

Bisexual Lives and Aging in Context: A Cross-National Comparison of the United Kingdom and the United States

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Abstract

Research on bisexual histories and identities in later life is limited and reflects only single-nation studies. This article compares findings from two independently conducted studies of bisexual aging, in the United Kingdom and the United States, using a discourse analytic and life course perspective. The goals were to compare how participants narrated and made sense of their bisexual experiences in later life and to examine ways in which historical and cultural contexts shaped their accounts. Findings indicate that similar histories around lesbian separatism and the HIV/AIDS epidemic enabled shared discursive resources, while differing ethnic and racial relations enabled distinctive discursive possibilities. In both studies intersectional experiences, particularly including being a person of color and having a transgender history, profoundly affected individual narratives. Future research will benefit from creative conceptualizations of bisexuality, applying the life course perspective in research and practice, and supporting the diverse and resilient ways bisexual older adults use language.

Keywords

bisexuality, discourse analysis, sexual experience, narratives, later life, life course

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Empirical research rarely explores the lives of older bisexual individuals separately from other subgroups within aging lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) populations (Jones, 2018b; Scherrer, 2017). This gap in the literature reflects the relative invisibility of older adults who have experienced bisexual attractions, behaviors, and identities within both the LGBTQ community and broader society. To address this gap, we present a cross-national comparison of bisexual aging narratives from two independently conducted qualitative studies with the goal of describing bisexuality as a differentiated experience in later life within specific historical and cultural contexts.

Setting the Stage: Bisexual Aging on a Global Scale

Before examining bisexual aging experiences, we must acknowledge the limitations of bisexuality as a global term. Gosine (2006) and Monro (2015) have argued that when researchers impose Western concepts of “lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual,” or “transgender” in settings where these terms are infrequently used or have limited cultural meaning, we restrict analytical scope and imagination, reducing our ability to understand alternative ways of conceptualizing sexuality and gender. While people who have sexual and romantic relationships with people of more than one gender seem to be relatively common in many cultures (Rodriguez-Rust, 2000), to name all such experiences “bisexual” is to impose Western paradigms. For example, in India, traditional emphases on marriage and reproduction as well as more diverse understandings of gender including *hirjas* (a third sex/gender) mean that the term and identity “bisexual” are little used (Monro, 2015). With this in mind, we speak about “bisexuality” in the context of Anglophone countries, while a truly global approach may require decentering the very term. Beyond the limits of language, there is a lack of data on bisexual populations at a global scale. Same-sex acts remain illegal in 71 countries and are punishable by death in 8 countries (Carroll & Mendos, 2017); therefore, no data describe the bisexual population in many of these locations or the global bisexual population as a whole.

In light of these limitations, national estimates in the United States indicate that bisexual-identified individuals constitute about 1.8% of the adult population (age 18+) compared with 1.7% who identify as gay or lesbian, while up to 11% report attractions to multiple genders without claiming a bisexual identity (Gates, 2011). In the United Kingdom, recent national estimates suggest that about 0.8% of people aged 16 years and older identify as bisexual, compared with 1.2% as gay or lesbian (Office for National Statistics, 2017) and although direct estimates of bisexual behaviors are not captured at a national level, one large-scale survey found that about 11% of women and 8% of men report same-sex experience or contact, of whom only 2.5% report lesbian or gay identities and 2.4% report bisexual identities (Mercer et al., 2013). In both countries, bisexual identity prevalence has increased in recent years, particularly among

young people (Copen, Chandra, & Febo-Vazquez, 2016; Office for National Statistics, 2017). Beyond demonstrating the relative size of the bisexual population, large-scale surveys and combined estimates illustrate the complexities of defining this population as well, as attractions and behaviors may not align with identity. Despite this, most bisexuality research reflects experiences of individuals who identified as bisexual at the time of data collection. In this article, we use Och's (2009) definition of bisexuality as "the potential to be attracted—romantically and/or sexually—to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree" (p. 9).

