship w/ same gender partner
Skyler	Trans man/nonbinary	First-generation Chinese American	25	Bisexual/queer/asexual/gay/pansexual	Spiritual New Age	US citizen	6 months	1 year	Single
C	Trans man	Adopted to White parents, born in South Korea	25	Bisexual	Unitarian Universalist	US citizen	2 years	1 year	Single

Table 3 (continued): Participant Demographics

RJ	Cis man	Biracial; Indian and Pakistani; first-generation Asian American	27	Bisexual /queer	Shia Muslim	US citizen	4 months	10 months	Single
Kumar	Cis man	First-generation Indian American	25	Bisexual	Jain/Hindu	US citizen	6 months	9 months	Relationship w/ same
Jason	Cis man	First-generation Chinese American	24	Bisexual	Culturally Buddhist/Atheist	US citizen	3 years	4 months	Single
Daniel	Cis man	Biracial; Chinese and Vietnamese ; second-generation Asian American	30	Bisexual	None	US citizen	9 months	1 year, 6 months	Single
David	Cis man	First-generation Indian American	25	Bisexual /queer	Hindu	US citizen	4 years	7 months	Single
Juan	Cis man	Second-generation Filipino (Ilocano) American	35	Bisexual /queer	Catholic	US citizen	6 months	4 months	Single

Note. *pseudonyms **PR (Permanent Resident)

Partner Demographics

When describing the gender of their partners, six participants identified “same gender partners” as cis or trans men, and nine participants identified them as cis men only. For different gender partners, six men identified their partners as cis women, six identified them as cis or trans women while three identified them as cis or trans women and nonbinary individuals.

Eight participants shared that their most recent/current partners were Asian, four were White, one Black, and two bi-racial. Seven shared being in recent relationships with cis women, five with cis men, two with trans men, and one with a nonbinary individual. In addition, participants identified their partners’ sexual identities as straight ($n = 5$), bisexual ($n = 6$), gay ($n = 3$), or queer ($n = 1$).

Interview Protocol Development

To uncover rich information about participants' lived experiences and have the flexibility to delve deeper into different aspects of participants’ stories, I developed a semi-structured interview protocol based on the literature reviewed in the previous chapter on sexual minority individuals, bisexual individuals, and their romantic relationships. Further, a prior study I conducted (Kwok et al., 2020) on bisexual women and their relationship experiences informed protocol development. Building on this research, I developed questions around two central foci: 1) the influence of gender and 2) the experience of bisexual stigma.

The semi-structured, open-ended question format allowed me to ask follow-up questions to learn more about participants’ relationship experiences with same and different gender partners while eliciting deeper exploration of the influence of

intersecting identities (e.g., race, gender, cultural/ethnic background) on lived experience. The full interview protocol is shown in Appendix G. I chose not to conduct formal pilot interviews because of the challenges to recruiting this sample and I wanted to use every eligible participant in the final data analysis. I did, however, continually assess the protocol, and made modifications throughout the data collection process. After each interview, the participant was asked for feedback on the protocol's content, phrasing, length, and utility of the questions. This feedback helped in rewording, restructuring, and revising the protocol. For example, several initial participants described experiences of their bisexual identities being misunderstood, misidentified, and being made invisible while in romantic relationships with both same and different gender partners. Thus, the existing protocol was modified to include more specific questions about participants' experiences of bisexual stigma, and how it played out in their relationships with different partners.

Data Collection

Before conducting the interviews, interested individuals were asked to follow a link to complete a brief pre-screening Qualtrics survey (Qualtrics, Provo, UT) (see Appendix C) which collected demographic information (e.g., gender, sexual identity, age, citizenship, or permanent resident status) and basic information on relationship history (e.g., current relationship status, relationship length, current partner's demographics, gender identity of previous partners). Lastly, participants were asked to provide minimal contact information (email address and/or phone number) if they were willing to be contacted for an interview. This screener was used to determine whether the individual

met all inclusion criteria and to aid in purposive and snowball sampling from a range of ages, geographic locations, and social/cultural backgrounds.

The Qualtrics screener (Qualtrics, Provo, UT) was completed by 101 people. I eliminated respondents who did not provide contact information ($n = 15$), did not identify as men ($n = 4$), and who did not complete the screener ($n = 28$). To ensure methodological integrity through data adequacy (Levitt et al., 2018) men who identified as queer, pansexual, gay, or other sexual identities and did not include bisexual as part of their identity were excluded from the sample ($n = 16$). Participants were retained in the sample if they identified as bisexual and *also* indicated additional sexual identities, such as queer, pansexual, or gay. The remaining respondents who met inclusion criteria ($n = 38$) were contacted to participate in the interview. Individual interviews were completed with the 15 men who responded to the invitation and were able to schedule an interview [see Guest et al. (2006) for determining sample adequacy].

Eligible participants were contacted via email and given the chance to ask questions about the study and to schedule a Zoom interview. Before the interview, each participant received a study consent form to gain written consent (via email) before the beginning of each interview (see Appendix E for interview consent form). Participants were asked to provide consent by responding to the email stating that they had read the consent form and were amenable to participating in the interview. For participants who provided phone numbers, a follow-up text message was sent to obtain an email address to send them the consent form (see Appendix D) and to gain written consent. Participants were also given the option to opt-out of the study at any time so as not to coerce or pressure them into continuing with the interview.

Each interview began with the participants being asked follow-up questions about their demographic information (e.g., religious/spiritual identity, class, educational background, and how long they had self-identified as bisexual) and further information about their relationship history (e.g., recency of their romantic relationships with same and different gender partner, recent partner demographics including gender, racial identity, and sexual identity) (see Appendix F for follow-up survey questions). Once this was completed, participants engaged in a semi-structured interview using Zoom that lasted between one and two hours. Each participant was sent a \$50 Amazon electronic gift card after the interview to thank them for their time and emotional labor. All interviews were conducted over Zoom including 13 as online, face-to-face with video interviews, and 2 which did not have video and only used audio functions on Zoom due to technical difficulties.

Interviews were audio-recorded on two, password-protected recording devices. Upon completing each interview, audio files were immediately uploaded to a password protected computer, deleted from the recording devices, and uploaded to a HIPAA compliant, password-protected folder on OneDrive. Interview audio files were then uploaded to Amazon Transcribe for initial transcription. Amazon Transcribe uses voice recognition technology to transcribe interviews, so I was the only person who heard the participant audio. Overall, interviews ranged between 50 minutes and 2 hours and 15 minutes with the mean interview time being 1 hour and 45 minutes long. Transcripts ranged from 17 to 37 pages (single spaced) with the average being 27 pages.

I read each transcript to ensure the accuracy of the transcription service. During this process, I listened to the interview audio while reviewing the transcripts generated by

Amazon Transcribe. While listening, I would make corrections to the transcription documents, such as filling in words the transcription did not include, correcting spelling, and making transcription formatting more streamlined for data analysis. Each transcription was given a code and all identifying information was removed. As per IRB, records will be maintained for a minimum of six years after study closure.

Data Analysis

I began data analysis with line-by-line coding of each participant's interview (Charmaz, 2014). Using gerunds – nouns that refer to an active state or process and end in “-ing” (Apramian et al., 2017), I read each line of a transcript and coded for action (e.g., “feeling like bisexual identity was not acknowledged”) (Charmaz, 2014). I also selected in-vivo codes that used participants' own words to capture their experiences (Charmaz, 2014). These initial line-by-line codes helped me to begin to summarize, catalog, and capture the lived experiences of the participants that pertained to the two foci of inquiry (gender and bisexual stigma).

After completing the initial coding, I identified codes that repeated and/or appeared to have a theoretical reach and collected them together for focused coding. I condensed initial codes based on the most frequently appearing and meaningful ideas that emerged during initial coding (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2014). I used constant comparison of emerging codes and the raw data set to determine the codes with the greatest scope that most accurately captured the participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2014).

My advisor, a White, bisexual-identifying, cis woman from the U.S. with 21 years of experience conducting and supervising qualitative studies of the lived experiences of

LGBTQ+ people served as the external reviewer and auditor and conducted a final check of the focused coding. Since the two of us shared one identity with the participants (either race or sexual identity) and did not share others, we worked together to stay close to the participants' narratives and accurately portray their intimate partner relationship experiences, meeting several times to review the coding process and my memos. Once focused coding was complete, I combined data that addressed the two foci of inquiry into categories and sub-categories (Charmaz, 2014). The next chapter presents the results of the CGTA process.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings from the systematic analyses of the rich data 15 participants provided during their interviews. The lived experiences shared by this sample of BIAM elucidated the influence of gender on relationship dynamics and intimacy and the experience of bisexual stigma and its influence on relationships (see Figure 2). Overall, BIAM perceived that their relationship experiences were profoundly influenced by their gender and sexual identities and the intersections of these identities with their race/ethnicity.

When describing the influence of gender on their romantic relationships with same and different gender partners, participants highlighted compatibility and specific relationship dynamics that were often shaped by masculine gender norms. They also described their experiences of bisexual stigma on their choice of partners, their disclosure and concealment decisions, and their fears and experiences of rejection in their relationships with same and different gender partners. Participants also shared their perceptions of how cultural norms related to their race, religion, and/or ethnic background shaped their experiences of gender and bisexual stigma in their relationships with same and different gender partners.

