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Reasons for Non-Disclosure of Sexual Orientation among Behaviorally-Bisexual Men: Non-disclosure as Stigma Management

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Abstract

Although bisexual men are known to be less likely to disclose their sexual orientation to others than gay men, the reasons why bisexual men choose or feel unable to disclose have received minimal research attention. To examine the reasons behaviorally-bisexual men offer for not disclosing to their friends, family, and female partners, in-depth interviews were conducted with an ethnically-diverse sample of 203 men who had not disclosed their same-sex behavior to their female sexual partners in New York City. Men were recruited from multiple venues and online sources using a targeted sampling approach. Transcripts were thematically analyzed using Atlas.ti software. Contrary to the theory that non-disclosure is due to uncertainty about one's sexual identity, the reasons offered for non-disclosure revealed that it was largely a method to avoid stigmatizing reactions from others. Men reported a number of specific reasons for nondisclosure, including: 1) anticipation of negative emotional reactions; 2) anticipation of negative changes in relationships; 3) belief that others held stigmatizing attitudes toward homosexuality; 4) prior experience with negative reactions to disclosure; 5) wanting to maintain others' perceptions of him; 6) fear that those told would disclose to additional people; and 7) fear of rejection due to culture or religion. These findings provide insights into the reasons why many behaviorally-bisexual men choose not to disclose, potential reasons why bisexual and gay men differ in the extent to which they disclose, and potential reasons why some bisexual men report greater emotional distress than gay men. Further, they suggest that greater attention needs to be placed on addressing the stigmatizing contexts that confront bisexual men and providing them with strategies to manage stigma.

Keywords

bisexuality; disclosure; stigma; sexual orientation; sexual identity

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INTRODUCTION

The disclosure of sexual orientation, and the related issues of openness about one's sexual identity and the coming-out process, has been a major and enduring focus of research on sexual minority men (e.g., Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; Pachankis, 2007; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2009; Schope, 2002; Troiden, 1989). Although a large body of research has addressed disclosure among gay men, this work has largely excluded bisexual men or treated gay and bisexual men as a single group (see Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2013 for critique). This is highly problematic as research has consistently documented that bisexual men (both self-identified and behaviorally-bisexual) are significantly less likely to disclose their sexual orientation than gay men (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Herek, Norton, Allen, & Sims, 2010; Lewis, Derlega, Brown, Rose, & Henson, 2009; Stokes, Vanable, & McKirnan, 1997; Wheeler, Lauby, Liu, Van Sluytman, & Murrill, 2008). Several studies in fact have suggested that the majority of behaviorally-bisexual men do not disclose their sexual orientation to their female partners (Agyemang, Wallace, & Liebman, 2008; Benoit & Koken, 2012; Kalichman, Roffman, Picciano, & Bolan, 1998; Stokes, McKirnan, Doll, & Burzette, 1996; Weatherburn, Hickson, Reid, Davies, & Crosier, 1998), to their friends and family members (Kalichman et al., 1998; Schrimshaw, Siegel, Downing, & Parsons, 2013), or to anyone (Reback & Larkins, 2010; Schrimshaw, Downing, Cohn, & Siegel, 2014). Non-disclosure by behaviorally-bisexual men is also associated with poorer mental health (Schrimshaw et al., 2013), more internalized homophobia (Lewis et al., 2009; Schrimshaw et al., 2013), and a greater likelihood of unprotected vaginal sex (Stokes et al., 1996; Tieu et al., 2012). Despite this considerable body of evidence that behaviorally-bisexual men often choose not to disclose their sexual orientation to others, little research has examined why this is so (Benoit & Koken, 2012; Malebranche, Arriola, Jenkins, Dauria, & Patel, 2010). Thus, the current study sought to understand the factors that contribute to non-disclosure among behaviorally-bisexual men.

The majority of theories on the disclosure of sexual orientation (and the larger coming out process) have tended to focus on the benefits of disclosure and openness about one's sexual orientation (e.g., Cass, 1979; Pachankis, 2007; Rosario, Hunter, Maguen, Gwadz, & Smith, 2001; Troiden, 1989). They suggest that disclosure of one's sexual orientation is part of identity development in which disclosure tends to occur after an individual becomes more confident and self-accepting of his sexual identity. From this theoretical perspective, non-disclosure is a result of individuals continuing to experience identity uncertainty. Indeed, to the extent that some behaviorally-bisexual men continue to think of themselves as heterosexual or are uncertain about their sexual identity, they might view disclosure as premature or unnecessary. Behaviorally-bisexual men who view their same-sex behaviors as temporary may likewise view disclosure as unnecessary. However, to the extent that these theoretical assumptions are based on stereotypes about bisexual men being uncertain about their sexual orientation or a temporary identity (Zivony & Lobel, 2014), these theories may not explain the true reasons for non-disclosure among behaviorally-bisexual men.

Disclosure of sexual orientation is not without potential negative consequences (Corrigan & Matthews, 2003; Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006). As Goffman (1963) and others (Cain, 1991) have noted, revealing one's same-sex sexual orientation can potentially place oneself

at risk for stigmatizing responses of ridicule, rejection, and victimization. Therefore, individuals who recognize they may be stigmatized for revealing their sexual orientation might engage in defensive strategies such as information control, covering, and passing to avoid stigmatization (Goffman, 1963). This suggests that non-disclosure may be a stigma management strategy to avoid negative reactions. Behaviorally-bisexual men may be at particular risk for stigmatizing reactions due to heterosexuals' more stigmatizing attitudes toward bisexual men relative to gay men (Herek, 2002), widespread negative stereotypes about bisexual men (Zivony & Lobel, 2014), stigmatization with by the gay/lesbian community (Cox, Bimbi, & Parsons, 2013), negative attitudes toward dating bisexual men (Armstrong & Reissing, 2014; Feinstein, Dyar, Bhatia, Latack, & Davila, 2014), and greater distress experienced by women in response to a male partner's infidelity with a same-sex male partner (relative to a female partner; Wiederman & LaMar, 1998). However, given the relative lack of research on the reasons for non-disclosure (especially among bisexual men), it remains unclear whether this occurs because men are in the process of identity development or whether they seek to avoid the potentially negative consequences to disclosure.

Much of the research on understanding what differentiates behaviorally-bisexual men who choose to tell others about their sexual orientation from those who do not disclose has focused on demographic correlates of non-disclosure [older age, less education, Black or Latino, heterosexually-identified, fewer male partners] (Latkin, Yang, Tobin, Roebuck, Spikes, & Patterson, 2012; Schrimshaw et al., 2013; Shearer, Khosropour, Stephenson, & Sullivan, 2012; Stokes et al., 1996). Although these demographic correlates are important for understanding which groups of behaviorally-bisexual men are least likely to disclose, they provide little insight into the motives and reasons why bisexual men choose not to disclose. Rather, qualitative research that provides insights in men's motives and rationale for non-disclosure are greatly needed.

