

Bisexual Women's Female Friendships: Predictors and Outcomes of Sexual Identity Disclosure

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### Abstract

This study examined Asian and White bisexual women's sexual orientation disclosure to their female friends, including the relation of disclosure to racial and sexual identity, individual well-being, and friendship quality. It was hypothesized that Asian bisexual women would be less likely to disclose their sexual minority status to Asian friends and more likely to friends of differing racial/ethnic identities, as well as less likely to monosexual friends. Also, sexual identity disclosure for all participants, regardless of race/ethnicity, was expected to be positively associated with both friendship quality and individual well-being. A sample of 324 bisexual women completed measures focused on their demographic information, personal self-esteem, self-authenticity, satisfaction with life, and perceived social support, as well as their interpersonal level of outness, validation, trust, intimacy, and overall friendship. Results from multilevel models indicated that participant race/ethnicity interacted with friend race/ethnicity and sexual orientation in predicting disclosure: Asian bisexual women's disclosure level was higher with same-race/ethnicity friends but unrelated to whether the friend was LGQ. In contrast, White bisexual women's disclosure level was unrelated to similarity of the friend's race/ethnicity but was lower among friends viewed as LGQ. Disclosure of bisexuality was positively associated with friendship quality at both the within-person and between-person levels, and was positively related to self-esteem, life satisfaction, and perceptions of social support from friends.

*Keywords:* bisexual; friendships; women; disclosure; well-being

### Bisexual Women's Female Friendships: Predictors and Outcomes of Sexual Identity Disclosure

Female friendships are a key predictor of women's mental and physical health and longevity (Sherman et al., 2000). Having close female friends has been linked to lower anxiety and stress, risk of suicidal ideation, and disordered eating behavior, indicating that these relationships play a crucial role in women's physiological, psychological, and psychosocial well-being (Alemán, 2010; Giletta et al., 2017; Juda et al., 2004). In fact, a lack of female friendships has been linked to loneliness, depression, and physiological illness, indicating that there may be strong motivation for women to maintain such relationships (Knickmeyer et al., 2002). Moreover, female friendships are typically higher in overall quality, intimacy, and trust compared to male friendships, qualities which have been linked to benefits in healing processes and personal empowerment functions (Comas-Diaz & Weiner, 2013; Grabill & Kerns, 2000; Sapadin, 1988; Warris & Rafique, 2009). Across studies, women find that their same-sex friendships provide validation and serve to advance their personal growth and development (Alemán, 2000; Alemán, 2010). Women may also use their friendships as a basis of advocacy, empowerment, and emancipation from patriarchal society, including self-empowerment in one's marginalized identity management, such as with their sexual minority status (Bachmann, 2014; Comas-Diaz & Weiner, 2013).

For sexual minority women, however, the process of developing and maintaining friendships with other women can be complicated by sexual orientation stigma. This process is all the more complex for bisexual women, who face potential rejection and marginalization not only among heterosexual people but also lesbian women and gay men, leading to negative mental health consequences (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Ka'ahumanu & Hutchins, 2015; Mohr et

al., 2016; Sue, 2010). The present study examined the role of one stigma-related process—disclosure of sexual orientation—in the female friendships of bisexual women.

### **Binegative Attitudes and Stereotypes**

The term bisexuality is complex because it is believed to have a myriad of meanings revolving around the notion that sexual and romantic attractions are not limited by the gender of a potential partner (Ochs & Rowley, 2009). Some individuals prefer the term bisexual to define their sexual orientation identity, whereas others who use the term also interchangeably use other sexual minority terms including plurisexual, nonmonosexual, or queer. Although any of these labels can lead to stigmatization, bisexual individuals, as compared to other sexual minority populations, experience further discrimination often coined “biphobia” (Eliason, 1997; Eliason, 2000; Galupo, 2006; Obradors-Campos, 2011) due to the specific stereotypes that are associated with the term. Indeed, recent population-based data have indicated that public attitudes toward bisexual people in the United States are more negative than those toward lesbian/gay people and the rate of change in public acceptance has been similarly slower for bisexuals (Dodge et al., 2016).

Bisexual individuals often face biphobic stereotyping, including the views that bisexual people are confused about their sexual orientation, are in denial about their status as lesbian/gay people, lack commitment to their sexual minority communities, wish to maintain heterosexual privilege, are sexually obsessed, and are unable to maintain monogamy (Zivony & Lobel, 2014). Binegative attitudes are also present in the erasure of bisexuality, indicating a doubt in the existence of such an orientation status (Yost & Thomas, 2012). Such discrimination towards bisexual individuals, specifically from heterosexual individuals, has been linked to symptoms of

trauma, including depression, indicating psychological consequences of experiencing sexual minority discrimination (Arnett et al., 2019; Meyer, 2003).

Some of these stereotypes are gendered. Bisexual women, for example, are often believed to desire the companionship of both male and female partners and are therefore believed to be sexually promiscuous and unable to maintain monogamy within their relationships (Ka'ahumanu & Hutchins, 2015). However, bisexual women are considered to be a more "tolerable" intersectional identity when compared to bisexual men among heterosexual individuals (Eliason, 1997).

