

**Straddling (In)Visibility:
Representations of Bisexual Women
in Twenty-First Century Popular Culture**

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Abstract

Throughout the first decade of the 2000s, LGBTQ+ visibility has steadily increased in North American popular culture, allowing for not only more LGBTQ+ characters/figures to surface, but also establishing more diverse and nuanced representations and storylines. Bisexuality, while being part of the increasingly popular phrase of inclusivity (LGBTQ+), however, is one sexuality that not only continues to be overlooked within popular culture but that also continues to be represented in limited ways. In this doctoral thesis I examine how bisexual women are represented within mainstream popular culture, in particular on American television, focusing on two, popular programs (*The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series). These texts have been chosen for popularity and visibility in mainstream media and culture, as well as for how bisexual women are unprecedentedly made central to many of the storylines (*The L Word*) and the series as a whole (*Shot At Love*). This analysis provides not only a detailed historical account of bisexual visibility but also discusses bisexuality thematically, highlighting commonalities across bisexual representations as well as shared themes between and with other identities. By examining key examples of bisexuality in popular culture from the first decade of the twenty-first century, my research investigates how representations of bisexuality are often portrayed in conversation with hegemonic understandings of gender and sexuality, specifically highlighting the mainstream "gay rights" movement's narrative of "normality" and "just like you" politics. Finally, it is in recognizing how representations of bisexuality are framed by specific reoccurring themes/tropes, as well as how these themes/tropes work together within larger social, cultural, and political climates, that it becomes possible to challenge existing gender and sexuality norms and ideals and create a more nuanced and complex understanding of bisexuality.

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Introduction: Bisexuality on Screen

Throughout the first decade of the 2000s, LGBTQ+¹ visibility has steadily increased in popular culture, allowing for not only more LGBTQ+ characters/figures to surface, but also establishing more diverse and nuanced representations and storylines that reflect changes in social, cultural, and political perceptions of non-heterosexualities. In spite of this trend towards increased LGBTQ+ visibility in popular culture and growing acceptance of sexual diversity more broadly, the market is still primarily focused on representing sexualities that continue to subscribe to monosexual², heteronormative values and binary gender ideals (*Grey's Anatomy*; *Modern Family*; *Brothers & Sisters*; *Desperate Housewives*). Bisexuality, while being part of the increasingly popular phrase of inclusivity (LGBTQ+), is one such sexuality that not only continues to be overlooked within popular culture but that also continues to be represented in limited ways, often reproducing (mis)understandings of bisexuality as being a temporary and inauthentic sexuality.

In this doctoral thesis I examine how bisexual women are represented within mainstream popular culture, and in particular, how they are represented on American television. More specifically, I highlight themes/tropes that appear again and again in conversation with bisexuality. As many of these themes perpetuate specific envisionings of bisexuality, where bisexuality is always-already understood as deviant, excessive, temporary, and unstable (to name a few examples), it would be easy to read these representations as "bad" or completely

¹ I use "LGBTQ+" to refer to non-normative sexuality and gender identities. This is a shortened variation of longer acronyms referring to non-normative sexuality and gender communities (also commonly understood as "queer communities"), where "LGBTQ+" = "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer", and where the "+" represents the multitude of other possible gender and sexuality identities under the queer umbrella.

² I use term "monosexual" to refer to attractions to members of one sex and/or gender (e.g.: heterosexuality, homosexuality), which is often understood in relation to attraction to members of more than one sex and/or gender (e.g.: bisexuality, pansexuality). "Monosexist" is also used throughout to refer to the social, cultural, and political normalization of monosexuality, often at the cost of delegitimizing non-monosexualities, and the assumption that monosexuality is the standard norm of attraction.

inaccurate. However, doing so would mean that there are "good"/more accurate ways to represent and/or be bisexual, which in effect negates any bisexuals who may themselves share qualities with their bisexual on-screen counterparts. Instead, in addition to providing important discourse analysis of representations of bisexual women in popular culture, I focus on the specific themes as well as the specific social, cultural, and political contexts in which these representations appear, as opposed to rendering individual representations as being "good" or "bad".

By examining key examples of bisexuality in popular culture from the first decade of the twenty-first century my research will investigate the ways in which representations of bisexuality are often portrayed in conversation with hegemonic understandings of gender and sexuality, as well as current social, cultural, and political happenings. Specifically, my examination of bisexual representations is framed by the mainstream gay rights movement that gained momentum in the United States during the 2000s, most notably through movements to achieve same-sex marriage and repeal the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. While I discuss both of these specific events at length in my concluding chapter, the cultural context from which these movements arise frames my overall analysis of bisexual visibility in popular culture. In particular, the mainstream gay rights movement is based on achieving heteronormative rights and values (e.g.: marriage) through the "just like you" homonormative argument, which in effect distances normative presenting/subscribing LGBTQ+ communities (most often white, middle-to-upper class, neoliberal-subscribing gay and lesbians) from their queerness.

My use of homonormativity throughout is indebted to the works of Lisa Duggan (2003) and Jasbir K. Puar (2007). Homonormativity "is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising

the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan 50). It is the uncritical subscription to heteronormative ideals, institutions, and politics that positions these ideals, institutions, and politics as not only necessary to the historical progress of LGBTQ+ communities but to the attainment of "basic human rights", dignity, and normativity. Further, these ideals and institutions are intricately embedded within histories of racist, sexist, and classist agendas. As such, homonormative nationalism or, "homonationalism", is produced, whereby the newly "normative" homosexual subjects are connected "both legally and representationally, to the national and transnational political agendas of U.S. imperialism" (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 9). Through the admittance of homonormative subjects, a sense of nationalism is encouraged that is predicated on the maintenance and perpetuation of values steeped within neoliberal, imperialist, racist, sexist, and homophobic histories, rhetoric, and ideologies. Here, homonationalism is used to mobilize already-established ideals into "new" avenues, whereby the U.S. continues to perpetuate imperialist measures under the guise of "equality" and "progressiveness". Within this political, social, and cultural climate normative-subscribing gay and lesbian citizens (homonormative) participate in nationalist projects (homonationalism) through the subscription to heteronormative institutions and ideals, simultaneously distancing themselves from "non-normative" queered identities and reproducing race, gender, and class norms. While this is done through a variety of ways, the perpetuation of hetero- and homonormative ideals in popular culture is especially important to this project. As such, popular culture becomes a relevant site to illustrate and perpetuate the "normality" of gayness, both through increased and nuanced representations of gay and lesbians, as well as through

representing queer-er sexualities in ways that portray them as being other and separate from homonormativity.

My focus on bisexuality and the ways in which its presence in popular culture works to maintain dominant understandings of hetero- and homonormativity does not presume that bisexuality is the *only* LGBTQ+ identity that is used as a tool for maintaining social standards of sexual and gender "normality" in the media. Trans communities in particular, as well as other sexuality and gender-minority groups, are often represented as caricatures, where general social anxieties surrounding gender and sexuality become ascribed to these communities, that is, when trans characters are represented at all. While much work needs to be done on trans, gender-fluid, and other sexual and gender minority representations in the media, my project focuses on the reoccurring ways in which bisexuality and/or bisexual-like behaviour becomes represented in popular media through content produced by and for both heterosexual and LGBTQ+ communities.

My research seeks to address the lack of sustained considerations of bisexuality within queer and feminist studies. Specifically, as Stacey Young highlights,

When bisexuality is mentioned at all in writings about queerness that aren't specifically about bisexuality, it is often in the form of being tacked on to one or more of the innumerable iterations of 'lesbian and gay' one finds in a given book or article —and then not mentioned again. Very rarely is it actually discussed, explored, or articulated as a queer identity alongside 'lesbian' and 'gay'. (Young 52)

Illustrating this, Young draws our attention to one of the most influential works in queer theory —Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*. Critiquing Sedgwick's silence on the

topic of bisexuality (discussion of bisexuality begins and ends within the last three pages of this work), Young highlights the shortcomings in critiques of hetero-and-homosexual representations that erase the possibility of a theory of bisexuality (Young 66). These examples, in addition to the others mentioned in my historical content section, are just a few of the critiques that have been made by those theorizing bisexuality (Garber; Bi Academic Intervention; Angelides; Hemmings, to name but a few). If there is not even a willingness to acknowledge any potential that bisexuality and/or bisexual theory may serve in the evaluation of social constructedness, it would appear that other domains of bisexual representation would be similarly neglected (e.g.: popular culture, which is often overlooked in more traditional areas of academia).

A Note on Language

Lisa Diamond's 2008 *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire* highlights the importance of understanding women's sexuality as based within fluidity, change, and growth that cannot be quantifiable through binary sexual identifications. But what exactly does this fluidity mean? Terms like "lesbian" and "bisexual" are problematic in that they connote varying levels of stability, which is counter to Diamond's theory on fluidity (Diamond 13). For Diamond, neither proves to be truly useful in discussing the intrinsic variability of women's sexual desire. How do such identifiers allow for a more nuanced discussion of sexuality if their historical situatedness has been constructed in such a way that creates very linear imaginings of ways of being?

While Diamond sees discrepancies in the use of "bisexuality" as encompassing all fluid sexualities, she also notes that it is imperative for academics to recognize bisexuality's potential and the ways in which fluidity does exist within it. The longstanding stereotypes of bisexuality in gay and lesbian communities as well as within heteronormative institutions (such as the

media) of being incapable of commitment, closeted gays/lesbians, repressed, indecisive, actually "straight", and overall, unstable, has permeated even the theoretical realm.

Between 1975 and 1985, for example, only 3 percent of the journal articles on same-sex sexuality included discussions of bisexuality in the title, abstract, or subject headings. Between 1985 and 1995, this figure increased to 16 percent, reflecting the growing acknowledgment of bisexuality as a legitimate sexual identity. In the past ten years, however, that percentage has climbed only 3 more points, demonstrating that bisexuality continues to be systematically understudied. (Diamond 27)

Where does this dismissal leave those who actively identify as bisexual, especially, as Diamond notes, the younger generations who not only see bisexuality as a useful identity descriptor, but who also see it as "an overarching philosophy promoting open, flexible understandings of sexuality instead of rigid homosexual and heterosexual categories" (Diamond 95)? Once again, even though Diamond is careful to distinguish between "sexual fluidity"/"non-exclusivity" and "bisexuality", she maintains, and I agree, that it is crucial for the evolving fields of feminist and queer theory to strive towards gaining a more thorough understanding of bisexuality.

With respect to my thesis, bisexuality continues to be negated as an "authentic" sexuality both within queer theory and wider understandings of sexuality more generally, especially via popular culture representations. On the one hand, this can be productive with respect to a postmodern identity-disrupting/playing politics as bisexuality can be read as inherently gender/sexuality-bending due to the fact that its definition is never singular but continuously evolving. Bisexuality, in this regard, makes space for understanding gender, sexuality, and attraction outside of binary, hegemonic understandings. However, as with most positionalities,

bisexuality continues to be understood and subsumed within mainstream, hegemonic, hetero- and-homonormative understandings. As such (and despite my preferred definition of bisexuality³), I read and analyze bisexuality throughout this dissertation using a mainstream, dominant understanding of bisexuality as being attraction to both men and women. This is not only necessary to acknowledge, but it becomes crucial in the addressing of larger political, social, and cultural influences that *do* prioritize linear understandings of "authentic" identities over others.

In this respect, the perpetuation of bisexuality as lacking authenticity and stability becomes the fuel to perpetuate systemic inequalities against both bisexual-identified and sexually fluid and marginal individuals more generally. To call for a complete undoing of hegemonic understandings of sexuality is both not realistic within the current social and political frameworks nor is it feasible for this project. However, through detailing the ways in which mainstream understandings of bisexuality are both produced and perpetuated by mass media (a hegemonic educational tool if there ever was one), one can begin to make connections between these representations and understandings with the larger social, cultural, and political movements. These representations do not exist in a vacuum, nor do they exist without purpose – these representations have been and continue to be especially useful in the mainstream lesbian and gay "progress" narratives of the past few decades, narratives that hinge tightly upon identity politics and the perpetuation and understanding of identities in binary ways.