Current research on bisexual individuals reflects distinctive life experiences and disparate health outcomes when compared with those of lesbians and gay men. Bisexual individuals report experiencing coming out later in life and are more likely to experience marriages with individuals of multiple genders (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Shiu, Bryan, Goldsen, & Kim, 2016). The stability or reality of bisexual identities is questioned as reported by bisexual- (McLean, 2008) and nonbisexual-identified research participants (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013), which can contribute to internal conflict, confusion, and felt invisibility (Klesse, 2011). In contrast, the hypervisibility or hypersexuality associated with bisexuality contributes to experiences of "biphobia" or "binegativity" (Eliason, 2001; Klesse, 2011), resulting in discrimination, negative stereotypes, and conflicted social interactions inside and outside of LGBTQ communities (McLean, 2008). Beyond the associated negative psychological impacts, these experiences can also limit access to supportive social networks or feelings of being devalued within LGBTQ communities (Jones, 2012; McLean, 2008). Although research on older bisexual individuals is limited, recent analyses from the *Aging with Pride* study, the largest study of LGBTQ adults aged 50 years and older in the United States, reveal similar patterns, including reports of worse mental and physical health, less positive feelings toward one's sexual identity, and smaller social networks compared with lesbians and gay men (Erosheva, Kim, Emler, & Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2016; Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2016). Very little is currently known about how aging and bisexuality intersect with other marginalized experiences such as being transgender and being a person of color (Jones, 2018a; Witten, 2016).

There is a pressing need to examine the lived experience of bisexuality in later life in order to provide more context for understanding these differences and disparities, and a discursive, life course approach can offer a deeper sense of complexity and cultural context. Marmor (1980) has argued that health disparities and differences in experience are not the result of sexual identities in isolation but rather due to the socialization process around sexuality. However, cultural and historical factors surrounding bisexual experiences have received little attention to date. By analyzing contextualized language use and its implications, a discourse analytic approach allows us to examine

processes through which societal messages and cultural context influence discursive possibilities for individual narratives (Willig, 2008) while a life course perspective grounds those narratives in historical context (Elder, 1994). A discourse analytic approach also enables attention to the ways in which other intersecting identities, such as being transgender or a person of color, are historically and locally available and made relevant by speakers. Thus, we apply a discourse analytic approach and life course perspective in order to examine how older people with bisexual histories narrate and make sense of their experiences in later life and to explore the impact of cultural and historical context on those experiences using a cross-national comparison of studies based in the United Kingdom and the United States. Our discursive analysis offers nuance to the existing literature on bisexual aging and by creating the first cross-national comparison with this population, we take a preliminary step toward producing a more coherent and synthesized global literature base.

Methods

This cross-national analysis compares findings from two independently conducted qualitative studies of bisexual aging. The first, the Looking Both Ways study, was carried out in the United Kingdom between 2013 and 2015. Inclusion required that participants aged 50 years and older and felt they had something to contribute to a study about aging and bisexuality; they did not need to identify as bisexual. Participants were recruited from community organizations, attendance at a seminar series on LGBTQ aging, and snowballing. The data set includes 12 people: 6 were female (three of whom had trans histories), 4 were male, 1 was “pangendered,” and 1 was “queer femme and trans.” Their ages ranged from 51 to 83 years (mean = 64, standard deviation = 8.9), and all had White ethnicities. Six identified as bisexual and six preferred alternative identities terms, such as “lesbian,” “gay,” “queer,” or “pansexual,” but acknowledged bisexual histories. In-depth interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 3 hours. These had a two-part structure: first, participants gave a narrative account of their lives so far, focusing on their sexual identity and second, they were prompted to imagine themselves aging into the future and to discuss issues that might arise. Initial analysis of this data set was thematic and iterative. See (Jones, Almack, & Scicluna, 2016) for a detailed description of the study.

The second study was a discourse analysis of interviews carried out in 2017 and 2018 with older bisexual women living in a large U.S. city. Inclusion required that participants identify as a woman, identify as bisexual, and were age 60 years or older at the time of data collection. Participants were recruited through community-based organizations, community centers, social media, email lists, and snowballing. The data set includes 12 cisgender women aged from 60 to 77 years (mean = 65, standard deviation = 5.4) who identified racially/ethnically as White/Caucasian ($n = 9$), Black/African American ($n = 2$), and

Asian American ($n = 1$). All participants identified as bisexual, and some also used other sexual identities including “queer” ($n = 7$), “hasbian” ($n = 2$), “lesbian” ($n = 2$), and “pansexual” ($n = 1$). In-person interviews lasted between 90 minutes to 2 hours and 15 minutes and included creation of a timeline of the participants’ life history followed by reflective questions regarding meaning-making around bisexual identities. Data were analyzed using Willig’s (2008) six-step approach to Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA; see below) and by comparing individual timelines to analyze life sequences in historical context. See Jen (2018b) for a detailed description of the study.