Each category and subcategory for each of the two areas of inquiry (gender and bisexual stigma) are further described below and illustrated using quotes transcribed directly from participant interviews. Participants' quotes are presented verbatim except for minor changes to promote flow and/or grammar or to protect the privacy of individuals named by participants. Additions are represented by brackets ([]) and signal any modification to participants' transcripts, while ellipses (...) note any omission of

words or phrases to improve the flow and brevity of quotes. All participant quotes are identified by their preferred pseudonym with their ages in parentheses to protect identity and confidentiality.



Figure 2: Categories and Subcategories Describing the Influence of Gender and Bisexual Stigma on Relationship Experiences of Bisexual-Identifying Asian Men

Influence of Gender on Relationship Dynamics and Intimacy

All 15 men said their own gender identity, or the gender identity of their partner impacted their relationship experiences. More specifically, participants shared that compatibility with their partner (e.g., sexual, practical) depended on their partner's gender and their relationship dynamics (e.g., emotionality, communication, roles in relationships) were influenced by masculinity and gender norm socialization. They also

emphasized the function of their other identities (e.g., race, sexual identity, culture) in shaping these relationship experiences.

Compatibility

Most ($n = 14$) of the men said compatibility with their partners played a significant role in a positive and/or successful relationship. They recognized that compatibility with their partners in sexual and practical (e.g., shared interests, acceptance of their identities) realms often depended on and differed based on partner gender.

Sexual Compatibility. Nine participants reported having more sexual compatibility with same gender partners than with different gender partners. These men felt that sex with men was more fulfilling and gratifying as compared to their experience with different gender partners. Kumar (25) recalled having to “fake it (orgasm) and pretend like I finished” when having sex with women while identifying the most positive aspect of his relationships with men as having “sexual compatibility” with them. David (25) described having “a certain level of sexual chemistry that I feel more often with men.”

A few of the men ($n = 3$) attributed sexual compatibility with same gender partners to a “shared understanding” of their sexual desires due to similar gender and/or sexual identities, or a mutual openness to sexual exploration. Bill (23) and Daniel (30) believed shared queer identities positively impacted their sexual compatibility with same gender partners. Bill (23) described, “I feel like queer men ... when dating men ... things turn sexual very quickly. My experience ... it was just nice [to] feel sexy or wanted. That was satisfying.” Similarly, Daniel (30) noted:

... in the sense of the LGBT community, I think with individuals who identify with that, you get a lot more open-mindedness about sexual experiences ... And so, if I wanted to try things or explore different options or have a more relatable understanding.

Juan (35) shared his sexual experience with a same gender partner. “We were open with each other about desires, and there was always the consent involved. But I guess there were assumptions that were made, and they were correct because he knew what I was talking about.”

Overall, men felt that their same gender partners were more sexually compatible due to a shared understanding of queer, male sexual pleasure and that this had a positive influence on their romantic relationships.

Shared Interests and Experiences. Twelve men thought their relationships with same gender partners were more positive due to shared interests or lived experiences based on their similar gender identities. When asked about the positive experiences with same gender partners, Kevin (44) stated he found comfort in “... things that we have in common ... video games, fishing, and stuff like that.” Kay (26) also shared:

... the experience of being socialized as someone who is male ... navigating the world as someone who is identifying as male or perceived or like read as a man, it's sort of a shared experience that I have with someone if I'm dating a man ... and I don't necessarily have to explain that in the same way that I might have to explain that [with] someone who identifies sort of solely as a woman. That kind of commonality is particularly ... I think helpful in sort of establishing those kinds of relationships. ... And I think through both of us mutually having that

support during that journey was really important. .. And I think having that sort of mutual growth was really sort of integral to our ... the whole relationship in a really healthy, positive kind of way.

Two men identified being able to share clothes with their same gender partner as a benefit to their relationship. Joe (24) stated, "The pro side of being in a same gender relationship; it's like you're able to share clothes." Sam (35) narrated a similar experience with a same gender partner where they were able to share both clothes and shoes due to their similar sizes and that that brought them closer together as romantic partners.

Though most participants felt more connected to their same gender partners due to shared interests/experiences, two men noted that being with different gender partners offered unique experiences as a result of their different lived experiences and perspectives. Sam (35) and Kay (26) described how being in relationships with different gender partners allowed them to "see a completely different side of the [relationship] experience" and that this exploration was "beneficial", "unique", and "allows for a different understanding."

Understanding and Sharing Sexual Identities. Most of the men ($n = 13$) perceived their same gender partners as more understanding and accepting of their bisexual and/or queer identities than their different gender partners. Juan (35) described how his same gender partners were more accepting and open to his bisexual identity as "gay or queer men also deal with that same struggle ... whereas straight women are not [accepting]." Similarly, Joe (24) shared:

Well, I guess that for same gender partners, I feel they're more open to the idea of bisexuality, like being bisexual or like other sexual identities. It's just ... that's

something that's more common ... And that's also because we've gone through the same struggles. And so then, we share a similar experience ... Same struggles as living as someone who identifies as LGBTQ within the U.S.

Several men ($n = 8$) felt that the shared experience of identifying as LGBTQ offered stability and openness, and further strengthened their relationships with same gender partners. Sam (35) highlighted:

... there is that social companionship, there's that kind of stability in that kind of relationship, which I like and the ability to kind of, you know, do queer things and, go out and, you know, just [experience] gay pop culture or things of that nature ... Where things are very, very easy to talk about and just express and whatever. That was always kind of really freeing and very important.

Thus, the mutual understanding and acceptance of each other's queer identities allowed for stronger, more stable relationships for BIAM with their same gender partners.

Relationship Dynamics

Each participant shared instances where gender influenced their interactions with partners and/or determined the dynamics of their relationships. In particular, participants felt the influence of gender on emotional intimacy and connectedness with their partners. They emphasized that the effects of masculinity and gendered norms on their roles in romantic relationships were also shaped by their gender as well as the gender of their partners.

Emotional Intimacy and Connectedness. All 15 men said emotional intimacy and connectedness were important facets of their relationships with both same and different gender partners. When describing emotionality with their partners, participants

noted that partner gender and their own identities (e.g., culture, gender, bisexual identity) played a role in influencing these experiences. Participants valued positive emotional experiences with partners with whom they could develop friendships and companionship, communicate openly and freely, and develop understanding and acceptance in the partnership. A few men ($n = 2$) also described receiving validation of their emotions from their partners and having “mental satisfaction.” More specifically, participants listed behaviors like “kissing”, “going on dates”, “holding hands” as key to their positive emotional experience. Daniel (30) shared:

I think if you have someone who understands you on, like an emotional level, it makes a lot of the other experiences a lot more relatable ... because it was finally someone who understands you, who's the same age as you and gets it. And it allows you to kind of find acceptance of “it’s OK.”

Most men ($n = 10$) said their partner’s gender played a role in their experience of emotional connection or disconnection in their relationship experiences. Six of these men reported stronger emotional support and acceptance of their emotions from different gender partners. They described different gender partners as emotionally available and aware, sensitive to their emotions, and willing to build strong emotional attachment in the relationship. C (25) noted:

I think people who are assigned to female at birth are more emotionally available for the most part ... I think that when I was explaining my [trans] identity [to men], there were more questions rather than just like “Okay, I understand. The end” ... they [female-identifying partners] took the time to understand me.

Similarly, Kay (26) shared,

Because women are socialized to be much more emotionally aware, they are also much better equipped to navigate that with me. Not in the sense of doing emotional labor, but like being an adult and handling emotional experiences.

Several men ($n = 6$) described their inability to discuss their emotions with partners due to internalized social norms about emotional expressiveness. Kabir (25) discussed his experiences with same gender partners whom he categorized as cis men:

And I think just like with men in general, like I've been more socialized to Not necessarily speak openly about feelings and things like that ... You don't really talk about feelings, you don't talk about ... that kind of emotions ... so, overcoming that has been kind of a barrier.

Kevin (44) experienced his same gender partners as emotionally detached:

I would say, the emotional connection piece ... I wouldn't say that there is much [of] a connection with a guy on that emotional level As for, being with a man, I would say they tend to be less emotionally attached.

A few men ($n = 3$) also perceived that they needed to do more emotional labor with same gender partners than with different gender partners. For instance, Kay (26) described, "I find myself doing more work when I am dating a man in terms of emotional development for both of us." These men noted the work that was required to establish emotional connectedness with male partners.

While most of the men experienced barriers to emotional connectivity with same gender partners, a few ($n = 3$) experienced the contrary. They felt that they were able to develop stronger bonds and emotional connections with same gender partners due to their shared lived experiences as men. Ahmad (35) felt he had "stronger emotional bonds"

with same gender partners while with different gender partners, he didn't "connect emotionally."

Masculinity and Gendered Norms. All 15 men felt that masculinity played a role in their relationships with both same and different gender partners. Participants felt that masculinity influenced how they, their partners, or society viewed their positions in relationships, thus determining their roles. More specifically, they felt pressured to conform to being the "masculine" partner in relationships with both same and different gender partners as a function of their male identities. They also felt that this pressure was augmented by the expectations partners (most often women) had of them.

Two-thirds of the men were encouraged or "forced" to be more masculine when in relationships with different gender partners. They recounted either feeling pressured by societal messages, and/or parental expectations to conform to traditional forms of masculinity in their relationships with women or receiving verbal messages from partners to be more masculine. For instance, Joe (24) described his internal pressure:

Well, like in my past relationships with people that are not the same gender as me or like of the opposite gender, I tried to be more conscious ... I tended to become more masculine or like how society views people that are more masculine ... just to fit in with my surroundings, fit in with society and stuff like that ... it kind of pushed me to be someone who I wasn't. So, maybe joining this sport or doing X, Y, and Z just to be more masculine ...

