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Ethnic-Minority Bisexual Women: Understanding the Invisible Population

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Ethnic-Minority Bisexual Women: Understanding the Invisible Population

Despite a growing body of literature on lesbian and gay (LG) individuals and LG counseling competencies, bisexuality continues to be an area with little empirical research and clinical understanding. From 1990-1999, in eight major counseling journals, only two articles focused on bisexuality (Phillips, Ingram, Smith, & Mindes, 2003). A challenge researcher's face is that historically sexual orientation theories focus on the categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality (American Psychological Association (APA), 2000; Klein, 1993; Phillips, et al., 2003). As a result, the existing theory and counseling competencies for working with both white and bisexual clients of color are largely generalized from empirical studies with LG clients (Rust, 2000). Consequently this literature is not relevant to the specific challenges of the bisexual community such as facing negative views from both heterosexual and LG communities and the lack of a bisexual community (APA, 2000; Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). In addition, potential cultural factors salient to ethnic-minority bisexual identity development such as cultural constructions of sexual orientation or varying levels of tolerance of sexual diversity are left invisible (Rust, 2000). Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify unique factors that influence bisexual identity development among ethnic-minority women due to the stressors they face in their multiple minority statuses (Singh, Chung, & Dean, 2006). Specifically, the study focused on women's bisexual identity development and how race, ethnicity, and religion may intersect with this process

Factors that Influence Bisexual Identity Development

The current literature on sexual identity development has focused largely on the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) population as a whole, highlighting these group's similarities. Based on this assumption of similarity, traditional LG identity development models have been applied to

bisexual populations (e.g., Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989) and recent research has typically studied the LGB population collectively. For example, Mohr and Fassinger (2003) investigated a model in which acceptance of being a LGB person was influenced by both socio-cultural factors (e.g., societal intolerance) and unique individual factors (e.g., attachment styles). Additionally, LGB individuals have been noted to face challenges of societal prejudice and discrimination towards same-sex attraction (APA, 2000; Smiley, 1997).

While these three groups face some similar challenges, the major LG models of sexual identity development prove inadequate for bisexual identity (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004; Smiley, 1997). Many LG models view coming out as part of a healthy identity, yet for bisexual individuals coming out may be less important or detrimental to psychological well-being (Smiley, 1997). Due to a lack of bisexual community to help support and sustain this identity (Smiley, 1997) bisexual individuals may take longer to establish self-identity (Hayes & Hagedorn, 2001). Developing identity pride may also be difficult because of the social invalidation of bisexual identities (Smiley, 1997). This is further exacerbated by other challenges experienced in bisexual identity development.

Indeed, *Guidelines for Psychotherapy with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients* (APA, 2000), note that bisexual individuals face many cultural and individual challenges. These cultural challenges include negative attitudes from *both* heterosexual and LG communities (Klein, 1993; Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004), wherein both communities perceive bisexual individuals as internally conflicted, emotionally immature, promiscuous, indecisive, and unstable; and therefore incapable of monogamy (Firestein, 1996; Rust, 2000). It is theorized that the heterosexual community may reject bisexuality because it challenges the social hierarchy of heterosexual privilege and heterosexual individuals' conceptualizations of their own identity. Conversely, the

LG community may resent the heterosexual privilege bisexuals may have and view them as less committed to the LGB community (Ochs, 1996). It is also theorized that the LG community may artificially dichotomize sexuality in order to legitimize the LG rights movement, which in turn, may perpetuate these negative attitudes towards bisexuality (Phillips et al., 2003).

Relatedly, these negative beliefs from both communities may increase pressures and stress at an individual level (APA, 2000; Klein, 1993; Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). The internal conflict experienced due to these pressures may manifest as internalized biphobia (Ochs, 1996). They may face pressure to conform to a fixed identity and have feelings of shame when their behavior reinforces stereotypes. Struggles in owning identity may result in individuals only identifying as bisexual privately to avoid conflict and preserve community ties. In comparison to the LG community, the lack of a visible and identifiable bisexual community is an added pressure bisexual individual's face (APA, 2000; Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). Due to this added pressure, integration of the public and private self may become challenging, and therefore identity synthesis may be unrealistic (Smiley, 1997). These challenges related to bisexuality are particularly salient for women, based on current gender socialization theories which suggest that women's sexuality is more contextually-based, relationship-oriented, and therefore more fluid, flexible, and variable over the life course than men's (Brown, 2002; Rust, 2000). Thus, applying LG models and research to bisexual women creates significant challenges in understanding the unique developmental issues they face.