Bisexual people of color are even more severely impacted by stereotypes, cultural expectations, and minority stressors (Cyrus, 2017), partly because they must contend simultaneously with racism in sexual minority communities and heterosexism in their racial-ethnic communities (Ghabrial, 2017). Research also indicates that sexual minority women of color are at a greater risk of substance use problems than White sexual minority women or heterosexual women of color (Mereish & Bradford, 2014), indicating a higher risk of physical health disparities among intersectional marginalized communities.

### **Friendship and Self-disclosure among Bisexual Women**

Self-disclosure is a key process in friendship formation (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011) and is often viewed as central to, if not synonymous with, intimacy (Grabill & Kerns, 2000). The intimacy afforded by self-disclosure, along with the concomitant social support, may be particularly meaningful for bisexual individuals, who have been found to experience poorer mental health than heterosexual individuals or other sexual minority individuals (la Roi et al., 2019). Thus, a central decision that bisexual woman must consider in their friendships with women is whether to disclose their identity. Sexual orientation disclosure can serve to deepen

trust and intimacy in relationships and thus strengthen interpersonal bonds (Jackson & Mohr, 2016). Overall, “coming out” or disclosing one’s sexual minority status is often linked with well-being (Pachankis, 2007). But because the act of disclosure can carry many risks, including discrimination, isolation, and even violence (Herek et al., 1997), sexual minority people may share their sexual minority identity only when they perceive it likely to be well received (Beals et al., 2009).

As a result, when disclosure is likely to be met with negative reactions or to lead to being “outed,” bisexual women may opt to conceal their identity by avoiding reference to their romantic/sexual relationships and through strategic presentation as either heterosexual, lesbian, or queer (Weinstock, 2006). Indeed, research has suggested that bisexual people are much more likely than lesbian/gay people to present their sexual orientation in different ways across different contexts (Mohr et al., 2016).

### **Present Study**

Despite the potential significance of disclosure in the friendships of bisexual women, remarkably little research has focused on this area of inquiry. Moreover, the little research that has been published on disclosure of bisexual identity has tended to examine global reports rather than levels of disclosure in specific friendships. The overarching aim of the present exploratory study is to address this gap by investigating potential predictors and outcomes of sexual identity disclosure in the friendships bisexual women have with other women. In terms of predictors, the focus of this study was on facets of sociocultural identity that may influence both the perceived safety and salience of sexual orientation disclosure. To meaningfully explore the role of race/ethnicity in friendship disclosure, the sample consisted of both Asian and White bisexual women. In terms of potential outcomes of disclosure, the study included indicators of both

friendship quality and individual well-being. In contrast to most research in this area, participants were asked to provide information about eight distinct friendships with other women. This made it possible to examine links between disclosure and other variables at the friendship level.

### **Potential Predictors of Sexual Identity Disclosure**

Bisexual women's disclosure to female friends may be influenced by the sexual orientation and race/ethnicity of the friend, as well as the woman's own race/ethnicity. In the context of sexual minorities in the U.S., some writers have noted that disclosure may be less valued by Asians than their White counterparts due to differences in cultural norms. For example, Choi and Israel (2016) noted that many Asian cultures emphasize a private, internal approach to identity development that stands in contrast to the more Western emphasis on individual self-expression over social order. Their review of research supported this perspective by providing evidence that the disclosure level of Asian American sexual minorities is lower than that of White sexual minorities and is negatively related to adherence to traditional Asian values.

Even if overall sexual orientation disclosure level is lower for Asian Americans than White Americans, intriguing questions remain about the role of friend race/ethnicity in disclosure decisions. Studies have indicated that Asian American sexual minority people view same-sex attraction and relationships as more accepted in Western and White cultures (Choi and Israel, 2016). For this reason, for Asian Americans, coming out to heterosexual Asian friends may engender greater risk of rejection compared to heterosexual White friends. On the other hand, research shows that individuals tend to select friends based on similarities in race and ethnicity (Chen et al., 2006; Sharabany et al., 1981), and the shared cultural experiences between friends of the same race/ethnicity might increase sexual minority Asian Americans' comfort with

disclosure. These possibilities have received virtually no attention by researchers, partly because sexual orientation disclosure has been little studied in the context of individual friendships.

The role of friend sexual orientation has also been little studied, particularly for bisexual people. It seems likely that bisexual people would view the risk of rejection and negative stereotyping as lowest among their bisexual friends, given the shared experiences related to bisexuality. There remains, however, the question of whether bisexual people are any more or less likely to disclose their bisexuality to lesbian/gay friends than to heterosexual friends. On the one hand, bisexual people would not have to fear rejection for reasons of sexual minority status from their lesbian/gay friends. However, Brewster and Moradi (2010) provided evidence that bisexual people do receive negative treatment from lesbian/gay people, albeit at lower levels than from heterosexuals. The risk of rejection from lesbian/gay friends may be especially alarming to bisexual people due to the sense of betrayal from the people who should, at least in theory, be a source of support in the face of sexual orientation stigma.