Although recruitment criteria and sample characteristics differed, these two studies were similar enough to enable similar analyses such that resulting themes and their interpretations could be compared with some additional analysis. While the U.S.-based study was initially analyzed using an FDA approach, we deepened the discursive aspects of the U.K.-based study’s thematic analysis and then compared resulting themes and discursive interpretations across studies.

FDA, in common with other types of discourse analysis, focuses on the significance of talk and texts in creating realities (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001). FDA’s distinctiveness comes from the use of Foucauldian theorizations of power and knowledge in order to interrogate the ways in which discourses shape accounts and experiences (Willig, 2008). Our analysis therefore identified and connected individual constructions of bisexuality to broader cultural discourses and examined the subject positions individuals do or do not take up. We then examined how these discursive resources did or did not allow participants to understand or interpret their experiences in various ways. In accordance with FDA’s underpinning social constructionist epistemology, we focused on the interview data as constructed narratives produced on a particular occasion not as a transparent medium which gives the analyst simple access to experience. Initial analysis was of major themes in both data sets in order to establish broad differences and similarities in discourses invoked followed by more detailed comparisons of interview extracts, focusing on the discursive resources and possibilities participants used.

Findings

We present findings under two broad headings. First, we discuss comparisons of historical and cultural contexts. Shared contexts of lesbian separatism and the HIV/AIDS epidemic did similar discursive work in contextualizing accounts of bisexuality across studies, while the Civil Rights Movement offered a unique discursive resource in the U.S.-based data set. Second, we explore the significance of intersectional identities, focusing particularly on differences in race or ethnicity and transgender histories between data sets, and examining the discursive impact of these experiences. Quotes are accompanied by participants’

chosen or assigned pseudonyms (or, by choice of some participants in the first study, their real names).

Comparing Historical and Cultural Contexts

As Anglophone nations with historic ties and some shared cultural influences, lesbian separatism and the HIV/AIDS epidemic informed discursive resources and participants' positioning relative to bisexuality similarly, while the Civil Rights Movement created an additional discursive context in the U.S.-based study.

Lesbian Separatism

In both studies, several participants talked extensively about the legacy of a political divide between bisexual women and lesbian communities, which arose in the context of the feminist lesbian separatist movement in the 1970s (Hartman, 2006). Separatists were described as having chosen to disassociate from men and from women who associated with men in order to focus on building women-centered communities that would not rely on or contribute to patriarchal structures. Participants in both studies drew on the history of lesbian separatism to account for still-present feelings of hurt and rejection and to explain cautious feelings toward LGBTQ communities. They described having been encouraged to “be your real self,” “choose one or the other,” or “make up your mind” in the context of lesbian communities, implying that their only options were to completely engage with or leave lesbian spaces, thereby discursively positioning bisexuality as at odds with lesbian separatism. In the U.S. data set, Petra cited separatist Ti-Grace Atkinson's quote, “Feminism is the philosophy; Lesbianism is the practice,” (Lesbianism and Feminism, n.d., cwlutherfordstory.org) and then stated, “I don't know if that's true.” In the U.K. study, Janet's account of past negative experiences with lesbian separatism framed an account of current caution in approaching support groups for LGBTQ older people in the expectation of encountering biphobia (see Jones, Almack, & Scicluna, 2018, for a fuller analysis of this account). Although the majority of these negative experiences had occurred in the distant past, participants' continued use of this discourse allowed them to problematize the validity of their claim to LGBTQ support and, for some participants in the U.S. study, the validity of their claim to feminism. In three U.S.-based narratives, this discourse was reinforced by the story of cultural icon, Holly Near. As a singer, songwriter and activist, Near became a poster child for the untrustworthy nature of bisexual women when she left her lesbian partner for a man in the 1990s. In contrast, the most prominent cultural icon mentioned by participants in the U.K. study was that of David Bowie, described as an inspirational role model. The polarized nature of these icons illustrates the importance of cultural referents in shaping the impactful discourses available to bisexual subjects.

