

BISEXUALITY AND THE THREAT OF THE HYBRID

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Liberal Studies.

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DEDICATION

To my wife

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ABSTRACT

Binaries dominate Western classification systems, and those that fall in between binary terms are often subject to discursive erasure. This thesis examines the category bisexual as a hybrid of the binary set heterosexual/homosexual, and argues that the cultural erasure of bisexuality is a function of power structures enabled by the binary system of categorization of sexual identities. Defining binary terms is a deliberate process enacted by dominant groups to establish difference and thereby maintain separation and differential distribution of resources and power in society. Marginalized groups also participate in this discourse, at times refuting it, but at other times bolstering it in efforts to claim legitimacy and resources. The hybrid threatens binary logic by calling into question the reality and sustainability of the two purported categories; the hybrid expresses the fluidity of identity and the instability of dichotomous terms, suggesting that the differences between groups are neither essential nor cause for differential treatment of persons based on such categorization. A comparative exploration of biracial as a hybrid of Black and white bolsters this argument, as commonalities between discourses on bisexuality and mixed race illuminate the operation of binary categories and the way in which they maintain hierarchical systems that privilege some groups and oppress others. This work sheds light on the ways in which binaries function in these two realms, the sexual/gendered and racial, thereby increasing the utility of identifying and deconstructing binary categories as an analytical tool for understanding and improving the social world.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is Bisexuality?

Bisexuality is generally understood as attraction to both sexes (men and women). Ochs (2007) defines bisexuality as “the capacity to be attracted to and sexual with people of more than one sex, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree” (para. 54). Ochs’ (2007) definition is the broadest of the ways in which bisexuals themselves define bisexuality and reflects the reality that many people in Western society today recognize a variety of gender identities and sex/gender combinations beyond man and woman (e. g., genderqueer, agender, transgender, two-spirit, etc.). In this paper, however, the kind of discourse examined tends to rely on the older and narrower definition of bisexuality (attraction to both men and women), reflecting traditional Western binary logic on sex and gender out of which the concept of bisexuality originally sprung.

Linguistically, the binary implications of the term are obvious - “bi” means “two” - and the expanding meaning of bisexuality creates a dissonance between this newer meaning and the term itself. A variety of other terms describing attraction to multiple genders, or attraction regardless of gender, have come into use (e.g., pansexual, heteroflexible, omnisexual, etc.), and some activists have begun to use “bisexual” as an umbrella term for these varying identities, because of its longer-standing existence as an indicator of plurisexual identity, and its status as the most well-known and best understood of these identities (Eisner, 2013). When I discuss bisexuality in discourse throughout this paper, I understand the concept as being used to reference a binary social construct of two genders, men and women, while acknowledging that

many bisexual individuals themselves base their identity on a recognition of more than two genders.

This paper is concerned with the larger discourse on bisexuality, the ways it operates in reference to the binary terms heterosexuality/homosexuality, and its function as a threat to this binary and the power systems it upholds. While the experiences of bisexual-identifying individuals are explored and used to illustrate the impacts of such discourse, the emphasis is on the discourse itself and the macro-level power structures enacted and maintained by it. Therefore, when referring to the term bisexuality as a reference to two sexes, genders, or sexualities, the intention is not to marginalize the plurality of non-binary sexes, genders, and sexualities experienced by individuals in Western society today nor to misrepresent the way individual bisexuals use the term, but rather to examine the functioning of the term in particular discourses which *do* ground their understanding of bisexuality in binary terms, and which seek to defend those terms out of specific motivations.

1.2 Tracing the Early Discourse on Bisexuality

In its beginnings, the term bisexuality did not carry the same meanings that it does in Western culture today (Angelides, 2001). The evolution of its meanings was driven primarily by discourses within evolutionary biology, where Charles Darwin's theories were prominent, and psychoanalysis, where Sigmund Freud's ideas dominated (Angelides, 2001). The term bisexuality was coined in the late 19th century by biologists to describe a lack of female or male sex characteristics, a condition found both in the embryonic stages of an individual organism's life and, according to Charles Darwin's theories, in the early evolutionary stages of humankind

as a species (Rapoport, 2012). Darwin posited a parallel between humankind's increasing sex differentiation throughout evolution and the progress of the species toward mental superiority and civilization (Rapoport, 2012). In this formulation, bisexuality, in the sense of physical androgyny or hermaphroditism, is a developmental stage in the life of human individuals and the human species, signifying immaturity and impermanence.

Sigmund Freud expanded the notion of physical bisexuality to psychological bisexuality, where one is sexually attracted to both women and men (Rapoport, 2012). Freud's understanding of this kind of bisexuality is rooted in his narrative of a psychological journey whereby one begins in childhood as naturally bisexual (not differentiating by gender in self-identification or in pleasure-seeking), but comes to identify with the "appropriate" gender, which follows from one's biological sex (i.e., male-bodied individuals come to identify as men, and female-bodied individuals come to identify as women) (Angelides, 2001; Callis, 2012). "Proper" sexual object choice follows naturally from "proper" gender identification, so that attraction to men is a "feminine" quality, and attraction to women a "masculine" quality (Angelides, 2001). Failure to establish proper object choice (heterosexuality) is a result of a failure to properly identify with the "appropriate" gender, a state of arrested development in the correct psychological journey to mature womanhood or manhood (Angelides, 2001). For Freud, just as for Darwin, bisexuality is a natural part of human development, but belongs properly in the immature stages of life, and is incompatible with mature adult gendered identity and sexuality.

1.3 Bisexual Erasure

The understanding of bisexuality as a developmental phase characterized by immaturity and impermanence has carried over into current popular culture (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009). Bisexuals are often labeled as confused about their true orientation, actually straight but experimenting with their sexuality, or actually gay but unwilling to fully relinquish their heterosexual privilege (Eadie, 1993/1999). Bisexuality has been figured as a transitional identity that gay men and lesbians employ on their path to admitting their true orientation (Diamond, 2009). Bisexuals are stereotyped as selfish people who want to “have it all” and refuse to make a choice (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009), eliciting notions of childishness and immaturity. Such stereotypes do more than stigmatize bisexuals, they effectively erase them, because to claim that bisexuality is a phase, a temporary state, and that bisexuals are actually gay or straight, is to say that they do not exist.