Kumar (25) described how the pressure to conform to his female-identifying partner's expectations around masculinity ultimately led them to end their relationship:

I remember when I was dating my last ex-girlfriend ... she was part of this giant group. Like with her college gang. And basically, it was like five girls, and all of them had long term boyfriends ... we had this one party where we were all together and slept over. And all the guys were chugging beer and joking around doing stereotypical guy things ... and she would always just be like, "Why aren't you with them? Like, go mesh with them?" And there were many, many instances like that. Whether it was our friends in that school or our friends outside of school ... I just couldn't uphold the typical guy-girl relationship because I wasn't a typical guy.

Based on these results, it appears that men most often felt pressured into conforming to traditional, gendered scripts that outlined how masculinity is to be performed with different gender partners. Failure to do so was commonly cited as a reason for relational conflict and sometimes the ultimate motivator for a broken relationship.

In contrast to experiences with different gender partners, five participants perceived they had more freedom to act outside of traditional notions of masculinity when in relationships with same gender partners. They attributed this to the lack of social scripts that determine gendered roles in same gender partnerships. Incorporating both partners' masculinity into the relationship allowed more flexibility and required open discussion about roles. Pencil (33) shared, "If I'm in a relationship with a man who doesn't show as many masculine traits as I have ... then I would automatically assume that I am the masculine guy and then I pick up that role." Similarly, Daniel (30) noted:

I think depending on the personality of the male [partner], I think it can either be ... I don't consider myself a very hyper-masculine person, but I think if my partner is more effeminate, I get to be more masculine. I get to do the “guy” things and the “bro” things ...

While these men perceived they had more freedom and flexibility, traditional notions of masculinity still seemed to serve as a “baseline” for comparison.

Social Influences on Masculinity. Thirteen men described how they learned about masculinity through social interactions (e.g., verbal cues from partners and verbal or vicarious messages from parents or social circles). Several men ($n = 7$) shared how they had learned about masculinity and relationship gender roles from their parents. Juan (35) described his mother’s role as, “... my mom's voice of ‘you pay for dinner,’ still kind of goes to my head ... it's still something that is in me, ... [it] continues to be with me.” Comparably, Kabir (25) shared how watching his father had taught him about gender norms:

That provider role that I really see myself in, that comes a lot from seeing how my dad handled things ... he was [the] stable pillar of support, and didn't really ever complain about that role ... And that is one gender norm that I’ve accepted for myself. That's something I really admire.

When discussing his experience of masculinity in romantic relationships with different partners, C (25) described:

... if the person is more female-identified, or like, falls on that spectrum, then I tend to swing more masculine ... Whereas [with men] masculinity depends on the masculinity of male partners ... I think that my background influences it because

of how I was raised. Like, my parents were a very heteronormative couple. So, I think that determines it.

Twelve men noted that their racial identities shaped their sense of masculinity which in turn influenced their experiences in romantic relationships (e.g., emotional connectedness). For example, Kay (26) shared:

I think so much of just masculinity, in general, is going to be tied up with race ... with other men, it becomes this scenario of ... as an Asian person, I was sort of ... maybe not encouraged, but rewarded for being quiet and not taking up space, which is not what most men are taught. So, this has sometimes come up with other men where it is a weird scenario of who is taking up more space and why is someone taking up more space? ... the power dynamic to be taking up more or to be more visible, I think, is much .. the struggle and the decision to make is much more difficult and much more important when I am interacting with another man ... yeah, I think in a lot of ways it becomes more so the race of my partner ... like if my partner is male ... 95% of the time, that person is going to not be Asian. So then navigating the sort of discrepancy in masculinity because of race is sort of what is going on a lot of the times, rather than necessarily like masculinity as a broader concept.

Men shared how these identities (e.g., culture, race) often hindered their ability to be emotionally vulnerable and engaged with their partners. Social norms about emotional expressiveness influenced how they experienced emotional bonds with both gender partners. Pencil (33) identified language as a barrier and shared that, “I wasn’t used to

expressing deep emotions in a second language.” Skyler (25) thought his Chinese culture played a substantial role in his romantic relationships:

Definitely in Chinese culture ... Ah, which was pretty similar to western culture, to where the male, especially [in] the family or relationship, is the one to initiate everything, their dominant role. You know, they have to be super masculine. Um, they can't be weak. They can't be sensitive. They can't be emotional.

Further, Juan (35) described:

... my examples of what an Ilocano man was or [is], is stoic, un-talking, un-emotional people. So, they always showed emotion, but they were angry ... Um, so that is in my head as a part of masculinity, even though I know that's something that needs to be taken out.

Largely, participants found that their learned behavior about their cultural practices (e.g., vicarious teachings about traditional masculine-feminine norms) played a significant role in establishing the position masculinity played in their romantic relationships.

Moving Away from Traditional Masculinity. Despite experiencing pressure to conform to traditional ideas of masculinity, some men ($n = 5$) actively distanced themselves from this form of masculinity that they considered “toxic” and unwanted in their personal lives. Ahmad (35) described “catching myself” in situations where “patriarchal and heteronormative notions of masculinity” played out with different gender partners. When asked about how masculinity played a role in his relationships, Skyler (25) described:

Well, I tried to be not toxic to people. And in my relationships and my day-to-day life, I try to be in touch with my masculine and feminine side. I don't want to be too much of one thing, cause too much of a good thing is a bad thing for anything. So, I always try to be in touch my emotions, but also, like, do something about it ... or find a solution, that would be like the masculine side, that would be taking charge ... and incorporating a bit of both qualities ... incorporating both the positive of feminine and masculine qualities into your own life and identity ... I think that's just beautiful.

Though participants felt compelled towards conforming to traditional mores around masculinity, they actively engaged in self-reflection about these social norms and their own responses to them.

Influence on Roles in Relationships. Several men ($n = 11$) adopted gendered roles in relationships where they were governed by traditional notions of masculinity, most often in relationships with women. Specifically, participants identified themselves as "care-givers," partners who took initiative with certain "masculine" chores and tasks like driving, buying groceries, paying bills, taking out the trash, and carrying heavier objects while avoiding "feminine" tasks like cooking, cleaning, and emotional labor. Sam (35) felt forced to adopt roles he did not want when in relationships with different gender partners. He shared:

... the perceived expectations of the society, like carrying the heavier boxes or paying the bills or always driving. I hate driving just to let you know ... But then there was an expectation, like, "Oh, yeah, you're the guy, you should be the driver."

Skyler (25) described the stark contrast he experienced with gender roles after coming out as a trans man to a female-identifying partner:

I guess there were certain expectations related to gender roles that she placed on me just cause I was male. Because as soon as I came out to her as trans male and nonbinary, that's when she started placing those expectations on me, which I thought was kind of ridiculous ... For example, she would always expect me to do things for her, or I have to initiate little chores ... and she wouldn't just tell me what to do but she would just expect me to initiate things. ... when we were both female-identifying lovers, it seemed to me that we were kind of equal. But as soon as I came out to her as nonbinary and trans male, that's when it became unequal.

A few participants ($n = 3$) shared how roles in relationships tended to be equal or balanced despite continued pressure towards traditional scripts around masculinity. RJ (27) described egalitarian relationships with both same and different gender partners.

... it was kind of 50-50 in terms of what we [different gender partner] did for each other. I think at times, she was a little bit more giving like "let me bring you food when you're doing work" or something like that. But there were times where I did something similar. With my previous relationship where it was a guy, it was very much matched ... I think he did a little bit more simply because he had the money to, or he was able to provide the means. I feel like gender roles in that sense, were very much 50-50 in both relationships.

Despite the effort from some participants to establish equality in their roles, a majority of men continued to either adapt to or adopt conventional, heteronormative relationship practices.

Experience of Bisexual Stigma and its Influence on Relationships

All fifteen participants experienced forms of stigma related to their bisexual identities that influenced their experiences in intimate partner relationships. More specifically, they feared being rejected based on their bisexual identities, faced negative stereotypes about bisexuality, or felt rejected and misunderstood. These experiences of stigma influenced their behaviors in their romantic relationships including their choice of partners, whether or not they came out to partners, and whether they came out to others about their bisexual identity. Further, participants highlighted how their bisexual identities interacted with partner gender, culture, race, and religion to influence their relationship experiences.

Partner Choice and Biphobia

Several men ($n = 9$) shared how biphobia (e.g., negative attitudes and behaviors toward bisexuality) and bi erasure (e.g., antibisexual prejudice) influenced their partner choice. Participants described how messages from society relating to traditional, “heteronormative” relationships were key factors in determining whom they chose as partners. Kabir (25) noted that before being able to “explore” his bisexual identity with a same gender identifying partner, “I didn’t allow myself to be attracted to men. You know, like, I kind of just, like, crushed it down.”

Who They Choose. In particular, participants identified criteria for their desired partners based on past experiences of stigma and rejection. Three men said they preferred to be in relationships with partners who understood what it meant to be LGBTQ-identifying due to the challenges they faced because of their bisexuality. Bill (23)

stipulated, “I’m really only interested in bisexual pansexual queer men.” Joe (24) was less specific, stating:

I’m more...in sort of, relationships, I’m definitely more picky ... One of the main factors is the level of wokeness and how socially aware they are. So, understanding that point and filtering my relationships through that lens ...