Interestingly, to date, only one known model of bisexual identity development has been published; this model was originally purported by Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor (1994) and updated by Brown (2002). This model highlights a bisexual experience as characterized by initial confusion of sexual feelings, followed by discovering and identifying with the bisexual label,

settling in to the identity through seeking relationships and questioning bisexuality as a phase, and finally identity maintenance where an individual engages in a variety of behaviors that allow maintenance of a bisexual identity. Brown (2002) also identified factors specific to women that impact bisexual identity development such as potential support or discouragement from feminist communities and changes in feelings towards either sex throughout sexual identity development. While Brown's model identifies bisexual women's specific concerns, the linear notions of the model, its philosophical underpinnings based in LG research, and its lack of attention to multiple cultural identities limits this model's applicability to bisexual women. Therefore, it becomes relevant to not only explore the unique factors that influence ethnic-minority bisexual women's identity development but also its intersection with multiple cultural variables.

Intersection of Bisexual Identity and Cultural Identities

Individual's multiple cultural identities and the connections between multiple oppressions are important factors influencing bisexual identity development (Steinhouse, 2001; Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004), and are aspects that have not been captured by research with predominately White samples (Harper, Jernewall, & Zea, 2004). To explore this complex layering of identities, multicultural literature encourages a focus on the overlap and interplay of identities to make a *whole* and state that the *parts* of the identity are not as salient (Steinhouse, 2001). For example, racial and ethnic identity are two distinct constructs yet their influences on identity development may be interconnected (Santos, Ortiz, Morales, Rosales, 2007). Similarly, religion is integrally intertwined with one's cultural values. Thus, in order to understand the intersection of identities, it becomes important to explore how race, ethnicity, and religion shape one's bisexual identity.

Bisexual Identity and Racial Identity. Within the United States, racial politics have played an important role for minority and majority groups. In particular, race has functioned as a social

stratification construct based on physical features and skin color (Fouad & Brown, 2000) which determine how individuals are afforded advantages and disadvantages in society (Helms & Talleyrand, 1997). Thus, race becomes an important component of an individual's identity when discrimination is encountered (Dworkin, 2002; Helms & Cook, 1999). When faced with victimization individuals adopt or abandon racial group identification (Helms, 1990) and experience emotional difficulties such as low self esteem and depression (Paniagua, 2001). These factors significantly influence racial identity development.

Due to the significance of race for minority communities, it is not surprising that race is significant for bisexual women of color. Bisexual women of color face compounded oppression, due to varying levels of power and privilege based on *both* race and sexual identity (Harper, et al., 2004); and their experiences of oppression may cause stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental and physical problems (Dworkin, 2002). Bisexual women of color may experience discrimination or be eroticized within the predominantly White LGB community (Harper et al., 2004; Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). In addition, bisexual women of color who participate in the predominately White LGB movement may be viewed as supporting systems of oppression (Harper, et al., 2004). These factors may lead to decreased involvement in the LGB community and a decrease in social support and access to resources. These findings highlight the importance of the intersections of marginalization as both bisexual and as a racial-minority woman.

Bisexual Identity and Ethnic Identity. In addition to race, ethnicity has also played an important role in the relational dynamics within the U.S. Dimensions of common ancestry such as culture, religion, language, kinship, and place of origin make up ethnicity (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Ethnic identity encompasses self-identification, feelings of belonging/commitment to a group, a sense of shared values, and attitudes towards one's ethnic

group (Phinney, et al., 2001). Literature suggests that having a secure ethnic identity can contribute significantly to psychological well-being (Phinney, et al., 2001).

Because strong ethnic identities are relevant to psychological sense of self for ethnic-minorities, understanding the role of ethnicity in ethnic-minority bisexual women becomes important. Ethnic cultures dictate specific values and influence several aspects of one's being. Relatedly, one's conceptualization of sexual identity is subsumed within the context of one's culture (Rust, 2000). To address the experience of ethnic and sexual minority individuals, Chung and Katayama (1998) developed a dual model of identity development to explain how ethnic-minority LG individuals navigate these two identities. They argue that the manner by which multiple minority identities become salient, get negotiated and integrated are important considerations for individuals with multiple minority identities. For instance, an individual's culture may place a large emphasis on the importance of having children and continuing family tradition (Rust, 2000). In this context, expressing a bisexual identity may be seen as rejecting these values and one's own ethnic culture (Harper, et al., 2004; Rust, 2000). Ethnic-minority bisexual women may also face acculturative stressors, and acculturation level may influence decisions about coming out to family and attitudes about one's own sexual identity (Singh, et al., 2006). Due to these challenges, ethnic-minority bisexual women may experience pressure to choose between membership in the bisexual community or their ethnic community (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). Relatedly, Chung and Katayama (1998) propose that a positive ethnic-minority bisexual identity cannot be achieved without the parallel psychological process of integrating both ethnic and sexual identities.