The existing qualitative research on behaviorally-bisexual men has begun to offer some insights into the potential reasons for their decision to not disclose to friends, family, or female partners. Consistent with stigma management theory (Goffman, 1963), some men report that they do not disclose in order to avoid stigmatizing reactions and rejection (Benoit & Koken, 2012; Dodge et al., 2012; Malebranche et al., 2010). Others report not disclosing in order to avoid the stigmatization of being labeled as gay or bisexual (Benoit & Koken, 2012; Severson et al., 2013). However, other reasons for non-disclosure depart from those anticipated by stigma management theory. For example, consistent with the identity development perspective, some men have reported not disclosing because they do not identify as bisexual or are uncertain about their sexual identity (Baldwin et al., in press, McCormack, Wignall, & Anderson, 2015; Wheeler, 2006). Other studies have found that some behaviorally-bisexual men report they conceal their sexual orientation because they feel others have no right to know this personal information, even their female sexual partners if they consistently use condoms (Malebranche et al., 2010; Schrimshaw et al., 2014). Furthermore, some research has suggested that prevalence and reasons for non-disclosure vary by the person to whom the men may disclose (Baldwin et al., in press; Dodge, Jeffries, & Sandfort, 2008). Despite these insights, however, the lack of consensus among the

available studies makes clear the need for a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of this issue.

The lack of agreement among the findings from existing qualitative studies may be due to a number of significant limitations of this past research. First, many of these studies did not seek to address reasons for non-disclosure, but rather examined related issues of identity formation (Baldwin et al., in press; McCormack, Wignall, & Anderson, 2015; Reback & Larkins, 2010), stigmatization (Severson et al., 2013; Dodge et al., 2012), or sexual health (Martinez et al., 2011; Wheeler, 2006). Others have briefly addressed non-disclosure as one of several topics (Benoit & Koken, 2012; Dodge, Jeffries, & Sandfort, 2008; Dodge et al., 2012; Malebranche et al., 2010), and therefore the depth of discussion on disclosure is limited. As such, there remains a need for an in-depth analysis of the factors that contribute to non-disclosure among behaviorally-bisexual men.

The existing literature is also limited by a nearly exclusive focus on African American and Latino men (Benoit & Koken, 2012; Dodge et al., 2008; Malebranche et al., 2010; Martinez et al., 2011; Severson et al., 2013; Wheeler, 2006), or is based on mixed-gender samples of bisexual men and women (Knous, 2005; McLean, 2007; Scherrer, Kazyak, & Schmitz, 2015; Watson, 2014). Although the research literature has found that African American and Latino bisexual men are significantly less likely to disclose than White men (e.g., Shearer et al., 2012; Stokes et al., 1996), the reasons for these differences are less clear. Research has suggested that the greater non-disclosure in African American and Latino bisexual men may be due to greater fears of victimization or rejection (Benoit & Koken, 2012; Dodge et al., 2008; Malebranche et al., 2010), more conservative religious or cultural views on homosexuality (Martinez et al., 2011; Severson, Muñoz-Laboy, & Kaufman, 2014), or fears of family reactions and respect for family (Martinez et al., 2011; Muñoz-Laboy, 2008). However, without including White or Asian men as a comparison group, the existing studies on African American and Latino men cannot determine whether these reasons for non-disclosure (e.g., stigma, religion) are more common among these groups than other cultural groups.

Given the importance in understanding why some behaviorally-bisexual men feel unable or choose not to disclose their sexual orientation, the current study examined the reasons they offered for non-disclosure in a larger and more ethnically-diverse sample than has been previously available. Such insights are critical to determine whether non-disclosure is due to a lack of comfort and certainty with their identity or whether it is a response to expectations of stigmatizing reactions. Extending prior research that has relied on samples of a single ethnic/racial group, we will examine whether the reasons for non-disclosure differ between African American, Latino, White, and Asian behaviorally-bisexual men. Furthermore, building on earlier insights that disclosure varies by the potential person to whom men disclose (Dodge et al., 2008), the current study will examine reasons for non-disclosure to friends, family, and female sexual partners and whether the reasons offered differ between these three groups.

METHOD

Participants

An ethnically diverse sample of 203 behaviorally-bisexual men in New York City participated in the study. To be eligible, men had to: 1) be 18 years of age or older; 2) not self-identify as gay; 3) report anal or oral sex with a man in the past year; 4) report vaginal, anal, or oral sex in the past year with a woman to whom (at the time) they were married or had a relationship lasting three months or longer; 5) have not disclosed their same-sex behavior to any past-year female sexual partners; and 6) reside in the New York City area. Sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

The study sought to examine a subgroup of behaviorally-bisexual men who did not disclose their sexual orientation to female partners. Thus, the decision was made to focus on men who were in a relationship (or had recently been in one) with a woman and who had not disclosed to their female partners of the past year. No constraints were placed on the level of emotional commitment of this relationship; thus, in addition to wives and girlfriends, men were also included if they reported a regular sexual (but not necessarily romantic) relationship with a woman. Quota sampling was employed to obtain approximately equal numbers of Black, Latino, and White men, and as many Asian and Native American men as possible.

Procedure

Men were recruited through a diverse set of venues (10%), Internet websites (57%), print advertisements (19%), and non-participant friend referrals (14%). A targeted sampling technique (Watters & Biernacki, 1989) was employed in which venues or websites were randomly selected from a larger sampling frame. Venues included gay bars, mixed-sexuality clubs, cruising parks, bathhouses, adult video stores, LGB organizations, and community-based HIV organizations. For venue recruitment, an ethnically diverse team of male recruiters approached every man who entered a venue and handed them a card containing study information. Targeting all men in a venue helped to eliminate recruiter bias and the perception that individuals were singled out for the study. In addition, men were told “If the card does not apply to you, please pass it to a friend.” This was intended to reduce the stigma of taking a card and allowed for non-participant friend referrals since non-gay-identified MSM are more likely to be reached through friend referrals (Fisher, Purcell, Hoff, Parsons, & O’Leary, 2006). For Internet recruitment, study information was posted in several sections of Craigslist.org, a popular online bulletin board. Recruitment on various other websites was also attempted (e.g., aol.com, yahoo.com, manhunt.net, adam4adam.com, hivpoz.net, gayblackchat.com, migente.com, etc), but proved unsuccessful. Advertisements were also placed in a free, daily newspaper with a general readership distributed throughout New York City.

