DiGeSt

Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies

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DiGeSt Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies, Volume 11, Issue 1
https://doi.org/10.21825/digest.89262
Print ISSN: 2593-0273. Online ISSN: 2593-0281
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On the Crossroad of Bisexual Theory and Affect Theory: Bisexual Shame as an Emotion Shaped by Heterosexism and Biphobia

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Abstract
Bisexual people are discriminated against both by heterosexual and homosexual people. They not only experience heterosexism because they are part of the LGBTQIA+ community, but they also experience discrimination because of still having 'heterosexual' attractions and relationships. These discriminations have a real-life impact on bisexual people, which is reflected in bisexual-specific emotions such as bisexual shame. Researching these emotions allows us to better understand bisexual discrimination. This article focusses on bisexual shame and thus occurs at the crossroad of bisexual and affect theory. The question we ask ourselves is: how are injustices and discrimination against bisexual people reflected in the way bisexuals experience shame? We start this research by embedding ourselves into existing bisexual and (queer) affect theory. Afterwards, we employ this theory and existing literature to reflect on ten conducted interviews with bisexual people. Through analysing these interviews, this study captures important aspects of bisexual people their experiences of bisexual shame, and studying this emotion teaches us about what biphobia can look like and be. In addition, this paper adds to existing literature, the employed theories, and LGBTQIA+ research by shedding light on bisexual shame as a distinct phenomenon that is both embedded in heterosexism and biphobia from both LGBTQIA+ members and heterosexual people.

Keywords
Bisexual theory, Affect theory, Bisexuality, Shame, Emotion, Biphobia, Bisexual Erasure

Introduction

Throughout history, people came to realise the importance of theorising both sexuality and emotions (Hemmings, 2002; Jaggar, 1989, p. 165). This paper looks at shame, an emotion commonly experienced in relation to bisexuality, and thus occurs at the crossroad of bisexual and affect theory. In doing so, it merges two novel and commonly misjudged subjects of analysis. Bisexual theory is a recent study field, and bisexuality has often been misunderstood and subject to many prejudices (Brewster & Moradi, 2010, p. 451; Caldwell, 2010; Hemmings, 2002, p. 22; Pennasilico & Amodeo, 2019, pp. 22-23; Halperin, 2009). Emotions, in turn, are often still considered irrational and 'unsuited for knowledge production' (de Sousa, 1987, p. 4). Some authors have called for systematic inquiry into emotions and the epistemological value they hold, but this field – like bisexuality studies – is still in development (Ahmed, 2004a; Ahmed, 2004b; Cvetkovich, 2012; Damasio, 1994; Damasio, 2003; Nussbaum, 2001). In the context of the present study, it merits to highlight that queer[1] emotions have enjoyed a growing interest recently. Nevertheless, here too, bisexuality enjoys a marginal presence at best. Indeed, queer affect has been studied primarily in relation to homosexuality, without addressing the specificity of a bisexual perspective.

This article aims to give a voice to bisexual emotions in academic research. It focuses on creating theory on one bisexual emotion: bisexual shame. The question it aims to answer is: how are injustices and discrimination against bisexual people reflected in the way bisexuals experience shame? This question is addressed by building on the existing literature (on both bisexuality and emotions) and by conducting and analysing ten in-depth interviews with bisexuals. This way, the article demonstrates the reality and gravity of biphobia's impact and – consequently – highlights the epistemological value of people's emotions.

Conceptual Framework

Bisexual Theory

The late 1980s marked the emergence of academic attention for bisexuality, as well as an increase in local, national and international activism. Faced with the more established scholarship in gay and lesbian studies, bisexual theory's primary concern has long been to assert its validity as a standalone object of study (Hemmings, 2002, p. 18). While there is more research on bisexual issues today, there is still little understanding of bisexual shame. In order to understand this shame, this article first focuses on current knowledge about bisexual issues. As such, we focus on heterosexism within the LGBTQIA+ community (Caldwell, 2010), bisexual erasure, invisibility and prejudices (Pennasilico & Amodeo, 2019), and intersectional mechanisms of marginalisation centred on bisexuality (Alarie and Gaudet 2013; Morgenroth et al., 2021).

To start, 'heterosexism' is best described as 'a form of cultural victimization that oppresses gay/lesbian/bisexual persons' (Neisen, 1993, p. 49). Heterosexuality is constantly promoted, whilst homosexuality is subjugated by key societal institutions – fostering prejudices against the LGBTQIA+ community. When institutions or individuals (un)knowingly maintain and act upon these prejudices, we speak of heterosexism. These institutional and individual acts converge when institutions allow and promote the continuation of individual heterosexist discriminatory acts (Neisen, 1993, p. 50). But with regard to bisexuality, heterosexism does not only come from outside the LGBTQIA+ community, it is also nestled within. This stems from two common misconceptions about bisexuals. Firstly, throughout history, bisexual people have been misregarded as *either* homosexual *or* heterosexual (Caldwell, 2010; Weiss 2003, p. 29). Even though bisexual practices have been documented throughout history, the concept itself only emerged in the 1960s. As a result, many people assume that bisexual people are simply homosexual based on their relations or attractions (Caldwell, 2010; Weiss, 2003, pp. 34-35). Conversely, other

[1] 'Queer' is used at various times in this article when either other scholars use it (e.g. 'queer affect') or when participants used the term.