Despite the frequency of negative experiences associated with lesbian separatism, participants in both studies, particularly cisgender women, also provided accounts that emphasized the positive impact of feminism in their lives and valued the original goals of lesbian separatism. Rachel, a participant in the U.S. study, had identified as a lesbian for 20 years before falling in love with a man and transitioning to a bisexual identity in her 40s. She described a sense of grief over losing access to lesbian spaces in that transition:

[. . .] women's space was so sacred. And it was constantly under assault and we were very, very defensive over it and so yes, I do feel a loss [over my lesbian identity . . .]. I experienced my own personal sadness at not being lesbian-identified. It was a source of great personal power.

Similarly, Imogen, in the U.K. study, chose to identify primarily as a lesbian because of her history of woman-centered work and life-long commitment to feminism, despite acknowledging the potential applicability of the label "bisexual" to her life history. Thus, the lesbian separatist movement and its feminist underpinnings were not always described as external to participants but as something more troubling because participants felt the pull of their power. These historical factors also illustrated the impact of the intersection between historical times and the timing of individual lives, as evidenced by Rachel's multiple identity-related transitions, both key dimensions of the life course perspective (Elder, 1994).

HIV/AIDS Epidemic

In both studies, the HIV/AIDS epidemic featured prominently in accounts participants gave of their sexual histories, functioning both as a reminder of how differently one's life might have, or not have, developed and a connection to community. In the U.K. study, Ian described having narrowly escaped contracting HIV in 1981 when he fell in love with a straight man who was not interested in a relationship:

That turned out to be really useful and fortunate because I wasn't interested in being sexual with other men, [. . .]. I was only interested in him. [. . .] Had I not been in love with him, I would have done more. And would quite probably have died as a result. So yeah [. . . that] quite coincidentally probably saved my life.

Similarly to Ian's story, Rennie, a woman in the U.S. study, described being cautious in a sexual relationship with a man living with Hepatitis C during the mid-1980s stating, "If it weren't for Hep C, I probably would be dead from AIDS." Rennie had been a social service provider for individuals living with HIV and their caregivers during the epidemic and described the draining

experience of coming home each day to multiple voice messages informing her of individuals who had died that day. Life histories that include an account of nearly dying young imply that participants' lives might have been drastically altered or ended much earlier, infusing a particular emotional charge into bisexual aging stories and highlighting the crucial importance of the timing of individual lives relative to the epidemic.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has been described as a crucial turning point in the lives of gay men (Tester, 2018). In the examined narratives, the epidemic provided a similar cultural anchor, discursively connecting participants' narratives to the broader LGBTQ community's collective trauma history. At times, this connection provided a deep sense of community belonging that participants lacked in other spaces. Mona, an Asian American woman, described how Asian fetishism, feminization of Asian men, and issues of racial power put Asian men at high risk for contracting sexually transmitted diseases. She described advocating for data collection on HIV/AIDS prevalence among Asian and Pacific Islander individuals:

Another huge thing was [. . .] we had this grant to work with [. . .] Asian folks with HIV and AIDS [. . .]. One of the biggest actions was to meet with one of the CDC (Centre for Disease Control) folks and what we wanted was our numbers. We weren't getting our numbers, so we were able to meet with him in D.C. and were able to talk to him about how we need to be collecting this data so that we know what kind of resources we need. That was actually an amazing period of leveraging our community numbers to make things visible.

Mona described these resilient community organizing efforts around HIV/AIDS as giving her a sense of voice and belonging, where she consistently found her "quierdos" in life, referencing the shared isolation of bisexual individuals alongside other queer "weirdos" or marginalized "others."

In contrast to experiences of belonging, bisexual individuals have frequently been described as a specific kind of threat to public safety in the context of the epidemic. A recent review of medical research with bisexual participants revealed that one fifth of included articles depicted bisexual individuals as an "infection bridge" with the potential to carry sexually transmitted diseases between heterosexual and homosexual circles of contact (Kaestle & Ivory, 2012). This medical discourse was also reflected in participants' narratives. Ian worked in sexual health promotion and described his frustrations at attempting to make sexual health campaigns and services pay attention to the male and female partners of bisexual men and bisexual men's positioning as the disease vector:

[. . .] there was the idea that, to get funding from the government, the idea of the bisexual threat [. . .] the idea that if you don't do anything then those horrible

bisexual men will take AIDS from the queer community and give it to the straight community.