Recruitment materials stated that we were looking to interview men who had sex with both men and women and whose female partners did not know about their sex with men. Recruitment materials also stated the investigators’ university affiliations, emphasized confidentiality, and that the participants would receive a \$75 honorarium. Where possible,

we provided the study website address for more information and a telephone number for participants to call to be screened for eligibility. Because Craigslist prohibits the posting of telephone numbers or web addresses, participants were asked to email the researchers in order to obtain the telephone number and website address.

Of a total of 685 men screened for study eligibility, 397 (58%) were determined to be eligible. A total of 324 (82%) men were willing to participate and scheduled an interview. Eighty-eight (27%) of these men failed to show for their interviews and were never able to be rescheduled, resulting in 236 completed interviews. Thirty-three (14%) were excluded from analysis after providing data in their interviews that contradicted their screening data and rendered them ineligible. This resulted in a final sample of 203 eligible men for analysis.

Eligible men were invited to meet with an interviewer at the researchers' offices. During this meeting, informed consent was obtained and men participated in a semi-structured focused interview (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990) about their sexual relationships with women and men, sexual behavior, disclosure, and sexual identity. Focused interviews lasted, on average, approximately two hours ($M = 134$ minutes). All men were interviewed by an ethnically diverse team of four interviewers, all of whom were experienced conducting qualitative interviews about sexual behavior. As part of the semi-structured interviews, men were asked several questions about the extent to which they had disclosed their sexual orientation. Specifically, each man was asked, "Is there anyone you have ever told that you have sex with men?" and "Is there anyone you would never tell that you have sex with men?" Interviewers probed for reasons why men had chosen to disclose, or not disclose, this information. Follow-up questions separately assessed the reasons for non-disclosure of sexual orientation to specific key individuals (i.e., female partners, family, and friends). Although men were asked about disclosure to male sexual partners, the reasons offered differed greatly and will therefore be reported in a separate paper. Participants received \$75 in cash and were reimbursed for their transportation costs. All recruitment and data collection procedures described above were approved by the university Institutional Review Board.

Data analysis

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis. These transcripts were entered into ATLAS.ti for the purpose of thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). Based on the topics addressed in the interview guide, as well as having conducted many of the interviews themselves, two senior researchers created a codebook detailing the specific topics discussed in the interviews. After training and supervision by the senior researchers, three additional research team members read all of the interviews and labelled the sections of text that represented each of these topic codes. Additional codes were added throughout the coding process. Next, a research assistant extracted all sections of the coded text regarding reasons for non-disclosure. The authors then analyzed the extracted sections to identify the principal themes related to reasons for non-disclosure. Unanimous agreement among the authors was obtained regarding which reasons for non-disclosure were most prevalent. Finally, direct quotations that most clearly reflected the participants' reasons for non-disclosure were selected for this report. Additional analyses were performed to identify potential ethnic/

racial differences in the reasons for non-disclosure. This was done through two methods. First, throughout analysis, while identifying reasons for nondisclosure, specific attention was devoted to any instances where race/ethnicity, culture, neighborhood, or religion were discussed as contributing to non-disclosure. Further, after identifying the dominant themes, the number of men of each ethnic/racial group who reported each theme were examined to identify if some themes were more commonly reported by certain racial/ethnic groups.

RESULTS

As required by the eligibility criteria, no participants reported having told any of their past-year female sexual partners about their same-sex behavior. In addition, relatively few men had told other members of their social networks, including best male friends (27%), best female friends (18%), mothers (12%), or fathers (5%). Indeed, 63% reported having never told any of these individuals. Men offered a number of reasons why they had not told, and in many instances, intended to never tell their friends, family or female partners about their sexual orientation. Below we describe the primary reasons offered by the men.

Anticipation of Negative Emotional Reactions

One of the most common reasons offered by the men for not disclosing their sexual orientation to others, particularly their wives and girlfriends, was the belief that these women would have strong negative emotional reactions. Men frequently used words like “shocked”, “hurt”, “upset”, “betrayed”, and “devastated” to describe their anticipated reactions. Men clearly wanted to avoid the emotional confrontations that they felt certain would result from disclosure. For example, a 51-year-old, White, bisexually-identified man told us:

Interviewer (I): So, now is there anyone who you wouldn't want to know or you would never tell at this point in your life?

Respondent (R): Yeah. Still, uhh, the woman I'm seeing. I don't - I don't think she could handle that. I know it.

I: Umm, what do you think she would say or do if she did find out?

R: Oh, God. [SIGH] I think it would just be a scene. It would just be something straight out of a television show. She's a nervous breakdown right before your eyes. The screaming and crying, and the whole thing. (#513).

Similar negative emotional reactions were reported by a 23-year-old, Asian man, who identified as just “sexual”:

I: Alright. So what do you think your female partners would say or do if they found out?

R: Oh, God. They would go crazy. They would just, they would feel--I think they'd be shocked, really. They'd be really shocked. Like they wouldn't believe it, you know, they'd just be like, are you fucking serious? No fucking way. No fucking way. Hell, no. (#657)

Several men also discussed that they anticipated that female partners would experience a strong sense of betrayal due to the sexual infidelity. Some expected that their wives and girlfriends would be more upset by infidelity with another woman while others reported their female partners would feel be more upset to learn of their sexual relationships with men. For example, a 51-year-old, heterosexually-identified Black participant remarked:

I: But, um, how do you think she would feel if she found out?

R: Betrayed. Same way I would feel if I found out she was fooling around. Disappointed, betrayed.

I: Why, why do you think she would feel betrayed?

R: Because she, she would feel that she should, if, you know, she should be able to trust me and tell her what, if I was having any kind of outside relationship.

I: Oh, so you think she would feel, but do you think she would feel betrayed because you had an outside relationship, or is it because you had, you had an outside relationship with a man?

R: Both.

I: Okay.

R: Probably the latter being the most important one. (#506)

In addition to wives and girlfriends, many men also reported that they would not tell their parents or other family members due to the negative emotional reactions they anticipated from them. Men believed that their parents and other family members would be “shocked”, “upset”, and “disappointed” to learn of their sexual orientation. In this example, a 26-year-old, heterosexually-identified Black participant expressed fear at the potential reactions of family members and friends:

I: Okay. Okay. Um, is there anyone that you would never tell?

R: Yeah there is.

I: Who would you never tell?

R: My parents, well no, well family members, friends, uh [LONG PAUSE]

I: Okay, why would you never tell them?

R: Oh, cuz I'd be afraid of their reaction. I'd be afraid of their reaction.

I: Uh huh. How do you think they would react?