bisexuals pass[2] as heterosexual. When challenging these assumptions, bisexual people violate the monosexist[3] idea of a 'homosexual'[4] identity as attraction to the same sex exclusively. They are then considered 'not homosexual enough' and therefore 'heterosexual'. Indeed, bisexuals are often assumed to be either homosexual or heterosexual based on the gender of their current partner (Dyar et al., 2014). Secondly, heterosexism against bisexuals also stems from the fact that bisexuals are often seen as 'too different', whereas homosexual people are often defended because they are 'just like you in many ways'. For instance, bisexuals are not considered to be 'just like other people' due to stereotypical assumptions that bisexuals are polyamorous or 'promiscuous'. This violates the idea of 'just like us', resulting in the stigmatisation of bisexuals (Weiss, 2003, p. 38). In short, bisexual people not being 'fully heterosexual or homosexual' and them being 'not like us' results in bisexual discrimination both by heterosexual and homosexual people (Eisner, 2012; MacLeod et al., 2015, p. 218; Rodríguez Rust, 2000; Weiss, 2003, p. 29).

Next, heterosexist attitudes often burden bisexuality with erasure, invisibility and prejudices. As some heterosexual and homosexual communities consider bisexuality a threat to the status quo, bisexual erasure is a common response to this fear, resulting in bisexual invisibility and misrepresentation (Caldwell, 2010; Pennasilico & Amodeo, 2019, pp. 23-24; Yoshino, 2000). Bisexuality is then not recognised as real and therefore excluded – or invisible – within several domains (e.g. media) (Pennasilico & Amodeo, 2019, p. 21). This happens for example by only representing bisexual people their sexual attraction to one gender, perpetuating monosexist assumptions (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013, p. 194; Israel & Mohr, 2003). Such monosexist depictions are generally gendered too. As global cultures centre masculinity, bisexual women are commonly portrayed as heterosexual, while male bisexuals are perceived as homosexual (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013, p. 200). Logically, bisexual invisibility makes it difficult for bisexual people to recognise themselves as bisexual and explain this to others (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013, p. 205; Rodríguez Rust, 2000, pp. 206-207). This often leads bisexuals to keep their sexuality secret, continuing the pattern of erasure and invisibility (Rodríguez Rust, 2000, pp. 206, 208).

Even if bisexuality *is* acknowledged, it is regularly perceived and represented negatively due to stereotypes and prejudices (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013, pp. 191, 194; Caldwell, 2010) – expressed by both heterosexual and LGBTQIA+ people (Brewster & Moradi, 2010, p. 451). As such, bisexuality is often portrayed as temporary by depicting it as 'experimenting' or 'a phase', further contributing to bisexual erasure (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013, p. 191, 198; Rodríguez Rust, 2000). Additionally, bisexuals are seen as confused, indecisive, and even presumed to string homosexuals along to then ultimately settle for a 'heterosexual household' (Alarie & Gaudet 2013, 200; Brewster & Moradi, 2010, pp. 451-452; Pennasilico & Amodeo, 2019, p. 24, Welzer-Lang, 2008, pp. 84, 87, 93). Especially bisexual women are habitually perceived as heterosexual but seeking to experiment. Their relationships with other women are seen as 'try-outs before eventually settling down with men'. Bisexual men, conversely, are often viewed as homosexual but not fully committed (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013, pp. 198, 204; Pennasilico & Amodeo, 2019, p. 24; Welzer-Lang, 2008, pp. 83-84). They are assumed to eventually not be 'brave enough to be gay' and opt for an 'easy heterosexual life', settling with a woman out of convenience (Welzer-Lang, 2008, pp. 84, 87). Regardless of gendered assumptions, bisexuals are considered indecisive and promiscuous, and – consequently – also disloyal (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013, pp. 194, 207; Israel & Mohr, 2003;

[2] This can happen due to e.g. having heterosexual looking relationships (Weiss 2003, p. 38).

[3] Monosexism is the privileging of sexual attraction to one gender, implying the idea that being heterosexual or homosexual is superior to other sexualities, such as bisexuality (Roberts, Horne & Hoyt, 2015, p. 554; Rust, 2001).

[4] Weiss (2003) uses the term 'homosexual' in this context to refer not only to homosexual people, but to all those who are not heterosexual. The monosexist view here defines all such people as exclusively attracted to the same gender, hence Weiss her choice of the term 'homosexual'.

Welzer-Lang, 2008, pp. 83-84, 88, 93). Because they are unable to commit to 'having only a partner of one gender', they are often seen as unfaithful (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013, p. 206; Welzer-Lang, 2008, p. 85). At the same time, bisexuals, often women, are sexualised for 'promiscuously' also being into women (Pennasilico & Amodeo, 2019, p. 24).

These prejudices lead many to avoid dating bisexual people (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013, p. 194). Interestingly, though, bisexuals are also envied at times (Welzer-Lang, 2008, p. 89). They are considered lucky because they are supposedly twice as likely to find love or one-night stands. Moreover, they are seen as being able to 'pass as straight whenever it suits them'. In the eyes of others, this not only makes them enviable but also gives them 'bisexual privilege'. Being able to pass as heterosexual is considered a privilege and therefore only the 'gay side' of bisexuals is seen as what needs to be asserted (Welzer-Lang, 2008, p. 84). Given these assumptions, it is unsurprising that some bisexuals internalise such prejudices and stereotypes. Some of them feel like they have to choose between men and women, but are confronted with the fact that they cannot, while others internalise the stereotype of unfaithfulness (Welzer-Lang, 2008, p. 93).

