

# Metropolitan Bisexual Men's Relationships: Evidence of a Cohort Effect

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## **Metropolitan Bisexual Men's Relationships:**

### **Evidence of a Cohort Effect**

Drawing on 90 interviews with openly bisexual men from three metropolitan cities this research explores experiences related to relationships. In using a comparative cohort research design, we demonstrate the presence of a generational effect, with members of the youngest cohort finding that their partners grant the greatest legitimacy to their bisexual identities. We also show that men of the older cohort maintained more heteronormative attitudes than men in the younger cohort, particularly concerning marriage and children. Finally, we find that while openly bisexual men located in three metropolitan cities were accepting of nonmonogamy for others, they were not largely practicing it themselves.

Keywords: bisexuality; relationships; nonmonogamy; generations; cohort

## **Introduction**

Alongside the stigma of being non-heterosexual (Meyer, 2003), bisexuals are subject to unique forms of stigmatization that other sexual minorities do not experience. These stereotypical and sometimes prejudicial views impact the bisexual life in multiple ways, including within relationships. Klesse (2011) for example shows that bisexuals often experience discrimination and bigotry from their own romantic partners and that, socially, bisexuals are frequently viewed as undesirable partners because they are deemed to be unlikely satisfied with a relationship with a person representing only half of their spectrum of attraction. Accordingly, bisexuals are socially perceived as unable to remain monogamous (George, 1993; Zivony & Lobel, 2014).

In order to examine these matters, this research draws on 90 interviews with self-identified bisexual men across three age cohorts recruited in an innovative manner. The cohort design enabled internal comparison of participants' experiences across generations, while the innovative recruitment practices facilitated hearing the narrative of bisexual men that sampling procedures do not normally locate (McCormack, Anderson, & Adams, 2014; McCormack, Adams, & Anderson, 2013). We find that the negative impact on bisexual men's lives is less than previous research suggests (Burlison, 2005). We attribute much of this to sampling procedures, but also because we identify a cohort effect (generational change) within our sample. We find that men of the older cohort studied maintained heterosexist constructions of gender within relationships, whereas those in the younger cohort maintained more egalitarian views. Finally, while we found some desire for non-monogamies in-line with other research (McLean, 2007; Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1994), our

participants mostly ascribed to socially acceptable monogamist ideals, something we attribute to our recruitment methods.

### **Bisexual Burden, Sexual Conservatism and Social Control**

Research documents that bisexuals experience stigmatization, discrimination and social exclusion beyond that which other sexual minorities face (Herek, 2002; Klein, 1993; Mohr, Israel, & Sedlacek, 2001). Anderson, McCormack and Ripley (2014) have called the collective aspects of biphobia ‘bisexual burden’—an umbrella term to understand the multitude of ways in which bisexuals are marginalized within society, independent of sexual prejudice directed toward gays and lesbians.

Klein (1993) suggests bisexuals are stigmatized as being neurotic, sex crazed, and incapable of love or monogamy. Bisexuals are also subject to negative stereotypes about their identities from other sexual minorities as well as heterosexuals, including being thought confused or in a transitional phase (Burlison, 2005; Diamond, 2008). As a consequence, bisexuals are accused of attention seeking and not having the courage to come out as gay or lesbian (Eliason, 1997; MacDonald, 1981).

Another key issue for bisexuals is that they face discrimination from gays and lesbians as well as heterosexuals (Barker & Langdrige, 2008; Ochs, 1996). Barker, Richards, Jones and Monro (2011) suggest that bisexuals often have a dual coming out process to navigate: they must face stigma from two communities, whereas gays and lesbians tend to face stigma from just one. As a result of the perceived elevated stigma within the gay community (Mulick & Wright, 2002; Weiss, 2003), Welzer-Lang (2008) describe a great deal of ostracism toward bisexuals.