Bisexual Identity and Religious Identity. Religion is one aspect of ethnicity that is highly salient as most individuals are raised in a family of some religious faith (Schuck & Liddle,

2001). Religion is highly significant within the context of sexuality as it dictates appropriate sexual behavior (Queen, 1996) creating specific conflicts for individuals (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). For instance, some religions have strong sex-negative attitudes and specifically homosexual-negative attitudes (Pope & Chung, 1999). Therefore the ability to integrate sexual and religious identity is a struggle for many individuals (Pope & Chung, 1999).

Although limited, authors have examined the role of religion on sexual identity. For instance, Schuck & Liddle (2001) found that LGB individuals experienced significant conflicts related to denominational teachings, scriptural passages, and congregational prejudice. They noted that conflicts resulted in feelings of shame, depression, suicidal ideation, and greater difficulty coming out. Other authors (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000) suggest that these conflicts may also be navigated by rejecting one's sexual identity, rejecting religion, or compartmentalizing the two identities. Involvement in LGB-positive religious organizations has proven to be helpful in integrating these two identities into one complex identity (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000), indicating the importance of the intersections of both religious and bisexual identity. However, as it is based on largely LG populations, this research is limited in its application to ethnic-minority bisexual women. Thus, it becomes relevant to investigate how race, ethnicity, and religion influence bisexual identity development.

The study's overall purpose was to understand the subjective experience of ethnic-minority bisexual women. Two research questions guided this study: what factors influence identity development of bisexual women, and how do race, ethnicity, and religion intersect with bisexual identity development. Given the lack of empirical research and the exploratory nature of the research questions, the Consensual Qualitative Research methodology (CQR; Hill, et al., 2005) was utilized.

Method

Participants

Fourteen ethnic-minority bisexual women were recruited to participate in the study. Participants were required to self-identify as ethnic-minorities and as bisexual women. The participants, ages 23-53 with a mean age of 30, completed phone interviews with the principal investigator. For participants' racial, ethnic, and religious self-identification and education level see Table 1.

Research Team

The primary research team consisted of three counseling psychology doctoral students (two women and one man; age = 24-28). The racial and ethnic identities of the team were White/Jewish-American, White/European-American, and White/Multi-Ethnic Arab-European American. Two team members identified as queer and one as bisexual/queer. The principal investigator conducted the interviews and all three primary research team members participated in analyzing the data. An advanced counseling doctoral student, a 25 year old Asian Indian heterosexual female, with previous CQR experience, served as the auditor for all phases of the project.

Researchers' biases and expectations

Due to the potential influence of biases concerning the interview material and data analysis, the primary research team documented their biases. The team thought that both biological and environmental/societal factors may play a role in sexual identity development; however, the degree and manner of involvement of each factor varied. There were also varying beliefs about bisexual women in general; two researchers believed bisexual women to be open-minded and flexible, while one researcher disagreed with this statement. All three researchers agreed that

common stereotypes of bisexual women are confusion, promiscuity, and hyper-sexuality. Additional stereotypes involved being viewed as traitors to the LGB community, immature, and never being satisfied with one partner. The team agreed that issues of sexual identity, race, ethnicity, and religion intersect in complex and varying ways and noted that the multiple minority statuses could potentially create varying sources of discrimination, difficulty integrating different identities, being open about their sexuality in ethnic communities, and feeling isolated from the mainstream LGB community, ethnic community, or both.

The research team discussed their expectations for responses to each of the interview questions and a wide variety of responses were predicted due to the anticipated diversity among ethnic-minority bisexual women. Generally, the team anticipated bisexual identity development may have periods of confusion and changes in sexual identity labels, varying affiliations with the LGB and heterosexual community and struggles with one or both communities, and a variety of challenges in relationships including misunderstandings about sexual identity, varying levels of partner acceptance, and partner insecurity. In regards to the intersection of sexual identity with race, ethnicity, and religion, the team anticipated a wide variety of responses due to the varying experiences of women from different ethnic backgrounds; however, we felt this interaction would be highly salient for participants.

Measures

Demographic questionnaire. A demographic questionnaire was used to gain preliminary information on the participant's sexual identity development and sexual history. Questions on the instrument included information about age of first same-sex and other-sex attraction and behavior, adoption of bisexual label and any other sexual identity labels, including age of adoption of these labels, identifying primary intimate relationships over the lifespan with men,

women, or both, and ethnic, racial, and religious affiliation. All questions were open-ended allowing participants to self-identify each of these variables. Demographic information was used to describe the sample and when appropriate incorporated in to the results of the study.

Semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview consisting of a standard set of questions was constructed based on themes identified in a review of the theoretical literature including the invisibility of bisexuality (American Psychological Association, 2000; Klein, 1993; Nichols, 1994; Rust, 2000), difficulty establishing sexual community affiliation (American Psychological Association, 2000; Klein, 1993; Nichols, 1994; Smiley, 1997), relationship challenges related to bisexuality (Deacon, Reinke, & Viers, 1996), and a lack of understanding of the intersection of bisexuality and culture (Rust, 2000; Smiley 1997). Questions were open-ended and included follow-up probes. For final interview questions see the Appendix.

An interview protocol was developed by the principal investigator and piloted with a White Jewish-American bisexual woman who identified as an ethnic-minority and held a college education. Following pilot participant feedback, minor revisions to the wording of interview questions were made. The final interview protocol focused on the factors influencing the bisexual identity development process and how race, ethnicity, and religion impacted their identity development.

Procedures for Data Collection

Recruitment and Interviewing. Participants were primarily recruited through bisexual-oriented and person-of-color-oriented email listservs and through email listservs of professional organizations with interests in these issues. Some participants were located through a snowballing sampling method in which the participants were asked to recommend other participants for the study. Initial contact to answer questions about the study was completed over the phone

or email, and upon agreement, the informed consent, demographic questionnaire, and interview questions were provided to participants, and returned via mail to the principal investigator. Sixty to ninety minute phone interviews were conducted and were recorded for later transcription.

Data preparation. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and double-checked for accuracy. All identifying information was removed from transcripts and random numbers were assigned before analysis. Participants received copies of their transcripts and were given the option to make revisions. No participants chose to edit their transcripts at this time.

Coding into domains. Hill et al.'s (2005) CQR methodology was used to analyze the data. Based on the interview responses, the research team developed a preliminary list of domains (i.e. topic areas). Team members independently divided the data into domains and then came to a consensus on these domains. Throughout the process of coding, domains were modified as needed to reflect the data. After the primary team completed the domain process, the auditor reviewed all of the data, and recommendations for changes were discussed through consensus.

Abstracting core ideas. The goal of this process is to reflect the essence of what has been said by participants in fewer words and with greater clarity than the raw data (Hill et. al., 2005). After the domains were finalized, the primary research team identified core ideas for all of the data and came to consensus. The primary team completed the core idea process, and then the auditor reviewed all the data and made recommendations for changes. The primary team reviewed these recommendations and made revisions based on consensus to increase clarity and make core ideas more concise. Once core ideas were finalized, transcripts reflecting each participant's domains and core ideas were sent to each participant and they were provided the opportunity to make revisions. One participant changed a core idea, based on an issue that had changed in her life; a second participant made some minor grammatical revisions. Four

participants responded to the principal investigator stating the domains and core ideas represented their interview accurately. Eight participants did not respond.

Cross analysis. The purpose of the cross-analysis is to identify patterns across participants and develop categories within each domain to reflect the core ideas. As a group, the primary research team developed categories, analyzed the core ideas, and placed each core idea in the applicable category while arguing consensus throughout the process. The cross-analysis was then audited, and suggestions were considered by the primary team and incorporated when appropriate. Participants were provided a copy of the draft manuscript of the results and were given the opportunity to make suggestions. No participants chose to edit the results.

Results

Two primary domains described the experiences of the participant's sexual identity development and the intersection with cultural identities. Within these areas, several categories and subcategories emerged through the cross analysis. Using Hill et al.'s (2005) criteria, a category/subcategory was described as *general* if it applied to 13-14 cases, *typical* for 8-12 cases, and *variant* for 3-7 cases. Categories or subcategories that reflected 1-2 cases (*rare*) were considered non-representative of the sample and were not reported. Table 2 summarizes these results. The term "queer community" will be used throughout the results, due to participants referring to this community as gay, GLB, GLBT, and queer. The team chose this term because it was the broadest term used by participants.

Factors Influencing Sexual Identity Development

The first domain, factors influencing sexual identity development, reflected a number of salient themes surrounding issues of identity development, identity ownership, and identity management. This domain consisted of five categories with subcategories emerging for some.