Evidently though, there is not just *one bisexual experience*. Just as the experiences of bisexuals differ from that of other LGBTQIA+ people, the experiences of bisexuals between themselves are also diverse. To start, historical and environmental factors influence the perception, experiences and treatment of bisexuals and bisexuality. For instance, bisexuality as a concept needed time to be recognised. Therefore, people of different ages grew up in different contexts in terms of how bisexuality was viewed and treated (Caldwell, 2010; Kertzner et al., 2009, pp. 501-502, 504). Additionally, intersectional identity aspects -such as age, gender, class, nationality, religion, race, ethnicity, etc.- also influence how bisexuality is perceived and/or experienced (Alarie and Gaudet 2013, 191; Bohan, 1995; Chan, 1989; Chan, 1995; Chan, 1997; Chun & Singh, 2010; Goldman, 1996; Collins, 2004; Pastrana, 2004; Morgenroth et al., 2021). For example, gender strongly determines how bisexuality is perceived (Alarie and Gaudet 2013, 191). This is not just visible when analysing prejudices (cf. supra), but also with regard to 'challenges for bisexuals' (e.g. their daily worries, reactions of the public …) (Bradford, 2004; Alarie & Gaudet, 2013, p. 209; Steinman, 2001). Moreover, Collins (2004, pp. 102-104) argues that bisexuality research has prioritised white middle-class participants, excluding ethnic minority groups. Bohan (1995) and Collins (2004, pp. 105-106) write about how bisexual people of colour are marginalised due to their ethnic background and – by both heterosexuals and homosexuals – because of their bisexuality. And Rodriguez et al. (2013, p. 303) address the impact of religion and spirituality on one's bisexual journey. In short, bisexuals' stories are not all the same and this should always be remembered and accounted for when analysing bisexuality. This is especially relevant to be mindful of when dealing with the affective and emotional responses of bisexual people to their environment.

Queer Affects

To see how the injustices against bisexual people influence bisexuals' emotions and experiences, we first need to dive deeper into affect theory. We start by discussing the works of two scholars, Sara Ahmed and Ann Cvetkovich, to lay bare the fundamentals of affect theory. Next, we discuss the relevant queer theory about shame.

The phenomenology of emotions can be understood through the work of Ahmed (2004a). Ahmed argues that emotions are a matter of how people and the 'objects' to which their emotions are oriented, come into contact. Emotions both shape objects and affect how people having emotions perceive and engage with these objects (Ahmed, 2004a, pp. 7-8). Ahmed moulds these insights into a model of the 'sociality' of emotions (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 9). According to this model, emotions define the relation between bodies by 'sticking' in certain ways (Ahmed 2004b, p. 119). They can 'stick' – in various degrees – to different people because of stereotypes (e.g. the 'confused bisexual') and they can 'stick' people together because of experiencing the same emotions due to undergoing similar events (e.g.

comparable forms of discrimination) (Ahmed, 2004b, pp. 122-124, 128, 131). In turn, scholars like Cvetkovich (2012) shed light on the motivational qualities of emotions. By building on the work of Lauren Berlant (2011) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003), Cvetkovich (2012, p. 4) sees emotions as part of public, collective experiences, rather than as features of private, individual lives. The collectivity of emotions brings people together, enabling and driving them to participate in political action. This makes emotions a necessary prerequisite for societal change (Cvetkovich, 2012, pp. 1-3). Recognising both the political potentiality of emotions and the impact emotions have on relations, people, and collectivities reveals how emotions are not merely irrational, but contain knowledge worthy of research. Therefore, in this article, we overturn the traditionally alleged dichotomy between theory and affect, yielding a knowledge conception that intersects with the affective dimensions of lived experiences, rather than excluding them.

That shame and being LGBTQIA+ often go hand in hand should not surprise, given that they were almost used as synonyms in the 19th century (Munt, 2007, p. 86). Even to this day, they are still closely linked. An important reason for this is the fact that, throughout human history, certain bodies have always been seen and treated as normative, whereas others have been defined as the 'abnormal' (Foucault, 1954-75; Foucault 1985; Foucault 1986). The latter are then often pathologically treated as the Other (de Beauvoir, 2019 [1949], pp. 13-14; Liu, 2017, p. 46). Drawing on Ahmed (2004a), we can understand how this results in several emotions (such as shame) sticking to these non-normative others. Today, heterosexual, able-bodied, white cismen are the norm and society is structured to accommodate them, not others. However, their identity depends on the rejection of the 'abnormal' (Foucault, 1954-75). This rejection does not stay implicit or tacit. For example, the abnormality of LGBTQIA+ people is explicitly voiced by heterosexist individuals and institutions. As such, homophobia displaces their sexual practices, that differ from the norm, into exile (Munt, 2007, p. 167). To experience this is something traumatic and can be seen as a form of abuse, since it can result in self-blaming, a negative self-image, depression, and shame (Liu, 2017, p. 46; Munt, 2007, p. 167; Neisen, 1993, pp. 49, 52-54; Rybak & Brown, 1996, p. 73).

To understand how heterosexism results in shame specifically, we draw on authors such as Sally Munt (2007). Heterosexism can be internalised by LGBTQIA+ people and make them believe that they are not 'normal citizens' (Munt, 2007, p. 80). Moreover, they frequently blame themselves for the injustices they experience instead of recognising this as heterosexist abuse. This may lead them to attribute their negative self-image to their LGBTQIA+ identity, rather than recognising it as a consequence of victimisation (Neisen, 1993, p. 52). These two aspects – internalised heterosexism and self-blaming – can both result in shame (Liu, 2017; Neisen, 1993, p. 53). Affected by heterosexism, LGBTQIA+ people can start to believe the widely spread heterosexist messages and feel ashamed for being 'bad', 'unworthy' and 'sick' (Neisen 1993, 54). Thus, LGBTQIA+ shame can be seen as something individuals internalise from the external messages they receive (Greene & Britton, 2012, p. 190; Kaufman, 1985; Neisen, 1993, p. 54). Importantly, this shame is thus systemic in nature (Liu, 2017).