Given this discussion, I made the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (sexual orientation): Bisexual women will be more likely to have disclosed their sexual minority status to friends who also identify as bisexual and less likely to have disclosed to monosexual (heterosexual and lesbian) friends.

Hypothesis 2 (race/ethnicity): The race/ethnicity of bisexual women will interact with racial/ethnic similarity of their friend to predict disclosure to the friend. Specifically, for Asian participants, the racial/ethnic similarity of their friend will be associated with disclosure to the friend. In contrast, such a link between the racial/ethnic similarity of their friend and disclosure will not emerge for White participants.

### **Possible Outcomes of Sexual Identity Disclosure**



Sexual identity disclosure was examined in relation to both individual well-being and friendship quality. Research on links between disclosure and well-being has been mixed, with small-to-moderate positive relations in some studies and nonsignificant relations in others (Jackson & Mohr, 2016). The significant relations may indicate that, for many sexual minority people, sexual orientation disclosure provides a basis for increased intimacy and social integration, which, in turn, improves mood, global life satisfaction, and sense of personal efficacy. Conversely, the associations may indicate that people are more likely to disclose their sexual orientation when they have strong friendships and good mental health.

The weak or null relations between disclosure and well-being found in many studies have been viewed as support for the notion that disclosure does not only have positive consequences (Jackson & Mohr, 2016). In the context of Asian American families, revealing one's sexual orientation may be counter to traditional values related to gender role adherence, filial piety, and collectivism (Szymanski & Sung, 2013). Indeed, as noted by Choi and Israel (2016), a lack of disclosure may be positively viewed as evidence of prioritizing of harmonious relations in one's family and maintaining a public face that preserves the family's honorable reputation. From this perspective, it is possible the link between disclosure to friends and individual well-being may be weaker for Asian sexual minority people than their White counterparts.

Based on this discussion, I made the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3 (individual well-being): For bisexual women, disclosure to friends will be positively associated with (a) self-esteem, (b) self-authenticity, (c) satisfaction with their life, and (d) global perceived social support from friends.

Hypothesis 4 (friendship quality): For bisexual women, level of disclosure to friends will be positively associated with friendship quality at both the within-person and between-

person levels. At the within-person level, friendship quality will tend to be higher in the relationships where disclosure level is higher. At the between-person level, average friendship quality will tend to be higher among women who generally have the highest disclosure levels to friends.

## Methods

### Participants and Procedures

To complete the survey, potential participants were required to report their (a) race/ethnicity as White, East Asian, Southeast Asian, or South Asian, (b) sexual orientation as bisexual, (c) gender as female, and (d) age as 18 or older. The final sample included 324 bisexual women, with ages ranging from 18 to 58 ( $M = 28.16$ ,  $SD = 6.68$ ). Participant race/ethnicity was as follows (categories were not mutually exclusive): East Asian ( $n = 52$ , 16.0%), South Asian ( $n = 142$ , 43.8%), Southeast Asian ( $n = 69$ , 21.3%), and White ( $n = 63$ , 19.4%). In addition to identifying as bisexual, participants also indicated strongly identifying with the following sexual orientation categories (which were not mutually exclusive): heterosexual ( $n = 6$ , 1.9%), lesbian/gay ( $n = 11$ , 3.4%), pansexual ( $n = 5$ , 1.5%), and queer ( $n = 10$ , 3.1%). Regarding romantic relationship status, participants reported being single ( $n = 68$ , 21.0%), having a male partner ( $n = 72$ , 22.2%), having a female partner ( $n = 198$ , 61.1%), and having a partner with a nonbinary gender identity ( $n = 11$ , 3.4%). Finally, participants reported their educational level as high school degree or less ( $n = 42$ , 13.0%), some college but no degree ( $n = 37$ , 11.4%), associate degree ( $n = 63$ , 19.4%), bachelor's degree ( $n = 156$ , 48.1%), graduate degree ( $n = 26$ , 8.0%).

The final sample represents a portion of the initial pool of respondents, which consisted of 789 people who met eligibility requirements and completed the online informed consent form.

However, data from over half of these respondents were not included in the final sample. Some respondents were dropped from the final sample because they did not provide data for at least two friends. In most cases, though, respondents were dropped from the dataset due to evidence of inattentive or inauthentic responses. Data were carefully screened for such concerns using a variety of recommended methods identified in best practice documents (Maniaci & Rogge, 2014). Some of the methods relied on ad hoc indices created by identifying unlikely patterns of responses. One such index was created by examining three pairs of oppositely phrased items from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (e.g., “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself”; “At times, I think I am no good at all”). Responses to each pair were considered to be inconsistent if they were identical and one of the extreme ends of the rating scale (e.g., if they were both 1 = *strongly disagree*). Another index was created by examining discrepancies in items regarding disclosure to a specific friend, specifically (a) an item asking whether the person had “explicitly told” their friend that they identified as bisexual, and (b) responses on the rating scale used for the Outness Inventory (described below), which assesses disclosure on a continuum. For a given friend, responses were considered discrepant if they indicated having disclosed their identity on one measure but not the other. Finally, an index was created based on responses to four friendship quality items, where one item was drawn from each of the four relationship quality measures. Responses to each item were compared across all friends and were considered identical if they were the same across all eight friends. Participants were retained in the final sample if they (a) correctly responded to at least one of the directed response validity items, (b) completed data for at least two friends, (c) had no duplicate IP addresses or email addresses in the dataset, (d) listed no more than two friend names that are typically male, (e) completed the survey in a time period that exceeded the 5% trimmed mean completion time for all 789