Social science research has also been found guilty of a tendency to erase bisexuals (Angelides, 2001; Diamond, 2009; Callis, 2012; Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009). Such fields have often treated bisexual identity or behavior as “noise in the data” which will muddy the findings (Diamond, 2009). This occurs despite Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin’s (1948/1999) finding that bisexual behavior in men was about as common as monosexual (heterosexual or homosexual) behavior, and more recent findings that nonexclusive sexuality in both men and women (that which is not restricted to one gender of object choice) is more common than strictly same-sex or other-sex sexuality¹ (Diamond, 2009). Researchers, in an effort for clear results, impose the pre-existing binary of heterosexual/homosexual on their subjects and either discard

¹ Same-sex sexuality refers to sexuality directed only at others of the same sex as oneself, while other-sex sexuality is sexuality directed only at others of a different sex from oneself.

whatever does not fit into the two categories, or force it into the binary, for example by denying its authenticity, as has been done to bisexual subjects (Diamond, 2009). “[W]e rely on the categories heterosexual and homosexual to group people, and when individuals’ behavior or self-identification does not fit either of these categories, instead of creating new categories, we expand the old ones to accommodate new facts” (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009, p. 299).

1.4 Biracial Erasure and the One-Drop Rule

The social construction of race in the United States offers an interesting parallel to the way in which bisexuals are erased and subsumed into other established binary social categories. Sexual unions between Americans of European descent and African descent have been occurring since the first Africans were brought to the New World as slaves (Crothers & K’Meyer, 2007) – some were consensual trysts between African slaves and European indentured servants or Native Americans, but most were rapes of female slaves by male slave owners (Dawkins, 2012). The line between Black and white was vital to early American economic and racial systems, as the color line was also the line between slave and free. Southern states instituted the “one-drop rule,” which defined anyone with any amount of African ancestry (even a single “drop” of Black blood) as legally and socially Black (Crothers & K’Meyer, 2007). Biracial and multiracial children were subsumed into the category Black under this rule, regardless of their percentage of Black or white ancestry and irrespective of the color of their skin. Even after the abolition of slavery, the rule remained codified in law in many Southern states and operated during the years of segregation and legalized discrimination under Jim Crow laws to legally define mixed race individuals as Black (Crothers & K’Meyer, 2007).

While the one-drop rule was ousted as official legal doctrine as a result of the Civil Rights movement, it continues to exert power over the social categorization of race. Khanna (2010) found that the internalized racial identities (how an individual sees him or herself) of the majority of her mixed-race sample were shaped by how the individuals believe others in society perceive them. This perception is inextricably related to the one-drop rule (Khanna, 2010). Since anyone with any Black ancestry has traditionally been considered Black, yet racial mixing between Blacks and whites has been occurring for centuries, the array of skin tones and phenotypic features Americans consider to “look Black” has become quite broad (Khanna, 2010). Many biracial respondents expressed that while whites see them as simply Black, other Blacks often recognize finer distinctions in skin color and phenotype, and will ask what the individual is mixed with (Khanna, 2010). However, even when another Black person acknowledges the mixed blood of the respondent, they will tend to draw on the one-drop rule, and the knowledge that someone who “looks Black” will be treated as such, to label the respondent “really Black” (Khanna, 2010). So despite some recognition of mixed ancestry from other people of color, the majority of Americans, both white and of color, continue to subsume bi- and multiracial Black individuals into the category Black.

1.5 Bisexuals and the One-Time Rule

Bisexuals, in a similar way to biracials, become subsumed into the sexual minority group by what Anderson (2008) terms the one-time rule of homosexuality. The rule originated in a particular discourse termed the medicalization of homosexuality, which occurred during the late 19th and early twentieth centuries (Callis, 2014). Medicalization is a process by which human behaviors or processes became defined as illnesses or psychoses. Thus, homosexuality became a

mental illness that needed to be cured. Most importantly, homosexuality, which had previously been understood as a type of behavior, became defined as a type of person (Angelides, 2001). The diagnosis of an individual as “homosexual” required merely one incident of same-sex sexual contact (Callis, 2012). Just as one drop of Black blood rendered the remainder of white blood, no matter how great, utterly insignificant for purposes of racial designation, one incident of same-sex behavior rendered any amount of other-sex behavior meaningless. A behaviorally bisexual history did not produce a bisexual person, but rather a homosexual one, because of this one-time rule.

1.6 Bisexuals as Hybrids and Binary Logic

Bisexuals and biracials both function as a hybrid of two preexisting binary terms: bisexuals as a hybrid of the terms heterosexual and homosexual, and biracials as a hybrid of the categories Black and white. A binary is a social construct in which two, and only two, categories are recognized as legitimate, with little to no room for complexity, hybridity, or continuum, and these two terms are defined as opposites (Collins, 2009). Western thought has been largely structured by binary thinking, and the imposition of this logic on social categories is apparent in constructs such as Black/white and heterosexual/homosexual, where those who do not fit either category are simply subsumed into one or the other, often the subordinated category.

This thesis examines the category bisexual as a hybrid of the binary set heterosexual/homosexual, and argues that the cultural erasure of bisexuality is a function of power structures enabled by the binary system of categorization of sexual identities. Defining binary terms is a deliberate process enacted by dominant groups to establish difference and

thereby maintain separation and differential distribution of resources and power in society. Marginalized groups also participate in this discourse, at times refuting it, but at other times bolstering it in efforts to claim legitimacy and resources. The hybrid threatens binary logic by calling into question the reality and sustainability of the two purported categories; the hybrid expresses the fluidity of identity and the instability of dichotomous terms, suggesting that the differences between groups are neither essential nor cause for differential treatment of persons based on such categorization. A comparative exploration of biracial as a hybrid of Black and white bolsters this argument, as commonalities between discourses on bisexuality and mixed race illuminate the operation of binary categories and the way in which they maintain hierarchical systems that privilege some groups and oppress others.² The purpose of this work is to shed light on the ways in which binaries function in these two realms, the sexual/gendered and racial, and thereby to increase the utility of identifying and deconstructing binary categories as an analytical tool for understanding and improving the social world.

² The aim in this comparison is not to suggest any particular similarities in the *intensity* or *severity* of oppressive experiences between sexual minorities and racial minorities. While there are important differences between experiences of racial oppression versus sexual oppression, I highlight the similarities because identifying patterns can illuminate common ways social group structuring occurs. Understanding oppression, domination, and inequality requires examining the common threads found among different intergroup power dynamics.

CHAPTER 2

PURITY AND PASSING: THE THREAT OF THE HYBRID FOR THE DOMINANT GROUP

2.1 Both Different and Opposite: The Binary's Power

The way in which Black/White biracial people were subsumed into the Black community by the one-drop rule, and bisexuals incorporated with gay men and lesbians by the one-time rule constitutes a cultural erasure of hybrid persons. This chapter argues that erasure is a response to the threat the hybrid poses to the dominance of the ruling group.