The marginalization in lesbian and gay communities is thought to contribute to the absence of significant political or public presence of bisexuals (Rust, 2002;

Steinman, 2000). This exacerbated the lack of public understanding about bisexuality and bisexuals' experiences or relationships. As George (1993, p. 83) argued, "People with no personal knowledge of bisexuality are likely to assume that bisexuals want multiple relationships...because a bisexual has needs which cannot be met by one sex or the other." The stereotype of the bisexual as promiscuous and sexually predatory maintains dominance in society (Zivony & Lobel, 2014).

The effect of this sexual stereotyping is exacerbated because of the stigmatization of sexual permissiveness. Vrangalova, Bukberg and Rieger (2014, p. 94) define sexual permissiveness as "attitudes or behaviors that are more liberal or extensive than what is normative in a social group." It is characterized by a set of behaviors and desires including, "actual or desired frequent, premarital, casual, group, or extradyadic sex, sex with many partners, early sexual debut, or even nonverbal cues signaling availability" (Vrangalova et al., 2014, p. 94). One reason sexual permissiveness is stigmatized is because there is a perceived (or real) elevated likelihood that people who are permissive will engage in sex with someone already in a monogamous relationship (Schmitt, 2004), or that they will be sexually unfaithful to their own partner (Bailey, Kirk, Zhu, Dunne, & Martin, 2000). People thus publically adopt sexually conservative attitudes as a way of protecting their social identities.

The characterization of bisexuals as sexually promiscuous simultaneously relegates them as sexual deviants while privileging (monogamous) heterosexuals. Accordingly, sexual conservatism not only preserves one's reputation and social status, but it operates as a form of social control (McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002). It is for this reason that empirical research on promiscuity shows that sexual restraint in a friend or partner is rated as more desirable than sexual experience (Coutinho, Hartnett & Sagarin, 2007), which is ranked among the least desirable traits in a friend

(Vrangalova et al., 2014). Sexual conservatism also guards against being considered less moral, less intelligent, less trustworthy, and less socially adjusted (Vaillancourt & Sharma, 2011). Thus, if bisexuals are stereotyped as being more sexually permissive, they are simultaneously socially devalued as friends, lovers, and human beings.

### **Bisexual Burden in Relationships**

Bisexual burden results in difficulties in finding and maintaining healthy romantic relationships. The complications are then exacerbated by cultural beliefs that bisexuals in relationships with a person of a different sex are often accused of not wanting to lose their heterosexual privilege (Burleson, 2005). Yet, when they are in a same-sex relationship, they are perceived either as gay/lesbian, erasing their bisexuality (Hartman-Linck, 2014), or they are reproached for not being entirely out and seen as clinging to heterosexual privilege (Firestein, 2007).

Bisexuals also must contend with whether to come out to a partner's friends and family. McLean (2007) contends that some bisexuals decide against coming out to particular groups because of the pain and anguish this can cause to themselves and their partners. She argues that this is further complicated by the hegemony of the monogamous couple as the preferred relationship type, against which non-monogamous relationships are judged. Furthermore, the stigma associated with bisexuality in relationships may be more damaging for bisexual men than bisexual women. Armstrong and Reissing (2014) examined attitudes towards forming relationships with bisexuals, and found that women dating bisexual men exhibited moderately high levels of insecurity about bisexuality, which increased as the relationship developed. Men dating bisexual women, however, showed relatively low-to-moderate insecurity in comparison.

In addition to the burden of stereotyping, the dynamics of bisexuals' relationships are often aligned with a heteronormative framework—with a disproportionate number of bisexuals being in opposite-sex relationships. PEW (2013) surveyed nearly 500 bisexuals, using a five-point scale to ask them about their desires. Despite 89% of participants suggesting that they are in the middle of bisexuality somewhere (i.e. substantial attraction to both men and women), 84% of participants who were in a committed relationship were with someone of the opposite sex.