respondents, (f) did not respond identically to all four relationship items across all eight friends, (g) did not have inconsistent responses on all three pairs of oppositely phrased self-esteem items, (h) did not have discrepancies in reports of bisexuality disclosure to more than four friends, and (j) did not list friends' full names, including middle initials (which was counter to instructions and found to be correlated with indices of problematic responses).

Participants were recruited by sending announcements to leaders of LGBTQ community/student organizations and online groups, including those directed at LGBTQ Asian communities, as well as managers of listservs and closed online groups that serve LGBTQ individuals regardless of race. Announcements highlighted the study focus on bisexual women's friendships and noted that participants could receive a \$10 Amazon gift card for fully completing the 20-30 minute survey through the Qualtrics platform. Requirements of the study were described, including being over 18 years old and identifying as bisexual and female. Eligibility requirements were not included in the email and forum announcements, as to maintain checks for fraudulent responses based on demographic information. Announcements also requested that the call for participants be shared with others who might be interested in the study but who might not otherwise learn about the study.

Interested individuals could immediately reach the survey link through the online announcements. Respondents completed a demographic questionnaire to determine eligibility. Participants who did not meet the eligibility requirements were automatically taken to the end of the survey, where they were informed of their lack of eligibility and thanked for their interest in participating. If eligible, participants were invited to complete an online informed consent process and measures related to themselves and their friendships with 8 different women. After completing the survey, participants were given instructions for requesting compensation for

attentive completion of the survey.

### **Measures**

Measures are listed below in the order they appeared in the online survey. As described below, I used abbreviated versions of many of the measures to reduce survey completion time. I also used a 5-point rating scale for most measures to increase consistency and improve readability for users completing the survey via smartphone. Scales with multiple items were all scored by averaging items (after reverse scoring as needed), such that higher scores reflected higher levels of the construct.

### ***Demographic Questions***

The eligibility portion of the survey included questions assessing age, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, residence in the U.S., gender, and education. The demographic questions were followed by the informed consent information and the main survey measures.

### ***Individual Well-being Measures***

**Self-Esteem.** An abbreviated 8-item version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was used to assess perceptions of overall self-worth (e.g., “I am able to do things as well as most people”). Items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *Strongly agree*, 3 = *Neither agree nor disagree*, 5 = *Strongly disagree*). In the present study, two items from the original scale were removed for survey brevity (“I certainly feel useless at times.” and “I take a positive attitude toward myself.”). The coefficient alpha for the scale in the original development study, which was conducted among high school students, was .92, suggesting strong internal consistency. In a sample consisting of lesbian and bisexual women (Szymanski & Kashubeck-West, 2008), a coefficient alpha of .92 was found again. In the present study, the coefficient alpha was .67.

***Self-Authenticity.*** The Authenticity Scale (Wood et al., 2008) was used to determine characteristics of participants' authentic living. This self-report measure consists of 12 total items, with the Authentic Living subscale comprising of 4 items (e.g., "I always stand by what I believe in."). The present study consisted of all four items Authentic Living on a 5-point scale (1 = Does not describe me at all, 5 = Describes me completely). Scores were averaged, with high scores determining high levels of self-authenticity. While, Cronbach's alpha for the Authentic Living subscale .69 in the development study, the present study indicated an alpha of .28. Such low reliability for self-authenticity within the present study indicates a possible inability to yield valid results, and this variable was therefore, omitted from further analyses.

***Satisfaction with Life.*** The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) consists of 5 items assessing global satisfaction with one's life circumstances (e.g., "The conditions of my life are excellent"). The present study consisted of all 5 items on a 5-point scale (1 = *Strongly agree*, 3 = *Neither agree nor disagree*, 5 = *Strongly disagree*). Sample items include "The conditions of my life are excellent." and "I am satisfied with my life." Cronbach's alpha was .87 in the development study and .71 in the present study.

***Perceived Social Support.*** The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988) consists of 12 items and is scored for three subscales: family, friends, and significant others. In the present study, the four items focused on friendships were displayed (e.g., "I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows") and rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 3 = *Neutral*, 5 = *Strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha for the Friends subscale was .85 in the development study and .68 in the present study.

### ***Friend Level Measures***

Participants were asked to report eight female friends by specifying the first name and last initial of each friend. For each friend, the participant responded to various questions about their friends' demographic traits and the nature of their relationship.

