

**AT THE INTERSECTION OF BISEXUALITY AND MASCULINITY:
BISEXUAL PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES IN TURKEY**

by
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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to explore bisexual men and nonbinary persons’ experiences with monosexism and binegativity through accounts of sexual identity construction, coming out as well as sexual and romantic relationships. The fact that social experiences of bisexuality might have negative implications on individuals’ health and well-being makes it essential to understand social experiences of bisexuality in Turkey, especially because few studies deal with this subject within the context of Turkey. As monosexism and its effects on sexualities in Turkey were not studied before, this study aims to locate monosexism and understand how it operates within the narratives of bisexuals. Based on my interviews, monosexism operates through binegativity (or biphobia), stereotyping, bisexual invisibility, identity invalidation, and bisexual shaming in Turkey. The three main chapters of this thesis explore, identify, and analyze how monosexism interacts with other societal structures and normativities to form the various social experiences of bisexuality within the contexts of identity construction, coming out, and sexual and romantic relationships consecutively.

ÖZET

BİSEKSÜELLİĞİN VE ERKEKLİĞİN KESİŞİMİNDE: TÜRKİYE'DEKİ BİSEKSÜELLERİN DENEYİMLERİ

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KÜLTÜREL ÇALIŞMALAR YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, MAYIS 2021

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Anahtar Kelimeler: biseksüellik, erkeklik, monoseksizm, bifobi, cinsellik

Bu çalışma, biseksüel erkeklerin ve nonbinary kişilerin kimlik inşası, açılma, cinsel ve romantik ilişki hikayeleri üzerinden monoseksizm ve bifobi ile deneyimlerini keşfetmeyi amaçlar. Türkiye'de biseksüelliğin toplumsal deneyimlerini anlamak hem bu toplumsal deneyimlerin kişilerin sağlık ve refahları üzerinde olumsuz etkiler yaratabileceği gerçeği sebebiyle hem de bu konunun Türkiye bağlamında daha önce çok az çalışılmış olması sebebiyle önem arz etmektedir. Türkiye'de monoseksizm ve cinselliklere etkisi daha önce çalışılmayan bir konu olduğu için, bu çalışma öncelikle biseksüellerin anlatılarında monoseksizmi konumlandırmayı ve monoseksizmin ne şekillerde işlediğini anlamayı amaçlar. Görüşmelerden çıkan sonuç, Türkiye'de monoseksizmin bifobi, stereotipleştirme, biseksüel görünmezliği, kimlik geçersizleştirme ve biseksüel damgalaması üzerinden işlediğini göstermektedir. Bu tezin üç ana bölümü monoseksizmin diğer toplumsal yapılar, kurumlar ve normlar ile kesişerek sırasıyla kimlik inşası, açılma, cinsel ve romantik ilişkiler bağlamlarında biseksüelliğin çeşitli toplumsal deneyimlerini nasıl şekillendirdiğini keşfetmeyi, tanımlamayı ve analiz etmeyi hedeflemektedir.

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During the writing process of this thesis, many pride parades and LGBTQIA+ events throughout Turkey were banned. Many people were detained by the police, subjected to torture and violation of human rights. Many trans people, queer people, and women were killed while I was writing this thesis, their perpetrators still cruising the streets. Many, including some of my interlocutors, my friends, my partner, and myself, were subjected to violence of all sorts: epistemological, social, emotional, and physical.

May we surpass these times and have more chances to tell our stories.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bisexuality as a distinct identity has received little attention in sexualities scholarship compared to other sexual minorities (Anderson, McCormack, and Ripley 2016; Monro, Hines, and Osborne 2017). In their review of sexualities scholarship within social sciences between 1970 and 2015, Monro, Hines, and Osborne (2017) conclude that bisexuality has been invisible, under-represented, and marginalized in various aspects within sexualities literature in the UK and the US. Similarly, Özbay and Öktem (2021) recently provided a review of the academic and journalistic literature on non-heterosexualities in Turkey and revealed a gap (or neglect) in knowledge production about bisexuality (Savci 2021; Tapinc 1991; Yuzgun 1986). The word ‘bisexual’ is mentioned only three times in the special dossier they coedited; once together with the other identities in the LGBTQIA+¹ acronym, and twice to cite the published journalistic accounts of homosexual and bisexual women and men called *Eşcinsel Erkekler: Yirmi Beş Tanıklık*² (Hocaoğlu 2002) and *Eşcinsel Kadınlar: Yirmi Dört Tanıklık*³ (Özbay and Soydan 2003) in the early 2000s.

Located at the intersection of bisexuality and masculinity, the purpose of this study is to explore bisexual men and nonbinary persons’ experiences with monosexism and binegativity through accounts of sexual identity construction, coming out as well as sexual and romantic relationships.

Comparing minority stress levels bisexual people experience with lesbian and gay populations, Anderson, McCormack, and Ripley (2016) argue that bisexual people experience overall worse outcomes due to ‘double discrimination’ they face from both straight and LG communities. They call this disparity ‘bisexual burden’. Bisexual burden comprises various ways in which bisexual individuals are marginalized in society due to bigenativity (or biphobia) and negative stereotypes associated with

¹Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual+

²Homosexual Men: Twenty-Five Accounts, in English

³Homosexual Women: Twenty-Four Accounts, in English

bisexuality (Anderson, McCormack, and Ripley 2016). Dodge and Sandfort (2007) suggest that social and political conflict between sexual minorities might also play a role in further increasing this disparity (in Anderson, McCormack, and Ripley (2016)). Coupled with other implications of bisexual burden, this might necessitate studying bisexuals as distinct from LG populations in order to better understand the implications of their social identities in various facets of their lives as well as for their health and well-being.

Bisexual burden and bisexual invisibility take a toll on individuals in terms of mental and physical health, causing disparities between bisexual people and their monosexual (homosexual or heterosexual) counterparts (Barker et al. 2012; Feinstein and Dyar 2017; Feinstein et al. 2019; Flanders 2016, 2017; Flanders et al. 2016; Friedman et al. 2014; Roberts, Horne, and Hoyt 2015). Studies have shown that bisexual individuals are more likely to have mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, stress, self-harm, and suicidality compared to other sexual orientations (Barker et al. 2012; Feinstein and Dyar 2017; Flanders 2016; Flanders et al. 2016; Friedman et al. 2014). They are also more likely to experience worse physical and sexual health outcomes (Barker et al. 2012; Feinstein and Dyar 2017; Flanders 2016), which might be exacerbated by being more likely to experience binegativity and bisexual invisibility from medical professionals and less likely to be out compared to LG individuals (Barker et al. 2012).

It is impossible to estimate the number of bisexual people in Turkey. However, surveys from various countries suggest that self-identified bisexual people constitute the biggest global population within sexual minorities (Barker et al. 2012; Copen, Chandra, and Febo-Vazquez 2016; Gates 2011). Given their numbers and the fact that social experiences of their identities can affect bisexuals gravely in terms of their health and well-being, understanding the social experiences of bisexual individuals in Turkey gains extra significance.

In Turkey, bisexual people and their experiences are predominantly studied together with other LGBTQIA+ identities (Astan 2019; Bilgehan 2011; Eltekin 2019; Kemer et al. 2017; Toplu-Demirtaş et al. 2018; Uzun 2019; Özyegin 2015), or in the context of women who have sex with women (WSW) (Başoğlu 2020; Coşar 2020; Savci 2016; Yıldırım 2018; Özlen 2017) and men who have sex with men (MSM) (Baydoğan 2019; Bereket and Adam 2006; Erol and Özbay 2018; Soybakış 2019; Ural and Bospinar 2017; Yalçınoğlu 2013; Özbay 2017) within disciplines such as sociology, psychology, psychiatry, social work, and nursing. There are only a small number of studies that focus specifically on bisexual individuals. I was able to locate only one article published in a peer-reviewed journal, written by Bereket and Brayton (2008). Focusing

on language, Bereket and Brayton (2008) explored how binarism in language affects bisexual identity formation based on experiences of bisexual men. They argued that social pressure to conform to categories of masculine and feminine makes bisexual self-identification both difficult and less desirable.

Two entries that focused on bisexual individuals were found in YÖK National Thesis Center; one master's thesis (Uğurluoğlu 2021) and one doctoral dissertation (Yılmaz 2020). In their thesis, Uğurluoğlu (2021) studied the role of partner gender identity on affect regulation in bisexual women's romantic relationships with men and women+. Their findings indicated that although bisexual women who are in a relationship with women+ partner demonstrated better affect regulation, identity uncertainty might have more significance on affect regulation than partner gender identity. Centering her dissertation on bisexual activists, seven women and one man, Yılmaz (2020) studied gender performativity and coping strategies with discrimination. Bisexual invisibility was identified as a prominent theme, which manifested guilt and identity uncertainty in some bisexual activists. She identified challenges in accessing social rights such as education, health, work, and housing and called for an intersectional study of bisexual populations in Turkey.

A review of academic literature in Turkey reveals a gap in knowledge production about bisexuality. Studies on bisexual individuals are not only small in numbers, but also tend to center on bisexual women, possibly due to challenges of accessing bisexual men. However, studies indicate that social experiences of bisexuality might vary depending on gender due to the gendered stigmas and negative stereotypes attached to bisexuality (Armstrong and Reissing 2014; Brewster and Moradi 2010; Dodge et al. 2016; Galupo et al. 2014; Gleason, Vencill, and Sprankle 2018). Located at the intersection of bisexuality and masculinity, the purpose of this study is to explore bisexual men and nonbinary persons' experiences with monosexism and binegativity through accounts of sexual identity construction, coming out as well as sexual and romantic relationships. As mentioned above, social experiences of bisexuality might have negative implications for individuals' health and well-being. By analyzing how bisexual individuals navigate their social identities, this study also aims to map bisexual men and nonbinary persons onto the existing bisexual literature as well as contribute to masculinities, sexualities, and LGBTQIA+ studies in Turkey.

1.1 Bisexuality, bisexual umbrella, and related concepts

Ochs (2007) defines bisexuality as a “potential to be attracted romantically and/or sexually to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree”. This study utilizes the words bisexual and bisexuality to refer to “a range of nonmonosexual identities, behaviors, and forms of attraction”, what is also called the bisexual umbrella (Flanders 2017). There are numerous nonmonosexual identities which might connote slightly different combinations, degrees, and qualities of sexual and/or romantic attraction under the bisexual umbrella such as bisexual, bi+, pansexual, queer, fluid, bicurious, bi-/panromantic, homo-/heteroflexible, mostly gay/straight, omnisexual, plurisexual etc. Although bisexual as an umbrella term might erase some of the diversity within bi-spectrum, it can nonetheless be a useful tool in studying nonmonosexual populations based on their shared oppression in society and experiences with monosexism and binegativity (Eisner 2013; Flanders 2017).

Similar to concepts like sexism, heterosexism and cissexism, monosexism is a “social structure operating through the presumption that everyone is, or should be, monosexual, a structure that privileges monosexuality and monosexual people, and that systematically punishes people who are nonmonosexual” (Eisner 2013). Monosexism essentializes sexuality as happening between members of the same or different genders (Klesse 2011; Roberts, Horne, and Hoyt 2015; Ross, Dobinson, and Eady 1971). It is responsible for the privileging and reinforcement of relationships and attraction to only one gender (Flanders 2017) and the assumption that their partner’s gender can identify a person’s sexuality (Weiss 2003). Through a strict binary of sexuality and attraction, monosexism dictates that only monosexualities (lesbian, gay, and straight identities) can exist; “deeming bisexuality illegitimate, occurring in a state of sexuality confusion, an experimental phase” (Roberts, Horne, and Hoyt 2015). Monosexism is at the root of binegativity and bisexual invisibility.

Binegativity, or biphobia, is commonly used to refer to stigma, prejudice, pathologization, and discrimination that bisexual people are subjected to based solely on their bisexual identities by heterosexual as well as lesbian and gay communities (Armstrong and Reissing 2014; Dodge et al. 2016; Niki 2018). Armstrong and Reissing (2014) argue that binegativity does not always manifest explicitly and identify some of the common covert forms of binegativity as (1) negative beliefs and stereotypes about bisexuality (e.g. bisexuals are promiscuous, unable to maintain monogamous relationships), (2) illegitimization of bisexuality (e.g. bisexuals are confused, in denial of their homosexuality, or bisexuality does not exist) (3) holding

bisexuality responsible for the spread of HIV or other types of sexually transmitted infections. Binegativity has been linked with mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, stress, self-harm, and suicidality (Barker et al. 2012; Feinstein and Dyar 2017; Flanders 2016; Flanders et al. 2016; Friedman et al. 2014), health and sexual health problems (Barker et al. 2012; Feinstein and Dyar 2017; Flanders 2016) as well as various forms of violence and abuse in relationships of bisexual individuals (Donovan et al. 2006; Niki 2018).

Bisexual invisibility (bi-invisibility for short), or bisexual erasure refers to the systemic “overlooking and dismissal of bisexual identities” (Hayfield, Campbell, and Reed 2018) in various domains such as mainstream media, LG communities, sex research, psychology, psychotherapy, and policy and legislation (Barker et al. 2012). In "The Epistemic Contract of Bisexual Erasure", Yoshino (2000) identifies monosexual interests in erasing bisexuality as “(1) the stabilization of exclusive sexual orientation categories; (2) the retention of sex as an important diacritical axis; and (3) the protection of norms of monogamy.” San Francisco Humans Rights Commission LGBT Advisory Committee issued a report on bisexual invisibility (Ulrich 2011), connecting it to disparities in mental, physical and sexual health bisexual people have compared to their monosexual counterparts. The report emphasized that due to bisexual invisibility, data about bisexuals might conflate the data about LG populations especially in areas where disparities exist, resulting in the allocation of resources but bisexual people rarely benefit from them. Another consequence of bisexual invisibility is that specialists such as legislators, social scientists, psychologists, and therapists among many might not be as knowledgeable about bisexuality (Hayfield, Campbell, and Reed 2018). Overall, bisexual invisibility might not only cause various problems for bisexual individuals but also make these problems difficult to identify and address.

1.2 Romantic relationships of bisexuals

Bisexual individuals often face challenges in their relationships due to binegativity and stereotypes against bisexuals (Cannon and Boccone 2019; Gleason, Vencill, and Sprankle 2018; Gustavson 2009; Klesse 2005, 2011; Li et al. 2013; Monro 2015; Toft and Yip 2018; Vencill et al. 2018). Several studies have identified a reluctance in monosexual populations against engaging in a relationship with bisexual identified persons, which has been linked with binegativity observed in both straight and LG populations (Armstrong and Reissing 2014; Callis 2013; Gleason, Vencill, and Spran-

kle 2018). Stereotypes such as being promiscuous, unfaithful, untrustworthy, unable to maintain a monogamous relationship; needing sexual relations with multiple genders for sexual satisfaction; ‘becoming’ lesbian, gay or straight later; more likely to spread sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV, and many more might render bisexuals ‘undesired partners’ (Anderson, Scoats, and McCormack 2015; Callis 2013; Feinstein et al. 2019; Gleason, Vencill, and Sprankle 2018; Klesse 2011; Monro 2015).

Bisexual men might experience more disadvantages in finding a partner due to further stigmatization of male⁴ bisexuality. Gleason, Vencill, and Sprankle (2018) studied the gendered differences in the stigmas against bisexual individuals and found that bisexual men tend to be subjected to more negative attitudes compared to other genders (also see Armstrong and Reissing (2014)). Some possible reasons they identified included association of male bisexuality with negative personality traits such as deceitfulness and untrustworthiness, perception of bisexual men as confused about their sexuality, and belief that bisexual men might be unable to maintain monogamous, long-term relationships. In line with the previous studies, Gleason, Vencill, and Sprankle (2018) concluded straight women rated bisexual men less sexually attractive, less masculine, and less desirable partners compared to straight identified men. They also observed that their participants’ willingness to be in a relationship with a bisexual man was inversely correlated with the commitment levels of hypothetical relationships.

Finding a partner and maintaining a relationship are not the only challenges bisexuals face. Being in a relationship might also have negative mental consequences for bisexuals due to identity invisibility. Hayfield, Campbell, and Reed (2018) propose that identity invisibility bisexuals experience in their daily lives increases significantly when they are in relationships, especially if the relationship is monogamous. Bisexual individuals’ identities are assimilated based on their partner’s gender identity, and their bisexuality might be erased and invalidated. One reason they identify for this invisibility is the common use of ‘relationship identities’ such as lesbian, gay, or straight in labeling bisexuals’ relationships. Building on previous research, they link identity invisibility in relationships with anxiety and depression and argue that identity invisibility has negative implications for bisexual individuals’ health and well-being.

Bisexual individuals might experience different relationship stressors depending on the gender and sexual identity of their partners (Gleason, Vencill, and Sprankle

⁴Throughout this thesis, the words female and male are not used to refer to sex, but are used as adjective forms of woman and man out of linguistic necessity.

2018). Bisexuals who are in different-gender relationships are found to experience more exclusion from LG communities, compared to those who are in same-gender relationships do not (Gleason, Vencill, and Sprankle 2018). Pennington (2009) studies the gender performances and negotiations of power in the relationships of bisexual individuals. Some of her findings demonstrate that the lack of gender scripts or models for same-gender relationships might be a relationship stressor for some bisexual individuals who are in same-gender relationships. Conversely, it can be argued bisexual individuals who refuse to enact conventional heteronormative gender scripts in their relationships might experience relationship stressors in their different-gender relationships.

Unique to bisexuals is the coming out experience within relationships (Li et al. 2013). Monosexual individuals do not usually come out in relationships since their sexual orientations are expected to align with their partner's gender identity. Bisexuals, however, are more likely to come out in a relationship since they might also discover their identities much later than their monosexual counterparts (Martos, Nezhad, and Meyer 2015). Coming out within a relationship can cause interpersonal conflict between partners (Li et al. 2013), and also might affect the disclosing individual mentally (Cannon and Boccone 2019). Cannon and Boccone (2019) discuss the coming out experiences of bisexuals who have monosexual partners and argue that the monosexual partner's negative reactions or rejection after coming out might be an indicator for bisexual individual's likelihood of experiencing internalized binegativity in the future.