Ian's account of frustration with binegativity and erasure and within sexual health work during the HIV/AIDS epidemic is supported by his clear and consistent positioning of himself as bisexual since childhood and ongoingly: He talked about currently playing the role of "elder" in bisexual communities predominantly made up of younger people, acting as a community resource. Thus, Ian's consistent positioning of himself as bisexual works together with his invocation of a discourse of biphobia in sexual health work to create an account that is rhetorically persuasive.

Notably, many of the participants who referred to the lesbian separatist movement and HIV/AIDS epidemic had come out as bisexual or another non-heterosexual identity in young adulthood or earlier, indicating that they were embedded enough into the broader LGBTQ community during that time to experience these cultural events as insiders. There were fewer shared cultural references among individuals who had come out later in life, a distinction revealing the importance of the timing of life events in shaping one's access to discursive resources around bisexuality.

Civil Rights Movement

In the U.S. study, several White participants credited the beginnings, strategies, and successes of the Queer Liberation Movement to the prior example of the Civil Rights Movement, illustrating one key distinction between the cultural contexts of the two studies. Rennie described the cultural context of the 1970s as a time when LGBTQ individuals had a responsibility to be out in order to show their numbers, to be resilient as a community, and how early political tactics were informed by those of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements:

We had to come out or they'd kill us all! They have to know we're their children, they have to know we exist. We have to march. [. . .] I think the gay liberation came out of Black justice issues. I think it came directly out of that . . . the marching, showing yourself, showing your political power, you know? I think confronting them, confronting politicians, I think it all came out of there. And when I was born, Black people didn't have the vote in most of the country.

Both racism and heterosexism were described by the U.S. participants as "divide and conquer" methods designed to marginalize and separate large sectors of the population, thereby allowing participants to frame bisexuality as simply one of the many aspects of difference that influenced participants' life experiences. While White participants tended to compare these sources of difference at a societal level, related to broader movements and political goals, women of color

compared race and sexual identity at an individual level, describing their own personal intersectional experiences as discussed in the following section.

Intersectional Identities and Experiences

Differing characteristics between studies deeply influenced the discursive resources that participants drew on and the subject positions that were available to them (Davies & Harré, 1990). The two intersectional identities that most distinguished the two data sets were race or ethnicity and transgender identities, although ability status and religious affiliation were also touched on by several participants. The U.S. sample included three women of color but did not include any transgender people, whereas the U.K. sample was entirely White but included four transgender people.

Bisexuality and Race or Ethnicity

The only Asian participant in the sample, Mona, described a complete lack of bisexual-identified Asian elders or mentors in her life. Despite her history of advocacy with an Asian and Pacific Islander LGBTQ community-based organization, she stated “I was always the oldest one there in queer spaces,” and her age prompted her to take up the positioning of an elder, responsible for the education and support of younger queer individuals which she had not benefited from. Both Black participants described having to be “representative of all Black people” while growing up in a “White context” and struggling to find spaces in which both their sexual and racial identities were acknowledged and valued. Despite these challenges, all three women drew on a discourse of resilience, stating that growing up as a racial minority helped them to be “self-sufficient” and to deal with the experience of coming out as nonheterosexual later in life. Alma, a Black woman who was first attracted to other women in her late 40s, identified herself as bisexual or lesbian depending on social context. She described how her understanding of fluidity in racial identities had grown over the course of her life, particularly through conversations with her biracial children, and how that shift had increased her capacity to incorporate the same flexibility into understanding her own sexuality:

The term bisexual feels too black-and-white a lot of the time, because I think it is more of a continuum of attraction [. . .] I think in the United States, from my generation of racial identity, one identifies as Black if you have any Black ethnicity. [. . .] but the younger generation [. . .] they don't want to make that distinction [. . .]. I'm evolving how I talk about sex and gender and I'm trying to get away from the binary stuff, because I think it is more fluid than how we've thought about it in the past.

