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Exploring the Intersectionality of Bisexual, Religious/Spiritual, and Political Identities from a Feminist Perspective

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Abstract

While there is a small but growing body of work that examines the religious and spiritual lives of bisexuals, there is a strong need for additional research that further explores the intersectionality of these distinct identities. Motivated by the feminist notions that the personal is political and that individuals are the experts of their own experiences (Unger, 2001), the specific aim of this study is to better understand the intersection of multiple identities experienced by bisexual individuals. Relying upon data collected by Herek, Glunt, and colleagues during their Northern California Health Study, in this exploratory study we examine the intersection of bisexual, religious/spiritual, and political identities by conducting an archival secondary analysis of 120 self-identified bisexual individuals. Among the significant findings, results suggest that higher LGB self-esteem scores and openness about sexual orientation correlated with higher levels of spirituality. Further, attraction to same sex partners was associated with perceiving sexual orientation as a choice, identifying as bisexual at a younger age, more likely to disclose one's sexual orientation, less likely to view religion as being socially important, and a higher score on the belief statement. We discuss the implications of these results and make suggestions for future research on the role of religion and spirituality in bisexual lives.

Keywords

Bisexual; Religious; Spiritual; Political; Identity; Feminism; Intersectionality

Until fairly recently, scholars researching the religious and spiritual experiences of sexual minorities have focused nearly exclusively on the study of lesbian and gay individuals, virtually ignoring the experiences of the bisexual and transgendered, even while utilizing the inclusive acronym LGBT. In so doing, the distinct faith experiences of bisexual individuals, as they differ from gays and lesbians, have largely been overlooked (Rodriguez, 2010).

Recently however, researchers have begun to move away from studying the LGBT community in its “entirety” and have started to focus more on the experiences of bisexual individuals apart from the larger sexual minority community. Specifically, scholars (Carr, 2011; Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007) have argued against grouping individuals into categories based solely on their gender or sexual orientation since, in particular, it neglects the unique experiences of bisexual women and bisexual men. Such distinctions add complexity and possible complications to any discussion of the influence of religion and spirituality in the lives of LGBT individuals.

Even as the study of sexual minorities follows sociopolitical trends (e.g., situational homosexuality, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, same-sex marriage), so has the inclusion and/or exclusion of bisexuality in research been impacted by such trends (Rust, 2002). Added to the mix is the use of a variety of theories and perspectives to understand sexuality and sexual orientation. As an example of this trend, recent research has incorporated principles of Positive Psychology in the exploration of non-heteronormative identities (Savin-Williams, 2008). To further this discussion, the authors of this paper will offer a discussion of the unique experiences of male and female bisexuals from a feminist perspective; one that recognizes the religious, sociopolitical, cultural, and historical experiences that have impacted bisexual individuals from both the heterosexual and LGBT communities. This paper will attempt to address these issues via a feminist perspective by exploring the connections between bisexuality, political view, and religiosity/spirituality.

Theories of Bisexuality

Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues suggested that sexual orientation existed on a continuum from homosexuality to heterosexuality and recognized bisexuality as a separate experience (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948/1998). According to Rust (2002), the term bisexual used to refer to the combination of homosexuality and heterosexuality or the sexual attraction towards same-gender as well as different-gender individuals. However, the American Psychological Association (2008) reported that sexual orientation was more than just sexual attraction to women, men, or both; it included emotional and romantic attraction as well. Furthermore, some individuals do not accept the concept of bisexuality at all and are under the assumption that bisexuals are either gays or lesbians who are not ready to come out due to societal homonegativity or they are simply experimenting heterosexuals (Rust, 2002). Even within the lesbian and gay community, some lesbian activists believed that bisexual women were not as invested in the lesbian feminist movement due to their occasional and pseudo-treasonous attraction to men. Additionally, bisexuals have also been stigmatized as being the conduit between gay men and heterosexual women for the spread of HIV/AIDS (Donaldson, 1995; Rust, 2002; Udis-Kessler, 1995).

Nonetheless, with all these disparate views of bisexuality, between the 1960s and 1980s, the movement toward greater bisexual awareness and acceptance began to come to fruition (Donaldson, 1995; Rust, 2002; Udis-Kessler, 1995), and by the 1990s bisexuality was starting to be addressed in both research and practice. However, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the debate over whether or not to include “bisexual” in the title of gay and lesbian

organizations continued and, according to Weiss (2003), this lack of inclusion still occurs in some groups.

Feminist Theory and Bisexual Identity

In considering the bisexual experience of negotiating identities from a feminist perspective, the notions that (a) individuals' experiences are influenced by their sociopolitical context (the personal is political) and (b) individuals should be considered experts of their personal experiences (Unger, 2001), are invaluable. In addition, the feminist theory of intersectionality, [defined as the intersection of social categories that are based on the subjective experiences of privilege and oppression (Bowleg, 2012; Collins, 2000; Frazier, 2012; Warner, 2008)] was used to further understand these overlapping identities. Bisexuals have traditionally been grouped together with gay, lesbian, and transgender individuals and their unique experiences are often overlooked (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007; Meezan & Martin, 2009). While the term 'LGBT community' is often bandied about, as Edwards (2003) suggested, this acronym is often seen more as a media tool and a label to group people together than as a means leading to greater understanding of sexual and gender minorities. Furthermore, Fassinger and Arseneau (2007) described how the intersection of gender and sexual orientation and the labels individuals place on themselves may vary depending on levels of internal and external acceptance, sociopolitical experience, and culture among other variables.