Bisexuals are also more vulnerable to abuse and violence in their relationships compared to monosexual individuals (Niki 2018). Niki (2018) cites verbal abuse based on negative bisexual stereotypes, bisexual shaming, threatening to 'out' the individual, trivialization or dismissal of the person's bisexuality, pressure to identify as monosexual, and in some cases, coercion into and punishment through sexual acts as some forms of abuse bisexual people might face in their relationships. Donovan et al. (2006) report that bisexuals are more likely to report physical abuse in their same-gender relationship compared to lesbians and gay men. They also found that men, in general, are more likely to be victims of physical and sexual abuse in their same-gender relationships. Taken together, the findings of Donovan et al. (2006) could indicate that bisexual men are in an especially precarious position in their same-gender relationships compared to bisexual and lesbian women as well as gay men.

1.3 Methodology

This study is based on my fieldwork between May 2019 and May 2020 as well as a qualitative analysis of 15 semi-structured, in-depth interviews I conducted between October and November 2019.

1.3.1 Fieldwork and researcher as the subject

When my advisor and I decided that my thesis topic would be bisexuality, he encouraged me to ‘mingle’ with the LGBTQIA+ community in Istanbul, to see what they are doing and what they have to say about bisexuality. I had very limited connection with the queer community back then and finding enough bisexuals to interview seemed to me a daunting challenge. So, I decided to take his word and emailed 27th Istanbul LGBTI+ Pride Week Committee, asking if I could observe their meetings as part of my fieldwork. I was immediately rejected based on my researcher identity, but they were kind enough to invite me as an individual. The first meeting I attended there marked the start of both my fieldwork and activism journey.

My fieldwork lasted one year between May 2019 and May 2020, during which I observed, moderated, and presented in many LGBTQIA+ and bi+ events, some as a participant and others as a volunteer or organizer, in various organizations such as LambdaIstanbul, SPoD, Istanbul LGBTI+ Pride Week, Bi+ Pride Istanbul, Bi+ Forum by Genç LGBTI+, Kampüste Lubunya, Sabancı University Cins Club, and BULGBTI+. My academic and bi+ activist identities as well as engagement with the community granted me access to the stories of numerous bisexual people across many cities in Turkey, and some even abroad.

It was during this period that I started to experience an incongruity between my academic and bi+ activist identities. Originally, activism was to be my fieldwork. However, in the spring of 2020, I realized that academia had become a field of activism for me. I had been taking various gender and sexuality courses at the time, and I was equally shocked and disturbed by the exclusion of bisexuality in both the syllabi and class content. As a researcher and subject of bisexuality, I experienced a lot of epistemological violence and erasure at the time, which was also later exacerbated by a raging pandemic. In May of 2020, no longer able to endure the mental distress I was experiencing, I decided to disengage from both academia and activism to recuperate. It took me a year to be able to engage with this study

again.

1.3.2 Interviews

I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 15 bisexual individuals based primarily in Istanbul between ages 18-35. I chose my interlocutors based on self-identification under the bisexual umbrella. Out of 15, 10 identified as men, 4 identified as nonbinary, and 1 identified as *ibne*⁵. Out of 10 bisexual men, 8 identified as cisgender and 2 identified as transgender. I met my interlocutors in various cafés, restaurants, and university campuses in Istanbul, and one person on Skype. With their consent, I recorded 14 of my interviews which lasted between 60 and 159 minutes, 106 minutes on average. One person refused to be recorded and I had to take notes during and after the interview. All my interlocutors were asked to choose a name they wished to be referred as and their preferred pronouns.

I had to use various recruiting methods to reach interlocutors, as bisexual men in Turkey do not usually engage with LGBTQIA+ communities due to various reasons, such as stigmatization and binegativity. Initially, I tried to recruit interlocutors from the events I participated in, as many LGBTQIA+ organizations refuse to directly refer subjects to researchers. My plan was to use the snowballing technique, but it soon proved impossible as interlocutors in my study either did not know any bisexual men or nonbinary persons, or the few people they knew refused to interview. I then had to advertise on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as well as contact LGBTQIA+ clubs in various universities in Istanbul to find more interlocutors. In these advertisements, I included the information that I conducted this research as a subject of my study. With the help of individuals in the queer community and LGBTQIA+ organizations who supported my research, I was able to find 15 bisexual individuals and conduct my interviews between October and November 2019.

My subject position as researcher played a significant role also in my interviews, first by enabling me greater access to interlocutors. Bisexual individuals, especially men, are a stigmatized minority in Turkey, and it can be challenging to reach and convince them for an interview. Some of them confessed that they were very hesitant at first, but my bisexuality made them feel safe and encouraged them to enter the study. Another role my positionality played was during our interviews, where many of them reported feeling comfortable and thus being able to open up, as evidenced

⁵Originally a Turkish slur referring to homosexuality, similar to the word ‘faggot’ in English. This slur has been reclaimed by the LGBTQIA+ movement in Turkey in the recent years.

by the average length of interviews of 106 minutes.

My positionality, as well as some other reasons mentioned above, required me to disengage from the interviews for more than a year to ensure a more unbiased analysis. After transcribing the interviews, I analyzed them thematically and three major themes emerged: sexual identity construction, coming out, and relationships. I based my three chapters around these themes.

1.4 Thesis Outline

The introduction chapter aims to explain the purpose, significance, and methodology of this study as well as introduce the concepts that will be utilized in the following chapters. I provide a literature review of bisexuality in Turkey and the romantic relationships of bisexual individuals.

Chapter 2 focuses on sexual discovery and identity construction processes of bisexuals. I provide accounts of how heterosexism, monosexism, internalized homophobia, and religion might hinder individuals during sexual discovery and identity construction. I then argue that bisexuals might engage in reinterpretation of their sexual histories, what I call ‘filtering history’, while constructing their bisexual identities to connect their early sexual histories with their bisexual present.

Chapter 3 discusses the coming out strategies of bisexuals. Providing accounts of when and how they come out, I argue that awareness of their social identities enables bisexual individuals to ‘juggle identities’ by positioning themselves as bisexual, gay, or straight depending on their contexts and desired outcomes. I argue that bisexuals not only ‘juggle identities’ to avoid negativity but also to achieve desired outcomes such as access to potential partners and building safe communities.

Chapter 4 explores the sexual and romantic relationships of bisexuals in two parts. In the first part, I identify challenges bisexual individuals face to find partners and analyze dating applications as an example of how their identities render this process both challenging and precarious. In the second part, I analyze negative and positive narratives of bisexual relationships and demonstrate how binegativity can affect bisexual relationships through the theme of jealousy.

2. FRACTURED HISTORIES: CONSTRUCTION OF BISEXUALITY

2.1 Discovering bisexuality

Bisexuals can have two major hurdles while discovering their sexual identities: heterosexism and monosexism. Heterosexism posits heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships as the social and cultural norm, positioning non-heterosexualities as deviant forms of sexualities. It not only privileges heterosexual people and their relationships but also marginalizes and oppresses non-heterosexual people and their relationships.

Many bisexuals struggle to realize and acknowledge their same-gender attractions due to internalized heterosexism. Realizing their non-heterosexuality might be further complicated by the fact that they have different-gender attractions, unlike gay men and lesbians. Same-gender attractions can be conceptualized as a temporary phase in their sexual discovery journey, attributed to youth, or considered a childhood fantasy.

They can sometimes clearly see themselves being with women, but will they accept the fact that they have sex with men as well? You get confused. And sometimes, you just cannot get over this. It's always somewhere in your mind. And then there's a role that society imposes on you, and being a man and simultaneously being straight cannot be thought of separately. And then you ask, "Am I not a proper individual? What will I do? Can I have a family in the future?" Silly questions flood your mind, though they should have never been there in the first place. Yiğit (24, recent graduate)

Yiğit reveals how societal norms play a detrimental role in the construction of bisexual identities. On the one hand, heterosexism tells Yiğit to conform to the heteronormative life narratives of the society, i.e. have a different-gender relation-

ship, get married, have children, etc. On the other hand, masculinity norms dictate that he cannot be attracted to men. Especially for those like Yiğit who come from conservative backgrounds, same-gender attractions can prove to be a great taboo; immediately denied and suppressed. Sometimes, ‘the thought’ does not even occur.

It took a long time to discover my bi+ identity. I didn’t even think something like this could be possible for a long time, I always thought of myself as straight.¹ Yiğit (24, recent graduate)

Until his twenties, Yiğit never even imagined that he would find himself desiring men. All his sexual and romantic experiences until then had been with women and he felt confident in his ‘straight’ identity. He knew the rules and he was good at it. Even though he can now point out some memories where ‘his bisexuality showed’, back then he was blind to it. He had never attributed any meaning to these memories or felt the need to question his sexuality.

My mind worked in very heterosexist ways. I mean, the fact that a man can be with a man, or that there could be a bisexual existence... I felt it, but it couldn’t be possible. Atman (29, master’s student)

Atman’s asexuality complicated the sexual discovery process for zir. For a long time, ze saw zirself “beyond sexuality”. Ze says ze never felt any sexual or romantic attraction towards anyone, until zir college years where ze had the chance to travel abroad on zir own. Somewhere in Asia, Atman met a woman and had a relationship which lasted for several weeks and experienced sexuality with another person for the first time. After coming back to Turkey, however, ze started to develop feelings for a male friend ze met, named Melih.

I mean, it was the same with Melih as well because there’s a phobia I subject myself to. I feel this, how do I feel this, what do I really feel? I judged my feelings, I judged myself, I really hurt myself for a long time. I overwhelmed myself a lot. How could I know it back then, being bi+ and all. It could have relieved me to know such a concept back then. Maybe not just knowing, but internalizing as well. Atman (29, master’s

¹All of the original interviews were conducted in Turkish. Being a translator by training, I personally translated all of the quotations used in this manuscript.

student)

Internalized heterosexism caused many a trouble for Atman. Queerness was something ze did not think much about and ze certainly had never imagined zirsself desiring or being in a relationship with a man. Ze reports getting depressed and even deciding to commit suicide during this period until ze was able to come to terms with zir sexuality.

Veli (27, works in culture and arts) also did not have any sexual or romantic experience until college. In his case, however, it was because he started suppressing all his desires after he found out his attraction towards men.

Cem: Okay, you suppressed your desires, but what was the reason behind it?

Veli: It was fear.

Cem: What were you afraid of?

Veli: First of all, not being able to understand it. Why did something like this happen? Why am I into men? And I actually had no idea how this was practiced. All of it, all of these unknowns were a source of fear, a source of anxiety for me. Understanding it during my acceptance process, and then coming out and start living it helped me overcome my fears, relax and further my self-understanding process. In that way, it was relieving.

Veli had to confront his internalized heterosexism before he could stop suppressing himself and his sexuality. Accepting and finally experiencing his same-gender desires freed him to realize and construct his bisexual identity.

Having to deal with same-gender desires first is a common theme I encountered many more times in my interviews. For many of my interlocutors, their attraction towards men was the elephant in the room that had to be addressed before they could move on with their lives. There is no doubt that internalized heterosexism and homophobia as well as stigmatization of non-heterosexual identities in Turkey play a significant role in how my interlocutors deal with their same-gender desires.

2.2 Monosexism

Once bisexuals go through the hurdle of heterosexism and acknowledge their same-gender attractions, they are confronted with another obstacle: monosexism. Monosexism is an essentialist view of sexuality as happening between members of the same or different genders (Klesse 2011; Roberts, Horne, and Hoyt 2015; Ross, Dobinson, and Eady 1971). Through a strict gay/straight binary, monosexism dictates that only monosexualities can exist; “deeming bisexuality illegitimate, occurring in a state of sexuality confusion, an experimental phase” (Roberts, Horne, and Hoyt 2015).

Monosexism can instill in people’s perception of sexuality that desire cannot be plural, which might render sexual and/or romantic attractions that do not fit the individual’s sexual identity narrative invisible. It was difficult for Kemal to realize what he felt towards men was sexual attraction because he was already invested in his straight identity.

It can take some more time to realize it when you’re interested in both women and men. But I think that I would have noticed [my attraction towards men] much sooner if I had only been interested in men. Kemal (19, undergraduate student)

What Kemal put so succinctly has been echoed in the stories I heard from many people during my fieldwork. People who previously invested in their lesbian, gay or straight identities might find it difficult to identify and accept their attraction for another gender that does not fit their current identity. Desire can become elusive when sexuality is understood to be fixed and unidirectional.

My mind was very binary at that time. I was either straight or gay. Ada (33, PhD student)

Another way monosexism affected my interlocutors before they identified as bisexual was through the binary conceptualization of sexual orientation. This binary is generally stricter for men because society does not provide men with the flexibility attributed to women’s sexuality (Brewster and Moradi 2010). Masculinity norms and monosexism intersect and leave men only two options: you are either gay or

straight.

Many bisexuals do not know how to conceptualize the plurality of their desires when they first discover them. This might cause confusion, feelings of exclusion, and depression in some individuals during their process. Some people like Barış (24, master's student) experience this as an abnormality, a defect of personality.

When I realized I was into men, I was like, what is happening? But I still didn't approach this matter in a homophobic way, I mean I wasn't homophobic to myself. This is possible, but then, there's the question of where I will put the previous women. I have to be either of them [straight or gay]. What I found abnormal was not that I liked men, but it was liking more than one gender. I thought everyone had only one choice and they had to continue with that. I felt like, okay, there's women and then there's men and I had to choose one of them. Barış (24, master's student)

Having grown up in a secular household in Izmir, Barış did not struggle with internalized heterosexism as much when he first discovered his same-gender desires in high school. He had experienced sexual and romantic attraction towards women before, so his interest in men confused him at first. He felt like he was not allowed to like more than one gender.

In high school, he found himself experiencing great loneliness, envying an openly gay person in his school in the meanwhile. Barış wanted to be him, wanted to be able to openly tell people who he was, just like him. "And then there was also the fact that I liked women," he says. He did not know 'what' he was. He felt completely alone and unloved until he went to a camp where he heard the word bisexual for the first time in his life. And it clicked.

If somebody had come up and said that there was something called bisexuality, I would have probably never experienced this confusion. Barış (24, master's student)

Another theme emerges in Barış's story on how monosexism affects individuals also through an erasure of bisexual identity. Bisexual identities and language related to bisexuality were mostly inaccessible to my interlocutors while they were discovering their sexuality. None of them had come across bisexual people in their lives or even

on TV during their childhood. They had not seen bisexuality represented in news media, in films or by celebrities. The erasure of bisexuality and the consequent invisibility of the identity hindered them in their identity construction process.

Many people are introduced to non-heterosexual identities through films, what Cover (2000) calls ‘first contact’. He argues that mainstream mass-circulation films establish sexuality as a binary and enforce the categorization of sexuality into the ‘hetero/homo’ binary (Cover 2000). This monosexist paradigm of sexuality reproduced in mainstream films can affect bisexuals during their sexual discovery.

Ada (33, PhD student) mentions the films he watched from TLA Releasing, a film distribution and production company that focuses on telling LGBTQIA+ stories. “I mean, I’ve never experienced such a process,” he says, referring to narratives of sexual discovery and coming out experiences he saw in those movies. He believes that the queer narratives in these films not only did not reflect his experience but also instilled in him some false expectations related to his identity, resulting in him denying his attraction toward women and constructing a gay identity first.

Monosexism can hinder bisexuals’ identity construction process by making it difficult to recognize their sexual and/or romantic attraction towards multiple genders, forcing them onto gay/straight binary, rendering bisexuality and its related language invisible, and through lack of representation. Within this context, it can take bisexuals a long time to construct their identities. In fact, bisexuals tend to discover their sexuality much later than lesbian and gay-identified individuals (Martos, Nezhad, and Meyer 2015).

What can happen in this long process is that individuals might first construct monosexual identities, some can even come out as gay before they realize their bisexuality.

2.3 Am I gay?

Bisexuality is commonly misconceptualized as an exploration phase, a temporary identity queer people go through in their journey to homosexual identities (McCormack, Anderson, and Adams 2014). Ironically, my interviews reveal that bisexual people might also use gay identities temporarily as a steppingstone in the construction of their bisexuality, contrary to popular discourses.

The majority of my interlocutors asked themselves the same question when they first started to deal with their same-gender attractions: Am I gay?

I started to think about whether I was gay. Of course, I didn't know anything about bisexuality, but I also liked what I experienced [being with a man]. Ada (33, PhD student)

Ada's internalized monosexism affected him significantly while he was first exploring his same-gender desires. Although he had a sexual and romantic history with women, his capability to desire men meant for him that he must be gay. This is an assumption that many people can make when they discover their same-gender desire.

I started questioning whether I experienced [sexuality and romance] with [women] because I liked it. When I looked at the past, I thought maybe I realized I was gay and used [women] as a cover. When I look at it now, I know that it was my romantic interest that kept me [in these relationships], of course. Ada (33, PhD student)

Confronted with great confusion, Ada started to question and reinterpret his sexual and romantic history with women. He had access to narratives of queerness and coming out from his social circles and the LGBTQIA+ themed films he watched. He knew 'the beard' trope, where gay men enter relationships with women to hide their sexuality from society. The pressure to identify as gay was so great that he eventually did so, erasing all his sexual and romantic history with women by labeling it as a 'cover' for his homosexuality. It took him a couple of years to make sure that 'his feelings were real'.

My friends, for example, told me that I could like only one side. Back then, I was in middle school or high school and we didn't know much. And I thought I had to lean more towards one side, and I guess I had chosen men. Özgür (18, undergraduate student)

For bisexuals like Özgür who join queer communities early on, monosexism prevalent in those communities can play a gatekeeping role in the construction of their identities. They must deal not only with their internalized monosexism, but also with external monosexism they experience from the communities they are in. Although they originally came out as bisexual, when they were told they must choose a side, Özgür gave into monosexism, chose men, and identified as gay for a couple of years.

I question myself, asking whether I am gay and I have some internalized homophobia. But maybe I ask this question because of the pressure within the [LGBTQIA+] movement. It could be a monosexist pressure. I should let go, I mean, it is what it is. Atman (29, master's student)

Atman is an activist who is academically engaged in the field of gender studies, which allows zir access to a theoretical framework through which ze can analyze zir experience. Although ze has long dealt with zir internalized homophobia, ze cannot stop doubting zirself still. Atman names this incessant questioning as a monosexist pressure from LGBTQIA+ movement and society in general.

Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor (1995) identify Atman's struggle with monosexism as 'continued uncertainty', a probable final phase of bisexual identity development in their model. They argue that bisexuals might continue questioning the validity of their identities long after they label themselves due to a lack of validation and support for their identities (Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor 1995). Atman's 'continued uncertainty' demonstrates how monosexism can trap individuals into ever doubting themselves and their bisexuality, asking whether they are gay long after they came out as bisexual.