Regarding bisexual men specifically, 32% stated they were attracted somewhat more to the opposite sex, 28% attracted equally to both sexes, and 32% attracted somewhat more to the same sex. Given that roughly a third are more attracted to men, a third to women and a third equally attracted, a distribution of whom they are dating might be expected to be 50% male and 50% female, not 84% female. However, PEW's findings do not ask other questions to substantiate if this is a matter of heterosexism, or whether this reflects the realities of finding a suitable partner from the majority (heterosexual women) compared to the small minority (other bisexual and gay men). Accordingly, for evidence of heteronormativity within the bisexual population, we turn to other data which supports that bisexual men often seek same-sex sexual interactions for recreation while reserving relationships for women (Hood, Prestage, Crawford & Sorrell, 1994; McKirnan, Stokes, Doll, & Burzette, 1995). Yet, with rapidly growing acceptance for same-sex relationships, including gay marriage, we question whether younger bisexual men might not take more of an egalitarian approach to dating and relationships.

### **Changing Sexual Norms**

Attitudes toward sexual minorities are improving at a significant rate (Clements & Field, 2014; Keleher & Smith, 2012). This is particularly the case among youth (Anderson, 2014; McCormack, 2012). The increased liberalism toward homosexuality and same-sex sexual behaviors has occurred alongside an expanded social and political landscape for sexual minorities (Weeks, 2007). This has been shown to impact positively upon bisexual men. Morris, McCormack and Anderson (2014) find that the coming out experiences for younger bisexual men is positive, with bisexual burden increasingly replaced by acceptance, and sometimes even an increase in peer popularity.

In addition to positive experiences of bisexual male youth, a study of 60 heterosexual undergraduate athletes in the US found that nearly all of them viewed bisexuality as a legitimate sexual orientation and non-stigmatized sexual identity (Anderson & Adams, 2011). In research under construction Anderson finds 30 heterosexual undergraduate British men unanimously contend that bisexuality exists. The athletes in both studies understand bisexuality in complex ways and most were also able to recognize aspects of bisexuality from their own lives, particularly concerning their emotional love for other males (Anderson, 2014). Anderson and his colleagues suggest that these findings are a consequence of increased liberalism and contact with other sexual minorities resulting in an environment allowing for more open discussions of the once taboo topics of sexual behaviors and sexual identity.

## **Methods**

### *Sample*

This qualitative research utilizes in-depth interviews with 90 bisexual men from three metropolitan cities; 30 men from each city. Within each city, participants were



strategically divided and recruited to evenly divide into three strategically selected age cohorts, with ten men in each cohort.

The age cohorts were devised to examine the influence of differing levels of homophobia during adolescence: a time of high cultural homophobia during the late 1980s, decreasing homophobia during the 1990s, and more positive attitudes towards homosexuality during the 2000s (Keleher & Smith, 2012; Loftus, 2001). Thus, we categorized three age cohorts for analysis with men aged 36-42, 25-35 and 18-24. The men in the in 36-42 group were aged 16 between 1984 and 1990; those in the 25-35 age group were aged 16 between 1991 and 2001; and those in the 18-24 year old group were aged 16 between 2002 and 2008. These cohorts correspond with three of Plummer's (2010) generational cohorts for gays and lesbians; arguing that the unique social and historical contextual factors of each generation has an influence on the ways in which society is experienced and sexualities are experienced.

Collectively this gives us a nine-cell recruitment design. We have ten men aged 18-24 in each of three cities, ten men aged 25-35 in each of three cities, and ten men aged 36-42 in each of three cities. We recruited to these categories and turned away volunteers once each cell was filled to ten. This provides a strategic approach for comparing men across generations and in three cities.

### *Participant Recruitment*

Research on sexual minorities has been critiqued for collecting data with biased samples because participants are commonly recruited from self-help groups, sexual minority political groups, or counseling services (McCormack, 2014). Other researchers rely on snowball sampling. Accordingly, bisexual research generally only recruits from a small, highly specific sub-group of the broader bisexual population

with the result that there is a selection bias toward those who have experienced discrimination (Hartman, 2011). In order to avoid perpetuating this issue, we utilized an innovative method of recruiting men who met our research criteria of being publicly open about their bisexuality, without over-sampling from LGBT group memberships. Thus, instead of recruiting from participants from pre-existing networks of bisexuals, we recruited directly from the busy streets of London, Los Angeles and New York.