Comparisons between racial and bisexual movements, identities, and experiences were not made by U.K. participants, which might be explained both by the fact that there was no movement comparable to the Civil Rights Movement in the United Kingdom and by the fact that no participants in the U.K. study identified as Black or minority ethnic. Their lack of racial marginalization denied them access to a cultural or personalized discursive tool of racial comparison from which to make sense of their sexual identities, while at once illustrating their privileged position beyond the reach of these intersectional “divide and conquer” tactics.

Transgender Identities and Experiences

Four women with transgender histories took part in the U.K. study, as well as one person who identified as pangender, and one partner of a transwoman. These participants talked extensively about how transgender identities intersected with their bisexual identities or experiences, often drawing on the notion that they or their partner had been transgender all their lives but had lacked the vocabulary to describe that experience until much later. For example, Chryssy said, “So as a teenager, at about the age of 14, I had lots of gender issues going on, which I just assumed was sexuality.” She came out as gay at the age of 15 years and “just explained everything that way.” Later, after a period of cross-dressing, she realized she was also attracted to women “so my reaction to that was to can the gender exploration that I’d been doing, and for a while I identified as bisexual.” After getting married and then divorced “I realized that these were gender issues rather than issues of sexuality.” Here, Chryssy treated bisexuality as a false explanation for her experiences and transgender as the correct explanation. Ola, by contrast, considered herself to be bisexual but claimed to have experienced her bisexuality as straightforward and unproblematic in contrast to the difficulty and struggle of being transgender.

Because of the time in which I grew up and lack of information, I spent most of my life until about 15 years ago thinking there was something seriously wrong with me [. . .] never really telling anyone about it, or doing anything about it until very late in life, which is one of those regrets I have. In terms of sexuality, that was the kind of irony [. . .] I had no problem with that, which is quite funny really [. . .] Being bisexual wasn’t an issue, it was just quite normal.

In both accounts, transgender experience is privileged over bisexuality as the more important aspect of participants’ identities, replicating the findings of one of the few studies focusing on both bisexual and transgender aging experiences (Witten, 2016). However, this was not the case for Rosemary and her partner Megan who, unlike Ola and Chryssy, are actively involved in bisexual

communities; they did not position bisexuality as secondary to Rosemary's transgender experiences but as a parallel but separate factor in explaining their experiences.

While no participants in the U.S. study identified as transgender, three participants did explain a sense of gender-based confusion in their childhoods, described by Mona as "weirdness around my gender." Rennie, who described herself as a kind of mix or hybrid between genders, stated that if she had been born in a later generation that she "probably would have been a 'they'" indicating that she might have identified with a genderqueer or nonbinary identity had the timing of her life and its intersection with cultural shifts aligned differently, implicating her cohort in shaping her choice of language use and identity.

Discussion

Within the global context of bisexual aging research, this cross-national comparison takes an initial step toward creating a more coherent and synthesized literature base. Although the included studies represent a focus within the Global North and samples differed somewhat in terms of makeup, the analysis contributes more depth and complexity to understanding how bisexuality is experienced and constructed in later life. Findings offer substantive gains in knowledge concerning discursive resources that bisexual individuals access in later life as well as pointing toward next steps in research, theory, and practice. We see these next steps as laying the groundwork for future macrolevel implications; for distinctiveness of bisexual, aging must first be acknowledged, represented, and recognized in an accurate way before we can determine how best to serve this diverse population through policy development (Jen, 2018a).

Similar historical contexts in the United States and the United Kingdom surrounding lesbian separatism and the HIV/AIDS epidemic contribute shared cultural discourses for sense-making around bisexuality in later life. However, these discursive narratives can be rife with internalized conflict and the unique positioning of bisexual individuals in relation to separatism and the epidemic (i.e., the treacherous bisexual woman; the diseased/dangerous bisexual man) may serve to limit or derail the potential bond that those narratives might have created between bisexual older adults and the larger LGBTQ community. These cultural events and their discursive constructions act as potential challenges to maintaining a positive sense of one's self, sexual identity, and social resources and contribute a deeper understanding to quantitative findings of psychological and social challenges reported disproportionately by bisexual older adults compared with lesbian and gay counterparts (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2016). In addition, participants' discussions of these events reveal the deep impact of positionality and timing of key life events, as bisexual individuals of various gender identities and whose aging and coming out processes intersected

differently with historical times may have drastically different interpretations of meaning connected to historical events.