***Disclosure to Friend.*** The rating scale from the Outness Inventory (Mohr & Fassinger, 2003) was used to assess level of disclosure to specific friends. The Outness Inventory is an 11-item scale designed to measure the degree to which a sexual minority individual is out and how often their sexual orientation status is openly discussed. In the original scale, each item consists of an individual or a group to whom the participant must determine their level of outness (e.g., "my new straight friends" and "my old heterosexual friends"). Outness to each individual or group is rated on a fully anchored 7-point scale (e.g., 1 = *person definitely does NOT know about your sexual orientation status*, 4 = *person probably knows about your sexual orientation status, but it is RARELY talked about*, 7 = *person definitely knows about your sexual orientation status, and it is OPENLY talked about*). In order to best match the goals of the present study, respondents were instead prompted with, "Does [*name of friend*] know that you identify as bisexual? Thus, disclosure to each friend was assessed by a single item.

***Validation.*** The Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (Reis & Carmichael, 2006) is a self-report measure that was developed to assess the degree to which an individual believes their romantic partner is responsive to them. However, the developers created the items to be general enough to be used for a multitude of interpersonal relationships, including friendships. The 18-item development scale consists of two aspects of responsiveness, understanding and validation, as well as two general items related to responsiveness. In the present study, five items related to validation were selected to best assess how their female friends validate them (e.g., The participant's friend usually... "esteems me, shortcomings and all", "values and respects the

whole package that is the 'real' me", and "seems interested in what I am thinking and feeling"). Items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *Not at all true*, 3 = *Moderately true*, 5 = *Completely true*). Cronbach's alpha for the full validation scale was .94; alpha for the reduced scale used in the present study was .80.

**Trust.** The Dyadic Trust Scale (Larzelere & Huston, 1980) is an 8-item measure used to determine levels of trust among dyads. The scale assesses the degree to which respondents believe that they can trust their partners in various capacities (e.g., "I feel that I can trust my partner completely.") For the present study, a reduced 4-item version of the measure was created by selecting the four items with the highest factor loadings in the original scale development study. Items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *Very strongly disagree*, 5 = *Very strongly agree*). Items that explicitly referred to the respondent's partner were adjusted to include the exact name of the respondent's friend. Cronbach's alpha was .93 in the original scale development study; alpha for the reduced scale used in the present study was .74.

**Intimacy and Overall Satisfaction.** The McGill Friendship Questionnaire (Mendelson & Aboud, 2014) was developed to assess aspects of same-sex platonic relationships, including subscales assessing overall satisfaction with a friendship and six specific functions within the friendship (stimulating companionship, help, intimacy, reliable alliance, self-validation, and emotional security). For the present study, two subscales were used: the Satisfaction subscale and the Intimacy subscale. Of the seven Satisfaction subscale items, two were used in the present study (e.g., "I am satisfied with my friendship.") and were rated on a 5-item scale (1 = *Very Much Disagree*, 5 = *Very Much Agree*). Cronbach's alpha in the scale development study was .96; alpha for the reduced version used in the present study was .62. Of the eight Intimacy subscale items, four were used in the present study (e.g., "My friend is someone I can tell private



things to”) and were rated on a fully anchored 5-point scale (1 = *Never*, 5 = *Always*). Cronbach’s alpha in the scale development study was .90; alpha for the reduced version used in the present study was .73.

### **Analytic Plan**

Statistical analysis for this study was complicated by the multilevel structure of the data, wherein data on multiple friendships were nested within participants. Multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM) was used to partition friendship-level predictors and outcomes into within-person and between-person components. MSEM has been shown to offer higher power to detect effects than more traditional multilevel regression models (Lüdtke et al., 2008; Preacher et al., 2011). Nonnormality and missing data were handled using robust full information maximum likelihood estimation. Analyses were completed using Mplus software (Version 8.0; Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017).

## **Results**

### **Preliminary Analyses**

Person-level descriptive statistics and correlations among primary study variables are presented in Table 1. Means for the variables related to the race/ethnicity and sexual orientation of friends indicated that, on average, 53.09% of the friends were the same race/ethnicity as the participant and 23.80% of the friends were viewed as possibly being the same sexual orientation (i.e., bisexual). Also, on average, participants believed that 56.21% of the friends they listed were heterosexual and 23.65% were LGQ (lesbian, gay, queer).

The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was calculated for the continuous friendship level variables. The ICC represents the proportion of variance in scores due to consistency within persons; conversely, (1 - ICC) represents the proportion of variance in scores due to differences

across friendships within persons, plus error. The ICC was .19 for disclosure, suggesting that approximately 19% of the variance in disclosure ratings was due to differences between participants in overall disclosure level. The remaining 81% of the variance in disclosure reflected differences across participants' friendships (and error), which suggested substantial differences in participants' disclosure level from friend to friend. ICCs for the relationship quality variables ranged from .33 (Satisfaction) to .44 (Validation), indicating both individual differences in friendship quality and within-person differences from friend to friend.