³ My preferred definition of bisexuality aligns closely with that of Robyn Ochs' (bisexual activist and educator) which states, "I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge that I have in myself the potential to be attracted – romantically and/or sexually – to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree" ("Bisexual"), as well as the definition of "same and different", which sees bisexuality as being "attraction to people of genders similar to and different from one's own" (Eisner 25). As bisexuality is popularly imagined in binary ways (attraction to men and women, and most often cis-men and cis-women), these definitions make space for countering arguments that bisexuality is a binary sexuality. See: Eisner (2013) and Serano (2013) for more detailed and critical discussions of these assumptions that highlight how the dismissal of bisexuality as being "binary" is not only biphobic but also cissexist and monosexist in itself.

Bisexual Women, Bisexual Men

This dissertation focuses on representations of bisexual women in U.S. popular culture. My decision to focus on bisexual women exclusively is to highlight the specific ways in which bisexuality is popularly imagined, often reflecting and further perpetuating very gendered imaginings of women's sexuality and especially that of the sexually "deviant" woman. My focus on bisexual women is also influenced by the severe lack of representations of bisexual men in popular culture, especially on television. This difference between bisexual women and men on television is made statistically visible through GLAAD's (known formerly as the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) "Where We Are On TV" reports. As an LGBTQ+ organization in the U.S. that focuses on monitoring LGBTQ+ media representations, GLAAD has released yearly reports (since 2005) analyzing both the quantity and diversity of LGBTQ+ representations on television in each broadcasting year based on the "expected presence" of LGBTQ+ characters in scripted shows that have or will air during a given season (Avruch et al. 3). In the 2010-2011 findings (the earliest and most comprehensive report I was able to track down) of all the LGBTQ+ reoccurring characters on broadcast networks, there was a total of 7 bisexual characters (where bi men and women were not differentiated from each other) compared to 25 gay, 5 lesbian, and 0 trans characters (Avruch et al. 16). During the same sample year, there were 5 bisexual reoccurring characters on cable networks, compared to 33 gay, 14 lesbian, and 1 trans character/s (Avruch et al.). The most recent GLAAD findings (2015-2016 report) differentiates between bisexual women and men, noting that on primetime, broadcast networks there are expected to be 12 bisexual women and 2 bisexual men, compared to 33 gay, 23 lesbian, and 0 trans characters (Botha et al. 7). On cable networks there are expected to be 32 bisexual women and 18 bisexual men, compared to 58 gay, 31 lesbian, 2 trans women, and 1 trans man

character/s (Botha et al. 9). While the increase in bisexual representation is notable, one has to keep in mind the quality of these representations, where bisexuality often replicates themes of instability, sexual excess, deceit, and so on, of which GLAAD itself notes (Botha et al. 26). Further, it is not entirely clear how these findings are tabulated, i.e.: is it based on self-identification or sexual/relationship pairings? As such, characters tabulated as "bisexual" may still fall into the trope of never identifying as such and/or having their sexuality identified only through their relationships to others.

One thing that is evident in these statistical findings is the consistent lack of bisexual men on television. While bisexual men may be represented in similar ways to how bisexual women are represented, there simply aren't equal levels of representations to compare, especially equal levels of main characters with reoccurring storylines. This is not to say that representations of bisexual women are in excess, as representations of bisexual women are also lacking, both in the number of bisexual characters that are available in popular culture, as well as how their bisexuality is made evident. However, as noted in Chapter Two, bisexuality has historically been primarily represented through female characters. During this history, many of these representations have failed to explicitly use the term "bisexual" to identify characters, and instead represent bisexuality, or, bisexual-like behaviour, via sexual fluidity. This is an important element to highlight, especially when trying to understand why there are so few representations of bisexual men in popular culture and especially on television. Within hegemonic, heteronormative understandings of sexuality, men in general are not "allowed" to be sexually fluid, or at least not publically, due to the threat of demasculinization and homophobia that tend to follow such explorations. While women are also at risk of homophobia, female sexual fluidity, openness, and experimentation in popular culture are often more acceptable

because of the appeal to male heterosexual fantasies, where female same-sex desire is allowed to exist as long as it is temporary and in connection with opposite-sex desire. The differences between "acceptable" sexual fluidity, then, could at least in part explain why there are so few representations of bisexual men in popular culture. Moreover, when representations of bisexual men are made available, it is most often in film as opposed to on television. This is perhaps indicative of film's ability (especially contemporary film) to explore more "risky" or "unconventional" storylines, as well as the gendered elements of television as a "domestic" medium (see: Davis and Needham).

As such, nearly all of the academic work that has been done on representations of male bisexuality in the media has primarily focused on film. In addition to many of the works highlighted below for their discussions of bisexual representations in film which look at both male and female representations, there have also been a few works that have focused exclusively on bisexual male representations in film, including Wayne M. Bryant's "Stereotyping Bisexual Men in Film" (2001) and Justin Vicari's *Male Bisexuality in Current Cinema: Images of Growth, Rebellion and Survival* (2011). Despite the current lack of male bisexual representations on television, the available research on filmic representations of bisexual men highlights some important similarities shared by representations of bisexual men *and* women. Two examples of this include the lack of blatant claims of bisexuality and the "threatening" nature of bisexual/sexually fluid characters. In the former example, as Bryant notes, despite the presence of male bisexuality within many films, the commonality amongst nearly all the examples is that "none of the characters actually identify as bisexual" (Bryant, "Stereotyping" 218). As I contend throughout this project, representations of bisexual women also follow similar scripts, where

bisexuality is made visible through subscription to certain themes and/or plots involving triangular relationships between the bisexual, straight, and gay/lesbian characters.

One of the more prominent themes I will be discussing is the representation of bisexuality as "deviant" and/or "threatening". Jonathan David White traces this construction of bisexuality, specifically highlighting the ways in which bisexuality has been represented as threatening in mainstream, popular culture films of the 1980s and 1990s. Titling this period as the "bisexual crimewave", White notes how beginning in the mid-1980s, films tended to portray bisexual men as "nemeses" who threatened public safety in various ways (White 41). This trend continued into the 1990s, but instead of bisexual men occupying the main role of deviance, bisexual women began to be represented as such, perhaps most famously in 1992's *Basic Instinct*. "*Basic Instinct* signalled the appearance of a new tradition in which bi women and lesbians were becoming increasingly susceptible to stereotypical representations that in the earlier period of bi emergence were focused on bisexual men, and that have historically been reserved for gay men" (White 50). This change from gay-men as threatening to bi-men as threatening to bi-women as threatening could be explained (at least in part) by the cultural shifts occurring in the United States during this time period. White does not consider how this change from representing "deviant" sexual-others as men to representing them as women coincides with the growing mainstream gay rights movement, where in order for the more privileged members of the LGBTQ+ community (white, middle-to-upper class, gay men) to be seen as "normal", deviant representations need to be projected on and through other-othered identities.

This brief overview of some of the more common ways in which bisexual men have been represented in popular culture (when made visible at all) highlights thematic similarities between representations of bisexual women and men, in addition to forming a more nuanced historical

trajectory of bisexual visibility *in reaction* to significant social, cultural, and political moments. It would be useful for future research on bisexual representations to examine the differences between representations of bisexual men and women within popular culture, especially noting the differences between filmic and televisual representations, as well as how these representations similarly and/or differently reflect dominant hetero- and homonormative ideals.

Bisexual Texts in Motion

The two main texts I have chosen to analyze throughout this dissertation are the highly popular television programs *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series, which is titled as *A Shot At Love With Tila Tequila* in its first season, *A Shot At Love II With Tila Tequila* in its second season, and *A Double Shot At Love With The Ikki Twins* in its third season. Both of these texts have been chosen for how they appear to break away from the trend of bisexual invisibility in popular culture, especially how bisexual women are made central to many of the storylines (*The L Word*) and the series as a whole (*Shot At Love*). In addition to the centrality of bisexuality in these programs (in varying ways), these series were also chosen for their popularity and visibility within mainstream media. The wide-reaching popularity of these shows — the first season of *A Shot at Love* had an average of 6.2 million viewers, quickly becoming one of MTV's most-watched series (Seaton) — joined together with their sexually explicit and provocative depictions have created a space in which bisexuals, bisexuality, and bisexual theory must be investigated. Further, the importance of analyzing these programs is all the more apparent due to the lack of academic attention given to these series and bisexuality on these series in particular. As will become evident in my literature review, aside from a handful of articles, there has been no full academic analysis of the *Shot At Love* franchise. On the other hand, *The L Word* has managed to establish a fair amount of scholarship, most notably in two edited collections (*Reading The L*

Word: Outing Contemporary Television and *Loving The L Word: The Complete Series in Focus*) and a book (titled as *The L Word*) devoted entirely to the series. Despite this attention to *The L Word*, however, there has been very little attention paid to the role of bisexuality within the series itself.

The L Word is a premium cable drama series (aired on Showtime) revolving around the lives of lesbian and bisexual women (and in later seasons, the series incorporates a trans man into its main character roster) in West Hollywood, Los Angeles. Airing for six seasons (2004-2009), this series has arguably been the most influential show in depicting more nuanced representations of lesbian women. Produced and directed by many queer⁴ women, and with fan input from the LGBTQ+ community, *The L Word* has been groundbreaking in pushing for queer visibility on primetime television. Chapter Two explores the series in connection to the larger climate of bisexual visibility in popular culture during the 2000s, with a focus on the main characters Jenny Schecter, Alice Pieszecki, and Tina Kennard, who present some of the only bisexual plotlines and identifications on the series as a whole.

In addition to analyzing *The L Word*, a fictional drama, I also analyze the *Shot At Love* series, a reality dating competition. Airing on basic cable (MTV), the first season of the series (*Shot at Love with Tila Tequila*) aired in October of 2007, followed by the second season in April of 2008, and the third and final season premiering at the end of 2008. Promoted as a bisexual reality dating show, the first two seasons of the series saw internet celebrity Tila Tequila (born Thien Thanh Thi Nguyen) search for her true love (twice) from a group of sixteen straight men and sixteen lesbians. Tila's involvement with the series ended after the first two seasons, and the third season saw bisexual twin sisters, Victoria and Erica Mongeon (stylized on the series as

⁴ At certain points I use "queer" to denote non-heterosexuality/non-normative gender identity, especially when the sexual and gender identities referenced are not known specifically beyond being non-normative.

Vikki and Rikki, or the Ikki twins), both dating twelve straight men and twelve lesbians, each in search of love. While all three of the leads of the series were met with claims of falsehood (especially that of not actually being bisexual), it was Tila Tequila in particular who received (and continues to receive) negative media attention, due to her presence on the series, her vocal statements of her sexuality during and after the series, and her highly mediatized persona following the series, which will be discussed at length in the following chapters.

While the different genres of these programs carry specific elements worthy of investigation (drama and reality dating), I discuss bisexuality as evident on each series in similar ways, highlighting common themes/tropes that appear in connection to bisexuality. I do, however, make note of specific stylistic differences throughout each text, namely the role that the confessional serves in reality television. In viewing each series carefully, I've organized references to bisexuality and characters/persona who identify and/or are represented as bisexual into two recurrent themes — abjection and authenticity. From these two central themes I organize thematically-connecting sub-themes and points of discussion. In addition to the similarities in how bisexuality is represented on each series and their shared popularity and wide viewership, *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series also aired around the same time, with *The L Word* beginning three years before the *Shot At Love* series and with both ending in early 2009. This timeframe and the entire first decade of the 2000s more broadly saw increased attention to LGBTQ+ visibility and rights. My analysis is framed by this specific social, cultural, and political climate and provides in-depth, discursive readings of bisexuality within these series in connection to its temporal location. Because of the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian rights during this timeframe (the legalization of same-sex marriage and the repeal of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy), my examination of bisexual representations will be in

conversation with larger understandings of hetero- and homonormativity, and my concluding chapter draws specific parallels between representations of bisexuality and the social and political gay rights mainstreaming of the 2000s.

Historical Context

Understandings of bisexuality as "fake" or "undecided" have fluctuated between popular media and bisexual history in both gay/lesbian and straight communities to the point that there are few multifaceted depictions of bisexual women in the media and bi-phobic rhetoric and action continues in many queer communities. As with much of the history on the LGBTQ+ community, most of the attention and research on queer identities within popular culture has focused on gay and lesbian sexualities (Abelove et al.; Benschhoff and Griffen; Davis and Needham).

In order to properly contextualize both the lack of nuanced representations of bisexuality (especially bisexual women) and the lack of academic intervention into the already existing representations in popular culture, it is necessary to touch on how bisexual individuals have been historically segregated by segments of the gay/lesbian and straight communities. This will make evident how many of the social and cultural anxieties surrounding bisexuality found in the early days of the sexuality rights movement have been fostered by and seeped into wider realms of intelligibility — namely, popular culture.