R: Well, that's uh, that's the thing, I'm not sure, but I'm thinking that it would be negative you know, the uh, you know it'll be um, they'll be um, probably some of them will have a nervous breakdown or a stroke. (#516)

In contrast to the highly negative emotional reactions that most men anticipated from their wives, girlfriends, and some family members, most were less certain about how their friends would react to disclosure. Generally, they anticipated that most friends would be “shocked” or “surprised”, but most did not feel as strongly that they would have negative reactions. However, many men did anticipate negative emotional reactions (e.g., betrayal, disgust, disparaging comments) from some, if not all, of their friends and consequently reported they had no intention of disclosing to their friends. For example, when asked if there was anyone else he would never tell about this sexual orientation, this 26-year-old, heterosexually-identified Latino participant remarked:

R: I wouldn't tell my girl, I wouldn't tell my friends; my boys- ...

I: Alright, so um, with your friends, what do you think your friends would say or do if they found out?

R: Uh, I think some of them would accept it, some of them would uh, make fun of me, judge me, harass me. So-

I: Um, how do you think they would feel if they-if they found out?

R: They would feel shocked.

I: Why would they feel shocked?

R: Because in their eyes I am the ultimate woman getter. [LAUGHS]. (#592)

Anticipation of Negative Changes in Relationships

In addition to the negative emotional reactions, many men also reported that they believed disclosure would result in profound changes in their relationships with others. Many men were certain that disclosure of their sexual orientation would result in the immediate termination of their relationship with wives or girlfriends. Specifically, many of the married men believed that their wives would leave them and file for divorce. One such participant was a 57-year-old, heterosexually-identified White participant:

I: Okay. Is there anyone that you would never tell?

R: Yeah, everyone. ... I would never tell anyone. I'll go to my grave with this.

I: Who would be the people you would least like to find out?

R: My wife would leave me in a minute. ...

I: Alright. So, what do you think your wife would say or do if she did find out?

R: Oh god, she would get a lawyer. She would leave me.

I: Okay. Tell me about that, what else would she do?

R: She would leave me, and she'd sue for divorce and she's put the reason. She wouldn't mess around with it. (#731)

Similarly, the unmarried men also believed that disclosure of their sexual orientation would most certainly result in the termination of their relationship with their girlfriends. One example was a 40-year-old, heterosexually-identified Black participant:

I: Um, is there anyone that you would never tell?

R: [Girlfriend's Name]. The main girl.

I: Um, why would you never tell her? ...

R: 'Cause fucked up as what I do, I don't want to lose her. I don't give a fuck who I fuck. I don't want to lose her.

I: Okay. Do you think your relationship with her would change?

R: Hell yeah.

I: How so?

R: She wouldn't fuck with me.

I: Okay.

R: Come on, I mean what girl gonna accept her man givin' another dude head; or a man is fuckin' doin' ass. Come on.

I: Do you ever think about her finding out?

R: [SIGH] It crossed my mind. Sometimes I dream about it. That's why it's very important that whoever I meet got to be discreet. (#568)

Men also offered concerns about possible changes disclosure might bring about in their relationships with parents and other family as a reason for not disclosing to them. While some men contemplated the possibility that their families would “disown” them, most did not believe that disclosure would result in a termination of their relationship with their parents. Many did, however, believe that it would significantly damage their relationship, and cause at least some family members to be more distant. For example, this 47-year-old, bisexually-identified White participant was particularly concerned about how disclosing his sexual identity would affect the relationship with his father:

I: Who would you never tell?

R: I'm not telling anyone.

I: But is there anyone specifically in your mind that sticks out that you would never, never tell?

R: My mother and father - my father.

I: And why would you never tell him?

R: You don't know my father - that's why I said - that's why I sounded - I reacted the way that I did. Um, my father played one year with the [Professional Football Team], okay. He's - that says it. You know what I mean? Okay, he's just very - what can I say. He's against. Don't like it. What can I say? And do I think that he would disown me? No. But it would - I would not have the same relationship with him today if he knew that I was bisexual. I would not have a real good relationship with him. (#509)

Finally, men also reported that they were reluctant to disclose to friends because they thought it would negatively impact their friendship. While some men reported that they had close female friends, gay male friends, and even some best heterosexual male friends who likely would be accepting of their sexual orientation, a significant number thought that many of their heterosexual male friends would terminate the friendship following disclosure. An example was, a 23-year-old, bisexually-identified Asian participant:

I: Okay. Is there anyone that you would never tell that you have sex with men?

R: I would never tell anyone besides the men I have sex with. Not my girlfriend, not my family, not my friends. ...

I: What do you think your friends would say or do if they found out?

R: They probably would not be my friend anymore. Um they'd probably stop talking to me.

I: And why do think that?

R: I mean my best friend might still keep talking to me because he's a true friend or- not to say that the other ones aren't but I think with him he would-that wouldn't be an issue for him who I have sex with or things like that, but the other ones, I don't know. Because they're 100 percent heterosexual maybe they might not want to be my friend anymore.

I: Okay.

R: Yeah. Or they might be in fear. They might be in fear that I'm attracted to them or that I might hit on them, that I might have checked them out in the past, something like that, y'know. (#582)

Belief that Others Held Highly Stigmatizing Attitudes Toward Homosexuality

Although not as frequently mentioned as negative emotional reactions and relationship changes, a substantial number of men did report that they did not disclose their sexual orientation to female partners, family, and friends due to the perception that these individuals held negative attitudes toward homosexuality. For some men, these homophobic attitudes would potentially result in their being called various derogatory names such as “gay”, “queer” and “faggot” as noted in this excerpt by a 50-year-old, heterosexually-identified White participant:

I: What do you think they [female partners] would say or do if they found out?

R: Ah, well from what I know, they probably would not accept it.

I: Okay. How do you think they would feel if they found out?

R: Knowing them, they'd, ah, the two I got together with, ah, they'd probably, they would probably lash out at me. They'd probably call me bisexual. They'd probably say I was queer, you know, by doing something like that.

I: Okay. And how would you feel if they found out?

R: Upset. I mean I would not want to tell them. I would never tell them. (#708)

In addition, many men also believed that disclosure would cause others to stereotype them as gay and possibly HIV-positive because they had sex with men. As such, they anticipated that their female partners would believe (in some cases unjustifiably) that they had placed her at risk of becoming infected. When asked what he thought his female partners would say or do if they found out about his sexual orientation, this 50-year-old, Latino man who does not like to be labeled remarked:

R: Hm, that would be a big issue. Cause they find out I was having sex with men, that would be a big issue [LAUGH].

I: What do, what do you think they would say?

R: Because you know females they like that. You know, they would say a lot of things.

I: Like what?