While external factors can help cause it, shame is fundamentally an experience of the self by the self (Munt, 2007, p. 83; Sedgwick & Frank, 1995a, p. 136). It is 'the most reflexive of emotions, as it is always concerned with the viewing of the self from the point of view of the other' (Munt, 2007, p. 83). People depend on each other and one's being depends on the recognition of the other (Cavarero, 2000; Munt, 2007, p. 83). As such, when someone shames someone else, that is annihilating for both, making shame a very disruptive emotion (Munt, 2007, p. 222). Shame is also a bodily experience, which can both be all-encompassing or something of which one is barely aware (Munt, 2007, pp. 2, 83, 203; Sedgwick & Frank, 1995a, pp. 133, 136). Additionally, although it can occur momentarily, shame has the potential to stick with you. Memories of shame linger deeply in one's thoughts and the residue that is left behind can invoke other emotions (e.g. envy, hate, humiliation, apathy,

and disgust) (Munt, 2007, p. 2). Lastly, in extreme circumstances, people can collectively be vilified, which is the case with the LGBTQIA+ community (Munt, 2007, p. 203).

Shame can have various effects on who experiences it. Indeed, dealing with this reflexive, disruptive, and collectively-experienced emotion happens in many ways. One of these is to resort to silence. People often feel like they cannot talk about their shame, because they are told that its subject is something to be ashamed of (Munt, 2007, p. 210). This can be very isolating. Moreover, LGBTQIA+ shame can result in LGBTQIA+ people hiding their sexuality. We can illustrate this with an example of Munt (2007, p. 167). She tells the story of a boy named David, who is able to pass as heterosexual. About this passing, Munt (2007, p. 167) writes: 'this generates a particularly potent anxiety for the liminal subject whose identity is so nearly, so very *almost* secure'. Being part of the LGBTQIA+ community is not always as obvious from an outside perspective, and so individuals can be torn between living their lives outside of the closet or more securely closeted. The closet can easily try to recapture the anxious individual (Munt, 2007, p. 174). When people are ashamed of who they are, they might be tempted to hide their sexuality. Bisexual individuals, specifically, might cope with stigmatisation by hiding themselves and carefully evaluating when to appear in conformity to heteronormative norms (Monaco, 2021).

However, not all effects of shame are negative (Cook, 1988, p. 197; Munt, 2007, p. 3). Since shame is the most embodied of emotions and intrinsically relational, it has the power to make things happen (Munt, 2007, p. 220). If people decide to open up, they can form a collective based on their shared shame, thereby transforming the shame into something productive. Indeed, even though shame can detach you from others, this is also shame's transformative potential (Liu, 2017, p. 87; Munt, 2007, pp. 22-24, 48). It is by going through the confrontational momentum of shame that one can exceed it and become a statement of being (Munt, 2007, p. 96; Sedgwick & Frank, 1995b, p. 501). As Munt (2007, p. 219) puts it: 'shame is an affect that entails communal effort, sometimes shame is enacted specifically *as* a collective rite, intended to re-attach those who are alienated to a communal bond'. Meaning, from the state of detachment that shame can instigate, individuals can find each other and re-attach themselves to create new collectives. Moreover, Munt (2007, p. 221) suggests, 'perhaps shame must be intensely endured in order that individuation, and hence new thoughts and feelings, can occur'. Going through shame, becoming a statement of being, and forming collectives, can then result in pride.

Methodology

In this article, I employ a 'grounded theory' framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Noble & Mitchell, 2016). Meaning, the theory developed in this research will be grounded in the interpretations and experiences of the research participants. To unravel what bisexual shame may look like, we focus on empirical data concerning individuals' experiences of this emotion. I collected qualitative data by conducting semi-structured interviews. Where needed, the course of the interviews was changed as to accommodate to what the participants shared. For example, not only bisexual shame but also bisexual confusion and pride were heavily discussed and therefore also emotions to be analysed afterwards.[5] Finally, using the conceptual framework, I analysed and contextualised the interviews. By relating the participants' stories to the literature discussed above, I show how injustices toward bisexuals are reflected in how bisexuals experience shame. Moreover, grounding the research in the participants' experiences allows us to get an idea of what this emotion can mean for bisexual people specifically, and can thus add to existing literature. This is then also the reason why the grounded theory framework was adopted.

[5] This is an interesting route for potential future articles.

Procedure and Participants

For the purpose of this research, only participants who identified as bisexual were selected. During the interviews, it emerged that some of them did not primarily use the term 'bisexual', yet they still used it and felt comfortable with it being used for them. Additionally, diversity was ensured among participants. All of them are from different countries, religions, backgrounds, ages and have different gender identities. This offers the research a more intersectional perspective, allowing for the identification of nuanced differences in experiences based on diverse intersectional identities.

I conducted ten interviews to collect the qualitative primary data. Before conducting these interviews, I received informed consent from all participants. I used theoretical sampling and let the interviews continue until reaching the saturation-point.[6] This allowed for critical engagement with – and contribution to – the existing literature. The names of all participants are anonymised and any information that can lead back to them is omitted. A brief overview of the participants is presented in the table below, offering some demographic insights to understand their intersectional experiences. All the information provided is information the participants felt comfortable sharing.