To account for the small proportion of people in the general population that publically identify as bisexual, we recruited from areas with high population density in these cities. Here, we shouted “Bisexual men, we’re paying forty dollars for academic research.” In order to diversify the range of people interviewed, we recruited people at multiple times of day, including late at night every day of the week. Interviews were conducted immediately in suitably private nearby locations, such as a coffee shop or secluded public area.

We highlight that the recruitment method was successful in recruiting 90 participants with diverse backgrounds to fill our nine cells. Given that we wanted to understand the experiences of bisexual men who were open about their sexual orientation, asking them to identify as bisexual on a crowded public street acted as one mechanism of narrowing our desired target population. It also made research more accessible to people who were not sure they fit the criteria.

Another benefit of this recruitment method is that it succeeded in locating a diversity of bisexual men. They ranged from bisexual men who had been out for over 30 years to an 18 year old who had just come out. Some participants frequented the gay scene while others had never been; some were in relationships with women, others with men—both monogamous and open. There was significant ethnic and

economic diversity, too. Accordingly, we believe our method enabled us to recruit a diverse section of society, and reach a number of bisexual men who would not normally respond to more traditional adverts about academic research.

### *Limitations to the method*

It is important to recognize the limitations of this method. First, given the need for separate analysis of men and women (Worthen, 2013), we restrict our sample to men. Second, our findings only speak to people who are openly bisexual, and the experiences of closeted bisexuals may differ. Thirdly, our findings only speak to bisexual men who are in metropolitan areas.

There are also potential hazards of our method. It is our experience that some people view these recruitment methods as controversial. Some have questioned us about our approach, and we even had one academic approach us on the streets of New York to give his unfavorable opinion, suggesting that our method could result in fraudulent narratives—that passers-by would pretend to be bisexual for the payment of forty dollars. While this critique might seem persuasive, it first fails to understand that this is true of almost all compensated research—it simply is not possible to provide a cast-iron guarantee that participants are being truthful. Indeed, it seems implausible that someone would be able to, impromptu, improvise a life history without contradictions or forgotten details over a forty-five minute interview to fool the skilled researchers.

Another methodological concern is that some bisexuals might be deterred from approaching us. However, given that our research aim was to recruit openly bisexual men, this seems unlikely. Certainly busier men might be less likely to approach us than those whom we were on the streets for recreation, but the categories of

men studies would not be substantially altered. Recruiting from the city streets enabled us to recruit men that were open enough to be seen identifying as bisexual, publicly – precisely the type of men we desired to recruit.

### *Analysis*

Interviews were largely biographical in nature, exploring participants' experiences across the course of their life. Discussions focused on relationships with friends, family and partners; the extent of biphobia; their bisexual coming out experiences; and their feelings about bisexual as an identity category. All interviews were digitally recorded, stored securely and transcribed. Participants were provided with contact details for the research team, and offered the opportunity to review transcripts. All other ethical procedures of the British Sociological Association have been followed, as per the university ethics approval at the time of data collection.

Constant comparative coding entailed that the researchers began to look for themes early in the research project. After interviews, each researcher would make notes on key themes from the interview. At the end of each day, we would discuss themes as a group. When themes appeared in multiple interviews, we determined additional questions to elaborate upon those themes in subsequent interviews. Accordingly, our interviews grew longer as our field work progressed.

Upon returning from our fieldwork, coding and analysis of the transcripts began. This occurred in combination with intensified search for literature pertinent to bisexual men's experiences. Two of the researchers transcribed and coded the findings, co-verifying 9 of the others' transcription in an ongoing process of inter-rater reliability. The third researcher was given the codes, and 9 transcripts for third-rater verification (Urquhart, 2013). Theoretical arguments were then formed from the

data (Charmaz, 2006). While we recognize the inherently subjective nature of qualitative research, it is through this process of logical abstraction and inter-rater reliability that rigor is assured.