### **Main Analyses: Disclosure Predicted by Race/Ethnicity and Sexual Orientation**

I first ran a MSEM model in which disclosure to friend was predicted by own race/ethnicity, similarity of friend race/ethnicity, and friend sexual orientation (see Table 2 findings). The model included the fixed effects of these predictors on disclosure, and the within-person slopes for friend race/ethnicity and friend sexual orientation (for heterosexual and LGQ orientations) were permitted to vary randomly across participants. Results at the within-person level indicated that participants had higher levels of disclosure with friends who were of the same race/ethnicity and with friends who were thought to be bisexual. No other within-person effects were statistically significant. None of the predictors at between-person level was statistically significant.

I next added participant race/ethnicity as a predictor of the random within-person slopes. This can be thought of as adding three cross-level interactions to the model, where participant race/ethnicity moderates the relationship between friend characteristics (race/ethnicity, sexual orientation) and disclosure to friend. This addition allowed us to determine whether links between friend characteristics and disclosure differed for Asian and White participants. All three cross-level interactions were statistically significant at the .05 level (see Table 2). To interpret

the interactions, I calculated simple within-person slopes separately for Asian and White participants. For the interaction between own race/ethnicity and similarity of the friend's race/ethnicity, simple slopes analysis suggested that Asian women's disclosure level was higher with same-race/ethnicity friends ( $B = 0.27, SE = 0.11, p = .011$ ) but White women's disclosure level was unrelated to similarity of the friend's race/ethnicity ( $B = -0.30, SE = 0.26, p = .243$ ). For the interaction between own race/ethnicity and whether the friend was viewed as heterosexual, neither of the simple slopes was statistically significant at the .05 level.

However, Asian women's disclosure level was marginally higher with heterosexual friends ( $B = 0.29, SE = 0.16, p = .077$ ) but White women's disclosure level was unrelated to whether the friend was heterosexual ( $B = -0.13, SE = 0.18, p = .455$ ). Finally, for the interaction between own race/ethnicity and whether the friend was viewed as LGQ, Asian women's disclosure was unrelated to whether the friend was LGQ ( $B = -0.07, SE = 0.15, p = .642$ ) but White women's disclosure level was lower among friends viewed as LGQ ( $B = -0.56, SE = 0.21, p = .007$ ).

### **Main Analyses: Friendship Quality and Well-Being Predicted by Disclosure**

I began the analyses by testing a measurement model in which all four friendship quality variables loaded onto a single latent variable. This was done because (a) the variables were highly interrelated (see Table 1), (b) use of a latent variable model could increase statistical power by reducing measurement error, and (c) focus on a single latent variable rather than four measured variables would reduce the number of analyses and thus the familywise Type I error rate. I ran a multilevel confirmatory factor analysis in which all four friendship quality variables loaded onto a single latent variable at both levels of analysis. Model fit was excellent:  $\chi^2(5) =$

14.737,  $p = .012$ ; CFI = .996; RMSEA = .027; SRMR(within) = 0.010; SRMR(between) = 0.010.

Based on the strong model fit, I used this latent friendship quality variable in all analyses.

I next ran a MSEM model in which friendship quality and the three individual well-being variables were predicted by disclosure to friend. The model included the fixed effects of these disclosure on friendship quality at both levels of analysis and individual well-being at the between-person level of analysis (because well-being variables were measured at the level of the individual participant). All of the outcome variables were allowed to correlate with one another. The within-person slope for disclosure was permitted to vary randomly across participants.

Disclosure was positively related to relationship quality at both levels of analysis (see Table 3). Thus, bisexual women reported the best friendship quality for the female friendships in which they had the highest levels of disclosure, and the women who reported the highest average levels of friendship quality across all friends had generally disclosed their bisexuality to a higher degree than others. All indices of individual well-being, except authenticity, were positively related to disclosure level, as predicted: self-esteem ( $B = 0.18$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p = .001$ ), authenticity ( $B = 0.02$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p = .793$ ), life satisfaction ( $B = 0.35$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $p = .001$ ), and social support ( $B = 0.39$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Next, I added participant race/ethnicity as a predictor of the random within-person slopes. The test of this cross-level interaction was not statistically significant (see Table 3), which supported the possibility that the link between sexual orientation disclosure and friendship quality would not differ for Asian and White participants.

### **Exploratory Analyses: Friendship Quality Predicted by Race/Ethnicity and Sexual Orientation**

Finally, though not related to the hypotheses, I tested a model in which friendship quality was predicted by own race/ethnicity, similarity of friend race/ethnicity, and friend sexual

orientation (see Table 2). The within-person results indicated that bisexual women viewed their friendship quality as highest with friends who were the same race/ethnicity and who were thought to be bisexual. Friend status as heterosexual or LGQ was unrelated to friendship quality. The between-person results indicated that women's average rating of friendship quality across all friends was associated with being White and, relative to other participants, naming more friends who were thought to be bisexual or heterosexual, and naming fewer friends who were the same race/ethnicity. When participant race/ethnicity was added to the model as a predictor of the within-person slopes for friend race/ethnicity and sexual orientation, no cross-level interactions emerged. Thus, the possibility that the link between friend characteristics and friendship quality differed for Asian and White women was not supported.