Romane (she/her)	Romane is a white, non-religious ciswoman studying in her twenties.
Devi (she/they, she requested to use 'she/her' in this article)	Devi is an Indian woman in her late twenties from an upper middle class background.
Ali (she/her)	Ali is a white, European ciswoman in her twenties.
Chiara (she/they, she requested to use 'she/her' in this article)	Chiara is a white ciswoman in her twenties.
Peter (he/him)	Peter is a white, working class, Buddhist, Northern cisman in his late thirties.
Jacob (he/him)	Jacob is a Dutch transman studying in his twenties.
Ell (they/she, they requested to use 'they/them' in this article)	Ell is a white, upper middle class student.
Ine (she/they, she requested to use 'she/her' in this article)	Ine is a non-binary student in the UK from the MENA region.
Amita (she/her)	Amita is a white, non-British, middle-class ciswoman studying in the UK.
Ana (she/her)	Ana is a white, American ciswoman and master's student in her twenties from an upper-class, non-religious background.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Since the participants came from different countries and the research was completed during a COVID-19 wave, I conducted the interviews online through videocalls. They lasted between one and two hours and were semi-structured. I prepared a list of questions in advance, but made sure to leave enough room for the participants to talk about what they viewed as relevant to explain their experiences. This way, the interviews did not feel strict and the conversation could flow. In addition, it limited the risk of the collected data being restricted to my personal preconceived notions (Davies, 1999, p. 95). It also resulted in discussing two other main emotions for all of the ten participants' bisexual journey:

[6] Meaning, interviews were conducted until they did not yield as much useful, original information anymore (Arsovska, 2012, p. 404; Bryman, 2012, p. 420).

confusion and pride. After analysing the interviews and connecting them to the conceptual framework, the participants were contacted again. This was to make sure that nothing was misunderstood and that the portrayal of their stories in the article was accurate. Where necessary, I removed fragments they did not feel comfortable sharing or added footnotes to give requested contexts.

Findings

Participants talked about the shame they felt in different contexts and how they internalised this shame during their bisexual journey. We first discuss the ways in which they experienced shame. They talked about being shamed by romantic partners, family members, and others. Interestingly, this shame was not only caused by heterosexual people, but also by people from the LGBTQIA+ community. The heterosexual-presenting relationships bisexual people may be in or the attractions they might express, can result in shame. The participants also shared experiences of shame that were not related to relationships or attraction, but to the way they present themselves. Secondly, we elaborate on how this shame can be internalised and have an impact on bisexuals' sense of belonging. Bisexual shame in public LGBTQIA+ spaces often results in a constant need to justify oneself, leading to feelings of exclusion.

Bisexual People Experiencing Shame

To start, the participants expressed being shamed by friends, family, romantic partners, and others because of their relationships and attractions. This happened both in heterosexual and LGBTQIA+ spaces. Regarding heterosexual spaces, anecdotes from Devi and Ali are insightful. Several participants mentioned how them being bisexual was less accepted than if they would have been homosexual. Devi, for example, paraphrased one of the things her mum said when she came out:

> *'I wish you were a lesbian, and not a bisexual. Because then at least I know that you […] had no other choice, but if you were to be bi […], you're making the choice of dating a woman and potentially be a source of pain for the family.'*[7]

Similarly, Ali expressed how her mum finds it much harder to accept that she is bisexual than if she had been a lesbian. Ali thinks this is because her mum believes that people need to choose and that bisexuals are promiscuous in 'dating whoever they want'. Her mum would love her no less if she dated a woman, which would make it easier for her to come out as a lesbian. However, the possibility that she can fall in love with any gender, the uncertainty, the non-fixedness of the situation; *that* is a problem for her mum.

The participants also talked about experiencing shame in LGBTQIA+ spaces. Many of the participants were confronted with exclusion and shame for still having 'heterosexual' attractions or relationships. For example, Chiara talked about a friend who organised 'queer dinner nights' but in reality, only women-loving-women or men-loving-men couples were invited. Bisexuals were welcome, but only those with a partner of the same gender. Peter mentioned a myriad of instances where he felt shamed by the LGBTQIA+ community. For example, when bisexual women on a dating app said they did not want to date bisexual men. Hearing this from other bisexuals was shocking, he said. Peter has also been told that he is 'actually just gay' by both LGBTQIA+ and heterosexual people. Likewise, Romane mentioned friends telling her that she is 'in reality simply a lesbian'. These ideas of monosexism really get tested when looking at the experiences of trans people. Jacob, a transman, talked about how his past relationships could be misinterpreted as being 'straight' or 'gay':

[7] Interview with Devi, 18/06/2022.

> *'Most of my relationships […] as a teen […] would be considered straight, but [looking back now, were] quite gay. And when talking about it now with people who know me as a man, it is weird to talk about past experiences because it wasn't an experience of a man"*[8].

During the interviews, the participants also talked about experiences with (both heterosexual and LGBTQIA+) romantic partners. They explained how being bisexual was something that was not automatically accepted by all partners. For instance, Romane talked about how her bisexuality made her ex-girlfriend feel uncomfortable. Her ex was afraid Romane would walk away with another man and asked questions like *'"oh but don't you miss a penis?"'*[9]. Ell was in a relationship with a man when they started longing for experiences with people of different genders. Although their ex-boyfriend eventually agreed with opening up the relationship, he said many shaming things like *'"is your pussy that important?"'*[10]. With his comments he shamed Ell both for their sexuality and for their wish to explore it through the means of an open relationship. Jacob told me about a relationship (with a man) before he was out as trans. When he would talk about bisexuality or about finding female celebrities cute, his ex would disapprove since it did not fit heteronormative standards. Peter spoke about his previous marriage and how he never told his ex-wife that he is bisexual. She grew up in a very heterosexist environment and loved to gossip about who might be homosexual. He did not feel comfortable to be himself around her. Ine talked about how her ex believed she could only be homosexual or heterosexual. Ine is also polyamorous and she felt she could not even begin to explore talking about polyamory in their relationship because of how looked down upon and shamed it was by her partner.