The hybrid's threat is based on its inability to be categorized neatly into the binary terms that structure identity groups in dominant discourses. Binaries are important to the power of dominant groups because binaries maintain boundaries between those with power and those without, or those with more power and those with less. A binary's power lies in its description of difference and mandate of opposition. A binary not only defines two groups as *different*, but indeed as *opposite*. Establishing groups as *different* provides justification for differential treatment. For example, defining Black women as hypersexual and white women as sexually innocent served as justification for the notion that Black women deserve rape and white women deserve paternalistic protection – a gendered narrative established during slavery as part of the overarching Black/white binary (Collins, 2009). Establishing groups as *opposite* solidifies the boundaries between the two and keeps them from slipping into each other. For example, when the homosexual/heterosexual binary was first established, homosexuality was labeled a sick sexuality, and heterosexuality was labeled healthy (Katz, 1995). Being homosexual trumped other characteristics of healthy sexuality, such as the ability to respect boundaries and the absence of shame, so that there was no possibility of redemption of homosexuality into the

category of “healthy.” In binary thinking, differences are described not in terms of degree, but in terms of oppositional types. Continuums are impossible, for one cannot fall between the two categories. This strict division precludes grey area between the two terms, which prevents slippage of individuals from one category to the other. By this, dominant groups are able to maintain separation from marginal groups and reinforce their claims to a larger share of power and resources.

2.2 Establishing Binaries

Americans are born into a society in which binary categories such as Black/white and homosexual/heterosexual already exist and dominate mainstream social categorizations, giving them the appearance of reality and masking the discourses which created them. Collins (2009) delineates the way in which the binary categories of Black and white came to be established as opposite and mutually exclusive in slavery-era United States, a process by which the dominant group, whites of European descent, defined itself in opposition to the deviant “other,” Blacks of African descent. Preexisting binaries, such as culture/nature, civilized/primitive, intelligent/unintelligent, and refined/animalistic, which were already assigned a positive value on one side and a negative value on the other, were assigned to each group accordingly (Collins, 2009). White European Americans, then, were defined as cultured, civilized, intelligent, and refined, whereas Africans were defined as close to nature, primitive, unintelligent, and animalistic. The firm division between each side of the binary created a definition of mutual exclusion and essentialism: whites were considered *inherently* more civilized, intelligent, and cultured, and Blacks *inherently* more primitive, animalistic, and unintelligent. The difference was considered essential and immutable (Collins, 2009).

A similar process has occurred in the creation of the heterosexual/homosexual binary. Katz (1995), in tracing the discourse around the term *heterosexual*, locates the establishment of this binary in a text entitled *Psychopathia Sexualis, with Especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Legal Study*, published in 1893, by the Viennese professor of psychiatry and neurology, Richard von Krafft-Ebing. Krafft-Ebing's "hetero-sexual and homo-sexual offered the modern world two sex-differentiated eroticisms, one normal and good, one abnormal and bad, a division which would come to dominate our twentieth-century vision of the sexual universe" (Katz, 1995, p. 28). Katz (1995) highlights the way in which the positive side of a binary set's positive value *depends* upon the opposing negative side for its meaning when he writes that Krafft-Ebing's book's "disturbing (and fascinating) examples of a sex called sick began quietly to define a new idea of a sex perceived as healthy" (p. 21). Previous incarnations of the term *heterosexual* did not always indicate a normal, healthy sexuality, but the creation of the binary, enabled by a discourse of same-sex desire as sick, enabled this new construction of heterosexual as the norm and homosexual as deviant (Katz, 1995).

2.3 Hybrid Degeneracy and the Marginal Man

The threat of the hybrid who, by half-belonging with the dominant group, may lay claim to the privileges of such a birthright, is well illustrated by the discourse on racial hybrids during the era of slavery. The theory of hybrid degeneracy was based on understandings of species mixing in the animal world and the resulting "defective" hybrid offspring produced (Squires, 2007). It also relied on the 18th and 19th century idea that whites and Blacks were different species rather than merely different races, reflecting binary logic (Squires, 2007). Hybrid degeneracy was connected to both Darwin's theory of evolution and the religious idea that God

is displeased with what is “unnatural,” and used pseudo-scientific bodily measurements to “prove” the inferiority of both Black and mixed-race individuals (Squires, 2007). Biracial people were considered both morally and mentally inferior to “pure-blooded” whites (Squires, 2007).

The theory of hybrid degeneracy was an important tool, used in combination with the one-drop rule and the rule of *partus sequitur ventrum* to bolster the Black/white binary in ways that directly benefited the ruling class of whites (Dawkins, 2012). The color line of the Black/white binary was also the line which designated slave from free. The one-drop rule designated all mixed-race children as legally Black, and the rule of *partus sequitur ventrum*, which means “birth follows the belly,” required that the legal status of a child as slave or free was determined by the status of the mother (Dawkins, 2012). Therefore, all children produced by the rape of female slaves by white masters were automatically designated as slaves, barring them from claiming any inheritance from their fathers, and preserving their labor, or the price they could fetch on the slave market, for the economic benefit of the slave owner (Daniel, 2004). The theory of hybrid degeneracy, as “proof” of the inferiority of racial hybrids, served to justify keeping mixed race individuals on the Black side of the racial binary, heading off potential arguments that their white ancestry made them superior to monoracial Blacks and perhaps deserving of the status of whites.

Departing from the purely biological-essentialist argument of hybrid degeneracy, the marginal man theory of the late 19th and early 20th century was a social/psychological analysis of the position of the racial hybrid (Squires, 2007), but from the same bias and with the same implications as the theory of hybrid degeneracy. The marginal man theory posited that mixed race individuals had no true place of belonging in society and were therefore doomed to

unhappiness (Squires, 2007). They suffered from inner turmoil as their “two sides” were constantly at war with each other, just as the two races to which they belonged were in conflict with one another (Squires, 2007). They felt themselves to be neither one race nor the other, and could fit comfortably into neither group, but only marginally into one or the other (Squires, 2007). They belonged nowhere and consequently never felt settled into society, never coming to a true sense of their own identity or a true sense of social integration (Squires, 2007). Many whites feared that this lack of stable identity and integration made the marginal man unable to accept his “place” within the subordinate group, and therefore viewed mixed race people as a particular threat to their dominance (Squires, 2007). The solution, according to whites, was to prevent race mixing as much as possible, and anti-miscegenation laws were common during this period (Squires, 2007). Such laws preventing interracial marriage were not abolished until the U.S. Supreme Court ruled them unconstitutional in 1967 (Gevrek, 2014).