It is difficult to trace bisexuality as a political movement and identity because bisexuality has so often been regrouped as either gay/lesbian or straight, depending on the current gender of a bisexual's partner. However, the recognition of "bisexuality" as its own distinct political identity can be traced to the mid-to-late 1970s through the advent of "social-only" groups, which allowed for a movement away from sexual politics of this period that were primarily focused on

gay and lesbian rights. These groups began to form in major cities across the United States, and would serve as a meeting place for individuals who identified as being attracted to both men and women (Udis-Kessler 22). These new spaces caused problems for many bisexual women who were formerly accustomed to the "safe-spaces" of the lesbian community, resulting in many misconceptions surrounding bisexuality (and women's bisexuality more specifically) when entering into these social groups. Many assumed that this was a new form of swingers clubs, where bisexuals' promiscuity could be tested to its fullest. Just as some gay, lesbian, and straight individuals are not monogamous and entertain polyamory, so too do some bisexual individuals. However, these qualities become defining features of bisexuality as a sexuality, as opposed to being representative of individual bisexuals. At the same moment that this widely-held belief began to permeate supposed bisexual spaces, a bisexual political movement also emerged.

Many women who had grown up heterosexual and encountered lesbianism through feminist political choice began to apply political sentiments that had previously been utilized by the gay and lesbian movements onto a new bisexual movement (Udis-Kessler 24). No longer feeling at ease within the feminist-lesbian communities that promoted solidarity only with women who always chose relationships with other women, many bisexuals began to move away from such environments and drew connections between the sexual dictates and monoculture of straight community and those of gay/lesbian communities.

Why is there this fear of bisexuals within certain segments of the gay/lesbian community, especially when these spaces have been portrayed as all-inclusive against a system based on heterosexual values? Jillian Todd Weiss argues that political progress made by gay and lesbian individuals within the United States has been built primarily upon the premise that they are "just like you" — minus sexual orientation (Weiss 49). It has been primarily through identifying with

mainstream America — through assimilating with their values and ideals — that a recognizable space for gay and lesbians has been allotted. Bisexuals' (apparent) slippery nature ((n)either hetero- (n)or homosexual), Weiss argues, is one of the main causes for tension within gay and lesbian communities. "Bisexuality, with its escape hatch marked 'heterosexual desire', is viewed as assuming that homosexuality is something to be avoided, constituting a step back into the closet" (Weiss 49).

In the same period, bisexuality within mainstream media began to gain a notable foothold. Within many popular culture outlets of the 1970s — namely, news reports and magazine articles — bisexuality was declared as the fashionable and new sexual trend (Rust, "Popular Images" 538). As the new "It" factor within the sexuality-rights movement, bisexuality's chic-aspect was read as standing in the way of "real" and relevant political concerns from gay and lesbian communities. The sensationalism of bisexuality only added to both gay/lesbian and straight communities' speculation that this was just a "phase" — either one that led to full-fledge homosexuality or one that returned to heterosexuality.

Shortly following its stint as the "fashionable" sexuality on the popular culture market, bisexuality soon found itself back in a contemptuous space with the dawning of the 1980s. This decade was marked by an increasingly malicious focus on bisexuals as the harbingers of disease and infidelity. With HIV/AIDs beginning to be recognized as a pandemic that was no longer only found in gay communities and only spread from men who have sex with men, bisexuals' "untruthful" character was seen as the new culprit of this disease (Rust, "Popular Images" 541). Charged with leading "double lives", many bisexual individuals — especially bisexual men — became villains who not only brought havoc to the straight community, but now also into gay and lesbian communities.

Within this space, bisexuals were then read as not only taking away the limelight from important issues being fought for in gay and lesbian communities, but they were also portrayed as two-faced, deceitful, sexually insatiable, confused, pathological, and dirty. Under these definitions, bisexuality operated as an opposite of sorts to rational heterosexuality, as well as mainstream homosexuality's quest to be seen as "just like you" by straight communities. Their inability to be placed in one category caused anxiety and nightmares of complete social disruption. Out of fear that bisexuals would be seen by greater society as gay but in denial, the more mainstream gay and lesbian communities' campaign for acceptance via the slogan "we are just like you" was (and, arguably, continues to be) only able to exist if they completely disassociated themselves from bisexuality. On the flipside, the straight community was being infiltrated by "homos in disguise", who risked undoing traditional heteronormative values and bringing forth disease and mayhem. In order to validate and uphold the status quo, bisexuals were and continue to be regularly questioned, challenged, and feared, and this becomes most apparent through many of the depictions of bisexuality in the media.

As Davis and Needham argue, "[b]roadly speaking, television has regularly been configured as a domestic medium and, as such, closely associated with the home, the family, the quotidian; in other words, the heteronormative" (Davis and Needham 6). As such, any depictions of alternative sexualities need to either conform to heteronormative standards of decency, or, be punished on screen. While this is undoubtedly the case for gay and lesbian characters as well, there has been an increasingly steady move to incorporate more "truthful" and "diverse" depictions of queer individuals, and especially of gay, and to a lesser extent, lesbian characters who are seen as conforming to already-existing normative standards. Within this discussion, however, bisexuals are only seen as "fitting in" when their fluidity is made invisible.

Most often, it is difficult to pinpoint actual bisexual characters unless they explicitly lead bisexual lives on screen; they must be seen to be engaging in sexual or romantic acts with both men and women. Even self-identifying as "bisexual" is not good enough — without proof, the bisexual character becomes gay until proven guilty, or, straight until swayed otherwise, and rarely is their bisexuality explicitly mentioned again.

In earlier popular culture examples, when bisexuals were depicted as actually being bisexual (and not gay/lesbian or straight and in disguise) there was often the need to promote this character as one who must be condemned in order to maintain the proper storyline, a trend that has continued into current representations of bisexuality. While under the Motion Picture Production Code (The Code) of the 1930s to the late 1960s, many lesbian and bisexual-esque characters could be seen gracing the screen, but only if the viewers were skilled in "reading between the lines" (Bryant, *Bisexual Characters* 4). While none of these characters were allowed to engage in explicit, or, even strongly suggested, sexual conduct, lesbians and bisexuals could be read as existing on screen by virtue of their deviance. "Under The Code, homosexuality could be portrayed only as negative stereotypes, warped personalities, or silly comic characters used to underscore the macho qualities of the leading (always white) male" (Bryant, *Bisexual Characters* 4). Homosexuality and bisexuality were only allowed to exist on screen as an abnormal occurrence that resulted in remedy — either institutional or, more commonly, by death. And so began a series of popular culture depictions of neurotic, deviant, promiscuous, monstrous women, whose perverse characteristics became inseparably tied to their bisexuality.

Outside of the blatantly "horrific" depictions of bisexual women in many films, bisexuality's disruptive "nature" within the media can also be traced to the 1960s and the advent of sexploitation films. While not necessarily deemed "bisexual", many of the films from this era

are highly tinged with the negative stereotypes commonly associated with bisexuality. Because 1960s sexploitation films were forbidden from showing heterosexual intercourse, some of the most popular scenes involved group sex and "girl-on-girl" scenes — and anything else that was regarded as "non-procreative" (Benshoff and Griffen 132). This highlights the cultural constructed popularity of bisexual women — or, bisexually-acting women — within popular culture.

Critics of sexploitation films have argued that because bisexuals are not considered to be "real" to begin with, they instantly become consumed by hetero-male desire as sexually insatiable with no preference for whom they satiate their insatiability with (men or women). These scenarios continue to circulate within modern mainstream film, television, and pornography. Any "queerness" of these women — that is a sexuality that is "other" from heterosexuality — is often completely disavowed and once again made "proper" and "acceptable" by moulding it into something easily read as constructed, commodified, and existing solely for a heterosexual, male gaze (Benshoff and Griffen 133).

Within films of the 1990s and early 2000s that deal with fluid female sexuality, the terms "bisexual"/"bisexuality" are rarely uttered, and when they are, it is usually as pejorative terms (Burleson 16). Given that verbal declarations are uncommon, the characters' bisexuality must be conveyed through a continuous performance of sexuality. At the same time, since bisexuality is most often read as something that does not exist until enacted — where a bisexual individual/character must continuously engage in sexual activity with both men and women — it is believed that bisexuals should then be able to choose when and when not to act on their sexuality. In other words, bisexuals should "just make a choice" and not be sexually fluid and liminal. This notion of "choice" again brings us back to common conceptions of bisexuality as

unreliable and fake, as well as bisexuality's apparent lack of verifiability where the fear of never truly knowing is projected in many areas of popular culture and continues to stoke the flames of biphobia in wider, Western culture.

Although much of the academic work that has been done on bisexuality in popular culture has been on bisexual representation in film (as will be expanded upon below), there are notable parallels between representations of bisexuality in film and television where many of the previously mentioned bisexual-tropes have followed bisexual representation into television. In addition to this, The Code standards of "decency" that relegated bisexuality to the role of cultural degenerate in film are similar to the U.S. government's regulation of television through the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). While already applying to radio broadcasting standards, the FCC officially set standards for television broadcasting in 1941 (Danesi 174). In similar ways to The Code's standards of "decency", the FCC's regulations reflected the general homophobic attitudes present in the early days of television. Non-heterosexual characters did not begin to appear until the 1970s, and any previous references to non-heterosexuality (specifically, homosexuality) were primarily found in news and "public interest" pieces.

Increased references to non-heterosexuality became especially apparent with the advent of the "Fairness Doctrine" by the FCC in 1949 (abolished in 1987), which encouraged broadcasters to discuss matters of public interest (including matters considered controversial at the time) (Ruane 1). In addition to this, the Fairness Doctrine stipulated that broadcasters must make available contrasting viewpoints in their public interest programming (Ruane 2). As such, non-heterosexuality began to be incorporated into news and talk-show segments (almost entirely presented through gay men). However, due to the FCC guidelines of incorporating "contrasting viewpoints", independent broadcasters' own agency in their content production, and the general

homophobic climate of the time, when non-heterosexuality was made available it was almost always in connection to it being presented as an "illness". This was often made evident by having the presence of a gay man on a segment accompanied by public figures (psychiatrists, law officials) discussing homosexuality's indecency. This trend continued into 1962 when New York City radio station WBAI (also under FCC regulation) aired a program featuring six gay men discussing their lives without the presences of the standard "antigay psychiatrist or law enforcement officer" (Alwood 36). Although this program was met with numerous complaints and grievances filed against the station, this moment functioned as an important turning point in the broadcasting of non-heterosexual content in radio and television. The FCC ruled in favour of WBAI, stipulating that broadcast licenses cannot be granted (or denied) based on content alone, and in effect lifted "a barrier that blocked many broadcasters from addressing topics related to the gay community by signalling that homosexuality had become a topic that would not jeopardize station licensing" (Alwood 37). As such, non-heterosexual content began to appear more often in television, although still not removed from much of the cultural prejudice and heteronormative assumptions.

As homosexuality began to gain traction in mainstream television, bisexuality continued to be made invisible. In similar ways to bisexual invisibility in film, many of the early bisexual characters in television were most often presented as and assumed to be gay/lesbian. Notable examples of this include the characters of Jodie Dallas from *Soap* and Steven Carrington from *Dynasty*, first appearing in 1977 and 1981 respectively, with both characters identifying as "homosexual" despite numerous relationships and sexual encounters with both men and women (Miller 29). Because of how bisexuality is often made invisible through the negation of bisexuality as a legitimate sexuality in its own right and instead envisioned as an extension of

gay and/or lesbian, it is often difficult to pinpoint bisexual characters in popular culture (Jodie Dallas and Steven Carrington are two examples of this, as well as C.J. Lamb from *L.A. Law* who identifies as "flexible" and is noted as initiating one of the first "lesbian" kisses on U.S. primetime television (Tropiano 89)). This trend of bisexual invisibility via the envelopment of bisexual characters and storylines as being "gay/lesbian" storylines and/or brief sexual explorations for straight characters occurs continuously throughout many popular culture representations of bisexuality. Because of this, bisexuality often becomes most visible through blatant sexual exploits, where the bisexual character is involved in a threesome (a popular bisexual trope in and of itself) and/or the bisexual character is presented as "promiscuous", having multiple sexual encounters and relationships with both men and women. And yet even through these more "visible" bisexual characters/storylines, bisexual visibility on television is further hindered by the FCC's regulations which rate all television programs "to reflect the absence of 'obscenity, indecency, and profanity'" during specific programming hours (Kenney 173). As such, more explicit and blatant representations of bisexuality on television run the risk of additionally being made invisible through "decency" ratings, often relegating more (arguably) obvious representations of bisexuality to some of the later broadcast times with higher TV-ratings, in effect risking viewer accessibility and audience reach.