2.4 Internalized homophobia

After asking the question "Am I gay?", many bisexuals are confronted with their internalized homophobia as they start to suspect they might not be heterosexual.

There was a constant question in my mind: can I possibly be gay? But it's because of fear, of course. I ask, and then I answer: No, I'm not, I mean, actually both. Then I look and tell myself, "Can I possibly give this answer because I'm afraid?" But no, I'm also into women. Çağatay (35, engineer)

Although Çağatay had always been certain of his attraction towards women, he could not help but ask himself whether he was gay. Çağatay only had access to men as sexual partners for six years after he discovered his bisexuality, which made it challenging to 'make sure'. He experienced considerable amounts of internalized homophobia throughout this period, where he thought being gay was 'the doomsday

scenario' and feared personal and societal consequences of such an aspect.

Throughout this process, the question of whether I was gay kept popping in my mind, but then I look at women, I desire them. I look at porn, I desire the women in porn; I look at the real-life, I desire the women there, I fantasize about them and masturbate. But at the same time, I sometimes fantasize about men and masturbate as well. It was interesting; my exploration experience as a whole was homosexual, but what emerged was pansexual. Çağatay (35, engineer)

Çağatay constantly reminded himself of his attraction towards women mentally or through practices such as watching 'straight' porn or fantasizing about women while masturbating. These practices became 'the weapons' he used in his fight with his internalized monosexism and homophobia. He describes these years as limbo; full of fear, anxiety, and self-hatred. It took him many years and therapy to finally make peace with his sexuality and start associating his identity positively.

When Doruk (25, teacher) found out his same-gender attractions, 'his world collapsed': he was gay, he would have to be penetrated and he would lose his masculinity. No longer a man. He experienced such internalized homophobia that 'being gay' nearly overrode everything else in his life and became the one problem that must be addressed before he could move on.

During his struggles with internalized homophobia, he decided to enter a relationship with a male friend from his high school, hoping that his fantasies would prove to be fallacious, and he could experience closure after all. He had one condition: "Neither of us will forget that we're men." However, everything went smoothly contrary to his expectations.

I started to fear because everything was going smoothly. It was going to end and I was going to be a man again. Doruk (25, teacher)

Enjoying his sexual and romantic relationship with a man and consequently 'becoming the gossip of the school' exacerbated his internalized homophobia even more. After breaking up with his boyfriend, he had a couple of one-night stands, all of which left him disappointed. His final move was to get help from a psychiatrist for a 'cure' to this problem, which he says helped him "solve his problems with men".

After I solved my problem with men, I found out that I could build healthy relationships with women as well. Bisexuality came after this. This shifted my focus from being a gay top² and encouraged me to redefine myself and focus on relationships and getting to know people. It reduced my anxieties. Anxiety of losing masculinity related to being gay. Doruk (25, teacher)

Accepting his same-gender attractions facilitated him in discovering his attraction towards women and constructing a bisexual identity. His attraction towards women and bisexual identity, in turn, enabled him to reclaim his masculinity, ‘becoming a man’ once again. Doruk’s example demonstrates how some individuals can legitimize their same-gender desires based on their attraction towards women, and paradoxically experience and reproduce homophobia still.

2.5 Religion

Religion plays a significant part in the identity construction processes of interlocutors who come from conservative Muslim backgrounds. Homophobic discourses they were subjected to in their religious communities, families and holy scriptures during their childhood affected some of my interlocutors greatly after discovering their same-gender desires. They were made to feel ‘dirty’, ‘wrong’, ‘uncleansable’, ‘sinful’, and ‘damned’ and suffered mentally until they were able to distance themselves from religion or study the holy scripture and reconcile their non-heterosexual identities with their religious beliefs.

I felt remorseful every time. I felt very remorseful. I never felt remorseful when I was with a girl, but I felt dirtied and sinful when I was with a man. Gunnar (32, engineer)

Gunnar grew up in a religious village where he was subjected to hate speech towards same-gender sexuality since he was born, as he puts it. Religion is not important in his life now, but he was very religious as a child. Discovering his same-gender desires started a troubled period in his life where he constantly felt ashamed, regretful, guilty, and lost. He tells me the story of a traumatic night after his first sexual

²Referring to the bottom/top binary, also known as the penetrated/penetrator binary.

contact with a man. Fearing his same-gender desires would never cease, Gunnar prayed before going to bed that god would take his life if he were to ‘continue living in sin’. He was very convinced that he would not wake up from sleep that night.

If I had never heard a religious discourse or about these sexual sins and punishments, I would have never uttered that pray. But, I mean the fear of eternal life in hell, and this fear of eternal wrath, and I think maybe the fear of expulsion from being a subject of God. I think maybe I wanted this not as a straight person but as a subject of God. For religious reasons. Gunnar (32, engineer)

Waking up the next day, Gunnar felt extremely surprised being alive. Retaining his life, however, did not help him much as he would have to first distance himself from religion and go through therapy to finally start feeling comfortable with his sexuality.

I go to my friend’s house, have sex with him while his family is gone. Or he comes to my house to have sex when my family is gone. Then I put myself into the bathroom, I clean myself, I perform ablution. But at the same time, I also try to clean myself mentally but it doesn’t work. Because it triggers my remorse. I am doing something wrong. Çağatay (35, engineer)

After each time he had sexual contact with a man, Çağatay tried to clean away his same-gender desires both physically and symbolically through ablution, a religious practice of bathing which Muslim people perform to clean themselves bodily and spiritually. He tells me in great detail how much his religious beliefs affected him back then. He always felt remorseful, wrong, and soon started to hate himself for his same-gender attractions. He thought of this chapter of his life as a ‘chaotic mud pond’ he jumped into and got lost in the darkness until a year ago when he started therapy.

If I experienced this relationship with a woman, I wouldn’t actually feel this remorseful. This is actually the cultural aspect of the matter. You think you’re experiencing remorse but the source of this remorse isn’t a hundred percent religion, it’s something more societal. When I started

to have relationships with women, I also brought them to our house secretly, but I never felt remorseful about them. Çağatay (35, engineer)

Although having pre-nuptial sex with women was also a ‘sin’ in their religious beliefs, both Gunnar and Çağatay acknowledge that it was only their sexual practices with men that triggered these feelings. Çağatay now conceptualizes this remorse as partly religious, but mostly societal. Gunnar and Çağatay’s cases demonstrate how homophobia can be amplified, institutionalized, and deployed through religion.

Olçay (20, undergraduate student) had not always been a religious child, but the influence of religion in their life greatly increased when they started to live with their father, who was an old-school religious man. Before discovering their same-gender attractions, they had been exposed to many homophobic religious discourses, including ‘the people of Lut’, which is a popular story from Kuran that describes the damnation and annihilation of a population on the grounds of their same-gender sexual behavior. The ninth and tenth years of their life were spent with incessant nightmares and horrible nights they kept waking up, praying that they would be ‘normal’ again. Being ‘gay’ meant for them at that time that they were not given a shot at life. This dark period culminated in an attempt to kill themselves when they were ten years old.

Going through that ordeal helped them distance themselves from the religious views of their father and they decided to come out to their school as gay at the age of eleven. They wanted to be righteous and did not want to lie to people anymore. Hearing the gossips soon after, their father turned Olçay’s life into an ‘unbearable torture’ for the next two years. At thirteen years of age, as an underage child, Olçay was thrown out to the streets by their father, left to fend and provide for themselves.

Olçay’s struggle with religion and homophobia started personally but escalated very quickly to include their school and family lives after coming out. They had to face some of the most extreme consequences of institutionalized homophobia throughout their childhood and teenage years. During this period, their ‘gay’ identity gained significance, becoming a badge they wore to honor their early experiences, which belated the construction of their bisexual identity.

Another way my interlocutors dealt with the pressure and negativity they experienced from religion is by studying the holy scripture and reconciling their non-heterosexual identities with religious beliefs. Jiyan (20, undergraduate student) was never religious, but their mother was. After coming out, their mother’s religious

concerns pushed Jiyan to study Kuran, reading it twice in Arabic and once in Turkish just to be able to generate arguments against their mother. Even though it took a long time, Jiyan's agility in religious discourses helped them legitimize their bisexuality to their mother.

Doruk (25, teacher), on the other hand, was religious himself and struggled a lot with internalized homophobia due to his beliefs. Like Olcay, the story of Lut affected him a lot and he decided to consult a psychiatrist to 'cure himself' from his homosexuality. The psychiatrist was able to ease Doruk's mind by quoting passages from Kuran, which caused an epiphany in Doruk, encouraging him to study Kuran with a fresh perspective. Doruk felt "legitimized. I was a Muslim gay!" Through a reconciliation of his same-gender desires with his religious beliefs, he was able to construct a 'Muslim gay' identity, which he says provided him with enough stability to then continue his sexual exploration journey and finally end up discovering his bisexuality.

These stories demonstrate how disruptive institutionalized homophobia legitimized though religion can be for non-heterosexual people. This institutional homophobia not only hindered my interlocutors in their sexual identity development but also left marks for life, which most of them had to deal with through therapy. Some of them even admit that they are still affected by these experiences and have to deal with internalized homophobia 'left from those days', even though they are actively working on it.

2.6 Women's role

Another factor that can play a significant role in the identity construction process of bisexuals is their sexual and/or romantic history with women. Eleven out of fifteen of my interlocutors report that people judge their bisexuality based on their relationship history with women. One probable reason for this might be the common stereotype that bisexual men are actually 'closeted homosexuals' that are in denial of their sexuality (McCormack, Anderson, and Adams 2014). Within this context, having access to women as sexual and/or romantic partners might serve as 'proof' of one's bisexuality, functioning like a gatekeeping mechanism.

One problem with this expectation to prove one's bisexuality is that sexual behavior is only one component of sexual orientation, along with sexual identity and sexual attraction (Fu et al. 2019). However, what many of my interlocutors feel is

that people (often, this also includes themselves) attach more importance to sexual behavior than sexual identity and sexual attraction. This overemphasis on sexual behavior can be detrimental for bisexual people due to two reasons: (1) they might doubt their sexual attractions towards one or multiple genders until they have ‘sufficient’ sexual experience, which they might never feel they do, and (2) their bisexual identity is constantly questioned until they can ‘prove’ it through sexual behavior.

Having this experience helped me understand my sexuality. Because, of course, you can’t be sure. Showing interest and being satisfied in a sexual or romantic relationship are different things. Experiencing this had an affirmative effect on me. Veli (27, works in culture and arts)

Veli knew he was probably bisexual, but he did not ‘know’ it until he had his first sexual experience with another person. Having had some sexual experience at last was what he needed to validate his bisexuality. Kemal also suspected he was bisexual, yet he also needed proof, what he calls ‘a breaking point’. His ‘breaking point’ was supposed to be a “sexual relationship or something absurd” but his aversion to dating applications prevented it.

I never used to have such an interrogation, but I started to think about this when I realized I was bisexual or LGBTI. Because I had never been able to build an emotional relationship with a woman as deep as I wanted to, I asked myself whether I wasn’t able to achieve this because I was gay. But when I look at it in the long run, it’s silly because although I’m not able to build an emotional relationship, I experience sexual desire, which means there’s an orientation, and somehow I’m bisexual. Okay, then, apparently, there’s no mold for this. I was able to say I was bisexual even though I couldn’t form a productive relationship. Kemal (19, undergraduate student)

Identifying as bisexual necessitated Kemal to question his romantic past with women, something he never felt the need of while he identified as straight. After volunteering for an LGBTQIA+ organization, Kemal had the chance to start talking and learning more about sexuality. He does not need a ‘breaking point’ anymore to validate his sexual identity, he is certain of his attractions despite his inexperience. However, this inquisition of sexuality is not something bisexuals experience only internally.

Olcay, for example, experiences this problem externally as nobody believes they are pansexual because they have never been in a relationship with a woman. They tell me the story of what happened just before meeting me for our interview when they told their ex-partner Bobby about ‘an interview about bisexuality’:

Of course, this is a little sad. The fact people don’t accept how you identify. Gay or not, people look at you and [form their opinions of you based on] the way you live your life, rather than how you express yourself. For example, Bobby told me, “Yes, yes, you’re pansexual even though you’ve never been with women.” And I told him: “Were you straight before you had sex with a man? What kind of nonsense is this?” Olcay (20, undergraduate student)

Olcay complains that their declaration of sexual identity is not taken seriously while monosexual people like Bobby are allowed to identify however they wish to without needing to prove their attractions. Olcay and others report experiencing this type of invalidation of their bisexuality more commonly in LGBTQIA+ communities compared to straight communities.

Bariş’s bisexual identity is also constantly questioned because most of his visible relationships were with men.

My identity is constantly questioned: “You say you’re bisexual, but we’ve never seen a girl with you.” It can come from within the [LGBTQIA+] movement but also from people outside the movement. Or sometimes they say, “Okay, you call yourself bisexual, but you like men more, right?” This ends up making me feel like I somehow have to prove this. Barış (24, master’s student)

Bariş has long felt the pressure to ‘prove’ his bisexuality, specifically his attraction towards women. People keep asking him ‘if he likes men more, right?’, implying that he might be gay, rather than bisexual. However, he decided a long time ago that he should not have to announce every sexual partner he has just to prove his bisexuality to people. When it happens naturally, though, he lets it.

Last week, I became intimate with a woman at a party, and my friends jokingly told me, “Now we believe you’re bisexual.” On the one hand,

this is something they do humorously, but on the other hand, there's a human reality to it. They want to see that performance. Barış (24, master's student)

Like in Barış's narrative, 'performing bisexuality' can usually mean having a visible sexual and/or romantic relationship with a woman. Despite his relationship history with women, Barış's bisexuality is questioned, invalidated, and overlooked when he is in serial monogamous relationships with men. Within this context, having a female partner enables him to reclaim his bisexuality.

Their relationship with women can also play a facilitating role for bisexuals during their sexual exploration and self-identification phase. Having a sexual and/or romantic history with women might predict a smoother transition during bisexual identity construction.

Yiğit's sexual exploration journey began during his relationship with Çağla, an openly bisexual woman. Yiğit remarks that bisexuality was not on his radar at the time he started this relationship. Çağla opened a whole new world for Yiğit by introducing him to queerness, questioning and criticizing gendered dynamics of their relationship, and developing sexual practices such as pegging³ and role-playing, which encouraged Yiğit to consider exploring his sexuality.

I had instances where I myself experienced anal sex with Çağla. If I had engaged in sexual behaviour with someone performing masculinity or with another man, I would have never accepted this. Because it's as if you're losing masculinity. Something happening there [anus] is like everything coming to an abrupt end. Then I discovered that I actually enjoyed it, and decided to follow through. Then we had role-plays, for example. Then I thought, yes, this is good, being completely free of taboos, behaving however I feel like behaving. Yiğit (24, recent graduate)

Disrupting the heteronormative penetrated/penetrator binary while retaining the woman/man binary enabled Yiğit to disassociate this sexual practice from 'homosexuality'. As he acknowledges, Çağla's gender identity had the utmost importance in his willingness to participate in this sexual practice. In a way, Çağla's feminin-

³Pegging refers to a sexual practice in which a woman penetrates a male partner usually with the help of a strap-on dildo.

ity permitted Yiğit to conceptualize pegging as a ‘straight’ sexual act and helped keep his ‘masculinity’ despite being penetrated. Breaking some of his taboos and feeling sexually liberated in his relationship with Çağla opened Yiğit to explore his sexuality further and after a short period, he started to identify as pansexual.

When I look at my first relationship, I can see many masculine aspects to it. It started as a heterosexual relationship anyway, and that masculinity comprised its foundations. I walked her home almost every day for two years. [...] While that’s true, we also had sexual practices where I was the anally receptive partner. So, it’s easy to call that relationship straight when I’m talking about certain practices, but at the same time it is difficult. Emre (24, recent graduate)

Emre was also in a relationship with a woman when they started to identify as bisexual. They describe their relationship dynamics as typically heterosexual and contrast it with their sexual practices, which again involves pegging. They came out to their girlfriend and received a supportive reaction.

I didn’t experience any problems with myself, I accepted it pretty quickly. I also never experienced the confusion of whether I was gay. I called myself bisexual after learning the name. Having a girlfriend at the time also made it easier for me. Maybe, if I hadn’t had a girlfriend at the time, I could have identified as gay. But her presence in my life made it easier for me to define myself as bisexual. Emre (24, recent graduate)

Having a girlfriend at the time may have facilitated Emre’s bisexual identity construction period by (1) making them more accepting of their non-heterosexuality and (2) preventing them from doubting their attraction towards women.

All but one of my interlocutors who had some form of sexual and/or romantic connection with women prior to coming out report having a more positive experience during their identity construction process compared to other individuals. They are also more likely to come out as bisexual without first constructing gay identities, possibly because they experience less invalidation during their identity construction process.

As discussed above, these findings might be due to the gatekeeping role that sexual and/or romantic relationship history with women can have on bisexual identities.

Due to the common monosexist stereotype that bisexual men are actually ‘closeted homosexuals’ who are in denial of their sexuality, individuals who identify as bisexual are expected to ‘prove’ their bisexuality through sexual behavior with women. Those who cannot ‘perform’ their bisexuality can be forced by their social environment to identify as gay, or their sexual identities might be denied.

2.7 Performing bisexuality

The illegitimacy of bisexual identity forces many individuals to prove and defend their bisexuality (McCormack, Anderson, and Adams 2014), first to themselves before coming out, and to others after it. Justifying one’s bisexuality can prove to be difficult, however, as bisexual desire can be (1) invisible and (2) burdensome to perform.

There are two main reasons why bisexual desire might usually remain invisible: monosexism and monogamy. Monosexism structures sexuality based on a single gender-object-of-choice, which dictates that one’s partner’s gender identity determines their sexual orientation. Monosexism operates through mononorms and stereotypes against bisexuality to invalidate plural desires as well as make them invisible to both the individual and others.

Monogamy structures sexual and romantic relationships to include only one exclusive partner. As a norm, monogamy both forbids and punishes individuals for the plurality of their desires, regardless of their gender-object-of-choice. Most of my interlocutors practice serial monogamy, meaning they are usually in a relationship with a single gender. When monosexism dictates that your partner’s gender determines your sexual orientation and monogamy makes it so that you can only have one partner at a time, bisexual desire can remain invisible and vulnerable to invalidation, especially for bisexuals who have long-term monogamous relationships.