One common theme of these theories and of the general discourse on race at the time was the idea of the “purity” of white blood. The idea that Black blood taints white blood is reflected in the one-drop rule, where a single “drop” of Black blood mixed with any amount of white blood destroys a person’s right to call him or herself white. There is a rationale behind the claim that Black blood sullies white blood, but white blood does not do the same to Black blood. The rationale lies in the valuing of white over Black. If Black is inferior to white, whiteness cannot taint it. But the implication, that whiteness would then *improve* Blackness, carried its own threat. This is why whites had to prove the inferiority of biracial individuals with the theory of hybrid degeneracy, to quash the notion that mixed race individuals might be more similar to whites than to Blacks, and therefore deserving of the rights and privileges reserved for whites. This is also why the marginal person threatened whites – unable to accept his or her “proper”

place in society among Blacks, the mixed race person may begin to think him or herself as more suited to the position and privilege of whites, and the individual may begin to agitate for such rights. Because of the person's connection to Blacks, s/he may also agitate for their rights as well.

Because the hybrid is believed to belong with the marginal group, no matter how much of his or her ancestry is white, the person is designated as unassimilable. Just as on the level of biology, the individual's Black blood has tainted his or her white blood; on the social level, s/he himself would taint the white race if allowed to become a part of it. The Black/white binary is maintained by keeping the marginal person entrenched with other marginal people, securing the continued dominance of whites.

2.4 HIV/AIDS and the Bisexual Bridge

The theories of hybrid degeneracy and marginal man illustrate fears that hybrid persons will both taint the purity of dominant groups and steal some of the power and resources which are consolidated under their control. The discourse on bisexuals and HIV/AIDS reflects a similar fear of contamination expressed by the dominant group, heterosexuals. The AIDS outbreak in the United States began in the late 1970s and originally affected three main groups: Haitians, intravenous drug users, and gay men, but it was most associated with gay men (Shilts, 1988). While gay men and lesbians had begun to make some social progress, they were still considered sexually deviant by the majority of society (Shilts, 1988). Because of the low value society placed on all three groups affected by HIV/AIDS, gay men in particular, the government did little to treat the afflicted or contain the outbreak (Shilts, 1988). One discourse that arose, the

discourse of the “bisexual bridge,” instead reflected concern for the potential that heterosexuals would be affected by what was termed the “gay disease” (Yoshino, 2000). The fear of bisexuals as “AIDS transmitters” turned bisexuals into scapegoats for any appearance of HIV among heterosexuals (Yoshino, 2000). It was said that bisexual men contracted HIV from gay men, and then in turn infected straight women with the disease (Yoshino, 2000).

The current discourse on the “down low” is a newer version, and a specifically racialized one, of the original narrative of bisexuals as vectors for AIDS from gay communities to straight ones (Malebranche, 2008). In mainstream culture, “on the down low” refers to Black men who sleep with both men and women but identify as heterosexual and keep their same-sex behavior a secret (Malebranche, 2008). In the early 2000’s, the media exploded with stories of men on the down low. These stories were embedded in the context of the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS on the Black community (Malebranche, 2008). While African Americans only make up 13% of the U.S. population, they account for over 50% of current cases of HIV/AIDS, and Black women comprise two-thirds of all female HIV/AIDS cases (Malebranche, 2008). When down low behavior was discovered by the media, it became a popular belief that down low men were the cause of such drastic rates of HIV infections in the Black community (Malebranche, 2008).

The discourse of the bisexual bridge is in many instances less a discourse on public health and more a narrative of social group purity and contamination, as evidenced by the fact that the public health concern was over the dominant group being affected, while the minority groups affected were virtually left to fend for themselves. The bisexual bridge narrative often ignores the impacts on STI transmission of factors such as lack of safer sex education, lack of access to STI prevention methods, and homophobia’s influence on safer sex practices and

disclosure of sexual history to sexual partners. It also dismisses the impact of intravenous drug use on HIV transmission. It privileges the needs and vulnerabilities of the dominant group, heterosexuals, over those of the minority group, gays/bisexuals, and paints bisexuals as deviant, heartless deceivers who place their sexual pleasure over the lives and health of their partners, while portraying heterosexuals as hapless victims of the “others” deception. This argument relies on the binary separation of homosexual as dirty and heterosexual as clean, where the minority has a contaminating influence on the majority, made possible by the hybrid, who uses his “heterosexual” side to infiltrate and taint the heterosexual community with the homosexual disease, AIDS.

2.5 Biracials and Passing

Secretive infiltration of the majority community by the hybrid is perceived as one of the most distinct threats, since the mixed-race person’s identity falls in between a dominant and subordinate group. “Passing” is defined by Dawkins (2012) as a “phenomenon in which a person gains acceptance as a member of social groups other than his or her own, usually in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion, citizenship, or disability status” (p. xii). During the periods of slavery and Jim Crow, racial passing was a common occurrence, as multiracial African Americans with light skin passed into the white world to escape slavery, avoid prejudice, or gain opportunities denied to Black Americans (Haizlip, 1995). While the motivations for passing were multiple (Haizlip, 1995), one prominent reason whites feared the passer was the threat of interracial sexual unions, reflecting fears of contamination of white bloodlines (Kennedy, 2001).

In white-authored literature on passing, the passer was typically the villain, making the hero or heroine fall in love with him or her, and trapping the protagonist in marriage (Squires, 2007). This motif portrayed the minority group as deceitful and villainous, and the majority group as victimized and innocent. The tension in such novels surrounded whether or not the white hero would find out the passer's "real" race before it was too late (Squires, 2007). The passer was a particularly threatening type of racial hybrid, because s/he was not identifiable based on looks. Whereas the multiracial person with darker skin and facial features that reflect Americans' idea of Blackness may have felt like s/he deserved the privileges of whiteness, as per the marginal man theory, a passer was capable of simply walking into the white world and taking those privileges. Worse, passers could be seducing "pure" white people every day, tainting the white race so stealthily that the whites never even find out until it is too late - America becomes a multiracial melting pot of indiscriminate browns, and whites become a minority. Interestingly, a similar discourse is currently prominent among some whites, per the prediction that by the year 2050 the majority of Americans will be non-white; though this fear is tied up with immigration concerns more so than racial mixing, it reflects a related fear of diminishing white dominance and political power (Bedard, 2015; Buchanan, 2006; Grove, 2015; Longman, 2014; "Minorities," 2008).