Moving on, bisexuals are not solely perceived as heterosexual or homosexual based on their relationships; the way they dress also plays a role. More so, their clothing is often a way to navigate LGBTQIA+ or heterosexual spaces. Ine, Ali, Amita, Jacob, Romane, Ell and Devi all talked about this. They mentioned dressing 'straight' for 'heterosexual' dates and dressing 'gay' for the other dates. They also talked about the pressure to dress 'gay enough' on Pride and other LGBTQIA+ events. Some felt shamed when dressing 'too straight' and others dressed differently out of (the fear of) shame. Jacob talked about dressing very 'straight' to pass as a man but nervously thinking in LGBTQIA+ spaces *'"I promise I'm one of you"'*[11]. Ali associates dressing 'gay' with being free and having fun. Consequently, in a professional setting she tends to dress 'straighter'. Amita has less issues with dressing 'straight' because her relationship with a woman can counterbalance looking heterosexual. However, people still make assumptions. Both strangers and friends often call Amita a lesbian. As such, they invalidate her sexuality. Additionally, she has had experiences with people assuming she and her girlfriend were heterosexual because her girlfriend presents more masculine. Peter once tried to go to a 'safe room' of his university's LGBTQIA+ student union but was refused entrance. He did not dare to come out as bisexual and someone blocked the door until he walked away. He thinks this is either because they knew him and thought he was heterosexual or just assumed based on the way he dressed.

Bisexual Shame's Impact on Oneself through Internalisation and on Belonging

The shame bisexuals face can be internalised. For example, Ali had others (including other bisexuals) comment on her dating *yet another guy*. *'"Oh really, you're going from a guy to another guy?"'*[12]. She expressed feeling ashamed and questioning whether she was wasting

[8] Interview with Jacob, 12/06/2022.
[9] Interview with Romane, 12/06/2022.
[10] Interview with Ell, 18/06/2022. Ell wanted me and you, the reader, to know that this was him being frustrated, not malicious.
[11] Interview with Jacob, 12/06/2022.
[12] Interview with Ali, 9/06/2022.

her time to explore. She became reluctant to tell people she dated him because of the shameful comments she had heard and the shame she internalised. She still sometimes feels ashamed towards other LGBTQIA+ people about being with a man. Ali was also hesitant to bring male partners to LGBTQIA+ events because she did not want to '*invade a space with a "straight relationship"*'[13]. She was not alone in feeling doubtful about bringing male partners to LGBTQIA+ events and experiencing shame for not being 'fully homosexual'. As mentioned earlier, Romane's ex-girlfriend was uncomfortable with her bisexuality and questioned it. As this was only shortly after Romane came to terms with being bisexual, she started changing her idea about her sexuality. She started to call herself a lesbian and told her ex not to worry. Ell's ex said many shaming things (cf. supra), which Ell internalised. This resulted in Ell asking themself: why were they prioritising their 'pussy' over a stable and good relationship? Ell also mentioned how, after getting into a new relationship, they felt like they were betraying the LGBTQIA+ community for getting together with another man after breaking up with one. Devi explained how she felt like she did not deserve to go to Pride because she had to explore her 'queer side' more. Ine's ex could not bear Ine saying that she thought men were cute. Whenever Ine would do this, she would think Ine was heterosexual. This resulted in Ine feeling like her sexuality was erased. Just like Romane, she did not feel safe to openly be bisexual and started questioning whether she really was. She thought she had to choose between homosexuality and heterosexuality and felt shamed by her girlfriend if she showed a sign of not fitting into one of these boxes. Her bisexuality got erased in the relationship since being with her partner meant for that partner that she was either homosexual or lying. Ine also talked about later relationships and feeling uncomfortable to be perceived as heterosexual. She deliberately called her partner 'partner' to avoid appearing as either homosexual or heterosexual. Peter and Chiara also told me they did this. To sum up, most of the participants have felt shame for not being 'queer enough' and had either internalised this completely or found it difficult to confront. Some of their ways of avoiding this confrontation include using 'partner' instead of 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend', remaining silent, or not going as a heterosexual-looking couple to LGBTQIA+ events.

Aside from this impact on bisexual people's sense of self and self-identifying practices, bisexual shame can also have an impact on bisexuals' sense of belonging in the LGBTQIA+ community. A consequence of the prejudice that one is either heterosexual or homosexual – and the shame associated with not fitting in those boxes – is the constant need to justify oneself. In Ali's words: '*I felt like I had to prove myself*'[14]. She explained that sometimes she wishes she was only attracted to one gender. Amita was afraid she did not have enough experiences with people of different genders to be recognised as bisexual. And in conversation with Ine about bringing male partners to LGBTQIA+ spaces, she sighed: *'why do I always have to justify myself?'*[15]. Moreover, Ine talked about how it seems like simply stating you are bisexual is never enough. In her experience, you always need to have a history of dating people of different genders before others believe you. Justifying one's bisexual identity is something the participants have to do time and time again to be allowed a place in their community. This justifying is tiring and, as Amita and Romane said, bisexuals just wish for themselves and their partners to feel comfortable in LGBTQIA+ spaces without having to constantly justify their mere presence and sexuality to their own community.