Similarly, Kay (26) shared,

It’s [bi erasure] become kind of a non-issue because I’ve just stopped interacting with ... I just stopped dating or talking with men who I would have to defend that [bisexuality] which kind of makes my life way easier. But then I guess that is how it affects [my relationships], in that, I just kick people out of my life quickly because I don’t want to explain [my bisexual identity] to them.

Racial and Cultural Influences on Partner Choice. Despite identifying the importance of shared experiences with same gender partners, multiple participants ($n = 7$) identified that the racial and/or ethnic identity of their partner mattered more to them than partner gender. They perceived they connected more deeply with Asian or Asian/American partners due to shared cultural experiences, and that they wanted their partners in the future to share similar racial/ethnic identities. During his interview, Kumar (25) expressed surprise at how important his cultural identity was to him and that, “Without that, so many things would not exist for me and so, I need to be with somebody who can relate, who could get that.” Similarly, Kabir (25) felt that his experiences as a South Asian American impacted his desire to be in a relationship with someone who also identified the same way:

I want to be with someone South Asian ...because I don't want to spend my whole life [as] cultural translator ... I want to be able to make a joke about Bollywood and they [partner] get it ... I want to be able to make a joke about how aunties and uncles gossip or something, and they just get it ... and I think being South Asian American specifically ... Like I want to be with someone who's also South Asian American. We do straddle two different worlds, right? ... You're not just South Asian, you're not just American, you don't fit completely into either label, and I found that when I've dated people who are ... who grew up in India as well ... our world experiences just aren't the same, right? Like, they say things that I don't understand, and I say things that they don't understand. So yeah, ideally, I'd like to end up with someone who's South Asian American.

Participants exhibited a desire to have romantic relationships with individuals who shared similar sexual, and racial identities to gain swifter acceptance of their identities and to have a common, shared understanding of their lived experiences.

Internalized biphobia and culture. Seven men identified how their cultural identities (e.g., Asian, Asian American) influenced their partner choice. They shared that their racial identity either compelled them to conform to heteronormative relationship structures (e.g., being partnered in different gender relationships) or to choose a partner who shared their cultural backgrounds. They described how their learned prejudices about their bisexual identity added to their fear of being in relationships with same gender partners. When describing how culture impacted his romantic relationships, David (25) stated:

I'm expected to marry a girl ... That's what everybody is kind of expecting ... But then what would happen if I went off and married a guy? Would they think of me differently? ... Would they celebrate the same? Would nobody show up to my wedding? ... I kind of feel like I want to tell people [about bisexual identity], but at the same time, I don't want to tell people because I'm more nervous about what everybody will think.

Kabir (25) described feeling selfish when he contemplated going against his religious beliefs and his parents' wishes:

... Oh, from my culture and kind of my religion being the son of Punjabi parents, Pakistani parents ... you want to prove that you're worth their investment in you in migrating and immigrating to a new country, and the fact that I'm bisexual and not straight-out gay means that... I mean I kind of do have a choice in who [I] end up with ... So, it still feels very selfish in a way. Like, it's self-indulgent to be with a guy than just be with a girl because with the girl, you know you're adhering to these gender norms and you're being in a relationship that will ultimately make your parents happy and proud and would be much less complicated for your community.

Overall, most participants identified how the pressure or desire to conform to cultural expectations of heteronormative relationships often influenced them to choose different gender partners.

Coming Out to Self and Others

Ten of the fifteen men perceived coming out to themselves, partners, or family and community as fraught with obstacles that included possible rejection, binegativity,

and pressures to adhere to heteronormative cultural standards learned through their families of origin and cultural backgrounds. Their fear of these outcomes led them to hide or hesitate to disclose their bisexual identity.

Coming out to Partners. Seven participants shared how they either struggled to come out to their different gender partners or that they refrained from doing so. All of these men described feeling misunderstood by their different gender partners after coming out to them. After coming out to their different gender partners, participants shared how these partners would assume that they were “fully gay”, “straight”, or that they would cheat on them. When describing his experience of coming out to his female-identifying partner, Kumar (25) said:

It makes things hard, especially when it's girls because they will just think that I'm fully gay ... Once, I remember I walked into a conversation of a bunch of girls in the library talking, "Oh, I could never date a bisexual man because I would just be too self-conscious and insecure." And I was like, "Well, that's the problem" ... if I ever were to date a girl in the future, I would maybe go out with her hopefully three or four times before I say “I'm bisexual” so that she actually gets to see me and doesn't just write me off instantly.

David (25) shared his fears about facing stereotypes as a bisexual man:

I always have this fear that even if they [female-identifying partners] say that they're okay with it [bisexual identity], it's always gonna be something that's in the back of my mind, or [in the] back of their minds like, “Oh, are you gonna leave me for a guy? Are you gonna check out this guy?” ... It's always a fear of

mine that somebody thinks I'm going to be unfaithful ... or the fact that I'm bisexual is gonna make somebody very anxious. That's what I'm scared of.

A few men ($n = 3$) also shared their concerns about coming out to their different gender partners based on past negative experiences. For example, Bill (23) shared that women he dated lost interest when he came out to them. Joe (24) also noted his uncertainty: “So, if I’m in a straight relationship, then there's always that worry that ... ‘Oh, my partner said it's fine if I am bisexual, but is that really the case?’”

Hiding Relationship from Others. Four participants said they were uncomfortable coming out to their parents. They believed their bisexual identity would not be accepted by their families because of their upbringing and cultural backgrounds that perpetuated heteronormativity. Juan (35) experienced culturally based and religiously based shame when in relationships with same gender partners, which strengthened his desire to hide his bisexual identity:

Due to me not being totally out, having shame ... the cultural shame, that kind of just served as an umbrella to a lot of it [coming out process]. So, I didn't tell my family that I was going to see him [partner] because I wasn't totally out with those family members at the time ... and that was the biggest struggle ... So, coming out is hard ... that was something that I just didn't want to do ... with just the whole Roman Catholic, colonized belief that “being queer is wrong.” So, even though I don't believe that and haven't practiced that for a long time, I know that older family members and, some more or less radical family members don't think that [bisexuality is acceptable].

Seven participants shared how biphobia and their perceived stigma against bisexuality further encouraged them to hide their same gender relationships from their social circles and communities. Skyler (25) described how he continues to feel social pressure to hide his bisexual identity:

Yeah, especially when we're public, to others, we seem like a gay couple and there are certain social pressures I get from other people or a certain attitude that people view us as ... I guess they would think we're a gay couple. I mean, we probably are but it doesn't automatically mean that each partner in this relationship is automatically gay ... I feel like I just had to sort of put on a mask, especially in public or with other people that were around. I just put on the mask, to seem like a normal couple, whatever that means ... Just so they won't question it ... because I wouldn't want people to just randomly come up to me or just be ... homophobic or something ...

Despite being out to himself for several years, Kabir (25) recalled,

... I remember, even on the most recent date I went out on with a guy, at the end of the date, I looked around to make sure that no one was watching before I gave him a hug and ... this is like after years and years of being out, after years and years of coming to terms with my sexual identity. You know, I'm still hesitant, and that's an instinctual thing.

Several participants ($n = 6$) felt the influence of their cultural identities (e.g., race, religion) on how they experienced their bisexual identities and romantic relationships.

Sam (35) noted:

I grew up in a South Asian community... internalized homophobia was probably the biggest challenge ... the first time ...when I felt that kind of attraction towards one of my male friends, rather than the first time I felt attracted towards the female, the experiences were different. I was excited when I felt that attraction towards a female, but when I realized that I'm actually sexually attracted towards a guy, I was scared ... that was the biggest challenge I would say.

Similarly, Ahmad (35) described his experience as a queer man at his mosque:

On the one hand, I felt very comfortable in the mosque environment because, uh I had a lot of guy friends there, and for some reason, I never found or felt myself attracted to anyone in that mosque environment, like the male friends ... And on the other hand, having queer experiences, queer attractions, suddenly recognizing that you're not completely at home in a particular space. So, it was like this dual discomfort or like a dual state.

Though participants had more freedom to share their relationship with others when with different gender partners, they felt unable to come out to these partners as they were afraid of being rejected for being bisexual. Simultaneously, when in relationships with same gender partners, participants' bisexual identity was not acknowledged, or their relationships were categorized as "gay" relationships. Therefore, the coming out experience for these men was shaped by the intersecting influences of gender, culture, and sexual identity.

Experiences of Rejection

Men ($n = 9$) recounted experiencing some form of rejection from romantic partners because of their bisexual identity. For example, some participants reported being

rejected by partners that did not believe bisexuality was “real.” Further, they perceived that their partners blamed their bisexual identity for unrelated difficulties in the relationship. Five men experienced different forms of bisexual stigma from partners (e.g., invalidating bisexual identity, being assumed to be gay or straight, being assumed to be promiscuous or not faithful). When David (25) came out to his partner he was told, “Bisexuality isn't a real thing.” Like several others, Daniel (30) had to defend his bisexual identity when invalidated by a partner:

I think some of the men I dated in the past, some of the men I have been with didn't understand and were like, “Oh, if you're bisexual, it's not a real thing.” And I'm like, “That's 100% a real thing. You could be attracted to both male and female or multiple genders or be pansexual or ...it's called LGBT. There's a 'B' in the association to it.” ... That was a struggle for a very long time ... and to see that struggle in both the male and female side of things. Like from the male side of that, they always thought that “Well, it means you're gonna cheat or you're gonna leave me for someone else.” And I'm like, “I'm a very committed person.”