### *Limits to Generalizability*

We recognize limitations on the generalizability of this project—these men were all located from metropolitan areas and they all had the time (or reason) to be in the areas where we were recruiting. The data does not speak to how bisexual women’s identities may be changing, the experiences of older bisexual men from ages not examined here, or those in the closet. It is also important to highlight that our recruitment procedures – calling publically for bisexual men for research – are more likely to recruit those with at least some attachment to bisexuality as an identity category. The difference in our recruitment strategy also makes direct comparison with other research on bisexual identities somewhat more complex—although it also highlights the issues with relying on particular groups from which to recruit participants.

### **Increased Personal Acceptance**

Disclosing a bisexual identity to romantic partners has not, and is not always problem-free (Hartman-Linck, 2014). However, most of the 90 men interviewed had positive experiences relating to this disclosure when dating. We do not quantify what percent of these 90 men had good versus bad experiences, because this is both open to interpretation and raises chronological questions. Instead, realizing that matters can be complex, we provide general directions of findings and exemplars for reader interpretation. We provide more details of the negative experiences (because they are

illuminating as to the problems of bisexual burden) but this should not be taken to reflect that the men we studied had difficulty, overall.

Rick, aged 32, was open with his fiancé about his bisexuality early into his relationship (the first week he recollects). He said, “She knows I am bisexual. It doesn’t put a strain on the relationship at all... she asks about what I get turned on by in guys and stuff.” Similarly, Andrew, white and aged 30, was out to his long-term girlfriend, even though he took longer to do so:

I told her...about six months in. I told her I liked guys and girls, and she was cool with it. She said, “As long as you make me happy and treat me good, I’m not worried about it.”

Whereas the literature finds many bisexuals experiencing significant prejudice from partners (Klesse, 2011) making it hard to find people to date, just one man experienced this in our sample. AJ, aged 38 and black, spoke of bisexuality as a “lonely journey,” because he had been mostly single. He said that his relationships “kinda blow up.” Significantly, while many men we interviewed had failed relationships, they did not attribute this to their bisexuality. Bisexual men in our sample did not report having difficulty in finding people to date or marry.

The majority of older men tended to disclose their bisexual identities when in serious, long-term relationships, as opposed to while dating, and this is perhaps a strategic move to ascertain their partner’s likely reactions (Weinberg et al., 1994). Few men in the older cohort told women that they were bisexual early into the relationship, although they did tell men. This contrasted with men of the youngest cohort, who tend to come out early in dating, suggesting less concern about how this would be perceived by their partners. We find no examples of younger men hiding their bisexuality from those they dated.

Cole, 18 and white, for example, had been in two relationships with gay men since arriving in New York. He said, “One for a month, the second was two months. They knew about me being bi and were pretty relaxed about it.” Similarly, Angelo, aged 18 and Hispanic, had been in a relationship with a woman for two months. He said she knew that he is bisexual, and he was open about being attracted to men and women equally: “She knows that, and she doesn’t care that I was having a relationship with a boy for a while before.” Similarly, Sam, aged 23 and Hispanic, said, “Right now, I’m in a committed monogamous relationship with a guy. He’s aware I’m bisexual, but I would generally use the label ‘gay’ at the moment just because it makes things easier.”

That many of this group disclosed their sexual identity earlier into relationships than reported by the men of the older cohort is evidence of a lessening of the influence of bisexual burden in their lives. Supporting this, while the youngest cohort did not have the same level of experience of long-term relationships (because of their youth), change was also evident in their relationship ideation.