### **Discussion**

As hypothesized, results indicated that correlations between disclosure and the racial-ethnic identity of the respondent were stronger for Asian bisexual women than for White bisexual women. However, counter to this hypothesis, the association between disclosure and racial/ethnic similarity of the friend was positive rather than negative. Possible explanations for this phenomenon may include a desire to find a supportive community, as community activity has been found to strongly correlate with sexual orientation and disclosure among lesbian and bisexual women of color (Morris & Rothblum, 1999). Results for the second predictor of disclosure, similarity in sexual orientation identity between the respondent and their friends, suggest that when the respondent perceives their friend to be bisexual, they are more likely to have disclosed their bisexuality as compared to friends who they perceive as monosexual, as indicated in the study hypotheses.

Hypotheses regarding links between disclosure and both friendship quality and individual well-being were supported. Results indicate that bisexual women experience significantly more positive feelings towards friends to whom they have disclosed their bisexuality when compared to friends to whom they have not yet disclosed. While this is seen among individual bisexual women's friends, results also suggest that overall, bisexual women who disclose their bisexuality to their female friends experience stronger relationship quality as compared to bisexual women who have not. Individuals who have disclosed more to various friends report higher levels of self-esteem, life satisfaction, and perceived social support compared to those who have not disclosed as often.

The present findings indicate that encouraging disclosure towards one's female friends can actually serve to deepen the friendship and be personally healing to one's self-esteem and life satisfaction. Such findings could inform practitioners working with bisexual women and LGBTQ scholars by providing a more nuanced picture under what circumstances friendship and disclosure are related for bisexual individuals. Further research would need to occur to explain the complexities of these intersectional experiences.

This study failed to take into account how central one's sexual identity label of bisexual is to their overall identity. Bisexual individuals have been found to consider their sexual minority identity as less central to their overall identity, as mediated by a lower level of perceived accuracy towards their sexual identity status (Dyar et al., 2015). As a result, the act of disclosure may have a lower impact on the individual's positive outcomes as compared to individuals of monosexual minority identities. Similarly, future studies should better identify how central one's adherence to Asian values is to the identity of Asian participants.

Additionally, disclosure in the present study focused on the respondent's level of outness as bisexual rather than outness generally as a sexual minority person. Different results may be present in studies that focus on outness more generally as a sexual-minority individual as compared to a specifically bisexual individual. Because the one-item disclosure measure that was used in the present study did not account for this, the measure's reliability may be questionable. The present study also could not identify a significant correlation between disclosure and self-authenticity due to a low reliability score ( $\alpha=.28$ ). While this may indicate that there may be other factors impacting one's self-perception, this is contrary to previous research, which indicates that authenticity may be a mediator between disclosure of sexual identity and well-being among bisexual individuals (Brownfield, 2019). Future studies may be necessary to identify potential links for intersectional minority individuals between disclosure and self-authenticity.

The present study being cross-sectional and correlational prevents the ability to determine causality from the results. When considering the outcomes of well-being, previous research has found that feelings of well-being have acted as a result of disclosure, but have also preceded outness (Barringer et al., 2017). With such findings, it is possible that feelings of personal and interpersonal well-being may have acted as a catalyst of sexual identity disclosure. In order to determine a stronger sense of directionality, experimental and longitudinal studies focused on disclosure, well-being, and cultural experiences among bisexual individuals will need to take place.

The present study consisted of a sample of Asian and White-identifying bisexual women, indicating that the study is not generalizable to all sexual minority individuals. Further studies should take into account the specific cultural experiences of various groups of color when conducting similar analyses. Various characteristics of friendship may also need to be further

addressed in future studies. The present study did not identify how frequently one may disclose their sexual identity to a female friend based on the respondent's age, but data suggest that as women age, they may be more likely to engage in self-disclosure of information (Adams et al., 2000). For this reason, future studies may benefit from identifying age differences, as women rely on their friendships differently as they age. Other characteristics of a bisexual woman's friend, such as their political affiliation, religious affiliation, adherence to traditional values, or geographic location of upbringing may impact the level to which the bisexual individual is out to their friend as well as the impact that such disclosure may have on the relationship.

In order to strengthen this field of literature, future studies might also investigate what motivates disclosure among participants who have disclosed their sexual identity to friends. In these instances, possible motivation factors may include avoidant behaviors such as hostility avoidance or punishment avoidance, or a desire to strengthen benefits, such as relationship building.