R: They would say, oh you gay, you fuckin faggot, and then whatever, and they gonna say another words to me. ... Because you know, I have sex with them, I'm a man. So it's havin sex with her and them and, and men, and maybe they, maybe they would think I would I would, even though I'm performing using protection, sometimes they get stupid they say, oh, having sex with men, they don't take care of themself, and they got AIDS and they got disease. Stupid mentality they have. (#716)

The belief that others held highly negative attitudes toward homosexuality was most commonly expressed in relation to parents and other family members and was offered as a reason for not disclosing to them. Often times, this was attributed to parents being part of an earlier generation, from a more traditional culture, or belonging to a conservative religious group that had less accepting attitudes toward homosexuality (see also the later theme “Fear of Rejection due to Culture or Religion). For example, when asked why he would never tell his father that he has sex with men, this 37-year-old, bisexually-identified Latino participant stated:

Because he is very, umm, old-fashioned, and he's more like “a guy is a guy”, and, you know, the chivalry, and all that stuff. He's more like into a guy should be with a

woman ... he still thinks that guys being into guys is more like a disease or something that can be changed. (#535)

A 36-year-old, heterosexually-identified Latino participant made a similar comment with regard to his mother:

I: Okay, so who in your family, who specifically in your family would you never tell?

R: Oh, my mother. She would have a heart attack.

I: Okay.

R: My mother's a very old-fashioned person, you know. She sees a rainbow flag, she flips.

I: So she knows what it means?

R: Oh, hell yeah.

I: Okay.

R: My mother sees a rainbow flag, she flips. She's very homophobic. (#556)

Although not as frequently offered as a reason for not disclosing to friends, a substantial number of men did report not telling their heterosexual male friends because they believed these friends held homophobic attitudes and consequently they anticipated strongly anti-gay attitudes in response to disclosure. When asked if there was anyone he would never tell about his sexual orientation, a 56-year-old, bisexually-identified White participant remarked:

R: My straight friends I would never say because, you know, they get very homophobic.

I: Okay. So um, and why would you never want them to find out, your straight friends?

R: Because um, I know they don't approve of the lifestyle, you know, and uh, they would probably look at me in a different light if they knew – In a negative light. And so I don't bother - you know, don't ask don't tell. Well, of course, if they asked me, I would probably lie about it anyway, but we don't - we never discuss it.

I: What do you think they would do if they found out?

R: Yeah. They would probably make jokes about it and, you know, call me this and call me that, and I'm not - I don't want to even go there. But - you know, they've expressed anti-gay sentiments before, so I know how they feel about it. (#637)

Having Witnessed or Experienced Negative Reactions to Disclosure in the Past

Another reason that many men offered for non-disclosure was that they had either witnessed or experienced negative reactions to disclosure of sexual orientation in the past. As a result, they had a more concrete basis for anticipating negative reactions to future disclosure to others. Based on these past experiences, these men often felt very reluctant to disclose in the

future. These past negative experiences took a number of different forms depending on whether the participant anticipated disclosing to female partners, family, or friends.

Despite the fact that none of the men had disclosed to their wives or girlfriends, several men still suggested that past negative reactions stood as barriers to disclosure to their female partners. For example, one 40-year-old White participant who identified as heterosexual reported that he decided against telling one past girlfriend after witnessing her reaction to a friend's husband coming out as gay. He told us:

There's a past girlfriend who I thought, if I could tell anybody, I could tell her. And then I saw her reaction to a friend of hers who was married to somebody, who then ended the marriage to be with a man. And I saw her reaction and I thought, 'Okay, this would not be a good idea to tell her. (#580)

Past negative experiences were also reported as a barrier to disclosing to parents and other family members. Some men recounted negative reactions to their disclosure to a family member (e.g., most often a mother), which had discouraged them from disclosing to other family members. However, more often men described witnessing how their family reacted when a sibling, cousin, or other family member had come out as gay. Witnessing these negative reactions to others' disclosure had reinforced their decision to not tell their family about their own sexual orientation. This was the case with a 30-year-old, Latino participant who identified as heterosexual:

I: How about your family? What do you think they would say or do if they found out?

R: Um, well, my brothers would beat me up for sure. And then disown me.

I: And why do you feel like that?

R: Because it happened to one of my cousins.

I: What exactly happened to your cousin?

R: Um, they beat him up, and the whole family disowned him.

I: So you haven't spoken to him?

R: Um, I don't know where he is now.

I: Um, how did the family find out?

R: Um, he told his mother, you know. He told his mother, and um, she told everybody else. (#504)

Similarly, some men also reported what they experienced as negative reactions in the past when disclosing to their friends (e.g., negative emotions, rejection, uncontrolled disclosure). As with disclosure to other groups, past negative experiences with disclosure led some men to decide against further disclosure in the future. For example, a 29-year-old, bisexually-identified Latino participant recalled being "outed" by a best friend:

I: Is there anyone that you have ever told?

R: Yeah.

I: Who have you told?

R: Uhhh, I told friends in high school. I told one of my best friends in high school and then she outed me to everybody and all my friends kind of turned their backs, so that's why I kinda am different now than I was back then. Back then I thought that was what you did, kinda come out to everybody. But, um, yeah, I mean and I don't have too many good friends telling people things like that. (#590)

Wanting to Maintain Others' Perceptions of Them

Another common reason that men offered for not disclosing was the belief that others would now see him differently in light of the disclosure. Men offered two different ways in which others' perceptions might change in response to disclosure. First, and perhaps most common, many men reported that upon learning that they had sex with men, their girlfriends, family, and friends would likely no longer see them as heterosexual or even bisexual, but rather as gay. This was true of a 26-year-old, bisexually-identified Latino participant who noted:

It don't matter if I'm bisexual or what, they [female partners] are going to consider me gay or either avoid me all the time...or forever because they've been, they will feel insulted...or they will just try to become uh just my friend. Like see me as, as gay, which is not the point. (#502)

Another participant, a 19-year-old, heterosexually-identified Latino man, suggested that others simply would not understand that it is "just about sex":

I: Is there anyone who you would never tell that you've had sex with a man?

R: Uh family. Uh, everybody.

I: Why would you never tell?

R: I guess it's the whole society thing, how they just wouldn't understand that it's like, just sex. Like they'll think like "aw you're gay", like "you have to be gay". I'd rather not deal with the controversy; I'd rather just go home and sleep calm knowing that only I know. (#515)

Rather than thinking that others would view them as gay, some men thought that revealing their sexual orientation would result in general and non-specific changes in how they are viewed and treated by others. This was true for the two heterosexually-identified men in the following excerpts; the first was a 30-year-old Latino participant:

I: Mm. Alright, now what about, um, a family member? What if they-

R: I wouldn't tell them about anything.

I: What do you think they would say or do if they found out?