Many participants in the youngest cohort expressed an equal desire to be in a relationship with a man or a woman. For example, Jacob, aged 21 and white, said: “I really don’t have any hang ups over who I’m gonna end up with. Like, if I meet a guy who I’m in love with, then I’ll be with a guy, and if it’s a girl then I’ll be with a girl.” And Anthony, white and aged 34, was open with all his ex-partners, both male and female—documenting the improvement compared with what the literature traditionally shows (Weinberg et al.,1994).

However, highlighting residual elements of bisexual burden, some of the men we interviewed suggested that their partners sometimes had problems with it. While in the minority, some of these attributed worse attitudes to that of heterosexual

women and others to gay men. For example, aged 21 and white, Jacob's experience of relationships included openness with his female partner about bisexuality, but his narrative also indicated that she had difficulty with it. Having recently ended the several-years-long relationship that he started in high school, he said:

She knew about me being bisexual. I came out to her while I was figuring it out, so she knew... She was a religious girl, and she was kind of weird about it. It's like now she thinks you're looking at other girls *and* at guys. But she didn't tell me I wasn't or anything like that. She just got more jealous.

Most of the others who indicated that their partners had difficulty with their bisexuality also attribute this to female partners. A recurring theme in participants' narratives was that heterosexual women were threatened by the idea that their bisexual lover might desire men more than them, leave them or cheat on them. For example, Ray, aged 25 and Hispanic, who believed that straight women were not open to the idea of bisexual men, said, "They say if you're into guys then you're gay, and if it's women you're straight. Straight women like straight men I guess."

Sam, aged 23 and Hispanic, also had similar experiences with girls, saying "My girlfriend liked it because she thought she could turn me straight, and it would prove her own sexual power." This was true of older men as well. Arthur, aged 42, said that, "I feel women get really angry over [men's] bisexuality."

Similarly, George, aged 28, white and from the American south, had negative experiences when coming out to his female partner. He said:

My girlfriend was telling me once about some semi-lesbian experience that she'd had, trying to turn me on. So I told her I'd had same-sex experiences as well, but she was horrified and instantly left. She had no interest in dating me anymore, because I was bisexual.



Finally, William spoke of prejudice from female sexual partners, who did not believe he was bisexual, saying, “I don’t think that the girls I get with really believe that I can be bisexual. I think that they believe in the theory of it, but I don’t think they actually believe in it.”

Not all men attributed fears and misattributions more to women. Anthony said that, “The girls are usually cool with it. The guys on the other hand don’t want to hear about it. They don’t want to understand it.” Collectively, all we can say about our research is that younger men were more likely to be out about their bisexuality earlier into a relationship, and appeared more willing to date men as well as women. We can also suggest that while the majority of men we interviewed did not find that their bisexuality caused them significant relationships issues, bisexual burden was still a problem for some. Much more research is needed to determine whether heterosexual women are less or more positive about dating bisexual men than gay men are. We simply cannot draw conclusions from the present work.

### **Decreasing Heteronormativity**

In addition to finding that younger bisexual men were more likely to come out as bisexual early into a relationship compared to older bisexual men, our interviews also suggest that non-traditional relationships tended to be more problematic with the older cohort, and less stereotyped by the younger cohort. In other words, heteronormativity appears to be decreasing with younger age cohorts of bisexual men. We measure this difference in two ways.

First, we find that men of the older cohort idealized heteronormative relationship types for their ability to produce children (Pennington, 2009). For example, JP, 32 and white, said his ideal relationship would be with a woman, “so I

can have a family,” He did not seem to consider the possibilities of adoption, surrogacy and shared parenting. Another participant from this age cohort said, “I want to have kids and I can’t have that with a guy, obviously.” Robert, aged 42 and white, has been in a relationship with a woman for nine years. When asked why he chose to date a woman instead of a man he said it was because he felt that his masculinity is enhanced when dating a woman because of his virility: “With a woman I can make a child. I’m not sterile.”