Not only did men experience rejection when in relationships but also during the pursuit of romantic partners (e.g., through dating apps). Some men ($n = 4$) shared how potential partners would “ghost” them or end a newly formed relationship upon finding out about participants' bisexual, and/or queer identities. Juan (35) described:

I wasn't even dating a person yet, but we were just chatting on one of the apps. And, when they noticed that I marked that I was queer, they were like, “Oh, I didn't notice that before.” So, I said, “Is that a problem?” and they just never responded. So, yeah, it was a problem, obviously.

Finally, a few participants ($n = 2$) said their partners blamed their unrelated relationship concerns or issues on the participant's bisexual identity. Sam (35) reported that his wife (at the time) assumed that her miscarriages were because of his sexual promiscuity and his bisexual identity. Similarly, Ahmad (35) said, "At one point she expressed dissatisfaction ... and told her parents that 'Oh, our issues ... are because of my [partner's] bisexuality.'"

Influence of Culture and Race. Almost half ($n = 7$) of the men experienced some form of rejection based on their Asian background, especially with regards to their physical appearance. They shared their perceptions of being undesirable romantic partners because their physical appearance did not conform to euro-centric male beauty standards (e.g., "I'm dark, I don't have a six-pack. I'm short"), and their experience of rejection based on stereotypes related to their masculinity (e.g., "Asian men are submissive"). For example, Kumar (25) described his experiences with men. "I guess, like, more so with guys, it's a problem, I think ... I guess maybe people don't find hair a turn on or whatever." Juan (35) said, "... it's a gay world ... specifically being tall fit white men. So, just being not that, is part of that [stereotype]. The idea that Asian men are submissive ...". Similarly, Ahmad (35) shared how he expected to be rejected based on his Asian identity,

I have this self ... this sense of racial ... negative self-talk of like, "Oh, there's certain people who wouldn't want to be in ... who wouldn't be interested in me"... This sense of, "I'm not of the ideal White [looks]" ... when I'm dating, it does come .. it comes up in the back of my mind, Like "How much does my racial identity play into their rejections?"

Therefore, we can observe the intersecting influences of gender, sexual identity, race, and culture on the experience of bisexual stigma and biphobia in participants' lives. Not only do they influence romantic relationship experiences, but more broadly, their overall experiences as bisexual-identifying Asian men.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

Previous research on BIM has broadly focused on HIV transmission, and sexually transmitted infections (e.g., Jeffries, 2014; Montgomery, et al., 2003; Muñoz-Laboy & Dodge, 2007; Breiding et al., 2013) or has studied BIM under the broader umbrella term of MSM (men who have sex with men) (e.g., Buller et al., 2014) or by aggregating them with gay and lesbian participants (e.g., Feinstein et al., 2016; Freedner et al., 2002; Rosario et al., 2004). The sample sizes of bisexual individuals within these studies tend to be small, and those of BIM, even smaller. For example, in a study by Whitton and colleagues (2018), in which they studied how romantic involvement acts as a protective factor for psychological health in racially diverse young sexual minorities, only 28.2% of the 248 participants identified as bisexual. Further, the racial and gender identity make-up of these participants ($n = 69$) was not specified. Prior to the current study, few exclusively focus on BIM from one specific racial group, and I could find none that focused on BIAM. Existing studies have failed to explore the unique experiences of BIAM and have not addressed how intersecting identities shape these relationship experiences. Research findings from the current study address these important questions.

Bisexual Asian men's lived experiences with both same and different gender partners shed light on how intersecting identities (e.g., gender, race, sexual identity) shape the way they experience romantic relationships. As shown in Table 1, BIAM's relationship experiences with same and different gender partners were organized under two major topics: the influence of gender and the influence of bisexual stigma on relationship experiences.

Participants shared how either their gender identity, their partner's gender identity, and the resulting gender role socialization played significant roles in influencing their relationship experiences. The main categories that emerged under the topic of "influences of gender" were compatibility, and relationship dynamics. Under "compatibility" fell the sub-categories of a) sexual compatibility, b) shared experiences, and c) understanding shared identities, while "relationship dynamics" included sub-categories of a) emotional intimacy and connectedness, and b) masculinity and gendered norms. Further, all the participants perceived that different forms of bisexual stigma influenced how they navigated different romantic relationships. The categories under the topic of "influences of bisexual stigma" were partner choice and biphobia, coming out to self and others, and experiences of rejection. The category of "partner choice and biphobia" was further sub-categorized into a) who they choose, and b) internalized biphobia and culture while that of "Coming out to self and others" included sub-categories of a) coming out to partners, and b) hiding relationships. Across both topics, participants contextualized their relationship experiences (regardless of partner gender) by referring to their racial and cultural backgrounds.

Therefore, the findings from this research project help expand our knowledge of BIAM's relationship experiences with both same and different gender partners by highlighting the role of intersecting identities. It begins to uncover how traditional hegemonic masculinity, culture, and gender play a role in shaping relationships within the context of power. Drawing from Levitt's (2019) and Moradi's (2019) emphases on the functions of LGBTQ+ genders in psychological, cultural, interpersonal, and sexual domains and the theorization of gender as an "axis of sociopolitical power," it is

important that future research directly consider how power plays a role in the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality and their interactions.

In the sections below, I first summarize findings from this study and compare them to previous findings about romantic relationships, minority stress, and the influences of identity on lived experiences of BIM. I then discuss how participants navigate the socially constructed and pervasive binaries of gender and sexuality that shape relationships experiences and how these binaries are further influenced by cultural background.

Influences of Gender

Participants' experiences highlighted how their gender identities or those of their partner often played significant roles in determining romantic relationship structures, positive/successful relationship outcomes, and intra-partner dynamics. Most participants expressed experiencing increased compatibility with same gender partners as a result of their shared identities, common interests, and the mutual understanding of lived experiences. For some participants, sexual satisfaction was higher with same gender partners and attributed to an acceptance of their sexual desires and a perceived openness to sexual exploration. Despite scarce literature on sexual compatibility in LGBTQ+ relationships, some studies have examined the influence of sexual communication on relationship and sexual satisfaction (e.g., Noland, 2010). Rubinsky and Hosek (2019) found a positive relationship between sexual self-disclosure and sexual satisfaction, sexual self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction and sexual communication satisfaction and sexual satisfaction amongst 226 LGBTQ-identifying individuals. Of this sample, 28.7% identified as bisexual or pansexual and 34.5% identified as men. Based on the

experiences of men in this sample, communication about sexual preferences may positively influence romantic relationships of BIAM.

Along with sexual compatibility, several participants identified that gender significantly influenced relationship dynamics. This included being able to be emotionally vulnerable, or open with partners, and their perceptions about feeling understood and supported by their partners. More commonly, men experienced stronger support and acceptance of their emotions from different gender partners. This emotional connectedness was often ascribed to the impact of socialized norms around masculinity and emotions. Findings are consistent with existing literature about men in romantic relationships and the tendency to adhere to traditional masculine roles that require the avoidance of emotional expressiveness and self-disclosure (e.g., Burn, 1996; Ludlow & Mahalik, 2001; Vogel et al., 2007; Vogel & Wester, 2003). Further, some participants experienced the effects of gender and masculinity on the roles they undertook in romantic relationships. They described adopting heteronormative gender norms and roles that included doing the “masculine” chores and acting as “care-givers” and providers. These traditions were frequently influenced by other salient identities (e.g., race, culture, religion), wherein social messages around masculinity and gender were ingrained into participant’s relationship schemas (Brooks & Good, 2001; Chan, 2001; Levant, 1995; Martin, 1990; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993).

Influences of Bisexual Stigma

Experiences of participants from this study emphasize how experiences of bisexual stigma overlap with romantic relationship experiences to effect how they navigate relationship development (e.g., partner choice), and openness about their

identities in relationships (e.g., coming out). Participants described biphobia, bi erasure, and bi invisibility to be strong factors that influenced their relationships. This included impacting who they chose as partners (e.g., preferring LGBTQ+ partners), hiding their identities from their partners, family, and community, or hiding their same gender relationships from others. Often, participants felt the need to conform to heteronormative relationship structures (different gender partnerships) to avoid societal rejection. These findings add to existing literature on bisexual stigma, being in relationships with bisexual-identifying individuals (e.g., Armstrong & Reissing, 2014; Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Scherrer, et al., 2015; Todd et al., 2016) and the impact of minority stress for bisexual-identifying individuals in relationships (Feinstein, et al., 2016). Results from this study expand the existing understanding of minority stress due to the emphasis of intersecting identities like race, and culture that further compound prejudice and stigma.

Straddling Socially Constructed Binaries

Participants' narratives highlighted how relationship experiences are problematized and complicated by binary constructions of gender, sexual, and racial identities. Collectively, these descriptions illustrate the power of binary constructions of identities and the challenge of living outside of those binaries. To further contextualize, we also see the various systems of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, biphobia) that interlocked to influence these lived experiences that were entrenched in the binaries. Despite a desire to move away from these binaries, participants continued to locate themselves within the binary and also resist the pull towards one side or another when navigating their romantic relationships.

