

# Invisibility of a sexuality: The Construction of a woman's bisexuality

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- ‘So what are you? Are you lesbian, straight? What is it? This is so confusing.’

# Introduction

- The agency for a South African women to discuss their sexuality is limited by the hetero-patriarchal nature of our society (Gunkel, 2010)
- Great strides have been made in sexual rights and freedom since democracy, but bisexuality is never given the same space as gay and lesbian identities and is often not viewed as a legitimate identity (Flanders & Hatfield, 2014)

# Introduction Cont'd

- Bisexuality is usually viewed through the lens of transition, curiosity, promiscuity or confusion and therefore it is not viewed as legitimate
- This makes it very difficult for bisexuals to come out
- Black bisexual woman the challenge is compounded by gender and race
- It is important for minority groups to contribute to discussions on sexuality so that our experiences are documented.

# Methodology

- Auto-ethnography
- Allows for an in-depth perspective using data that comes from the lived experiences of the author
- Allows for marginalized individuals to document their experiences through research
- Allows for the intersectional approach – female, black, class and sexuality
- Challenging

# Beginning Stages of my bisexuality

- 9 years old- I recognized I was a bisexual but growing up in a heterosexual and conservative family I felt something was wrong with me
- Stobie (2007) 'Somewhere in the Double Rainbow: Representations Of Bisexuality in Post-Apartheid Novels' – characters in novels where described as being bisexual but it was never overtly said. Secondly bisexuality is viewed in the context of confusion or transition to homosexuality
- Brenda Fassie – prominent example of the invisibility of bisexuality
- I associated bisexuality with chaos and emotional instability

# Bisexuality and Religion

- Page et al (2013) – being a part of a religious system that disapproves of sexual minorities has a negative impact on how individuals identify and accept themselves.
- I come from a Christian background where LGBTI issues were not discussed at the time and if they were discussed it was in a negative manner

# Teenage Years

- Lynch and Maree (2013)- heteronormativity is promulgated through institutions such as heterosexual marriages and relationships, the nuclear family and schools
- Matric dance experience – I could not take my friend (female) as my date. It would send the ‘wrong message’
- The space for women to discuss their sexuality independently is limited as it is mainly done in relation to servicing the man (Grosz, 1985)- sexualities which do not conform to the ‘norm’ are excluded.
- Challenge of being a bisexual in this space.

# Disclosure

- Telling family members has been challenging
  - Telling my mother – ‘being a lesbian is a very difficult life you have to be constantly defending yourself not only to family and friends but also to broader society. Do you really want to go through that struggle if you can avoid it’
  - Family members view being gay and lesbian is ‘un-African’ telling them I am bisexual is difficult

# Bisexual Adult

- Institutionalized patriarchal heterosexuality still persists
  - the constant objectification and sensationalism of my sexuality ('threesomes', 'so sexy').  
Phallogocentric nature of Western society (penis favoured over the vagina in various spaces)
  - LGBTI clubs and societies but I could only express myself in these spaces during my university years

# Labels associated with Bisexuality

- Klesse (2005) words that are used to describe bisexuals 'promiscuous' 'sluts' 'selfish'
- Constant word I hear as a bisexual is 'selfish'
  - You are selfish pick a side
  - Can't have your cake and eat it

# Bisexual Erasure

- Yoshino (2000) homosexuals deny bisexuality as it threatens their inherent defence of homosexuality – bisexuality challenges this idea
- Rust (1992) – dichotomous sexual identity that has been created has made the space for different types of sexualities to become invisible
- Bisexuality goes against the theory of desiring one sex and this destabilizes the hetero/homo binary
- Space has been made for lesbian and gays but bisexuals are invisible in this space as our issues are never discussed
- My experience in LGBTI spaces (avoidance of the ‘B’ word)

# Black/Middle-Class/Bisexual

- Being homosexual is still not fully accepted in all Black communities. Trying to explain bisexuality is even worse as it is not even being discussed
- Being bisexual or homosexual is seen as not being 'Black' or it is seen as 'un-African'
- Homosexuality is viewed as White exploitation of Black culture
- Fear of holding my girlfriend's hand in the township as we may experience violence
- Biphobia – set of prejudiced attitudes and beliefs about individuals with a bisexual sexual orientation (Yost & Thomas, 2010). Bisexuals are seen as confused and promiscuity.

# Black/Middle-Class/Bisexual

- Middle class background- don't face any violent discrimination but I have experienced incident in Melville (sies)
- Maliepaard(2015) argues that the surrounding space for an individual needs to be conducive for them to be able to express their sexual identity
- I socialize in spaces which are heterosexual, but I am not afraid to express my bisexuality

# Conclusion

- Need to continue to create a space for all sexualities to be able to express themselves
- More black bisexuals need to speak and voice their experiences so that we do not remain invisible.

- Thank You