2.6 Bisexuals and Passing

Bisexual passing is also related to the concern over sexual intimacy as a vector for contamination of the dominant group, as seen in the "bisexual bridge" discourse, where bisexual men, and now particularly Black bisexual men, are scapegoated for the spread of HIV/AIDS. This fact illustrates the intersecting oppressions of racism and heterosexism. But unlike mixed-

race individuals, some of whom may pass as white while some cannot, bisexuals almost universally pass as heterosexual in the absence of a same-sex partner (Callis, 2014). The cultural assumption of monosexuality, a reflection of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, feeds this passing (Callis, 2014). The assumption of monosexuality assumes that all individuals are attracted to only one sex/gender; that is, everyone is either straight or gay (Callis, 2014). If an individual expresses interest in someone of another sex or is dating or married to someone of another sex, s/he is assumed heterosexual. Further, unlike race, there is no physical marker of sexual orientation (Lingel, 2012). While there may be a “gay aesthetic,” often related to variations of gender expression, and this style may be used to “read” others as gay or straight, it is a very inexact business. For bisexuality, no concrete aesthetic exists, no style that is considered “bisexual.” Thus, part of the threat of the bisexual is that s/he is completely invisible as bisexual, and will be taken for straight unless partnered with someone of the same gender, based on the cultural assumption of heterosexuality in the absence of other indicators. Here lies the fear of the bisexual man who does not disclose his bisexuality to female partners, exposing them to the threat of HIV/AIDS.

2.7 Destabilizing Sex and Sexual Orientation

It is not merely what the hybrid may do (deceive the dominant group by passing, contaminate the dominant group, steal the dominant group’s power or resources), but what s/he suggests that is threatening. Bisexual existence throws heterosexual and homosexual identities into question. Yoshino (2000) argues that bisexuality makes monosexual identities impossible to prove, because it would require proving a negative. If only heterosexuality and homosexuality exist as mutually exclusive terms, then showing other-sex desire is all that is required to prove

one is heterosexual (Yoshino, 2000). But if bisexuality exists, then in order to prove one's heterosexuality, one must not only show other-sex attraction, but also prove a lack of same-sex attraction, which is impossible (Yoshino, 2000). A self-proclaiming heterosexual can never prove that s/he is not actually bisexual in a world where bisexuality exists (Yoshino, 2000). Heterosexuals are invested in the stability of their identity as straight because of the privileged place of that orientation in the culture (Yoshino, 2000). The existence of bisexuality is a threat to that stability. The heterosexual/homosexual binary provides the dominant group with an opposite identity against which to define themselves, allowing heterosexuals to refute same-sex desire easily, since the two terms are defined as mutually exclusive (Yoshino, 2000). But the presence of the bisexual upends that stability (Eadie, 1993/1999; Yoshino, 2000). It blurs the boundary between the two categories and creates the possibility of the two identities collapsing into each other. In other words, if some people are bisexual, anybody could be bisexual, and all claims to stable sexual identity are called into question. In that case, all the power and privilege consolidated amongst heterosexuals becomes threatened.

While the above argument shows that bisexuality directly threatens the homosexual/heterosexual binary, Yoshino (2000) also points out that bisexuality indirectly threatens the sexual orientation binary by destabilizing the sex binary. While some bisexuals are attracted to men *as* men and women *as* women, others claim that their attractions are not based on sex at all (Yoshino, 2000). This opens the possibility of a sexuality not based on the sex of object choice, which disrupts monosexuality, as it is based entirely on the sex of object choice (Yoshino, 2000). "Without a clear and privileged distinction between 'man' and 'woman'," Yoshino (2000) argues, "there is no clear and privileged distinction between 'straight' and 'gay'" (p. 413).

This disruption of the male/female binary is also threatening to heterosexuals because they hold the largest share of discursive power to determine sex norms (Yoshino, 2000). The way in which women present themselves as women, under a heteronormative regime, will be determined largely by what men find attractive, and vice versa, though men will be less subject to the desires of women because the society is also patriarchal (Yoshino, 2000). Bisexuality challenges heterosexually-determined sex norms, because what a bisexual desires cannot be determined by his or her gender, therefore normative feminine or masculine performance cannot be assumed to function as attractive for any given desire object (Yoshino, 2000). This, too, threatens the dominance of heterosexuality, in its power to shape sex and gender norms.

CHAPTER 3

LOYALTY AND PRIVILEGE: THE THREAT OF THE HYBRID FOR THE MARGINAL GROUP

3.1 Introduction

While the binary logic of the dominant discourse lumps hybrids in with their corresponding minority groups, minority groups themselves do not always welcome hybrids unambiguously. The African American community has a relatively solid history of embracing multiracial Black individuals as members, but the place of mixed race people among other Blacks is complicated by colorism in the community, passing, and white privilege. The gay and lesbian community also has a complex past with regard to the inclusion of bisexuals, with a particular tension between bisexual women and lesbians fueled by concerns about loyalty and heterosexual privilege (Udis-Kessler, 1995). This chapter argues that hybrids also pose a threat to the subordinate group as it struggles to gain legitimacy and overcome oppression in society.

3.2 Colorism in the Black Community

While the white supremacist regime employed the one-drop rule as a tool of exclusion and oppression, to categorize all Black/White multiracial individuals as Black and therefore subordinated to whites, the Black community, in its struggles for freedom, embraced the rule for its own positive purposes. African Americans used the one-drop rule to create solidarity among all Blacks, regardless of heritage mixture, and to broaden the size of their community and therefore their strength as they battled the overpowering white racist system (Spickard, 2004). This sense of loyalty and solidarity was not uncomplicated, however. Internalized racism and

the influence of broader cultural values which privileged whiteness caused a color hierarchy in the Black community (Slate, 2014). Lighter-skinned Blacks were often privileged within the Black community, while at the same time envied for their ability to take advantage of some aspects of white privilege (Crothers & K'Meyer, 2007). This phenomenon began during the era of slavery, when biracial slaves often received special treatment from their white slave owners (Baxley, 2014). Because they were “closer to whiteness” than their monoracial Black counterparts, they were often the ones considered fit to be house slaves – to serve inside the master’s house rather than in the fields (Baxley, 2014). This created divisions among slaves: many field slaves were jealous of the preferred treatment of mixed-race slaves, and many biracial slaves considered themselves superior to those who labored outdoors (Baxley, 2014). The slaves, living under the dominant racial ideology, came to internalize oppressive norms reflecting the notion that whiteness is superior, and Blackness inferior.

The legacy of this colorism, bolstered by continued racial inequality in the United States, remains prevalent in the modern era. Research on biracial women has shown that their appearance as lighter-skinned both lends them status and fosters jealousy and rejection from some within the Black community (Crothers & K'Meyer, 2007). Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2004) found that biracial women experienced difficulties relating to Black women because of the color hierarchy. Respondents claimed that Black women were jealous of their lighter skin and “good hair,” and the attention these features brought them from Black men (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2004). These women felt rejected by Black women, some of whom excluded them from their social groups and explicitly denied that biracial women were Black (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2004). Despite Khanna’s (2010) findings that members of the African American

community draw on the one-drop rule and tell biracial people that they are “really Black,” many within the community see biracial people as “not Black enough” (Henriksen & Trusty, 2004).