Due to the different experiences among females and males regarding gender-role socialization, Fassinger and Arseneau (2007) argued against using the term bisexual, regardless of gender, since it does not sufficiently address these individuals' unique life experiences. For instance, Savin-Williams and Diamond (2000) found that women were more likely to identify as bisexual and women in general were more likely to identify with this sexual orientation prior to the onset of sexual activity; whereas men tended to label themselves after becoming sexually active. However, since bisexual individuals have been under-studied, the intersection of gender and sexual orientation among other identities (i.e., religious identity) is just starting to be addressed (Jefferies, Dodge, & Sandfort, 2008; Toft, 2009; Unger, 2001).

According to Fassinger and Arseneau (2007), assumptions about bisexual individuals are often made, since there is limited research that focuses solely on the bisexual experience. For example, Weiss (2003) reported that suppositions about bisexuals remain (such as the previously mentioned experimentation, or not being ready to come out as gay or lesbian), as well as assumptions about bisexuals trying to gain more power and privilege by not identifying as gay or lesbian. According to Clarke and Peel (2005), advances in feminist theory as well as gay and lesbian psychology have been made in response to societal stigma and oppression. However, little has been done to address the postulations about bisexual individuals. In addition, Smiley (1997) reported that more awareness of bisexuality as a culture in of itself is needed to improve both research and clinical practice.

As with other hidden identities, Corrigan and Matthews (2003) described the pros and cons gays and lesbians face while deciding how and when to come out. With an invisible identity,

individuals are often assumed to be part of the majority and, according to Ochs (2007), most people do not realize how many LGBT individuals they actually know. Bisexuals may face the same negotiations as gays and lesbians in having to decide between the psychological advantages of disclosing one's identity with such disadvantages as legalized discrimination and oppression. On the other hand, bisexual individuals may have the unique experience in that their privilege and oppression may vary depending on partner status; bisexuals may receive heterosexual benefits when with other-sex partners and experience more oppression when with same-sex partners (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007).

Encouragingly, scholars have recognized the need to be more inclusive of bisexuals within LGBT identity research. For instance, Mohr and Kendra (2011) revised the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale to be more inclusive towards bisexual individuals and to use less pejorative language in their measure. In addition, Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor (2001) reported that although bisexual individual may go through an acceptance process, their identity process differs from that of gays and lesbians. In their study, Weinberg et al. interviewed a group of bisexual individuals at three time intervals (1983, 1988, and 1996) and found that among the changes (i.e., sexual activity, gender of partners, and types of relationships) participants reported over time, half of the respondents were involved with one gender or were in monogamous relationships. Additionally, for a variety of reasons the participants limited their involvement with the bisexual community and were more definitive, over time, with regard to their bisexual identity. The authors also found that with age, bisexual individuals appeared to become more certain of their sexual orientation by reviewing their lives rather than by focusing on their current experiences.

Ochs (2007) reported that she found that some bisexuals do not want to be confined by a label, that neither bisexuality nor gender were binary experiences and, therefore, these terms do not conceptualize these phenomenon. For instance, as one participant reported to Ochs, her partner status was not limited to male or female, but to a relationship with a man, a woman, a transgender individual, or an intersex individual, fully dependent on characteristics other than biological sex. Further, Ochs found that for some individuals, the identification as bisexual or as lesbian may be made for political purposes. Additionally, some bisexual women recognize that lesbian feminists have political clout and choose to identify as lesbian whereas others prefer the label bisexual to prove that there are more than two sexual orientations (Ochs, 2007).

Religious and Spiritual Identity

To gain further insight into the intersection of identities, in this case the impact of religion and spirituality on bisexual experience, the feminist view holds that environment has an impact on individuals' experiences (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000) and is utilized to highlight how the cultural and social norms as experienced by bisexuals may facilitate or impede the integration of identities. Therefore, it is essential to consider the interaction between what bisexual individuals experience, based on the larger culture they live in as well as how they identify themselves (Unger, 2001). Previous researchers have examined the process individuals go through in negotiating identities that were assumed to be mutually exclusive. For instance, Ritter and O'Neill (1989) suggested that gay and lesbian individuals from

Judeo-Christian denominations may believe they have to choose between their religion and sexual orientation, while Hunsberger (1996) found that conservative Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu religions tend to be intolerant towards gay and lesbian individuals. More recently, however, scholars have found that accepting one's sexual orientation does not have to be at the cost of her or his religious identity (Buchanan, Dzelme, & Hecker, 2001; Lease, Horne, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005; Rodriguez, 2006; 2010). Further, some religions (i.e., Neo Paganism) may coincide with a bisexual identity as well as a feminist perspective (Harper, 2010).

According to Cole (2009), feminist theory suggests that the interaction between multiple identities found among an individual's characteristics (e.g., religion, race/ethnicity, political view, sexual orientation, etc.), are inseparable. For example, individuals may experience privileges based on certain aspects of their identities and encounter oppression due to other characteristics. For some bisexuals, these experiences may be mediated by which identities are salient versus those that are not. Specifically, a bisexual Christian in an other-sex relationship may experience more privilege than a bisexual Christian in a same-sex relationship. As per the discussion above regarding bisexual privilege, both of these individuals may experience Christian privilege since they belong to the predominant religion in the United States. However, the latter may face more oppression due to heterosexism in the larger society. Therefore, the complex relationship between bisexuals and their religious and spiritual experience is an area for future exploration due to varying levels of privilege and oppression.

Researchers have started to investigate the relationship between religion, spirituality, and sexual orientation (i.e., Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000), though few have focused specifically on the intersection of religion and bisexuality. Lease et al. (2005) reported that lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals who were involved with gay-affirming religious organizations were less likely to experience internalized homonegativity, were more likely to identify as spiritual, and therefore were less likely to have psychological health concerns. Yip (2007) reviewed data from a number of studies to examine the experiences of Christian and Muslim LGB individuals, and suggested that individuals create their own interpretations free from homonegative sentiments –that connecting with LGB affirming religious groups facilitates the negotiation of multiple identities, and LGB religious organizations have started to work with other LGB groups (both religious and secular) to enhance their political investments. According to Dworkin (1997), Jewish LGB individuals who live in a predominantly Christian society may experience multiple forms of coming out (e.g., disclosing one's sexual orientation as well as disclosing one's religion), and individuals may need to weigh the benefits associated with identity acceptance and the risks of giving up an invisible identity.