Despite negativity surrounding bisexual subjects within these discourses and the challenges related to experiencing multiple marginalized identities, participants in both studies demonstrated discourses of resilience as well. Although feminism had deeply shaped both external and internal conflicts in bisexual women's lives, many talked about feminist values and commitments as a strength and the HIV/AIDS epidemic was described in relation to community-based power and belongingness, which provided meaning and value in the face of collective trauma. Intersectional identities provided discursive resources for making sense of bisexuality and promoted self-sufficiency and a capacity for complexity, and although participants described a lack of mentorship or bisexual elders, Mona and Ian had turned this lack into a meaningful role they played in their own communities. This resilience was enabled in part through the personalization of broader cultural events. For instance, although racism was described by White/Caucasian participants as a "divide and conquer" tactic, women of color drew on personal experiences with race and ethnicity for their potential contributions to one's strengths and meaning-making ability.

As two Anglophone nations that share some historical and cultural influences, our analysis is limited to and inevitably influenced by the particular contexts of the United Kingdom and the United States. Furthermore, these purposive samples should not be interpreted as generalized findings even within this limited contextual frame as few bisexual men were included, and trans and gender nonbinary individuals were only included in the U.K. study. Despite these considerations and from a discourse analytic framing, it is very clear that participants' uses of language are deeply informed, even shaped, by the cultural discourses, icons, and movements to which they are exposed. From a life course perspective, the influence of national context is evident in the ways that cultural events and movements shape narratives by intersecting with the context of individual lives and their timing. For instance, the drastically varied presence or lack of political movements, public health concerns, and media representations of bisexuality and the timing of their emergence across national contexts would likely produce endless variants of contextual influence on the intersecting experiences of aging and bisexual lives. As we build toward a global literature base on bisexual aging, it will be crucial that researchers and practitioners account for these differences in context when studying and serving bisexual populations in a broadly defined way. From a theoretical perspective, this will likely mean producing conceptualizations of the lives and experiences of individuals who experience sexual or romantic attractions and behaviors that are contextually sensitive and specific. Current conceptualizations of bisexuality also lack a deeper sense of temporality and fluidity over time, despite the fact that

bisexual individuals tend to report multiple shifts in their sexuality over the full life course, and added nuance is needed to address ways in which individuals of various gender identities experience bisexual lives (Rodriguez-Rust, 2000). These shifts should be accounted for in ways that deprivilege stability in sexuality in order to be more broadly inclusive of and accurate in our examination of bisexual populations.

We have found the life course perspective (Elder, 1994) to be a useful conceptual tool in accounting for change, human agency, and the contextualized nature of bisexual experience and behavior. Further conceptual and methodological creativity in research on sexual identity, attractions, and experiences will also inform intentional and creative recruitment of bisexual populations through methods that deprivilege identity as the sole basis of study criteria. Further theoretical refinement and attention to the importance of language will be particularly important for future cross-national comparisons, which can serve as a useful means of comparing language use, context, personal characteristics, and health-related outcomes among diverse bisexual behaving, attracted, and identified populations. The findings of this study also suggest differences in narrative resources and life histories across racial and ethnic categories, gender identities, cohorts, and the timing of one's coming out process. As such, future research should account for the ways in which these differences contribute to divergent life histories within the aging bisexual population.

In practice settings, applying a life course perspective can contribute a more acute sense of temporality in the lives of bisexual clients, allowing for a more flexible understanding of the diverse discourses of bisexual aging and what a bisexual identity means to each individual, as informed by the cultural and historical context and timing of their lives. Examining discursive resources for sense-making, including the limiting and resilient narratives tied to historical events and intersectional identities, can also assist in promoting critical consciousness raising among older bisexual clients and offer context for analyzing their relative positioning within LGBTQ communities and the broader society. Sensitivity to the discursive work undertaken in invocations of bisexuality (or indeed invocations of any sexuality or gender) creates the possibility of offering alternative framing, which may challenge dominant constructions and be more personally helpful to individuals.

This analysis offers a fresh perspective on experiences of a marginalized, unheard, and underresearched population. In looking toward future understandings of bisexuality and aging, we strongly encourage added attention to creative conceptualizations, methodological advancements, and collaborative approaches. Only then may we reflect back the strengths, resiliency, and capacities of the participants who have so generously shared their stories with us.

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