On the other hand, television also holds great potential in its ability to create more nuanced characters and storylines through the fact that the time-limitations are less constricting than those in many finite film narratives, where characters and storylines can develop over multiple episodes as opposed to film's roughly 90-minute running time. While *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* examples do present more material, storylines, and character development to analyze, especially in relation to the lack of explicitly bisexual, reoccurring characters on

television in general, bisexuality on these series (and on television more broadly) is often depicted in the same undimensional ways as bisexuality is represented in film: bisexuality as deviant, bisexuality as being on the road to homosexuality, bisexuality as sexually excessive and so on.

Existing Literature on Bisexuality in Popular Culture

What little scholarly attention that has been paid towards female bisexuality in popular culture has noted how such representations still seem to be caught up in problematic assumptions and stereotypes about women's sexual fluidity (Thompson; Fahs; Capulet). Because of such depictions, where bisexuality is once again understood as fake, experimental, and abnormal, theorists who have analyzed women's sexual fluidity on television have tended to conclude that, within these spaces, there is no room for politically theorizing bisexual representation. If political possibilities are argued to exist, it is often only as a reaction to these representations (i.e.: women condemning such acts as fake in order to reaffirm a more truthful sexuality). It appears to me that in promoting this hierarchical relationship between authentic/inauthentic bisexuality (which is ironic, since bisexuality is already understood as not being "real", or, at least, permanent), scholars are merely skimming the surface of what is being represented of bisexuality in popular culture.

While much of the research I have discussed touches on how bisexual individuals are portrayed as "deviant" or "disorderly", there is very little research that describes such occurrences as strategic productions within specific social, cultural, and political landscapes, especially the current, post-2000 landscape. What is missing in these very few scholarly analyses of bisexuality in popular culture is an in-depth examination of how bisexual representation intersects with other identity markers. Also neglected in these analyses are critical

investigations into the purposes behind such depictions — do they exist to maintain/reinvigorate/re-stabilize hetero-and-homonormative ideologies and larger cultural imaginings around "authentic" identities and ones that are read as "flip-floppers" and unreliable? Conversely, do these representations work to open up spaces for alternative sexualities that might not fit into homo- or hetero-normative categories?

While there has been groundbreaking work done on representations of bisexuality in popular culture, most of these have focused on bisexual representations in film, including mainstream, art-house, and independent films. Notable examples of some of the academic contributions to the study of bisexual representations in media and popular culture include: Marjorie Garber's theorizing of the "bisexual plot" in *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (1995), in which bisexuality is primarily represented (in literature and film) in a triangular relationship with hetero- and homosexuality, most visible through an "erotic triangulation in which one person is torn between life with a man and life with a woman" (Garber 456); Maria Pramaggiore's "Straddling the Screen: Bisexual Spectatorship and Contemporary Narrative Film" (1996), which theorizes "bisexual reading practices" for mainstream films that depict sexual fluidity; Wayne M. Bryant's comprehensive overview of the history of bisexuality in American films from the early 1900s into the 1990s in *Bisexual Characters in Film: From Anaïs to Zee* (1997); the edited collection, *The Bisexual Imaginary: Representation, Identity and Desire* (1997) and in particular Jo Eadie's discussion of bisexual visibility in film in "'That's Why She's Bisexual': Contexts for Bisexual Visibility" (1997), which argues that the presence of a bisexual figure in film serves as an indicator of tension, which is especially evident in the "dangers the bisexual always embodies" (Eadie 142); and Paula C. Rodríguez's "Popular Images and the Growth of Bisexual Community and Visibility" (2000),

which discusses the growth of bisexual visibility throughout popular representations and discussions of bisexuality (primarily articles and books, of the mainstream/popular, academic, and community/activist varieties) from the 1970s-1990s. All of the above examples focus almost entirely on bisexual representations in film (aside from Rodríguez, who focuses primarily on print). This attention to film over television is interesting in that, as previously stated, television series appear to have more time to devote to character- and story-building and development. As will be discussed more heavily in Chapter Two, prominent examples of representations of bisexual women during the 2000s occur primarily on television, while popular film examples of bisexuality during this time period are predominantly of men. While a comparison between bisexual men and women are not the focus of this dissertation, this is an interesting point worth noting, and is perhaps indicative of the lack of attention paid to bisexuality on television, where there are very few representations of bisexual men. It would be interesting for future research on this division of territory between bisexual women and men and television and film to note whether any of these differences (as well as differences in academic contributions on the two) are due to the ways in which television is often seen as mainstream and ordinary in comparison to film, which is often regarded with more esteem as it's framed as having more progressive possibilities.

With this in mind, there are a few academic contributions on bisexual visibility in television that focus specifically on representations of bisexual women. In "Girl Friend or Girlfriend?: Same-Sex Friendship and Bisexual Images as a Context for Flexible Sexual Identity Among Young Women" (2006), Elisabeth Morgan Thompson discusses how young women's friendships, often intense and passionate, make space for considering sexual fluidity in new ways (Thompson 49). In connection with this, Thompson specifically notes the increasing presence of

bisexuality/sexual fluidity in popular culture, highlighting how this increased visibility allows young women more opportunity to imagine same-sex desire. While Thompson's discussion of popular representations of bisexual women is only one area of her analysis, this work is one of the few that actively addresses bisexual representation on television during the 2000s. As Thompson notes, when bisexuality is depicted in mainstream television programs it almost always vilifies the characters who represent bisexuality. In some of the more popular examples of bisexuality on television, including *The OC*, *One Tree Hill* and *Grey's Anatomy* (which Thompson discuss a specific bisexual plotline unrelated to Callie Torres, a notable bisexual character on the series), "the female characters involved either ultimately relinquish their bi-curiosity/bisexuality, specifically through emphasizing their 'true' desire for men, or are taken off the show" (Thompson 55). In these depictions, representations of women's bisexuality/same-sex desire is read as "less-threatening" or "temporary" in that they reconfirm hetero-patriarchal ideals by returning to/choosing men. While these representations of bisexuality, or bisexual-like behaviour, allow networks to appear "progressive" and "hip" in their hinting at non-heterosexual possibilities (while still confirming heterosexual-endings), these representations also often create high ratings for networks.

This play for ratings becomes even more apparent when many of these more popular bisexual plotlines are quickly ended, often with bisexual characters being written out of the series entirely. Further, some of the more well-known bisexual storylines of the mid-2000s aired at the same time as bisexual storylines on other networks, visibly competing for ratings using similar ploys (see my discussion of *The O.C.* and *One Tree Hill* in Chapter Two). The commercially-driven nature of many of these examples does not negate any political outcomes that such representations may carry, as the visibility of bisexual/sexual fluidity allows for queer

and questioning women to witness "active sexual desire between women", an act that can be revolutionary in and of itself, especially in a landscape of compulsory heterosexuality (Thompson 55). Instead, my highlighting of some of the motives behind such representations should be understood within the larger project of this dissertation that seeks to understand representations of bisexuality within larger cultural climates. While I do not devote much time to the economic gains that representations of bisexual women bring to television networks, it is important to acknowledge that any profitability that bisexuality carries through an increase in ratings is derived from already-established understandings of bisexuality as being sensational and sexually adventurous/excessive.

Focusing entirely on representations of bisexuality on television, Michaela D. E. Meyer's "Representing Bisexuality on Television: The Case for Intersectional Hybrids" (2010) analyzes American scripted, primetime dramatic series aimed at "emerging adult audiences" (roughly 18-30 years old) that are focused primarily on identity development (Meyer 368). Meyer is particularly interested in highlighting how these representations of bisexuality make space for thinking about issues of identity more broadly, including gender, sexuality, and race. Meyer deals primarily with representations of bisexual women, discussing how they are introduced as "bisexual" as well as providing a brief overview of their arc and character development. In addition to this, Meyer also briefly discusses two examples of male bisexuality (*Brothers & Sisters* and *Nip/Tuck*), noting that when male bisexuality is present it is almost solely devoted to propelling "the central relationship between two main male characters", unlike the character development and storylines concerning bisexual women (Meyer 378). By analyzing many of the bisexual characters available on "emerging adult", primetime dramatic television, Meyer notes that these characters, in addition to being women, are also women of colour. Reading these

representations within a larger cultural understanding of "diversity" — where the characters' identities are framed by marginalized gender, race, and sexuality as non-white, bisexual women — "allows the narrative to streamline cultural issues of intersectionality by positioning that character as a token representative for all discourses of cultural struggle" (Meyer 381). Meyer presents necessary work on representations of bisexuality within popular culture, work that not only analyzes the intersections of identities and oppressions in conversation with bisexuality, but that also details the larger social and cultural implications of such representations more broadly.

Finally, Maria San Filippo's *The B Word: Bisexuality in Contemporary Film and Television* (2013) offers one of the more recent, comprehensive contributions to the examinations of contemporary media representations of bisexuality. It is one of the few academic books to deal entirely with representations of bisexuality within film and television. San Filippo's analysis is organized around "four occasionally overlapping but aesthetically and industrially distinct modes of screen media: international art cinema, 'sexploitation' cinema, contemporary Hollywood cinema, and English-language television" produced after the 1960s (San Filippo 19). San Filippo is primarily interested in analyzing how bisexuality is represented over time, noting how bisexuality is often made (in)visible both on-screen and in media studies. More specifically, San Filippo reads these representations "bisexually", making evident how bisexuality is a viable reading even when it may appear to be unclear/(in)visible. In addition to examining how bisexuality is made (in)visible, San Filippo also focuses more specifically on "defamiliarizing images and expressions of desire assumed to be monosexual" (San Filippo 34). For example, she reads "bromance" films bisexually; even though bisexuality is by no means explicit, the male same-sex friendship coupling is made central and indispensable to the story, in effect "tacitly" referencing romance and erotic-intrigue (San Filippo 153).

Of the four analysis chapters that San Filippo provides, only one explicitly deals with television, where bisexuality is read through both male and female characters. San Filippo does accord some space to *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series, although to vastly varying degrees. Discussions of *The L Word* and representations of bisexuality on the series comprise little over a paragraph within which bisexuality is only mentioned in reference to Alice and Alice's denial of her bisexuality. San Filippo argues that the series "ultimately chose to project its own monosexism" through the negation of Alice's bisexuality and simultaneously closes "one of American television's most prominent discourses on bisexuality" (San Filippo 206). While I agree with San Filippo that bisexuality on *The L Word* does maintain normative assumptions of monosexuality, it is peculiar to me that Jenny and Tina are made invisible within this brief analysis, especially since San Filippo is "reading bisexually", which does not necessitate direct references to bisexuality. As I point out, bisexuality is as equally evident, if not more so in certain cases, in Jenny and Tina as it is in Alice, thereby illustrating the diversity of ways in which bisexuality is discursively constructed on the series.

Unlike the brief analysis of *The L Word*, San Filippo devotes considerable space within the chapter on television to the *Shot At Love* series (especially in its first two seasons), which she views as a unique example of bisexual representation, especially in that it makes bisexuality "hypervisible" while other examples often render it unspoken and/or reject it entirely (San Filippo 208). Reading the series through a postfeminist lens, San Filippo claims that *A Shot At Love* presents an ambiguous and complex representation of bisexuality that both reinforces and undermines dominant assumptions of gender and sexuality. On the one hand, Tila Tequila herself reverses dominant gender norms by seemingly being in control of the competition and in deciding who she will take "a shot at love" with. "Assertive, confident, and (apparently)

financially independent, Tila herself is an exemplar of postfeminist sexual and romantic agency and empowerment, for whom love is business and the business of love is self-promotion" (San Filippo 212). At the same time, normative gender and sexuality roles are reaffirmed through the elimination of the more masculine-presenting women in the competition (except for Dani, who makes it to the final two at the end of Season One), the hyper-focus on the sexual exploits between Tila and the female contestants, and the perpetuation of a monosexual ending, or at least the illusion of it, which is evident even when Tila chooses a woman at the end of Season Two as her relationship(s) are ultimately unsuccessful.