Bariş’s narrative above is an example of how monosexism and monogamy can combine to invalidate a person’s bisexual identity. Due to his serial monogamous relationships with men, Bariş’s bisexuality is constantly questioned, and he is expected to ‘prove’ his identity through sexual behavior with women. He remarks that people naturally want to see him ‘perform’ his bisexuality.

How does one ‘perform’ bisexuality? In Bariş’s case, performing bisexuality meant having a visible sexual and/or romantic relationship with women. For Yiğit (24, recent graduate), it is his relationship with men. Ada (33, PhD student), however,

exposes a long list of sexual practices he is expected to perform to validate his bisexuality:

If you're bisexual, you have to use everything your body possesses; you have to be a top and a bottom. If you're bisexual, you have to do everything your body is capable of with everybody. Then you become bisexual. If you have anal sex with a man but not with women or if you don't like doing something with a certain gender, this becomes a question for them. Or if you like performing oral sex to a vagina but not to a penis, that's also a problem. And they question you, question whether you're straight, saying "I mean you did this once in a while, but it's very rare." Ada (33, PhD student)

Ada's list reveals that bisexuals might not only be expected to perform their bisexuality through alternating their gender-objects-of-choice between relationships, but also through various sexual practices that demand they use their body's sexual capacity to the fullest extent. Ada's account indicates that bisexual people might be expected to have no sexual boundaries and preferences if they are to 'prove' their bisexuality.

Maybe this will last for a long time, but however much I explain to people that I'm bisexual, people feel the need label me in their heads. And it's usually not bisexual. I'm either straight or gay for them, and most of the time gay. Because I don't perform the masculinity they expect. I don't adhere to masculinity norms, I don't stand with my chest puffed and my head held high. Jiyan (20, undergraduate student)

Jiyan exposes the gender-related aspect of 'performing bisexuality'. Their nonbinary gender identity and androgynous gender performance expose them to sexual identity invalidation. Özgür (18, undergraduate student) is another nonbinary individual who experiences invalidation because of their femininity. Although neither of them identify as men, both are judged against masculinity norms because they were assigned male at birth. Their experiences of sexual identity invalidation based on their gender performances may indicate that bisexual persons might be expected to perform certain types of masculinity.

2.8 Filtering the history

This chapter so far has focused on various challenges that bisexual persons face during their sexual discovery and sexual identity construction processes. Overemphasis on sexual behavior over sexual attraction and sexual identity, monosexism, monogamy, and expectations of a bisexual performance were identified as some of the factors that complicated bisexual identity construction.

I thought of myself first as straight. Then I thought of myself as gay. Then I said, damn these, I'm neither of them. Olcay (20, undergraduate student)

Bisexual narratives of sexual discovery, identity construction and coming out do not always fit the normative discourses of queerness, such as the 'born this way' discourse prevalent in many narratives, which suggests a fixity of sexual orientation at birth. As evidenced from their accounts, many of my interlocutors had to work their way up through societal structures to claim their identities. Their sexual and romantic histories can bear fractures as they tend to discover their bisexuality later in life and may construct straight or gay (and sometimes both) identities during the process. This is further complicated by the fact that a number of my interlocutors report experiencing sexual fluidity, meaning their attractions towards various genders might fluctuate or they might not experience any attraction periodically. The fractures in their sexual and romantic histories as well as the external complicating factors mentioned above can incline some individuals to deploy their sexual and romantic histories as a stabilizing element in the construction of their bisexual identities.

There's a long process of questioning until you accept your bisexuality. You filter history a lot. Ada (33, PhD student)

Bisexuals may retroactively reshape and recontextualize their sexual and romantic histories while constructing their bisexual identities. One way this manifests in my interlocutors' narratives is through a close inspection and reinterpretation of their early sexual history, what Ada calls 'filtering history'.

2.9 Recontextualizing early sexual experiences

An incongruency manifests in the narratives of my interlocutors when I ask them when and how they discovered their bisexuality. Like the literature predicts, many of them say at first that they discovered they were bisexual in their late teens or early twenties. Their sexual discovery stories, however, usually start from their childhood.

Early homoerotic experiences can become an important site in the construction of bisexuality. My interlocutors define these experiences originally as part of homosocial bonding in their friend groups or sometimes children's games in their narratives. However, these memories can become recontextualized and gain new meanings in the process of identity construction. In a way, they function as anchors that connect the 'unknowing' past to the bisexual present.

When I ask my gay or bisexual friends, mutual masturbation sessions are one of the things most people remember fondly because there's a very interesting homoerotic atmosphere there and everyone feels relaxed. But in fact, it's not totally [safe] because if you happen to out yourself as gay, there are things you can experience. And I know people who did this and experienced very bad stuff. [...] The feeling these places evoke, I don't know how to say it, but I discovered myself there. It's very interesting, there was always the aim of impressing girls, being with girls. It sits at the corner all the while, always discussed as an aim. Çağatay (35, engineer)

Again, experiences of watching porn with friends. It's actually a very homoerotic experience at the same time. We were masturbating each other while watching straight porn, for example. It's actually a strange experience. The fact that we're doing this to each other while there's straight porn on the screen. Emre (24, recent graduate)

For example, I remember watching porn with four of my male friends. I didn't ascribe any meaning to it at the time. Atman (29, master's student)

Some people cite watching porn and masturbating in homosocial friend groups as an important step in discovering their bisexuality. These homosocial sites are constructed as heterosexual by invoking symbols of masculinity and heterosexuality. The homoerotic subtext is constantly repudiated by focusing on ‘straight’ porn and talking about girls. Showing interest in homoeroticism of the experience is strictly banned, and like Çağatay remarks, to show your true colors is potentially very dangerous.

Unlike Atman’s, Çağatay and Emre’s experiences include giving and receiving sexual pleasure through mutual masturbation and oral sex. Although their experience was also physically involved, they still did not think much of it until they were ready to come out. These homoerotic sites may have played a significant role in sexual discovery for my interlocutors because they might have provided participants a relatively safe space to explore their sexuality without necessarily jeopardizing their ‘straight’ identities.

I always had a homoerotic relationship with all my childhood friends during my adolescence. But then they got married and such. They visited brothels, for example. I did not. They changed, and I thought I also would, but this interest in me always lingered. Gunnar (32, engineer)

From early on, Gunnar engaged in various sexual activities including intercourse with his male friends. When he talks about his memories, he says “There’s no definition to it like bisexual or gay. You know, you can sometimes play football and you can be in the same team, for me this was like that.” He conceptualized these sexual acts as part of his friendship, an ‘animalistic act’ that does not comment on his sexuality. His friends became a yardstick through which he measured his sexuality throughout years. Once a children’s game, these memories became part of his bisexual identity after he came to terms with his non-heterosexuality.

I actually had a pretty early experience in the fifth grade. Things like kissing and rubbing each other with a couple of my male classmates. I couldn’t ascribe my meaning to it those days, but looking at it after a while, I felt like that. After a while, being attracted to men and simultaneously trying to suppress it but at the same time trying to understand it made my attraction to women fade into background. I had a lot of people I was interested in who were women, so I really suppressed it in

that way. Even though I was aware of my attraction towards men, I was trying to understand it by looking at pornographic materials on the internet. Veli (27, works in culture and arts)

The sexual games Veli played with his male friends did not mean much until he became aware of his same-gender attractions. Just like many others, he thought for a long time that his interest in men was related to being an adolescent and that it would be temporary. He says that he suppressed his sexuality completely and did not have any sexual or romantic experience with anyone until he came to terms with his sexuality at twenty-one years old.

At the school bus, there was a kid called Hakan, who was two years younger than me. I was fourth or third grade at the time, very young. I remember putting him on my lap, bouncing him and telling him stories, and getting erected. I remembered this much later. Those days, I thought of it like maybe it was because I was having a contact, it was physical and I was enjoying it irregardless of whether I was straight or gay. Or, when I was very little, like, again, ages 7-8, I remember getting behind one of the neighbour's kids while we were playing. I remember this very clearly. Maybe I could have gotten the hints back then, but this was so veiled. I mean, I never got the chance to try it later or somehow channel it towards somewhere or think about it. Yiğit (24, recent graduate)

Yiğit 'did not get the hint' until he was twenty-three. He grew up in a tough neighborhood in Istanbul, and the possibility of having same-gender attractions never even crossed his mind until he started college. During his time there, he met queer people and gained a new perspective on his gender and sexuality. These 'funky' memories he did not pay much attention to became the first 'hints' of his newly discovered bisexuality.

Some people tell me "I've never seen you with men, how come are you bi+?" Yiğit (24, recent graduate)

Recontextualizing his early sexual experiences might have been even more important to Yiğit than others, because he has not had much experience with men so far. He

does not feel safe enough in Turkey to pursue a romantic or sexual relationship with a man, which means he cannot ‘perform’ his bisexuality. When people question his bisexuality, implying he might be straight, his sexual history transforms into one of the sites through which his bisexuality is reproduced.

My interlocutors can ‘filter’ their sexual histories while constructing their bisexuality and reinterpret them retroactively to fit their current identities. In a way, they might be searching for ‘hints’, like Yiğit puts it, that would validate their bisexual identity. Memories of homosocial bonding and children’s games, which did not mean anything for them at the time, can transform into early indicators of their same-gender attractions.

Did Yiğit and so many others really miss ‘the hints’? After all, same-gender sexual behavior is found commonly in children regardless of their sexual orientation (Larsson and Svedin 2002). The point is not to answer this question but rather to ask: Why are there supposed to be hints in the first place? Which identities are forced to ‘filter history’ and look for ‘hints’ to justify themselves? In what other ways might the fixed categorization of sexuality affect individuals in how they relate to themselves, their histories, and sexualities?

3. JUGGLING IDENTITIES: COMING OUT STRATEGIES OF BISEXUALS

Coming out is a discursive practice that entails disclosing one's non-heterosexual identity to others by positioning themselves on the sexuality spectrum (Maliepaard 2018). As a significant stage in the development of non-heterosexual identities, coming out can be considered a prerequisite for a fully integrated and healthy sexual identity (McLean 2007). In a sense, coming out can be both a milestone, an objective to strive for and an obstacle to overcome for non-heterosexual people. It also plays an important role in theorizing identity together with "the concept of identity formation through interaction with others" (Ward and Winstanley 2005).

Early theories on homosexual identity development consider coming out as one of the final stages of queer identity development, whereby the individual comes to terms with their non-heterosexual identity and posits themselves as a fully integrated sexual citizen (McLean 2007). This way of thinking about sexual identity creates a binary, where 'committed' individuals who 'accepted their sexualities' are juxtaposed with the others who have not had success so far, who are 'unsure' of their sexualities, 'uncommitted,' or in some cases, 'confused.'

While these early models might have some use in discussing homosexual identities, they do not necessarily always apply to bisexual people's lived realities. Analyzing bisexual people's identity construction processes and coming out stories might help reveal the hidden presuppositions in these theories.

One problem with the early approaches is that they suppose one can be sure of their sexuality and that sureness plays a vital role in developing a fully realized identity. In her discussion of coming out experiences of bisexuals, McLean (2007) argues that for many bisexuals, their final development stage can be an unsure place called 'continued uncertainty.' She criticizes normative discourses on coming out, arguing that they fail to consider the fact that bisexuality is an "often misunderstood identity." If to come out is to be sure of one's identity, many bisexuals do not come

out simply because they never reach this stage of assuredness.

McLean (2007) argues that bisexuality does not have a set meaning in society, making the identification process confusing and difficult for some people. Another important reason is that there are many misleading stereotypes of bisexuality (McLean 2007) as well as a lack of accurate and positive representation. This lack of understanding of bisexuality might not only make it more difficult to construct and manage a bisexual identity but also act as a deterrent for bisexual individuals to come out.

I feel this. How do I feel? What do I really feel? I mean, I judged my feelings, I judged myself, I harmed myself a lot for a long period. I really oppressed myself. How could I know about bisexuality back then, bi+ and all. It could have relieved me a lot to know such a concept at that time. Atman (29, master's student)

Atman's account reveals some of the difficulties bisexuals face when trying to come to terms with a precarious and misunderstood identity. After zir first sexual contact with a woman, Atman found zirself infatuated with a man. Without access to any other experience or a source of knowledge, ze found it challenging to make sense of the plurality of zir sexual desires. When mononorms dictate a singular and unidirectional desire, dealing with one's bisexuality can be mentally taxing, even leading to suicidal thoughts in some instances like Atman's.

I seriously supposed I was the only one in the world like this until the moment I was able to name myself. Usually, it's trans or gay people who say this. For me, both trans and homosexual people existed, and it was okay. But I didn't know something like bisexual. It was something extremely complicated and confusing for me, and it had no meaning. That's why I found myself experiencing great loneliness. I heard the word bisexual for the first time in a camp I went to in 2012, and experienced a great enlightenment. I was a junior in high school back then, and I was hearing something like bisexual for the first time in my life. I felt extremely ignorant. I told myself it was a huge ignorance that I hadn't heard of this until that age. Barış (24, master's student)

You know that classic thing where homosexuals tell themselves that there's Zeki Müren, trans people say there's Bülent Ersoy. We really can't say anything like "there's me and there's this person" while growing up. Because there isn't. We don't have that "there's also this person."
Barış (24, master's student)

Barış, although he was knowledgeable about some other identities in the LGBTQIA+ acronym, did not know what bisexuality was until he participated in a camp about sexuality. His prior understanding and acceptance of homosexual and trans identities did not help him make sense of and name his bisexuality. He cites the lack of representation of bisexuality in media as one of the main reasons for his ignorance. His account exemplifies how inaccessible bisexual identities can be for many people, including those sympathetic towards the LGBTQIA+ community, due to a general lack of understanding.

Maliepaard (2018) makes a distinction between coming out and disclosing sexuality. He considers coming out as normative practice non-heterosexual people are expected to perform. Contrary to the performativity of coming out, he describes disclosing one's sexuality as reactive and context-dependent. He criticizes the current theories on coming out on the account that they focus too much on the rationality of subjects. For him, coming out is not always rational, but it can also be a context-dependent and affective decision.

Building on McLean (2007), Maliepaard (2018) identifies some more factors that contribute to the decision of disclosing one's bisexuality. As non-heterosexual identities tend to carry a stigma with them, risk management can become a significant factor in how bisexuals navigate their identities (Maliepaard 2018). Exclusion, losing a job, losing family members or friends, potential physical or psychological violence are some of the risks that affect the decision processes of bisexuals (Maliepaard 2018).

Another factor Maliepaard (2018) determines is the relevancy of the person's (bi)sexuality in their relationships with other people. Some of his participants refuse to disclose their bisexuality to people with whom they do not even discuss sexuality in the beginning. However, when the topic of sexuality comes up, they might choose to disclose their bisexuality, which serves as an example of how coming out can be a context-dependent decision.

Maliepaard (2018) argues that for many, "disclosing one's bisexual identity/desire is not an end but a means to achieve something." He finds out that bisexual people

might come out because they want to connect or be honest with people.

Çağatay is a 35-year-old man who works for a company that deals with the government. Although he was out to many coworkers in his previous company, he has not come out to anyone in his current company yet because the government's conservative and regressive policies and discourses on LGBTQIA+ communities put him in a precarious position in terms of revealing his sexuality. For him, coming out requires total risk management, and anything less than safe is unacceptable. To ensure his safety, he established a complex system that exemplifies some of Maliepaard's findings.

Çağatay uses coming out to form or strengthen bonds with other people, making friends, and finding new sexual partners in the process. First, he makes sure to build trust and learn about some vulnerabilities of the other person through conversation or secret sharing. Afterward, he waits for the topic of sexuality to come up before coming out, sometimes accelerating the process by telling jokes or making insinuating comments. The outcome is usually excellent, he says. Sometimes, he is able to create a shared vulnerability with the other person and confirm a strong bond, and other times people also come out to him or become his sexual partner. And when it does not go according to the plan, "people couldn't cause trouble, even though they would, because I knew their secrets."

Considering coming out 'not as an end but a means to achieve something' can allow us to ask many important questions regarding the topic. If coming out is a means to achieve something, what other things can bisexuals achieve by coming out? How can we discuss coming out in a way that acknowledges subjects' agencies? Could there possibly be strategies that people use in how they navigate their bisexual identities? If so, what are these strategies, and in which ways do they help bisexuals?

Exploring bisexual narratives of coming out/disclosure, this chapter will argue that bisexuals construct and deploy various strategies of coming out depending on their context and their desired outcomes. These strategies usually involve either (1) not coming out explicitly, based on the expectation that they will be labeled with one sexual identity or another, or (2) coming out explicitly as bisexual or gay, depending on the context. I call this 'juggling identities'. I argue that bisexual individuals' proficiency in 'juggling identities' demonstrates an awareness of their social identities and allows them to exercise their agency in the face of monosexism and heterosexism prevalent in society.

3.1 Not coming out

Many people do not consider bisexuality a legitimate identity (Feinstein et al. 2019; McCormack, Anderson, and Adams 2014). For some, as a ‘hybrid’ identity, bisexuality is simply an amalgamation of heterosexuality and homosexuality, strung together haphazardly, waiting for a moment to come undone. This hybrid understanding of bisexuality might create a false belief that bisexuals are able to “switch off or switch on the different parts of their sexuality according to context” (McLean 2007). In a sense, bisexuality can be understood as a matter of choice. This lack of legitimacy is prevalent in straight and LG communities, putting bisexual people in a disadvantageous position in both communities (McCormack, Anderson, and Adams 2014; Weiss 2003).

Bisexual people are less likely to be out than their monosexual counterparts in the LGBTQIA+ community (Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor 1995). As discussed above, monosexism and binegativity are prevalent in both straight and queer cultures, which might discourage bisexual people greatly because they fear the negative consequences of coming out (Maliapaard 2018). Due to the stigma attached to bisexual identities, individuals might also choose to ‘hide’ their identities not to lose their privileged positions in social hierarchies in which they belong.

One group of people do not come out simply because they refuse to label their sexualities. Atman is a nonbinary person who refuses to identify with a fixed label as ze “cannot embrace labels and identities.” When asked about how ze identifies, Atman says:

Where I stand, there used to be M. (a cisgender woman) and now there is O. (a cisgender man). When we also look at the people I flirted along the way, they all point towards pansexuality but I don’t come out as pansexual. I only come out as nonbinary out of necessity. Atman (29, master’s student)

Atman experiences zir sexuality episodically, focusing on zir relationships rather than constructing a continuous sexual identity. Ze does not come out but openly talks about zir partners or introduces them to zir family and friends. Atman supposes that acquaintances assign various labels for zir sexuality, depending on how long and actively they have been involved in zir life.