The first general category, internal self-concept, or a personal understanding of the self as bisexual, was fostered by initial bisexual attractions and sexual experiences. This self-concept often allowed participants to identify a sexual identity label to be used when disclosing their sexual identity to others. For example, one participant stated, “It was in the context of my first same sex attraction that I changed what I called myself and how I conceptualize my sexual identity”. Within this sample, most participants began to identify as bisexual in their teen years with the average age of bisexual self-identification being 19. The second general category that influenced sexual identity development was community membership or the community the participants identified with most strongly. This identification varied greatly among participants. Some participants identified with the queer community, some felt they did not fit in to *either* community, and some identified with *both* the heterosexual and the queer community. One participant who identified with both communities shared that she had mostly heterosexual friends but also actively volunteered for LGBT events.

Third, sexual identity management emerged as a general category across the sample and reflected how participants negotiated revealing aspects of their identity to others. In particular, two subcategories evolved with reasons for *not* disclosing and reasons *for* disclosing a bisexual identity. Within the reasons *for not* disclosing subcategory, participants typically reported not wanting to disclose in order to avoid conflict with others, due to uncertainty about the outcome of disclosure, and due to not wanting to have to explain their identity to others. For instance, one participant shared “I don’t talk about my sexuality with my family because they are really set in their ways”. Within *reasons for* disclosing subcategory, participants variably reported disclosing due to anticipated acceptance from others, and in order to educate/ clarify ideas about bisexuality. One participant stated, “I wasn’t afraid to tell my parents because they’re pretty

liberal”. In relation to this theme, some participants also reported disclosing their identity had a positive impact on them, such as “I’m not hiding anything anymore so I feel a lot better”.

The fourth general category, partner relationship issues, consisted of themes specific to relational considerations for ethnic-minority bisexual women. In this context, five subcategories emerged. The first typical subcategory, negative partner reactions was exemplified in the following quote “one woman I tried to have a relationship with freaked out and she was not ready for things like that”. Additional examples of negative reactions include participants’ partners feeling betrayed or insecure, or encouraging the participant to choose a heterosexual or lesbian identity. In the second typical subcategory, participants described characteristics of supportive relationships including partners’ openness about bisexuality and knowledge about the oppression of bisexuals in society. This is illustrated in the following quote, “My current partner is a diversity trainer and celebrates that I am not straight”. Third, gender issues were typically described in the form of differing experiences in relationships with men and women and how differing gender role dynamics may play out in relationships. For example a participant said, “The men and women I have dated were flexible in their gender roles”. Another shared, “I don’t date women as much as I used to because they’re more emotional”. A fourth variant subcategory, dilemmas of heterosexual privilege, focused on having access to heterosexual privilege and feelings associated with this privilege which typically consisted of anger or guilt. For example, one woman stated, “[I’m] in a relationship with a male right now, I have the privilege of appearing to the world to be heterosexual”, and another shared “It angers me now how easy it is being with my current male partner”. The final variant subcategory indicated that some participants felt they experienced no relationship challenges specific to their bisexuality.

The fifth category, family and social reactions, also appeared generally across participants. This category focused on reactions towards participants from family and also the participant's social context such as friends, society at large, the queer community, and the heterosexual community. Within this context four subcategories were revealed. First, participants generally talked about varying experiences of rejection from others due to their bisexuality. This was exemplified in the following examples: because of other's discomfort, being perceived as betraying the queer community, denial or a lack of understanding of bisexuality, grief over unmet expectations for the participant, being surprised or shocked the participant was bisexual, or due to direct homophobia/biphobia. For instance, one participant shared that her father said she would "taint the family", and another stated "people say you can't ... be bisexual, it's either one or the other". Second, participants generally reported assumptions about sexuality which included negative stereotypes about bisexual women (e.g., promiscuous, hyper-sexual, non-monogamous, bisexuality is a phase), positive stereotypes about bisexual women (e.g., cool, trendy), and others assuming the participant was either lesbian or heterosexual depending on the gender of her partner. The third subcategory, acceptance was typically reported in the form of positive responses from family/friends, improved relationships with family/friends, and social support from the queer community. And finally, participants also typically experienced neutral reactions wherein the participants' bisexuality did not make a difference to family/friends, or participants reported not feeling excluded *or* included in the queer and heterosexual communities.

Multiple Identities

The multiple identities domain refers to the intersection of sexual identity with other cultural identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, and religion) and its importance to the participants' sexual

identity development. This domain consists of two categories with several subcategories emerging. The first general category, challenges negotiating multiple identities, addressed the difficulties that participants experienced in managing multiple identities and entailed three subcategories. The first general subcategory focused on experiencing oppression within the context of participants' multiple identities. This was depicted in the form of religious intolerance of bisexuality, racism and invisibility of their ethnicity within the predominantly White queer community, not meeting gender role expectations within their given culture, or being objectified by others due to their gender and sexual identities. For example, one participant shared, "Christianity put limits on sexual identification and has interpreted them in some incredibly dangerous and detrimental ways" where as another shared, "[the] GLBT community can be not a friendly place for minorities". In regards to objectification, one woman shared, "I'm considered "more exotic because I'm a bisexual Asian...It's like a double-edged sword".

