



# BEST OF BOTH WORLDS?

## BISEXUAL WOMEN & THE CONCEPT OF "HETEROSEXUAL PRIVILEGE"

### MONOSEXISM

Discriminatory behaviour/belief, asserting that only monosexual (heterosexual & homosexual) orientations can be considered legitimate

### "HETEROSEXUAL PRIVILEGE" (General definition)

Unearned individual and institutional privileges granted to the heterosexual population, which aim to reinforce heteronormative ideologies

### "HETEROSEXUAL PRIVILEGE" (Definition in relation to bisexual women)

The assumption that bisexual individuals possess the 'best of both worlds' – the pleasure of same-sex encounters and taking resources from the LGBTQ+ community, as well as the ability to 'pass' as heterosexual to avoid prejudice

## BACKGROUND

**Bisexuality** can be defined as an attraction towards more than one gender, which does not limit itself to the bounds of sexual or gender binary. Previous studies have shown that bisexual individuals are continuously struggling with receiving acceptance from both heterosexual populations and LGBTQ+ communities ('**double discrimination**'), which is largely influenced by **monosexist views** present within binary, Western cultures. Although the burden of being discriminated against and negatively stereotyped is particularly prominent in **bisexual women** (due to both their sexuality and gender), they are also frequently accused of taking advantage of "**heterosexual privilege**", especially through their engagement with male partners.

## RESEARCH & METHODOLOGY

Considering the lack of in-depth analysis of the concept of "heterosexual privilege" in relation to bisexuality and the extensive evidence for bisexuals' negative experience, this study aimed to qualitatively explore **whether bisexual women consider themselves to have an advantage of "heterosexual privilege"**, with additional focus being placed on the treatment from heterosexual population and LGBTQ+ communities.

Fifteen undergraduate University of Glasgow students (who identified as bisexual women) were recruited to take part in three focus groups. The data collected from these meetings have been analysed using **reflexive thematic analysis**, resulting in the identification of three main themes.

# THEMES & DISCUSSION



## THIS IS A MAN'S WORLD

The study found that the heterosexual population places a strong **emphasis on bisexual women's attraction towards men**, due to social expectations of heteronormativity and phallocentrism. Men also frequently **objectified participants' bisexuality**, causing women to feel invalidated and frustrated. This treatment could explain why some bisexual women might wish to avoid disclosing their sexuality if only to avoid unwanted attention.

## YOU'RE WELCOME TO JOIN (BUT DON'T BRING YOUR BOYFRIEND)

Participants reported that LGBTQ+ communities often **struggled with the concept of bisexuality**, which frequently led to exclusion. Moreover, although being perceived as a member of one community and "passing" as homosexual can grant bisexual women acceptance from LGBTQ+ communities, it can also **threaten their sense of self** (identity uncertainty). This suggests that while a relationship with a man could give bisexual women "heterosexual privilege" of protection, it also likely prevents them from engaging with LGBTQ+ communities unless they sacrifice part of their identity.

## SOCIAL PRIVILEGES WITH INDIVIDUAL COSTS

This study suggests that the concept of bisexual "heterosexual privilege" needs to be discussed with attention to **nuanced interactions between oppression and privilege**. The act of "passing" can grant bisexual women the advantage of being perceived as heterosexual, therefore protecting them from oppression. However, these benefits result in a form of **trade-off**, where in order to avoid being discriminated against, they also have to sacrifice their well-being and integral parts of their bisexual identity. This can lead to the **invalidation of their identity and bisexual erasure**.

## 'All Roads Lead To a Man'

Participants reported the heterosexual population over-focusing on their attraction to men while ignoring their attraction to women, as well as the constant fetishisation received from heterosexual men

## When 'B' in LGBTQ+ doesn't quite fit in

LGBTQ+ communities were reported to lack understanding and acceptance towards bisexual women, especially when they entered a relationship with a man, frequently leading to identity questioning

## Best of both worlds? – The paradox of "heterosexual privilege"

Although participants acknowledged that "heterosexual privilege" could bring them the benefit of safety, this can also come at the expense of overlooking or 'erasing' bisexual identity