Discussion

We started this article by asking how injustices and discrimination against bisexuals are reflected in the way bisexuals experience shame. The conceptual framework articulates that heterosexism is not only a dynamic between the LGBTQIA+ community and others, it also prevails within the community itself. In other words, bisexuality is erased and misrepresented

[13] Interview with Ali, 9/06/2022.
[14] Interview with Ali, 9/06/2022.
[15] Interview with Ine, 8/06/2022.

by both heterosexual and LGBTQIA+ people. Looking back at the ten interviews and their analyses, we can see how these bisexual injustices are reflected in the shame the participants experienced for being bisexual. While some participants (e.g. Romane) talked about experiencing shame for being LGBTQIA+ in general ('queer shame' in Munt (2007)), this article focuses on the additional shame for being bisexual.

Several participants experienced shame through prejudices of others. Ali talked about her mum believing that being bisexual means being promiscuous, following the prejudice scholars like Alarie and Gaudet (2012, pp. 194, 207) and Welzer-Lang (2008, pp. 83-84, 88, 93) analysed. Peter gave an example of the prejudice that bisexual people are supposedly more likely to cheat. He talked about bisexual women not wanting to date him because of this. Bisexuals often hear that people do not want to date them because of their sexuality and the fear that they might cheat (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013, pp. 194, 206; Welzer-Lang, 2008, p. 85). Several participants, such as Peter, Romane, and Chiara, also talked about being perceived as 'actually just gay or straight'. This form of erasure illustrates the prevalent idea that bisexuals are actually homosexual or heterosexual and how they are shamed for not fitting into one of these boxes (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013, p. 200; Dyar et al., 2014; Weiss, 2003, p. 38). The inadequacy of these two boxes (i.e.: the assumption that people are either heterosexual or homosexual) was highlighted in the conversation with Jacob, a transman. Not only can people wrongly assume sexuality based on relationships (e.g. Chiara) and/or attractions (e.g. Peter) (Dyar et al., 2014; Weiss, 2003, p. 38), but – as in Jacob's case – also past relationships can be misinterpreted as being 'straight' or 'gay'.

Thus, having a partner or attraction towards people of a certain gender can be misinterpreted as only being attracted to people of that gender (Dyar et al., 2014; Weiss, 2003, p. 38). Since romantic partners of bisexuals can also make this assumption, there is a constant need of coming out and a risk that their partners will not accept them or even that their sexual identity will be erased. For example, Romane talked about how her bisexuality made her ex feel uncomfortable due to having the prejudice that bisexuals are just going through a confusing phase (Pennasilico & Amodeo, 2019, p. 24; Welzer-Lang, 2008, pp. 84, 87). Similarly, Ine felt like her sexuality was erased due to her ex-partner's monosexist prejudices and behaviour. As Weiss (2003, p. 38) clarifies, Ine's partner was sadly no exception in having this negative reaction. Ine also never dared to share with this partner how she was polyamorous. Being bisexual is often seen as being promiscuous and Ine wanted to avoid this judgement. Unlike Ine, Ell did share that they were polyamorous with their ex and was shamed for this. In reality, however, their polyamory was not about them 'being a promiscuous bisexual person', but about trying to get to know themselves better (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013, pp. 194, 207; Welzer-Lang, 2008, pp. 83-84, 88, 93). The interviews also taught us how people do not only assume the sexuality of others based on relationships and attractions. Indeed, several participants said they were conscious about how they express and dress themselves, as different ways of dressing are associated with different sexual orientations on the basis of stereotypes (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015).

Furthermore, bisexual shame has ramifications. Shame negatively affects bisexuals' sense of belonging in LGBTQIA+ spaces, as well as their sense of self. Heterosexism and heteronormative standards can make people believe something is wrong with them (Munt, 2007, p. 80). This is visible in e.g. Jacob's experience regarding his ex's disapproval of his non-heteronormative celebrity crushes. The disapproval led him to think he was being absurd and that something was wrong with him. The tendency of LGBTQIA+ people to blame themselves for their sexual attractions is a typical characteristic of queer shame in general (Neisen, 1993, p 52). However, with regard to bisexuality specifically, we observe that people blame themselves not only for their 'homosexual', but also for their 'heterosexual' attractions. This is illustrated by how Ali responded to other people judging her for dating *another guy* and not being 'fully homosexual' by questioning herself. She was not alone in internalising and feeling shame for her 'indecisive' sexuality (Welzer-Lang, 2008). This is

also visible in Ell their story, since they felt like they were betraying the LGBTQIA+ community. Devi in turn considered her 'bisexual privilege' (Welzer-Lang, 2008, p. 84) too prevalent to be allowed at events such as Pride. Ine, Peter and Chiara talked about the shame for not being 'queer enough' as well, and how confronting this is difficult. Shame is both silenced and silencing. Not revealing one's sexuality (by using the term 'partner', not going as a heterosexual looking couple to LGBTQIA+ events, etc.) is one way to not confront this shame and to not talk about it, which involuntarily contributes to the cycle of bisexual invisibility (Monaco, 2021; Munt, 2007, p. 210).

