8 “I think that I’m not a relationship person”

Bisexual women’s accounts of (internalised) binegativity in non-monogamous relationship narratives

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Introduction

This chapter draws from the first Austrian qualitative study to be published on bisexuality. The aim is to show how deeply ingrained stereotypes can be, and how (internalised) binegativity is present in women’s accounts of unfaithfulness and bisexuality. Unfaithfulness is one of the most common stereotypes faced by bisexual women (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Ochs, 1996; Rust, 2003; Welzer-Lang, 2008). This means that those who seek to explore bisexuality and unfaithfulness are in danger of potentially perpetuating and feeding into problematic existent stereotypes. This work tries to circumvent this risk by setting out that the author takes an affirmative approach to bisexuality and by exploring the complexity and challenges of this topic for bisexual women living in non-monogamous relationships.

Individuals from stigmatised social groups are reported to be exposed to additional stressors because of their “minority” position. Meyer (2003, p. 35) takes the view that internalised stigma, expectations of rejection, and concealment of one’s identity reflect “minority stress processes”. These stressors are considered to be one cause of the poor psychological health that many bisexual people have been found to manifest (Jorm et al., 2002; Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). It is therefore crucial to investigate the lives and challenges of those with marginalised sexualities, including bisexual women. Internalised discrimination is defined as the internalisation of societal values, and is often understood to be invisible to the persons themselves (Meyer, 2003).

Previous work has either dealt with internalised stigma or the experienced discrimination of bisexual women, or has examined accounts of bisexual non-monogamous lives (Klesse, 2005; Robinson, 2013). This chapter provides an analysis of the complex interplay between (expected) unfaithfulness and different forms of (internalised) binegativity in the narratives of bisexual women who live non-monogamously. Some of the examples show

how women's perceptions and understandings of bisexuality and unfaithfulness may reflect internalised binegativity; others depict how experiences interplay with self-conceptions and inform coping strategies for (internalised) discrimination.

Defining binegativity

The terms "biphobia" and "binegativity" refer to negative understandings of bisexuality and associated oppressive practices, which include discrimination, violence, and the erasure of bisexual identities (Klesse 2011). Much of the existing literature uses the term "biphobia", which – similarly to "homophobia" – refers to a specific form of minority oppression (Flanders et al., 2016; Hoang, Holloway, & Mendoza, 2011; Ochs, 1996). The term "biphobia" evokes connotations of oppressive practices being born out of fear. In contrast, "binegativity" is a more nuanced term, and points more broadly to the negative attitudes with which bisexual people are confronted (Eliaison, 2001). Therefore, I mostly use "binegativity", but draw on the term "biphobia" when quoting others' publications. A common form that binegativity takes is the belief in, and expression of, negative attitudes towards bisexual people. These binegative notions include the belief that bisexual people have an alleged propensity toward promiscuity, viewing bisexual people as unfaithful and untrustworthy, questioning the very existence of bisexual identities including the notion that bisexuality is just a phase, and suspecting bisexual individuals to be transmitters of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (Eisner, 2013; Hertlein, Hartwell, & Munns, 2016; Ochs, 1996). Some of these notions are directed especially to certain groups of people. For instance, bisexual women are stereotypically hypersexualised. This happens even more if they are living non-monogamously (Klesse, 2005).

Being surrounded by antibisexual attitudes, either through direct interpersonal interaction or via societal discourses, can in turn easily lead to bisexual people "directing negative social values towards the self" (Meyer, 2003, p. 14). This "internalised binegativity" is therefore the internalisation of antibisexual societal values (Meyer, 2003; Ochs, 1996). For my own work, I found it useful to keep Meyer's (2003) concept of "minority stress" in mind. In his framework social attitudes, so called distal minority stress processes influence proximal minority stress processes like internalised stigma (e.g. binegativity), expectations of rejection, and concealment. Expecting rejection because of one's identity or experience (Bostwick, 2012; Meyer, 2003) is particularly pertinent to bisexual people, whose experiences of rejection by gay men, lesbians, and heterosexuals in general have been documented within the literature (Ault, 1994; Hayfield, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014; Li et al., 2013). Since minority stress processes are hypothesised as one reason for the poor psychological health of some bisexual people (Ross et al., 2010), it is important to investigate how these inform the lives and actions of bisexual people. In this research, I chose to analyse how bisexual

participants' understandings of bisexuality and unfaithfulness might reflect internalised binegativity. I use the term "internalised binegativity" to reflect the broad nature of negative societal attitudes toward bisexual people that are internalised, and in this way I distinguish the term from internalised biphobia, which is often used to describe the desire to change one's (bisexual) identity (Bostwick, 2012). Additionally, I consider minority stress processes such as the concealment of one's identity or having expectations of rejection because of one's identity or experience (Meyer, 2003).