3.3 Black Nationalism and Black Authenticity

While biracial women’s struggles with other Black women represent the enactment of colorism at the individual level, larger social group freedom struggles throughout Black history shed light on the meanings of color and authenticity for the African American community. In one sense, the one-drop rule has always operated as a tool of solidarity for Blacks, mono- and multiracial, in their struggle against racism (Spickard, 2004). But with the dawn of Black Nationalism and Black Power in the 1960’s, questions of authenticity and “true” Blackness arose (Van Deburg, 1992).

Loury (2009) recounts an episode of questioning Blackness at a Black Panther rally. A good friend of his, Woody, was a multiracial Black man who looked white but was firmly committed to participation in the struggle for racial equality (Loury, 2009). Together they attended a rally of the Black Panthers, a Black Power group, and Woody, in his fervor, at one point became particularly vocal and attracted the attention of the leaders of the rally (Loury, 2009). They noticed him and his apparent whiteness and asked, “Who can vouch for this white boy?” (Loury, 2009). Loury, fearing that his own authenticity would be called into question, remained silent, choosing in that moment bonds of color over his bond of friendship with Woody (Loury, 2009). He explains that, though he knew his friend’s commitment to the cause and his purity of intent, he also had moments of doubt about Woody’s authentic Blackness:

Because he had the option to be white...those without the option could not accept his claim to a shared racial experience...even I found myself doubting that he fully grasped the pain, frustration, anger, and self-doubt many of us felt upon encountering the intractability of American racism. (Loury, 2009, p. 18)

Granted, multiracial people who did not look white enough to pass were less likely to have their racial integrity questioned by Black Nationalists and other participants of the Civil Rights movement. The questioning of Blackness of the light-skinned Woody hinged upon the shared racial experience mentioned by Loury (2009). Black nationalists were involved in the psychological process of embracing their Blackness as something to be valued; indeed, as something to be celebrated over the dominant cultural values (Van Deburg, 1992). The Black nationalists affected a shift in the Civil Rights movement of the mid-20th century (Van Deburg, 1992). The previous emphasis had been on forcing the dominant white culture to accept African Americans (Van Deburg, 1992). They wanted integrated schools, access to jobs without discrimination, and to be a part of the cultural institutions that wielded power in the society (Van Deburg, 1992). Many of the Black nationalist groups shifted their emphasis away from the white world and into psychological healing and self-help within the Black community (Van Deburg, 1992). They wanted to overcome internalized racism, resurrect African-based cultural forms, and celebrate Blackness as beautiful (Van Deburg, 1992). There was a shift of emphasis from sameness to difference, from integration to separatism. Rather than emphasizing Blacks' similarities to whites and therefore their right to equality, Black nationalists were emphasizing their difference from whites, celebrating their unique heritage and distancing themselves from white cultural norms and values. In this context, approximation to whiteness was viewed negatively and immersion in Black culture was highly valued. Multiracial Blacks' lighter skin

color alone indicated a less detrimental experience of racism from white culture, and an affinity for white culture or an assimilationist drive signaled internalized racism, lack of authentic Blackness, and betrayal of the Black community.

3.4 Bisexual Loyalty, Lesbian Feminists, and Straight Privilege

Questions of loyalty and authenticity have also colored bisexuals' relationship to movements for gay and lesbian rights. Arguably the most bisexually-inclusive phase of these movements was the phase known as "Gay Liberation," the time period immediately following the Stonewall riots (Highleyman, 1995). This phase had a uniquely utopian bent, emphasizing an overall sexual freedom reflecting the sexual liberation movement, and utilizing the slogan "free[ing] the homosexual in everyone" (Adam, 1995, p. 78). Sexual freedom, exploration, and self-discovery were emphasized, and a culturally authentic gayness was not yet a dominant theme (Highleyman, 1995). Because so many gay men and lesbians had heterosexual histories due to the strong imperative to comply with heteronormative mandates, "gold star" status (a gay man or lesbian who has never had an other-sex experience) was not yet a primary value among this minority, and a bisexual history did not indicate a bisexual orientation or identity. When bisexuality was named specifically, it was sometimes held up as a utopian orientation, superior to both heterosexuality and homosexuality (Donaldson, 1995). Fritz Klein published *The Bisexual Option: A Concept of One Hundred Percent Intimacy*, arguing that bisexuality could be seen as an orientation of greater freedom and openness, one which placed no unhealthy limits on the possibilities of intimate connections with others (Klein, 1978/1999). Popular culture also saw a phase of "bisexual chic" in the 1970s, where pop stars such as David Bowie and Patti Smith

represented a fluidity of sexuality and gender that was idolized and celebrated (Donaldson, 1995).

Despite these representations of bisexuality as utopian and popular, its height was short-lived. As gay men and lesbians began to develop distinctive communities and cultures, bisexuals came to be scrutinized in a similar way as the biracial people in the Black Nationalist movement, as inauthentic and disloyal to the gay rights movement. Bisexual women in particular experienced rejection from the lesbian feminist community in this very sex-segregated movement (Udis-Kessler, 1995). Lesbian feminists built a movement based on their understanding of the interconnected nature of sexism and heterosexism (Udis-Kessler, 1995). They understood heterosexism and homophobia to be based on patriarchy, as compulsory heterosexuality was an institution whose purpose was to ensure that women remained in positions of subservience to men (Rich, 1980/2003). For lesbian feminists, oppression came from two dominant groups: heterosexuals and men. They formed a movement distinct from the gay men's movement, as gay men often refused to engage the intersectionality of lesbians' oppression as women and its connection to their oppression as gay persons (Faderman, 1991). Some feminist lesbians were not necessarily driven by a sexual attraction to other women at all. For these "political lesbians," a lesbian identity was something more than a romantic and sexual identity. Rather, it was a political choice to refuse relationships with men in a society that mandated those relationships be hierarchical, and to prioritize relationships with other women, sexual/romantic or not, in a common struggle against patriarchy and heterosexism (Udis-Kessler, 1995).

These early feminist lesbians were not able to conceive of a utopian bisexuality, or even a neutral bisexuality, for they saw relationships with men as inherently oppressive to women under

patriarchy. Bisexual women were seen as under-politicized in regard to heterosexism, and their relationships with men were understood as “consorting with the enemy” (Highleyman, 1995, p. 82). To these lesbians, bisexual women refused to commit to other women and their needs and struggles in an oppressive culture. They desired the “honey of lesbian sisterhood” but refused to give up the benefits of heterosexual privilege (Däumer, 1992/1999, p. 156). Bisexuals’ betrayal of queer women was seen as both a micro and macro-level phenomenon – bisexual women betrayed their lesbian lovers by leaving them for men, and they betrayed the lesbian movement by abandoning it for the comfortable life of heterosexuality.