In the second subcategory, it was typical for participants to report their ethnic community not being accepting of bisexuality (e.g., cultural values disapproving of same-sex relationships). Within this context, participants spoke about specific challenges with their families. As one participant shared, "It's been a process and challenge to educate them [my family] because it's a very homophobic and racist culture". Third, participants typically talked about their multiple identities affecting their romantic partner relationships such as their bisexuality challenging cultural norms for intimate relationships or feeling individuals from dominant group backgrounds may not understand their experience as ethnic-minority bisexual women. For instance, one participant shared, "[an] Indian guy I dated was pissed off because his masculinity had no power or privilege over me, since I could be dating women as another option". Another stated, "[I] can't date a White person...they wouldn't understand my experience as a Mexican

American... It's a challenge finding a partner who understands all these experiences of race, sexuality, etc".

The second general category that emerged within this domain was strategies for negotiating multiple identities which addressed ways of coping with the challenges multiple identities present. Within this context, three subcategories were revealed. First, participants typically reported a compartmentalization or separation of their multiple cultural identities in their daily lives. For example, one woman described how her culture's tendency towards compartmentalization of the public and private self impacts her negotiation of her sexual identity; she stated "I can be open with my husband but I can also be a respectable straight woman if I played the right role. So my ability to live in two worlds is very cultural". Another woman shared "Whether or not I come out depends on the [racial or ethnic] community I am working with".

Second, participants also typically reported negotiating their multiple identities by integrating their cultural identities into one holistic identity. For example, one participant stated "My bisexuality is rich and complex, the way my race and ethnicity are complex and not just polarized. I think they [bisexuality, race, and ethnicity] interact in those ways that enrich me as a person and my experience because I take all of those different parts into account in who I am and my many aspects of self". The third typical subcategory, renegotiating alliances, focused on participants developing a new way of conceptualizing identities or developing a new community that honors all parts of their identities. For instance, in speaking about religion, one participant shared "I feel like religion is such a deep experience ... I don't want to be judged ...so that's why I choose not to go to church and I choose to have my own way of thinking about spirituality". Furthermore, participants spoke about developing their own religious path by

choosing to reject religion due to its biphobic values, or adopting a new religion due to its acceptance of sexual diversity. One participant described developing a space in which both her ethnicity and sexual identity could be fully understood, “I tend to be more comfortable with [the] South Asian gay community because there tends to be that common bond of cultural comfort and similarity of growing up in (country)”.

Discussion

The results of the study indicated the importance of several factors in ethnic-minority bisexual women’s identity development. These findings will be addressed in terms of their implications for theory and counseling. In addition, limitations of the study with considerations for future research will be highlighted.

Theoretical Implications

In terms of the overall bisexual identity development process, the majority of participants reported self-identifying as bisexual in their teen years, which is inconsistent with theory that it takes longer to establish bisexual self-identity (Hayes & Hagedorn, 2001). This finding raises the question of whether this sample possesses a greater understanding of their own sexual identity than other bisexual individuals, or whether bisexual identity is typically established in the teen years, similar to LG individuals. The study also supports and counters some of the concepts presented in Brown’s (2002) theory of bisexual identity development and challenges the linear notions of identity development models. Participants did not report confusion about their bisexual identity or have difficulty applying the bisexual label as Brown proposes. Instead, initial attractions seemed to solidify a self-concept and label for participants. Brown also focuses on seeking relationships and questioning bisexuality as a phase. While developing supportive relationships were significant steps for understanding and accepting bisexual identity,

questioning whether bisexuality is a phase was not a salient theme in the current study. Furthermore, identity maintenance which Brown describes as behaviors or activities were conceptualized by our participants more as the internal self-concept or on-going understanding of the self as bisexual rather than acts they perform to maintain identity.

In addition to the overall process of bisexual identity development, the study also revealed many specific pressures and factors that influence bisexual women's identity development. Our results contradicted the idea that coming out may be less important or detrimental to bisexual women (Smiley, 1997). While some reasons for not disclosing identity emerged, participants also reported several reasons *for* disclosing their identity and some even reported a positive impact of coming out. This indicates that issues related to coming out are key elements of bisexual identity development and may consist of both positive and negative aspects and outcomes. Closely related to these issues of disclosure, assumptions about sexuality were also influential on bisexual women's own perceptions of their bisexual identity and relationships (Firestein, 1996; Rust, 2000). For example, stereotypes often contributed to participant's not disclosing their bisexual identity to others and often limited their options for partners (APA, 2000; Klein, 1993; Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004).

The lack of a bisexual community was highly salient for our participants (Smiley, 1997). Our study contributed new knowledge to the literature by identifying that women cope with a lack of community by developing bonds within the queer community, in *both* the heterosexual and queer community, or by strategizing and renegotiating alliances. As is consistent with current literature participants also reported that negative attitudes from the heterosexual community and LG community, as well as family and friends (APA, 2000; Klein, 1993; Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004), had a major impact on participants' identity development. In

addition, both positive and neutral responses from others were reported by participants, a topic which has received little attention in the literature to date and guides us towards an understanding that bisexual-negative views may be beginning to shift within society. The study also revealed the importance of partner relationship issues, aspects that have received limited attention in the literature. Participants reported a number of negative reactions from partners in relation to their bisexual identity, which contributed to their difficulties with identity. However, supportive partners were also described, which seemed to be of great value to participants in their bisexual identity development. These findings reveal the need for in-depth study of the specific issues and positive and negative outcomes that relational factors may have on ethnic-minority bisexual women.

Additionally, the current study sheds light on the intersection of multiple cultural identities' impact on bisexual identity development (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004; Steinhouse, 2001). The findings indicate that there were three primary strategies utilized to navigate racial and ethnic identity and sexual identity: compartmentalizing, integrating identities, and renegotiating alliances. Thus, our findings not only indicate the importance of oppressions based in multiple identities (Harper, et al., 2004), but also support Chung and Katayama's (1998) theory related to the parallel processes and challenges inherent in the development of different cultural identities. Interestingly, Chung and Katayama's theory proposes that integration is the most effective way of navigating multiple identities, yet many of our participants reported compartmentalizing and developing new conceptualizations of identity and community to be an effective way of negotiating the different challenges inherent in these identities. Furthermore, some women reported race and ethnicity having no effect on their sexual identity. Yet, it is interesting to note that all of the women who reported no effect also reported utilizing the

strategies identified for negotiating identities, therefore suggesting the significant impact that these constructs have on one another.

Furthermore, navigating these multiple identities created a number of pressures for bisexual women. Women reported experiences of discrimination and discomfort in the predominantly White LGB community and reported being eroticized by society at large (Harper, et al., 2004; Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). Harper et al. (2004) suggest that women who participate in the dominant mainstream LGB community may be viewed as supporting systems of racial oppression; however, the women in this study did not report this experience. Yet, Harper et al.'s. (2004) theory may account for some participants reporting the importance of participating in ethnic-minority LGB communities. Participants also indicated a number of conflicts between religion and sexual identity (Schuck & Liddle, 2001) and most participants' ways of coping with this conflict was to reject religion or to choose a new religion that is more accepting of sexual diversity (e.g., Buddhism; Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). The current study also expands on bisexual identity theory by highlighting the role of gender in navigating multiple identities. For instance, bisexual identity may conflict with gender role expectations of one's ethnic culture and cause stress for ethnic-minority bisexual women. These findings contribute to the current literature by shedding light on the many complexities of navigating multiple identities for ethnic-minority bisexual women.

Counseling Implications

In regards to counseling, the study guides us towards a number of counseling considerations when working with ethnic-minority bisexual female clients. First, it is important to recognize that an empirically-supported bisexual identity development model is yet to be developed. Therefore, counselors should anticipate a diversity of identity development

trajectories with this population; and not impose templates of sexual identity models not validated for this group. Next, counselors should be aware of varying pressures identified that influence bisexual women's disclosure of identity. Thus, interventions must be tailored around the disclosure needs of their specific client due to cultural and relational supports and consequences of disclosure may differ greatly amongst bisexual women. Third, counselors must attend to the on-going challenge of a lack of bisexual community and be aware of the difficulties ethnic-minority bisexual women may face in traditional LG communities. Therefore, the development of supports within varying community groups in which the client feels comfortable is essential. Finally, counselors must honor clients differing strategies for negotiating the challenges of multiple cultural identities and multiple oppressions and not assume that integration of identities is the best fit for all clients.

Limitations and Research Implications

The sample size of the study is consistent with the recommendation for CQR (Hill et al., 2005); however, there are some limitations in the composition of the sample. First, the sample only included women who *self-identified* as bisexual. Current theory indicates that a wide variety of factors make up sexual orientation, such as sexual attraction, sexual behavior, sexual fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, lifestyle, and self-identification (Klein, 1993). Therefore these results may not be representative of women who are behaviorally bisexual, but do not self identify as bisexual. Second, the sample was highly educated (ranging from some Bachelor's level education to PhD). This may impact participant's exposure to academic theory on sexuality and social supports for diverse sexuality, which may not be available to individuals outside of the college environment. Therefore, participant's insight into their sexual identity development may not be representative. Third, the sample was heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity which made it

difficult to capture the intricacies of specific culture's (e.g., Black) intersection with bisexual identity.