Research on internalised binegativity

Internalised phobias or negativities play an important role in the psychological wellbeing of sexual minorities and, appropriately, are the subject of psychological health research (Jorm et al., 2002; Meyer, 2003; Ross et al., 2010). Generally, the body of empirical literature on internalised binegativity is scarce. Hoang et al. (2011), for instance, describes a positive correlation between internalised binegativity and the unfaithfulness of bisexual women in her quantitative study on intimate relationships. Similar quantitative work, investigating the mental health of bisexual people, focuses instead on the fear of rejection and experiences of stigma and monosexism (Bostwick, 2012; Roberts, Horne, & Hoyt, 2015). Some binegativity research treats "internalised" binegativity as a secondary issue to experiencing the binegativity of others. The work of Flanders and colleagues (2016), for example, describes an "indicative" case of internalised binegativity, deriving from one participant's ambivalent feelings towards her own identity. Another case is mentioned in the work of Li and colleagues (2013), which describes a participant's negative attitude towards bisexuality stemming from her father's bisexuality. However, none of the existing research focuses on internalised binegativity specifically in relation to the negative stereotype of bisexuality and unfaithfulness. This is therefore the first qualitative study exploring how bisexual women's understandings of unfaithfulness, and the ways in which they position their bisexual relationship experiences, reflect (internalised) binegativity. Furthermore, this research also explores the strategies that bisexual women may develop to cope with their experiences of binegativity around unfaithfulness in relation to their relationship experiences.

Research on bisexual people and non-monogamy

Unfaithfulness has long been one of the most prominent antibisexual stereotypes (Eisner, 2013; Hertlein, Hartwell, & Munns, 2016; Ochs, 1996). This is a result of conceptualising bisexuality as a mixture of homosexuality and heterosexuality, and thereby conflating multiple attraction with a "need" to engage in behaviour with multiple partners. Therefore, bisexual people are understood to only be satisfied when having sex with men and women (or,

more recently, with other multiple sexes or genders), which positions them as inherently non-monogamous (Rust, 2003). Although consensually non-monogamous and polyamorous ways of living play a positive role in the lives of many bisexual people (Ritchie & Barker, 2007; Robinson, 2013), bisexuality should not be assumed to *necessarily* or always be conflated with polyamory or non-monogamy (Ochs, 1996). Still, bisexual people, as well as others who engage in non-monogamous/polyamorous relationships (or more recently specifically identify with non-monogamy/polyamory as identities), often face allegations of promiscuity (Klesse, 2005; Mint, 2004). Previous research describing the relationships of people living at the intersection of bisexuality and non-monogamy has focused on specific challenges for bisexual people, ways of negotiating relationships, and relationship forms as “strategies of sexual expression” (Robinson, 2013, p. 21; see also Klesse, 2005; McLean, 2004). Even if bisexual people live in monogamous relationships, it can still be challenging (see Chapter 7 of this book). Little research to date has dealt with the intersection of female bisexuality and non-monogamy, and the interweaving with minority stress processes such as (internalised) binegativity and expectations of rejection and concealment.

Methods

The research drew on interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to engage in making sense of the participants making sense of their worlds (Smith, Flowers, & Osborn, 1997). The author takes a critical realist perspective (e.g. Bhaskar, 2008) in order to investigate how the interviewed participants make meaning of their bisexual relationship experiences and unfaithfulness, taking into account how those meanings may be shaped by their experiences, environment, expectations, and the situations in which they find themselves (Bhaskar, 2008; Danermark et al., 2002). By giving a voice to the experiences of women, this study also draws on a feminist perspective (e.g. Kitzinger, 2006).