The B Word: Bisexuality in Contemporary Film and Television provides much needed analysis of on-screen representations of bisexuality within academia. More specifically to this project, San Filippo's discussion of the *Shot At Love* series not only highlights the importance of a series that is often overlooked in academic discussions, but also illuminates the ways in which the series offers nuanced and complex readings of gender and sexuality more generally, and bisexuality in particular. Aside from San Filippo's discussion of *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series (even in its brevity), there has been almost no attention paid to how bisexuality is represented on these two series, despite the fact that both of them have been culturally influential and groundbreaking. The following section addresses the few academic works that have focused on the two series, in addition to highlighting some of the ways in which *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series continue to be overlooked.

Academic Contributions on *The L Word*

Much of the academic work on *The L Word* focuses on how the series has increased lesbian visibility within popular culture more generally, as well as how lesbians are represented on the series in particular. A quick glance through Kim Akass and Janet McCabe's anthology,

Reading The L Word: Outing Contemporary Television, reveals discussions of the show providing much needed visibility for lesbians (Anderson-Minshall), how the creators came up with the idea of a lesbian primetime program (Warn, "Introduction"), the show's relationship with recent gay and lesbian civil gains (Aaron), and anxieties surrounding the singular-types of lesbians being depicted on the series (Wolfe and Roripaugh; Heller, "How Does A Lesbian Look?"), to name but a few examples. Within this anthology, there is not one article that focuses entirely on representations of bisexual women on the show, even though there are a significant number of bisexual experiences and identifications that take place over the six seasons. As *Reading The L Word* deals with only the first two seasons of the series, the follow-up edited collection, *Loving The L Word: The Complete Series in Focus* (Ed. Dana Heller), has not only opportunity to remedy the omission of bisexuality from the first anthology but also has the time to reflect on bisexuality on the series as whole. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Instead, despite claims to reflect on *The L Word's* "quantum contribution to the ongoing evolution of *queer* [italics mine] television" (Heller, "Introduction: Loving and Losing" 4), as in, not just gay or lesbian, the volume focuses nearly entirely on lesbian representation. It is worthwhile to note, however, that while the volume is primarily about lesbian visibility and representation, there are a few chapters that address gender-bending, gender-queer, and trans characters and storylines on *The L Word*. In spite of this move to incorporate critiques and explorations of storylines involving marginalized members of the LGBTQ+ community and how these storylines and characters work to reaffirm lesbian normativity on the series (as opposed to LGBTQ+ diversity), there is one glaring omission: bisexuality. Within the entire anthology, there is not one chapter that is devoted to bisexuality and bisexual visibility, nor how bisexuality *also* often functions on

the series (as I will discuss throughout) as a way to normalize lesbianism, despite this normativity being highlighted within the anthology.

In similar ways to both *Reading The L Word* and *Loving The L Word*, Margaret T. McFadden's book devoted to the series (also titled as *The L Word*), offers little mention of bisexuality, except for minor references to bisexual characters and the bisexual stereotypes they perpetuate (McFadden 5-6). McFadden focuses almost entirely on the representations of lesbians on the series, and specifically highlights how *The L Word* (through its six seasons) calls attention to historical misrepresentations of lesbians as well as how the series provides "a compelling alternative vision of lesbian lives and cultures" (McFadden 3). It is unfortunate, however, that such an analysis of *The L Word* and its critiques of misrepresentations could not more fully acknowledge (mis)representations of bisexuality on the series itself. Finally, in addition to these three academic contributions that focus entirely on *The L Word*, there has also been a sizeable number of chapters in books and edited collections on queer media/queer television that also discuss the series (Keller and Stratyner; Peele; Chambers; Campbell and Carilli; Demory and Pullen; and N. Richardson et al., as a few examples). While it makes sense that discussions of lesbian representations would be focused upon in many articles on *The L Word*, as a majority of the characters identify as lesbian, it is quite neglectful that neither the three works devoted entirely to the series nor any of the above mentioned chapters discuss bisexuality in its full complexity on the series. This is especially unfortunate as three of the main characters on *The L Word* either identify or are represented as being bisexual (at various points in the series as a whole).

Thankfully, in Rebecca Beirne's edited collection, *Televising Queer Women*, there are nuanced discussions of bisexuality as viewed on *The L Word*. Noting that the history of

American television has revealed only a handful of recurring bisexual/bisexual-appearing characters, Jennifer Moorman applauds *The L Word's* political stance on at least incorporating bisexuality into its premise — whether or not these depictions are seen as being "accurate" (Moorman 163). Moorman analyzes bisexuality through the characters of Jenny and Alice within the first two seasons on the series. Throughout her analysis, Moorman concludes that "ultimately, *The L Word* attempts to alleviate the anxieties associated with bisexual identification, through both its tendency toward the stabilizing of identities and its willingness to embrace sexual difference and to depict sexuality as open and fluid" (Moorman 176). I agree that *The L Word*, especially within the first two seasons, appears to embrace sexual openness and fluidity, especially when compared to the general lack of main characters on television expressing sexual fluidity/bisexuality more broadly. However, bisexuality on *The L Word* needs to be understood within the overarching world-building of the series as a whole. My examination of *The L Word* seeks to fill this gap, and in addition, incorporates Tina into the discussion, a character who is often overlooked in discussions of bisexuality.

In the same volume, Faye Davies eloquently notes the ways in which lesbian and bisexual identities are performed in relation to one another, stating that "lesbian sexual identity is represented as settled and stable in *The L Word* and this representation runs through both domestic and professional identities in relation to the characters. None of the asserted lesbian characters appear to struggle with their identity; only those who are bisexual appear to encounter any identity issue" (Davies 179). Within this context, then, an authentic and reliable lesbian identity is able to flourish only in its relationship to the confused and unstable bisexual representations. As we have seen through the brief historical overview, the claiming of a truthful sexual identity seems to be intricately tied to the denigration of other sexualities in its vicinity.

Davies' work highlighting this is crucial in understanding how women's sexualities on *The L Word* (and, in popular culture in general) are wrapped up in various power-relations and carry residual historical injuries; sadly, her work is one of the few that purposefully addresses this connection.

Academic Contributions on *A Shot At Love*

As previously stated, there have been few academic contributions on the *Shot At Love* series, especially when compared to the attention paid to *The L Word*. This lack of attention is made all the more odd as both have set precedents for focusing exclusively on queer women. Of the handful of academic articles that address the *Shot At Love* series and Tila Tequila, there are only two analyses that devote considerable attention to bisexual representation on the series (Capulet; Richter, "Ambiguous Bisexuality"). Outside of this, the remaining contributions make only brief references to the series and/or Tila, or, they focus on the series but make almost no reference to bisexuality. Of the former example, April S. Callis' 2014 article, "Where Kinsey, Christ, and Tila Tequila Meet: Discourse and the Sexual (Non)-Binary", discusses Callis' interview findings concerning how dominant discourses (religion, popular science, and media) portray sexuality, whether in binary or non-binary ways, and how these discourses effected the research participants' understandings of sexuality (Callis 1629). In the discussions of representations of sexualities in the media, the majority of the focus was on monosexual models of sexuality, although 39 participants did mention bisexual representations (Callis 1636). Representations of bisexual women comprised the majority of the discussions on bisexuality in the media (Thirteen on *House, M.D.*; Callie on *Grey's Anatomy*), with many of the participants questioning the accuracy of these representations. The participants specifically pointed to Tila Tequila on *A Shot At Love With Tila Tequila* (first and second seasons) as a "suspicious"

representation of bisexuality, where Tila's "sexual antics served to 'give bisexuals a bad name'", specifically noting her sexual encounters with men and women on the series (Callis 1636).

Although the discussion of Tila Tequila in Callis' article is brief, it nonetheless illustrates how dominant understandings of bisexuality are perpetuated through the media as well as the specific ways in which both the series and Tila herself are often understood as being "fake" (in varying ways). An article that does focus completely on the first season of *A Shot At Love*, "Tequila, Straight Up: Bisexuality, Reality Dating, and the Discourse of Heteronormativity" (Antony and Thomas), mentions the central role of bisexuality within the series but focuses instead on representations of lesbianism. As such, the entirety of the paper (outside of a brief mention that the show "prompts intriguing questions regarding bisexuality") analyzes how representations of lesbianism on the series are superficial and reduced to reaffirm heteronormative ideals (Antony and Thomas 54). Despite how bisexuality is made central to the series, and, arguably, central to these affirmations of heteronormativity through lesbianism, bisexuality instead becomes a neglected afterthought.

While the entire focus of Ian Capulet's "With Reps Like These: Bisexuality and Celebrity Status" (2010) is not solely on Tila Tequila or the *Shot At Love* series, Capulet does devote a sizeable amount of attention and analysis to the star and series. Despite the increasing presence of bisexuality in Western (primarily American) popular culture, from celebrities publicly declaring bisexuality to bisexual/bisexual-like representations in the media, Capulet argues that these representations actually "damage the greater bisexual cause" as opposed to fostering political growth and visibility (Capulet 296). Capulet discusses prominent bisexual celebrities (Lady Gaga, Megan Fox, Tila Tequila, among others) and highlights how they further perpetuate negative stereotypes of bisexuality, especially stereotypes of sexual excessiveness. In particular,

Capulet notes how Tila has consistently claimed bisexuality, both prior to and following the *Shot At Love* series, despite public accusations of fakery (Capulet 300). Despite this consistency (a point worth noting in conversation with bisexual stereotypes as bisexuality is often framed as being *inconsistent*), and Capulet's highlighting of Tila's involvement in political issues (same-sex marriage and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"), Tila's unapologetic sexuality (featured in men's magazines, pornography) appears to negate any political possibilities that her bisexuality may carry – "Although she continuously identifies a [sic] bisexual, she is also sure to keep up her flashy and highly sexualized image" (Capulet 300).

As Capulet notes, these representations only serve to let "real" bisexuals know how amazing they are in comparison to the "jokes" they are watching: "It stands to show that bisexuals should not look to the likes of Megan Fox or Lindsay Lohan to bring about any discussion or change" and "Put tersely, the bisexuals outside of the spotlight are nothing like those in it" (Capulet 305). Capulet appears to believe that Tila Tequila and the other bisexual celebrities mentioned (all women) give bisexuality a "bad" name, as opposed to understanding their representations of bisexuality within a larger context of specific sexual norms and ideals. Outside of this dualistic reading, where there are "good" and "bad" ways to be bisexual, and how these celebrities are representing "bad" bisexuality", this analysis is further harmful in its ignorance of how these specific representations and understandings of bisexuality exist in a culture of heteronormativity (and, to a lesser extent, homonormativity). As such, these representations need to be analyzed within a larger social, cultural, and political context. In fact, Capulet's analysis seems to reinforce the very stereotypes the article attempts to challenge by reading these celebrities' sexuality and sexual expressiveness as being directly connected to their bisexuality. Instead of stating that Tila's apparent excessive sexuality is a direct example of

bisexuality, Capulet sees Tila's apparent excessive sexuality as being a direct example of why she gives bisexuality a bad name; in both cases, Tila's bisexuality is always-already tied to her excessive sexuality. While I also discuss "excessive" sexuality and mental health (another argument Capulet poses as adding to Tila's "bad" representation of bisexuality), my aim is not to make moralistic judgements about "good" or "bad" ways to be bisexual, but is instead to highlight the repetitive ways in which bisexuality is represented in popular culture. By focusing on themes that appear continuously, a greater understanding of bisexual visibility can occur, one that doesn't focus on specific celebrities or characters, but that instead highlights patterns and discursive elements present throughout, as well as the strategic ways in which these representations manifest in conversation with dominant sexuality norms.