Binaries of Gender and Culture

Participants shared their experience of conforming to traditional, heteronormative gender roles that were informed by conventional ideas around hegemonic masculinity. Several participants adopted the more “traditional male role” more commonly in relationships with different gender partners but found that a gendered binary emerged even in relationships with same gender partners. They shared how their roles were guided by traditional scripts around gendered norms. For instance, participants found themselves moving towards tasks or chores that they considered more masculine (e.g., driving, paying bills) while shying away from those they deemed more feminine (e.g., emotional labor). These findings are consistent with existing research that posits that bisexual men often attempt to achieve or demonstrate their masculinity in accordance with the socially accepted, heteronormative standard (e.g., Pascoe, 2011; Steinman, 2011).

Similar to the binaries of gender, participants found themselves stuck between the binaries of cultural expectations. They felt that they were constantly navigating traditional conformity to heteronormativity while also resisting its confines. My previous study on bisexual-identifying women and their relationship expectations (Kwok et al., 2020) also found that despite a desire to reject traditional gender roles and hold egalitarian values and expectations, participants tended to rely on traditional gender role expectations with female- and male-identifying partners, most notably conforming to these traditional scripts in relationships with male-identifying partners. This is also consistent with the scarce literature on BIM who reported deviating away from heteronormative models, especially relating to masculinity, and showing strong motivations to emotionally connect with their romantic partners (Elder et al., 2015). The

BIAM in this study, despite voicing a desire to reject ideas based on hegemonic masculinity, were aware of conforming to these gendered expectations in their romantic relationships.

Binaries of Race/Ethnicity

The binaries of gender appeared to be shaped by the men's Asian-American cultural identities, another binary that they straddled. Participants related feelings that they were "not being Asian enough" while also feeling the need to conform to American standards of masculinity and physical beauty (e.g., "big", "strong", "muscular"). Some participants experienced rejection from non-Asian romantic interests because of their Asian identities while simultaneously feeling distant from partners who were Asian but not raised in North America. Studies have shown that American society demands that Asian American men endorse hegemonic masculinity (Lu & Wong, 2013) and that this adoption of masculinity has resulted in increased distress, substance use, and depression (Iwamoto, et al., 2010; Liu & Iwamoto, 2007). Further, the inability to meet these expectations can also cause distress (Lu & Wong, 2013). This often results in Asian American men feeling emasculated (Chan 1998; Chua & Fujino, 1999), or pressured into higher performance at work to prove their masculinity (Owen, 2010). They may also experience being dubbed as asexual due to their prioritization of work over personal/romantic relationships (Sue & Zane, 1985). Participants expressed need to perform American-mandated hegemonic masculinity within relationships which appeared to dominate their narratives, while Asian masculinity became subordinated or invisible.

Binaries of Bisexuality and Culture

Most of the participants perceived their bisexual identity meant traversing the binary of heterosexual versus gay depending on the gender of their partner. They often perceived their bisexual identities as forgotten and/or that they were often subject to the experience of prejudice. They faced stereotypes like being “assumed gay” or “assumed straight” by both the heterosexual and LGBTQ+ communities, and their same and different gender partners. These experiences are consistent with studies that highlight the negative stereotypes or attitudes that stigmatize bisexual men and women (Breno & Galupo, 2008) and influence others’ reluctance to be in romantic relationships with them (Armstrong & Reissing, 2014).

Analogous to previous findings (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009; Ross et al., 2010), participants also emphasized that their bisexual identity became context-dependent, according to their partner’s gender identity and the social meaning ascribed to their partnerships by others. For example, when in relationships with same gender partners, men were commonly presumed to be gay; when with different gender partners, men were assumed to be straight. Thus, under either circumstance, their bisexual identity became invisible. This experience of bi invisibility highlights the binary and rigid categorization into either end of the gay-straight spectrum. As a result, when asked to define their bisexuality, participants were intentional about using the words “bisexual” or “bi” to describe their sexual identities. They perceived they needed to boost and strengthen their bisexual identities to counter their experiences of bi invisibility.

It is important to recognize how culture plays a role in influencing these binaries of bisexuality. Participants shared how their experience of biphobia from others, or their

own internalized biphobia were reinforced by their traditional, Asian cultural backgrounds. They noted how cultural influences impacted their “coming out” and often led them to hide their non-heterosexual identity(ies) from family and/or community. Further, when in pursuit of partners, they leaned towards heteronormative, different gender relationships. Thus, intersections of culture, bisexuality, and gender and their overall influence on the bisexual experience are illustrated (Feinstein et al., 2020; Fuller et al., 2009).

Strengths, and Limitations, and Future Research

The findings from this study demonstrate the importance of an intersectional framework when understanding the relationship experiences of BIAM. The rich narratives uncovered some new findings that shed light on the distinctive experiences of BIAM (these are discussed below). Web-based, Zoom interviews and purposive sampling allowed me to recruit diverse participants from across North America (the United States and Canada) which also resulted in a varied sample of individuals from different countries of origin or cultural backgrounds. This heterogeneity of the sample is both a strength and a limitation. On the one hand, the sample included participants from over eight different racial backgrounds (e.g., Vietnamese, Pakistani, Indonesian, Chinese, Indian, Korean, Filipino, Bangladeshi) with some participants identifying as biracial or multi-racial. This provided a reasonable array of representation of individuals from across Asia. However, it is also important to recognize how this diversity brings to light the issue of racial sub-grouping and the assumption that all Asian experiences are homogenous. Thus, future research would benefit from examining within-group differences in a larger sample to further inform our existing understanding of lived

experiences of BIAM. For example, studies may explore whether acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals in a participant's country of origin influences their relationship experiences (e.g., relating to coming out).

Like all in-depth qualitative interview research, these findings have limited generalizability as results are based on a small sample of BIAM who were willing to be interviewed (Levitt et al., 2018). This sample was limited to those individuals we could contact through social media and other online resources and is constrained to those with access to the internet and LGBTQ groups and organizations. The online nature of data collection did not appear to impact the depth and richness of data generated; however, future studies may benefit by considering the possible influencing factors on online data collection strategies (e.g., access to the internet resulting in a limited sample, technical issues impacting flow of conversation). Further, though most interviews were online, face-to-face interviews using video, two interviews were solely audio due to technical difficulties. This may have influenced results wherein participants whose cameras were off may not have had in-depth interviews due to lack of non-verbal cues that drove probing questions. Additionally, the process of building rapport with the participant may have been hindered due to this lack of video. For instance, one of the two interviews was considerably shorter in duration as compared to others, and the participant in this interview presented as more reticent and briefer in his responses.

This study sheds important light on the experiences of an important, and often forgotten subgroup within the LGBTQ+ community. It is important to begin to question the significance of the label of "bisexuality". It may be important to consider whether the term "bisexuality" or "bi" continues to perpetuate the binaries discussed above. The

definition of bisexuality has moved from being specific to men versus women partners to an expansion that includes both same and different gender partners (Eisner, 2013).

Despite this expansion, participants in this study most often used bisexuality in reference to female- and male-identifying partners, thus reinforcing the binary. This gives rise to the question of whether or not “bisexual” continues to be a meaningful term that truly captures the lived experiences of these individuals. Future research may focus on uncovering how bisexuality is defined by the individuals using it as an identifier and whether they feel like it is an accurate descriptor.

During the interview, data were collected from the participants about their most recent partner's social identities (see above in Participant Demographics). Partners were identified as having diverse and different racial identities, gender identities, and sexual identities compared to that of the participants. Participants discussed the importance of their partners having similar racial identities to them; however, they did not prioritize having partners who also identified as bisexual. Current research on mixed-orientation couples tends to focus on straight women in relationships with sexual minority men (e.g., Adler & Ben-Ari, 2018). Further, studies on non-heterosexual and interracial couples found that relationship stigma influenced relationship outcomes (e.g., relationship commitment, trust, love, and sexual communication between partners) (Frost, 2013; Lehmler & Agnew, 2006; Rosenthal & Starks, 2015). Thus, future studies of BIAM may benefit from examining relationship dynamics and dyadic identity intersections in mixed-orientation and interracial relationships to further understand how relationship dynamics and well-being are impacted by intersecting factors like partners' racial and sexual identities.

Although this study provides an important starting point, there are several ways in which future research can extend the literature on BIAM and their relationship experiences. Most notably, this study is missing partner perspectives (as described above), especially in understanding how intersecting identities of both partners may influence relationship dynamics, and/or gendered role socialization. Moreover, given that the qualitative and thus non-generalizable nature of this study, future researchers may benefit from quantitative or mixed-methods studies that explore more relationship processes and outcomes. Studies may examine the relationship between BIAM's "outness" with demographic data relating to them being raised in North America versus an Asian country and how this minority stress factor shapes relationship quality.

Implications for Psychological Practice

Previous research has found that BIM face unique mental health challenges, most often relating to experiencing significant levels of stigma (e.g., negative attitudes, stereotypes, and behaviors against bisexuality) (Bostwick, et al., 2010; Conron, et al., 2010). Mental health clinicians are tasked with recognizing these unique negative factors and their influence on BIM's lives. Expanding to BIAM, it is important that mental health providers adopt multicultural frameworks that consider the influence of intersecting identities on their lived experiences. They may benefit from further training that focuses on Asian cultures, Asian-American culture, and on understanding the binaries that BIAM continuously navigate.