Before the interview, participants were informed about the aim of the project and signed a consent form. The interviews were conducted in German, and extracts presented in this chapter are verbatim transcripts, which were translated by the author.¹ To protect the privacy of the participants, self-chosen pseudonyms were used and identifiable details (e.g. names and places) were changed. The interview structure was a problem-centred interview (Witzel, 2000), starting with a broadly pre-formulated question that generated storytelling, followed by further prompts and additional questions about topics that had not yet been raised.

Participants

The aim was to interview women who had either had sexual and/or romantic relationship experiences with more than one sex or gender, or

defined themselves as "bisexual" or as having another plurisexual identity. Recruitment began with women I knew via Vienna's queer community. Additional participants were recruited through snowball sampling, a commonly utilised recruitment method within sexualities research (Browne, 2005). Interviews took place in Vienna, either in bars or in private apartments. After the interview, the participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire to identify participants' social characteristics, including their gender identity and sexual self-identifications. All participants had had sexual experiences; seven additionally had experienced long-term relationships with people of more than one sex or gender. The relationship experiences of these women could therefore be broadly described as bisexual. Sometimes "bisexual relationship experiences" is used as a short form to summarise their experiences. Of the nine women interviewed,² five identified as bisexual, two of whom also used the labels "queer" and "heterosexual". One self-defined as "ecosexual",³ one used her own concept of "genderblind" regarding sexual orientation, one defined herself as "heterosexual", and one gave no self-identification. At the time of the interviews, the women were aged between 19 and 54 (mean age = 34 years) and none of the participants had children. Eight were white (seven with an Austrian background and one identifying as an ethnic minority from Eastern Europe) and one was black. All were born in Austria, had been living in Vienna for several years, were well-educated, and described themselves as feminists.

Results

Different binegative concepts were identified throughout the analysis. In this chapter, however, I focus only on "unfaithfulness", as it proved to be the most pertinent and widely occurring theme in these women's narratives. I show how the participants positioned (their own) unfaithfulness in relation to their attractions to, and behaviours with more than one sex or gender (termed bisexuality), and the different strategies they applied to cope with (internalised) stigma. Additionally, I explore how female non-monogamous bisexuality can be theorised as linked to minority stress processes like (internalised) binegativity, expectations of rejection, and concealment of one's identity. The strategies the women adopted to cope with (internalised) binegativity, their reactions to allegations, and the actions that followed their own conclusions were particularly revealing. Therefore, the results report the different strategies the women adopted, ranging from negative self-conceptions to emancipation and agency. To depict the intricacy of the women's experiences, I chose to look for latent meanings in their narratives. In practice, I interpreted the underlying, internalised binegativity of statements and actions, taking into account the complex ways the women came to certain conclusions – for example, what other experiences of binegativity they had encountered. Thus, each extract will be discussed in light of additional information from the interviews.

Drawing negative conclusions about oneself: Jac

The first example focuses on one participant whose unfaithfulness is presented as something that happened, and that could be interpreted as internalised binegativity, which in turn contributes to the adoption of a binegative self-conception. Focusing on the negative conclusion Jac draws from her experiences and her coping strategy, I will discuss what her extract inherently tells us about her self-perception.

Jac is a 33-year-old woman. She had only had relationships with men until she “fell in love” with a woman, who she repeatedly referred to as her “big love”. The five-year relationship ended after Jac cheated on this partner with a man. Even though this break-up had occurred two years prior to the interview, she was still mourning the past relationship. Summarising her relationship experiences, Jac came to the following conclusion:

Jac: Because, unfortunately, I was always the person that cheated –

Renate: You said you cheated? I did not quite –

Jac: I cheated, yes. Well, that I had the feeling it is not what I want or it is too boring or I need – a kick or something and therefore, I think that I’m not really a relationship person.

Later on, Jac provided more information about her ex-girlfriend and what she thought about the relationship:

She prophesised that already from the beginning that I would do that [be unfaithful], because she didn’t believe that I am a lesbian [...] Well, she never bought it, – I think she bought it only way later how much I really love her, yeah. She just couldn’t understand why I thought she was great even if she is a woman [...] And she always said, ‘you will definitely cheat on me with a ... you will definitely cheat on me and it will for sure be with a man’.