In light of many of the above discussions, Nicole Richter's "Ambiguous Bisexuality: The Case of *A Shot at Love with Tila Tequila*" (2011) offers a more nuanced take on the *Shot At Love* series, Tila Tequila, and representations of bisexuality. In analyzing both the series (especially the first two seasons) and Tila Tequila herself, Richter notes how bisexuality is represented ambiguously, where bisexuality is understood in both stereotypical and subversive ways. In addition to discussing some of the more prominent stereotypes/themes surrounding bisexuality (including the plot of erotic triangulation — the simultaneous romance/conflict between straight, bisexual, and gay/lesbian individuals; the temporariness of bisexuality, where bisexuality is seen as actually being straight or gay/lesbian; and the need to constantly "come out" as bisexual in order to be understood as such), Richter also highlights how bisexuality functions to maintain dominant gender and sexuality norms. This normalization of gender and sexuality is most apparent through the normalization of lesbianism (via the lesbian contestants) on the series. More specifically, this is achieved not only through understandings of bisexual-as-other, but also

occurs and is strengthened by an alliance between the straight men and the lesbian contestants (Richter, "Ambiguous Bisexuality" 130). Not only are both groups represented through their shared monosexuality, but the series as a whole — through gendered decor in the house, the fact that both groups must share one giant bed together, and that they all take part in competitions for Tila's affection — works to frame the straight male and lesbian contestants as being "in this together", while Tila Tequila is positioned as the outsider:

In aligning the lesbians with the straight men on the show, *A Shot at Love* worked to normalize lesbian identity and allowed audiences to see heterosexuality and homosexuality as parallel sexual orientations. In terms of narrative, Tila's bisexuality became the scapegoat for building homo/heterosexual unity.

Bisexuality is in effect framed as the 'ultimate perversion'". (Richter, "Ambiguous Bisexuality" 131)

Another interesting point in Richter's work is through her discussion of the "good" vs. the "bad" bisexual. This plays out most obviously in the second season of the series when Tila chooses Kristy, a bisexual woman, to be with at the end of the competition. In declining Tila's offer of love — an offer of love that represents Tila Tequila "choosing a side" (monosexuality) — Richter notes that Kristy takes on the role of being the "bad" bisexual. Here, Kristy's inability to commit to Tila is represented as deceit, as though Kristy was lying about her interest in Tila Tequila the whole time. As such, "what emerges is two versions of bisexuality: the 'authentic' bisexuality embodied by Tila through her proclaimed desire to have a long-term relationship with Christy [sic], and the 'inauthentic' bisexual represented by Christy [sic] who likes to mess around with girls but ultimately doesn't take them seriously as life partners" (Richter, "Ambiguous Bisexuality" 132). However, as Tila's bisexuality is framed in this situation as only being

authentic due to her connection to Kristy's apparent inauthenticity, Richter argues that Tila-as-authentic is only possible because she has been reframed as "lesbian" through her choice to be exclusively with Kristy (Richter, "Ambiguous Bisexuality" 133).

In addition to highlighting the various ways in which bisexuality is represented in more stereotypical ways, as well as providing more nuanced readings of bisexuality *in relation to* dominant understandings of gender and sexuality more broadly, Richter also notes that Tila Tequila and the *Shot At Love* series also advance "the project of bisexual liberation" through visibility (Richter, "Ambiguous Bisexuality" 122). Both the series and Tila actively position bisexuality as a central focus. The blatancy with which bisexuality is made evident is contrary to the majority of representations of bisexuality within popular culture, where bisexuality often exists only through references to sexual fluidity as opposed to having characters/series directly reference it. For Richter, this "visibility is a critical first step for convincing audiences that bisexuality does in fact exist" (Richter, "Ambiguous Bisexuality" 124). The ambiguity found through the *Shot At Love* series (stereotypes *and* political possibilities) mirrors contradictory and ambiguous understandings of bisexuality more broadly. As such, Richter highlights the multitude of possibilities available in a bisexual epistemology, where "bisexuality's ability to inhabit the space of contradiction and frame itself in diverse ways is the primary value of bisexual scholarship" (Richter, "Ambiguous Bisexuality" 137).

* * *

What is missing from many of these scholarly analyses of bisexuality in popular culture are more in-depth examinations of how bisexuality is represented in connection with and in relation to other identity positionalities. As such, my analysis works to highlight the complex ways in which bisexuality intersects with other identities and how these representations often perpetuate specific themes and dominant understandings. One example of this is how

representations and understandings of bisexuality reflect representations and understandings of mental illness, where both are framed as "reckless" and "unstable" within the popular imaginary.

Further, while a few of the above-mentioned works discuss the role that bisexual representations hold in maintaining monosexuality and heteronormativity, I will be expanding on these claims by also highlighting the strategic ways in which bisexuality is represented (through reoccurring themes/tropes) that work to normalize homosexuality and homonormativity. This will become especially apparent through my argument that these representations are framed within a larger social and political climate that forges mainstream gay rights and ideals, often at the cost of more marginalized LGBTQ+ communities. My work diverges from earlier analyses on bisexual representations in popular culture by providing critical, in-depth analysis of *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series, two programs that have been paid relatively little attention. My analysis not only provides a detailed historical account of bisexual visibility, but also discusses bisexuality thematically, highlighting commonalities across bisexual representations as well as shared themes between/with other identities. Finally, by highlighting themes and social/cultural/political ideals, my analysis moves away from more limited, dualistic readings of bisexuality, where representations of bisexuality in popular culture are commonly framed as being "negative" or "unrealistic", and instead reads bisexuality as always-already in conversation with larger hegemonic ideals.

"Although different in formal intent from the prescriptive text and so nominally differentiated from it, mainstream representations of sexuality may perform a similar educative or socializing function. Such representations are complex, to varying degrees both depicting and distorting actual behavior, as well as influencing it" (Vance 12). By recognizing how mainstream media works to produce very specific images for very specific purposes, my analysis

aims to create a space where such depictions can be used as fuel for a radical re-visioning of sexuality more generally, and bisexuality in particular. *The L Word* and the *Shot at Love* series are just two examples where women's bisexuality/sexual fluidity cannot be understood as existing only in relation to itself. Both programs deal with issues surrounding class and social mobility, race and ethnicity, mental health and illness, and hetero- and homonormative ideals. Not only are these identity markers evident in the general premises of the series, but they are also intricately tied to how we come to understand bisexuality more broadly, and how we grow to love, hate, or ignore these bisexual characters in particular.

Overview

This project will analyze representations of bisexual women within popular culture, specifically focusing on two, popular American television programs (*The L Word* and the *Shot at Love* series). By drawing attention to both "fictitious" (*The L Word*) and self-declared "realistic" (*A Shot At Love*) depictions of female bisexuality, my thesis will begin to draw connections between the performance of sexuality and the maintenance of status quo ideals. In addition to providing in-depth intersectional and deconstructive discursive analysis of bisexuality in each series, I analyze bisexuality in relation to predominant themes that continuously appear throughout both shows, themes that work to frame bisexuality in strategic ways that maintain and perpetuate normative conceptions of sexuality in relation to bisexuality's perceived "otherness". I draw on theories of the abject/monstrous other, queer theory, and theories of performance and performativity to navigate the various thematic representations of bisexuality.

Chapter One details my theoretical and methodological influences, specifically highlighting abjection, performance theory and theory of performativity, and queer theory, as well as the intersectional and deconstructive discursive analysis I will employ throughout.

Chapter Two provides a contemporary history of popular culture representations of bisexuality during the 2000s, as well as detailing in full the two televisual examples I analyze. Chapter Three is framed by an understanding of abjection, where I analyze themes in which bisexuality is presented as "deviant", "excessive", "comical", and "confused". Chapter Four is framed by an understanding of authenticity, and I specifically analyze bisexuality in conversation with themes of "coming out", "deceit", "temporariness", and "instability". Finally, my concluding chapter situates my examination within a larger understanding of hetero- and homonormativity, and specifically reads these representations in connection to the social, cultural, and political happenings of the mainstream gay rights movement in the United States.

The importance of this study is far reaching. First and foremost, prejudice against bisexual individuals (biphobia) is rampant in both straight and gay and lesbian communities as illustrated above. Most recently, the prevalence of biphobia and the circulation of common, simplistic beliefs of bisexuality has been the focus of a Canadian research project. In this study, the researchers have documented the alarming effects that biphobia (as witnessed in straight and LGBTQ+ communities) has on the mental health and wellbeing of bisexual-identified individuals (Ross et al.). From experiencing poor health outcomes due to biphobia to lack of support from mental health practitioners when sought out, the effects of negative representations of bisexuality are long-lasting and need to be part of larger critical conversations.

Secondly, the main depictions that I analyze have been highly viewed examples of bisexuality within popular culture. By focusing on popular culture, this study reaches beyond academia by discussing shows that are recent, relevant, and popular in order to demonstrate how ideologies surrounding certain sexualities have been created for specific entertainment and political purposes. Finally, by recognizing how representations of bisexuality are framed by

specific repetitive themes and how they work together to produce specific understandings of bisexuality, I hope to create a space where such depictions can be used as fuel for a radical re-visioning of a sexuality that does not need to rely on more traditional, binary sexuality ideals in order to be understood.

Chapter One: Theoretical and Methodological Outlook

Theory

Throughout my dissertation, I will draw on a few intersecting theoretical frameworks in order to best contextualize my analysis of representations of bisexuality in popular culture, as well as to discuss how such representations and constructed understandings work to facilitate certain readings of bisexuality. Specifically, I will use theories of the abject and monstrous, theories of performance and performativity, and theories that critique normative understandings of sexuality from within queer theory to frame my analysis and discussion. For purposes of clarity, each theory (and the contexts from which they arise) will be highlighted on its own, but my use of these theories will be one that is much more fluid, dynamic, and representative of bisexuality's own complexity.

Abjection and Monstrosity

Women's bodies and experiences have long been central concerns within certain areas of feminist politics and theories. Understandings of women's bodies — and bodies more generally — as being fluid and multiple, however, have been especially highlighted and conceptualized in more contemporary, postmodern feminist thought. In particular, feminists such as Judith Butler and Margrit Shildrick see the body (and identity subjectivities tied to certain bodies) as a discursive construction, produced in and through specific power/knowledges, which then produce the necessity to critique and analyze these formations in order to uncover what purposes these constructions serve (Shildrick and Price 7).

In conversation with the discursive production of bodies and identities, one of the overarching theoretical frames I will draw from are feminist theories on the body, and specifically on theories surrounding bodies as "monstrous", "out of place", and "abject". While

many theorists have brilliantly articulated how certain bodies are understood as being always-already leaky, faulty, and volatile (namely, Creed; Grosz; Russo; and Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries* and *Embodying the Monster*), I will specifically be drawing on understandings of the "abject", perhaps most popularly theorized through the work of Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. The "abject" refers to Julia Kristeva's theories on bodily acts and substances that are out of place. The abject body "leaks wastes and fluids in violation of the desire and hope for the 'clean and proper' body, thus making the boundaries and limitations of our selfhood ambiguous, and indicating our physical wasting and ultimate death" (Covino 17). Our greatest repulsion of the abject — all that is leaky, wasteful, diseased, and so forth — stems from the notion that we must protect ourselves from impending danger. It is feared because it is ambiguous and perpetually present. Simply expelling these bodily aspects deemed "abject" (urine, feces, vomit, blood, and etcetera) will not necessarily protect us: "on the contrary, abjection acknowledges [the body] to be in perpetual danger", forming a "composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives" (Kristeva 9-10). They stand in to remind us of our constant faults, a taunting riddle forcing us to recognize our human flaws and our inability to be perfected beings. In this context, the abject is so repulsive because it stands to disrupt the very boundaries by which our existences have come to situate themselves.

While abjectness at its core is best understood as a means of understanding the formation and maintenance of the subject/object, human/non-human, Kristeva positions abjectness within the symbolic (psychoanalytical) and the material (biological) mother/woman, and sees abjection as being situated within and between the bonds of the mother-child relationship. As such, Kristeva is concerned by how the symbolic mother becomes materialized as the material Woman. As Barbara Creed details, abjection occurs through the symbolic dissolution of this

relationship, where "the child struggles to break free but the mother is reluctant to release it" (Creed 11). Within this understanding, it is in the separation of the child from the mother that the child is able to become human, in that they enter the world of individuality, language, citizenship (Covino 21). It is this process of leaving behind the mother/Woman, which is symbolically tied to classical understandings of women's bodies as being sites of irrationality and deviancy, that Kristeva articulates the theory of the "abject" as being a process towards maintaining social order and control, and ultimately, creating and maintaining the normal, masculine social body in distinction from the archaic, feminine abject body.

In this respect, the abject body forces us to recognize its slippery nature, which perpetually tests the borders of life and death, human and monster. The abject figure is also "perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but it turns them aside, misleads, corrupts, uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them" (Kristeva 15). Its very presence repeatedly disrupts borders and simultaneously denies and accepts social propriety. All that is abject — all that is disposed of by the body to maintain its health — violates our need for social control and rationality. It stands in to remind us that no matter how hard we work towards being proper and perfect, we can never fully rid ourselves of our horrific "nature".