R: Um, they wouldn't disown me or anything, but they would just, they would look at me differently, and they'd start acting differently or whatever. (#505)

The second, a 40-year-old Black participant:

R: I'm more worried about what they [friends] gonna think of me, you know what I'm saying. How they gonna look at me. Are they gonna treat me different? You know what I'm saying? I'm more worried about-well I guess everything. I'm more worried about, um, me get a reputation. The wrong reputation, you know what I'm saying? (#544)

Fear that Others would Disclose to Additional People

A number of men also reported that they were unwilling to even selectively disclose their sexual orientation to some people because they feared that these individuals might disclose the information to other friends, family members, or neighbors. This fear was most strongly expressed about female partners in particular. A number of men reported that they believed that their wives and girlfriends might use the information to retaliate against them for lying or cheating on them. This point was very clearly articulated by a 48-year-old, heterosexually-identified White participant:

I: So what do you think your female partners would say or do if they found out?

R: I'm afraid they might tell all my friends.

I: And why do you think that they would do that?

R: Um, they would use it as a weapon, you know, get back at me. I don't know. I don't - I - I don't know why, just have that great fear. (#508)

However, even when men didn't believe that their female partners would vindictively spread the information about their bisexuality, most still didn't want the women to have that kind of information because they felt every person who knew their secret was a potential source of further unwanted disclosure. For example, when asked what he thought his most recent female partner would say or do if she found out, this 37-year-old, heterosexually-identified White participant remarked:

R: I'm not sure she would care. I don't know if she'd care. I still wouldn't tell her. And, I would deny it. But, I don't know that she'd care.

I: Mm-hm. Why is that?

R: She's really open-minded, really progressive. I don't think it would bother her. I don't know.

I: Okay. How would you feel if she found out?

R: [SIGHS] I would only care in the sense if again, she'd be a loose end. So, we know some mutual people. So, there's a chance it would get back to them. There's this-there's that factor. That's the major one.

I: Mm-hm.

R: That's the reason I would deny it. (#575)

A similar rationale, that anyone who knew might potentially share the information with others, even if it was unintentional, was offered for both disclosing to family or friends. When asked why he would not tell his sister, this 36-year-old, heterosexually-identified Latino participant explained:

R: Because my sister is very close with my older brother...They tell each other everything.

I: So you don't think she would respect your privacy?

R: Oh, hell no, my sister would blow it up...She'll blow my cover. (#556)

Similarly, a 42-year-old, bisexually-identified White participant remarked:

R: You know, people talk; you know, people love to talk gossip. And then you tell one person then 15 people would find out. ... But, you know, that's why I don't come out to anybody for that reason alone because if one person knows, it spreads; and then, you know, it would just-it would alter my life completely in a way I don't want to do. (#579)

Fear of Rejection due to Culture or Religion

When discussing some of the reasons for non-disclosure described above, men frequently noted the potential role that cultural background of their family, friends and community often played in the emotional reactions and relationship changes they anticipated in response to disclosure. Latino and Black men frequently noted that they anticipated rejection as a result of disclosure. They suggested that this was because they viewed the Latino and Black communities in which they lived to have traditional views of sexuality and homosexuality. For example, this 40-year-old, heterosexually-identified Black participant explained:

I: Okay. Uh, so what is it that kept you in a relationship with her [female partner]?

R: Society.

I: What do you mean?

R: There's something about living in a community if you don't have a woman. If a man don't have a woman, how society look upon him as being different; although you can be educated just to be thought of as the way people view you all-you don't see the girl. Especially the African American community or the Latino communities are he's a homo.

(#568)

However, Black and Latino men were not the only individuals who reported that their cultural background contributed to their anticipated negative reactions and their decision to not disclose. Many Asian and White participants from Jewish, Italian, Greek, and other cultural groups in New York also anticipated that their cultural background would contribute to negative reactions and therefore they had no intention to disclose. Although these cultural concerns included men who had immigrated to the U.S. and lived in ethnic enclaves of New York, many men who were U.S.-born also described such cultural concerns. For example, when asked why he had not told any family members or friends, this 34-year-old, heterosexually-identified participant remarked:

R: I'm scared of their reactions. I know they just wouldn't understand, you know what I mean. You know, I grew up in a very Italian neighborhood, you know what I mean. All my friends are like Italian, Italian, Guido type of Italians; and they just, they wouldn't understand it. They really wouldn't understand it, you know. They would kinda like exile [me], you know, if I'd be honest with them. (#578)

The traditional religious backgrounds of their wives, girlfriends, family, and friends were another reason why the men anticipated negative reactions to disclosure. Regardless of the specific religious tradition, men often noted religious prohibitions against homosexuality and suggested that disclosure within this context was certain to result in negative reactions or damaged relationships. This was particularly true in the following example of a 49-year-old, heterosexually-identified Black participant:

I: Okay. What do you think your family would say or do if they were to find out?

R: Oh, they would feel dismayed, shame and, and, uh, very religious, Baptist family so - So, you know, that - you know that's not gonna come out with them! [CHUCKLES] ...

I: Okay. Um, and do you think your relationship would change?

R: No. No, but it will always be in the back of their minds, you know. You know uh, especially if you have one of those families where um, where religion is a major thing, you go to church every Sunday, you know, um, uh, you're always reading The Bible, you know, it's gonna hurt them, it's gonna shame them, you know. You committed a, a sin. You know the seventh deadly sin down there. You know? (#522)

A 23-year-old, bisexually-identified Asian participant expressed similar concerns:

I: Okay. Um, is there anyone that you would never tell that you have sex with men?

R: Yes. Lots of people. Most people.

I: But anyone, like, anyone specific?

R: My mom. My dad. My brother. My sister. Anyone Muslim. Or if I find out that they could be Muslim, or Middle-Eastern or come from my culture.

I: Why would you never tell them?

R: Because it's not accepted in that culture.

I: Mm-hmm.

R: In fact, it's-the-the Muslim laws are pretty stringent when it comes to that. Um, I know people who have had to seek asylum, or change their name and their identity in fear of losing their lives, and my fear is that I don't know how someone from that culture will react. I like to think I come from a moderately, not too conservative background. My family isn't like, fundamental Muslim, but at the same time, I can't anticipate how they would react to their son being potentially gay or having sex with men. Um, so I would never ever even wanna entertain that thought. (#673)

DISCUSSION

Despite the significantly greater likelihood of non-disclosure found among bisexual men, relative to gay men (e.g., Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Herek et al., 2010; Lewis et al., 2009; Stokes et al., 1997; Wheeler et al., 2008), little research has directly focused on understanding the reasons why so many bisexual men choose not to or feel unable to disclose their sexual orientation. Using a large, ethnically-diverse sample, we examined the reasons these behaviorally-bisexual men offered for why they had not told (and frequently never planned to tell) their friends, family, and female partners about their sexual orientation.