At the beginning of the relationship, her female ex-partner struggled to accept that Jac could love her. She continuously repeated the prophecy that Jac would cheat on her with a man. After many years, the prophecy “came true” when Jac had a sexual encounter with a man outside of their assumed monogamous relationship. Consequently, her female partner broke up with Jac, who felt sorry and guilty, and did not dare to attend the queer-lesbian community they had both frequented. Multiple times during the interview, she expressed her remorse about what she had done. The above section shows Jac’s final conclusion. Generalising about her past (“always”) by using the exact wording of her ex-partner’s prophecy (“cheat”), she came to the conclusion, “Therefore, I think that I’m not really a relationship person”.

This short extract gives us several hints about Jac’s internalised binegativity, which can be understood when taking into account what happened before her

self-assessment of not being a relationship person. Before the act of unfaithfulness, there was: (a) the repeated vocalisation of an antibisexual stereotype (the prophecy), and years later; (b) the fulfilment of the actual unfaithfulness; Jac's reaction to the break-up was (c) to anticipate stigmatisation from the queer-lesbian community; (d) her withdrawal from this community and, finally; (e) the adoption of a binegative stereotype in her self-assessment.

Looking closer at each of these points, the following can be added. First, the repeatedly vocalised expectation that Jac would eventually cheat on her female partner with a man is a well-described prejudice by lesbians towards bisexual women (Ault, 1994; Lahti, 2015; Rust, 2003). Even the fact that the expectation becomes true can be interpreted within a bisexual context. Those bisexual people lacking role models who would otherwise give guidance to the unmasking of and dealing with stereotypes in a self-determined way are more vulnerable to fulfilling these stereotypes (Rust, 2003). Moreover, Jac's strategy of dealing with the breakup resembles a textbook example of a bisexual woman's bad breakup. Jac detailed how the queer-lesbian community of which she and her ex-partner used to be a part might have felt about her. While those who cheat may often be positioned as the villain by mutual friends and acquaintances, nonetheless it is clear that Jac clearly expected to be unwelcome specifically within this lesbian community after what she had done, which also lived up to stereotypes of bisexual people. Being afraid of stigmatisation by a lesbian community is a well-known stressor for bisexual people (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Bostwick, 2012; Hayfield et al., 2014). In the end, the fear and guilt were so strong that she decided to withdraw from the queer-lesbian community, a state of affairs that had already lasted for two years at the time of the interview. Finally, Jac's negative assessment of her fitness for relationships ("therefore, I think that I'm not really a relationship person") can also be seen as the adoption of an internalised antibisexual stereotype: that bisexual people are not good at relationships in general (Klesse, 2011).

To sum up, when Jac instantiated a repeatedly vocalised stereotype from the lesbian community (the expectation of bisexual women cheating with men on their lesbian partner) and her relationship subsequently ended, her reaction was on two levels. First, she withdrew from the queer-lesbian community in anticipation of stigmatisation; second, she concluded that she was "not a relationship person", thereby self-applying the binegative stereotype of not being good at relationships. Thus, the notion of binegativity is not only expressed by members of the lesbian community, and by her female partner, but also by the bisexual woman herself. Therefore the negative constructions of bisexuality affect everyone involved.

Expectations of binegativity and rejection leading to concealment: Johanna

The next example depicts how antibisexual discourses around promiscuity may play into expectations of rejection because of one's identity and/

or sexual experience. Johanna had experienced relationships with different genders (including one trans woman) and was single at the time of the interview. She described her then-recent dating experience with a woman:

Also, I never told Julia that I date a man because I somehow have the feeling it would hurt her somehow double, because they have the feeling I only would have played with them and actually wanted a guy or I don't know what and then. It was consecutively like that, like, that I actually concealed the sex [of her partners] and maybe they had their own thoughts on that matter. However, up to today I really don't know what to do about it.