In working with couples, therapists should avoid making assumptions about the identities of both members of the dyad as well as how these identities play a role in their relationship dynamics. Further, couple or family therapists may benefit from an

intersectional lens that considers the cultural factors (e.g., traditions, values, norms) that may influence their conceptualization of client issues. They may also benefit from an examination of their values and gendered beliefs about relationship structures to ensure that these are not imposed on their bisexual-identifying clients and/or their partners. Given the individualized expectations and attitudes that each partner may have based on their cultural background and upbringing, therapists can facilitate conversations that focus on exploring these differences to help couples increase empathy for each other and to negotiate any differences from a place of mutual understanding and respect. Practitioners can also facilitate couples' conversations about the role of masculinity, power, and stigma on their individual and relationship experiences. They might suggest books like 'Reinventing Masculinity: The Liberating Power of Compassion and Connection' (Adams & Frauenheim, 2020) for partners from more privileged backgrounds to expand their knowledge and skills.

Finally, the diverse BIAM that were interviewed for this study exhibited strengths that included self-awareness, insight, empathy for others, desire to support others with similar backgrounds, and desire to resist traditional norms and behaviors. Thus, it is imperative that these and other strengths be affirmed and celebrated, especially within a society that continues to marginalize and stigmatize bisexual-identifying individuals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, bisexual stigma, gender, and intersecting identities (e.g., sexual identity, race) play a significant role in influencing the relationship experiences of BIAM. These factors influence the experience of compatibility, understanding, and connectedness with romantic partners while also having a role in relational dynamics.

Some BIAM experience more pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and norms, especially when in relationships with different gender partners. Most often, these traditions are reinforced and learned from society, community, and family.

This study contributes a new understanding of the various facets of romantic relationships that are influenced by BIAM's identities. Recognition of the strengths, influencing/motivating factors, and experience of bias and stigma can inform existing therapeutic services to align with counseling psychology's values and commitments to social justice, and inclusion.



RECRUITING BISEXUAL-IDENTIFYING, ASIAN MEN FOR A RESEARCH STUDY ON RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCES

YOU ARE ELIGIBLE IF YOU:

- identify as a man
- are 23 years or older
- self-identify as bisexual
- identify as Asian
- have been in a relationship with individuals of the same and different gender for at least 4 months each
- are a U.S./Canadian citizen or permanent resident
- speak fluent English

If interested, PLEASE complete this brief survey (https://uky.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bw1t3rSdMNguCUJ) or contact me at cheryl.kwok@uky.edu

Eligible participants who participate in an online interview will receive a \$50 Amazon gift card as compensation for their time.

Thank You!
Cheryl Kwok



Appendix B. Recruitment Email

Hello! My name is Cheryl Kwok, and I am a doctoral candidate in the University of Kentucky's Counseling Psychology Program and am currently working on my dissertation project under the supervision of Sharon Scales Rostosky, Ph.D. I am seeking bisexual-identifying Asian men (BIAM) to interview about their romantic relationship experiences with same and different gender partners. The findings from this research will contribute new knowledge to improve the work of professional helpers like therapists, social workers, and social justice advocates. I am writing to you to invite individuals from your organization who may be eligible to participate in this study.

To be eligible for this study you must:

- Be 23 years of age or older
- Identify as a man
- Self-identify as bisexual
- Have had romantic relationships with both same and different gender partners of at least 4 months duration
- Identify as Asian
- Are citizens or permanent residents of the United States
- Speak fluent English
- Be willing to talk about your experiences related to your identity and romantic relationships in a 1-2-hour interview that will be audio-recorded.

If you are interested in participating, please complete this brief survey (https://uky.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bw1t3rSdMNguCUJ), or if you would like further information, please contact me at cheryl.kwok@uky.edu and I'd be happy to talk about the study further! If you are not eligible or interested but know others who might be, I'd appreciate you sharing this email with them. Participants will receive \$50 to compensate them for their time. Thank you again for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Thank you!

Cheryl Kwok, M.A.

Preferred Pronouns: she, her, hers

Counseling Psychology Doctoral Candidate

Educational, School, & Counseling Psychology

University of Kentucky

236 Dickey Hall

Lexington, KY 40506

Appendix C. Qualtrics Survey

Relationship Experiences of Bisexual-Identifying Asian Men

Thank you for your interest in our study! I am a doctoral student conducting research at the University of Kentucky under the supervision of Sharon Scales Rostosky, Ph.D. (s.rostosky@uky.edu) If you are a bisexual-identifying Asian man, I would like to hear about your thoughts and experiences about your romantic relationships.

HOW IT WORKS: This survey should take about 2-3 minutes to complete. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. After completing the survey, you will be contacted using the information you provide at the end of the survey to see if you would like to participate in a demographic information questionnaire and online video interview. You will receive more information about consent and the research process and will have a chance to ask questions prior to the interview.

If you decide to participate in the follow-up questionnaire and interview, you will be given a \$50 Amazon Gift Card as compensation.

Your participation will contribute to ongoing efforts to support the health and well-being of bisexual-identifying Asian men.

Thank you again for your interest in this important project!

For any questions, please contact Cheryl Kwok at cheryl.kwok@uky.edu

Are you aged 23 or older?

Checking "continue" (the arrow) below means that you consent to complete this short survey and being contacted for possible participation. After clicking, a new window will open that contains the survey.

What is your age? (in years)

Are you a citizen of the United States or Canada?

Are you a permanent resident of the United States or Canada?

What is your sexual identity? (Choose all that apply)

- Heterosexual
- Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Asexual
- Gay
- Pansexual
- Queer
- Other _____

What is your gender? (Choose all that apply)

- Cis female
- Trans female
- Cis male
- Trans male
- Gender non confirming
- Nonbinary
- Gender fluid
- Other _____

What is your racial/ethnic identity? (Choose all that apply)

- White
- Asian/Asian American
- Black/African American
- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Latino/Latina/Latinx
- Hispanic
- Native Hawaiian
- Pacific Islander
- Biracial
- Multiracial
- Other _____

How long was your longest relationship with a person of the same sex/gender as you? (in years/months/weeks; choose one that applies best)

How long was your longest relationship with a person of the different sex/gender as you? (in years/months/weeks; choose one that applies best)

How many relationships have you had with a person of the same sex/gender?

How many relationships have you had with a person of a different sex/gender?

Are you currently in a romantic relationship?

Describe your romantic relationship history.

- Only with individuals of the same sex/gender
- Only with individuals of the different sex/gender
- Equally with both individuals of the same and different sex/gender
- Mostly with individuals of the same sex/gender partners
- Mostly with individuals of a different sex/gender partners
- Other _____

Are you willing to participate in a Zoom interview?

If Yes, how can we contact you? (Please fill the appropriate box with contact information)

How did you learn about this survey? (Choose all that apply)

Appendix D. Text Message for Participants Who Provided Phone Numbers

Hi! My name is Cheryl Kwok, and I am contacting you as you took the time to fill out my survey for my dissertation study on bisexual Asian men and their relationship experiences (Thank you for doing that!)

I am reaching out to see if you are still interested in participating in my study and have a few follow up questions before we schedule a time to do the interview over Zoom! If you are, would it be alright to communicate over email so I can send you the consent form, etc.?

Appendix E. Informed Consent Form



Consent to Participate in a Research Study

KEY INFORMATION FOR BISEXUAL-IDENTIFYING ASIAN MEN'S RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCES

We are asking you to choose whether or not to volunteer for a research study about the relationship experiences of bisexual-identifying Asian men with same and different gender partners. This page is to give you key information to help you decide whether to participate. We have included detailed information after this page. Ask the research team questions. If you have questions later, the contact information for the research investigator in charge of the study is below.

WHAT IS THE STUDY ABOUT AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

We want to interview bisexual-identifying Asian men about their relationship experiences with both same and different gender partners and to understand how different identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual identity) influence their overall lived experiences.

Your participation in this interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes. The researcher may reach out to you later to see if you would like to review the transcribed interview to see if they reflect your experience, or if you would like to add anything to your interview, but you will not be required to do this. All interviews will be recorded by the researcher and kept on a password protected jump drive that only she has access to.

WHAT ARE KEY REASONS YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO VOLUNTEER FOR THIS STUDY?

You should participate in this study if you wish to tell us about your relationship experiences with same and different gender partners. There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. However, some people have experienced increased insight and agency regarding their bisexual identity and how it relates to their relationship experiences. Your willingness to take part, however, may, in future, also help society as a whole better understand this research topic. Furthermore, participants receive a \$50 Amazon gift card as compensation for their time. For a complete description of benefits and/or rewards, please refer to the Detailed Consent.

WHAT ARE KEY REASONS YOU MIGHT CHOOSE NOT TO VOLUNTEER FOR THIS STUDY?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm that you would experience in everyday life. Further, if for any reason you would like to skip questions or stop the interview all together, you are welcome to do so. For a complete description of risks, refer to the Detailed Consent.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

The person in charge of this study is Cheryl Kwok, M.A. of the University of Kentucky, Department of Educational, School and Counseling Psychology. If you have questions, suggestions, or concerns regarding this study or you want to withdraw from the study, her contact information is: cheryl.kwok@uky.edu. She is being supervised by Dr. Sharon Rostosky of the University of Kentucky, Department of Educational, School, and Counseling Psychology.

If you have any questions, suggestions or concerns about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact staff in the University of Kentucky (UK) Office of Research Integrity (ORI) between the business hours of 8am and 5pm EST, Monday-Friday at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428.

DETAILED CONSENT:

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU WOULD NOT QUALIFY FOR THIS STUDY?