In her discussion on the abject body, Deborah Caslav Covino utilizes Patricia Yaeger and Mary Russo's categorization of the abject woman to situate her body as a place where utter abjectness is attained, but without the evidence of a corpse (as Kristeva argued) (Covino 29). They state that the female body, which is full of capacities to leak and purge, explicitly violates the social position relegated to her — that is to be clean and proper. The very existence of a female body — the abject woman — signifies the fact that she has fully immersed herself within the realm of the monstrous, defying symbolic order along the way (Covino 29). By her existence

— a body full of excess waste — she cannot be understood within the dualistic framework of the rational mind. But her existence cannot be ignored; her leaking body will time and again remind you that she is here to stay, and as such, she is situated precariously in a state that is in-between. She is meaning collapsed, the place where intelligibility ceases to exist (Creed 37). She must be radically excluded from the remainder of society through various measures to ensure that her threat of infection does not seep over the sides of the fence.

While Kristeva's work may not allow for understandings of abjection as understood through multiple bodily positionalities, in that she appears to focus nearly entirely on assumed white, cis-gendered women, her work remains critical in that she does invoke feminist and queer understandings of psychoanalysis — one of the historical power-knowledges that studied, monitored, and classified bisexuality. In spite of this importance and the popularity of Kristeva's perspective, however, I will be moving away from an essentialist understanding of the "abject" and instead join together with queer, poststructuralist theorists in recognizing the "abject" as existing within a system of discursive formations as opposed to biological manifestations.

Kristeva's work has been critiqued as being essentialist, especially in relation to how she articulates the maternal and Woman in limited, pre-discursive ways (see: Birgit Schippers' (2011) thorough examination of the different ways Kristeva's work has been taken up by modern feminist thinkers, including Kristeva's use of the maternal body and debates over essentialism). More specifically, "Kristeva is often accused of positive essentialism (idealizing women or maternity), negative essentialism (representing women as 'other,' as 'foreign'), or of effacing, if not erasing, both 'Woman' and real women as a distinct group with concrete political interests" (Edelstein 214). While dominant understandings of bisexuality tend to reflect essentialist, binary understandings of gender and sexuality, as is especially evident in popular culture examples, the

deconstructive analysis of this project moves away from essentialism and instead works through an understanding that bisexuality (like all identities) is discursively produced and formed through culture and dominant ideologies. However, despite some of the more essentialist aspects of Kristeva's theorizing of the abject, its usefulness as a theory to understand and work through representations of bisexuality in popular culture remains. Instead of situating my understanding of abjectness as existing within a symbolic and material maternal figure, I incorporate Kristeva's articulations of the abject as being that which is expelled in order to maintain systems of regulation and control. It is the idea of risk and threat to hegemonic ideals that sees abjectness as a useful tool in this discussion of bisexuality, as the abject, whether that is referring to an act, substance, or person, is something that does not respect borders, and is an ambiguous and shameless traitor/liar — qualities which are, once again, often associated with bisexuality (Kristeva 4). It will be through this articulation, as well as other theorizations of the abject/monstrous/grotesque/deviant (namely, through Butler, Russo, and Shildrick) that the cultural formation and understanding of bisexuality as abject (especially in reference to an understanding of a more "rational" homonormative subject) will become evident.

Drawing on Kristeva's understanding of the "abject", Sigmund Freud's "uncanny", and Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion of the carnival figure of the "grotesque" (which will be discussed in Chapter Three), Mary Russo traces the creation and presence of "female grotesque", a site of risk, anxiety, and abjection. Importantly, while Russo does recognize this body as existing within the realm of the feminine, she is careful not to essentialize this figure as always-already Woman. Instead, Russo sees all identities understood as "grotesque" as being "produced through an association with the feminine as the body marked by difference" (Russo 13). Key to this is "produced", as Russo sees bodies and identities as being created through historical, social, and

cultural understandings and ideals, as being produced through discursive patterns as opposed to biological determinism.

Mary Russo states that the grotesque body is a body which is an "open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming, process, and change" — all of which stand in complete opposition to the closed, clean, and completed masculine body, therefore instantly relegating it to the feminine domain (Russo 62). Here, Russo's use of the "feminine" is specifically tied to classical understandings of the mind and body, where the mind is always-already associated with rational, normal, human, and masculine, and the body is always-already seen as irrational, deviant, monstrous, and feminine. Even if a grotesque body is inhabited by a man, social articulations of such bodies are still brought forth under the premise that they are deviant because their bodies no longer resemble the rational, stable, fixed masculine ideal, but instead the absurd, erratic, and fluid female deviation. As such, the figure of the "female grotesque" risks dismantling — or at least highlighting the fabricatedness of — normalizing systems of representations and understanding.

Throughout *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity*, Russo traces what she calls "grotesque performance" within literary, artistic, and popular culture representations. Through the "grotesque performance," Russo uncovers how notions of "unconventional" femininity (more specifically, abjectness) become reinscribed time and again in order to maintain larger social and cultural understandings of more idealized and conventional femininity (Covino 30). In addition to highlighting the reinforcement of hegemonic ideals through social, political, and cultural discourses, Russo also sees the "grotesque performance" as being a site of disruptive possibility, in that these performances make evident the refusal to subscribe (or the possibility to not subscribe) to norms and instead allows the potential "self-fashioning with reference to a body

that does not obey prescribed limits" (Covino 30). It is this idea of possibility through performance of the grotesque/abject, in addition to Butler's discussion of performativity more generally (as will be discussed below) that is exciting and useful to a discussion of bisexuality within popular culture. On the one hand, how have abject performances of bisexuality further perpetuated idealized notions of a "good" and "bad" queer citizen? At the same time, how might such abject performances be read as/utilized as a means to critique larger assumptions about sexuality and hegemonic ideals more generally, while at the same time offering a possible playful alternative to such ideals?

While utilizing similar understandings of abjectness and monstrosity as Kristeva, in that abjectness/monstrosity allows us to think about standards or normality and control, Margrit Shildrick moves away from Kristeva's aforementioned essentialism, and instead articulates a theory of monstrosity that situates the self/monstrous-other as a continuous "condition of becoming" (Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster* 1). More specifically, Shildrick sees the figure of the monster, or monstrous understandings of bodies out of the "norm", as not only standing in *opposition* to understandings of the self and normality, but as being inherently necessary to the *production* and maintenance of the rational self.

In addition to Shildrick's poststructuralist approach to understanding the formation of bodies and identities, Shildrick further diverts from earlier discussions of the body/abjectness/monstrosity via an intersectional analysis. In particular, Shildrick extends her work from not only addressing how femininity and racialized individuals have been constructed as "monstrous", but also includes and highlights the historical and social understanding of disability with reference to embodied difference (Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster* 2). This understanding of difference will be useful in my analysis of the intersecting representations of

bisexuality and mental health, especially in highlighting how representations of mental health as "unstable" and "volatile" interestingly coalesce with representations of bisexuality as "fake" and "temporary".

Shildrick theorizes monstrosity and "monstrous bodies" as "bodies that in their gross failure to approximate to corporeal norms are radically excluded" (Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster* 2). Drawing from this, I argue that it is not only through failure to subscribe (or inability to subscribe) to corporeal norms that excludes othered-bodies, but also through failure to subscribe to hegemonic ideals of the self that are not necessarily grounded in the corporeal. Perhaps most importantly, notions of both the "monstrous" and the "self" are not formed through some inherent, essentialist understanding of biological differences, but instead through a process of iteration, whereby the very constitution of such subjectivities relies on *performative* and discursive patterns or repetition (Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster* 84). It is through this understanding of performativity and processes of becoming that Shildrick challenges the security of these categories ("monstrous" vs. "self") by recognizing the very impossibility of fully embodying either category. In recognizing this vulnerability of both the self and other, Shildrick sees the usefulness of "monstrosity" as a challenge to "the parameters of the subject as defined within logocentric discourse" (Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster* 3). It is this ambiguity (or leakiness, in reference to abject qualities) that threatens to undo normative discourses and identity formations. In a similar way to which bisexuality is understood in reference to and definition of hetero- and homosexuality, Shildrick's theorizing of the monstrous defines the limits of the normalized "self" as well as reflects the very instability of such definitions as "the self" is always at "risk" and threatened by its inherent vulnerability (Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster* 67).

This understanding of performativity, especially in reference to the formation and maintenance of identity positionalities, is perhaps best understood through the theories of Judith Butler. While I will elaborate below on Butler's performativity, both Butler's critique of Kristeva's "abject" and the elaboration of abjectivity through a poststructuralist perspective has been incredibly influential in a movement away from understanding bodies and identities in essentialist ways and instead focuses on recognizing their discursive formations.

One of Butler's main critiques of Kristeva's work has been on her dependency on and description of the maternal body, both in *Powers of Horror* as well as her earlier work. By positioning the maternal body as pre-symbolic, as before culture, Kristeva in effect maintains the hegemonic understanding of culture as paternalistic as opposed to deconstructing it (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 109). This essentialist understanding works to further relegate and "other" the maternal, and by effect, women, and situate this understanding as "natural" and a priori as opposed to seeing such formations as cultural constructions that are variable and changing based on historical, social, cultural, and political specificity.

Butler understands subjectivities as coming into formation through discursive patterns. As part of these patterns, historically and socially specific ideals and norms become reinscribed through performative processes of reiteration, and as such, produce subjectivities that are contingent upon systemic regulations and constraints. One of the primary means of creating and maintaining understandings of the self is through the "assumption" of the other, and the propagation of this constructed system as "natural" (Butler, "Bodies That Matter" 236). It is through this process of exclusion — of the production of "othered" bodies by which the "self" is constituted in and through — that Butler utilizes the notion of the "abject". For Butler, the "abject" is produced as "those who are not yet 'subjects', but who form the constitutive outside to

the domain of the subject" (Butler, "Bodies That Matter" 237). In this respect, the "self" is produced in and through the expulsion of the abject "other" through a continuous — reiterative — process of regulation and control, and thus produces an understanding of an "abjected outside" and a subjective "inside" (Butler, "Bodies That Matter" 237). Instead of seeing abjectness and the expulsion of all that is considered abject as being a means to merely maintaining borders between the self and other, Butler sees how repulsion of the abject in and of itself actively constitutes the self and other (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 182). Similarly to Shildrick's articulations of the "monstrous", Butler sees the constructed nature of both the "abject" and the "self" as challenging notions of fixity and normativity as opposed to merely maintaining it. It is through this continuous performativity of the "self" in reference to the abject "other" that simultaneously maintains such hegemonic understandings as well as destabilizes them by virtue of their reiterations; these are not "natural" occurrences, but instead ones that must continuously be enacted and performed in order to maintain intelligibility.

Queer Theoretical Approaches

How are bisexual individuals read as being bisexual? What signs and signifiers are understood as referencing bisexuality? Must bisexuality always be a blatant and conscious enactment? Is it only understood through, as mentioned previously, the sexual act of being with both men and women at the same time? Similarly, why is bisexuality always-already understood as the sexual attraction to both men and women as opposed to the sexual attraction to two or more genders/sexes? This is especially interesting since the prefix "bi-" makes no reference to any genders/sexes; it only references "two". With respect to these questions (among others), queer theory will be incredibly useful in breaking down heteronormative constructions of identity and belonging.

The social, cultural, political, and theoretical revolutions of the 1960 and 1970s provided many necessary tools of critical investigation that initiated the creation of queer theory. In particular, the sexual rights and political movements of this time period, which called for attention to and deconstruction of heterosexism and hegemonic institutions of power and privilege, helped shape some of the core principles of queer theory. These systems of power and regulation have long been theoretical concepts at the core of many feminist conversations. Feminist theorizing on sexuality and its relationship to political and social institutions of knowledge formation have long viewed sexuality in conjunction with gender, with gender most often taking importance over sexuality and being seen as the main site of inequality. Coming out of the events of the 1970s, feminist scholars began to question both the prioritization of gender in these conversations and the universalizing of "woman" and "womanhood" as an identity category.