In the interview, Johanna added that this was the first time in her life that she had tried to date both men and women at the same time. She would have liked to be open about it. However, with women she was more reticent than with men. She expected women to be unaccepting of her openness to more than one sex or gender at the same time. She anticipated the binegative reaction that her date would assume she actually preferred men, which makes sense in a society where heterosexuality is seen as the default, compulsory, and naturalised sexuality (Butler, 1990). Johanna's reaction may have been intensified by the fact she was also considering non-monogamous relationships that fell outside of mononormativity and other normative relationship practices. A similar prejudice to the one that played out in Jac's case (the stereotype that bisexual women prefer men) is here expressed as anticipated binegativity. The main topic, however, is being afraid of rejection because of one's non-monogamous bisexual identity.

Johanna's case is a good example of the challenges that arise for someone with an identity at the intersection of bisexuality and non-monogamy, specifically during the start of an intimate relationship. She shows what Bostwick (2012, p. 8) calls "stigma consciousness". In the end, she chose the strategy of concealment. It is clear that she anticipated having to manage binegative attitudes. Her ambivalence about "coming out" is well attested to in the literature describing the struggles of bisexuals coming out in a society full of anti-bisexual discourses and practices (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Flanders et al., 2016; Fra, 2014; Li et al., 2013). Furthermore, dealing with a twofold outing, as a bisexual and as a person preferring non-monogamous relationships, increases the challenges at the start of an intimate relationship in her experience.

Non-monogamy as strategy for emancipation: Kalypso and Asha

Not all the women understood bisexuality and non-monogamous practices as negative. The next two examples show how some women frame their experiences of unfaithfulness with greater agency. Similar to descriptions

by others, some women may embrace consensual non-monogamous or polyamorous relationship forms or identities as emancipatory possibilities (Gustavson, 2009; Klesse, 2005; Robinson, 2013). The next two examples exhibit a spectrum from challenging compulsory monogamy to claiming polyamory for oneself and adopting it as an inspiring relational identity.

Kalypso works in the arts; she has been in relationships with men and also had romantic and sexual encounters with women. In the following extract, she describes how important these encounters have been to her:

Something I didn't wanna miss. Anyway, I was in monogamous relationships and I just was unfaithful and I kept it to myself because I didn't want it to be destroyed. It was, it was selfish decisions that I took because I just wanted to give room to these women, well these encounters and I didn't want to accept why that shouldn't work out. And when I realised that, okay people are hurt, I thought, 'shit I don't want them to be hurt, that's not what it's all about'. So, I just don't tell them.

For Kalypso, non-consensual non-monogamy was a way for her to *live out* her sexuality. In the above extract, she expresses her conflicting thoughts of wanting to have sexual encounters with women while being in supposedly monogamous relationships with men at the same time as not wanting to "miss out" or hurt anyone. Considering her narration of other relationship experiences, a progression can be seen from non-consensual non-monogamous relationships in the past to a consensual, open, and honest relationship with her current partner. Similar to the women presented in studies by Li and colleagues (2013) and Robinson (2013), Kalypso thought of her bisexuality as the reason why she wanted to engage in an open relationship. The quoted passage shows that she does not blame herself as much as Jac does (Kalypso's "It was, it was selfish decisions that I took" versus Jac's "Because unfortunately, I was always the person that cheated"). Also, she did not draw negative conclusions about herself from her experiences. She only stated that she acted egotistically. However, she was pretty clear that she too wanted to have sexual/romantic encounters with women ("because I just wanted to give room to these women, well these encounters and I didn't want to accept why that shouldn't work out"). It is something she did not want to give up under any circumstances. In Kalypso's case, my interpretation did not find a link between internalised binegativity and unfaithfulness. This shows also how diverse the experiences (and subsequent interpretations) of the participants were and how problematic sweeping generalisations (e.g. in the form of stereotypes) about bisexual people are.

Asha is another example of a woman dealing with her sexuality in an emancipatory way. Her way of adopting polyamory as an inspiring concept for her identity and love life is one step further towards self-determined

agency. In the following extract, she discusses what discovering the concept of polyamory meant for her:

It was like a revelation when I realised I'm no arsehole. I'm no arsehole that always wants to play around. I am just in the wrong relationship concept, because I always thought there is just one. And that was such an *aha* experience for me; that was really cool.