When younger bisexual men expressed interest in dating women over men, this tended not to be based in heterosexist presumptions or desire for children, but it was related to personal preferences of personality and sexual habits. For example, Terrance, aged 23 and black, said, “I think I’ll date women more. Some guys can be just too much, a real pain in the ass.” He added, “I’ve always had more girlfriends than guy friends, so it fits that I’d have a girlfriend as well.” Similarly, Frank, aged 20 and Hispanic, said, “I see guys as more friends, but with girls it can go more romantic. That may change, but at the moment, but I don’t have that lovey-dovey feeling with guys.”

Conversely, several men in the younger two cohorts also expressed preference for men. For example, Jose, Hispanic and aged 24, said that he “had sex with men more often, maybe because they’re a little tighter. Women take a lot longer to make me cum.” Anthony, 34 and white, preferred men for emotional reasons:

Women are a little too high maintenance for me, particularly as I’m pretty high maintenance myself...I must say that, I’ve got great friends who are girls, and you know when I’m around them I have fun. But it also wears on me a bit. Ultimately, I just think ‘yeah, I need to date a guy.

And while men in the older cohort were mostly with women, not all were. Arthur, aged 42, said, “I gravitate toward men, because they are okay with each other playing around, but women are more clingy, particularly if you want an open relationship, they just say no. Whereas with a man you can be fuck buddies.” Accordingly, overall, the younger cohorts exhibited more openness to relationships with men, and discussed potential relationships with less heterosexist perspectives. Part of this might be attributed to the fact that they are not thinking about children and families, but given that having children is a foundational principle of heterosexual coupledness, it highlights that, at least in their youth, they are willing to eschew heteronormative ideals, and instead date whomever they feel they will have the best emotional and sexual relationship with.

### **Monogamism**

Despite finding that younger bisexual men tended to eschew some aspects of heteronormativity—that they came out as bisexual earlier and reported few problems with it—the men we interviewed, collectively, remained in favor of monogamy. We found fewer of our participants overall desired polyamory or open relationships than documented in other studies (see McLean, 2004; Rust, 1996; Weinberg et al., 1994). Instead, the majority across cohorts idealized monogamy and sought sexual fidelity in their coupled relationships; even among those who would cheat as well—something Anderson (2012) calls monogamism.

John, aged 38 and white, had been in a long term nonmonogamous relationship. He said:

I’ve been with the same guy for 12 years and it’s great. I’m not a big believer in monogamy, I just don’t think it’s natural and being a man, gay or straight,

we're gonna fuck everything and anything. That was easier to do with a guy for sure.

One participant said that if you “aren’t doing monogamy than you aren’t doing a relationship.” In response to questions about open relationships, a dozen men asked of the researcher variations of the same question, “What’s the point of getting married then?”

Filipe, 39 and Hispanic maintained that monogamy was important to him because he could not handle the jealousy of his partner sleeping with others. “I need to feel that I am the most important person in the world to her [he’s married to a woman] and she needs to know that I view her the same. I would be incredibly jealous if we opened up the relationship. I just couldn’t handle it.”

Finally, Ricardo, 38 and Hispanic, said that monogamy was a character test of love. “I’m not opposed to people doing what they want, but for me, monogamy is a character test of love. If I don’t love him or her enough I will want sex with someone else.” When asked if he thought those in open relationships did not love their partners as much as those in monogamous relationships he answered, “I think that’s probably true. Yes.”

Collectively, men we interviewed were reluctant to stigmatize those who did not seek monogamy. While they seemed to reserve judgment for those who cheated, having an open sexual relationship was looked upon with tolerance—yet these relationships were not viewed as valuable as monogamous relationships. This is not to say that many men were not interested in or open to others having open relationships or polyamorous relationships, but it is to suggest that across all three cohorts the desire for monogamy was the norm.

These findings are dissimilar to other research that has documented that bisexuals are more likely to be in nonmonogamous relationships than the general population (Klesse, 2005; McLean, 2004) and that bisexuals practice a range of relationship types. Weinberg et al. (1994) for example, documented bisexuals engaging in “swinging, sexual triads, group sex parties...casual sex with friends, and anonymous sex,” as well as practicing open (nonmonogamous) relationships with one primary partner (Rust, 1996).