“People around me know it like there used to be this [partner], now there is this [partner], so I might be gay in their heads,” says Atman. Ze does not care that zir bisexuality might go unrecognized, but ze does not like being thought of as gay, as being gay connotes that ze is a man. That is why Atman feels obligated to come out as nonbinary, despite zir antipathy towards labels, but not as bisexual.

I sometimes experience moments where I say “There’s something queer about me but I cannot solve it either.” But specifically putting a name to it... I mean because it changes, the terminology changes, and the concepts change. Some day in the future, I might feel like I belong to a term, and be around people there. Some other day, the meaning of that term might change and all of our perceptions with it. That’s why I imagine something completely transparent and inclusive for me. Yiğit (24, recent graduate)

Yiğit is another bisexual who “doesn’t feel the need to assign a specific label to his sexuality.” Many people usually only know that “he is queer”, mostly when they see him socializing with his queer friends. Similar to Atman, he lets people find out his non-heterosexual identity through his connections with other people. Unlike Atman, however, he can embrace ‘queer’ as an identity, as he believes it has a vague, ever-changing, and inclusive meaning.

Another reason why bisexuals might wait is that they might find it an ‘unnecessary drama’ to come out until they have same-gender partners or visibly queer relationships (Maliapaard 2018). Yiğit comes from a conservative neighborhood from Istanbul with a strictly heteronormative definition of masculinity that excludes non-heterosexualities. This is one of the major reasons he cites when explaining his decision not to come out to his family and relatives. He argues, however, that “having a male partner in the future might encourage [him] to come out to [his] parents” as he would want to introduce his partner to his family. Since he has not had same-gender partners yet, he lacks motivation and finds it unnecessary to come out to his family.

Masculinity norms and attitudes towards bisexuality and homosexuality can play a significant part in deciding bisexual people’s coming out experiences (McCormack, Anderson, and Adams 2014; McLean 2007). In his discussion of Southern homonormativity, Özbay (2021) argues that homonormative gay men in Istanbul base their quest for ‘acceptance’ and ‘normalcy’ on two pillars: class privileges and performance of conventional masculinity. He identifies the core elements of this homonormativity as “having and preserving social invisibility (i.e., passing as “normal” and “straight,”

being accepted and not marginalized, being safe from ridicule and harassment, and unperturbed by criticism), an unmarked presence with layers of class privilege and politics of respectability, and indifference to social inequalities” (Özbay 2021).

Some bisexual individuals in my study invoke this Southern homonormative logic partly when explaining their choices not to come out. However, most of them also add that they let go of this logic after coming to terms with their sexualities. While men in Özbay’s case mainly utilize heteronormative practices and discourses to navigate their position in society, bisexual individuals might have another ulterior motive: access to women as potential sexual and/or romantic partners.

I’m not a masculine person, so I think it’s a problem when I experience things with people who identify as woman. People who identify as woman might usually want someone more masculine. This can sometimes be complicating. My gender performance makes my relationships with women a little difficult. Özgür (18, undergraduate student)

Özgür, just like many other interlocutors, emphasizes the decisive role of masculinity in their relationships with women. Özgür, however, is not a man; they are nonbinary. For Özgür, being nonbinary means that they are not willing to perform conventional masculinity solely to gain access to women as potential partners.

Cem: Won’t [women] be interested in you when they know you’re bisexual?

Kemal: Actually, they might. But I don’t want to take any risks with women and I try to position myself as a straight man. It’s more advantageous that way.

On the other hand, Kemal (19, undergraduate student) cannot help but desire total invisibility of his bisexuality with women. He is highly aware of the influence of his gender performance on how people perceive him (gay or straight), and so he regulates his performance, behavior, and speech in front of women. His experiences of being friend-zoned by women led him to believe that he should “pass as straight” if he is to have any chance of being a potential partner. Coming out, therefore, has never even been an option.

Lately, especially in my relationships with people I meet on the apps, I can think of [experiences] I can label as a straight man. I realize that I'm having experiences similar to those when I identified as a straight man. Because people like this, I mean the general profile of Turkey, are in large numbers both in terms of the population and the rates of matches. That's why I can find myself in such experiences again. Because I feel like that's what's expected from me. And it's never acknowledged, and then I'm like what is happening. But as I said, I'm trying to cut down on these. Yiğit (24, recent graduate)

Yiğit is not as pre-planned in how he regulates his performance of masculinity as Kemal. He says that being bisexual enables him to move past binaries of gender and fixed gender roles. He finds joy and freedom in disrupting normative gender roles, so in theory, he does not feel the need to hide his bisexuality as much. In reality, however, he finds himself constantly shifting his gender performance based on the perceived expectations of his female partners. The keywords 'real man' and 'straight man' become the criteria on which women judge him, and he is ready to deliver, despite the discomfort of performing conventional masculinity.

Kemal and Yiğit might not be entirely wrong. Especially for men who pursue or are in relationships with straight women, being openly bisexual might be a disadvantage (Gleason, Vencill, and Sprankle 2018; Israel and Mohr 2004). The experimental study of Gleason, Vencill, and Sprankle (2018) in the US has demonstrated that straight women rate bisexual men as "(1) less sexually and romantically attractive than straight men, (2) less desirable to date and have sex with compared to straight men, and (3) less masculine than straight men." The study concluded that straight women have a significantly more negative attitude towards bisexual individuals compared to straight men. Straight women's expectations of masculinity and lack of masculinity attributed to bisexual men might discourage bisexuals from coming out for sexual and romantic accessibility.

Another way masculinity norms interact with bisexuality can be observed in trans men's narratives of coming out. Although he is out with his transgender identity, Deniz (23, undergraduate student) chooses not to reveal his bisexuality to anyone. For him, like many other trans people, his gender identity supersedes his sexual identity. When asked what kind of reactions he feared when he came out, he replied that his masculinity and gender identity would be questioned, and people would say, "If you're like this [bisexual], why did you change [referring to his gender reassignment]?"

Berfo also faces the stereotype that all trans men are straight. Although nobody outright questions his gender identity face-to-face, he says that people still question him indirectly, primarily online. Confirming Deniz's fears, he reports an instance where a person asked, "If you're a girl and you like boys, why would you [transition]?" Here, heterosexuality becomes the prerequisite of having (or wanting to have) a masculine body and gender performance.

There are people who know I'm a trans man and think that I'm straight. A lot of people are surprised when they hear my partner is a man. And I'm not talking about unaware people; I'm actually talking about people who we consider to be activists and talk to. So, I'm assigned straight, kind of reversely. Berfo (34, translator)

Misunderstanding about trans men's sexual identities is not only pervasive in society in general but also in political spaces where queer people meet and do their activism (Schein, Adam, and Marshall 2019). Cissexism and heterosexism might combine and leave trans men little room to express their sexual identities authentically by subjecting them to a choice between 'masculinity' and 'bisexuality.'

Both cases reveal how bisexuality and masculinity norms might interact with gender identities of trans men. Although they developed different strategies to deal with this interaction, both Deniz and Berfo report experiencing expectations for them to be straight. This might indicate that compulsory heterosexuality further complicates the coming out practices and strategies of trans men. Learning further about trans bisexual experiences can help us understand how this interaction might affect them in other areas of their life.

It is clear from the narratives of my interlocutors that bisexual people can have a plethora of reasons not to come out. Although the majority of these reasons include avoiding various negativities, bisexual people can also utilize not coming out as a helpful strategy while juggling identities to increase their access to future partners and LG communities and help maintain their relationships.

Some individuals use not coming out as a strategy when they are looking for hookups, especially online. Binegativity that they experience implicitly in their daily lives become explicit in certain dating and hookup applications such as Tinder and Hornet.

For example, no one easily writes in their dating app profile, like in Hornet, that gays shouldn't contact them, but they do that with bisexuals.

Or, on Tinder, they say bisexuals shouldn't swipe right. There's a direct filter to this. Emre (24, recent graduate)

When I entered the profile of a person I felt physically attracted to, I saw a sentence saying "no bisexuals" in their profile. Jiyan (20, undergraduate student)

The explicit binegativity that permeates these dating applications is an issue that people mention. Although none of my interlocutors comment on how this might affect their mental health or experience of their social identities, they are keen to observe how this limits their access to potential partners.

Some people, like Emre, do not let binegativity affect them, as long as they are "horny enough." Others, like Kemal (19, undergraduate student), do not feel completely safe in these environments and periodically deactivate their accounts. However, most bisexuals in the study react to this explicit binegativity by not revealing their bisexuality on their online profiles as they prefer to be assigned a monosexual identity (gay or straight, depending on the context).

You must know this if you also use applications, I don't like to say that I'm bisexual on my profile. There were times when I included that information, but then I didn't because of biphobia. Veli (27, works in culture and arts)

I don't really come out to my partners if it's a one-night stand. Because it's not something I ascribe a lot of meaning into, and I think it comes from a place of "let's not ruin the fun." I will probably say bye and walk away when I hear the question "What? Are you bisexual?" I don't want to do that, so I actually don't say it much. Barış (24, master's student)

Bisexuals in my study are highly aware that (1) being openly bisexual lessens their chances of finding a partner, and (2) people will assume they are monosexual as long as they do not come out. Their awareness regarding the invisibility of bisexual identities allows them to turn not coming out into a strategy to have better access to potential sexual partners. By doing this, however, they also paradoxically contribute

to the invisibility of bisexuality.

Not coming out as a strategy can also help bisexuals maintain their romantic and/or sexual relationships. As mentioned above, defined as ‘undesirable partners’, bisexual people can face many prejudices and negativity in their romantic and/or sexual relationships. Some bisexuals can choose to hide their sexuality from their partners after experiencing many a heartbreak and disappointment.

From 2016 to 2018, I said okay, I’m not going to be able to have a relationships with my condition (bisexuality). Because I was fed up with constantly explaining myself to people and being judged all the time. Ada (33, PhD student)

Ada prefers to come out to his partners because it makes him feel honest, and he believes that honesty is essential in a relationship. So far, coming out has never worked in any of his relationships, even with a bisexual woman. He had to deal with a lot of binegativity and end his relationships because of his bisexuality. His experience made him believe that he will never have a partner as long as he is bisexual. Although he refuses to hide his sexuality strategically, he serves as a prime example of what some visibly bisexual people can experience in their sexual and romantic relationships.

I made such mistakes [by coming out to my partners]. I won’t do it ever again. But I unfortunately did it. It incited arguments every time, but every single time. From this point on, I won’t disclose something like this, I won’t do it. Maybe after 3 years, 4 years, 5 years, when the other person really knows me and the foundation of the relationship is laid properly. But maybe even then I won’t say anything if I fear that the relationship might end. But I did it in the past. Gunnar (32, engineer)

Gunnar had similar problems with coming out in his past relationships. Unlike Ada, he decided coming out was a mistake and formed a burdensome strategy of concealing his bisexuality in his relationships, regardless of his partners’ genders and sexual identities. By not revealing his bisexuality, he can avoid potential problems and benefit from privileges that monosexuality confers. He is determined to hide his bisexuality to have a better chance of maintaining his relationships, even if it means waiting for five years or more.

Another strategic reason not to reveal one’s bisexuality can be a wish to be perceived as a gay man in LGBTQIA+ communities, as some people might believe gay identities come with more privileges. According to my interlocutors, binegativity

is commonly observed in LG communities in Turkey. Bisexuals who want to be accepted into these communities or those who would rather not have any trouble prefer not to disclose their bisexuality and pass as ‘gay’. Passing as ‘gay’ is not hard, because just like Barış remarks, “if you’re there, they think you’re either gay or trans.”

“I don’t bring up the topic of bisexuality when I’m with my gay friends,” says Günnar. He learned that passing as gay saves him many headaches in friendships, especially with gay men. When I ask him why, he starts to recount the tales of many times he experienced binegativity and lost his friendships. One of the most striking instances happened on a vacation when he went abroad with his friends from the LGBTQIA+ community. They were in Egypt, near the Sudan border, when Günnar’s friends ‘accidentally’ learned that he is bisexual through a comment he made. This revelation was followed by verbal abuse for a day until his friends decided to desert Günnar and go their separate ways.

Binegativity, masculinity norms, and stereotypes about bisexuality can encourage bisexual people not to reveal their identities, while bisexual invisibility ensures their identities are erased. Although this mostly affects bisexual people negatively, it can also provide them with opportunities to exercise their agency and turn this negativity into their advantage in certain contexts. Their life-long experience with monosexism enables them to use not coming out as a strategy because they understand how they are perceived by others in certain contexts. By juggling their ‘perceived’ identities, they are not only able to reduce harm but also achieve their desired outcomes.

3.2 Coming out as gay

Bisexuality is not a well-understood identity (McLean 2007; Ochs 2007; Yoshino 2000). Due to a lack of representation, bisexual people’s experiences and the concepts related to the bisexual identity are usually not as accessible as those of monosexual identities. An analysis of Turkish academia’s studies on queerness reveals that bisexuality is not a well-research sexual identity in Turkey (Özbay and Öktem 2021). Following the global trends (Klesse 2011), LGBTQIA+ organizations in Turkey also did not pay much attention to bisexuality until recent years. This lack of knowledge production, coupled with the fact that bisexuals in Turkey do not even have an openly bisexual male role model to identify with, might it difficult for people to identify their bisexualities.

These are some of the reasons why bisexual people tend to discover their identities much later in life than most monosexuals (Martos, Nezhad, and Meyer 2015). During this long exploration process, bisexual people can construct temporary monosexual identities such as gay or straight. Many of my interlocutors state that they discovered and accepted their bisexuality in their late teens to early twenties. Some of them, like Yiğit (24, recent graduate), constructed straight identities and were not even conscious of their same-gender attractions. Yiğit's heteronormative habitus and compulsive heterosexuality rendered his sexual and romantic attraction to women visible while suppressing his same-gender desires. Like many others in my study, it took Yiğit years and coming out to himself to make sense of his early sexual history.

Others, like Doruk (25, teacher), constructed homosexual identities and came out as gay before coming out as bisexual. This is relatively common in the narratives I heard during the interview process. For many, being capable of having same-gender attraction can have only one meaning: being gay. Monosexism and the homophobic construction of masculinity might be two of the factors that cause this logic. Another factor that cements this misidentification is the much greater accessibility of homosexuality as an identity, compared to bisexuality.

When I looked at the sources, the relationship a man had with another man was called homosexual. That's why I thought I was homosexual for a while. Then I realized that was not the case. Jiyan (20, undergraduate student)

Many people like Jiyan first access homosexuality as an identity to describe their attraction towards men. In some cases like Gunnar's (32, engineer), it can even take 28-29 years to learn that bisexuality exists, while homosexuality is a readily available identity for most.

Seeing that at least a third of my interlocutors constructed gay identities at some point in their lives, it could be argued that coming out as gay is a fairly common step in the construction of bisexual identities. Özgür is an 18-year-old college student who recently came out as bisexual. For many years until two months before we met, people knew them as gay.

I don't want people to say "Oh, they came out as gay, and two months later started to say I'm pansexual." That's why I feel uncomfortable.

Now I say that I'm pansexual to people I come out for the first time, but I told people I was gay until two months ago. I actually don't come out [again as pansexual] to people I came out as gay. Özgür (18, undergraduate student)

Özgür's conflict with his new bisexual identity has three roots. Firstly, they are non-binary and they have a feminine gender performance. Due to femmephobia, many people can doubt trans people's and effeminate men's sexual attraction towards women. Secondly, bisexuality is often conceptualized as a 'temporary' identity on the way to becoming 'gay' for many people who were assigned male at birth (McCormack, Anderson, and Adams 2014), which might make it even more difficult for people like Özgür to come out after labeling themselves as gay because they go against the grain. Thirdly, the fact that they had come out as bisexual for a brief period even before coming out as gay makes them more susceptible to stereotypes against bisexuals being 'confused' or 'undecided'. In face of this conflict, Özgür chooses to maintain their gay identity with the majority of people in their life.

It is fair to say that many bisexuals can have a personal experience with gay identities. Those who have not identified as gay before also have partial access to this identity, either because they are assumed to be gay in certain environments, or through their connections with their gay partners or LGBTQIA+ communities. Some bisexuals in my study utilize this knowledge to navigate the contexts they find themselves in.

Some people strategically choose to come out as gay in certain contexts even after they are sure of their bisexual identities. Bisexuals in my study show various motives in using this strategy depending on to whom they are coming out. While the underpinning reason seems to be the illegitimacy of bisexuality as a sexual identity, this practice might manifest with a motive to distance the individual from heterosexual expectations of their close ones, especially their families, to refuse to be implicated with heterosexuality, and to combat the erasure of their non-heterosexuality. In some cases, bisexual people can also come out as gay because they think people are not informed about bisexuality and they are tired of explaining their identities.

One reason my interlocutors come out as gay strategically, especially to parents and family members, is to distance themselves from heterosexuality and deflect any heteronormative expectations they might be subjected to by 'burning the bridges'.

I came out to my mom as gay. Even though I didn't describe myself

as gay during that period, my mother would imagine me having a wife, the girl [who would be my wife] would walk through this door wearing a wedding gown and a red sash, I would impart on her the mission of womanhood, etc. I actually came out as gay to shatter this [dream] in my mother's head. Jiyan (20, undergraduate student)

If being bisexual means that one can repudiate queerness, Jiyan did not want to be forced into identifying as heterosexual. This is a common misunderstanding among people, stemming from the popular misconception of bisexuality as a hybrid identity comprising heterosexuality and homosexuality (McLean 2007). Bisexual people might be thought of as being capable of 'choosing a side', and most are expected to choose 'heterosexuality' to maintain privileged heteronormative lives.

Like with some other interlocutors, this expectation caused Jiyan considerable amounts of anxiety. To lessen this anxiety, Jiyan refused the expectations to uphold the heterosexist ideals of their mother and chose to come out as 'gay' to their parent to emphasize their queer identity (as opposed to identifying as bisexual specifically) and further distance themselves from heterosexuality.

Jiyan is not the only person who chose to come out as gay to their close ones. Emre also chose this strategy "to crash their relatives' heterosexual dreams" from the start.

While I was coming out to the family, I came out as bisexual to my core family. But I told my relatives that I was gay because I was aware of the light of hope that would appear in their eyes the moment I said I was bisexual. So, I'm not giving them hope because I don't want to be exposed to that light of hope. Emre (24, recent graduate)

Emre has been a part of queer political movement since they were in high school, so they also have a political motive to maintain their queer identity. They believe that coming out as bisexual to their relatives will not change their impressions of Emre enough and they will refuse to acknowledge their non-heterosexuality. Emre calls this 'a light of hope'. Hope that Emre will find the 'correct way' and choose to marry a woman and start a family. They do not want their queer identity to be ignored, and they certainly do not want to be part of this conversation, so they choose to come out as gay to end it once and for all.

Jiyan and Emre might also have another motive in maintaining their strategies,

as they both identify as nonbinary. In patrilineal societies like Turkey, men are expected to sustain their family trees through marriage. Despite their nonbinary identities, their families still consider them as ‘sons’ and might hold expectations for posterity. By refuting their attraction towards women, Jiyan and Emre might distance themselves not only from heterosexuality but also from other conventional life narratives of masculinity.

Bisexual erasure is a common problem that has a negative impact on bisexuals’ mental health (Flanders 2016; Roberts, Horne, and Hoyt 2015). In addition to that, some bisexuals can experience this erasure twofold when they are assumed to be straight. They are not only (1) denied their bisexual identities, but (2) their ‘queerness’ is also erased. Some of my interlocutors are highly aware that their bisexual identities are usually disregarded, and so they can start to place more importance on their queer identities rather than their bisexuality. By identifying as gay, they ‘at least get to maintain their queerness’, which also helps them make a more solid connection with LGBTQIA+ communities and individuals.

Berfo: If it’s someone I’m not sure whether they’ll understand me, I don’t say I’m bisexual, but I say I’m trans gay.

Cem: Very interesting, so you come out as gay.

Berfo: Because it’s easier. How so, because you simply don’t enter the topic of bisexuality. I mean you don’t have to explain from the beginning. And also, when I tell people I’m a trans man, they directly assume that I’m straight and this functions as a great barricade against that.

I mean, you spend your life being queer and they still assume you’re straight. Man, we suffer a lot for this, just let us carry the identity at least. It’s really disturbing when people assign you straight. Even though people say it’s privileged, it’s not a privilege, I feel like it’s an insult. Your father is straight. Berfo (34, translator)

Berfo is a trans man who constantly battles with the expectations for him to be straight. He complains that people immediately assume he is ‘straight’, ‘top’, and ‘dominant’. He does not like it, first of all, because he feels like he is being stereotyped based on his trans experience. Being queer is also an important part of his identity that he feels proud of, so he wants people to acknowledge that. That is why he might

come out as a gay trans man to some people he meets, especially if he believes that the individual does not have sufficient knowledge about bisexuality.

“I think there might be some occasions where gender expression, gender identity and sexual identity clash and don’t combine,” says Berfo. Bringing his trans identity into the equation makes juggling identities even more complex for him, and thus requires some alternative solutions and shortcuts.

If I trust people’s knowledge about sexual orientation or sexual identity, I come out as pansexual. If they don’t know, I come out as gay. I don’t really want to explain a lot, it’s really difficult. Özgür (18, undergraduate student)

Similarly, Özgür might choose to come out as gay to people who do not know much about LGBTQIA+ identities. They are tired of explaining what pansexuality and bisexuality are to people, especially when people keep questioning the legitimacy of Özgür’s bisexuality. They found that in certain contexts, coming out as gay is the shortcut to reveal their queerness without being bothered too much.

Both Berfo and Özgür can use gay identity as a ‘quick solution’ while talking about their non-heterosexuality. Trying to emphasize their queer experience through coming out as gay becomes a paradox; by dealing with identity erasure this way, they contribute to the undercurrent problems that help maintain bisexual erasure, creating a vicious cycle.

The first section of this chapter explored how and why some bisexuals might assume gay identities by not coming out, either to have better access to potential sexual and/or romantic partners or to be able to equally participate in LGBTQIA+ communities, especially friend groups that consist of gay men, where bisexuals might find themselves at a disadvantage. Some bisexuals can also actively come out as gay in order to achieve the same results.

I feel like homosexual people can find partners more easily. If we take Hornet as an example, a person who calls themselves homosexual does not receive the same reaction as someone who calls themselves bisexual. In fact, a great majority of the people who use that app identify as homosexual. Or, for example, a bisexual person doesn’t say “oh, you’re homosexual?” to people because they are homosexual. But a homosexual person says that to a bisexual, can say “oh, you’re bisexual?” At that

point, I think that I'm having more difficulty and that being homosexual might be easier there. Barış (24, master's student)

Based on his experience, Barış describes the negative attitudes towards bisexuals in websites and dating applications where men having sex with men try to find sexual and/or romantic partners. He acknowledges the privileged position of gay identities in such contexts, but his activist identity prevents him from coming out as gay. Some people like Kemal (19, undergraduate student), however, do not hesitate to actively come out as gay to benefit from some of these privileges.

As a bisexual, if I'm with a gay man, I really avoid introducing myself as bisexual. I find it more productive to introduce myself as gay. Kemal (19, undergraduate student)

Kemal uses gay identity to increase his chances of finding a male partner. He complains that people in places like Hornet usually do not welcome those who are on a sexual exploration journey, and they expect him to have a 'fully realized queer identity'. This caused Kemal some difficulty while he was struggling with his sexuality. However, he soon discovered that his chances of having positive reactions improved if he came out as gay and has been using that strategy ever since.

I only come out as gay to gay people. Because their friends are very cruel, unbelievably cruel. Gunnar (32, engineer)

Gunnar is another bisexual man who finds it advantageous, and sometimes essential, to come out as gay in certain situations. The amount of binegativity Gunnar experienced within LGBTQIA+ community, from his male partners and their friend circles was able to convince him to come out as gay whenever he finds himself in a homosocial setting with gay men. In his experience, even if his partner is supportive of his bisexuality, their friends can find a way to 'cause trouble'.

Gunnar and Kemal are certainly not the only bisexuals who utilize gay identities to access queer communities. Özgür tells me of the last time they shared a story on their Instagram account on September 23, Celebrate Bisexuality Day:

People who are in queer communities who identify as homosexual came

to me and said that they were bi+ after I shared a story [on Instagram]. They say that they can't share this in queer communities. They say they're subjected to biphobia. This is true for straight-identified people as well as queers. Özgür (18, undergraduate student)

Özgür's anecdote might be emblematic of the struggles bisexuals face in LG communities. Altogether, these stories both highlight the strategic importance of utilizing gay identities in bisexual people's relationships with the LG community and expose how strong and common binegativity is within these communities.

3.3 Coming out as bisexual

This chapter so far has focused on how bisexual people make use of 'gay' and 'straight' identities by deploying various coming out strategies, what I called juggling identities. As discussed above, many bisexuals do not prefer to consistently come out as bisexual because this might render them vulnerable to discrimination, exclusion, and binegativity. Building on the findings of McLean (2007) and Maliepaard (2018), this section tries to identify whether coming out as bisexual can be a strategical tool in my interlocutors' repertoires.

Maliepaard (2018) argues that "disclosing one's bisexual identity/desire is not an end but a means to achieve something" and uses bond-sharing and practicing honesty as two examples of what bisexuals can achieve by coming out. How this manifested in my interlocutors' narratives was discussed above through Çağatay's example. My interlocutors also demonstrate several ways coming out as bisexual might be used as a strategy.

Bisexual is an umbrella term that includes many other identities such as pansexual, queer, fluid, pan-/bi-romantic, mostly-homosexual/heterosexual, homo-/heteroflexible, omnisexual, and many more (Flanders 2017). Although each identity under the umbrella can connote slightly different combinations, degrees, and qualities of sexual and/or romantic attraction, each of them has a commonality in that they all refer to nonmonosexualities.

Many of the identities that fall under the bisexual umbrella are lesser-known compared to bisexuality in Turkey. Bisexuality's longer history and established status within the LGBTQIA+ acronym might encourage people who identify with the lesser-known identities under the umbrella to come out as bisexual. In fact, many people

in my study who identify within the bisexual umbrella use bisexual as an interchangeable term to identify themselves. The much greater visibility and legitimacy of 'bisexual' as an identity also allow some people to use bisexuality as a shortcut to reveal their nonmonosexuality without explaining their identities 'yet again'.

But of course, there are stages to this; [I come out] as gay to a random person, as bi on the next stage, and as pansexual on the next. I mean, for me to say that, the person mustn't be confused when I say I'm pansexual. Berfo (34, translator)

The distaste of having to explain himself again and again is so unbearable that Berfo is willing to 'dumb it down'. In many instances, this means coming out as bisexual, as many people do not know what pansexuality is. Even he says, "pansexuality didn't exist in my time." The word bisexual holds a special place in his heart, anyway, because that was the first identity he met years ago.

Another theme related to coming out as bisexual emerges from my activist interlocutors' narratives. Barış and Emre are activists who identify as pansexual but prefer to come out as bisexual. They cite (1) the invisibility of bisexuality, (2) the misconception that bisexuality is based on gender binary, and (3) the false belief that bisexuality and bisexuals are transphobic as their reasons behind this decision. Through actively coming out as bisexual, they try to challenge these misconceptions and provide positive representations of bisexuality.

The invisibility of bisexual identities and especially bisexual men are two common problems that almost all interlocutors mention. They believe that bisexuality is not a visible sexual identity in society, which they explain from the lack of knowledge and representation on the subject. What some of them also experience is that 'bisexual man' as a category is thought to be impossible or non-existent in society.

Because I started not to conceal [my bisexuality]. I mean, I have to say it when there's so little visibility. Ada (33, PhD student)

I had one friend in my social circle who was a bisexual man. I realized I didn't have any apart from him. A bisexual female friend made me realize this. She said, "Oh, you're the first bisexual male friend I have," and I thought whether I had any. And I realized I didn't. Veli (27, works

in culture and arts)

Although they might have multiple women or nonbinary bisexual friends, most people in my study do not know more than one bisexual man. Barış thinks that this lack of representation of bisexual men had a negative impact on him while he was trying to understand his sexuality, both delaying his process and causing him mental problems. He felt like he was the only one in the world “who was like this.” His personal and political motivations encourage him to come out as bisexual to break this invisibility.

Atman, Barış, and Emre have been volunteers of different LGBTQIA+ organizations for varying durations. Their political engagement within the LGBTQIA+ community put them in a position to access what people think about bisexuals and bisexuality. They observe that people think bisexuality reproduces the gender binary, and they disagree. As nonbinary individuals themselves, Atman and Emre might have another motivation to disprove that bisexuality is a binary identity. Although Atman does not like to label himself, Emre and Barış choose to come out as bisexual and educate people about this misconception.

Coming out as bisexual can also function like a ‘litmus test’ that people use in their sexual and/or romantic relationships and their friendships. Because openly bisexual people experience a lot of prejudice and negativity in their sexual and/or romantic relationships, coming out can usually become a hurdle that one must pass in a relationship.

Some people like Ada prefer to disclose their bisexuality before they are too entangled in a relationship. In Ada’s experience, all of his relationships end after his partners learn about his bisexuality. He has a very deterministic attitude when he talks about the role his bisexuality plays in his relationships and he fears his partners’ reactions. Coming out as bisexual becomes a litmus test for him when trying to build a connection with a potential partner. He utilizes this strategy as an effort to establish a safe space in his romantic relationships.

I come out, if they say ‘okay’, we’ll have a great friendship. If they make a problem out of it, I can remove them from my life. Barış (24, master’s student)

Coming out as bisexual can also be a litmus test for friendships. The pervasiveness of binegativity can make safe spaces and relationships rare and vital for bisexual

people. Just like Barış remarks, one way to pick your friends is to sort them out by coming out. In other words, coming out as bisexual can also become a methodology in community building for bisexuals. This might be especially relevant in Turkey's context because bisexual people do not have exclusive communities to meet and spend time with other bisexuals. So, creating a safe community is an individual task each bisexual must engage in on their own.

3.4 Juggling identities

This chapter sought to explore the coming out strategies of bisexual individuals. As oppressive social structures, heterosexism and monosexism can present challenges to bisexual individuals in many facets of their lives. I argued that some bisexual people can position themselves as bisexual, gay, or straight through various coming out strategies to help navigate these challenges, which I called 'juggling identities'.

Not coming out usually results in individuals being assigned gay or straight labels due to the monosexist understanding of sexuality and bisexual invisibility. I argued that having experienced the effects of monosexism on their identities internally and externally all their lives, bisexual people can be fluent in which identities they will be assigned in various contexts. They can use this knowledge to 'pass' as gay or straight by not disclosing their sexual identities, or might even come out using a different sexual identity. While it is true that bisexual people juggle identities mostly to avoid negativities, I argued that these strategies could also be used to achieve desired outcomes such as increasing accessibility to potential partners or particular communities, distancing themselves from social expectations, and establishing safe communities.

I chose to conceptualize this practice as 'juggling' because I wanted to highlight the agency in how bisexuals in my study deal with binegativity, homophobia, and transphobia. However, the lived reality of this need to assume different identities can be burdensome. Can this burden have negative implications for how bisexuals conceptualize and experience their sexual identities? If so, how does it affect them in terms of their health and well-being?

4. BISEXUAL NARRATIVES OF RELATIONSHIPS

4.1 'No bisexuals': Finding a partner

4.1.1 Bisexuals as 'undesired partners': stereotypes against bisexuality

Allegedly with an infinite number of potential partners due to their attraction towards multiple genders, people in my study still have to sift through many people to find one. That is because finding a partner who is supportive of their bisexuality can be an ordeal for many when they face binegativity commonly from both straight and LG communities.

I talked to someone on the internet for two months around August. When I asked her to meet out, she said "I can't be with you." When I asked why, she said, "You're a good person, you're well educated but it won't work with you." And I asked but why? She said, "I know you're bisexual." You just stand there, shocked. Ada (33, PhD student)

Ada considers himself extremely unlucky in finding a partner who is supportive of his bisexuality. After many of his relationships ended due to binegativity, he decided not to come out to his latest flirt, just to be safe. After two months of flirting, however, the person learned about his bisexuality through means Ada still does not understand and rejected him solely on grounds of his bisexuality.

When you're bisexual, people who identify as woman might not want to have a relationship. It's usually like that. [Pauses] Or, people who identify as man might not also want to have it. I'd like to think this is because of trust issues, but a person will cheat on you if they will. Özgür

(18, undergraduate student)

While explaining how their bisexual identity hinders their potential romantic connections with women, Özgür pauses for a second and corrects themselves by adding men also on the list. They connect this averseness to be in a relationship with a bisexual to some of the most common stereotypes against bisexuals: untrustworthiness and unfaithfulness. Like others who were confronted with these same stereotypes, they find it illogical and argue that this depends on an individual's personality rather than their sexual identity.

What Ada and Özgür mention is common in the narratives of my interlocutors. Many individuals cite binegativity and stereotypes against bisexuals as a factor limiting their chances of finding a relationship. Promiscuity, unfaithfulness, untrustworthiness, inability to maintain monogamous relationships, needing sexual relations with multiple genders for sexual satisfaction, carrying sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV, hiding their 'true sexuality' (being gay or straight), and enjoying 'heterosexual privileges' but secretly having sex with men are some of the stereotypes they mention, which are similar to those found in the Western bisexual literature (Anderson, Scoats, and McCormack 2015; Callis 2013; Feinstein et al. 2019; Gleason, Vencill, and Sprankle 2018; Klesse 2011; Monro 2015). Although a small minority reports not being subjected to them personally, all of them are able to list at least a few stereotypes without hesitation.

Stereotypes do not have to be overtly negative to affect individuals adversely in their search for a partner. Barış tells me the story of one time he encountered a stereotype that bisexual people are better in bed due to their sexual involvement with various genders:

There are people who distance themselves from you when they learn your sexual identity during the flirt process. I once had a person find me more attractive because I am bisexual. [...] They told me things that I politically oppose and, in fact, find pretty nonsensical, like bisexual people have more sexual experience or they get to know various bodies. But at the same time, this made me more eligible in their eyes. On the one hand, this is an advantage but on the other... On the other hand, this is something that puts pressure on me due to expectations. Barış
(24, master's student)

Barış was also familiar with binegativity as he had been rejected due to his sexual identity before, but never had he experienced a situation where his bisexuality gave him some form of advantage while flirting. Even then, this made him feel ambiguous and uneasy as he thought this was still stereotyping his sexual identity as well as inducing performance anxiety.

And also, when you meet people on dating apps and tell them [you are bisexual], they strangely assign you a sexual role. They say, “You must be a top, then.” And one of the actions that end the conversation after you say you’re bisexual is unmatching you, saying “Then you probably don’t bottom,” etc. Emre (24, recent graduate)

Emre’s narrative exposes another seemingly neutral stereotype related to sexual behavior that bisexuals are always ‘top’s and ‘do not bottom’. Collapsing sexual behavior onto the penetrated/penetrator binary, this stereotype might be disguising binegativity behind sexual roles, as people do not even wait for Emre’s response before they block them. Through associating bisexuality with certain sexual behaviors, stereotypes such as this might not only function as a mechanism through which bisexuals are rejected but might also limit bisexual individuals’ sexual expression due to partner expectations.

4.1.2 Dating apps as a site of forced (hetero-/mono-/cis-)normativities

Dating apps such as Tinder and Hornet are the most popular means through which people in my study find sexual and/or romantic partners. Some individuals depend solely on dating apps to find partners, while others might also find partners from their social environments or refuse to use dating apps. Although many people are dependent on these apps, their sexual identities might be limiting their access to the full potential of these spaces. Many narratives of dating apps include experiences of overt and covert binegativity. In fact, dating apps are the sites that they report being subjected to most overt binegativity, along with social media.

It can be argued that bisexual narratives of dating apps reveal a hierarchy of desire established in heterosexism, monosexism and cissexism, whereby some identities can be rendered vulnerable and less desirable. Normativities can be constructed and reproduced via overtly bi-/femme-/transphobic profile texts, identity invalidation and mechanisms of rejection. As those who do not conform may be limited in their access to potential partners, some individuals can be forced to either conform or use various strategies to overcome these limitations.

4.1.2.1 Heteronormativity

Many bisexuals mention the improbability of matching with women in dating apps despite the fact that the majority of profiles they come across belong to women. In face of this improbability, many of them report either periodically or permanently closing their dating profiles to women in order to increase their chances of finding a partner. Although explanations for this improbability vary between individuals, most of them point to expectations of heteronormative masculinity.

I have few matches with women on Tinder. That must mean women don't prefer me. Barış (24, master's student)

I also tried Tinder. I have almost zero chance with women on Tinder. Çağatay (35, engineer)

I don't think Tinder is an inclusive application. I only look for men there, it's easier that way. Özgür (18, undergraduate student)

For example, I match with women less when I use Tinder. At some point, I close it to women. I give up. Or I can't chat a lot with the people I match. Veli (27, works in culture and arts)

Çağatay, for example, does not believe that "I have the material for women to say 'I want to be in a relationship with this person' randomly, just by seeing my looks." His asset is his personality, he says, not his looks. Instead of using apps, he finds partners through friend circles and BDSM communities.

People who identify as woman might usually want someone more masculine. This can sometimes be complicating. My gender performance makes my relationships with women a little difficult. Özgür (18, undergraduate student)

Other accounts focus on gender expression as a possible explanation. Barış and Veli think they are not favored by women, possibly because they do not perform conventional heteromascularity. Özgür's account reveals the expectations bisexual individuals might feel from women in terms of their gender performance. Due to their femininity, Özgür believes that their chances of matching with women are decreased significantly. Taken together, these accounts might indicate that bisexuals are expected to conform to conventional heteromascularity norms to access women as potential partners.

Lately, especially in my relationships with people I meet on the apps, I can think of [experiences] I can label as a straight man. I realize that I'm having experiences similar to those when I identified as a straight man. Because people like this, I mean the general profile of Turkey, are in large numbers both in terms of the population and the rates of matches. That's why I can find myself in such experiences again. Because I feel like that's what's expected from me. And it's never acknowledged, and then I'm like what is happening. But as I said, I'm trying to cut down on these. Yiğit (24, recent graduate)

Yiğit describes himself as 'straight passing', connecting this to his upbringing in a rougher neighborhood of Istanbul. He still has to switch his gender performance frequently and 'perform heterosexuality' between his university and family life. He does it by hiding all his accessories and purple-dyed hair and transforming his language, gestures, and mimics. He says although he is good at it, he feels restricted by it and would much prefer to "perform his queerness instead."

Yiğit reports having more success with women on dating apps than any other individuals in my study. However, not without a catch: he feels forced to perform heteromascularity. In his accounts, he explains how the 'unspoken expectations' of dating women affect his gender performance, making him feel and act like his 'straight male' days. Although he feels compelled to conform to norms of heteromascularity, he is disturbed when he catches himself conforming. It can be argued that like others, he is forced to negotiate his willingness to conform to gender norms, which restrict him so much, with his needs of sexual and romantic intimacy.

4.1.2.2 Mononormativity

Bisexual people report experiencing the most amount of binegativity in dating apps, only paralleled by Twitter. From overtly binegative profile messages to identity invalidation and verbal violence, bisexual narratives of dating apps expose the binegativity that permeates a portion of LG communities in Turkey. Especially in dating apps like Hornet, where predominantly men who have sex with men operate, monosexuality can be established and encouraged as a norm that dictates who has access to sexual partners. The normative position of monosexuality, in return, renders bisexual individuals vulnerable to binegativity and rejection based on their non-monosexual identities.

For example, no one easily writes in their dating app profile, like in Hornet, that gays shouldn't contact them, but they do that with bisexuals. Or, on Tinder, they say bisexuals shouldn't swipe right. There's a direct filter to this. Emre (24, recent graduate)

I feel like homosexual people can find partners more easily. If we take Hornet as an example, a person who calls themselves homosexual does not receive the same reaction as someone who calls themselves bisexual. In fact, a great majority of the people who use that app identify as homosexual. Or, for example, a bisexual person doesn't say "oh, you're homosexual?" to people because they are homosexual. But a homosexual person says that to a bisexual, can say "oh, you're bisexual?" At that point, I think that I'm having more difficulty and that being homosexual might be easier there. Barış (24, master's student)

Emre and Barış's accounts demonstrate the mononormative hierarchies of desire some users operate within these apps. As the majority, gay identities are established as the norm; posited as universally acceptable, desirable, and unquestionable. Nonmonosexual identities, on the other hand, are prone to being questioned, invalidated, and excluded.

When I entered the profile of a person I felt physically attracted to, I saw a sentence saying "no bisexuals" in their profile. Jiyan (20, undergraduate student)

You must know this if you also use applications, I don't like to say that I'm bisexual on my profile. There were times when I included that information, but then I didn't because of biphobia. Veli (27, works in culture and arts)

Bisexual people report frequently coming across binegative messages in especially gay men's profiles, usually directly addressing them not to make contact if they are bisexual. Profile messages become the first 'filter' through which bisexual people must pass before engaging with persons operating in these dating apps. However, as Veli implies, binegativity does not end there. Individuals can also experience binegativity after they start making contact in the form of stereotyping, identity invalidation and verbal harassment.

If I just want sex at the moment, I can be like "Okay, continue," when people call me gay. Emre (24, recent graduate)

I find it more productive to introduce myself as gay. Or not say anything at all about this subject. Kemal (19, undergraduate student)

Confronted with binegative and mononormative logic of these apps, some individuals stop using them permanently or periodically. Doruk (25, teacher), for example, only activates his account when he feels especially 'horny' and deactivates it immediately after. Other individuals might submit to this mononormative logic by either avoiding the topic of bisexuality in their conversations at all costs, or outright lying about their sexual orientation in order to find partners.

4.1.2.3 Cisnormativity

Cisnormativity is used to describe the privileging and normalizing of non-trans experiences, and the consequent marginalization and oppression of trans people (Boe et al. 2020). Trans bisexuals in my study report experiencing cisnormativity on top of other normativities cisgender bisexuals are challenged by.

Some of the dating apps, like Tinder, require its users to identify within the gender binary, as woman or man, leaving nonbinary trans bisexuals who still want to be

in these platforms, like Özgür, no choice but to identify with their assigned sex at birth.

I was misgendered a lot in Tinder because they only had options to identify as man or woman, and people who I talked to kept calling me a “man”. Apart from that, I used OkCupid and felt more comfortable there because I had a lot of options to choose from. Özgür (18, undergraduate student)

Özgür is nonbinary but they had to identify as ‘man’ to open a profile on Tinder. They say this rendered them vulnerable to misgendering, as people who matched with them kept calling them ‘man’. Misgendering is a “form of destructive social exclusion” (Ansara and Hegarty 2014) and “enacted stigma” which might affect how trans people “evaluate themselves and their social identity” (McLemore 2015). It might trigger gender dysphoria and negatively affect trans people’s mental health. No longer being able to tolerate Tinder’s forced cisnormativity, Özgür switched to another dating app which is more inclusive of diverse transgender identities.

If I just want sex at the moment, I can be like “Okay, continue,” when people call me gay. I can be like “Okay, continue,” when they call me a man. Or if I find somebody attractive who says “only masculine people should write” and they want to have sex with me, I’m also okay with that. Emre (24, recent graduate)

Emre is another nonbinary person who sometimes has to tolerate misgendering, monosexism and femmephobia if they want to find a sexual partner. They say they have not had a single good experience in the last six months when they came out with any of their identities. So, they formed a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ approach towards their sexual partners, and try to avoid ‘sensitive’ topics as much as possible.

Berfo: I’ve never used [dating apps], never even downloaded them on my phone. Because it makes me scared, that thought makes me scared. I mean, you have to come out and then there’s the fact that I’m a trans man who hasn’t had his [surgeries] yet. Come and tell people this. It’s not that easy.

Cem: So it’s your trans identity that makes this less possible?

Berfo: Yes, I mean, I don't know what I'll experience. I don't know what I'll come across. If my experience on social media is an indicator, I predict that I'll have a similar experience on dating apps, where people ask me foolish questions like what's between my legs, the curiosity and all. I'm guessing they will ask even more easily. Because they're very comfortable when they ask me on Twitter. If they ask on Twitter, they will definitely ask on dating apps.

Berfo (34, translator) is a trans man who had just started his gender affirmation process when I met him. He says cisnormativity and transphobia are the last things he needs, so he never even considered using dating apps. Based on his experience on social media, he is convinced that people would keep asking him silly and inappropriate questions like 'what's between his legs'. Because his transgender body disrupts the cisnormative regime of these dating apps, he feels too vulnerable to consider participating.

4.1.2.4 Vulnerabilities and limited possibilities

This section analyzed dating apps as a site where hetero-/mono-/cisnormativities are reproduced through overtly negative profile texts, identity invalidation and mechanisms of rejection. Normativities reproduced in these sites might establish hierarchies of desire, whereby some identities can be rendered (1) vulnerable and (2) less desirable. Some people can feel compelled to conform to these norms to access potential partners, whereas others might avoid using these sites overall. I argued that this can negatively affect bisexuals in their search for sexual and/or romantic partners by limiting their sexual and romantic possibilities as well as exposing them to discrimination and negativity based on their sexual and gender identities. Bisexual invisibility (Hayfield, Campbell, and Reed 2018; Ulrich 2011), binegativity (Flanders 2016) and identity invalidation (Feinstein et al. 2019) have been implicated with mental and physical health problems in bisexuals. Feinstein et al. (2019) suggest that even subtle dating discrimination bisexual individuals face might have negative consequences for their well-being, which suggests it might be important to further study bisexual narratives of finding partners.

4.2 ‘Unreliable lovers’: Bisexual experiences of relationships

The first part of this chapter focused on various problems bisexual people can face in their search for a partner. I argued that binegativity and stereotypes against bisexuality, among other factors, could make finding a partner who is willing to ‘accept’ their bisexuality challenging as well as expose them to various forms of discrimination and binegative practices such as identity invalidation.

Finding a partner, however, is only half of the story. Bisexual people might also have to deal with various problems in their relationships due to their sexual identity, which may include interpersonal conflicts between partners (Cannon and Boccone 2019; Li et al. 2013), vulnerability to abuse and violence (Donovan et al. 2006; Niki 2018), identity invisibility (Hayfield, Campbell, and Reed 2018), and exclusion from LG communities (Gleason, Vencill, and Sprankle 2018). This section will focus on bisexual narratives of relationships and explore the various adversities and benefits bisexual people experience in their relationships unique to their sexual identities.

4.2.1 Gender deficiency discourse: Manifestations of jealousy in bisexual relationships

A common misconception about bisexuals in relationships is that they are not capable of having a monogamous relationship with a single gender. Some people might believe that since bisexuals experience sexual and/or romantic attraction towards multiple genders, they cannot have ‘full’ satisfaction unless they are involved with multiple people at the same time. This might be further reinforced by stereotypes such as bisexuals being untrustworthy, unreliable, prone to cheating, and liking/needing group sex. In some cases, this might manifest as ‘jealousy’ in bisexual relationships.

‘Jealousy’ is the most common theme in relationship narratives of my interlocutors. Using ‘jealousy’ as a connecting theme, I argue that binegativity in the form of misconceptions and stereotypes about bisexuality might not only cause various problems for bisexuals in their relationships but also render them vulnerable to various practices of verbal, psychological and physical violence in some of their relationships.

For example, in my last relationship, my partner used to bring up the fact that I am bi+ when he talked about our problems. “Normally, I’m

jealous of men, but with you I'm also jealous of women," he said. [. . .] Then there's also stereotypes. There were discourses such as bisexual people like group sex, bisexual people are inclined to cheat constantly in their relationships. My partners brought these up from time to time. Jiyan (20, undergraduate student)

Jiyan's bisexuality was a clearly defined problem in their last relationship. Their partner was jealous, and his jealousy was exacerbated by Jiyan's potential to be attracted to multiple genders. For some partners like him, bisexuality might mean that they have more people to be jealous of. Jiyan also mentions the role of stereotypes in aggravating this problem in almost all their previous relationships. These two themes are not unique to Jiyan's experience but are common across many bisexual relationships.

I had a specific problem in my monogamous relationships, women have this interesting behavior. If your lover is bisexual, you need to be extra careful because you might lose your lover to a man. "Oh my God, what a horrible thing to happen!" etc. I think I was never able to make any of the people I was involved with understand this. Yes, if I chose you, it's not in my character to cheat, so I won't cheat on you. Çağatay (35, engineer)

Çağatay's bisexuality also invoked jealousy in many of his past monogamous relationships. His ex-girlfriends always 'needed to be extra careful' because they were afraid to 'lose him to a man'. Moreover, 'losing him to a man' was 'what a horrible thing to happen'. No matter what he did, Çağatay could not convince any of his previous partners that his bisexuality was not a problem.

What is interesting in Çağatay's accounts is that his ex-partners never felt as intimidated by women as they were by men. One possible explanation is that stereotypes of 'bisexual men eventually becoming gay' or 'bisexuals liking men more' might make these individuals feel especially insecure about their partner and relationship. It can also be argued that framing Çağatay's potential future relationships with men as 'a horrible thing to happen' might indicate these cases are related to homophobia as well as binegativity.

I actually feel very lucky as a person who has experienced love with both

a man and a girl, not just love but also relationships. But unfortunately, the other person can see this as a threat because maybe they are right when I think about it straight. Maybe a girl might fear that some day I'll want something that they won't be able to provide, or a man might fear that I'll want something they won't be able to provide. Gunnar (32, engineer)

Gunnar considers himself lucky that he was able to experience love and relationships with multiple genders, but his partners usually do not agree. His bisexuality can be a 'threat' to his partners and Gunnar can empathize why. He believes his partners might be threatened because they are afraid that they cannot provide what another gender can provide. I call this the gender deficiency discourse. Gender deficiency discourse is based on two presuppositions; (1) Gunnar will need something else eventually (i.e. "bisexuals cannot be 'fully' satisfied with a single gender"), and (2) genders are mutually exclusive categories with essential differences in what they can provide (i.e. genitals, certain sexual behaviors, visible relationships, marriage, etc.).

First, although there are also polyamorous individuals in my study, all my interlocutors including the polyamorous ones report being capable of sexual and romantic satisfaction with a single gender as long as they are happy in their relationship. Çağatay, for example, prefers polyamorous relationships but his account above demonstrates his willingness to commit to a single person. For many bisexuals, their partner's gender plays a relatively insignificant role in their attraction to them in the first place. In their narratives, what they need to feel satisfied in a relationship varies, but never directly includes the gender of a person.

Secondly, an analysis of the gender deficiency discourse across multiple narratives reveals that it might refer to gendered bodies, genitals, and certain sexual behaviors in both different-gender and same-gender contexts, while also referring to visible relationships, marriage, and children in same-gender contexts. Collapsing gender onto genitals and sexual behavior, this discourse reproduces cissexism and gender essentialism. Gender essentialism has been discredited widely by various feminist and queer scholars (Butler 1999; Connell 2010) and does not necessarily reflect how some of my interlocutors conceptualize and experience their genders.

The gender deficiency discourse, however, can partly be true in same-gender contexts as same-gender sexualities and relationships are still widely stigmatized and illegitimized in Turkey (Özbay 2015, 2021; Özbay and Öktem 2021). While Turkey does not outlaw same-gender sexualities, it also does not provide any constitutional protection based on gender and sexual identities. Turkey also does not allow marriage

equality, so domestic partnership and marriage are not an option for same-gender couples.

Cem: How does it make you feel [that your bisexuality is seen as a threat], then?

Günнар: Yes, it's horrible. I didn't choose my family but this is what I experience with them. And it's horrible that I'm now also experiencing this with a person I chose. [...] A person you yourself chose.

Günнар feels sorry and disappointed that his partners must be threatened by his bisexuality. He compares his partners with his family to emphasize how vulnerable he can be to binegativity in a relationship with a person he chose willingly.

Intense phobia can cause problems in romantic relationships. Because it's probably in your partner's head all the time, no matter what their gender identity is. If this relationship is monogamous, it's the fear that you might orient towards somewhere else. I mean, because dealing with phobia within a relationship can be a little more difficult. Just like how it's difficult with your family. In the mean time, you break down a lot of walls but there's this wall of phobia and it's invisible. I never saw this wall, always rendered it invisible. When something happened related to it, I said no and took a step back and never put any effort into breaking it down, because it's very difficult to tear it down within a relationship. [...] There are things, situations, difficulties that come up during fights, things like "being desirous" or "Are you more interested in others?", which are part of dating violence. Emre (24, recent graduate)

Emre shares Günнар's sentiment that dealing with binegativity can be more difficult in a relationship due to its already emotionally and physically vulnerable nature. Like many, Emre tried to ignore binegative discourses and practices of their partners to maintain their relationship, which rendered them vulnerable to dating violence. Emre reports having experienced physical violence based on their bisexual identity in two of their previous relationships with men. In one of these relationships, physical violence got to a point where they say they "had to take it to a court".

I've never been free from my internalized biphobia, because my experi-

ence still teaches it. I mean, I still experience gay socialization after all, and that place somehow teaches me how to laugh at a biphobic joke. I don't laugh at transphobic jokes, for example. And I always intervene. But I can still laugh at a biphobic joke. Emre (24, recent graduate)

Emre professes they might have internalized binegativity due to many years spent within the LGBTQIA+ movement, where bisexuality and problems pertaining to bisexuals were always secondary concerns and deprioritized. They say that socializing primarily in gay communities was another factor that might have helped them internalize binegativity, as bisexuality was usually the target of offensive jokes, and they would learn to laugh at them. It can be argued that internalizing binegativity in these social spaces might have rendered Emre especially vulnerable in their relationships, as it could have been a factor in them ignoring red flags of binegativity.

4.2.1.1 A case study: Ada and Sena

Ada (33, PhD student) had a long history of binegativity in his previous relationships when he met Sena, a cisgender bisexual woman. At the time, he had not had any relationships for two years because of his relationship traumas caused by binegativity. Finding a bisexual partner for the first time, he felt relieved thinking that he would have a partner who understands him at last. They started a relationship.

Whether we were in a monogamous or polyamorous relationship became a problem. I'm not against polyamory but I told her that I'm a monogamous person, I need to connect. And when I connect with a person, that's it, I don't look anywhere else. That started.

The first problem they encountered was about the nature of their relationship: monogamy or polyamory. Sena did not want to be in a polyamorous relationship. Even though Ada emphasized he wanted a monogamous relationship multiple times, he was not able to convince Sena. This became a recurring problem in their relationship.

Then a process started, where the other person always puts you under an inquisition, where your everyday actions that you don't really pay attention to becomes a problem. She said you don't like me. If you leave

me and be with a person of my gender, it's not a problem. But if you are with others, I'll think that you left me for something I don't possess. [...] It goes like "What if he wants to be with men," or, when you're in a relationship with a man, it's "What if he wants to be with women." They think of you like you don't know where you belong to, that you can't even choose your side, and that you can't be satisfied somehow. It's like you'll always have something missing in your life.

Sena's lack of trust in Ada quickly turned into dating violence. Ada reports feeling constantly watched, questioned, and abused during that period. Soon enough, the root of their problem was revealed: Ada's attraction towards men. Similar to Çağatay and Gunnar's accounts, Sena did not have a problem with Ada having an affair with a woman. Men, however, were out of limits as it would mean Ada was 'leaving her for something she does not possess'. Like in other cases, Sena invoked the gender deficiency discourse to justify her binegativity, which Ada was already familiar with because of his previous relationship.

Then, she started to ask "What will happen if there's a man in your life?" And I told her I'd been alone all these years and never had anyone. This doesn't mean it will never happen. But I'm happy with you right now and if anything changes during our relationship, I'll tell you. For example, she asked me what I did when I was with men. Was I a top or a bottom? When I answered, she said "What will happen if you need this?" I said why are we even talking about this right now. Apparently, she wondered how she would feel if I were to be penetrated one day.

Sena kept questioning Ada about men despite his efforts to ease her mind on the subject. What she wanted to know was Ada's sexual history with men, especially whether he had been penetrated before. She was worried that (1) Ada might need to experience penetration, (2) she would not be able to provide that experience for him due to her gender, (3) her boyfriend could be penetrated by a man in the future, and (4) she would feel a certain way about her partner being penetrated. Sena's justification indicates that homophobia might also play a part in gender deficiency discourse.

There's always this inquisition. And it hurts even more when it comes from a person who likes women, you know, it's the person you expect

to understand you. Because people feel like we have to be involved with multiple people all the time, and I mean, it can also be the case. [...] Whatever I did, I couldn't make her believe that I loved her. I couldn't explain to her that her suspicion and distrust in me alienated me from her. Experiencing biphobia from a bisexual person, and this constant emphasis on always looking for a potential relationship exhausted me a lot. She talked positively about me to the outside world, but she was mean to me when we were alone. [...] Maybe this is about what she experienced during her process. I think she might have a fear of polyamory. I think she matched these two [bisexuality and polyamory] in her head.

Despite his many efforts, Ada could not avoid binegativity and abuse in his relationship until the end. He describes what he experienced as psychological violence. He says he had experienced very similar problems in his previous relationship with a woman but experiencing so much binegativity from another bisexual hurt him even more.

I said okay, I'm not going to be able to have a relationships with my condition (bisexuality). Because I was fed up with constantly explaining myself to people and being judged all the time.

Experiencing binegativity from every romantic and sexual partner since he came out affected Ada mentally. He was exhausted from constantly explaining himself and being judged due to his bisexuality. He thought he could not have a satisfying relationship unless he lied to his partners about his bisexuality, but he also did not want to compromise his honesty.

Sena's case demonstrates how bisexuals can also internalize binegativity and stereotypes related to bisexuality when they are exposed to them frequently. Like Ada suggests, Sena might have associated bisexuality with polyamory. This might also be explained by the gendered differences in stigmas against bisexual women and men. Gleason, Vencill, and Sprankle (2018) argue that male bisexuality is further stigmatized possibly due to the association of male bisexuality with negative personality traits such as deceitfulness and untrustworthiness, perception of bisexual men as confused about their sexuality, and belief that bisexual men might be unable to maintain monogamous, long-term relationships.

Ada's relationship with Sena is emblematic of how binegativity can affect both the bisexual individual and their partners in their relationship through the theme of jealousy. This experience is not unique to Ada's relationship with Sena, as accounts of his other relationships also bear many similarities in how binegativity manifested through jealousy. Similar accounts also exist in other bisexual relationship narratives, which suggest that gender deficiency discourse might be a common problem bisexual people face in their relationships.

4.2.2 Various manifestations of binegativity in bisexual relationships

Binegativity does not always manifest through jealousy in relationships but can also manifest as rejection based on sexual identity, identity invalidation, and bisexual shaming.

One day, I was sitting with a man I was romantically interested in, and he asked a question. He asked me to talk about my first love. And my first love is a girl. And I said, it was like this and that, and it was a girl. And he realized that it was a girl. My head was on his lap at the time. He grabbed my head and threw me from the couch. He grabbed and threw me. He grabbed and threw me and he said. He said "You're nothing more than a man who is with another man just because you can't find a girl. You'll leave me anyway when you find a girl one day, or when you're pressured to get married." It was very difficult but I was able to convince him that this relationship shouldn't end here and he shouldn't go. But it didn't work out. Gunnar (32, engineer)

Coming out as bisexual in a relationship, Gunnar was violently rejected by his romantic partner. He was on his partner's lap in a physically vulnerable position when his partner grabbed and threw him on the floor. Gunnar consecutively repeats 'grabbed and threw me' three times to possibly emphasize the violence and consequent shock he was subjected to. Even though violence was involved, Gunnar tried to convince the person to maintain their relationship, but it did not last long. Gunnar's case demonstrates how binegativity can invoke violence within relationships and serves as an example of gender deficiency discourse in a same-gender setting. The partner not only invalidates Gunnar's bisexuality by putting into question Gunnar's romantic and sexual attraction to men, but also invokes gender deficiency discourse to justify his violent reaction, assuming that Gunnar will leave him either

whenever he can find a woman or when he wants to get married.

We talked to each other and decided that we can't maintain a relationship. And after this process, whenever Melike talked to her friends, she referred to me as "gay". Melike insistently referred to me like that even though we had a romantic and sexual history. In her head, she assigned an orientation to me and talked to people like that. It came to a tipping point after a while, and I told Melike that I wasn't "gay" and she shouldn't talk like that about me to people. Jiyan (20, undergraduate student)

Even though Jiyan came out to her as bisexual, Melike kept calling Jiyan 'gay' after they decided not to pursue their relationship. Calling them 'gay' despite their romantic and sexual history puts the authenticity of Jiyan's attraction towards women into question and not only invalidates their relationship history but also Jiyan's bisexual identity. Identity invalidation is a common type of discrimination bisexual people face whereby their identities are denied, negated, or refused (Feinstein et al. 2019). Feinstein et al. (2019) identify "negative emotions, identity-related challenges, and relational difficulties" as possible consequences of identity invalidation. Jiyan was negatively affected by Melike invalidating their identity constantly and had to address the problem when they 'couldn't take it anymore'. This demonstrates how bisexuals can be subjected to binegativity even after their relationships have ended.

I feel like I'm going to be judged, like if my male partner learns that I'm also into women, I feel like he'll ostracize and judge me. Or, my female partners as well. I actually experienced this. When I first found out that I was bisexual, there was a woman I was romantically getting involved with. I came out to her as bisexual. And she said "What? Did a bisexual really ask me out?" And I froze and I couldn't say anything. Barış (24, master's student)

Upon learning Barış's sexual identity, his date shamed and rejected him as she did not understand 'how a bisexual could ask her out'. This was Barış's first time coming out to a romantic partner in a relationship, so he felt confused and judged and did not know how to react. Negative coming out experiences with monosexual partners have been implicated with a higher possibility of experiencing internalized binegativity

later in life for bisexual individuals (Cannon and Boccone 2019). Barış's account demonstrates how this early experience of bisexual shaming might still affect him by instilling the feeling that he will be judged by his partners due to his bisexuality.

4.2.3 Enhancing experiences of bisexuality in relationships

Bisexual people do not always face difficulties due to their sexual identities. Some people also report their bisexuality being a positive element in their relationship as a factor enabling couples to establish non-normative romantic and sexual practices.

I'm completely open, open to everything. [Women] sometimes want to try things but they can't try it with some others. But they can try these with me. For example, maybe they want to use a strapon with another person, but maybe they couldn't experience this with their previous boyfriends or in their past relationships. They have the chance to experience this with me. Yiğit (24, recent graduate)

Yiğit tells me how his bisexuality can enrich his sexual experiences with women by enabling various sexual practices such as pegging. Based on his previous experience, he believes that masculinity norms coupled with heteronormativity do not usually facilitate some forms of sexual experimentation in different-gender relationships. His identity as a bisexual man, however, can help him disrupt heteronormative sexual dynamics in his relationships with women by being a partner who is 'completely willing to do it all'.

My bisexuality was something we talked a lot about in my relationship with my girlfriend. I think it was my girlfriend's first relationship with a bisexual man. In that way, it was something that enriched fantasies rather than being a source of problem. We also talked about this because we were open to open relationships, or being with other people together, even though it never happened in the end. Veli (27, works in culture and arts)

Veli's bisexuality was also an enhancing factor in his previous relationship with a woman who was completely supportive of his sexual identity. Not only did his bisexuality enrich their sexual fantasies, but also allowed them to question the monog-

amous nature of their relationship by bringing up the possibility of polyamory and group sex. Although they did not end up practicing polyamory, Veli reports feeling satisfied due to the support and enthusiasm he received in his relationship.

Being poly, bi and pan go together really well. Your options increase a lot. Besides the options, I think that each person is a little bit of an exploration. In that way, there are more people I can explore. Çağatay (35, engineer)

Bisexuality and polyamory ‘go together really well’ in some bisexual people’s experiences. Çağatay is in a polyamorous marriage with a bisexual woman. They participate in BDSM scenes in Istanbul with his partner and practice polyamory together, and sometimes individually depending on how busy their schedules are. He says bisexuality and polyamory not only enhanced their sexual life, but also many other aspects of their relationship. Acceptance, validation, open communication, and honesty are some of the benefits he reports.

My spouse sometimes stops and says “Oh my God, I can’t believe it! I’m so happy that I have a bisexual spouse.” She never even imagined this could happen. I correct, she couldn’t imagine this could happen. Çağatay (35, engineer)

His partner openly acknowledges the positive impact Çağatay’s bisexuality has in their relationship. Çağatay emphasized that having a male bisexual partner was something she ‘could not’ have imagined, possibly due to stigmatization and consequent invisibility of male bisexuality in Turkey.

Bisexuality can be an enhancing factor in people’s relationships by enabling non-normative relationship practices. The first part of this section analyzed monogamous bisexual relationships and demonstrated through the theme of jealousy as well as the gender deficiency discourse that bisexual people might be more likely to experience binegativity in their monogamous relationships. Based on negative and positive accounts of bisexual relationships, it can be argued that bisexuals might be more likely to have positive experiences of their identity in relationships where (1) sexual and gender norms are challenged, (2) monogamy as a relationship norm is questioned, or (3) sexual experimentation is valued.

5. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore bisexual men and nonbinary persons' experiences with monosexism and binegativity through accounts of sexual identity construction, coming out as well as sexual and romantic relationships. The fact that social experiences of bisexuality might have negative implications on individuals' health and well-being makes it essential to understand social experiences of bisexuality in Turkey, especially because few studies deal with this subject within the context of Turkey. As monosexism and its effects on sexualities in Turkey were not studied before, I first had to locate monosexism and understand how it operates within the narratives of my interlocutors. Based on my interviews, monosexism operates through binegativity (or biphobia), stereotyping, bisexual invisibility, identity invalidation, and bisexual shaming in Turkey. The three main chapters of this thesis explore, identify, and analyze how monosexism interacts with other societal structures and normativities to form the various social experiences of bisexuality within the contexts of identity construction, coming out, and sexual and romantic relationships consecutively.

The first introductory chapter aimed to explain the purpose, significance, and methodology of this study as well as introduce the concepts that will be utilized in the following chapters. I provided a literature review of bisexuality in Turkey, which begged more research, and the romantic relationships of bisexual individuals. The first chapter introduced the concept of bisexual burden, which suggested that bisexual individuals have disparities in their mental and physical health compared to monosexual individuals due to the social experiences of their identities and the 'double discrimination' they face from both straight and LG communities. Basing my argument on the bisexual burden, I highlighted the importance of studying bisexuality as a distinct identity to better understand the lived experience of this identity and the statistics related to LGBTQIA+ communities.

The second chapter focused on the sexual discovery and identity construction processes of bisexuals. I provided accounts of how heterosexism and monosexism affected individuals during sexual discovery and identity construction through various

institutions, structures, and norms. The accounts of sexual discovery and identity construction revealed that bisexual people in Turkey face many challenges and negativities due to their sexual identities before and after they come to terms with their nonheterosexualities. External and internal heterosexism and monosexism, religion, overemphasis on sexual behavior over sexual attraction and sexual identity, monogamy, and expectations of a bisexual performance were identified as some of the factors that complicated bisexual identity construction.

I argued that bisexuals might experience fractures in their sexual and romantic histories due to the factors mentioned above. In the face of these fractures, binegativity, and the invalidity of the bisexual identity, I argued that some individuals might engage in reinterpretation of their sexual histories while constructing their bisexual identities, which I called ‘filtering history’. Through this filtering process, sexual and romantic histories are reinterpreted to function as an anchor to connect the ‘unknowing past’ to the bisexual present. Taking a critical stance, I asked which other identities are subjected to these processes of ‘filtering history’ and ‘looking for hints’ to justify their existence.

The third chapter discussed the coming out strategies of bisexuals. Providing accounts of when and how they come out, I argued that awareness of their social identities enables bisexual individuals to ‘juggle identities’. I defined juggling identities as strategical coming out practices of bisexuals by positioning themselves as bisexual, gay, or straight to help navigate challenges they face due to their bisexual identities as well as achieve desired outcomes. I highlighted that bisexuals not only ‘juggle identities’ to avoid negativity but also to achieve desired outcomes such as access to potential partners and particular communities, distancing themselves from social expectations, and building safe communities.

Juggling identities included strategies of not coming out, based on the expectation to be assigned gay or straight labels due to the monosexist understanding of sexuality and bisexual invisibility, coming out as gay, and coming out as bisexual. The accounts of how and where bisexual people deploy these strategies revealed the binegativity prevalent in both straight and LG communities and highlighted the challenges of maintaining a bisexual identity in various facets of life due to monosexism. I pointed out that having trans experience might complicate these practices further, sometimes leaving people no choice but to choose between expressing their gender identity or sexual identity, and called for more studies that focus on transgender people to better understand the interaction between trans identities and nonheterosexualities.

The fourth chapter explored the sexual and romantic relationships of bisexuals in

two parts. In the first part, I identified challenges bisexual individuals face to find partners due to binegativity and stereotypes against bisexuality. I provided an analysis of dating applications as an example of how various identities of bisexual people might render the process of finding a partner both challenging and precarious. I approached dating apps as a site where hetero-/mono-/cishnormativities are reproduced through overtly negative profile texts, identity invalidation, and mechanisms of rejection. I argued that normativities reproduced in these sites establish hierarchies of desire, whereby some identities can be rendered (1) vulnerable and (2) less desirable. When faced with these normativities, some individuals feel compelled to conform to these norms to access potential partners, while others who refuse to do so are limited in their access. My analysis revealed a possible correlation between having non-normative identities and experiencing negativities within these spaces. Having non-normative identities in terms of sexual identity, gender identity, and gender performance usually meant limited sexual and romantic possibilities as well as exposure to discrimination and negativity. I called for further exploration of these spaces based on the fact that social experiences such as bisexual invisibility, binegativity, identity invalidation, bisexual shaming, and misgendering are implicated with mental and physical health disparities in individuals.

In the second part of the chapter, I analyzed negative and positive narratives of bisexual relationships and demonstrated how binegativity can affect bisexual relationships through the theme of jealousy. The original contribution of this chapter was the ‘gender deficiency discourse,’ which served as both the logic and justification of binegative practices such as identity invalidation, bisexual invisibility, and various forms of violence and abuse in relationships of bisexuals. Gender deficiency discourse is built around the two premises that (1) bisexuals have different needs from different genders and they cannot be fully satisfied sexually and/or romantically unless they have access to multiple genders and that (2) genders are mutually exclusive categories with essential differences in what they can provide (i.e. genitals, certain sexual behaviors, visible relationships, marriage, etc.). I exemplified how the gender deficiency discourse might affect bisexual people in their relationships by analyzing various relationship narratives and a short case study.

The second part of the chapter also analyzed relationships where bisexuality was considered to be a positive influence. Comparing these narratives with the binegative ones, I argued that bisexuals might be more likely to have positive experiences of their identity in relationships where (1) sexual and gender norms are challenged, (2) monogamy as a relationship norm is questioned, or (3) sexual experimentation is valued. Taken together with the gender deficiency discourse, the findings of this study indicate that the epistemic contract of bisexual erasure of Yoshino (2000) holds

validity within the context of Turkey. Yoshino identifies monosexual interests in erasing bisexuality as “(1) the stabilization of exclusive sexual orientation categories; (2) the retention of sex as an important diacritical axis; and (3) the protection of norms of monogamy.” It can be argued that gender deficiency discourse is one of the mechanisms through which this contract is enforced and reproduced in Turkey. Although Yoshino discusses these interests within the context of bisexuality, they can also intersect with the structural interests against women, homosexual people, transgender people, asexual people, polyamorous and polygamous people, and many more.

This study functions as an introduction to locate monosexism in the construction of sexualities in Turkey and to provide accounts of how bisexual people are affected by monosexism as well as some other societal structures, institutions, and norms. However, the scope of this study was limited, first because of its nature of being a master’s thesis, which required a significant amount of delimitation. This is why this study focused on identity construction, coming out, and sexual and romantic relationships of bisexuals and could not include other relevant aspects such as family, work, education, health, welfare, etc. Secondly, the amount of binegativity and LGBTQIA+phobia present within the context of Turkey restricted access to a more diverse set of bisexual individuals. Even the fact that I chose my interlocutors based on self-identification under the bisexual umbrella excluded many people from this study. The limited access I had to bisexual individuals meant that the vast majority of my interlocutors came from middle-class backgrounds, all of them had access to higher education, and they had a heightened awareness of their sexual identities overall.

Studying bisexuality, identifying and understanding the societal structures, institutions, and norms that operate against it can benefit our overall understanding of the gender and sexuality regimes in Turkey. When we consider monosexism as another mechanism through which patriarchy operates, infuses in power relationships, privileges, and disenfranchises certain configurations of identities, it can be argued that at its core, the struggle of bisexual people is a struggle against patriarchy. This is where the insights gained from studying bisexuality can contribute to the feminist, masculinities, sexualities, and LGBTQIA+ studies in Turkey. Locating monosexism at the center of the patriarchy, I ask, what is it that this structure protects? Who does it benefit? Who does it harm? How might monosexism affect the gender regime and configuration of sexualities in Turkey, not only pertaining to bisexuals but also including monosexuals? How can we integrate insight provided by studying bisexuality into our understanding of sexuality and gender in Turkey? As individuals who render these structures visible, what do the imparities in physical and mental health

look like for bisexuals in Turkey?

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