Asha did not give us her personal conclusion on her sexual history as the previously mentioned women did. She just echoed the outside view of her ex-partners, who she told us did not have a positive opinion of her. It is not clear whether she ever thought them to be right about their assessment or whether it hurt her. The interesting part, however, is that she did not blame herself – feeling that she was a bad person – because she followed her sexual attractions. On the contrary, when she learned about the concept of polyamory from one of Vienna's bisexual support groups, it was “like a revelation” to her. She frames the concept of polyamory as something that she had always actually had inside herself; like other essentialised identities, it just needed to be revealed. I argue that in Asha's case, the adoption of a polyamorous identity is an act of empowerment. Others have also found that bisexual women adopt non-monogamous or polyamorous relationship concepts as an act of agency (Klesse, 2005; Robinson, 2013). Moreover, Asha was able to distance herself from the insults of others. Like Kalypso, in Asha's account there was seemingly no link between internalised binegativity and unfaithfulness that could be identified in the analysis. Thus, both examples provide evidence that women experiencing the emancipatory potential of non-monogamy are less likely to link bisexuality and unfaithfulness in a way that reflects internalised binegativity.

Discussion and conclusion

This work shows how bisexual women make meaning of unfaithfulness in relation to bisexuality. It adds to the current body of research on bisexual women by illustrating the complex interplay between (expected) unfaithfulness and different forms of binegativity (anticipated, internalised, or coming from others). It also provides evidence about how binegative accounts may reflect (internalised) binegativity. It explicitly portrays the conclusions the women draw for themselves and their surroundings, and their reactions and strategies based on their understandings of unfaithfulness and bisexuality: coming to the negative conclusion of not being “a relationship person” and emancipating oneself through non-consensual and consensual forms of non-monogamous relationships. Additionally, the following minority stress processes could be identified in bisexual non-monogamously living women: binegativity coming from others, being internalised or anticipated, expectation of rejection, and concealment of one's identity.

There are particular challenges in capturing different forms of internalised anti-bisexual attitudes that underlie the statements of the participants. From a superficial point of view one could jump to simple conclusions, such as that the extracts are accounts of the connection between promiscuity and bisexuality. However, this would over-simplify the complexity of bisexual lives. To show the intricacy of the women's experiences, I chose to look for latent meanings in their narratives, seeing the statements of the women in light of their actions, conclusions, and lived experiences. For the analysis, it proved to be helpful to have Meyer's (2003) framework of minority stress processes in mind. Looking at known stress processes such as discrimination (internalised binegativity or other people's negative attitudes), expectations of rejection, and concealment was crucial when taking into account the following points: (1) how the participants' understandings and positioning of unfaithfulness may not just highlight a reaction to one's own real or expected unfaithfulness; (2) how these understandings are connected to experienced or anticipated binegativity; and (3) how they are intertwined with internalised binegativity. In addition, the strategies the women adopted to cope with their internalised binegativity, their reactions to allegations, and the actions that followed their own conclusions were particularly revealing. The form the reactions took provided additional evidence, for example, regarding which ways binegativity has been internalised or challenged. The strategies of the women ranged from negative self-concepts to emancipation and agency. However, it is important to acknowledge the challenges in capturing internalised binegativity between the lines of the participants' narrations. Thus, the interpretation provided in the analysis is not the only possible one. Norms and attitudes surrounding (bisexual) women, their sexuality, and their relationships are manifold. Many parts of the interviews could also be interpreted as accounts of other norms around sexuality, sexual identity, and relationships such as compulsory monogamy and heteronormativity.

Predominant anti-bisexual attitudes presented here were that bisexual people are unfaithful and untrustworthy, and that their relationships are lacking in seriousness. These allegations are a result of the hypersexualisation of bisexual women, together with the idea that bisexual people can only be satisfied when engaging sexually/romantically with more than one sex or gender at the same time (Rust, 2003). Women failing to live in a monogamous way were in danger of falling into a complex array of anticipated stigmas and internalised binegative attitudes. However, choosing to live at the intersection of bisexuality and non-monogamy also proved to be challenging. Nevertheless, some women experienced non-monogamous relationship forms as empowering.