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Table 1

*Person-level Descriptive Statistics for the Main Variables*

Variable	<i>M</i>	Range	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Asian	0.81	[0.00, 1.00]	.40	1.00											
2. Friend Same Race	0.53	[0.00, 1.00]	.28	-.53	1.00										
3. Friend Bisexual	0.24	[0.00, 1.00]	.22	-.35	.09	1.00									
4. Friend Heterosexual	0.56	[0.00, 1.00]	.24	.20	.07	-.54	1.00								
5. Friend LGQ	0.24	[0.00, 1.00]	.20	.20	-.26	-.14	-.49	1.00							
6. Friend Validation	3.53	[2.08, 5.00]	.59	-.17	-.11	.30	-.06	-.10	1.00						
7. Friend Intimacy	3.48	[1.91, 5.00]	.54	-.24	-.04	.35	-.14	-.08	.85	1.00					
8. Friend Trust	3.56	[2.31, 5.00]	.55	-.19	-.09	.32	-.08	-.09	.87	.89	1.00				
9. Friend Satisfaction	3.74	[1.75, 5.00]	.63	-.21	-.09	.35	-.07	-.10	.74	.74	.81	1.00			
10. Self-Esteem	3.26	[1.63, 5.00]	.68	-.08	-.12	.00	.15	-.09	.23	.17	.22	.25	1.00		
11. Life Satisfaction	4.73	[1.00, 7.00]	1.30	-.28	-.01	.28	-.08	-.03	.37	.41	.40	.45	.17	1.00	
12. Social Support	4.85	[2.75, 6.00]	.78	-.21	-.06	.28	-.05	-.16	.53	.51	.55	.55	.40	.35	1.00
13. Disclosure to Friend	4.39	[1.00, 7.00]	1.09	-.17	.03	.27	-.18	-.04	.35	.39	.33	.28	.19	.19	.36

*Note.* LGQ = lesbian, gay, or queer.



Table 2

*Fixed Effects and Variance Components for Multilevel Models Predicting Disclosure and Friendship Quality from Race-Ethnicity and Sexual Orientation*

Predictors	Disclosure		Friendship Quality	
	No interaction	Interaction	No interaction	Interaction
Level 1 (within person)				
Friend same race	0.20 (0.10)*	-0.30 (0.26)	0.16 (0.03)***	0.15 (0.03)***
Friend bisexual	0.76 (0.14)***	0.73 (0.14)***	0.13 (0.05)**	0.13 (0.05)**
Friend heterosexual	0.19 (0.14)	-0.13 (0.18)	-0.05 (0.05)	-0.05 (0.05)
Friend LGQ	-0.19 (0.14)	-0.56 (0.21)**	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.05)
Level 2 (between person)				
Intercept	5.25 (1.07)***	5.88 (1.07)***	--	--
Asian	-0.41 (0.28)	-1.18 (0.35)**	-0.58 (0.13)***	-0.68 (0.14)***
Friend same race	-0.69 (0.62)	-1.20 (0.65)	-1.27 (0.29)***	-1.27 (0.30)***
Friend bisexual	1.01 (0.73)	1.01 (0.74)	1.76 (0.29)***	1.76 (0.29)***

Friend heterosexual	0.07 (0.79)	-0.22 (0.79)	1.25 (0.33)***	1.27 (0.33)***
Friend LGQ	-1.40 (1.22)	-1.75 (1.23)	0.13 (0.47)	0.13 (0.47)
Cross-level interactions				
Asian x Friend same race		0.57 (0.28)*		0.07 (0.09)
Asian x Friend heterosexual		0.42 (0.21)*		0.13 (0.08)
Asian x Friend LGQ		0.49 (0.21)*		0.08 (0.07)
Variance Components				
Level 1				
Residual	2.83 (0.13)***	0.51 (0.03)***	0.20 (0.02)***	0.20 (0.02)***
Level 2				
Intercept	1.06 (0.22)***	0.98 (0.20)***	0.13 (0.03)***	0.13 (0.03)***
Friend same race slopes	0.82 (0.25)**	0.76 (0.24)**	0.06 (0.02)*	0.06 (0.02)*
Friend heterosexual slopes	0.48 (0.31)	0.41 (0.30)	0.09 (0.03)**	0.09 (0.03)**
Friend LGQ slopes	0.43 (0.25)	0.36 (0.23)	0.07 (0.03)*	0.07 (0.03)*

*Note.* Standard errors are in parentheses. LGQ = lesbian, gay, or queer.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 3

*Fixed Effects and Random Effect Variances for Multilevel Models**Predicting Friendship Quality from Disclosure*

Predictors	No interaction	Interaction
Level 1 (within person)		
Disclosure	0.12 (0.01)***	0.12 (0.01)***
Level 2 (between person)		
Disclosure	0.19 (0.05)***	0.20 (0.05)***
Asian		-0.05 (0.06)
Cross-level interactions		
Asian x Disclosure		-0.02 (0.02)
Level 1		
Residual	0.13 (0.01)***	0.13 (0.01)***
Level 2		
Intercept	0.21 (0.02)***	0.21 (0.02)***
Disclosure slopes	0.02 (0.00)***	0.02 (0.00)***

*Note.* Standard errors are in parentheses. LGQ = lesbian, gay, or queer.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .