Experiencing biphobia: Navigating bisexuality within intimate relationships and the queer community in Austria

By
Madison D. Wildey

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies

Supervisor: Professor Hadley Z. Renkin

Vienna, Austria
2021

Abstract

This thesis explores bisexual individuals and their experiences of biphobia within their intimate and sexual relationships and within the queer community, in Austria. Utilizing in-depth, semi-structured interviews, I examine bisexual individuals' narratives and analyze how biphobia in the way it is exhibited, differs depending on the perpetrator and the space in which it occurs. While bisexuality and biphobia are under-researched, there are even fewer studies examining the intricacies of biphobia and how it is presented differently within different spaces. In doing so I also explore the interviewee's own conceptualization of their bisexuality, where I argue that bisexuality interrogates contemporary conceptions of gender and sexuality binaries, and while bisexuality is commonly seen as being situated in between hetero- and homosexuality, this makes bisexual individuals susceptible to experience biphobia from both hetero- and homonormative spaces.

Table of Contents

Introduction

What does being bisexual mean? Unfortunately, this cannot be answered in its entirety. While at its core, identifying oneself as bisexual broadly means having sexual or romantic attraction to more than one sex or gender. However, for every bisexual individual, bisexuality in the way it is conceptualized varies greatly. Prior to beginning my research, I spent many months discussing the fluidity of bisexuality and the hardship bisexuals face in understanding and coming to terms with their sexuality due to the biphobia they face not only from the general public but also from their own community and intimate partners, vulnerable spaces in which are typically marked as spaces where clarity and acceptance can be gained from. I began studying bisexuality due to its polarity and its assumed position, lying somewhere between the homosexual and heterosexual, within the context of Austria.

Commonly, bisexuality is conceptualized as lying between the binaries of homosexuality and heterosexuality, however, this can further reinforce bi-erasure, creating the idea that bisexual individuals can traverse between the homosexual and heterosexual, which revokes the notion that bisexuality is sexuality in its own right. However, due to this widespread perception, from both the general public and the queer community, bisexuality is seen to lie in the intersection between the hetero- and homosexual. This constructs the experience bisexual individuals are exposed to of simultaneously experiencing homophobia within heteronormative spaces and face exclusion in non-heteronormative spaces (Pollitt et al. 2021). Through my research I

focus on the spatiality of the interviewees living in Austria, using narrative style in-depth interviews. I specifically examine the impact the dichotomy, of bisexuality lying between homonormativity and heteronormativity, has on the acceptance and understanding of bisexuality. While little scholarship studies bisexuality and biphobia, even fewer examine the ways biphobia can be exhibited differently depending on the perpetrator. In my thesis, I specifically explore the unique ways bisexual individuals experience biphobia within the queer community and within their intimate and sexual relationships. Simultaneously I explore the changes biphobia can take depending on the gender identity of the bisexual individual.

Austria, situated in Central Europe, is influenced by both the West and the East. Some countries in Western Europe legalized same-sex marriage several years ago, and have made efforts to address LGBT+ issues while attempting to decrease the marginalization of LGBT+ individuals through social and political action. However, many countries in Eastern Europe still do not recognize same-sex marriage and some countries have even begun to take steps back in their LGBT+ rights efforts. Austria is largely impacted by both sides, only legalizing same-sex marriage in 2019, and often times getting grouped together with Western or Eastern Europe depending on the context. This dichotomy was visible through many of my interviews. While none of my interviewees addressed how Austria is situated within the broader scale, it was evident in their narrative, they moved from the countryside, which often is described to hold more conservative views and has deep ties to Catholicism stemming from Eastern Europe to Vienna, which has been described as promoting more liberal ideologies and where a majority of LGBT+ rights efforts for the country begin (Mayer et al., 2014).

Many interviewees expressed that they were able to find a community that accepted their bisexuality and in turn faced less discrimination and/or felt more accepted within the city than they did living in the countryside (Weston, 1995).

Throughout my research I use the term queer in order to distinguish between heterosexual and non-heterosexual individuals. I have chosen to use queer rather than LGBT+[1] due to my interviewees own use of it, all of whom consistently used the term to categorize non-heteronormative groups and individuals. Many individuals within the younger generation have chosen not to identify their sexuality, using the term queer and/or sexually fluid, allowing them the freedom to move throughout the spectrum of sexuality without facing constricting sexuality and gender binaries tied to concrete sexual identity terms (Russell, Clarke, & Clary, 2009). I have also chosen to use the term due to my argumentation within my thesis that sexuality is fluid, and I use queer to attempt to diminish further classification and binaried language regarding gender and sexuality, allowing for greater fluidity than definitive terms that create the LGBT+ acronym (Barker et al., 2009; Galupo, 2011).

The societal classification of bisexuality is defined as the sexual or romantic attraction toward more than one sex and/or gender (Eisner, 2013). For my consistency and comprehension purposes I will be using the definition of biphobia outlined by Welzer-Lang (2008), who states, “any portrayal or discourse denigrating or criticizing men or women on the sole ground of their belonging to this sociosexual identity, or refusing them the right to claim it, is considered biphobic” (p. 82). Many bisexual individuals face biphobia within their lifetime, whether it be through the general public,

[1] Although when it’s deemed necessary, in some cases I do use the acronym LGBT+

their intimate partners, or the queer community itself (Ozalas, 2020). However, research on homosexuality and homophobia far exceed the study of bisexuality and biphobia (Garelick et al., 2017). This gap in knowledge and focus within literature, transcends outside of academia as well. This disparity, inside of the field of academia infiltrates, or perhaps stems from, outside of it, to the broader scope of society. In nearly all contexts bisexuality and biphobia are largely underrepresented and misunderstood, disadvantaging those who identify as such and are subject to biphobia. In this thesis I aim to explore the motivation and intricacies behind the reason bisexual individuals identify as bisexual. With this conceptualization, biphobia in the way it is perceived by the individual can be better contextualized and understood. Due to the understanding of biphobia as the fear and/or prejudice against bisexuals, which is commonly used in literature as well as in society[2], I will be using this denotation of biphobia for the basis of my research as well, while also exploring the ways in which I have found it to differ from the accounts of my interviewees from the more universalized definition of the term.

Thus, the main question my research is seeking to answer is: how do bisexual individuals in Austria experience biphobia in their intimate and sexual relationships as well as in the queer community more broadly? My secondary questions will explore: to what extent does gender identity play a role in the way biphobia is exhibited? How is biphobia presented within different-sex relationships verses same-sex relationships? How does experiencing biphobia from the queer community impact bisexual individuals' involvement in the community? With this research I hope to contribute to existing literature the way bisexual individuals navigate their sexuality within their relationships

[2] See: Theories on Biphobia

and their involvement in queer spaces. In addition to understanding and illustrating the potential external pressure they face to exclude themselves from or assimilate themselves to, either heterosexual or homosexual labels and spaces. While biphobia is largely conceptualized as one definition and used as such within literature, I hope to examine the intricate ways biphobia can differ depending on the space and both sexual identity of the perpetrator and their relation to the bisexual individual. While my interviewees are in no way representative of the entire bisexual experience in Austria, they do illustrate how a few bisexual individuals navigate their bisexuality and experience biphobia within vulnerable spaces in the spatiality of Austria.

Chapter 1 – Theoretical framework, Literature, Discourse, and Methods

Theories on Bisexual Identity and Biphobia

Examining bisexuality as a held identity in contemporary society is crucial in foregrounding the discussion surrounding biphobia. Examining the bisexual identity is consequential in aiding the theoretical discourse regarding how bisexuality is conceptualized and how it stands within the broader framework of sexual identities. It is also significant in understanding the intricacies of how biphobia is understood both in literature and in society, as well as how it is exhibited in different spaces.

Bisexual Identity

Hemmings (2002) defines bisexuality as the middle ground (p. 3). Due to post-structuralist approaches to gender and sexuality, through Hemmings' conceptualization of bisexuality, the middle ground is delineated as bisexuals not being required to conform to these gender and sexual binaries that are rigidly attached to sexuality. Rather, Hemmings argues that bisexuality attempts to work around these binaries. Bisexuality is typically envisaged as being situated, between hetero- and homosexuality. This conception constructs the idea that bisexuality is a "partial" sexuality, which attributes to both hetero- and homosexual individuals' reservations in regarding bisexuality as a sexuality in its own right, while also asserting that bisexuality is situated within other sexual identities (p. 12). Hemmings (2002) claims bisexual subjectivity is "formed *through* its partiality rather than that partiality being the site of its undoing" (p.

42). Hemmings continues by asserting that the partiality that bisexuality holds, uncovers the reality that everyone is a sexual and gendered subject (p. 43). The affinity for identifying as bisexual for the purpose of resisting to conform to sexual and gender categorizations was displayed throughout my interviews and gives grounds for my argument that bisexuality as a held identity breaks away from the structure of homo- and hetero expectations. Some believe “bisexual umbrella” is a term that encapsulates non-monosexual identities such as: bisexual, pansexual, and queer, respectively (Galupo et al., 2016). This range of sexualities under the bisexual umbrella encourages fluidity in how one defines themselves and creates the potential for sexuality to be conceptualized as ever-changing (Hemmings, 2002). Many of the interviewees held an awareness in their sexual fluidity and the constant transitions their bisexual identity undergo, a notion that helps them frame their own idea of bisexuality and thus how they perceived the biphobia they are subjected to.

Conversely, the notion of bisexuality as a middle ground, which attempts to work around gender and sexuality binaries is not universal. Bowes-Catton et al. (2011) explore the binary categorization that sexual identities impose on individuals who define their sexuality. They propose that bisexuality too was conceived through gendered attraction, thus reinforcing the binaries Hemmings (2002) claims bisexuality attempts to negotiate. The belief that bisexuality adheres and continues to establish rigid binaries, prevents individuals from choosing to label themselves as bisexual or creates hesitation in doing so. The notion that bisexuality reaffirms these binaries while rejecting fluidity, was held by some interviewees in their own conceptualization of bisexuality, influencing them to claim two or more sexual identities or make them tentative in holding the label

at all. However, all of the interviewees did identify as bisexual, regardless of their ambivalence, which I use as justification for my argument that bisexual individuals claim their bisexual label for reasons greater than the individual, as I will explore below (du Plessis, 1996).

Michael du Plessis (1996) suggests the middle ground bisexuality holds should be seen as active, through the use of "radical […] bisexual activism," as something political and driven by the distinct marginalization bisexual individuals are subjected to, rather than as "passive", through romantic or sexual actions or thoughts alone (p.). Hemmings (2002) epitomizes du Plessis' theory, and reaffirms the middle ground bisexuality holds must be "active" (p. 3). Hemmings argues that establishing bisexuality as active, there is an importance placed on the bisexual individuals themselves, allowing for one to understand and conceptualize the sexuality's relation to sexuality and gender. In addition, Warner (1993) proclaims that identifying as non-heterosexual, in itself is a political act, and by default one fights against ideologies and policies that are set in place by heteronormative societies (p. xiii). By synthesizing the findings of these theorist, I aim to explain how identifying as bisexual for many of the interviewees went beyond merely sexual and romantic attraction, but rather claimed and asserted their bisexuality for visibility and political purpose, in doing so pivotally contribute to the queer community in their deconstruction of the discrimination of queer individuals.

Biphobia

A phobia is defined as "intense fear or anxiety when exposed to specific objects or situations" by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Homophobia, defined by Weinberg (1972) as,

"the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals," has more broadly classified homophobia as negative attitudes, holding fear and prejudice, toward homosexuality and homosexual individuals. Much debate has occurred over the usage and definition of the term homophobia, and if it should be termed as such due to the controversy over whether or not homophobia is in fact a phobia. Homophobia should more accurately be termed homoprejudice, as the anti-homosexual responses by individuals align to a larger degree toward prejudice than that of a phobia (Logan, 1996). Similarly, to the definition of homosexuality, biphobia is also defined as the fear and prejudice one feels toward bisexuality and bisexual individuals (Mulick & Wright, 2002). Although there is a considerable quantity of literature questioning the usage of the term homophobia, there is an absence in literature regarding the term biphobia as a misnomer, however biphobia could presumably be regarded with the same level of debate. Logan (1996) expresses that the classification of homophobia as a phobia, allows for anti-homosexual response, to be passed by society as acceptable, due to the response being under the guise of fear (p. 32). Although biphobia is conceived as a phobia in the modern day, I argue that the biphobia that the interviewees reported to have experienced was often not rooted in fear, but rather prejudice. As well as through a societal collective, rather than individual, as the term phobia insinuates (Taylor & Whittier, 1992).

As discussed, the terminology of biphobia as a phobia, automatically designates biphobia to be defined as a fear of bisexuality and bisexual individuals. However, this conceptualization of biphobia is not widely considered to be the universal definition. For this reason and for broader understanding of the way biphobia is exhibited in today's society, I will be contextulizing biphobia as outlined by Welzer-Lang (2008), who states,

"any portrayal or discourse denigrating or criticizing men or women on the sole ground of their belonging to this sociosexual identity, or refusing them the right to claim it, is considered biphobic" (p. 82).

Theories on Heteronormativity and Homonormativity

Labels in today's society are readily utilized by society in the classification of individuals, oftentimes "othering" individuals who fall outside of the hegemonic construction of sexuality and gender. However, in some cases, labeling oneself has been found to beneficial in understanding one's own standing within society. Queer theory questions contemporary discourse on the binaried labels within sexuality and gender, and attempts to reframe the perception of classifying individuals into constricting categories (Fritzsche, 2007). Despite the growing visibility of LGBT+ individuals and the increase in the enactment of legislation furthering equality for queer individuals in Western and Central Europe, sexual minorities continue to face exclusion and discrimination within many discourses (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009). Heteronormativity, popularized by Michael Warner (1991), is the amalgamation of the normativity of heterosexuality, epitomizing heterosexuality as the norm within modern society. Heteronormativity also classifies constructs founded from the heterosexual framework as the "default" or the norm within society, such as the gender identity, nuclear family, monogamy, and gender roles. Individuals who live in a society in which is built on heteronormative ideologies are susceptible to internalizing said ideologies. These ideas create a narrative where heterosexuality and gender conformity are regarded as the default, thus heavily influencing social expectations and experiences

(Martino, 2000). Therefore, normalizing these “default” ideals, while decentralizing and marginalizing those who do not adhere to them. Heteronormativity privileges those who adhere to the “default,” creating what is termed by Williford (2009) as “heterosexual privilege” (p. 418), while disenfranchising those who fall outside of the “norm” of gender expression and sexuality (Pollitt et al., 2021). Contemporary society has been built upon heteronormative and expectations, that individuals are assumed to be heterosexual, and thus, monosexual. These are notions that I found to affect the way the interviewees conceptualize their own bisexuality as well as the grounds for most, if not all, of the biphobia they have experienced. I will use these theories to explain the intricacies behind biphobia and the motive behind the discrimination by analyzing the interviewees accounts of biphobia.

As discussed above, heteronormativity creates a prioritization and assumption of heterosexuality and gender conformity. Queer theorists question the way Western societies have largely created and perpetrated gender and sexuality binaries. In doing so they have made strides to reframe the way individuals should conceptualize these identities and forms of expression, however these ideas are not universal (See: Butler, 2004; Pollitt et al., 2021). Queer theorists have found that societal discourses produce and perpetuate ideologies within a given society to maintain both masculinity and heterosexuality (Pollitt et al., 2021). In turn, these ingrained ideologies instinctively and sometimes deliberately, prescribe clearly constructed ideas of what masculinity and femininity look like, and how they should be exhibited by individuals. These ideas of how gender should be expressed within contemporary society, begin at birth, and by adolescent years, the feminine and masculine in the way they should be presented and

by who is ingrained (Martino, 2000; Pollitt et al., 2021). Due to gender expression being so closely linked to sexual orientation, those who are gender nonconforming are often presumed to be homosexual as well as being at greater risk of experiencing violence due to their assumed sexuality assumed due to how they externally present themselves (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009).

Homonormativity coined by Duggan, (2005), was formed in order to create distinct identities from heterosexual individuals. While homonormativity attempts to eradicate the rigid binaries heteronormative enforce onto society members, it can be argued that homonormativity simply created their own set of binaries, distinct to the queer[3] community (Mathers et al., 2018). While homonormativity was created in response to the opposition of homosexuality, homonormativity was rooted in binaries similar to heteronormativity, creating the standard of white, middle-class, monogamous (Mathers et al., 2018). Eisner (2013) expresses the social accomplishments in which gay and lesbians have received in the past decades through homonormativity, have not extended to bisexual individuals. This is a sentiment that prevailed throughout nearly all of my interviews and will be utilized as justification for my analysis regarding biphobia and bi-erasure within the queer community as well as in the broader general public.

Both hetero- and homonormativity were and continue to be, rooted in gender and sexual identity binaries, and in doing so attempt to sustain a clear distinction between gender and sexuality. The use of queer theory through Valentine's (2007) ethnography, *Imagining Transgender,* aids in the understanding and exploration of the sexuality and

[3] Although I use the term "queer" here, homonormative expectations were founded by and geared toward gay males and lesbians, rather than all sexual identities that fall outside of the heteronormative framework.

gender identity of gay and transgender individuals in New York City in the 1990s. During this time the terms bisexuality and transgender were first introduced in the United States and space was beginning to open up in queer spaces for individuals holding these identities. Valentine's theory illustrates the intricacies of sexuality and gender identity, and iterates that while the two are purported as separate entities, in reality the way they are conceptualized as being reliant on the other, they are connected and cannot be seen as dichotomous. Chauncey (1994) also explores the association and unity between gender and sexuality, illustrating the realities of gay males in New York City in the turn of the 20th century. Chauncey (1994) focuses on the emergence of queer identities within the middle-class and how their socioeconomic standing works to structure the ideas held around the binaries of gender and between the homo- and heterosexual. With the almost unusual prevailing unity between hetero-and homonormativity in regard to the rigid binaries they hold, the multifaceted sides of bisexuality, is largely neglected within the confines of their ideals (Garelick et al., 2017). Within both hetero- and homonormativity, bisexuality challenges the gendered binaries of sexuality, while bridging the assumed gap between gender and sexuality (Valentine, 2007). Valentine's theory begins to reframe the way one conceptualizes gender and sexuality, a notion that was prevalent within my interviews and the argument I attempt to make, with examining my respondent's conceptualization of bisexuality in relation to gender identity and alternative sexual identities. I utilize theories highlighting the connection of gender and sexuality, impressing upon the fact that they impact the other, while exploring the exact ways they do so within my interviewees accounts of experiencing biphobia in relation to gender.

Literature on Bisexuality

While there has been an incline in research the past decade, bisexuality and thus, biphobia is predominantly under researched within literature. In literature, bisexuality often gets categorized together with gay males and lesbians, and when exploring the prejudice LGB[4] individuals face, biphobia is commonly overshadowed by homophobia. This is a disservice to the lived experiences of bisexual individuals and how their narratives differ from those of homo- and heterosexual individuals. Consequently, the lack of distinction currently present, makes the conceptualization of bisexuality and biphobia within much of literature and within the broader society, indistinguishable from other marginalized sexualities, a gap I hope to mitigate with my research.

As discussed in my theoretical framework, within the published literature on bisexuality, the book, *Bisexual Spaces* by Clare Hemmings (2002) is essential in the critical discourse surrounding bisexual theory. In the book she argues that bisexuality as the middle ground, deconstructs the binaries of sexuality and gender, binaries in which sexuality is often rooted in and perpetuated by their mainstream definitions and thus their usage (Hemmings, 2002, p. 2-3). Bisexuality as middle ground also asserts its position as a sexuality in its own right, outside of the binaries of hetero- and homosexuality while simultaneously maintaining its positionality of its existence in other sexualities (Hemmings, 2002). My research explores this conceptualization of

[4] Lesbian, gay, and bisexual

bisexuality as middle ground, in which negotiates sexuality and gender binaries, as well as exploring the plurality bisexuality holds within the framework of sexual identities.

Galupo (2018) examines the significance in labeling oneself as bisexual to fight against the invisibility bisexuality can hold within the hetero- and homonormative framework. The author asserts that holding and affirming a bisexual identity leads to an increase in both visibility and understanding within a society where bisexuality is continuously undermined. Due to heterosexual marking as perpetuating monosexuality, and in doing so increasing bi-erasure, proclaiming one's sexuality which lies under the bisexual umbrella[5] fights against this narrative and creates visibly of non-monosexualities, such as bisexuality (Galupo, 2016; McLean, 2018).

While Weinrich et al. (2014) argues, "understanding bisexuality is the key to understanding sexual orientation" (p. 350), Rust (1995) explores the hesitation bisexual individuals have in giving their bisexuality a concrete definition. Some individuals feel limited within their sexuality by the constricting definition of bisexuality (Catton, Iantaffi, Cassidy, & Brewer, 2008; Rust, 2000). Some of my interviewees expressed reluctance in defining themselves as exclusively bisexual for this reason. In my thesis I argue that bisexual individuals who may feel ambivalent toward the label of bisexual, may choose to define themselves as such for reasons beyond simply defining their attraction, but rather for collective and/or political reasons, a notion that is largely excluded from the literature above.

[5] See: Theories on Bisexual Identity and Biphobia

Literature on Bisexuality and Biphobia in the Austrian Context

As for the unique context of contemporary Austria, there has been little data recorded and published. In the small sample of published literature, gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, are categorized almost as one single sexual identity, with little distinction between the experiences (See: Lemke, 2020; Plöderl et al., 2010). In addition, throughout the published literature, Austria is regularly grouped together with many other countries set within Central and Eastern Europe. This creates a non-representative sample specifically from the Austrian context and one that is frequently unrepresentative of the current lived experiences of Austrians due to the wide disparities between social and political perception and legal status of gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals throughout these regions.

Most of the literature published centered in Austria, in which bisexuality is included, is produce within the field social and clinical psychology utilizing quantitative research methods. This literature focuses on suicidality and/or suicidal ideation, and more broadly the adverse risk of harassment and/or prejudice based on sexual orientation and the impact these can have on an individual (See Kralovec et al., 2014; Plöderl & Fartacek, 2009; Plöderl et al., 2010). As literature groups gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals into the same sample group, the researchers oftentimes measure homophobia, rather than biphobia more specifically. However, following the delineation of homophobia and biphobia[6], one could assume their conclusions regarding homophobia would translate to some extent to those of biphobia. Thus, Plöderl (2010) found that harassment and homophobia is linked to gender nonconformity studying

[6] See: Theories on Biphobia

young gay and bisexual males within schools in Austria. As gender nonconformity also departs from the heteronormative norms and expectations, heteronormativity is taught and expected from a young age in Austria, which could attribute to a rise in biphobic responses specifically directed toward bisexual males. However, in the additional literature there was no gender distinction on how biphobia is exhibited or experienced differently depending on the gender of the receiver. Thus, no prevailing data regarding females and how they experience biphobia and/or homophobia within Austria was concluded, a distinction I will be addressing within my own thesis.

To date, Baumgartner (2017) has conducted the only research using qualitative methods focusing on Austrian bisexuals. In her study she explores the internalized binegativity bisexual women can hold while engaging in non-monogamous relationships. Baumgartner conducted semi-structured narrative styled interviews, emphasizing on the interviewees experiences with internalized binegativity and how they cope with these feelings while navigating their bisexuality in their intimate relationships. She concluded that the bisexual women often times faced binegativity within their non-monogamous relationships from their partners, holding the ideology that bisexual women are untrustworthy and promiscuous, hyper-sexualizing them on the basis of their sexuality. These encounters with prejudice from their partners, were much of the same binegativity that was held by the bisexual respondent themselves. While the researcher focuses on internalized binegativity and biphobia within non-monogamous relationships, While I will be focusing on external biphobia from partners who are engaging in primarily monogamous relationships and short-term sexual encounters, my interviewees reported to have experienced sexualization from partners and partners

holding the notion that they are untrustworthy due to the common misconception that all bisexual individuals are promiscuous and/or non-monogamous (Baumgartner, 2017).

Literature on Biphobia: Intimate and sexual relationships

While much scholarship exists on the LGBT community and the subjection of homophobia onto gay and lesbian individuals, bisexuality and thus, biphobia as a single entity, is heavily under researched. Many bisexual individuals face biphobia within their lifetime, whether it be through the general public, their intimate partners, or the queer community itself[7] (Ozalas, 2020). Garelick et al. (2017) examines prejudice toward the LGBT community. The authors found that while gay and lesbian individuals were the most accepted, bisexual and transgender individuals were most susceptible to prejudice, predictably due to them being outside of either the gender and/or sexual orientation binary. I utilize the argumentation by Garelick et al. (2017) and further assert that due to bisexuality lying outside of both the hetero- and homonormative expectations[8], bisexual individuals are susceptible to facing prejudice from both hetero- and homosexual partners.

Scholarship has found that bisexual individuals face more negative attitudes toward their sexuality than lesbian and gay identifying people, from heterosexual individuals (de Bruin & Arndt 2010). Feinstein & Dyar (2018) explore the distinct challenges bisexual individuals face within their intimate relationships, particularly through the rejection they encounter due to the stigma attached to bisexuality. Due to

[7] See below sections: "Biphobia: Intimate and sexual relationships" and "Biphobia: Queer community"
[8] See: Theories on Heteronormativity and Homonormativity

bisexual individuals' attraction toward more than one gender and bisexuality challenging heteronormativity, in which monogamy is the default, bisexuals are assumed to be promiscuous, untrustworthy partners, and nonmonogamous (Baumgartner, 2017; Feinstein & Dyar 2018). The gap in bisexuality research lies in studying the unique ways biphobia is presented within intimate and sexual relationships and how this impacts feelings of acceptance within, or exclusion from, vulnerable spaces. Studies examining bisexuality and biphobia often focus on mental illness or intimate partner violence (See Coston, 2021; Dyar et al., 2014). Within my research I am hoping to bridge the gap in knowledge through prioritizing lived experiences, and the specific ways in which bisexual individuals encounter biphobia within their same-sex and different-sex intimate relationships and how this can influence felt acceptance outside of the relationship, within both hetero- and homonormative spaces.

Literature on Biphobia: Queer community

While more recently there has been an increase in literature and recognition surrounding bisexuality and biphobia, biphobia that is still present within the queer community still largely remains absent from literature and discussions. Due to the widespread misconception that bisexual individuals are actually heterosexual or homosexual, or that as a bisexual, one is part homo- and part heterosexual, bisexuals are susceptible to facing discrimination from both homosexuals and heterosexuals alike (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009).

Welzer-Lang (2008) found lesbians and gay men were found to have negative attitudes toward bisexuals. These negative responses were found to be exhibited in

different ways, driven by various reasons. A small percentage refusing to give bisexuality social recognition, attributing their erasure to questioning why bisexuals feel the need to label themselves, and claim social identity. These perceptions seemingly stem from their assumption that as lesbians and gay men, they fought for their labels and social recognition within a heteronormative world, while denying that bisexuality is a sexual identity in its own right. Some homosexuals were found to hold negative perceptions toward bisexuals due to personal experiences, believing that their same-sex relationships only consisted of sex, or that bisexuality is a stepping stone toward homosexuality and is a way to hide their true, "homosexual" sexuality behind their different-sex marriages. When asked his opinion of bisexuals, one gay male stated, "they're hypocritical, unfaithful, two-faced, uptight, cold, pains in the neck, turncoats, self-important, trendy, heterosexual, capricious, and frigid" (Welzer-Lang, 2008, p. 84). However, most homosexuals were found to hold indifferent or positive attitudes toward bisexual individuals, which is hypothesized to be largely in part to shared sexual experiences and similar marginalization.

Rust's (1995) study indicates discord between lesbians and bisexual women within the United States. While responses varied, Rust found that lesbians held similar attitudes toward bisexuality and bisexual individuals, finding that there was a greater presence of negative responses, than positive, of perceptions toward bisexuals. Rust found that half of the participants within the sample, implied bisexuality is a sexual identity, while a small portion explicitly stated it was a legitimate sexuality, while the remaining participants stated that it either did not exist, was a transitional identity before coming out as a lesbian, or the women who identified as bisexual were closeted

lesbians (p. 103). Gay males and lesbians alike have been found to refuse to accept and/or ignore the inclusion of bisexual individuals within the queer community (Rust, 1995; Weiss, 2003). Although Rust is renowned in the study of lesbian and bisexual individuals and their lived experiences, and is cited widely due to her groundbreaking research, after more than two decades, the dynamics within the queer community has evolved, offering more inclusion, that is largely not reflected within literature today. I aim to explore the ways bisexual individuals are still excluded within the queer community and in what ways the community has since changed.

Flanders (2018) examines the stigma that bisexual males face, which is distinct from what bisexual females experience, from both heterosexual as well as from gay and lesbian individuals. Flanders (2018) highlights the erasure and invisibility gay males and lesbians cast onto bisexuals through their own identity and held perception of sexuality, ultimately finding that bisexual males are at an increased risk in facing bi-erasure from homosexuals. However, this erasure from both homo- and heterosexuals increases for bisexual individuals, regardless of gender, when they sexual and/or romantically engage with, or enter a relationship with, an individual. For hetero- and homosexuals, this creates the perception that the bisexual individual is actually either gay or straight, depending on the gender presentation of their partner (Flanders & Hatfield, 2014; Brekhus, 1996). However, I go even further with the line of argumentation, asserting within my thesis that a bisexual individual's sexuality is better conceptualized as such by both homo- and heterosexual individuals, when they are not engaging in any sexual and/or romantic relations, or if they are engaging in sexual and/or romantic relations with several people of different genders.

History and Discourse on Bisexuality in Austria

Historical Influence

Bisexuality within the Austrian context is an interesting one, situated between Eastern and Western Europe. The positionality of Austria can be reflected both in their current political discourse as well as through the ideologies upheld by society. Many countries in Western and Central Europe have made strides in recent years regarding the acceptance of LGBT individuals. With the collapse of the fascist regime, which affected much of Europe between the 1930s to 50s, respectively, Austria began to undergo socio-political structural change, and as a result began to initiate attempts to pass laws regarding human rights within legislation (Bunzl, 2004). These laws were executed in an effort to further equality within marginalized and stigmatized groups. With the recent political law changes, representation within media and arts, and the influx of conversations surround the queer community, some individuals have become more tolerant in terms of LGBT rights. However, these exact discourses, with the amount of acceptance they carry, are relatively recent.

June 29, 1996, marked the day of the first pride parade in Vienna, bringing together a small group of lesbian and gay individuals for the Regenbogenparade (Rainbow Parade). Vienna pride officially began in 2007, the Rainbow Parade now attracting over 200,000 individuals who participate in the event. Now, Vienna is seen by many as a queer-friendly city: displaying pride flags across the region during pride month in June, and most importantly provides numerous queer events and spaces throughout the city.

However, Vienna is not representative of the country as a whole. Many villages and smaller regions throughout the country remain conservative in their views and are deeply rooted in Catholicism, and in some cases do not support same-sex relationships and marriage (Mayer et al., 2014). 2006 marked the year where same-sex partnerships were recognized throughout the nation as civil partnerships and the year of the legalization of same-sex adoption. Same-sex marriage was legalized in Austria in 2019, after nearly two decades of gradual legal reform on the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals.

Political discourse on the LGBT+ Community

It is important to understand how bisexuality, and the LGBT community as whole, is viewed in more political domains and discussion, as well as how society perceives, talks, and thinks about the LGBT community. When Austrian's were asked the extent to which politicians used offensive language about LGBT individuals, 29% answered that this occurrence was "fairly to very widespread" within the country. Another question asked if discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation was rare or widespread, 74% answered that it was either "very or fairly widespread" within Austria (FRA, 2018). These two accounts show that while less than one third of politicians are officially publically heard stating anti-LGBT sentiments, those who fall outside of the heteronormative framework are susceptible to discrimination in Austria.

The past decade has marked an increase in the rise of right-wing populist movements, throughout several European countries, many located within Central Europe. With the combination of right-wing politics and nationalist rhetoric, gender

ideology is being questioned within these groups. These political groups believe gender ideology poses a threat to society (Kováts, 2018). In turn, this belief attempts to demobilize efforts of the LGBT+ community advocating in these regions, seeking to revoke any previously gained equality rights, and diminish efforts for equality moving forward (Kováts, 2018). Gender mainstreaming and the fight against gender ideology, has predominantly centered around Austria and Germany in their struggle to push back against policy change regarding gender. In the case of right-wing populist groups, Austria views gender ideology, not as a tool for policy, but rather understands gender as gender identity, thus strictly connecting it to trans rights and queer identities. This furthers their push to decenter gender ideology for fear of making gender mainstream and promoting this approach in politics. These efforts reaffirm heteronormativity within the country, while showing their lack of acceptance and support toward those who fall outside of heteronormative expectations, such as gay, lesbian, and bisexuality individuals.

Furthermore, The Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), is the third leading party within Austria's National Council. The FPÖ is described and known as a national-conservative, right-wing populist, political group. The FPÖ has gained traction and has been on the rise due to national support over the past couple of decades. The FPÖ's political agenda is heavily based on anti-immigration ideologies and through advocacy pertaining to sustaining and re-implementing laws supporting traditional family values. The familial values they promote can be seen through their definition of "Family and Generation," which states, "The family as a community of man and woman with children together is the natural nucleus and framework for a functioning society and, together

with the solidarity of the generations, guarantees our future viability" (FPÖ, 2021). This rhetoric supported by some governmental parties within Austria stands to purport one idea of what a family looks like, through gender and sexuality binaries. This stands to reason that this could assist individual ideologies which contribute to the suppression and denial of LGBT+ individual's rights and forms of expression. This promotion of rhetoric could make it more difficult for bisexual individuals to come to terms with and accept their own sexuality, as well as feel comfortable exploring their sexuality and gender, while also increasing the biphobia and discrimination they face based on their sexuality.

Method: Interview Analysis and Positionality

Studying bisexuality and biphobia through qualitative research methods gives the interviewee allowance to explore their own conceptualization of their identity while exploring more fully their own unique experiences while limiting the risk of restriction that can be experienced through alternative methods[9]. For my research I conducted 8 in-depth, semi-structured interviews to analyze the experiences bisexual individuals face within their intimate and sexual relationships and to understand their felt acceptance within the queer community. These interviews permitted me to gain insight in their personal experiences with biphobia in these spheres of their life and how these experiences pose as significant in relation to their own bisexual identity.

My lived experience, identifying as bisexual for many years, before coming-out as a lesbian, gave me space to become involved in the queer community and have

[9] As I touched upon in section: Literature on Bisexuality and Biphobia in the Austrian Context

several conversations with individuals regarding their sexuality and the ideologies and prejudice they hold toward sexuality. This evoked an interest in biphobia in intimate and vulnerable spaces, specifically in terms of sexual and/or intimate partners and within the queer community. It also created the curiosity of how these experiences can transcend or differ depending on geographical location, both continental and within a country, in rural villages versus an urban city which is an element I attempt to explore throughout my thesis (Weston, 1995).

My previous education and experiences in the United States, focusing on the queer community and queer rights, has framed much of the knowledge I hold and has impacted the way I identify within the queer community and shaped the way I approached many of my interview questions. For my data analysis and interviews I utilized queer approaches to help me understand the complexities and plurality of the interviewees conceptualizations and experiences with navigating their bisexuality and encountering biphobia (Kulpa & Liinason, 2009). Through my use of queer ethnography, I am better able to understand the experiences bisexual individuals face within their intimate and sexual relationships and to understand their felt acceptance within queer spaces and how and if this influences their involvement within the queer community (Nencel, 2014).

Between April and June 2021, I interviewed eight individuals living in Austria who identify as bisexual to capture a more holistic understanding of the bisexual experience in Austria. I used the snowball method to acquire most of my interviewees, thus reflecting in some of my interviewees knowing one another. This also resulted in a sample size that was relatively unrepresentative of many varying identities. Based off of

my perception and the demographic information the interviewees reported, all of the interviewees were Caucasian, middle-class, and educated, and to some extent versed in queer/sexuality theories. The snowball method may also have impacted the responses I received to my interview questions. I could see in my first questioning that explored how individuals conceptualize bisexuality, and following to my last set of questions inquiring about the conceptualization of biphobia, that some respondents had held very similar notions in their conceptualization. Some interviewees even stated that they had previously had conversations with another interviewee on the topic, presumably impacting their own conceptualization. Although, as I was exploring the unique experiences of my interviewees through narrative style interviewing, I focused most of my questions and time on their own personal stories. In doing so I specifically geared a majority of my question to how they have experienced biphobia within their personal relationships and through the queer community, asking about their involvement and the inclusion or exclusion they felt from the community, while seeking to understand how their spatiality impacted their held experiences (Harrison, 2009).

I conducted all of my interviews in English[10]. Due to me conducting the interviews in English, and me coming from the United States, I am positioned as an outsider in Austria (Rooke, 2009). My outsider positionality could have contributed to the information that the respondents felt comfortable revealing to me, in some situations while answering some questions they could have felt uncomfortable or hesitant in revealing some information, preventing me from getting the whole picture. However, I

[10] The interviewees all spoke English fluently and their ability to articulate their experience in the interview did not seem impaired due to English primarily being their second or third language.

sensed that the interviewees assumed me to be queer, sometimes asking me about my own experiences with biphobia or when I came-out – insinuating they automatically assumed me to hold a non-heterosexual identity. I believe their assumption of me, created the belief that we held shared experiences, which could have been a factor in their detailed accounts of their life stories and particular experiences with biphobia (Rooke, 2009).

Participants

Thomas: age 28, male, comes from a small village in Lower Austria and moved to Vienna at age 20 to attend university. He currently works as a social worker in Vienna. He is in a relationship with a queer woman.

Magnus: age 24, male, while having Polish roots, he grew up and currently lives in, Vienna. He is a Law student. He is polyamorous.

Lili: age 27, female, comes from a small village outside of Salzburg, and moved to Vienna several years ago. She is a musician and works in an herb and spice shop in Vienna.

Chrisi: age 23, female, comes from a small village in Upper Austria and moved to Vienna around the age of 18 to study Biology. She is polyamorous in a relationship with a heterosexual man.

Scarlett: age 22, female, comes from Brighton, England and moved to Vienna two years ago for her studies in History. She is in a monogamous relationship with a woman, interviewee Meg.

Meg: age 22, female, comes from Cardiff, Wales and moved to Vienna two years ago as an au pair in Linz, Austria. She currently lives with her partner, interviewee Scarlett, in Vienna, Austria.

Emily: age 23, female, comes from a small town in New York, United States and moved to Vienna three years ago for her studies in Sociology. She is in a monogamous relationship with a woman.

Marina: Age 29, female, comes from Brazil and has lived in Vienna for the past 9 years. She has Germanic roots and speaks Germany fluently, therefore she is typically read as Austrian.

Chapter 2 – Conceptualizing Bisexuality and Biphobia through Experiences

Heteronormative societies have conceptualized heterosexuality and homosexuality as opposing ends. Identifying as bisexual however, something to which is generally conceived to stand somewhere between homo- and heterosexuality, challenges the norms of a hetero- and homonormative society and the expectations deriving from both (Garelick et al, 2017). Queer theorists have begun to deconstruct preconceived notions of sexuality and gender, while also making attempts to eradicate binaried classifications of sexuality (Fritzsche, 2007). Bisexuality as an ideology does much of the same, questioning ideas of heterosexuality and homosexuality, and for some, questioning the construct of gender as a whole (Hemmings, 2002). Bisexuality is defined as sexual and/or romantic attraction toward more than one sex and/or gender (Eisner, 2013). However, as Galupo (2011) found, there is discontinuity between societal classification and self-identification (p. 547). Sexuality in the way that it is conceptualized by society, can stand far from how sexuality is defined by oneself and thus how one self-identifies. In light of this, this chapter considers how bisexuals conceptualize their own bisexuality, and define it themselves, and how this may differ from the social classification and definition. In doing so, this chapter explores how individuals define their bisexuality and the reasons why they feel the label is important within contemporary society.

While bisexuality is generally conceived as an identity that is used to merely convey sexual and/or romantic attraction, bisexuality as a held identity is active, rooted

in political purpose, driven by the marginalization of queer individuals in today's society (du Plessis, 1996; Warner, 1993). In this chapter I argue that identifying as bisexual can go beyond simply attraction, and can be seen as motivated by a collective and/or political purpose.

Much like Logan's (1996) debate on the terminology of homophobia, I further argue that this can be applied to biphobia as well[11]. Classifying biphobia as a phobia, allows for anti-bisexual response, whether it be covert or overt, to be permissible by society, due to the response being on driven by "fear." In this chapter I will explore if and how the biphobia the interviewees experience is different and/or similar to the common definition of biphobia, as a phobia, or rather if it is rooted in prejudice (Logan, 1996).

In addition, due to bisexuality located outside of both the homo- and heterosexual expectations[12], biphobia is exhibited and experienced differently than the widely recognized understanding of homophobia (Garelick et al., 2017). In this chapter I examine how bisexuals individually conceptualize and contextualize biphobia from the way they have experienced it and have seen it exhibited. This chapter will help frame Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 in their exploration of navigating bisexuality and experiencing biphobia within intimate and sexual relationships as well as within homonormative spaces.

[11] See section: Theories on Bisexual Identity and Biphobia
[12] See section: Heteronormative and Homonormative Theories

Why Bisexuality?

Before delving into how the bisexual interviewees define bisexuality, and their reason for labeling themselves as such, the broad social definition of bisexuality must be outlined. The most common accepted definition of bisexuality, is: one's ability to have sexual and/or romantic attraction toward more than one sex and/or gender (Eisner, 2013). This definition is widely recognized and was shown throughout the interviews as the basis for all of the interviewees conceptualization's of bisexuality, regardless of if they grew up in Austria, United Kingdom, United States, or Brazil.

While some interviewees outright defined the way they conceptualize bisexuality, others did not, choosing to allude or explicitly adhere to the "universalized" understanding of the sexuality as their conception of bisexuality. Some interviewees were reluctant to identify strictly as bisexual, making it clear that they would also identify as pansexual or sexually fluid. When I asked Scarlett how she defines her sexuality, Scarlett (22) stated almost reluctantly that she identifies as bisexual because, "I'm attracted to more than one gender and this is what bisexual means within the community and also from outside the community." Although, it was clear that however they chose to explicitly or implicitly define their bisexuality, their understanding of bisexuality was largely indistinguishable from one another. Many of the respondents perceived bisexuality to be "feeling the potential to be attracted to someone of your own gender and other genders not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily to the same extent," Thomas (28). Lily, a friend and previous roommate of Thomas's, explicitly stated similar sentiments declaring that when she came to the term bisexuality she was finally able to better understand her sexual desires and in doing so realized that there is

no one binary to adhere to and romantic and sexual attraction is fluid, stating "it took me quite a lot of time to realize it for myself, […] [bisexuality] can be a little bit less or a little bit more attracted to this gender or that gender, and it doesn't matter," (Lili, 27). In both Lili's and Thomas's conceptualization of bisexuality, they highlight how one can be more attracted to one gender and less to the another and vice versa due to the fluidity of sexuality, and of bisexuality more specifically, a notion Hemmings (2002) asserts when arguing the partiality and transitional nature of bisexuality through its subjectivity. The occurrence of bisexuals being hesitant to identify as bisexual, or outright rejecting the label is not uncommon (Bowes-Catton et al., 2011). Sexuality is attached to and rooted in binary categories, specifically gender binaries. Bisexuality too originated due to gendered attraction, reinforcing these binaries that many of the interviewees were seeking to deconstruct (Bowes-Catton et al., 2011).

Some interviewees however, defined[13] bisexuality much like that of the broader social definition of bisexuality, perhaps due to it being the most commonly utilized definition in many contexts[14]. While others impressed the great significance of the fluidity of sexuality, some felt like the contemporary label is in some ways constricting. Abiding to this more "universalized" definition, outlined above by Eisner (2013), to some degree revokes the fluidity of bisexuality – something which many interviewees found to be important both in their usage and conceptualization of bisexuality. Interviewee's, Thomas and Lili, had a slightly different definition in how they conceptualize bisexuality

[13] "Defined" as used here, is the interviewees explicit or implicit definition of bisexuality
[14] Such as: by friends and family, media, and within queer spaces

– which could prove to be a factor in their affinity for the label in its lack of limitations towards them and their self and sexual exploration.

Holding a bisexual identity in aggregate is not merely about sex and/or attraction. At its core it defies and deconstructs binaries that constrict the notions of gender and sexuality (Hemmings, 2002). Michael du Plessis (1996) states that bisexuality is not simply sexual or romantic attraction, it can also be seen as political and radical (p. 23). I argue that due to many interviewees disclaimer that they hold more than one sexual identity (i.e. bisexual and pansexual, bisexual and sexually fluid), despite their attempts to deconstruct the binary in which bisexuality is rooted as expressed above by Bowes-Catton et al. (2011), they choose to identify as bisexual for reasons that go beyond simply sexual attraction. While I cannot say that all of the interviewees would agree with du Plessis' theory in its entirety, all alluded to the belief that identifying as bisexual challenges heteronormative expectations – which I argue is both political and radical in itself.

Once one identifies as queer, Warner (1993) asserts that by default the individual must fight against held beliefs and politics set in place by heteronormative societies, and that is what being queer means (p. xiii). Identifying as bisexual for specifically political and radical purposes was categorized as the motive behind why a couple of the interviewees choose to identify as bisexual (Thomas and Emily). Thomas (28) stated, "it might have been years […] of me not wanting to define myself […] and then maybe 4 or 5 years ago I started to think about it more and think about the political implications and found a liking in the term bisexual." Emily (23), growing up in a small town in the United States, comparably spoke about how after coming-out as bisexual for visibility

purposes, decided she “felt more comfortable defining myself as queer,” highlighting that she felt it captured the “fluidity of my sexuality” better. She expressed how growing up in the United States she felt that most of her LGBT+ friends – no matter how they identify on the spectrum, identify more broadly as queer, stating that her and her peers “found the term queer to be more accepting and less limiting,” a notion that was not repeated by any of the Austrian respondents. However, after moving to Vienna and speaking about LGBT+ issues with more individuals, Emily determined that bisexuality held more weight politically, and “felt using the term queer was too ambivalent in today’s political climate,” and due to this, she believed it was necessary for her to define herself as bisexual to take a stand and increase representation.

For some individuals, bisexuality as a held identity is essential for visibility purposes. Lili, Scarlett, Emily, Thomas, and Marina comparably stated that for them, they felt most compelled to use bisexuality to define their sexuality due its wider understanding outside of the queer community, in comparison to lesser known non-monosexualities, such as pansexuality. Lili, Scarlett, Emily, and Marina stated that they have and/or would also consider themselves to be pansexual, however mostly or exclusively choose to define and label themselves as bisexual due to the lack of knowledge or understanding surrounding pansexuality in the general public. When I asked Marina (29) how she identified she replied stating, “most people don’t know what pansexuality means and especially in Brazil, there’s this myth that you’re attracted to objects and children too, so I kind of don’t use that definition.” While most interviewees described sexuality as fluid in itself, Scarlett (22) was the only respondent who explicitly stated that she also defines herself as “fluid” in terms of her sexuality, stating “I see my

sexuality as quite fluid but within contexts where I do have to put a label on it, I would define myself as bisexual." In time, however, she has realized that many heterosexual individuals question the meaning of sexually fluid, and question this label, further declaring that the term bisexual is "like an easy catchall because I feel like people know what this means and if I don't want to… divulge into why sometimes I just want to not put a label on my sexuality, but obviously there's a lot of contexts where it's just easier to say [that I'm bisexual]." For this reason, she feels most comfortable defining herself as bisexual to others while not strictly placing it on herself personally and often does not explicitly label herself as bisexual when speaking to other queer individuals, who would be more likely to grasp the fluidity of sexuality and would understand her hesitance in defining her sexuality with a concrete label. I argue that these accounts above show that political purpose and visibility are interconnected due to both making attempts to eradicate bi-erasure and thus seeking to break down the hetero- and homonormative binary (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009). Defining oneself as bisexual for visibility purposes is political whether that is the intent or not. And defining oneself as bisexual for political purposes is to gain visibility and representation within the contemporary world.

While Scarlett grew up in England, Magnus (24), who grew up in Austria, did not hold the same sentiment in his interview, stating that he felt that in his experience, living in Vienna, bisexuality was not well understood outside the queer community stating "the straights aren't even that aware of bisexuality." Due to this, he stated that it almost did not matter how he identified to others. Instead, he chose to identify as bisexual due to his affinity to it, stating that he identifies as bisexual for "hedonistic" reasons, wanting to

take part in all of life's sexual pleasures. He continued by declaring he doesn't understand how individuals can be "strictly homosexual and strictly heterosexual" due to the blurred lines of gender. When asked, Magnus declared that it was important for him to identify as bisexual due to his own desire to deconstruct notions of gender, expressing that for him bisexuality is a "rejection of gender." And believed that out of all of the labels he could choose to define his sexuality, bisexuality best describes his experience.

Within the interviews a few bisexuals echoed similar sentiments on their conception of sexuality. In addition to Magnus, Emily also emphasized that due to gender being a construct created by society, sexuality then is also a constructed concept. Alluding to or specifically stating the fact that they identify as bisexual because they do not believe concretely in gender. In some cases, diverging from heteronormativity with their bisexual identity also makes it easier for individuals to question the construct of gender, and gender presentation, as seen through some of the interviews (Pollitt et al., 2021). Emily (23) stated "after I came out and began to come to terms with my sexuality, I also began to explore my gender expression and what gender, or being a woman really means to me […] I began to question the gender binary in ways I hadn't before." To a larger extent, Magnus (24) also rejects gender binaries and reported that he has had to:

> struggle with gender norms and expectations for most of my life and now it's at a point where I don't feel like I have to do that and it doesn't bother me that I am read and identified as male […] but I don't identify myself as male necessarily, simply because I reject gender.
> It also wouldn't make much sense for me to exclusive date people of just one gender, whatever that may be.

For Emily, bisexuality is what helped reshape and question gender constructs. For Magnus, his ideas of bisexuality both for him personally and on a broader scale are foregrounded by his rejection of gender. Bisexuality challenges the binaries of gender and sexuality simultaneously from both hetero- and homonormative constructions (Hemmings, 2002). Due to this I argue that although gender and sexuality are commonly viewed as separate entities, they are interconnected and one cannot be explored and questioned without the other, especially when taking into account identities which prove to challenge the binaries of both, such as bisexuality and transgender individuals (Valentine, 2007).

Respondents Conceptualizing Biphobia

Much like understanding the interviewees conceptualization of bisexuality, it is important to outline how biphobia is defined by society on a larger scale before exploring biphobia on an individual level. Biphobia, coined by Bennet (1992), is defined as "a prejudice toward bisexuals" (p. 205), a definition which is still commonly used to illustrate biphobia today. However, biphobia in the way it is termed, connotes that it is indeed a phobia, and individuals who hold biphobia, respond so in fear (Logan, 1996). I aim to argue that the responses reported do not align with a fear response but rather that of prejudice. In doing so I argue that biphobia should be coined bi-prejudice, to reflect the true root of the discrimination that occurs today as reported within my interviews. In addition to biphobia[15], bi-erasure was also frequently reported by the

[15] While I argue that biphobia should be termed bi-prejudice, I will continue to use biphobia for clarity and concision as it is the most universally used and known term.

interviewees. The binaries created through hetero- and homonormative expectations, label individuals as either heterosexual or homosexual (Ochs, 1996). This categorization creates the automatic assumption that one is straight, or when revealed to have attraction to the opposite sex, assumed to be lesbian or gay. This assumption diminishes bisexuality as a held identity, creating the erasure of those who are bisexual, which is defined as bi-erasure (Yoshino, 2000).

Much like the definition and the conceptualization of bisexuality from the interviewees were largely consistent, the denotation of biphobia at its core was also predominantly unanimous. When asked, interviewees broadly articulated that biphobia was inwardly holding and/or outwardly expressing negative thoughts and/or feelings toward bisexuals through the use of negative speech, tone, and/or actions. This definition was continuously held and similarly reported by the interviewees in their recounts of the biphobia they have experienced themselves. While the notion of biphobia was largely comparable, specific accounts of biphobia and the way interviewees found biphobia to be exhibited the most, was more dispersed and unique across the board.

While the responses varied, it was unanimous amongst the respondents that biphobia is exhibited differently depending on if it came from the general public[16] versus the queer community. Some interviewees (Magnus, Meg, and Emily) insinuated or outright stated that the biphobia which exists within the general public was largely presented as homophobia due to the lack of understanding of bisexuality. For this reason, there is primarily a misconception that bisexual people automatically “switch”

[16] Defined as non-queer individuals

from heterosexual to homosexual and vice versa depending on the gender of their partner (Brekhus, 1996). When I asked Meg about a previous relationship she had been in with another woman she stated, “we experienced quite a bit of homophobia,” as she kept describing the discrimination she experienced as homophobia I continued by asking her if she had any additional experiences with biphobia and/or homophobia. Meg replied “homophobia, yeah.” This seemed to be largely due to her perception that the individuals who held the prejudice against her and the woman she was with, could not possibly assume that she was bisexual, but rather surmised that she was a lesbian.

Wearing a crew neck t-shirt, knee length shorts, and tennis sneakers, Meg describes herself as presenting more masculine. Meg begins to tell me about a time when she was with an ex-girlfriend, she reported them to be sitting outside while both were au pairs in Linz, Austria, encountered a man who came up to them. While beginning to “hit on” her girlfriend, referred to Meg asking “what’s that,” in reference to her masculine appearance. “this guy kept staring at us for ages, […] and I think he figured out that we were together and then he approached us, and they [the guy and Meg’s ex] spoke in German to each other. And he was like […] asking questions trying to chat up my ex, and then said “and what’s that” and pointed to me. I think I was wearing trunks and a sports bra, I had long hair at the time as well, maybe looked like a boy, but he was like “what’s that” and that was horrible for me.” Meg classifies experiences like these not as biphobia, but as homophobia, due to the perpetrator not aware of her bisexual identity, but rather believes she is a lesbian based on the information presented, such as two women together. While Chrisi did not explicitly state to share the sentiment on experiencing homophobia rather than biphobia, she did reveal

that she often experienced this idea that some individuals thought her sexuality would switch from gay to straight depending on the gender of her partner. She disclosed when she was living in the countryside in Upper Austria where her friends were less understanding of her bisexuality, she stated that they said “oh you’re bisexual, but now you’re in a relationship with a guy, so you’re not bisexual anymore.” This automatic assumption and misconception that bisexual individuals switch from gay to straight fosters and perpetuates bi-erasure. The thought that an individual can only be heterosexual or homosexual, which is based upon the gender of their partner, is a common display of biphobia and one that interviewees reported to experienced often from the general public (Brekhus, 1996; Flanders & Hatfield, 2014).

While there has largely been little to no question in the literature of biphobia existing outside of the queer community, all interviewees, stated that they believe biphobia exists within the queer community, and nearly all have experienced biphobia themselves from the queer community. The prejudice bisexual individuals are subjected to was described as “double discrimination” by Ochs (1996), which was outlined as the discrimination a bisexual face from both hetero- and homosexual individuals alike. A couple of interviewees stated explicitly that they believe biphobia exists to a larger extent within the queer community. Thomas and Magnus had similar sentiments, declaring that to them biphobia in the way they have experienced it, is the questioning of their sexuality – believing they “lack” something and are “too straight” to fully be a part of the queer community. Magnus (24) stated, “biphobia to me sort of, just in my experience, always comes in the form of sort of my queerness being called into question, there is this notion I think also, that bi people are sort of half queer or half

gay." The notion that bisexual individuals have it "easier" than lesbian or gay people, and that they can pick and choose whether or not to present gay or straight based on the person they are with, ostracize them from the queer community. "It's always a question to my sincerity with what I'm doing" Thomas (28) similarly stated when speaking about dating and how the queer community views his sexuality. Magnus even takes it a step further and declared that, he believes biphobia exists exclusively within the queer community[17] and cannot exist outside of it due to the general publics' ignorance surrounding bisexuality as reported in "*Why Bisexuality?"*.

The female interviewees often reported biphobic comments based on gender. Female sexual fluidity has begun to take a front seat in sexuality research, creating greater recognition in females being more sexually fluid than previously thought. However, historically, lesbians have had to traverse through many obstacles in order to gain recognition and visibility in our current society (Butler, 1991). Flanders and Hatfield (2014) argue that the increase in sexual fluidity as opposed to mono-sexualities, could be a cause to why females are subject to the misconception that they are less homosexual than males. Many female interviewees explicitly stated that they have experienced comments directed toward themselves or toward others, that invalidated their bisexuality. When asked about how she sees biphobia to be exhibited, Scarlett spoke about conversations she has had with family members and the general idea she understands as a wide misbelief of the bisexual community, she woefully responded stating, "I think that's a misconception of bisexual women, that it's a phase and that they

[17] Explained further in Chapter 4: Queer versus Heteronormative Spaces: Where do Bisexual Individuals Fit in?

will eventually turn to guys." Scarlett explored this topic and discussed how through the discourses she has heard, the misconception that is commonly held, is that: men are necessary for sexual pleasure and desire. Sex between two individuals whose biological sex is classified as male is considered sex, although still not readily accepted, it is a graspable concept for a majority of society. While sex between two individuals whose biological sex is classified as female, tends to be devalued and undermined due to the genitalia involved. Scarlett, Emily, and Meg echoed similar sentiments, stating that they have experienced others to be under the assumption that when males come out as bisexual, individuals tend to believe they are gay, and hiding their true sexuality under false pretenses. However, when women come out bisexual, individuals believe that in actuality they are heterosexual, and their bisexuality is only a phase.

Conclusion

While the societal categorization of bisexuality is the most universal and even the most widely used amongst the interviewees in their conceptualization of bisexuality, I argue that bisexuality is conceived as more intricate and multifaceted than the socially defined categorization of bisexuality. I argue that while at the core of bisexuality lies the ability to have romantic and/or sexual attraction to more than one sex and/or gender, it is conceptualized to go beyond this rudimentary articulation. Many of the interviewees viewed their sexuality as fluid – often explicitly stating such when asked how they currently define their sexuality and chose to define themselves as bisexual due to its fluidity. Similarly, a couple interviewees declared that bisexuality is attraction toward

more than one gender, but the attraction toward a gender can shift throughout time and be held to varying extents.

I argue that while the foundational reasons as to why individuals choose to define themselves as bisexual are largely individual, at its core, it is greater than simply attraction, but rather defining oneself as bisexual is political and active, and holding the identity carries implications that extend further than oneself (Hemmings, 2002, du Plessis, 1996). I further argue that a reason as to why some of the interviewees chose to identify as bisexual, even if they view it as a constraining identity, one that reinforces the same binaries in which they are attempting to eradicate, is due to its political implications.

While the terminology of biphobia may allow, to some extent[18], for the dismissal of anti-bisexual or "biphobic" language, actions, or reaction, by society, the respondents conveyed different experiences with biphobia than what would be described as responses rooted in fear, but instead rather that of prejudice (Logan, 1996). While responses varied, generally the interviewees all conceived biphobia to exist, and be exhibited by, heterosexual as well as homosexual individuals, some even went as far to say that biphobia was even more present or exclusively present within the queer community. Some of the interviewees believed some of the discrimination they faced to be liken to homophobia, and would classify it as such, rather than biphobia. I argue that due to the hetero- and homonormative matrix, one is assumed as either as homosexual

[18] Due to the progression of LGBT+ rights in Austria and in Western societies more broadly, "phobias" connected to sexual orientation are sometimes reprimanded when they are exhibited in some spaces by individuals within that given society.

or heterosexual due to how their sexuality is perceived within that moment.[19] I further argue that this contributes to the type of discrimination they face.

[19] Most commonly this indicator is reliant upon the gender of their current sexual and/or romantic partner

Chapter 3 – Navigating bisexuality and Experiencing Biphobia in Intimate and Sexual Relationships

Biphobia in itself is seldom explored within literature, oftentimes getting overshadowed by homophobia. Traditionally, heterosexual individuals engage in sexual/intimate relations with other heterosexual individuals, while homosexual individuals engage in sexual/intimate relations with other homosexual individuals. This is not the same for bisexual individuals who engage in relations with both homo- and heterosexual individuals. Thus, they have the potential to be subjected to discrimination from both communities due to their lack of inclusion within both the hetero- and homonormative framework (Pollitt et al., 2021; Mathers et al., 2018). Studies have revealed that bisexuals are at an increased risk of facing discrimination from heterosexuals than gay and lesbians are (de Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Eliason, 1997), and in addition, findings have shown the negative attitudes lesbians and gay males have toward bisexual individuals (Mulick & Lester, 2008; Rust, 1995). The positionality of bisexuality within the hetero- and homosexual matrix creates a double bind for bisexuals in their experience of facing biphobia from the queer community and general public[20] alike.

I begin the chapter by illustrating the significance of exploring one's sexuality through sexual and/or romantic acts and their conceptualization of coming-out and if they deem this as important. This will help foreground the following discussion on if, when, and why some interviewees disclose their bisexuality to their sexual and/intimate

[20] Defined here as, heterosexual individuals.

partners, and why some may not. In the subsequent section this in turn is shown to affect the extent of biphobia the interviewees have faced individually due to their increased or decreased risk for facing prejudice depending on if their partner is privy to their non-heterosexual or non-homosexual identity (Feinstein & Dyar, 2018).

The way biphobia is presented can vary greatly, to name a few it can be dependent upon: the gender identity of both the instigator and receiver, the sexual orientation of the aggressor, and the nature of the relationship between the individuals (Ozalas, 2020). Following the contextualization of bisexuality and biphobia in Chapter 2, in this Chapter I aim to explore the way bisexual individuals traverse through their intimate and sexual relationships with their held sexual identity. In addition, I continue to explore how biphobia is exhibited and thus conceptualized within intimate and sexual relationships. Consequently, I attempt to delineate the term biphobia and examine the fear and/or prejudice attached to the discrimination the interviewees have experienced (Logan, 1996). I aim to explore how and if their held bisexual identity can create additional obstacles and prejudices within their relationships. In doing so, I intend to demonstrate the intricate ways biphobia is exhibited, and how it can differ depending on the nature of the relationship (same-sex versus different-sex) and the way gender plays a role in these unique experiences.

The Importance of Intimate Relationships

Many of the interviewees expressed the importance of sexual exploration when recounting their coming out stories and their own acceptance toward their sexuality. Sexual exploration was formative for many interviewees in better understanding

themselves and their bisexual identity. When I directly asked if exploring his sexuality was important in discovering and accepting his bisexuality Magnus (24) stated, “yes, immensely [..] for such a long time I was convinced that I was straight, questioning that or thinking that maybe I wasn’t, wasn’t enough I needed some sort of concrete evidence to prove to myself that I wasn’t.” Thomas (28) stated similarly about his sexual exploration, “I had sexual experiences before I outed myself and before the process in my mind happened of like of me asking myself or like questioning whether I might not be straight.” Lilli (27) held similar experiences, stating that she had “not really thought about it” prior to coming-out two years ago, when asked about her sexuality, and only started to feel comfortable in labeling herself after she began to explore her same-sex attractions.

Some interviewees illustrated that coming-out in the formal sense is a phenomenon that almost exclusively exists with family, especially older family members, such as parents, aunts/uncles, grandparents, as shown in the interviews with Scarlett, Magnus, Emily, Chrisi, and Lili. Many of the interviewees declared they have rarely come-out to their friends and sexual partners, but rather made a point to say that they simply told them their sexuality, or talked about it as it came up in conversation, without making their bisexuality seem like a “big deal.” This more informal way of coming-out was expressed by interviewees to be decidedly much different than their conceptualization of what it means to truly come-out in today’s society. This was largely due to the acceptance they felt from their peers, which released the pressure to formally come-out within these social circles. This shows the extent bisexuality, or simply non-heterosexual, has been normalized within social circles that are comprised of largely

younger individuals (>30 years old) (McCormack et al., 2014). This would stand to reason that biphobia would be less present in their sexual relationships with individuals who are in early adulthood, around 20-30 years of age. However, a majority of the interviews revealed that this is not the case and several have faced various forms of biphobia in their relationships.

Many interviewees also stated that coming out in the formal sense is almost non-existent in today's digital world (Johnson, 2019). With the growing use of dating apps, people are able to display their sexual orientation, without verbally revealing it to their sexual partners. Not only did this eliminate the need to explicitly come out to sexual partners, it also ensures that their sexual partner knows prior to their meeting. At the same time, this allows the sexual partner to already have their initial reaction toward the interviewee's bisexuality before moving forward with further communication. Magnus (24) stated, "the only context through which I have been meeting new people is through dating apps, where my sexuality is explicitly stated, so whatever reaction they have, has already happened before I actually meet them." I argue that, this relatively new coming-out process in the digital age, could prove to be one of the main reasons why some interviewees have not face what they would consider "extreme" forms of biphobia upon meeting sexual partners and even within intimate partnerships.

Bisexuality and Biphobia in Different-Sex Relationships

With the exception of Meg, all of the interviewees engaged in different-sex relations prior to coming-out[21] as bisexual. Some respondents stated that they felt more

[21] Here I am referring to coming-out to someone else, such as family members or friends

comfortable engaging in different-sex relationships because they held more experience engaging in this type of sexual and gender relations. Thomas has spoken to me on several occasions about the differences he has experienced having relations with same-sex and different-sex individuals. On the evening of the interview, Thomas explicitly spoke about his socialization and how it has affected his comfortability engaging in different-sex versus same-sex relations. Thomas (28) stated,

> The way I have been socialized I have learned from day one how a man interacts with a woman within a relationship and in general but more in a romantic or sexual context. I mean not explicitly sexual in that sexual technical techniques or hand on, but more socially is what I mean and I think that just like affects everything. Both like in terms of who takes initiative especially when it's more with hookups and things like that. There's way less structure or pre-made ideas with men, which makes it more open but also makes me more insecure at the same time. It makes me feel like there is way less security and less of a default where everyone knows how it works. I think that also plays out strongly in sexual interactions because there's again way fewer preconceived ideas of how it's supposed to be. So that makes it feel more free on one hand and more experimental and playful and I would also say more diverse in the experiences. But it definitely also adds a level of stress for me because it's like much newer.

To a lesser extent, roommates, Marina and Lili echoed similarly. When I asked Lili (27) if she felt more comfortable with her bisexuality depending on the gender of her partner, she stated, "men. Just because I am more used to it. But I haven't had any relationships with women so I don't know, my path with them might also be very nice and easy, but right now, I guess to say dating men." Heteronormativity both purported by Austrian society and some Austrian political parties, as well as through contemporary media, perpetuates gender norms within relationships, through the use of depicting marital and familial relations in heterosexual couples (See; FPÖ, 2021; Bernstein, 2002). Bisexuality holds plurality within the conceptualization of sexuality[22], and is described by Hemmings

[22] See: Theories on Bisexual Identity and Biphobia

(2002) as partial, intertwined within multiple sexual identities, bisexuality neither proscribes to hetero- nor homonormativity. Thus, the heteronormative expectations that bisexuals are expected to conform to, are difficult to break from and it can feel more comfortable to conform to them as expressed by Thomas. Thus, I argue this can make it more comfortable for some bisexual individuals to engage in different-sex relationships where adhering to these norms is easier.

Most of the interviewees stated that they did not come out to every sexual partner they have had. They withheld their sexuality most regularly if they were engaging in sex with a one-night stand or with someone whom they would see a couple of times, or extremely irregularly. This was especially common when interviewees described their sexual encounters with a different-sex individual, who identified as heterosexual (Feinstein & Dyar et al., 2018). Thomas (28) expressed that he sometimes did not want to open a discussion in which could "sometimes just provoke mostly tiring conversations and naïve questions that I'm not always willing to face," regarding his sexuality and felt it was easier to not bring up the topic at all. While he also stated that on occasion when he would tell his sexual partners, he found it to sometimes be a test, as some of his sexual partners expressed negative reactions. He further indicated that he would not want any sort of relationship with individuals who had issues with his sexuality, and it would be a cause to end the relationship.

I found that while both Magnus and Thomas came out to a majority of their partners, a majority of the female interviewees, with the exception of Marina and Lili, did not regularly disclose their bisexuality to their partner if they were engaging in different-sex relationships. Lili (27) stated that she felt it was important for her to disclose her

sexuality to most of her partners, simply due to the fact that it is something she likes to talk about and craves depth in her dialogue with her partners, regardless of the length of the relationship (i.e. one night versus longer-term). While she stated that typically the discussion comes up naturally, when I asked her if she found it important for her to tell her partners, she stated, “Yes, I do think so […] I’m curious, I bring it up because I’m also curious about their sexual orientation, and even, not only because they are my intimate partner but also because generally I’m curious about people. And like if there’s kind of a connection there then I’m interested in intimate things.” She followed by revealing that she has found it much easier if the individual she is with also identifies as queer, which creates a space to talk about shared experiences and ultimately leads to a deeper relationship founded to some extent on acceptance. Thomas also stated that he found it much easier to discuss his sexuality with female partners if they also identified as queer, or at least held knowledge pertaining to the LGBT+ community, which has also been found to increase positive attitudes of bisexual individual (de Bruin & Arndt, 2010). Thomas (28) stated, “I think it just takes away this stress of uncertainty for both parties and there are fewer prejudices” when speaking about his sexual partners and their knowledge of bisexuality.

Some interviewees directly stated that they rarely or never came-out to their heterosexual male sexual partners simply because they did not find it necessary within the nature of the relationship, typically one-night stands or short term hook-ups, other interviewees stated they did not disclose their bisexuality for fear of rejection or negative response. Meg, Scarlett, and Emily, all stated that they felt less inclined to disclose their sexual orientation to their partners if they were engaging in different-sex relations with

heterosexual males. In her interview, Scarlett revealed that she had never been in a relationship with a man, and that she was currently in her first relationship, with a woman. Due to her held experiences, she almost exclusively spoke of her sexual relationships, consisting of primarily one-night stands, and when I specifically asked her if it was important for her to come out to one-night stands or short term sexual partners, Scarlett (22) responded “No, not at all […] with a stranger, that you’re just hooking up with, I wouldn’t feel the need”. Meg (22) recounted a prior relationship that she was in was a heterosexual man right before she officially came-out, when a male partner insisted she was bisexual. When she told me she had denied his instance, I responded asking her if she perceived his claim as negative or as an opportunity to discuss her potential bisexuality, Meg responded,

> I perceived it as negative because I felt like it was an attack, because he was right, he was accurate, I was like, “oh no” he’s on to me. But it wasn’t said in a kind way, it was said like “I think you’re bi, I’ve sussed you.” But I quickly shut it down, because I didn’t feel like I was in a space where I could come out to him, I didn’t feel comfortable. But that might have just been the person. But he said homophobic things.

Even interviewees (Marina, Lili) who did not share the same idea in coming-out to their heterosexual male partners, stated to have experienced biphobia from their male partners following their disclosure. Marina stated, “I have men that, cis men that I date, and very often when I tell them I see a little fetish light going on” and later went on to say “I don’t like it when [men] automatically think, “oh she’s into girls, I bet I can find a girl who we can have a threesome with.” Gender has been found to be a factor in the shaping of attitudes toward bisexual individuals, with males indicating to be less accepting and holding more prejudice toward bisexual men and women (de Bruin & Arndt, 2010). To help explain this polarity, Rich (1980) emphasizes the dichotomy of

what is required between men and women in regards to gender self-expression within a heteronormative society. Rich claims that within the framework of heteronormativity, masculinity is correlated with heterosexuality, whereas femininity is not associated to heterosexuality due to the fact that it is automatically assumed, therefore women do not need to proclaim their heterosexuality to the same extent as men. Thus, McCreary (1994), asserts that due to this notion, men must actively attest to their dislike of individuals who fall outside of the heteronormative "default" to a larger extent than women.

Religion and politics came up in several interviews and were described as important by some in the way their sexuality was perceived by an intimate partner. Chrisi and Thomas specifically spoke about times when they had been in a relationship with individuals holding conservative views and/or catholic backgrounds. Chrisi (23) recounted a time when she was together with her now ex-boyfriend and said that she had felt hesitant to tell him that she was bisexual due to the negative reaction she was afraid she would face, and finally chose to tell him after several weeks of being together, stating, "I was dating this kind of conservative guy […] he was… not so supportive about it, but he didn't talk about it, he was just a little… he just didn't talk about it." When Thomas (28) illustrated a prior relationship, he expressed how at first for the woman he was seeing, she perceived his bisexuality as exotic since she had grown up in a conservative and catholic background she had little experience with queer individuals. However, as time went on, his bisexuality provoked her own feelings of insecurities and she ended the relationship because of his sexuality, stating that "she couldn't see herself being in a long term relationship with me because I am bisexual and because

she would never know if she would be enough for me." Political and religious affiliations tend to cast more feelings of uneasiness around the queer community (Feinstein et al., 2016; Kralovec et al., 2014). This can both lessen their exposure to queer individuals and experiences, as well as create and reinforce prejudices and stereotypes that are purported by the Catholic Church and conservative parties Kralovec et al., 2014)

The main concern that female interviewees stated when expressing their hesitation in disclosing their sexual orientation, was the sexualization they felt they would be subjected to. As explored in the sections above, it was a common occurrence for the interviewees to experience straight individuals dismissing their bisexuality. This was also done by masking their biphobia with misogyny, or their misogyny with biphobia. Chrisi, Emily, and Marina all revealed general experiences of facing sexualization when telling heterosexual males their sexuality.

Within the interviews, it was clear that there is a large disparity in the response toward the interviewee's sexuality depending on if the individual they were having a relationship with was queer versus straight. Thomas stated that he had several relationships with heterosexual women prior to his first experience with a queer woman. While most of these women were liberal and open-minded, when asked Thomas (28) said,

> I think also a big part of what is different with queer women, or […] like the first girlfriend I talked about who had like liberal background, was that it felt more freely in terms of what sexual acts would be imaginable or not a big deal or something that you could talk about without it being weird.

When asked about his relationships with queer people of the opposite gender, Thomas (28) responded saying that dating queer women helped him, "in terms of lived experiences. I think [dating queer women] also helped me feel quite a bit more settled in

me with my own sexual orientation and in combination with my gender expression and sexual expression, especially with women." Continuing by stating, "Because with men my sexual expression thing was almost never an issue or like where I got any negative feedback, but with women it was." And went on to discuss how a heterosexual woman he had been with showed a "clear gesture of irritation" and "disgust" when asked to explore anal play. A situation in which he had never experienced with a queer woman, categorizing the lack of limitation and the inhibition of exploring sexual acts as a large contributor to him feeling more comfortable engaging in sexual acts and relationships with queer rather than heterosexual women.

Thomas, Magnus, and Chrisi declared having experienced partners asking them if they missed or would miss at some point having sex with opposite sex to their current partner. Chrisi (23) stated that upon tell an ex-boyfriend that she was bisexual, "he was kind of scared that I was leaving him for a girl." In addition, one of Thomas's (28) previously stated comment included this notion as well, stating, "one day she told me she couldn't see herself being in a long term relationship with me because I am bisexual and because she would never know if she would be enough for me." I argue that these accounts and held perception stem from the common misconception that bisexual individuals are promiscuous, untrustworthy, and non-monogamous (Baumgartner, 2017). Holding the misconception that bisexual individuals are non-monogamous and therefore untrustworthy or risky partners, furthers the othering they experience from both the hetero- and homonormative framework. Both hetero- and homonormativity purport monogamy as the norm within society, as excluding bisexuals from this standard, it can increase their risk of being subjected to biphobia (Klesse, 2011).

Bisexuality and Biphobia in Same-Sex Relationships

Being in a same-sex relationship and/or engaging in same-sex sexual practices already presents the assumption that both parties are not heterosexual. This fact revealed itself to be the foundational component in nearly all of my interviews as to why the interviewees felt more comfortable publicizing their bisexuality to their partners. Nearly every respondent stated that when engaging in same-sex relations, they would almost always disclose as well as discuss their sexual orientation with their partner, regardless of the length of the relationship. This was largely in part to an understanding and an exchange of shared experiences the interviewees felt that they would receive from their same-sex partner, something which a few felt they lacked in different-sex relationships. They also expressed they anticipated they would receive greater acceptance, adding to their likelihood of disclosing their bisexuality.

While overall, interviewees were more likely to discuss their sexuality when engaging in same-sex relationships, I found the responses from the male interviewees to be different than those of the female interviewees. Thomas and Magnus both stated that following their disclosure of their bisexuality to their male partners, oftentimes they would face a neutral or even negative reaction. Thomas (28) oftentimes faced “a lot of naïve to rude questions from gay guys, mostly in the context of hookups” when he told them he was bisexual. They also stated that it was also common that once began to withdraw from the relationship or end it altogether, they would then typically receive negative responses directed toward them, blaming their sexuality as the reason for the relationship not continuing. Magnus (23) stated throughout his interview that the most

regular form of biphobia he received from gay males was their assumption that he was never into men, or that in actuality he is straight, stating that sometimes they would say to him “oh so you aren’t that into men, hah, so you do prefer women.” Thomas (28) also stated, “pretty much out of nowhere he would insult me and be like “yeah, it’s always the same, the bisexual guys always go for the pussy in the end.” This belief is very different than what was reported throughout many interviews when asked about biphobia males face within society. Meg, Scarlett, Chrisi, Thomas, and Magnus all reported that they believed bisexual males were most susceptible to face the preconceived idea of society marking them as gay, when they come-out as bisexual. However, in reality, they seem to face a double edged sword, as the two male respondents both stated instances in which gay males falsely accused and assumed they were straight.

Different-sex relationships are considered the norm in today’s society. Heterosexual relationships specifically are purported to be the default and most accepted within Austrian society (Kováts, 2018). With this incessant portrayal of what is deemed as “normal,” individuals are exposed to gender roles and norms that follow the familial ideal of man and woman (FPÖ, 2021). This leaves little representation outside of the heteronormative ideals. In which end up creating a space in same-sex relationships where gender roles and the expectation placed on the individuals within the relationships, are undefined since they no longer prescribe to the “default”. This in no way means they are exempt from societal gender norms, however, it creates space within the relationship to break away from what is expected, allowing room for a truer display of self-expression, something which Thomas thoroughly expressed within his

interview when recounting his prior relationships[23]. However, this way not a case for all of the respondents. Meg (22) described an ex-girlfriend stating, “she encouraged me to present more masculine because at the time I met her I was kind of in the middle, and she encouraged me a lot to be more masculine” however, later in the interview she said that she encountered times where she felt pressured to act out prescribed gender roles within her same-sex relationships due to her presenting as more masculine and her girlfriend presenting more feminine.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Respondents Conceptualizing Biphobia, while sexual fluidity has been recognized and studied, female sexual fluidity more recently has begun to be more widely acknowledged (Flanders & Hatfield, 2014) In addition to the phenomenon of society disregarding female bisexuality (as previously explored in section Respondents Conceptualizing Biphobia), the increase in centering female sexual fluidity, could be viewed as hindering the efforts of lesbians in their own recognition. Butler (1991) voices the hurdles lesbians have historically attempted to overcome in gaining visibly within society, much like bisexuals. While only one female respondent (Lili) reported to have experienced biphobic language from a same-sex sexual partner, Emily also reported to have overheard or been party to conversations in Vienna from lesbians dismissing and questioning the legitimacy of bisexuality. Emily (23) described a couple of occasions, to have been involved in conversations where lesbians were recounting their past sexual experiences, and in both instances “the lesbian said that even though they had slept with a girl who defined as bisexual, they said that in actuality the girl was “probably straight.” In her home city, Cardiff, Wales,

[23] See section: Bisexuality and Biphobia in Different-Sex Relationships

Meg (22) also stated to have overheard lesbians on her basketball team declaring similar sentiments,

> I think the queer community can be just as biphobic as straight people like especially a lot of lesbians would say, “oh don’t want to get with a bisexual girl because she’s just going to run off with a boy.” And there were always these stories of lesbians who got with a bisexual girl and then she cheats on her with a man. Yeah, so I think some lesbians just view bisexual woman as […] straight and so there’s a bit of a risk. When really, bisexual girls are just as into girls as lesbians.

Conclusion

In this Chapter I argue that intimate and sexual relationships are at the core of understanding and accepting one’s own sexuality. This acceptance allows for the greater exploration of their sexuality, thus helping in framing their own conceptualization of their experiences with biphobia in their relationships. This understanding also contributes to the individual’s own felt inclusion in the queer community, contributing to their desire to be involved within it, as will be explored in Chapter 4. I further argue that while exploring one’s bisexuality through sexual and intimate relationships, in doing so, bisexual individuals are susceptible to experiencing biphobia within these vulnerable spaces, regardless of the gender and sexual orientation of their partner (Ozalas, 2020;

I argue that as heteronormativity is the default within Austrian society, gender norms connected to relationship dynamics are perpetuated by the structure of marriage and children that derive from heteronormativity (Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2011) and purported by the Austrian politicians and political parties (FPÖ, 2021). In light of this, some interviewees (Thomas, Meg) reported to have experienced gender norms and expectation from their partner in their same-sex relationships due to the socialization and pressure they experienced growing up. While some interviewees also explicitly

stated that they felt more comfortable engaging in different-sex relationships due to their increased comfortability, as they had more experience and labeled it as “easier” to engage in different-sex relations. I argue that the comfortability and easiness the interviewees reported to have felt engaging in different-sex relations, was due to heteronormativity and the ingrained ideologies that make it more straightforward to abide by the expectations purported by heteronormativity if engaging in different-sex relationships. I also argue that while homonormativity begins to challenge the gender norms set in place by heteronormativity, bisexuals within same-sex relationships are still susceptible to experiencing the pressure to conform to gender roles within a non-heterosexual relationship (Valentine, 2007; Chauncey; 1994).

Chapter 4 – Queer versus Heteronormative Spaces: Where do Bisexual Individuals Fit in?

Contemporary society has created a binary of heteronormativity and homonormativity (Warner, 1991; Duggan, 2005). When going against heterosexuality, one is assumed to be homosexual (Pollitt et al., 2019). This notion does not allow for deviation and disenfranchises those who do not abide by these binaries. Since bisexuals do not comply with the heteronormative expectation, nor that of homosexuality, this heterosexual/homosexual binary creates the exclusion and erasure from both groups (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009). This allows bisexuals to face biphobia and bi-erasure from their own community, based on their marginalized sexual orientation within the categorization of queer identities. In this chapter, I explore the degree to which bisexual individuals experience biphobia in the queer community in Austria, and in most accounts, more specifically in Vienna, and the exclusion and erasure they endure based on their held sexual identity. I am studying this by examining the extent they are involved, or not involved, in the queer community and how this involvement can play a role in the ways they experience biphobia from the community to which they belong. To measure their involvement in the queer community, within my interviews I loosely identified involvement as advocacy/educational work and/or participating in spaces that are specifically geared toward the LGBT+ community.

Involvement within the queer community

Only two female respondents (Scarlett, Marina) recorded having direct involvement in the queer community. Both of them had involvement in their home countries and have found it more difficult to integrate themselves within the community since moving to Austria. While, the two male respondents, (Magnus and Thomas) stated that they had prior experience taking part in spaces created for queer individuals, which was specifically made possible through living in Vienna. While Magnus grew up in Vienna, Thomas illustrated the time when he first moved to Vienna, 8 years ago, and how upon moving, felt it was important for him to become involved in the queer community since he had "very few friends who consider themselves queer or a part of the community as well," which seemed as though it was a large factor in him seeking other ways of involvement within the community. Before moving to Vienna, Thomas came from a small village in the countryside in Lower Austria, where while he was openly out, expressed "back before I came to Vienna […] [I had a] circle of friends that I had been seeing mainly before I came to Vienna, […] I was still open [about my sexuality] but it was it was a bit tiring and shit at times" (Thomas, 28). It was not until Thomas moved to Vienna that he became extremely open about his bisexuality and began to cultivate a group of friends who were accepting and open to dialogue on topics around sexuality. A year after he moved to Vienna he joined a queer educational program that was driven by "autobiographical work," where the individual's taking part would share their experiences and stories to promote acceptance and normalize conversations around sexuality beginning in the classroom, to be utilized outside of it as well. This was where Thomas (28) began to learn more about the queer community

stating, “it had like a great impact on me – in good and bad ways I think – because before I had hardly read anything about like the current discourse, I didn’t know what the “proper language” was […], [I learned more about] the theoretical knowledge and I did learn other stuff there and I also did lead some workshops.” Through this experience he realized how impactful queer spaces can be, especially for individuals who are questing their sexuality or new to the community. Due to the educational program being peer based, he also began to recognize his own impact, whether it good or bad, within the community, even if just in small groups like the one he had been a part of.

Magnus had volunteered in a queer café in Vienna before COVID-19 hit and has paused his involvement since their closing during the pandemic. He joined directly following his coming-out as bisexual. Magnus (24) stated, “the idea was that I would sort of bartend there […] that’s really what I was interested in, but instead it ended up being endless zoom calls about sort of trivial details and long discussions about whatever the fuck, and I just didn’t care.” Throughout the interview, he expressed the importance of queer/queer accepting places in feeling better in his placement within society, as his presentation and self-identities navigate both the deconstruction of gender and sexuality. This could have led to his drive to become more involved in the queer community and feel acceptance from a queer space where he felt more freedom to defy gender and sexual expectations he is faced with outside of queer/queer accepting spaces. I argue this, due to the fact that he was only interested in volunteering and being a part of the queer café while it was open and running for the public, which would allow him to interact and meet other queer people rather than attend meetings focusing on logistical aspects of the café during its closure due to COVID-19

As explored in Chapter 2, *Biphobia with Intimate and Sexual Relationships,* while bisexual males experience biphobia at approximately the same rate as bisexual women from the general public, they face biphobia from the queer community, specifically from gay males, to a larger extent than bisexual women do from lesbians. The fact that Thomas and Magnus both felt that it was important for them to be a part of the community could stem from their experiences of discrimination from both heterosexuals and homosexuals. Biphobia and bi-erasure affect bisexual males at an increased rate to bisexual women, although exhibited differently, as explored throughout my research, from both heterosexuals and homosexuals alike (Flanders, 2018, p. 129). Since bisexual women did not report the same level of prejudice from homosexuals, that bisexual males did, this may increase bisexual males' desire for inclusion and involvement within a space, specifically through seeking to obtain this within queer spaces. While they may be driven to be involved in the queer community to feel included in some space, they may also feel inclined to help other bisexuals or queer individuals who face prejudice and injustices within Austria, through advocating for policy or social change. Thomas also briefly reported his previous involvement in teaching sex education, something which he feels is lacking in general in the Austrian educational system. Part of the reasons for his involvement stemmed from the lack of queer representation and same-sex education he experienced during his school years when sex education was taught. This was something that he hoped to change in his involvement in teaching the sex education program to younger children.

Most respondents stated that they feel no difference with how they feel about their sexuality and standing within the queer community based on the gender of their

partner. Although, a couple of interviewees (Emily and Thomas) explicitly stated that they felt less involved and less like they were a part of the queer community when they had a different-sex partner. While stating that they felt more inclined to participate and integrate themselves in the community when they were engaging in same-sex relationships. They both similarly stated that they sometimes felt insecure in their sexuality when with a different-sex partner. Emily (23) went further stating that she felt less inclined to even join queer spaces when she was in a relationship with a man and would feel uncomfortable during these times being in queer spaces, anxious that people would automatically assume she was straight. She even stated that "if I saw people who presented as an opposite-sex couple, my first reaction would be to assume they were straight, so I wouldn't blame them for thinking the same of me, but it does make me feel less inclined to go to queer events or clubs." She went on to describe how her female roommate of hers who identifies as queer will sometimes go to queer bars and clubs and kiss men, which leads to her experiencing negative reactions from other party-goers. This automatic speculation of an individual being heterosexual based on their sexual activity, stemming from heteronormativity, can lead to bisexual individuals feeling uncomfortable within their own community, making them more insecure and less inclined to be involved within the community depending on the gender of their partner (Warner, 1991; Pollitt et al., 2021).

A couple of interviewees (Thomas and Emily) stated that they felt more inclined to be involved in the queer community when they were engaging in same-sex relationships. When I explicitly asked Thomas (28) who has spent most of his adult life in Vienna, if the gender of his partner made a difference in whether he felt more or less

drawn to being involved in the queer community he stated, “maybe [I] would walk hand in hand with a guy in public, that would be something where I felt very queer for example, […] I think the visibility changes so much for me of in terms of how I perceive myself and how connected I feel to the cause of queer rights in general.” While Emily moved to Vienna three years ago from the United States she stated that she felt more “comfortable in my sexuality since I came to Vienna,” and unprompted, Emily (23) declared, “I have never gone to pride before, I’ve always wanted to go but I felt less like I was a part of the queer community when I was single or seeing a guy for instance but this year I have a girlfriend” and continued by stating, “I feel so much better and comfortable going this year, where I know I will be read as gay, even though I’m not, but at least I won’t be seen as some “straight ally” […], I’ll look queer, and that to me makes me feel so much more excited and proud to be a part of it.” Physical appearance and being “read” or “perceived” as queer, has been an ongoing theme in many of the interviews. As I will explore further in this chapter, the assumed gender of the interviewees’ partner, can make a major difference in the way they, or if they, experience biphobia or erasure within the queer community. For Emily, she found that it is more comfortable for her to be involved in the queer community and spaces if she is perceived as queer, and for her, this is largely dependent on the gender of her partner. Thomas, felt similarly, as he disclosed in his interview that he does feel more queer when engaging in same-sex relations and thus feels more inclined to be involved in the queer community, or advocate work for queer rights.

While a majority of the interviewees did not report having involvement in the LGBT+ community, they all expressed that being a part of queer spaces was incredibly important to them. The spaces were not only deemed as important but as vital, by most interviewees. All of the respondents reported having friends who identified as queer or were a part of events and/or activities that included predominantly queer individuals. They categorized these spaces as friend groups and social circles, sports teams, and bars and clubs, which they did not feel was direct "involvement" in the queer community. They did, however, mark these spaces as fundamental in their own acceptance of their sexuality and overall livelihood. The foremost reason for the need for these spaces was the acceptance the interviewees received from them. These spaces allowed them to have conversations regarding sexuality. A few respondents (Emily, Scarlett, Lili) stated that in their journey toward coming-out and feeling acceptance toward themselves and their own sexuality was aided to a large extent by their friends, which was comprised of individuals whom they feel comfortable talking about sexuality and sexual exploration with and at least one or two queer individuals. Emily (23) stated,

> Thankfully, when I moved to university I became a part of a really liberal group of friends, some of them were queer or have come out the past couple years […] they helped me so much in my acceptance toward myself, I had a hard time coming to terms with my sexuality, and still do, so being a part of groups that just normalize being bisexual or gay or any sexuality, is really important for me.

Similarly, Lili began exploring her sexuality a couple of years ago and stated that after moving to Vienna from the village she grew up in Upper Austria, she was able to talk to her roommate (interviewee; Thomas), about bisexuality. Lili (27) declared "I want to learn and explore more about bisexuality […] he made me feel very comfortable, also because he's bisexual like me, and it was a good reflecting moment for me and gave me [a space] to think." A few other respondents expressed the importance of moving to

a big city in order to feel more accepted within society and to have more access to queer spaces and queer individuals (Weston, 1995). All of the Austrian interviewees currently live in Vienna and each one expressed their appreciation for the city, declaring that it is more liberal than the villages most of them grew up in (Chrisi, Lili, Thomas). Liberal environments also foster more acceptance of the LGBT+ community, making Vienna a place where queer individuals migrate from villages or other smaller cities due to the city offering more of an abundance of queer spaces and people to meet and share experiences with (Grollman, 2017).

Biphobia within queer spaces

All of the interviewees stated that they believed biphobia was present within the queer community, Meg (22) declared, “I’d like to think that the queer LGBT community is good about bisexual people, but from what I’ve seen, I think the queer community can be just as biphobic as straight people.” While a few even stated that they viewed biphobia as even more present (Thomas, Emily, Chrisi), or exclusively present (Magnus), in the queer community versus the general public. When I asked Magnus (24) how he would describe biphobia he responded, “biphobia to me, is something that I associate exclusively with the queer community.” However, many respondents did not report ever having experienced biphobia when in queer spaces or from individuals in the queer community when taking part in advocacy or educational work, activities, or events geared toward the queer population.

A common theme I found across the interviews was the way one physically presents themselves was a large factor in the way they experienced biphobia from the

queer community. When asked if they believed biphobia was present within the queer community and how they experienced it themselves or saw it exhibited by others, interviewees commonly stated that bisexuals were seen as not “queer” enough. This notion stems from the idea that bisexuality in itself lacked something for bisexuals to truly be a part of the queer community. From those who stated this, I perceived this mentality to be driven by the notion that bisexuals did not face the same discrimination and hardship that homosexuals face. While several respondents declared similar statements Magnus and Thomas experienced this to a larger degree stating,

> [It is] like the general idea that it’s easier to be bisexual as a man than to be gay. And that we can choose how we are seen, which isn’t wrong, but isn’t only positive. So I would say that’s like a big part of like the baseline of the discrimination within the community. Like this, “oh you have it easy and you can have an easy life if you want to, you don’t have to have to struggle if you don’t want to.” (Thomas, 28)

> Biphobia to me sort of, just in my experience, always comes in the form of sort of my queerness being called into question, there is this notion I think also, that bi people are sort of half queer or half gay, which I think there is some validity to that, in that, some anyway, could pass for straight, which is much more difficult for gay men. (Magnus, 24)

Homonormativity produces the assumption that same-sex partnerships are the pinnacle of what being queer is (Flores, 2017). When bisexuality is seen as simultaneously holding forms of heterosexuality and homosexuality, rather than a singular sexuality in its own right, this can create exclusion from both the queer community and general public. This theory takes two separate identities and places them both on an individual, while disregarding that the convergence of differing identities can cause unique marginalization that bisexual individual possess (Hemmings, 2002).

While all interviewees reported experiencing biphobia from queer people, only a few gave an account of a time when they had directly faced biphobia directly within

queer spaces. Most often the biphobia interviewees reported having experienced within these spaces was gay males or lesbians questioning the legitimacy of their bisexuality. Meg described multiple times when lesbians within queer spaces questioned her bisexuality while living in Wales, since her move to Austria she has not encountered the same prejudice, however much of her time in Austria has been during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. One instance involved a gay woman at a party who, before Meg (22) was even out as bisexual, not only declared but insisted Meg was a lesbian. When Meg denied it, the woman continued to berate her, she stated, “I was sat, like my legs were spreading and I was quite drunk, and I was in the closet then and there was this girl who […] I think she’s lesbian and she was like “you’re gay” to me, and I laughed it off and was like “no I’m not” and she was like “you are gay, look at the way your sat, look at the way you do this, do that.” Meg’s tone became despondent as she reflected back on her experiences, describing these instances as uncomfortable, stating “I felt attacked because I wasn’t ready to come-out” and continued by expressing that situations like this happened often and these accusations are “usually [said] in a negative manner, it’s not been “are you gay?” but rather “*you are* gay.” When I asked how these affected her desire to come-out, she stated that they made her feel as though she was lying to them, as she continuously denied their accusations, but also question the legitimacy of her attraction toward men. These experiences were reported to have happened during her University years living in Cardiff, Wales, she went on to say that she continues to experience instances like these, living in Austria. Because she has less involvement in the queer community in Austria, due to both the COVID-19 pandemic and her inability to speak German, she experiences less biphobia within the

queer community. However, she continues to experience biphobia to the same degree, and even worse, by the general public while living in Linz, Austria[24].

Facing exclusion and bi-erasure from the queer community

Some interviews stated the inaccessibility of the queer community. When Thomas was involved in the queer educational school program, he reported that while he learned an immense amount, as described above in this Chapter, in the section, *Involvement in the Queer Community*, he stated first and foremost the inaccessibility of the program. Where the program promoted that it was open to the public for any queer identifying people, in which mainly had gay, lesbian, and bisexual attendees, Thomas described the class as "very overwhelming" and continued by stating,

> I didn't feel like I could contribute anything because I was afraid that first what I was saying would be disrespectful to someone and also that I couldn't contribute any knowledge/ideas because I didn't know enough […] and it was like a mix because I felt very drawn to the whole thing and at the same time I was freaking out and it was making me feel shitty and insufficient because I didn't know these things that other people knew. (Thomas, 28)

Since this experience, Thomas has completed a degree in Social Work and previously taught sex education classes on the side. He has gained an immeasurable amount of knowledge in sexuality and queer studies due to his areas of expertise within the field of social sciences. However, he remains hesitant to become involved in another queer space, like the one depicted above, due to its intellectual inaccessibly. Whereas he would now feel comfortable and confident to join the discussion, he is reluctant to join a space that would perpetuate an unapproachable and exclusive environment that may

[24] See Chapter 2, section: Respondents Conceptualizing Biphobia

discourage other queer individuals from participating, much like he felt several years ago.

The approachability of the queer community was questioned by a few interviewees. Hemmings (2002) argues that bisexual subjectivity captures the partiality of bisexuality, a sexuality in which holds fluidity. I argue that this conception is not readily held by many homosexual individuals, and within the queer community, can be the core to the lack of acceptance of homosexuals toward bisexuals (p. 42). in Similarly, Lili, Emily, and Thomas all stated feeling that they did not belong in some spaces due to them feeling like they were either "not queer enough" or were too new to the queer community. When asked if she was comfortable within queer spaces, Emily (23) stated, "especially in the beginning, when I had just come-out […] I felt really on edge and a bit uncomfortable [in queer spaces], just because of my own insecurities and how the people there would look at me and their assumptions of my sexuality, maybe questioning why I was even there." When I asked Thomas about his involvement in the queer educational program, he comparably stated that when he joined the program,

> I was in a mix-sex relationship with my girlfriend at the time and so I felt insufficient in that, am I queer enough to be justified to be here? Because I am in a relationship with a woman, I am a man. And I've hooked up with guys before but does that even qualify me as bisexual and I always felt inferior in all the ways I said before, to the other people there. (Thomas, 28)

> It's quite new to me that I consider myself bisexual, so when I'm in queer spaces, I feel like, I kind of get excited and I'm like "am I right here?" […] I feel… not really uncomfortable, but I'm not really sure where I'm supposed to be, and it seems like the last year was only Corona so there weren't queer spaces, so I feel a little stuck. (Lili, 27)

While Lili stated that she did not feel uncomfortable in queer spaces, she later went on to insinuate such feelings. Lili, Emily, and Thomas suggested times when they felt uncomfortable or less at ease within these spaces. Both Emily and Lili expressed that

these feelings were caused by them themselves, with no deterrence or discrimination from the community itself. Lili inferred that with time, she would feel more comfortable within these spaces, However, I would argue that the feelings of not being queer enough to be a part of, or feel comfortable in, the queer community, can in part be directly from the LGBT+ community and the conversations they choose to bring to the forefront and what conversations they choose not to label as important. Queer identity politics are seen to transition from single-interest politics to collective group politics, depending on which marginalized group one is a part of (Seidman, 1993, p.105). This could push bisexuality to the back while gay and lesbian politics take precedent. This can further be seen through Duggan's (2005) homonormativity and Eisner (2013) in her assertion that through the efforts of homonormativity in gaining LGBT+ rights, gay males and lesbians have profited to a greater extent than bisexual and transgender individual.

I would even go a step further and argue that the queer community could be seen as sexuality and gender gatekeeping. Through both the interviews and existing literature, this gatekeeping could be seen through the higher rates of biphobia and transphobia present within the community (Garelick et al., 2017). The lack of inclusion bisexual individual's feel being a part of the community, illustrates that the community could be geared toward, and more accepting of some sexualities than others. This can also be seen through bisexuality often referred to as the invisible sexuality (Yoshino, 2000), and it being situated between hetero- and homonormativity, creating some exclusion of bisexuals from both spaces (Duggan, 2005; Warner, 1991). Even in spaces designated to LGBT+ individuals, gay and lesbian issues are at the forefront, centering

discussions and resources to tackle homophobia, rather than homophobia and biphobia (Barker et al., 2012, p. 16).

Facing exclusion within queer spaces was recorded to happen more often when the respondent was perceived as straight or was in a relationship with/involved in some capacity with, a different-gender person. While Magnus described his time at a queer café in Vienna, he said that he had felt uncomfortable. He had just come-out and taking advantage of his newfound acceptance toward himself, joined the café staff in hopes to feel more integrated into the queer community. However, following his recruitment, the café closed due to the pandemic and moved online, with a large focus on discussion-based online meetings, deliberating on how to move forward with the café, allowing for suggestions on future plans. Magnus stated feeling excluded from the discussion and felt like his suggestions were vetoed or ignored completely in these meetings.

> My hair wasn't dyed, I didn't have an undercut, I often wasn't wearing nail polish. I seemed very much like a cis-white straight guy and I did feel like my ideas were often dismissed and my assumption, and maybe I'm just trying to cope and they didn't like my ideas, but I did feel like because also we did explicitly state our sexualities, I did wonder if maybe they just think I'm just this straight dude who's here. (Magnus, 24)

Although he could not say for certain if this treatment was due to his perceived sexuality, he believed that perhaps they would have treated him differently if they had known he identified as bisexual. Magnus, seated in front of the video camera with painted nail polish, was it blue or black… it was difficult to tell through the grainy screen, paired together with bleach blond hair and an undercut in which he gestured to when speaking about his physical appearance, declared that although now he goes to great lengths now to be read as queer, at the time, he said he "looked straight" and could be cause for their dismissal of him. I argue that gender presentation is linked to sexuality,

and as heteronormativity is comprised of normalizing gender conformity and heterosexuality (Warner, 1991), to be seen as queer, a bisexual individual has to work harder in asserting their non-heterosexuality as well as go to greater lengths to challenge the gender binary with their outward appearance (Valentine, 2007).

From multiple accounts from interviewees, I argue that within the queer community, specifically for gay and lesbian individuals, bisexuality is better understood and positively regarded when the bisexual individual is either single or not having sexual relations with just one gender. When a bisexual person enters a relationship or begins to have sexual relations with a single person and/or gender, their sexuality begins to be questioned within the community, as either gay or straight creating bisexual erasure (Flanders & Hatfield, 2014, p. 233). Marina, specifically expressed this in her interview, stating that while she felt the queer community in Brazil was more open and allowed for greater freedom of self and sexual expression and exploration who wouldn't question the validity of her sexuality, she found Vienna to have a more linear and closed mindset when it came to sexuality. This perception was echoed by some respondents, who stated that bi-erasure was prevalent within queer spaces. Stating that when seen with an individual of the different-sex, they were automatically perceived as heterosexual within these spaces due to their sexual or romantic partner.

On the flip side, Scarlett reported that she occasionally faced the opposite in queer spaces, individuals assuming she's a lesbian without her coming out to them. While she stated to never have experienced biphobia in these circumstances, she emphasized the need for her to come out to them as bisexual after they misidentified her as a lesbian. Scarlett (22) recounted one situation where a group of queer

individuals “assumed I was gay, then I actually think I kind of came out as bi to them. And then, they were actually really shocked by this.” She found it humorous and held no ill feelings when recounting these experiences, but their automatic assumption of her sexuality is the erasure of bisexuality from lesbians (Flanders, 2018, p. 130).

Conclusion

It was clear through nearly all of my interviews that being involved within the queer community was marked as incredibly important. While many did not feel a particular pull to be involved in the queer community in a formal sense, such as through advocacy or educational work, they reported having involvement on a smaller scale as significant in throughout the interview in their narrative in exploring and accepting their sexuality. As I explored in this chapter, individuals seek involvement in different ways or in less formal settings, such as with friends and peers who identify on the LGBT+ spectrum. I argue that becoming involved in queer spaces is proven to be easier and more accessible within larger cities as explicitly or implicitly expressed in many of my interviews (Weston, 1995).

Outward appearance has proven to be important in the queer community in determining who may be queer and who is not. This, however, can be harmful within the queer community itself, as demonstrated within this Chapter[25], it increasingly leads to reflexive assumptions and categorizations of individuals of their sexuality based on their physical appearance of themselves and/or their sexual or romantic partner. This can

[25] See also: Chapter 3 – Navigating bisexuality and Experiencing Biphobia in Intimate and Sexual Relationships

lead to exclusion within the community, due to their presumption of one's sexuality, discrediting and dismissing them, if they "look" straight or are seen to be straight through who they are dating or seen with at the time being. I also argue that the queer community can present as gatekeeping, preventing some bisexual individuals to feel comfortable in becoming involved in the community due to their identity not abiding to the homonormative expectation (Duggan, 2005) and not feeling or looking queer enough to be accepted (Valentine, 2007). This automatic judgement happens even more often when bisexual individuals are married (Galupo, 2011). Due to the age demographic of my interviewees and their unwed relationship status, this is not something I could explore in this chapter.

Conclusion

Throughout my thesis I explored how bisexuality begins to question and challenge binaries surrounding gender and sexuality. In the strides made to attempt to navigate gender and sexuality binaries, the expectation of both holding a static, unwavering sexuality and abiding to concrete binary gender presentation begins to break down as well (Hemmings, 2002). As this is a foundational piece of how bisexual individuals conceptualized their bisexuality, I argue that the exclusion and erasure of bisexuality that the interviewees experienced, are largely driven by gender – both in the way, the interviewees express their gender identity, as well as the gender identity of their presumed partner. To restate my research questions, within my thesis I sought to answer: how do bisexual individuals in Austria experience biphobia in their intimate and sexual relationships as well as in the queer community more broadly? My secondary questions explored: to what extent does gender identity play a role in the way biphobia is exhibited? How is biphobia presented within different-sex relationships verses same-sex relationships? How does experiencing biphobia from the queer community impact bisexual individuals' involvement in the community?