While these scholars have utilized research as a tool towards social change for LGBT individuals, the unique experience of bisexual individuals has not sufficiently been addressed. More recently, scholars have been addressing the intersection of bisexuality and religious identity. For example, Jefferies et al. (2008) used grounded theory to explore the experiences of Black bisexual men and found that, although most participants believed that their bisexual identity would not be accepted within their religious communities, others who

attended gay and lesbian affirming religious groups believed their bisexuality would be accepted. This study also found that most individuals differentiated between their spirituality and their religion's intolerance towards LGB individuals. Specifically, participants tended to use their religion or faith to manage the stress of negotiating intersecting identities, whereas others discussed the protection they received from God (Jefferies et al., 2008). In agreement with Lease et al. (2005), Jefferies et al. described the psychological benefits that affirming religious or spiritual experiences may have for Black bisexual men. Toft (2009) qualitatively examined the experience of bisexual Christians who were in the process of negotiating their multiple identities and found that bisexual individuals vary in their self-definition; involvement in religion was either limited or re-defined, and the fluidity of their bisexuality facilitated negotiating their sexual orientation with their religious identity. Although Jefferies et al. and Toft have started to research the religious experiences of bisexual individuals, more research is needed.

Political Identity

As discussed above, the sociopolitical context of an individual's experience shapes their perspective. In feminist theory this is referred to as “the personal is political” (Unger, 2001). Although political identity is not a social category within the theory of intersectionality; it may influence how individuals identify. According to Crenshaw (1989; 1994), political intersectionality describes how experiences with oppression tend to result in political activation. Udis-Kessler (1995) described how, during the 1970s, feminists used to believe that sexual relationships with men could be used to fight against patriarchy; thus, lesbians were not considered useful in the movement. But later, lesbian-feminist groups suggested that woman should always be put first that being a lesbian was a way to practice feminism, and this led to the “women-only” trend of lesbian-feminism. In turn, lesbian feminists did not view bisexual women as committed to the cause; bisexuals were viewed as imposters. This triggered the creation of bisexual feminism (Udis-Kessler, 1995). With the advent of bisexual feminism, bisexual organizations started to develop, the bisexual movement became a separate political force and, by the 1980s, bisexuals were fighting for recognition in gay and lesbian communities, resulting in the inclusion of the “B” in LGBT organizations (Udis-Kessler, 1995).

Similarly, Donaldson (1995) discussed the bisexual movement from the male perspective and addressed how the Quaker religion facilitated his experience. According to Donaldson, he led a discussion on bisexuality at an annual Quaker conference; this resulted in the formation of a bisexual Quaker committee. In the 1970s, this religiously-based group fought for bisexual rights within other religious organizations. In the 1970s, although bisexuality was described in the popular media as “chic”, in the larger gay and lesbian communities there was limited acceptance of bisexual individuals (Donaldson, 1995). It was during this time that awareness for the bisexual movement was bolstered by articles about the fluidity of bisexuality and how being bisexual defied dichotomous labels. However, this support did not last very long, and stigma regarding bisexuality began to rise. According to Donaldson, the number of bisexual men who were actively involved in the bisexual movement may have been influenced by the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s (e.g., bisexual men were stigmatized as AIDS carriers) and lesbian feminists' refusal to work with men. Although it may be argued

that lesbian feminists refusals had less to do with gender than differing and, at times, fractious, sociopolitical agendas between lesbians and gay men. Nonetheless, fewer men remained involved in the movement.

According to Rust (2002), due to the bisexual political movement, researchers were more focused on the HIV epidemic, same-sex marriage, and bisexual culture. However, now that more scholars have included bisexual individuals in their research or have become invested in understanding bisexuality, research has moved past explaining sociopolitical assumptions to understanding the bisexual experience. For instance, Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, and Braun (2006) found that although youth who oscillate between gay or lesbian and bisexual identities tend to move towards a gay or lesbian identity over time, those who identified as bisexual to begin with were more likely to maintain this identity. Hence, researchers have determined that bisexuality is a separate identity rather than a transitional phase (Rosario et al., 2006; Rust, 2007). However, more research is needed to understand these nuances of bisexuality.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a feminist concept with historical roots partially credited to the Combahee River Collective (Cole, 2009). This Black feminist group focused on the intersection of race, sex, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, among other identities which influenced their political identity and their desire to fight against multiple forms of oppression (Combahee River Collective, 1982). The Collective recognized that the lesbian feminist movement left too many people behind and suggested that the fight against racism, sexism, heterosexism, and class oppression needed to occur simultaneously.

Cole (2009) suggested that when considering intersectionality, psychologists should consider the following questions: “who is included... what role does inequality play... where are the similarities?” These same questions apply to LGBT research and, more specifically, to bisexual experience. Perhaps due to the interaction between sexual orientation and gender as well as political power, there are times when researching LGBT individuals together makes sense as long as each group is considered equally. However, the question of inequality should also be considered.

Even within the LGBT “community,” inequality remains; and although bisexuals have fought for inclusion within the larger group, their needs have often been excluded. Cole (2009) proposed that subgroups of people who have been neglected should be given a voice. Therefore, the experience of bisexual individuals as a unique group should be considered independently rather than comparing and contrasting their experience to gay, lesbian, transgender, or heterosexual individuals. Further, when considering the inequality, scholars must consider the intersection of a bisexual identity with other relevant identities to consider the interplay of privilege and oppression which may be experienced simultaneously. As discussed above, a bisexual Christian man who is partnered with a female may choose to keep his bisexual identity invisible in order to maintain power and privilege. However, a bisexual Jewish woman in a relationship with a female may have to negotiate her identities based on the interplay of power and oppression.