Although the majority of theoretical work on disclosure of sexual orientation has hypothesized that disclosure is a function of greater acceptance of one's sexual identity (Cass, 1979; Rosario et al., 2001; Troiden, 1989), men in our study did not report a heterosexual identity, identity uncertainty, or other identity issues as reasons for non-disclosure. This differs from some of the past qualitative research which has suggested that identity issues are a major reason for non-disclosure among bisexual men (Baldwin et al., in press; McCormack et al., 2015; McLean, 2007; Wheeler, 2006). However, this difference may be attributable to some of this past research being largely focused on understanding issues of bisexual identity, rather than on reasons for non-disclosure. Contrary to common stereotypes about bisexual men, most men in the sample were not uncertain about their identity or attractions, but rather offered the stigmatization of same-sex attractions and behavior and the potential for adverse reactions as the primary motive for their non-disclosure to friends, family, and especially female partners.

Our findings suggest that non-disclosure of sexual orientation among behaviorally-bisexual men is often used as a stigma management strategy to avoid anticipated experiences of stigma from their social network. Men reported a variety of reasons why they believed that disclosure would result in various stigmatizing or negative reactions and outcomes. Specifically, these men anticipated highly emotional, negative reactions from female partners and family members. It was also believed that disclosure would result in negative changes (e.g., termination, disowning) in their relationships with friends, family, and especially female partners, as well as the way these individuals viewed him (e.g., label him as gay). Perhaps related to the anticipated negative reactions, some men even suggested that female partners (but also friends and family) would retaliate against them by telling other

friends and family members. Given the stigmatization of bisexuality (Herek, 2002), women's negative attitudes about dating bisexual men (Armstrong & Reissing, 2014; Feinstein et al., 2014) and their greater upset in response a partner's having a same-sex infidelity than other-sex infidelity (Wiederman & LaMar, 1998), men's anticipation of such negative reactions may be a reasonable expectation. Men also offered their own experiences for why they anticipated stigmatizing reactions. Specifically, they reported that many friends, family, and female partners had previously expressed highly homophobic attitudes and reported witnessing or experiencing negative reactions to past disclosures. Not only did these homophobic experiences add to their unwillingness to disclose, but it also reinforced their perception that disclosure would result in negative emotional reactions.

Despite the consistent finding that men chose not to disclose due to the anticipation of various stigmatizing reactions, it is particularly important to note that very few, if any, men anticipated stigmatizing reactions due to their bisexuality (either due to bisexual identity or having had sex with both men and women). Rather, men consistently reported anticipating stigma due to their sex with men. As noted in the results, the participants viewed their friends, family, and female partners as homophobic, rather than specifically biphobic. Men were concerned about being called faggot or queer, or being viewed as gay rather than being labeled as bisexual. Female partners were anticipated to be more upset by infidelity with a male partner than with a female partner. These perceptions, and resulting non-disclosure, raise important insights about the stigmatization of bisexuals. Specifically, suggests that some of the stigmatization anticipated or experienced by bisexuals, may be better labeled and understood as homophobia rather than biphobia because it is not bisexuality that is the underlying cause of the stigma, but rather their same-sex sexual practices.

Perhaps the most novel reason identified for non-disclosure was that men commonly viewed the religious and/or cultural background of their friends, family, and female partners as a barrier to disclosure because they believed it contributed to the anticipation of rejecting reactions. However, in addition to finding this among African American and Latino men, the current research extends this work by also finding that White and Asian men also believed that their religious and cultural backgrounds contributed to their friends, family, and female partners holding more negative views of same-sex sexuality. Further, for all four groups, our findings suggest that these cultural and religious backgrounds (even when these cultural values and religions are not endorsed by the participants) served as barriers to disclosure of their sexual orientation because of the anticipation of negative reactions from the friends, family members, and female partners who did endorse them. Although previous research has noted that religiosity was perceived as potentially contributing to greater stigma of same-sex behavior in Latino (Severson et al., 2014) and Black communities (Jeffries, Dodge, & Sandfort, 2008), past work did not identify religiosity as a barrier to disclosure. Likewise, past work has found that Latino bisexual men view Latino culture as contributing to more stigma toward homosexuality (Martinez et al., 2011; Muñoz-Laboy, 2008).

In addition to finding that culture and religious barriers to disclosure were reported by behaviorally-bisexual men in all four racial/ethnic groups, we also found no racial/ethnic differences in the other reasons offered for non-disclosure. Despite examining whether African American or Latino men were more likely to report specific reasons for non-

disclosure, we found that all four groups commonly reported all of the reasons described here. This differs from past research which hypothesized that African American and Latino behaviorally-bisexual men may be less likely to disclose due to greater perceptions of stigma, greater expectations of discrimination, more conservative religious and cultural views, and greater deference to how such disclosure would impact the family (Benoit & Koken, 2012; Dodge et al., 2008; Malebranche et al., 2010; Martinez et al., 2011; Muñoz-Laboy, 2008). However, given that much of the past research examined only African American and Latino bisexual men, it was unable to examine whether reasons for disclosure differ from those of White and Asian men. Although these findings suggest that while bisexual men of all racial/ethnic groups offer similar reasons for non-disclosure, they do not necessarily suggest that all bisexual men perceive or experience similar levels of stigma or rejection or whether bisexual men are equally likely to disclose. Rather, because the study focused on behaviorally-bisexual men who do not disclose, we cannot examine potential differences in the prevalence of disclosure, only the reasons why they feel the need to not disclose.

Consistent with some past theoretical work (Petronio, 2002) and suggestions from past qualitative work with bisexual men (Baldwin et al., in press; Dodge et al., 2008), differences were found in the extent to which certain reasons were used to justify non-disclosure to friends, family members, and female partners. For example, the most commonly reported reason for nondisclosure, anticipation of negative emotional reactions, was something men anticipated from female partners as well as some family members. Men did not expect as many negative emotional reactions from friends. Likewise, men anticipated more negative changes in their relationships with female partners than with family, and fewer in negative changes in relationships with friends than with family. This is consistent with patterns of disclosure to different sources. Men reported disclosing to friends more than to their parents, and expressed greater potential willingness to disclose to family than to their female partners. Despite differences in these perceived reactions, other common reasons for non-disclosure were commonly offered for all three groups, including the perception that others were homophobic, having past negative reactions to disclosure, and the fear that others would tell additional people.

The finding that anticipation of stigmatizing reactions and rejection are the major reason why many behaviorally-bisexual men choose not to disclose their sexual orientation offers some potentially useful insights for understanding previous research that has found differences in disclosure between bisexual and gay men (e.g., Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Herek et al., 2010; Lewis et al., 2009; Stokes et al., 1997; Wheeler et al., 2008). Although gay men are known to experience more victimization, discrimination, and rejection than bisexual men (e.g., Herek, 2009), this could be because greater disclosure by gay men places them at risk for such stigma. However, these greater experiences of stigma reported by gay men do not eliminate the possibility that bisexual men may anticipate or perceive greater stigma or rejection than do gay men. Although differences in experiences of stigma have been documented, future research is needed to examine if gay and bisexual men differ on perceived stigma as well. Given the negative attitudes toward bisexual men relative to gay men (Herek, 2002), such a finding is possible. However, bisexual men's greater perceptions of stigma may be less a result of their bisexuality, but rather the result of having chosen not

to disclose (and the resulting lack experience of unanticipated accepting reactions to disclosure which may reduce anticipated stigma from future disclosures). This suggests the need for research comparing non-disclosing gay men and non-disclosing bisexual men to gain better insights into whether gay men perceive less stigma (and therefore are more likely to disclose) or whether gay and bisexual men experience similar levels of stigma perceptions prior to disclosure. Such research would be critical to understanding the potential causal order between stigma and disclosure among both gay and bisexual men.

These findings offer potentially important insights for understanding the health and wellbeing of behaviorally-bisexual men. Previous research has documented that bisexual men are more likely to report mental health problems than either heterosexual or gay men (e.g., Bostwick, Boyd, Hughes, & McCabe, 2010; Conron, Mimiaga, & Landers, 2010). Subsequent research has suggested that the emotional distress found among behaviorally-bisexual men is a result of greater concealment of their sexual orientation (Schrimshaw et al., 2013). Non-disclosure by behaviorally-bisexual men is also associated with more internalized homophobia (Lewis et al., 2009; Schrimshaw et al., 2013) and a greater likelihood of unprotected vaginal sex (Stokes et al., 1996; Tieu et al., 2012). The current findings provide new insights into why non-disclosure could result in greater emotional distress, internalized homophobia, and sexual risks among behaviorally-bisexual men. To the extent that non-disclosure is a result of greater anticipation of stigmatized responses by members of one's close social network as the findings here suggest, it is possible that the poorer mental health outcomes and greater likelihood of non-disclosure found among bisexual men, rather than being causally linked, are both the result of these stigma perceptions reported by bisexual men. Likewise, given the consistent association between emotional distress and sexual risks, stigma could similarly be a contributing factor to both emotional distress and sexual risk behaviors. Future research examining the relative contributions of stigma and non-disclosure to the mental health of bisexual men will be important.

These findings suggest the need for the development and dissemination of interventions for bisexual men to reduce the anticipation and experiences of stigma with the goal that this will enable men to feel more comfortable disclosing and reduce the poor mental health and sexual risks observed among bisexual men. Our findings clearly identify the need for public education campaigns to dispel myths about bisexual men (e.g., bisexual men are not gay, do not have HIV, are not necessarily non-monogamous) and to reduce anticipation and experience stigma among behaviorally-bisexual men. A number of successful community- and school-based efforts and social marketing campaigns have been shown to reduce anti-gay stigma (Cahill, Valadéz, & Ibarrola, 2013). Additional efforts to specifically target similar interventions to reduce antibisexual stigma are clearly needed. In addition, our findings suggest that interventions among bisexual men should provide strategies for successfully managing stigma. The existing literature on coping with stigma offers many effective strategies that serve to help stigmatized individuals manage or cope with stigma (e.g., Cain, 1991; Corrigan & Matthews, 2003; Miller & Major, 2000; Yanos, Lucksted, Drapalski, Roe, & Lysaker, 2015) which may be effectively applied for the benefit of assisting behaviorally-bisexual men. For example, the availability of supportive others has been documented to benefit the health of even non-disclosing bisexual men (Schrimshaw et

al., 2013). As such, efforts to provide support, either through supportive therapy or through connections to bisexually-supportive community organizations may assist men in coping with the anticipation or experiences of stigma. Further, the anticipated negative reactions from female partners specifically suggest the need for strategies to assist behaviorally-bisexual men in disclosing to female partners in ways that minimize negative reactions and work with the couple to preserve the relationship. Models of counseling and support for couples comprised of a bisexual male and a heterosexual female have been developed (Buxton, 2006). The widespread concerns reported here suggest a great need for expanding their availability.

Despite the importance of these findings for understanding stigma and non-disclosure for this population, the limitations of this work must be acknowledged. First, the sample consisted of men who volunteered to participate in the study, and therefore were potentially more open about their bisexuality than men who did not volunteer. Second, the study recruited a specific subgroup of non-disclosing, behaviorally-bisexual men, many of whom did not identify as bisexual. As such, these findings may not generalize to the larger population of bisexually-identified men or openly bisexual men. Although we reported on the reasons for non-disclosure to friends, family, and female partners, we did not address reasons for disclosure and non-disclosure to male partners because their reasons were very different. These findings will be reported in a future report. Finally, because the eligibility criteria for the study required that men had not disclosed their sexual orientation to their female partners, we could not examine the reasons why bisexual men choose to disclose. Future research is needed to explore the reasons why some bisexual men choose to disclose, including whether it may be due to lower perceptions of stigma or greater acceptance of their bisexual identity.

Despite these potential limitations, the current study provides evidence that the anticipation of stigmatizing reactions is a major reason why these behaviorally-bisexual men choose not to disclose their sexual orientation to friends, family, or female partners. In contrast to identity development theories and stereotypes about identity confusion among bisexual men, our findings make it clear that non-disclosure was used by these men as a stigma management technique to avoid a variety of anticipated stigma-related outcomes. As such, it is suggested that rather than placing blame on bisexual men for not disclosing, greater attention needs to be placed on addressing the stigmatizing contexts that confront bisexual men.

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Table 1

Demographic Characteristics (N = 203)

	%	N	M	SD
Age (in years)			36.9	11.2
Race/Ethnicity				
Black	33%	68		
Latino	29%	59		
White	27%	54		
Asian	10%	20		
Native American	1%	2		
Place of Birth				
New York Native	62%	126		
Other U.S.	20%	40		
Outside U.S.	18%	37		
Years living in U.S. (of those born outside U.S.)			17.6	11.7
Education				
High School or less	31%	62		
Some College, Associates, or Technical School	33%	68		
College graduate or more	36%	73		
Household income (yearly)				
Under \$30,000	39%	76		
\$30,000 – \$74,000	38%	75		
\$75,000 or more	23%	45		
Don't know	3%	7		
Religious denomination (current)				
Protestant	24%	48		
Catholic	30%	60		
Nondenominational Christian	7%	14		
Jewish	3%	6		
Islamic	3%	6		
Eastern religions	1%	3		
Other	4%	9		
No religion	28%	57		
Current Relationship Status				
No Wife or Steady Girlfriend	25%	50		
Girlfriend, but not living together	53%	108		
Lives with Wife or Girlfriend	22%	45		
Sexual Identity				
Heterosexual	35%	71		
Bisexual	57%	115		
Other ^a	8%	17		

^aOther non-gay identities included “refusing to label oneself,” “goes either way,” “between bisexual and heterosexual,” “curious,” and “down low.”

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