You would not qualify for this study if you are not 23 years or older, do not identify as a man, do not self-identify as bisexual, do not identify as Asian, are not a citizen or permanent resident of the United States and/or Canada, do not speak fluent English, and/or are uncomfortable or do not want to participate in an interview on relationship experiences, sexual identity, race, and gender that will be audio-recorded.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The research procedures will be conducted over Qualtrics and Zoom. You will need to participate 1 time during the study. The study will take about 60 to 90 minutes. The researcher may reach out in the future to see if you would like to give any input on the results, but you are not obligated to do this. If you wish to discuss and check the results at this time, this conversation will likely take about 30 minutes. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 60 to 90 minutes, with a possible 30-minute follow-up if interested and willing.

Due to the use of Zoom for interviews: Please be aware, while we make every effort to safeguard your data, the interview is being conducted via an online medium, as with anything involving the Internet, we can never guarantee the confidentiality of the data while still on the company's servers, or while en route to either them or us.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

If you agree to participate in this study a researcher will send you a link to a Qualtrics survey which will ask you questions about your and your partners' demographic information. You will then be interviewed about your relationship experiences with same and different gender partners and how these experiences have been influenced by your identities (e.g., race, gender). The interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed. You will have the opportunity to review and offer comments about your transcript. Aside from telling us about your experiences and optionally providing feedback about the transcripts, there are no other expectations of you.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm that you would experience in everyday life. However, depending on your personal experiences you may find some questions we ask you to be upsetting or stressful. If so, you have the ability to skip any questions or stop the interview altogether. In addition to risks described in this consent, you may experience a previously unknown risk or side effect.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

We do not know if you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. However, some people have experienced increased insight and agency regarding their romantic relationships due to thinking through and discussing their relationship experiences. However, if you take part in this study, information learned may help others.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in this study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

When we write about or share the results from the study, we will write about the combined information. We will keep your name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. You will be assigned a pseudonym that will be attached to your transcript and data. The audio file will be transcribed using automatic speech recognition software that uses encryption to protect your information. Any identifying information within the interview will be removed in the transcript. All audio files and interview transcriptions will be stored on a password protected OneDrive folder with all identifying information removed. This will only be accessible to members of the research team. A master-list attaching contact information with each pseudonym

will only be accessible by the primary investigator and will be stored on a private computer with a password in a password protected file.

You should know that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to share your information with:

- authorities, if you have a reportable disease; if you report information about a child being abused, which could include a minor engaging in sexual acts while younger than the legal age of consent, if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else; and/or
- the University of Kentucky IRB may look at or copy pertinent portions of records that identify you.

CAN YOU CHOOSE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY EARLY?

You can choose to leave the study at any time. You may also choose not to answer certain questions. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. If you choose to leave the study early, data collected until that point will remain in the study database and may not be removed.

The investigators conducting the study may need to remove you from the study. This may occur for a number of reasons. You may be removed from the study if:

- you are not able to follow the directions
- they find that your participation in the study is more risk than benefit to you

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will receive a \$50 Amazon gift card for completing the demographic survey and interview. If you decide to skip questions during the interview or otherwise leave the study early, you will still be given the gift card as compensation for your time.

WILL YOU BE GIVEN INDIVIDUAL RESULTS FROM THE RESEARCH TESTS/SURVEYS?

Generally, interviews done for research purposes are not meant to provide results that apply to you alone. However, you will be given the opportunity to review your

transcript to see if it accurately depicts your experience or if you would like to add anything. You do not have to complete this aspect of the study but will be given the opportunity to do so. If you do not review your transcript, the data will still be used in the study and you will still receive the \$50 Amazon gift card.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 15 people to do so. The PI is Cheryl Kwok, a doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology program at the University of Kentucky. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Sharon Rostosky, Ph.D. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

WILL YOUR INFORMATION BE USED FOR FUTURE RESEARCH?

Your information collected for this study will NOT be used or shared for future research studies, even if we remove the identifiable information like your name, or date of birth.

Appendix F. Follow-up Demographic Questionnaire

Are you currently in a romantic relationship?

How do you define same and different gender partners?

When was your last relationship with a same gender partner?

When was your last relationship with a different gender partner?

How long was your most recent relationship with a same gender partner?

How long was your most recent relationship with a different gender partner?

What is the gender of your most recent partner?

What is your most recent partner's racial identity?

What is your most recent partner's sexual identity?

What is your religious/spiritual identity?

How would you describe your socio-economic status?

What is your educational background?

How long have you self-identified as bisexual?

Appendix G. Interview Protocol

1. This study is focused on the relationship experiences of bisexual-identifying Asian men age 23 and above. What are your most important identities? What makes them particularly important to you?
2. Please tell me about your relationship experiences with same gender partners. Is there one past relationship that comes to mind? What aspects of the relationship were good/satisfying (e.g., emotionally, sexually, practically)? What was challenging?
3. Please tell me about your relationships with different gender partners. Is there one past relationship that comes to mind? What aspects of the relationship were good/satisfying (e.g., emotionally, sexually, practically)? What was challenging?
4. How do you define masculinity? What does it mean to you to be a man? How does your sense of your own masculinity influence your romantic relationships with same gender partners? With different gender partners? Please give specific examples from your life. Does idea of masculinity change depending on partner gender?
5. What gender roles show up in your relationships with same gender partners? (please give specific examples). What gender roles show up in your relationship with different gender partners? (please give specific examples)? How do aspects of your social or cultural background influence how these gender roles show up in your relationships with same gender partners? With different gender partners?
6. You self-identified as bisexual, what does it mean to you to have a bisexual identity? How do your other identities shape your bisexual identity? (please give specific examples from your life). How does your bisexual identity influence your other identities? (Please give specific examples from your life).
7. Have you experienced any forms of erasure, or stigma as a result of your bisexual identity in your romantic relationships? If so, how did you navigate that in your relationships with same gender partners? With different gender partners? (***added as a modification to the protocol after 3 interviews***)
8. How does your bisexual identity influence your romantic relationships? (Please give specific examples from your life). How have your other identities shaped your relationship experiences with same gender partners? With different gender partners? Please give specific examples.
9. How has your identity as an Asian man shaped your relationship experiences with same gender partners? With different gender partners?
10. Do you think living/growing up in North America influences your bisexual Asian male experience?
11. What has been your most positive experience as a bisexual-identifying Asian man? What positive characteristics or strengths do you have that might be directly

related to your identity as a bisexual Asian man? What strengths has that identity given you?

12. What was it like to talk to me about your identities and relationship experiences? Is there anything I didn't ask that you think would help me better understand your perspective on relationships with same gender partners and different gender partners?

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VITA

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EDUCATION

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- 2014 - 2016 **Master of Arts in Applied Psychology with Specialization in Counseling
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CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

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- Present *Pre-doctoral Psychology Intern (Supervised Doctoral Training)*
- Sept. 2019 – **Transform Health Clinic, University of Kentucky HealthCare;**
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- May 2020 *Practicum Counselor (Supervised Doctoral Training)*
- August 2018 - **Bluegrass Family Consultants, LLC; Lexington, KY**
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- Spring 2019, **College of Health Sciences, HHS 453: Cultural Competency in
Healthcare; University of Kentucky**
- Spring 2018 *Lab Leader*
- August 2017 - **Veteran Affairs Medical Center (Inpatient Unit and Outpatient Clinic);**
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- May 2018 *Practicum Counselor (Supervised Doctoral Training)*
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- Fall 2019; *Supervisor of Master’s Students (Supervised Doctoral Training)*

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August 2016 - **University of Kentucky Counseling Center**; Lexington, KY

May 2017 *Practicum Counselor* (Supervised Doctoral Training)

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Oct. 2015 *Practicum Counselor* (Supervised Master's Training)

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April 2015 *Counselor Trainee* (Supervised Master's Training)

PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Published Manuscripts

Kwok, C., Rostosky, S. S. & Riggle, E. D. B. (2020) Bisexual-Identifying Women's Relationship Expectations of Female- and Male-Identifying Partners, *Journal of Bisexuality*, 20:2, 141-165, DOI: [10.1080/15299716.2020.1755406](https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2020.1755406)

Clements-Hickman, A. L., Dschaak, Z., Hargons, C. N., **Kwok, C.**, Meiller, C., Ryser-Oatman, T., & Spiker, D. (2019). Humanity in homelessness: A social justice consultation course for counseling psychology students. *Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology*, 10, 34-48. [Authors listed in alphabetical order to reflect equal contribution]

Brown, H. M., Rostosky, S. S., Reese, R. J., Gunderson, C. J., **Kwok, C.**, & Ryser-Oatman, T. (2019). Blessing or BS? The therapy experiences of transgender and gender-nonconforming clients obtaining referral letters for gender-affirming medical treatment. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*.
<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.uky.edu/10.1037/pro0000274>

AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS, AND HONORS

- August 2019 **Graduate and Professional Student LGBTQ* Research Grant**
Office of LGBTQ Resources, University of Kentucky*
- August 2019 **ScholarConnect Scholarship**
University of Kentucky Federal Credit Union
- August 2019 **Conference Funding Award**
College of Education, University of Kentucky
- Sept. 2018 **ScholarConnect Scholarship**
University of Kentucky Federal Credit Union
- August 2018 **John Edwin Partington and Gwendolyn Gray Partington Scholarship**
College of Education, University of Kentucky
- August 2018 **Conference Funding Award**
College of Education, University of Kentucky
- June 2018 **Research Grant**
American Institute of Bisexuality (AIB)
- Jan. 2018 **Helen Thacker Graduate Fellowship in Educational & Counseling
Psychology**
College of Education, University of Kentucky
- Aug. 2016 - **Graduate School Academic Year Fellowship**
The Graduate School, University of Kentucky