We posit that while finding that most bisexual men desire monogamy is an anomaly, when comparing this finding to other research, it may be more reflective of bisexual men as a whole. That is to say, that our findings of bisexual men valuing monogamy may be more generalizable because it’s possible that studies that recruit men from LGBT groups are likely collecting data on those that are more inclined to counter-cultural sexual thinking. In other words, whereas others have described polyamorous groups as being highly prevalent within bisexual cultures (Monro, in press) we question if this is not simply because nonmonogamous bisexuals are more inclined to join bisexual groups than monogamous desiring bisexuals.

## **Discussion**

This research draws on interviews with 90 bisexual men from three metropolitan cities to examine the changing patterns of relationships among our participants. It is part of a broader study that has documented a generational cohort effect in bisexual men’s lived experiences. In this article, we focus on changes in how bisexual men come out as and experience their bisexuality with partners across three age cohorts.

We found multiple narratives related to maintaining a bisexual identity, and there was no hegemonic relationship experience for these men. Still, an identifiable

pattern across the age cohorts was evident, with decreasing aspects of bisexual burden for bisexual men of the younger cohort studied. Younger men had more confidence in announcing their bisexual identities earlier into relationships. They also reported that their bisexual identities were more generally accepted by their partners, both male and female, than older bisexual men experienced.

This pattern emerged between the older and middle cohort; but was most striking with the youngest cohort (aged 18-23). One reason might be that a majority of those in the very youngest cohort had not had a significant relationship that lasted more than a few months. Still, the fact that the youngest cohort were coming out to partners in a matter of weeks rather than months or years, bisexual burden seems to impact less on the youngest cohort of bisexual men. We suggest that this is a reflection of the cultural progress toward sexual minorities more broadly (see also McCormack & Anderson, 2014).

Younger bisexual men were also less heteronormative in their desires for dating women than the older cohort. We suggest that this is attributable to the generational nature of sexualities (Plummer, 2010), whereby older bisexual men grew up in a culture where gay adoption and equal marriage neither existed nor seemed possible in the future. This is compared with the youngest cohort who are aware of same-sex parenting, and for whom debates about same-sex marriage have been part of the political landscape when growing up.

Finally, we found that monogamy was valued by all three cohorts of the bisexual men that we interviewed to a greater extent than traditionally found in the literature (e.g. Monro, in press). Thus, consistent with other recent research on nonmonogamy among straight and gay men, this research on bisexual men finds that despite the growing acceptance of sexual diversity in a range of forms, monogamy is

still socially esteemed (Anderson, 2012). The marked difference from this and other literature on nonmonogamies among bisexual men is most likely an artifact of our sampling procedures—finding bisexual men who are more integrated into mainstream society than those who are located within bisexual communities (e.g. Monro, in press).

There are of course limitations to our study. The aim of qualitative research is not to make total generalizations, and our sample is limited in several ways. First, the manner of recruiting bi-identified individuals means that we will not have recruited all types of people with non-binary sexual identities, which will influence our findings related to experiences of social and sexual identity (Callis, 2014; Mitchell, Davis, & Galupo, 2014). Similarly, the characteristics of our sample in terms of its location, urban nature and public manner of participant recruitment will also influence who participated and thus the nature of our findings. Thus, the relevance of our findings are primarily for men who identify as bisexual, who are public about this to some extent, and who live in relatively liberal metropolitan cities. Notwithstanding these important limitations, our research is evidence that bisexual organizations are not representative of the broader bisexual population (McCormack et al., 2014; PEW, 2013), and our results contribute to the debate about the problems of recruiting sexual minorities from particular groups and communities (McCormack, 2014; Savin-Williams, 2001). Thus, our research shows that there is a need to think critically not only about our understandings of bisexual men and their experiences of romantic relationships, but how we recruit the men that we study.

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