In order to gain a better understanding of bisexual identity development, several future research directions must be considered. The domains and categories identified need to be further studied through replications and extensions. It would be important for future researchers to conduct comparable studies with specific ethnic-minority groups (e.g., South Asians, African-Americans) in order to better understand the intricacies of intersecting cultural identities, and with White bisexual women in order to see the generalizability of these concepts. Furthermore, it would be interesting to study the effects of negative reactions, positive reactions, lack of community support, and differing strategies for navigating multiple cultural identities on bisexual women's psychological well-being by completing mixed-method studies using qualitative predictors of quantitative mental health outcomes (e.g., depression, anxiety, general life satisfaction). In addition, assessing the current level of counselor competence with bisexual women proves to be a very important future research endeavor. This could be accomplished through utilizing quantitative measures to assess perceived competency and case conceptualizations to assess actual competency. Finally, the many areas in need of expansion for bisexual women are also greatly understudied for bisexual men. Therefore, research efforts in these areas must be pursued with both bisexual women and men in order to gain a greater insight into the needs of the bisexual community.

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Appendix: Semi-structured Interview Questions

Tell me about your experience of developing your bisexual identity.

Follow-up:

Describe how your sexual identity label has changed over time.

Describe how coming out as bisexual has influenced a) how your view yourself and b) how you feel others view you.

Describe your current and past identification with the GLBT and heterosexual community.

Follow-up: How has your bisexual identity impacted your relationships with family, friends, and others?

Describe how your sexual identity impacts your intimate relationships?

Follow-up: What challenges have you faced in your intimate relationships?

How do issues of ethnicity, race, and religion intersect with your sexual orientation?

Follow-up: How has your ethnic, racial, religious identity influenced your identification with the GLBT and heterosexual communities? How has your ethnic, racial, religious identity influenced your ability to be open about your sexual identity?

Table 1: *Demographic Information*

Racial identification	Ethnic identification	Religious identification	Educational level
5 Asian (36%)	3 Chinese/Chinese-American women (21%)	5 Buddhist (36%)	2 participants completed some college education (14%)
4 Black (29%)	2 African-American women (14%)	3 no religious identification (23%)	5 participants completed a Bachelor's degree (36%)
2 Bi-Racial (14%)	2 Asian Indian/ Indian-American women (14%)	2 Hindu (14%)	2 participants completed Master's degrees (14%)
1 Multi-Racial (7%)	1 Latina woman (7%)	1 Roman Catholic (7%)	1 participant was pursuing a Law degree (7%)
1 Native American (7%)	1 Chinese and European woman (7%)	1 Spiritual (7%)	2 participants were pursuing Ph.D.'s (14%)
1 unsure (7%)	1 Latina and European woman (7%)	1 Atheist (7%)	2 participants completed Ph.D. degrees (14%)
	1 Brazilian and European woman (7%)	1 Agnostic (7%)	
	1 Lakota woman (7%)		
	1 Mexican-American woman (7%)		
	1 African-American and Native American woman (7%)		

Table 2: *Number of cases represented in each category and subcategory within each domain across all 14 cases*

Domain	Categories and subcategories	Frequency classification
Factors influencing identity development		
	Internal self-concept	General
	Community Membership	General
	Sexual Identity Management	General
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasons not to disclose 	Typical
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasons to disclose 	Variant
	Partner Relationship Issues	General
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative Partner Reactions 	Typical
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive Relationships 	Typical
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender issues 	Typical
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dilemmas of Heterosexual Privilege 	Variant
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Challenges 	Variant
	Family and Social Reactions	General
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rejection 	General
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assumptions about Sexuality 	General
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance 	Typical
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neutral Reactions 	Typical
Multiple Identities		
	Challenges Negotiating Multiple Identities	General
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oppression based on multiple cultural identities 	General
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic community not accepting of bisexuality 	Typical
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple identities effect on romantic partner relationships 	Typical
	Strategies for Negotiating Multiple Identities	General
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compartmentalizing 	Typical
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrating 	Typical
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renegotiating alliances 	Typical

Note: A category or subcategory was identified as general if it applied to 13-14 cases, typical for 8-12 cases, and variant for 3-7 cases. Categories representing only 1 case were considered rare and not reported in this table.