Lastly, Cole (2009) suggests that to understand intersectionality, researchers must also address the similarities between and within groups. By focusing solely on the diversity within groups it is easy to overlook the similarities between groups. For instance, the phrase ‘coming out’; is often associated with LGBT individuals – but, as previously noted, individuals with other hidden identities may also have a coming out experience (Dworkin, 1997). Therefore, by considering areas of commonality we can start to break down boundaries. This paper will thus attempt to address these issues by exploring the intersectionality between three key identities – bisexuality, religion/spirituality and political view.

The Current Study

Although there is a small but growing body of work that examines the religious and spiritual lives of bisexuals (i.e., Donaldson, 1995; Harper, 2010; Rodriguez, 2006; Toft, 2009), there is a strong need for additional empirical research (employing both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies) to better explore the intersections of bisexual and religious/spiritual identities. Increasingly, quantitative methods have been used by psychologists to examine feminist concerns, especially when it comes to examining complex relationships (Peplau & Conrad, 1989; Warner, 2008). The present paper is an exploratory study that seeks to use the lens of feminist theory to assess the relationship between bisexual, religious/spiritual, and political identities. Motivated by the feminist notions that the personal is political and that individuals are the experts of their own experiences (Unger, 2001), the specific aim of this study is to better understand the intersection of multiple identities experienced by bisexual individuals. Specifically, this research was designed to examine bisexuality as it intersects with both political and religious/spiritual identities. What is the relationship between bisexual identity and religious/spiritual identity? What is the relationship between bisexual identity and political identity? What is the relationship between political identity and religious/spiritual identity? What demographic variables play a role in influencing these three identities? These are the research questions that this current study will attempt to answer.

The specific aims and research questions for this study were assessed by conducting an archival secondary analysis of data from the Northern California Health Study (NCHS) conducted at the University of California, Davis (UC Davis). Dr. Greg Herek and his colleagues, from August 1994 through December 1995, conducted this study to better understand the relationship between hate crime victimization, non-hate crime victimization, psychological well-being, world-view, and victimization related beliefs within a large sample of gay men, lesbians and bisexuals, as well as a small number of transgendered and heterosexuals (Herek, Cogan, & Gillis, 2002; Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009; Herek, Gillis, Cogan, & Glunt, 1998).

One of Herek's colleagues on the NCHS, Eric Glunt, was interested in assessing religiosity and spirituality within a GLB sample. Thus, embedded within the NCHS was a battery of religious and spirituality questions that were randomly given to a third of the study's sample ($n = 761$). These data were never analyzed by the NCHS team, thus it serves as an ideal data set to conduct an analysis of intersecting bisexual, political, and religious/spiritual identities

as there was a sizeable subsample of bisexual individuals who participated in the survey. For additional information about the methodology utilized during the NCHS, including detailed descriptions of the non-probability sampling strategy, data collection, and the structure of the survey instrument, please see Herek, Gillis, and Cogan (1999; 2009) and Herek, Gillis, Cogan, and Glunt (1998).

Method

Participants

The sample size for the NCHS was 2,259, with 1,170 women and 1,089 men (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999). Of these participants, a sub-sample of 761 individuals answered a series of questions regarding their spirituality, religious beliefs, and religious behaviors. Of these 761 participants, 120 self-identified as bisexual. This subgroup of 120 bisexual individuals ($n = 67$ females and $n = 53$ males) forms the research sample for the current paper.

Measures

The measures used in this study were all taken directly from the religious/spirituality version of the NCHS survey and were divided into four subsets: demographic variables, measures of political identity, measures of bisexual identity, and measures of religious and spiritual identity. There was very little missing data in the NCHS dataset, but to ensure maximum power for subsequent data analysis, mean replacement was used to correct any missing data points found within each of the continuous variables.

Demographic variables—The demographic variables of interest were age, level of education, sex, race/ethnicity, and satisfaction with their standard of living. Because the sample was predominantly White, the race/ethnicity variable was recoded for analysis purposes into a binary dummy variable with 1=White and 0=non-White. **Bisexual identity variables.** The specific measures of bisexual identity are described below:

- *Degree Out Regarding Bisexuality* to family, friends and co-workers (a single 10-point Likert scale item ranging from not out at all [0] to completely out to everyone [9]).
- *Age Came Out to Self* (continuous variable in years), *Have a Choice in Being Bisexual* (a single 5-point Likert scale item ranging from no choice at all [0] to a lot of choice [4]).
- *LGB Community Consciousness* (scale consisting of five, 5-point Likert scale items [0-4]; potential scale range = 0 to 20, with a 20 indicating a high level of involvement in the gay, lesbian and bisexual community).
- *LGB Self-Esteem* (scale consisting of five, 5-point Likert scale items [0-4]; potential scale range = 0 to 20, with a 20 indicating a high level of self-esteem regarding one's sexual orientation).

Participants were also asked about *Bisexual Attraction* – specifically whether they found themselves attracted more to the same sex, to the other-sex or were equally attracted to both women and men. For analysis purposes each of these three attraction targets were recoded

into binary dummy variables: attracted to the same sex (1=Yes, 0=No), attracted to the other-sex (1=Yes, 0=No) and equally attracted to both sexes (1=Yes, 0=No). **Political identity variables.** Political identity was assessed by asking participants their political view (a single 7-point Likert scale item ranging from very conservative [1], to middle of the road [4], through very liberal [7]). Participants were also asked to describe their political affiliation (Democrat, Republican, Independent, etc.). Given that the data was primarily drawn from Northern California (a “blue state” that historically leans Democratic in national elections), political affiliation was recoded into a binary dummy variable where 1=Democrat and 0=Not Democrat.

Religious and spirituality identity factor variables—For the purposes of the current paper we analyzed 16 religiosity and spirituality questions from the NCHS survey. Although the Cronbach's alpha reliability of this 16-item scale as a whole was an acceptable .686, the wide diversity and theoretical range of the questions precluded using the total religiosity/spirituality score for analysis purposes. An exploratory Principal Components factor analysis was conducted using a Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization. This factor analysis resulted in six distinct factors, each with eigenvalues greater than one. Additionally, the resulting factor model showed clear theoretical underpinnings and strong face validity, and accounted for 72% of the total variance.

The six factors uncovered included the following:

1. *Religiosity* – consisted of five items including “My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life” and “I enjoy reading religious or spiritual books.”
2. *Spirituality* – consisted of two items including “I have a sense of harmony with the universe” and “I feel a spiritual connection to all living things.”
3. *Religion as Oppression* – consisted of three items including “Traditional religion has been a repressive force in women's lives” and “I believe that organized religion has done more harm to the world than good.”
4. *Alternative Religious Beliefs* – consisted of two items including “The idea of a female divine or goddess is an important part of my spiritual beliefs” and “I think that it is important to center my spiritual beliefs around the idea of Mother Earth and fertility.”
5. *Religion Socially Important* – consisted of two items including “Being involved in religious activities is an important way to develop good social relationships” and “Being involved with a church or synagogue helps to establish a person in the community.”
6. *Atheism* – consisted of two items including “Spiritual and religious beliefs do little more than mask reality” and “Religion is little more than a kind of social control over people.”

For data analysis purposes, the six factors were converted into scale variables by summing the individual scale items that loaded on each factor. Please note that items with negative

factor loadings were reverse-coded to ensure similar directionality for each of the resulting factor scale variables and due to mean replacement there were no missing data issues to address. The descriptive statistics for each of the six factor variables can be found in Table 1 and, as can be seen, each had an acceptable reliability coefficient

- **Other religious and spirituality identity variables.** In addition to the six religious/spiritual factor variables (previous section), there were several other religious variables assessed: *Church Attendance* in the past year - This was a six-point Likert scale item ranging from never (0) to more than one time per week (5). *Current Religious Beliefs* - A continuous five-point variable broken down as follows: 1) I belong to a religion, 2) I believe in God, but don't belong to an organized religion, 3) I believe in the spiritual, but not religion or God, 4) I am an agnostic, and 5) I am an atheist.
- Participants were also asked about their experiences with *Religious Support* – an aggregate score of 3, four-point Likert scale items (0-3) measuring support from a specific church/religious group, support from a clergy member, and support from someone who is an active participant in organized religion. The potential range of this scale was 0 to 9, with a score of 9 indicating high levels of religious support. Participants were also asked if they had *Ever Attended an LGB-Positive Religious Organization*. This construct was coded as a binary dummy variable with 0=No and 1=Yes.
- Participants were also asked what religion they currently identified with today. For analysis purposes this question was recoded into two different binary dummy variables: Currently identify as Christian (1=Yes, 0=No) and currently identify with any established religion (1=Yes, 0=No).

Data Analysis Plan

In addition to running frequencies and descriptive statistics for all identity variables of interest, the exploratory multivariate analyses conducted for this study began with a series of correlational analyses assessing the relationship between the demographic variables and the bisexual, political, and religious/spiritual identity measures. After determining which demographic variables could potentially influence subsequent analyses, we then ran partial correlations to control for any statistically significant demographic covariates uncovered during the previous wave of analyses. We relied on the standard .05 cutoff to determine statistical significance of all the above-mentioned results, and also used a .10 cut-off to identify results that approached a trend level of significance.

Results

Basic Demographic and Identity Information

We present the descriptive statistics for all of the continuous demographic, political identity, bisexual identity, and religious/spiritual identity variables in Table 1. As noted previously, 55.8% of the bisexual participants in this current study were female. Racially, the participants were predominately White ($n = 81$; 67.5%), with 13 (10.8%) identifying as mixed race, twelve (10%) as Hispanic, seven (5.8%) as Black, four (3.3%) as Native

American, and three (2.5%) as Asian. As can be seen in Table 1, the sample had an average age of 32, was highly educated (only three had less than a high school education; 83% had at least some college or more), and were generally only somewhat satisfied with their standard of living. Intercorrelations between the demographic variables uncovered several relationships between age and several of the other demographic variables. Age was positively correlated with higher levels of education ($r = .388, p = .0001$) and showed trend-level positive correlations with being White ($r = .164, p = .074$), being male ($r = .168, p = .067$), and being more satisfied with one's standard of living ($r = .15, p = .10$).

Bisexual identity—Seventy-two percent ($n = 60$) of the bisexual participants in the current study reported that they found themselves more attracted to the same sex, 19% ($n = 23$) found themselves more attracted to the other-sex, and 21% ($n = 25$) were equally attracted to both men and women. The bisexual participants in this current study scored in the middle of both the LGB community conscious and self-esteem measures, and they tended to believe that being bisexual was not a choice (scoring on the low end of this particular measure). Study participants also tended to score on the low end regarding how open (or “out”) they were regarding their bisexual orientation to their family, friends and co-workers.

Political Identity—Given that the sample was drawn predominantly from Northern California, it comes as no surprise that the majority of the research participants identified as Democrats ($n = 66; 55%$) and leaned more toward the liberal end of the political spectrum. Fifteen of the participants identified as Independent (12.5%), ten as belonging to the Green Party (8.3%), eight as Republican (6.7%) and four as a “Mixed” political affiliation (3.3%). While ten participants identified as having an “Other” political affiliation (i.e. Libertarian, Peace and Freedom, “Other”), seven participants (5.8%) identified as having no political affiliation at all.

Religious/Spiritual Identity—Over 78% of the bisexual participants in the current study ($n = 94$) did not currently identify with an established religion. Of the 22% who did, eighteen (15% of the total sample) identified as Christian (with eleven Protestants, four Catholics, and three Christians –denomination unspecified), seven (5.8%) identified as belonging to a non-Western religion (i.e. Buddhist, Pagan, or Wiccan), with only one bisexual individual identifying as Jewish. Interestingly, while there was not much current involvement in established religion, when dealing with issues of belief only 7.5% of the sample identified as atheist ($n = 9$) and only 5.8% identified as agnostic ($n = 7$). Over 84% of the bisexual individuals surveyed reported some level of religious and/or spiritual belief: 21.7% noted that they belong to an established religion ($n = 26$); 34.2% ($n = 41$) believed in God but did not belong to an organized religion; and 28.3% ($n = 34$) believed in the spiritual, but not religion or God. Seventeen participants ($n = 14.2%$) noted that they had once belonged to an LGB-positive religious organization at some point in their lives.

Determining Significant Covariates for Subsequent Analyses

The next step in the multivariate analyses was to determine if any of the demographic variables of interest needed to be used as covariates in the subsequent analyses of the

bisexual, political, and religious/spiritual identity measures. For the measures of political identity, correlational analyses showed statistically significant relationships between sex and political view ($r = -.30, p = .001$), level of education and political view ($r = .225, p = .014$), and level of education and being a Democrat ($r = .21, p = .021$).

These results indicate that the female participants tended to be more politically liberal, whereas the male participants tended to be more politically conservative. Additionally, those with higher levels of education tended to identify as Democrats and leaned more towards the liberal end of the political spectrum. There were no statistically significant relationships between the demographic variables of race, age, satisfaction with standard of living, or the measures of political identity.

For the measures of bisexual identity, correlational analyses showed statistically significant relationships between sex and choice ($r = -.201, p = .028$), and between sex and age at which the participants decided they were bisexual ($r = -.277, p = .002$). These results indicate that women tended to view their sexual orientation as more of a choice than men, and women tended to be older than men before deciding that they were bisexual. Level of education was significantly correlated with age the participant first told someone else that they were bisexual ($r = .233, p = .01$) and age the participant decided they were bisexual ($r = .194, p = .034$).

These results indicate that those participants with higher levels of education tended to be older before deciding that they were bisexual and then telling others about their sexual orientation. The participant's age was significantly related to LGB self-esteem ($r = -.183, p = .046$) and the age they first told someone else that they were bisexual ($r = .271, p = .003$), while also indicating a trend level of significance with the age that they decided they were bisexual ($r = .15, p = .10$). These results indicate that older bisexual study participants tended to have lower levels of self-esteem regarding their sexual orientation and that they tended to wait until they were older before disclosing their bisexuality to others or coming out as bisexual to themselves. There were no statistically significant results for either the race or the satisfaction with standard of living variables.

For the measures of religious and spiritual identity, age was significantly (inversely) correlated with having alternate religious beliefs ($r = -.204, p = .026$) and positively associated with attending religious services ($r = .190, p = .037$). It showed trend levels of significance with currently identifying as belonging to an established religion ($r = .161, p = .078$), ever belonging to an LGB-positive religious organization ($r = .153, p = .096$), and currently identifying as Christian ($r = .168, p = .066$). Sex was significantly correlated with viewing religion as oppression ($r = -.236, p = .009$), having alternate religious beliefs ($r = -.178, p = .051$), attending worship services ($r = .181, p = .048$), and identifying as Christian ($r = .237, p = .009$). Level of education was significantly related to viewing religion as oppression ($r = .212, p = .02$), atheism ($r = -.238, p = .009$), and religious support ($r = .188, p = .04$), while showing trend levels of significance with church attendance ($r = .160, p = .08$) and having alternate religious beliefs ($r = -.173, p = .059$).

For the bisexuals participating in the current study, these results indicate that being older is related to a lower likelihood of having alternate religious beliefs, belonging to an established religion, currently identifying as Christian, ever belonging to an LGB-positive religious organization and attending church more often. Being female was significantly related to viewing religion as oppression, having alternate religious beliefs, attending worship services more often, and currently identifying as Christian. A higher level of education was related to viewing religion as oppression, not identifying as an atheist, receiving more religious support, attending worship services more often, and not having alternate religious beliefs. Being White was only significantly correlated with higher levels of spirituality ($r = .222, p = .015$) and with viewing religion as oppression ($r = .185, p = .044$), while standard of living was only correlated at the trend level of significance with being an atheist ($r = -.153, p = .095$).

As a result of the correlational analyses discussed above, we determined that that the demographic variables of age, education, and sex would be used as covariates in the subsequent analyses to follow.

Bisexual, Political and Religious/Spiritual Identity Analyses

The partial correlation analyses of selected bisexual and political identity measures by selected religious/spiritual identity measures, controlling for the statistically significant covariates of age, level of education and sex, are presented in Table 2. There were no statistically significant results for being a Democrat, religion as socially important, being an atheist, currently being Christian, ever attending an LGB-positive religious organization, and currently belonging to an established religion; therefore, these variables were dropped from the resulting analysis. However, we uncovered multiple statistically significant and trend level findings. Participants who viewed bisexuality as a choice had higher levels of religious/spiritual belief. Those who were older when they decided that they were bisexual were more likely to view religion as oppression and to have received higher levels of religious support. Those who were older when they began disclosing their bisexuality to others were less likely to have alternative religious beliefs. Those who scored higher on the measure of community consciousness showed higher levels of religiosity and higher levels of spirituality, and were more likely to have alternative religious beliefs. Those who scored higher on the measure of LGB self-esteem showed higher levels of spirituality, and were more likely to have alternative religious beliefs. Those bisexual participants who were more open about their sexual orientation showed higher levels of both religiosity and spirituality, were more likely to have alternate religious beliefs, and were less likely to attend church regularly. Finally, those with a more liberal political view showed higher levels of spirituality and were also more likely to have alternate religious beliefs.

We ran additional analyses assessing whether the bisexual participants were more attracted to same sex partners, to other-sex partners, or to both sexes equally. We first correlated the binary attraction target variables with the demographic variables (race, age, education, sex, and satisfaction with standard of living) to determine whether any of the demographic variables needed to be included as covariates in the subsequent analyses. Those bisexual participants who identified as being more attracted to the same sex tended to be older ($r = .$

151, $p = .099$), had significantly higher levels of education ($r = .183$, $p = .045$), were more likely to be male ($r = .212$, $p = .02$), and tended to be more satisfied with their standard of living ($r = .197$, $p = .031$). Those bisexual participants who identified as being more attracted to the other sex tended to be less satisfied with their standard of living ($r = -.153$; $p = .096$), whereas those who identified as being equally attracted to both men and women were more likely to be younger ($r = -.207$, $p = .023$), have lower levels of education ($r = -.178$, $p = .05$), and tended to be female ($r = -.167$, $p = .068$). Although attraction was not related to race, these results indicate that we needed to use the demographic variables of age, education, sex, and satisfaction with standard of living as covariates in the partial correlational analyses to follow.

Table 3 presents the partial correlations of attraction target by selected bisexual, political, and religious/spiritual identity measures, controlling for the statistically significant covariates of age, education, sex and satisfaction with standard of living. While many of the identity variables of interest were dropped from the resulting table due to a lack of statistically significant findings, we nonetheless observed multiple statistically significant results. Those bisexual participants who self-reported that they were more attracted to members of the same sex were less likely to view their sexual orientation as a choice, were younger when they decided that they were bisexual, were more open about their sexual orientation with their friends, family, and co-workers, were less likely to view religion as being socially important, and were more likely to score higher on the belief statement. Those bisexual participants who self-reported that they were more attracted to members of the other-sex were more likely to view their sexual orientation as a choice, were older when they decided that they were bisexual, were less open about their sexual orientation, and showed higher levels of spirituality. Those bisexuals who reported that they were equally attracted to both men and women were more likely to see bisexuality as a choice and were more likely to view religion as being socially important.

Discussion

Relying on the feminist theoretical notions that the personal is political and that individuals are the experts of their own experiences (Unger, 2001), that the environment impacts an individual's choices (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000), and that the interaction between multiple identities found among an individual's characteristics should not always be considered separately (Cole, 2009), the present study is one of the first to quantitatively explore the connections between bisexual, political, and religious/spiritual identities. Relying upon a sizeable N of self-identified male and female bisexuals, this exploratory, archival secondary data analysis uncovered a number of significant findings.

Consistent with long-standing assertions that experiences of bisexual individuals may be heavily influenced by their gendered experience, women were much more likely to experience their bisexual attractions as a choice and come to self-identify at later ages, perhaps reflecting assertions that women who are attracted to the same gender are more likely to experience perceived shifts in their identities and attractions (consistent with emerging work on sexual fluidity in women). Given the more liberal political views, endorsement of alternative religious beliefs, and greater perception of religion as an

oppressive force, it is also possible that the historical marginalization of women in many branches of Christianity is not surprising to be more common among the women bisexuals in the sample.

Not surprisingly, the experience of religion as oppressive was linked to older age at first self-identification as bisexual, while alternative (LGB-affirming) religious beliefs were linked to earlier disclosure, higher community consciousness, self-esteem and more Democrat political views, suggesting a possible buffering effect of exposure to more LGB-affirming experiences in one's environment to the challenges of bisexual identity development.

Bisexual individuals who were predominantly attracted to those of the other sex endorsed items that suggested a more complex identity development process in terms of lower degrees of outness, older age at self-identification, and greater perception of their orientation as a choice. In contrast, those who were primarily attracted to the same sex were more likely experience their bisexuality as innate, which was associated with earlier markers of internal identity development, greater disclosure that may come with a pattern of attractions that is more similar to gay and lesbian identified peers. Those with equal attraction to men and women demonstrated their own unique patterns regarding a tendency to endorse their orientation as a choice (similar to those with primarily other-sex attractions) yet showed no clear patterns in terms of other identity variables, perhaps indicating the diverse experiences of this under-researched subgroup.

Study Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

As with nearly all research, this study has several methodological limitations that should be taken into account in subsequent research projects on the religious and spiritual lives of bisexuals. Please note that the limitations found within the current study are presented along with suggestions for future social scientific research that address each of the drawbacks listed below.

Racial minorities were not well represented, nor is the study inclusive of non-Western religious experiences—Racial/ethnic minorities were not well represented in the current study as almost 68% of the sample ($n = 81$) self-identified as White. While most likely a demographic artifact of collecting the data primarily from Northern California, future research in this area needs to be more sensitive to the inclusion of racial/ethnic minorities. While we are pleased to note that the literature on LGBT people of faith continues to expand, the majority of the research (both qualitative and quantitative) conducted to date focuses primarily on Christianity and to a lesser extent on Judaism. Future research should attempt to expand the study of LGBT religiosity and spirituality to non-Western religions such as Buddhism, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam and even Neo-Pagan religions such as Wicca and Shamanism.

Non-random sampling—Historically, it has been extremely difficult to conduct research using a representative sample of gay men and lesbians (Gonsiorek, 1991). An unknown subset of the gay and lesbian population is not open about their sexual orientation and is unwilling (or unable) to volunteer to participate in social scientific research. Gonsiorek

(1991) also points out that previous research has shown that sexual minorities who do volunteer for psychological research are not always representative of the larger LGBT population. Because of these inherent difficulties, random sampling and/or random selection are rarely viable options in social scientific research studies of the LGBT community. Care has been taken, however, to insure that any generalizations made regarding this research may not necessarily apply to bisexual individuals as a population. The general nature and sheer variety of non-probability sampling techniques used by Herek, Glunt and their colleagues have ensured that, while the sample collected was not a probability sample, it was probably one of the stronger non-probability samples of GLB individuals ever collected during the course of psychological research. Future research that relies on such large datasets is imperative to enable us to continue to increase our understanding of the role of faith in the lives of LGBT individuals.

There are drawbacks to using and relying on someone else's data—While the dataset utilized for this research project was one of largest and most complete religious and spiritual datasets ever compiled on LGB individuals to date, the data contained gaps that we were not able to overcome in the study design and secondary data analyses described here, including the fact that the scale items compiled by Glunt do not correspond with any established measures of religiosity or spirituality. Additionally, it is important to note that correlation is not causation – while the relationships uncovered here are fascinating and warrant future exploration, additional research using diverse methodological approaches is needed to establish causality between the variables described here.

Conclusion

Despite the study limitations noted above, this current project had multiple strengths and advances the current literature on bisexuality in several unique ways. First, it introduces a feminist theoretical framework to the psychological study of bisexual religiosity and spirituality. Second, it expands our understanding of the religious and spiritual lives of bisexuals. Third, it expands our understanding of the relationships between political outlook, sexual orientation, and religiosity/spirituality. Finally, it looks across multiple identities (bisexual, political, religious/spiritual) to better understand the multiplicity and intersectionality within bisexual lives.

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Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for the Continuous Demographic, Bisexual, Political and Religious/Spiritual Identity Measures (N = 120)

Scale	# of Items	Alpha	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Demographic Variables						
Age	1	N/A	32.27	11.72	18	82
Education	1	N/A	5.93	2.56	2	11
Satisfaction with Standard of Living	1	N/A	1.34	.83	0	3
Bisexual Identity						
LGB Community Consciousness	5	.70*	14.90	3.30	4	20
LGB Self Esteem	5	.87*	11.97	4.72	0	20
Choice in Being Bisexual	1	N/A	1.62	1.49	0	4
Age Decided was Bisexual	1	N/A	17.22	6.72	0	50
Age First Told Another about Bisexuality	1	N/A	20.33	6.29	9	52
Degree Out to Others re: Bisexuality	1	N/A	3.83	2.84	0	9
Political Identity						
Political View	1	N/A	5.38	1.37	2	7
Religious/Spiritual Identity Factors						
Factor 1 – Religiosity	5	.78	16.96	4.80	5	25
Factor 2 – Spirituality	2	.81	7.73	1.87	2	10
Factor 3 – Oppression	3	.65	11.58	2.46	3	15
Factor 4 – Alternate Religious Beliefs	2	.71	5.81	2.16	2	10
Factor 5 – Religion Socially Important	2	.67	6.28	1.88	2	10
Factor 6 – Atheism	2	.69	6.13	2.03	2	10
Other Religious/Spiritual Identity Variables						
Church Attendance	1	N/A	1.18	1.43	0	5
Belief Statement	1	N/A	2.51	1.25	1	6
Religious Support	3	.85	2.28	2.63	0	9

* Reliability coefficient reported in Herek, Gillis, and Cogan (1999) for the full NCHS sample (N = 2,259).

Table 2
Partial Correlations of the Bisexual and Political Identity Measures by Selected Religious/Spiritual Identity Measures, Controlling for Age, Level of Education and Sex (N=120)

	Factor1: Religiosity	Factor2: Spirituality	Factor3: Oppression	Factor4: Alt Rel Bel	Church Attendance	Belief Statement	Religious Support
Bisexuality as a Choice	.044	.050	.074	.087	.046	.202#	.091
Age Decided was Bisexual	.063	.035	.151+	-.041	.033	.031	.182#
Age Told Others was Bisexual	.013	-.025	.051	-.154+	-.093	.064	.085
LGB Community Consciousness	.187#	.239*	.049	.265*	-.079	-.034	.012
LGB Self Esteem	.016	.166+	.090	.250*	-.135	.137	.054
Out to Family & Friends	.152+	.199#	.085	.177+	-.217#	-.039	.079
Political View	.050	.292**	.117	.315**	.000	.110	.073

+ Significant at the .10 level

Significant at the .05 level

* Significant at the .01 level

** Significant at .001 level

Table 3
**Partial Correlations of Attraction Target by Selected Bisexual, Political and Religious/
 Spiritual Identity Measures, Controlling for Age, Level of Education, Sex, and
 Satisfaction with Standard of Living (N=120)**

	Attracted Same Sex	Attracted Other Sex	Attracted Both Equally
Bisexuality as a Choice	-.399**	.241*	.234 [#]
Age Decided was Bisexual	-.165 ⁺	.167 ⁺	.030
Out to Family & Friends	.191 [#]	-.163 ⁺	-.065
Spirituality	-.066	.181 [#]	-.101
Religion Socially Important	-.199 [#]	.076	.161 ⁺
Belief Statement	-.209 [#]	.123	.125

⁺ Significant at the .10 level

[#] Significant at the .05 level

* Significant at the .01 level

** Significant at .0001 level