The lesbian feminists’ narrative hearkens to narratives of purity and contamination seen in the discourse on the purity of whiteness. Bisexual women were accused of bringing “male energy” into lesbian spaces. Bisexual women have been told they are welcome at gay pride events, but not with their male partners. Bisexuals are seen to contaminate communities of women both as women trying to be free of patriarchy and as lesbians trying to be free of heterosexism (Eadie, 1993/1999). The bisexual bridge discourse of the straight community has also been an aspect of lesbian feminists’ rejection of bisexuals, where bisexuals are viewed as potential HIV/AIDS carriers who bring this disease from men they sleep with into the lesbian community (Däumer, 1992/1999).

The discourse on heterosexual privilege also mirrors the discourse on white privilege directed at biracial individuals. Bisexuals have been rejected from gay and lesbian spaces and communities, or accepted only marginally, because their oppression is viewed as less severe and as avoidable entirely (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009). Gay men and lesbians note that bisexuals in other-sex relationships have access to heterosexual privilege as utterly as if they were heterosexual, and the notion abounds that a bisexual could choose at any time to be strictly

heterosexual (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009). This is both an attack on authenticity – bisexuals are not authentically queer – and an attack on loyalty – bisexuals will abandon the more difficult life of homosexuality for the safety, security, and privilege of a heterosexuality, betraying their gay friends, lovers, and the movement as a whole (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009). Just as the biracial persons’ “white” side calls his Blackness into question, so does the bisexuals’ “heterosexual” side call his queerness into question.

3.5 Bisexuals and Passing

Concerns about betrayal and privilege are connected to passing, but these connections are complex. For biracial individuals, the ability to pass as white varies by individual; some are light enough to pass, and others are not. Even for those who cannot pass, however, some aspects of white privilege are accessible, as approximation to whiteness itself entails improved treatment in a white supremacist society, as shown by the better treatment of biracial slaves over monoracial slaves (Baxley, 2014), and other evidence that skin color privilege in general is delineated not by just racial groupings, but by gradations of skin tone within racial groups (Bedford, Berry, Duke, & French, 2011).

Bisexual passers, on the other hand, pass not so much on personal physical appearance (though a queer gender expression may cause a bisexual to be taken for a gay person) as on perceived gender of partner (Callis, 2014). A bisexual person in a relationship that appears heterosexual will be taken for heterosexual because of the cultural assumption of monosexuality (Callis, 2014). Likewise, a bisexual person in a same-sex relationship will be taken for a gay person (Callis, 2014). A bisexual person without a partner present will be taken for a

heterosexual person based on the assumption of monosexuality combined with the assumption of heterosexuality (Callis, 2014). Passing based on temporary social context is only part of the story of passing, however. While situational passing may give a bisexual person access to heterosexual privilege in a certain context, a same-sex partnered bisexual who is denied equal treatment or legal protections is experiencing oppressions in ways not arguably different from a “pure” homosexual. Noting that the violently homophobic make no distinction between bisexuals and gays when the presence of same-sex behavior is present, one bisexual individual remarked, “We are not half-gay bashed.” (Ault, 1996, p. 179).

3.6 Assimilation and the Immutability Defense

Just as concerns about biracial individuals have often been related to the movement for Black equality, denial of bisexual belonging has been strategically related to the goals of the gay rights movement. Interestingly, while the Black nationalists sometimes rejected biracials because of their similarity to whites during their anti-assimilationist push, gay activists distanced themselves from bisexuals because of an assimilationist tactic. Until the recent Supreme Court ruling which effectively made same-sex marriage legal in all 50 states (Liptak, 2015), the main initiative in the gay and lesbian rights movement was marriage equality. In their efforts to achieve the right to marry, gay men and lesbians emphasized their similarity to heterosexuals – they argued that they shared mainstream values of monogamy and middle-class respectability (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009). Arguing against binary constructions positing a heterosexual couple as the ideal, especially for raising children, and gay couples as deviant and harmful to children’s successful mental health and integration into society, gay and lesbian

activists emphasized their similarities to straight couples over their differences (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009).

In this context, the bisexual posed a threat to the success of the marriage equality movement. The binary constructs of heterosexual/homosexual and man/woman have led to a misunderstanding of bisexuality as an inherently promiscuous orientation (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009). The understanding of men and women as not only different but as opposite contributes to a stereotype that bisexuals are not merely attracted to both genders, but as having an independent desire for each that is unfulfilled by contact with one. In other words, bisexuals are thought of as incapable of monogamy (Lingel, 2012). They are portrayed either as polyamorous, or as appearing as monogamous but always cheating or leaving their partner for someone of another gender (Diamond, 2009). The fear that association with bisexuals would taint gay men and lesbians' claim to the value of monogamy and the institution of marriage has played a part in the rejection of bisexuals from movements for gay rights (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009).

Bisexuals are also seen as threatening to the success of the movement for gay rights in the sense that they pose a challenge to the immutability defense (Yoshino, 2000). Popularized with the rallying cry "born this way," the immutability defense argues that sexual orientation is a trait one is born with and has no control over, therefore it is wrong to punish gays and lesbians for their orientation. Instead, they should be provided equal rights and protection under the law (Yoshino, 2000). Per Yoshino's (2000) argument, delineated in Chapter Two, the existence of bisexuality renders proof of one's immutable homosexual orientation impossible. All those claiming a gay or lesbian identity become suspected of potential bisexuality, which then negates

an argument based on lack of choice, since a bisexual could presumably choose to partner exclusively with other-sex individuals (Yoshino, 2000).

The immutability defense may aid gay men and lesbians in achieving short-term goals, but it is a deeply flawed way of arguing for the rights of sexual minorities. The marriage equality movement's reliance on the immutability defense clearly marginalizes bisexuals by stereotyping and excluding them, but it also does harm to gay men and lesbians. Because it argues that gay men and lesbians should be granted equal rights *because* they cannot help their sexual orientation, it implies that if they *could* change it, they could reasonably be expected to do so. It acquiesces to the notion that same-sex partnering is indeed less desirable or legitimate than other-sex partnering, and that it is tolerable only because gay men and lesbians are incapable of making the best choice, heterosexuality. The radical threat of bisexuality lies in part in the suggestion that sexual orientation *could* be a choice, and that either choice could be deemed equally valid. But in a society still firmly structured by a hierarchy of sexual orientation, the immutability defense has more social power than more progressive arguments claiming that same-sex partnering is inherently as valuable as other-sex partnering, and choice or lack of choice is an irrelevant factor in determining legitimacy.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the way binary categories operate in society to maintain distinctions between majority and minority groups, to justify differential treatment and the privileging of dominant groups and oppression of subordinated groups. Hybrids challenge these categories, and therefore represent a threat to the power of dominant groups. Minority groups, in their quest for greater legitimacy in society and greater access to power and resources, at times also find hybrids a threat to their goals. Bisexuals function as hybrids of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, and in a similar way, biracials also function as hybrids of the Black/white racial binary. Similarities in the discourse on these two binary constructs and in the discourse on the two hybrids show patterns in the discursive functioning of binaries and hybrids. Specific tactics of hybrid erasure, such as the one-drop rule of racial categorization and the one-time rule of sexual categorization, are used by dominant groups to subsume hybrid racial and sexual categories into subordinate groups. Subordinate groups have handled these tactics in complex ways, at times employing them as well to embrace hybrids, and at other times denying their legitimacy, often depending on their current needs, self-understandings, and movement goals.