This work also shows how connected the challenges of bisexual identities and non-monogamously living people are when it comes to allegations of promiscuity. For some participants, non-monogamy proved to have an emancipatory potential, while others may have been inspired by

information explaining how active cultural forces around compulsory monogamy and couple-centrism shape the way we think about ourselves and our surroundings. Therefore, this work reiterates the call for activist synergies between bisexual and non-monogamous or polyamorous communities (Baumgartner, 2020; Klesse, 2011; Mint, 2004).

Some of the women in the current study talked about having sexual experiences while simultaneously being in relationships that were assumed by their partners to be monogamous. However, this occurrence of unfaithfulness is by no means generalizable to all bisexual or bisexually living women. There is generally little research on the infidelity of bisexual people (Hoang et al., 2011); similarly, few studies deal with the concept of “cheating” in consensual non-monogamous relationships (Wosick-Correa, 2010). For heterosexual women, it has been described that 50.6 per cent report they have cheated (Brand et al., 2007). So it seems safe to say that unfaithfulness is a widespread practice, irrespective of sexual orientation or relationship form (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014).

Promiscuity allegations were often connected to the lesbian community, either anticipated by the participants or as vocalised allegations. Ault (1994) described the contentions of some members of lesbian and gay communities seeing bisexual people as traitors of their agenda and further expected them, in the long run, to choose a privileged heterosexual “lifestyle”. These allegations have to be contextualised within the wider web of power relations that regulate sexualities (Butler, 1990). In a society where heterosexuality is still the norm and homosexuality is the “other”, it is theorised that lesbian and gay communities have to distance themselves from the heterosexual mainstream and keep their communities free of possible intruders (Ault, 1996; Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990). This proves to be especially challenging for bisexual people, who often find themselves positioned between the two communities (Borver, Gurevich, & Mathieson, 2001).

Different forms of discrimination – for example, stigmatisation, marginalisation, and internalised discrimination – can lead to psychological distress (Meyer, 2003). This has been described as especially impacting bisexual people, who experience double discrimination by both lesbian/gay communities and the heterosexual mainstream (Jorm et al., 2002; Ross et al., 2010). Thus, it is significant for therapists to have a full understanding of the complex psychological and social structures that influence the lives of bisexual people. Allegations of promiscuity and unfaithfulness are one of the most prominent aspects of binegativity; however, research on how bisexual women make meaning of bisexuality and unfaithfulness is scarce. Even if unfaithfulness should not be conflated with non-monogamous ways of living, publications on non-monogamy offer an interesting insight into the additional challenges and perks of being bisexual and non-monogamous. Work by Klesse (2005), Robinson (2013), and Gustavson (2009) describes the specific challenges of bisexual non-monogamous women, such as having

to deal with promiscuity discourses or being hypersexualised. It also shows that engaging in non-monogamous relationships acts as a form of agency for bisexual women. Some of the participants in these studies even described it as a "natural way of expressing their bisexuality" (Robinson, 2013, p. 28). Conversely, some bisexual people have been reported to see monogamous relationships as a way of resisting expectations that bisexual people will, by default, live non-monogamously (Gustavson, 2009; Robinson, 2013). Such research provides a vivid picture of the way bisexual people speak about (non-) monogamy. However, they do not take into account the complex interplay between bisexuality, (expected) unfaithfulness, and minority stress processes. The current chapter provides a complex analysis of this much discussed but under-researched topic on bisexual women.

The participants were all women and mostly well educated, feminists, and/or politicised. It would of course be interesting to find out about the experiences of bisexual people of other genders – for example, men and those who are trans, genderqueer, and/or non-binary. Additionally, it would be of special interest to adopt an intersectional approach to find out what role other social categories such as race/ethnicity, class, ability, and religion play in different forms of internalised discrimination. Future research could also focus on understanding other notions of internalised binegativity. In light of these findings, this chapter reinforces the importance of educating therapists about bisexual-specific issues and raising bisexual awareness within the LGBT+ community and society at large.

Notes

- 1 "—" Mid-statement pause; "(...)" pause, points correspond to pause length in seconds; "..." omitted text.
- 2 Regarding their gender identity, all the participants identified as "female". One used "queer" to describe their gender identity.
- 3 The participant reported having been inspired by Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens, who coined *ecosexual* as "exploring the eroticism, romance, sensuality/sexuality of nature".

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