Analysing these interviews, we see how various concepts of bisexual theory correspond to the experiences from the participants. However, we also see that existing queer affect theory falls short regarding bisexual experiences of shame. The interviews reveal how talking about bisexual shame requires a rethinking of some central terms of queer and Foucauldian theory (Angelides 2001, p. 199). Queer theory has often talked about heterosexuality and homosexuality as two binary opposites (Angelides 2001, p. 159). However, this needs to be questioned by critically engaging with Foucault's theory. Foucault (1954-75) explains how the norm – heterosexual, non-disabled, white, cis men – is defined by what it is not: disabled, queer, trans, of colour, etc. But we can also imagine this dynamic to take place within the abnormal (here: the LGBTQIA+ community) itself. Throughout history, people of colour, transgender people, and others have been excluded from the community (Cyrus, 2017; Knee, 2018; McCormick & Barthelemy, 2020). Bisexuals were no exception from this (Eisner, 2012). Within the LGBTQIA+ community, we can identify multiple normal-abnormal dynamics, homosexual-bisexual being one of them. In the same way that heteronormativity leads to queer shame (Liu, 2017; Munt, 2007; Neisen, 1993), homosexual norms within the community can lead to shame for being part of the community but still liking people of another gender. Bisexuals are then abnormalised both with regard to heterosexuality and homosexuality as norms. I argue that their shame then also works both ways. They experience shame both for being attracted to people of the same gender and to people of a different gender. Bisexual people are abnormalised by both heterosexual and homosexual people, and can hence also feel like they have to constantly justify themselves to both of them (as for example Ine and Ali expressed). All of this demonstrates the limitations of current queer affect theory when it comes to covering the diverse experiences of all LGBTQIA+ identities, including the feelings of shame experienced by bisexual individuals. Indeed, bisexual shame is a distinct concept that at times differs significantly from emotions of other LGBTQIA+ members.

These differences between homosexual and bisexual shame can be illustrated by returning to Munt's example of David (2007, pp. 167-174). When individuals are ashamed for who they are, they can be tempted to hide their sexuality and 'get back into the closet'. However, as explained, bisexuals are not only, like David, torn between living as who they are and going back into the closet. They can also be ashamed for 'not going all the way' and 'still having heterosexual attractions'. The interviews and their connection to bisexual and affect theory thus suggest that bisexuals are shamed both for being 'not quite straight enough' and 'not quite gay enough'. Moreover, this shaming comes from both heterosexual and homosexual people and spaces. Whether bisexual shame is something bisexuals experience without being fully aware (e.g. Romane) (Munt, 2007, pp. 2, 203; Sedgwick & Frank, 1995a, pp. 133, 136), or whether they realise (e.g. Peter), shame can leave a residue that can be both negative (doubting one's own sexuality, confusion…) and positive (Munt, 2007, p. 2). The latter because, by going through shame, one can end up in pride; a completely different emotion that can be used to fight back and make inclusive spaces truly inclusive.

Finally, to fully understand the importance of acknowledging bisexual experiences of shame, let us consider how the conducted research stands in relation to its wider context. We looked at bisexuality by focusing on emotions. Even though emotions are often still seen as irrational and not worth studying, analysing them provided us with valuable insights. Using affect theory was thus fruitful. Listening to the way the participants experience(d) shame

taught us how biphobia and heterosexism indeed come from both heterosexual and LGBTQIA+ communities. It made these ideas more tangible and real by showcasing how bisexual discrimination is in fact reflected in the emotions bisexuals experience. This not only illustrates bisexual injustices, it also gives us a better understanding of what these can look like. Furthermore, it shows us how current queer affect theory is falling short in relation to bisexual experiences. Indeed, bisexual shame is not the same as homosexual shame. However, the latter is currently still defined as representative for all LGBTQIA+ experiences of shame. Moreover, this articulates that bisexual discrimination is not merely homosexual discrimination. If we want to fight this discrimination, we should start with understanding it. Therefore, understanding the similarities and differences between heterosexism towards homosexuals and towards bisexuals, and between homosexual and bisexual shame is of great importance.

Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

I see two main routes for follow-up research. Firstly, we have to keep in mind that the current research has been conducted with a small set of primary data, meaning that further primary research on bisexual shame with a larger and even more diverse dataset might be opportune. However, this need not detract from the insights gained from this study. Therefore, secondly, the fruitfulness of this research and its contributions to constructing theory around bisexual shame suggest that it is also worthwhile researching other bisexual emotions in a similar manner. Both confusion and pride were mentioned often during the interviews. It could therefore be interesting and important to analyse these further to better understand bisexual experiences and injustices.

Conclusion

This research contributes to the representation of bisexual emotions in LGBTQIA+ and affect theory by analysing how injustices and discrimination against bisexual people are reflected in the way bisexuals experience shame. We started by discussing some important findings from bisexual theory and queer affect theory. We focused on heterosexism, bisexual erasure and the importance of acknowledging intersectionality. In relation to bisexual erasure, we also focused on bisexual invisibility and common bisexual prejudices. In order to understand how bisexual injustices might influence bisexual experiences, we talked about affect theory and relevant queer theory about shame. Next, ten in-depth interviews with bisexual people were conducted and analysed. These illustrated the important difference between homosexual and bisexual shame. Bisexuals are not only shamed for not fitting into heteronormative standards, but also for being ‘not fully gay’. This shame comes from both heterosexual and LGBTQIA+ spaces and can be internalised. Biphobia can then result in others shaming bisexual people, and in bisexual people doubting themselves and their space and belonging in LGBTQIA+ environments. We were able to learn about these impacts of biphobia by allowing bisexual individuals a voice and focusing on their emotions regarding bisexuality. As such, the study points to the value of affect theory, especially in combination with primary qualitative data, for gaining a better understanding of the lived experiences of groups of people. But more importantly, it can also mark a valuable step in combatting bisexual discrimination. Indeed, to fight biphobia and its ramifications, we need to understand bisexual people’s experiences. Making sure their emotions and voices are represented in LGBTQIA+ research is thus crucial.

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