Feminists and critical theorists have argued that the discourses created by the sciences and other analytical fields, despite claims to the contrary, are never neutral or value-free. When those with the power to mold discourse create constructs and call them truth, they may appear to be doing so with objectivity, simply describing and categorizing the physical or social world as it is, with objective vision and bias-free tools. As this analysis shows, constructs that serve as

descriptors of the natural or social world have often been created not just to provide a neutral description, or to increase understanding, but also to serve the interests of those who created the discourse.

Defining Blacks and whites as different and opposite served the interests of whites by providing justification for the enslavement of people of African descent, and the continued oppression of those same people even after the abolition of slavery. Maintaining the binary by defining multiracial people as Black served those same interests, defending the “purity” of whiteness, increasing the number of those legally defined as slaves, and preventing claims to whiteness and all its privileges from those with partial white ancestry. Defining heterosexuals and homosexuals as different and opposite served the interests of heterosexuals by positioning heterosexuality as the only legitimate sexuality, and relegating homosexuality to an illness or a perversion. This opposition served as justification for reserving resources for use by the majority group, as seen when the U.S. government slowly and reluctantly contributed little to the epidemic of AIDS, which at its early years predominantly affected gay men and other marginal groups. Maintaining the heterosexual/homosexual binary by grouping bisexuals with homosexuals served to maintain the “purity” of heterosexuals, as seen in early psychoanalytic constructs where one same-sex act warranted a homosexual diagnosis, and also as seen in the fear of contamination based on the “bisexual bridge” narrative.

Erasing hybrids by subsuming them into the marginal group also serves to assuage psychological fears which result from the potentialities that the existence of the hybrid suggests. Hybrids threaten the solidity and safety of binary categories, where the “other” is separate from the self, “out there” rather than “within,” by suggesting that clear-cut divisions of either/or are unstable and collapsible. Two races in one person suggests a lack of stability in the racial

categories Black and white, and a lack of permanence in the future trajectory of distinct races. Two desires in one person, for women and for men, suggests a lack of provable stability in a homosexual or heterosexual orientation, and also calls into question the binary structure man/woman, where desire for men is feminine and desire for women is masculine, making dichotomous gendered identity and gendered desire potentially incoherent.

The usefulness of binaries has often served not only dominant groups, but marginal groups as well, though often with more complex results. African Americans used the racial binary to incorporate biracial Americans into their communities, fortifying their ranks and creating solidarity as they fought for equal rights. On the other hand, biracial individuals' place in communities of color has been complicated by their access to white privilege and concerns about their authenticity and loyalty. Similarly, bisexuals have sometimes been included among communities of gay men and lesbians, in particular during the early Gay Liberation movement, but more commonly they have been excluded, especially among early lesbian feminists, for their difference, their access to heterosexual privilege and the subsequent possibility of betrayal and defection.

There are some important limitations to note about this work. First, when comparing the oppressions of different social groups, it is inevitable that the differences between the groups' experiences will be obscured. Notwithstanding the argument made in this work that certain similarities exist, and are worth exploration, it is also vital to keep in mind that the social oppression of racism experienced by African Americans and mixed-race individuals is vastly different from the oppression of heterosexism experienced by lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. The most obvious difference lies in the fact that Black Americans began their lives in the United States as slaves, and the legacy of this horrific system continues to hamper the social progress of

the race, especially in terms of economic status. There is nothing in the history of sexual minorities in America to compare to such profound abuse on the social group level. Another important difference is that racial group status is typically identifiable based on physical appearance, whereas sexual orientation is not, resulting in much greater opportunity for escaping prejudice for sexual minority individuals.

Secondly, this work is limited because a macro-level focus erases the intersectional nature of privilege and oppression experienced on the individual level. Each individual holds a variety of social statuses based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, and ability, among others. Macro-level explorations describe group experiences as if they applied equally to all members of a group, but of course they do not. An individual who experiences oppression based on race but is privileged by class will have vastly differing experiences from one marginalized by both race and class. Likewise, a person of minority sexual orientation who experiences racial privilege may have little in common with many others of the same sexual identity who lack such racial privilege. This work was unable to explore such nuanced realities, and consequently risks representing the lives of those in each social group explored as homogenous.

Paradoxically, this study does argue for an increased understanding of human complexity, through its exploration of simplistic and limiting binary structures, even while lacking the nuance of an intersectional analysis. The importance of macro-level exploration is not diminished by its limitations, but it must be a piece of a larger inquiry which includes micro-level studies and attention to intersectionality. Future studies should focus on deconstructing binaries at both micro and macro levels, exploring overarching cultural discourses such as those examined in this work, and also social narratives developing at the level of individuals and communities. Future works should also ask more nuanced questions with an intersectional

focus, for instance, how a bisexual identity intersects with race, gender, or ability, and if the hybrid status of bisexuality explored here maintains its relevance at such intersections.

As elements of discourse created by groups with certain interests, binary categories do not reflect the reality of human complexity; they are overly-simplified classifications imposed upon complex human beings, rather than descriptors of the reality of human experiences. As multiracial individuals and bisexual persons continue to articulate their experiences and identities, they enrich the discourses that reflect the complexity and fluidity of race and sexuality. Still, mainstream and even some counter-cultural discourses continue to insist upon binary logic. Social scientists struggle to represent the complex and varying experiences of humans, while relying on some elements of categorization in order to maintain some coherent way of talking about and studying humans and their social worlds. While disrupting binaries and striving to understand human experience without relying on them is complicated and difficult, without such attempts, it is impossible to grasp the diversity and complexity of human experiences, and to challenge the power structures that privilege some and oppress others. The goal of this work is to contribute to that effort, and to inform future projects which seek to both understand the social categories that structures human lives and experiences, and to subvert those that undermine the goal of full human freedom and self-determination.

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