Chapter 2 foregrounded the following discussions in Chapter 3 and 4. In this chapter I explored how bisexuals conceptualize their bisexuality. Through this I discovered why individuals choose to use the term bisexual to define themselves and the overt and nuanced way the label holds power for these individuals. I found that while most interviewees generally hold the same definition of bisexuality as the common definition used by society Eisner, 2013), there were slightly different definitions in which some

interviewees felt were more inclusive to how they feel within their sexuality, lessening the limitations and rigid binaries the term is seen to hold and has been criticized of (Bowes-Catton et al. 2011). I also argue that bisexuals choose to label themselves as such for reasons that extend beyond simply their attraction toward more than gender, but rather for visibility and political purposes, which I claim are the same (du Plessis, 1996). Chapter 2 also examined and helped frame how biphobia is exhibited differently in spaces through the interviewees conceptualization of biphobia. While I will discuss the findings of biphobia to a greater extent below, I found all but one interviewee (Scarlett) had directly experienced biphobia at some point in their life. I found that all of the interviewees believed biphobia was present within the queer community and some even went as far to say that it was worse, or exclusively present within the queer community. Many interviewees believed the discrimination they faced and reported within their interview would be better classified as homophobia, rather than biphobia due to their assumed sexuality due to the partner they were seen with (same-sex presenting couple). I argue that the assumption of an individual to either be hetero- or homosexual based on the gender of their current partner, stems from hetero- and homonormative expectations (Duggan, 2005; Warner, 1991). The hetero- and homonormativity that bisexuals fall between, puts them in a position where they are not only susceptible to experiencing biphobia, but also homophobia.

In Chapter 3 I further explore the way biphobia is exhibited and prevalent within intimate and sexual relationships. I argue that heteronormativity and the norms it categorizes as the default (Warner, 1991),[26] are purported by Austrian society and from

[26] See: Theories on Heteronormativity and Homonormativity

some political parties (FPÖ, 2021). Thus, engaging in different-sex relationships is sometimes classified as easier than engaging in same-sex relationships due to homonormativity being largely unsupported by society (Kováts, 2018). I also explore the feelings of untrustworthiness and promiscuity from partners, or potential partners that they hold as being associated with bisexuality (Baumgartner, 2017). I argue that this misconception of bisexual individuals furthers them from both hetero- and homonormativity, as both conceive monogamous relationships as the norm within society, which enhances the "othering" they experience and thus, increases biphobia (Klesse, 2011).

Chapter 4 examines the involvement of bisexual individuals in the queer community. I argue that when in a larger city, like Vienna, it is easier for bisexual individuals, and more largely queer individuals to integrate themselves into the queer community and find like-minded individuals (Weston, 1995). Being involved in the queer community to some extent was marked as incredibly important for many interviewees, in feeling their own acceptance within the community, as well as allowing them a space to speak about their bisexuality around similar minded individuals. I argue that even within queer spaces, bisexual individuals are still prone to being categorized at gay or straight, depending on the gender presentation of their current romantic and/or sexual partner, perpetuating bi-erasure (Flanders & Hatfield, 2014). I further argue that one's physical appearance and presenting as "queer," also plays a role in how they are perceived within the queer community (Valentine, 2007).

While half of my interviewees (Thomas, Magnus, Lili, and Chrisi) are from Austria and have spent most of their lives living in the country, half of the interviewees come

from various countries; United Kingdom (Meg, Scarlett), United States (Emily), and Brazil (Marina). Intersectionality plays a large role in determining how and to what extent queer individuals engage and deviate from heteronormative expectations. Adolescent years are formative in identity development and their cognizance in how their merging identities work together within a heteronormative society and consequently how they perceive and are perceived within the framework of heteronormativity (Choo & Ferree, 2010). Sexual minorities who hold additional marginalizing identities (i.e. gender and racial/ethnic identities) face added obstacles when forced to traverse through a heteronormative society (Pollitt et al., 2021). Due to these intersections, I was anticipating greater disparities between the interviewees in their conceptualization of bisexuality and biphobia as well as their experiencing facing biphobia. While there were slight differences between the two groups, most of their notions and experiences reflected that there was little discontinuity between them. This could be in part to their racial identity, as all of the interviewees were white. As well as in part due to their geographical background, as most of the interviewees[27] came from "Western" countries in which hold similar views regarding heteronormativity, and thus their conception of sexuality and gender were largely homogenous.

Overall, I argue that marking hetero- and homosexual identities as the framework for bisexuality, while diminishing the notion of bisexuality as a sexuality in its own right, produces and reinforces bi-erasure, contributing to the biphobia that bisexual individuals are susceptible to (Hemmings, 2002). When exploring this common conception, I argue that the lack of acknowledgement toward the bisexual identity produces suppression,

[27] With the exception of Marina

and creates the possibility for biphobia from both hetero- and homosexuals. However, I also argue that with the accounts of biphobia reported by the interviewees and illustrated within my analysis chapters, biphobia is displayed differently depending on various factors, such as the gender of the bisexual individual, the gender and sexual identity of the perpetrator, and the perpetrator's relation to the bisexual. With this in mind I continue to argue that while biphobia is termed as a phobia, and thus rooted in fear and reliant upon an individual, rather than a social or collective phenomenon (Taylor & Whittier, 1992), in the way biphobia was detailed by the interviewees it was that of a collective and of prejudice rather than fear (Logan, 1996).

References

Barker, M., Richards, C., & Bowes-Catton, H. (2009). “All the world is queer save thee and me...”: Defining queer and bi at a critical sexology seminar. *Journal of Bisexuality, 9*(3/4), 363–379.

Barker, M., Richards, C., Jones, R., Bowes-Catton, H., Plowman, T., Yockney, J., & Morgan, M. (2012). The bisexuality report: Bisexual inclusion in LGBT equality and diversity. *The Open University Centre for Citizenship, Identities and Governance*.

Baumgartner, R. (2017). “I think I’m not a relationship person”: Bisexual women’s accounts of (internalised) binegativity in nonmonogamous relationship narratives. *Psychology of Sexualities Review*, *8*(2), 25–40.

Bernstein, M. (2002). Identities and politics: Toward a historical understanding of the lesbian and gay movement. *Social Science History*, *26*(3), 531-581.

Brekhus, W. (1996). Social marking and the mental coloring of identity: Sexual identity construction and maintenance in the United States. *Sociological Forum*, *11*, 497–522.

Brewster, M. E., & Moradi, B. (2010). Perceived experiences of anti-bisexual prejudice: Instrument development and evaluation. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 57*, 451–468.

Bunzl, M. (2004). Symptoms of modernity: Jews and queers in late-twentieth-century Vienna. *University of California Press*.

Butler, J. (2004). Undoing gender. *Routledge*.

Chauncey, G. (1994). The forging of queer identities and the emergence of heterosexuality in middle-class culture. In *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (pp. 99-127). New York City, NY: Basic Books.

Choo, H. Y., & Ferree, M. M. (2010). Practicing intersectionality in sociological research: A critical analysis of inclusions, interactions, and institutions in the study of inequalities. *Sociological Theory, 28*, 129–149.

Coston, B. M. (2021). Power and inequality: Intimate partner violence against bisexual and non-monosexual women in the United States. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *36*(1/2), 381–405.

de Bruin, K., & Arndt, M. (2010). Attitudes toward bisexual men and women in a university context: Relations with race, gender, knowing a bisexual man or woman and sexual orientation. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *10*(3), 233–252.

du Plessis, Michel. 1996. “Blatantly bisexual; or unthinking queer theory” In Pramaggiore, M., Hall, D. E., *RePresenting Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire*. (pp. 19-54). NYU Press.

Duggan, L. (2005). *The twilight of equality?: neoliberalism, cultural politics, and the attack on democracy*. Beacon Press.

Dyar, C., Feinstein, B. A. (2014). Dimensions of sexual identity and minority stress among bisexual women: The role of partner gender. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *2*(4), 441-451.

Eisner, S. (2013). Bi: Notes for a bisexual revolution. *Seal Press*, 1-352.

Erickson-Schroth, L., & Mitchell, J. (2009). Queering queer theory, or why bisexuality matters. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *9*(3/4), 297–315.
EU LGBT survey - European Union lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender survey. (2018).
Feinstein, B. A., & Dyar, C. (2018). Romantic and sexual relationship experiences among bisexual individuals. In D. J. Swan & S. Habibi (Eds.), *Bisexuality: Theories, research, and recommendations for the invisible sexuality.* (pp. 145–163). Springer International Publishing.
Feinstein, B. A., Dyar, C., Bhatia, V., Latack, J. A., & Davila, J. (2016). Conservative beliefs, attitudes toward bisexuality, and willingness to engage in romantic and sexual activities with a bisexual partner. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 45*, 1535–1550.
Flanders, C. E., & Hatfield, E. (2014). Social perception of bisexuality. *Psychology & Sexuality, 5*(3), 232-246,
Flores, B. (October, 12, 2017). Everything you need to know about homonormativity. Pride. https://www.pride.com/firstperson/2017/10/12/what-homonormativity.
FPÖ. (2021). *Family and Generations*. Freedom Party of Austria. https://www.fpoe.at/themen/parteiprogramm/familie-und-generationen/
Fritzsche, B. (2007). “Das Begehren, das nicht eins ist. Fallstricke beim Reden über Bisexualität.” In Heteronormativität [Heteronormativity], edited by Jutta Hartmann, Christian Klesse, Peter Wagenknecht, Bettina Fritzsche and Kristina Hackmann, 115- 131. Wiesbaden: VS.
Galupo, M. P. (2011). Bisexuality: Complicating and conceptualizing sexual identity. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *11*(4), 545–549.
Garelick, A. S., Filip-Crawford, G., Varley, A. H., Nagoshi, C. T., Nagoshi, J. L., & Evans, R. (2017). Beyond the binary: Exploring the role of ambiguity in biphobia and transphobia. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *17*(2), 172–189.
Grollman, E. A. (2017). Sexual orientation differences in attitudes about sexuality, race, and gender. *Social Science Research, 61*, 126–141.
Harrison, B. (2009). Editor’s introduction: Researching lives and the lived experience. *Life story research*, *1*, 1-26.
Hemmings, C. (2002). Bisexual spaces: a geography of sexuality and gender. *Routledge*. 1-244.
Hequembourg, A. L., & Brallier, S. A. (2009). An exploration of sexual minority stress across the lines of gender and sexual identity. *Journal of Homosexuality, 56*, 273–298.
Johnson, P. M. (2019). Digital coming out: The politics of LGBTQ culture in social media [ProQuest Information & Learning]. In *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences, 80*(2/A(E)).
Yoshino, K. (2000). The epistemic contract of bisexual erasure. *Stanford Law Review*, *52*(2), 353–461.
Klesse, C. (2011). Shady characters, untrustworthy partners, and promiscuous sluts: Creating bisexual intimacies in the face of heteronormativity and biphobia. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *11*(2–3), 227–244.
Kováts, E. (2018). Questioning Consensuses: Right-wing populism, anti-populism, and the threat of ‘gender ideology.’ *Sociological Research Online*, *23*(2), 528–538.

Kralovec, K., Fartacek, C., Fartacek, R., & Plöderl, M. (2014). Religion and suicide risk in lesbian, gay and bisexual Austrians. *Journal of Religion and Health*, *53*(2), 413–423.
Kulpa, R., & Liinason, M. (2009). Queer studies: Methodological approaches. Follow-up. *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, *6*(1), 1–2.
Lazy Life Verein. (2021). Lazy life Vienna. http://www.lazylife.at/
Lemke, R. (2020). The association of the availability of offline gay scenes and national tolerance of homosexuality with gay and bisexual men's sexual online dating behavior. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *104,* 1-11.
Logan, C. R. (1996). Homophobia? No, homoprejudice. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *31*, 31-53.
Martino, W. (2000). Policing masculinities: Investigating the role of homophobia and hetero-normativity in the lives of adolescent school boys. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 8*, 231–236.
Mathers, L. A. B., Sumerau, J. E., & Cragun, R. T. (2018). The limits of homonormativity: Constructions of bisexual and transgender people in the post-gay era. *Sociological Perspectives*, *61*(6), 934–952.
Mayer, S., Ajanovic, E., & Sauer, B. (2014). Intersections and inconsistencies. Framing gender in right-wing populist discourses in Austria. *NORA: Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*, *22*(4), 250–266.
McCormack M., Anderson E., & Adams A. (2014). Cohort effect on the coming out experiences of bisexual men. *Sociology*, *48*(6), 1207–1223.
Nencel, L. (2014). Situating reflexivity: Voices, positionalities and representations in feminist ethnographic texts. *Women's Studies International Forum, 43*, 75-83.
Ochs, R. (1996). Biphobia: It goes more than two ways. In B.A. Firestein (Ed.), *Bisexuality: The psychology and politics of an invisible minority* (pp. 217–239). Sage Publications, Inc.
Ozalas, B. (2020). "What if you meet someone else?": An autoethnographic account of biphobia and intimate partner emotional abuse. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *20*(1), 86–103.
Plöderl, M., & Fartacek, R. (2009). Childhood gender nonconformity and harassment as predictors of suicidality among gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual Austrians. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *38*(3), 400–410.
Plöderl, M., Faistauer, G., & Fartacek, R. (2010). The contribution of school to the feeling of acceptance and the risk of suicide attempts among Austrian gay and bisexual males. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *57*(7), 819–841.
Plöderl, M., Kralovec, K., & Fartacek, R. (2010). The relation between sexual orientation and suicide attempts in Austria. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *39*(6), 1403–1414.
Pollitt, A. M., Mernitz, S. E., Russell, S. T., Curran, M. A., & Toomey, R. B. (2021). Heteronormativity in the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer young people. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *68*(3), 522–544.
Rooke, A. (2009). Queer in the field: On emotions, temporality, and performativity in ethnography. *Journal of Lesbian Studies, 13*(2), 149-160.
Russell, S. T., Clarke, T. J., & Clary, J. (2009). Are teens "post-gay"? Contemporary adolescents' sexual identity labels. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence, 38*(7), 884–890.

Rust, P. (1995). Bisexuality and the challenge to lesbian politics*. NYU Press.*
Rust, P. (2000). Two many and not enough: The meanings of bisexual identities. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *1*(1), 31–68.
Seidman, S. (1993). Identity and politics in a “postmodern” gay culture: Some historical and conceptual notes. In M. Warner (Ed.), *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory* (pp. 105–142). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
Swan, D. J., & Habibi, S. (2018). Bisexuality: Theories, research, and recommendations for the invisible sexuality. *Springer International Publishing.*
Taylor, V. and Whittier, N., E. (1992). Collective identity in social movement communities: Lesbian feminist mobilization. In Morris, A. D., & Mueller, C. M. (Eds.) *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (pp. 104-129)*.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Valentine, D. (2007). Ch1 “Introduction”, Ch2 “Making community”, and Ch3 “‘I know what I am’: Gender, sexuality, and identity”. In *Imagining transgender: an ethnography of a category*. Duke University Press, 3-28, 68-104, 105-37, 173-203.
Villa Vida. (2021). Villa Vida, Queer community café. https://villavida.at/
Warner, M. (1991). Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet. *Social Text*, *29*, 3–17.
Warner, M. (1993). Fear of a queer planet: queer politics and social theory. *University of Minnesota Press.* vii-xxxi.
Weiss, J. T. (2003). GL vs. BT: The archaeology of biphobia and transphobia in the U.S. lesbian and gay community. *Journal of Bisexuality, 3*, 25–55. 02
Welzer-Lang, D. (2008). Speaking out loud about bisexuality: Biphobia in the gay and lesbian community. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *8*(1/2), 81–95.
Weston, K. (1995). Get thee to a big city - sexual imaginary and the great gay migration. *GLQ-A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, *2*(3), 253–277.
Williford, B. (2009). Heterosexual privilege. In J. O'Brien (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of gender and society* (pp. 418-420). SAGE Publications, Inc.