In the 1980s and into the 1990s, key feminist theorists (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Gayle Rubin, Judith Butler, Teresa de Lauretis as influenced by Monique Wittig and Adrienne Rich, to name but a few) began to write about sexuality and gender as two distinct areas and called for a separation of the two "in order for the internal dynamics within the production of homosexuality and heterosexuality to be understood" (McLaughlin et al. 1). Gayle Rubin's 1984 essay "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality", in which Rubin provides a framework for thinking about sex and sexuality, was particularly influential to the formation of queer theory. Throughout the article, Rubin notes how many various sexual acts and sexualities have been socially constructed as either proper or deviant, and goes on to highlight the specific ways institutions of knowledge and sites of activism (like feminism) have theorized sex and sexuality in limited ways. Articulating difference in feminist theorizing of sex and sexuality,

Rubin notes that many feminists have called for sexual liberation through the envisioning of environments in which women can experience their own sexual fluidity as a political move away from strict regulations which seek to hinder women's movement (Rubin 28). At the same time, many have also drawn attention to how sexuality is seen as being "liberating", arguing certain recuperations of "sexual liberation to be inherently a mere extension of male privilege" (like anti-pornography feminism) (Rubin 28).

Challenging this dualistic framework of analyzing sexuality through feminism, Rubin calls for a separation of gender and sexuality within theorizing of systems of oppression. In the focus on, or, prioritization of, gender over sexuality, sexuality is read as merely an extension of systemic gender inequality as opposed to being understood as a "vector of oppression" in and of itself, that may intersect with other modes of inequality (including gender) but that has dynamics, histories, and politics inherent to itself alone (Rubin 22). Providing an example of lesbian feminist ideology, Rubin highlights how lesbians are oppressed not only as women but also as "queers and perverts, by the operation of sexual, not gender, stratification" (Rubin 33). Rubin believes that analyses of gender and patriarchy must be incorporated into theories of sex and sexuality, just as theories of sexual oppression would benefit feminism, but ultimately, she champions for a theorization of sex and sexuality that is of its own (Rubin 34).

In addition to feminist critiques on prioritizing gender in conversations about sexuality, another field that greatly influenced the creation of queer theory was that of poststructuralist theory. French philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan were particularly influential to queer theory theorists and their use of discourse analysis and the illustration of systems of knowledge-productions. Poststructuralists viewed subjectivities (as well as knowledge and power which form subjectivities) as being created,

produced, and understood in and through historically and culturally specific discourse (Sullivan 2). Poststructuralists seek to break down assumptions of "truth" and "nature", and in the process, expose the constructedness of meaning. As such, "what is not said — slips, silences and unfinished thoughts — garner as much interest as that which is verbalised; unpacking the latent becomes as important a task as understanding that which is stated directly" (Giffney 7).

Michel Foucault's work on the creation of identities (including that of homo- and heterosexuality) through systems of knowledge/power disciplinary actions and discourses has had tremendous effects on queer theory and is especially useful for analyzing representations of bisexuality (*Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, 1965; *The History of Sexuality Vol.1-3*, 1978, 1985, 1986). For Foucault, sexuality not only became one of the key elements in the maintenance of social control and order, but our understandings of sexuality itself were developed through various techniques of governance and control, namely biopower.

Foucault articulates biopower as that which "made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life" through explicit mechanisms and calculations (Foucault, *An Introduction* 143). Under this premise, whole groups of people seeming to display similar characteristics — or "populations" — are monitored and tallied at every turn. Death rates, birth rates, marriage rates, and so forth, work to produce norms in which the "populations" should (must) follow —legal ages for marriage; types of relationships individuals are allowed to have with one another; hours one can work; and the list continues. And once specific norms are categorized and dispersed to the masses as "common knowledge", deviations are also recognized and labelled accordingly. The creation of terms to describe particular actions of a certain population, for instance heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual, "can be traced to changes in the

medical and emerging psychiatric professions that sought to categorise people's behaviour and understand such behaviour as symptomatic of innate identities" (Alexander and Yescavage, "The Scholars Formerly Known As" 52).

Within this space, no longer does a certain act or lifestyle solely represent an independent agent; now, under the guise of public control, biopower works to place specific traits and characteristics on whole groups of individuals. However, as Foucault argues, the role of biopower does not simply end in classification – "A power whose task is to take charge of life needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms" (Foucault, *An Introduction* 144). In one and the same instant, a person is not only a part of a population deemed "deviant" or "normal" but they are also subjected to a series of practices and disciplines that work to control and correct their body and actions. With reference to queer theory, and more importantly for this project on bisexuality, the hierarchization of sexualities produces systems that actively work to regulate and discipline sexual norms. Representing bisexuality as "deviant", "fake", and "temporary" in mainstream popular culture continues to not only perpetuate problematic stereotypes, but through this, maintains hegemonic systems of power and privilege, especially in relation to sexualities that are read as "proper" and "authentic" often *in and through* bisexuality's deviance.

It is through this theorizing on and analysis of gender and sexuality that has provided much of the important groundwork for queer theory. In 1991, feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis first used the term "queer" in reference to a new "queer theory", which she hoped would purposefully unsettle and challenge the complacency that was occurring in Lesbian and Gay Studies (Halperin 340). In addition to this, "she hoped both to make theory queer (that is, to challenge the heterosexist underpinnings and assumptions of what conventionally passed for

'theory' in academic circles) and to queer theory (to call attention to everything that is perverse about the project of theorizing sexual desire and sexual pleasure)" (Halperin 340). However, as Halperin notes, the establishment of queer theory, and, its widespread use within the academy, calls into question the very "queerness" and perversity of the field that de Lauretis and others had initially championed for due to its very institutionalization.

The establishment of an anti-establishment theoretical outlook is just one of the concerns that queer theory presents. The lack of intersectionality in queer theory has been another important point of critique. While challenging hegemonic systems of understanding and power, queer theory is still primarily taught about and concerned with white, Western, able-bodied gay men and lesbians. José Esteban Muñoz details how white queer theorists often cite race through "a soft multicultural *inclusion*", where race is often only discussed in relation to sexuality when the topic involves people of colour and when queer theorists of colour are only cited in research instead of being critically engaged with (Muñoz 11). This performance of political correctness not only leads to erasure and ignorance of systemic inequalities faced by queers of colour (and other marginalized identity sub-groups) but also renders the possibility of political action and change (a core tenet of queer theory) nearly impossible.

In addition to the prioritizing of white, Western, and gay/lesbian identities and experiences in queer theory within the academy, the term "queer" itself has become a more popular umbrella-style form of identification for LGBTQ+ sexualities. The term "queer" operates in a multitude of ways, including fostering feelings of community, as well as acting as a movement-building technique where groups of people who experience similar systemic forms of oppression (in this case, gender and sexuality-based oppressions) can more cohesively organize for political purposes. Alternatively, the term can lead to prioritization of some identity

groups and the erasure of others. In this respect, "queer" has become understood within the larger cultural imaginary as being synonymous with "gay" and/or "lesbian", and a majority of the research within queer theory has reflected the same. This leaves "little room for identities, desires, practices and relationships that [fall] in between or outside of such categories", in addition to challenging the very existence of that which exist in the margins, like bisexuality as one example (Giffney 5). Since it is seen as existing between hetero- and homosexuality, bisexuality offers queer theory an opportunity to question traditional understandings and boundaries of sexuality in general:

[T]his is not to say that bisexuality is the 'magic bullet' for totalizing constructions of sexuality. It is simply to say that bisexuality, brought into theoretical play, might exert enough pressure on those constructions to disrupt, irreparably, sexually homogenized accounts of queers. Doing so might in turn make way for disrupting the homogenization that takes place around race, gender, class, and other sources of difference that are so often suppressed in the service of constructing a coherent subject of queer theory and politics. (Young 68)

Aside from the above mentioned concerns, queer theory still offers a viable and exciting theoretical outlook to deconstruct representations of bisexuality. Bisexuality's apparent middle-positionality (between hetero- and homosexuality) and potential fluidity offers exciting challenges to and critiques of normative conceptions of sexuality, challenges and critiques that queer theory encourages. It is here that queer theory offers us a theoretical outlook to "disrupt and denaturalise sexual and gender categories in ways that recognise the fluidity, instability and fragmentation of identities and a plurality of gendered subject positions" (D. Richardson 22). In addition to challenging "natural" assumptions about sexuality, I will use queer theorists'

discussions of performativity (discussed in the following section) to illustrate how understandings of bisexuality surface through repetition within a highly regulated frame of understanding. Finally, I embrace the call for a renewed queer studies/theory that recognizes that "sexuality is intersectional, not extraneous to other modes of difference, and calibrated to a firm understanding of queer as a political metaphor without a fixed referent" (Eng et al. 1) in order to articulate new possibilities and understandings of bisexual representations in popular culture.

Performance Theory and Theory of Performativity

In order to contextualize the literal performances of bisexuality within popular culture, an understanding of performance theory is necessary. While the definition for 'performance' is as fluid and changing as performance acts themselves, I will primarily be drawing on Erving Goffman's definition throughout — "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his [*sic*] continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observer" (Goffman 22).

Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* has been one of the seminal theoretical contributions to the foundation of Performance Studies. Goffman investigates how everyday occurrences and interactions amongst people operate in similar ways to dramaturgical performances (Goffman xi). Goffman uses the understanding of an actor — one who performs characters and scenes to an audience — to express the similarities in which non-actors perform themselves in social situations. Drawing on Goffman's definition of performance, we see how the various participants of an "act" encompass the similar roles that take place within dramaturgical performances — the person who is the main participant of this activity (maybe leading a discussion or activity) becomes the performer, while the remaining participants fall into the roles of the audience, observers, and even co-participants/actors (Goffman 16).

Goffman continues with illustrating the performance of everyday life by highlighting the repetitious nature of our everyday actions and interactions, including our sceneries, settings, mannerisms, and often times, our appearances. All of these operate together to produce a sense of coherence and understanding, which then become necessary for our everyday performances to be read as "truthful" and "authentic", which are the main aspects that differentiate it from dramaturgical performances. While I will be discussing "authenticity" at length in Chapter Four, it is necessary here to highlight the importance of an understanding of "coherence" and "authenticity", both to Goffman's theorizing of everyday performances as well as to my theorizing of "authenticity" in reference to bisexuality:

Perhaps most important of all, we must note that a false impression maintained by an individual in any one of his [*sic*] routines may be a threat to the whole relationship or role of which the routine is only one part, for a discreditable disclosure in one area of an individual's activity will throw doubt on the many areas of activity in which he [*sic*] may have nothing to conceal. (Goffman 64-65)

Through this understanding, if the performer is read as "fake" by and/or as portraying a false reality to the audience, a sense of doubt then prefaces the performer's other performances. Goffman's understanding of casting doubt on the audience is useful in analyzing not only how bisexuality is portrayed/performed within popular culture, but also, and perhaps more importantly, how the creation of doubt over such performances seeps into other areas of the performer/bisexual's life.

Drawing from Goffman and other sociological and anthropological investigations into everyday occurrences and rites of passage, in addition to theatre studies, Performance Studies is an interdisciplinary academic discipline that views performance as existing in human behaviours

and actions. For Richard Schechner, one of the founders of Performance Studies, the underlying premise for what is understood as "performance" (and thereby what is studied in Performance Studies) is "any action that is framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed" (Schechner 2). These actions can be anything from more traditional understandings of "performances" (theatre, film and television, entertainment), rituals, play, sports, and everyday "natural" occurrences, including how we perform and understand gender, race, class roles and so on (Schechner 2).

For Schechner, analyzing performances (both of the everyday and the spectacular) have radical possibilities in understanding the constructed nature of our actions and behaviours that are positioned within historically and culturally specific moments. More specifically, it is in moments of upheaval or breaks from our performances (similar to Goffman's discussion of inducing doubt in the audience) — that is, in-between fact and fiction, space and time, and the actor and audience — that allow for moments of deconstruction. These moments of "in-betweenness" is perhaps best illustrated through the anthropological discussions of "liminality" in reference to rites of passage, especially through the works of Victor Turner and Arnold van Gennep.

Cultural anthropologist, Victor Turner, is perhaps best known for his work with the Ndembu people on rituals and rites of passage in the early 1950s. Drawing heavily on ethnographer Arnold van Gennep, Turner developed a model for analyzing the social dramas he witnessed during the rites of passage rituals amongst the Ndembu, and argued for its use in explaining our daily acts of performance. Throughout his ethnographic field work, Turner notes that many of the social ceremonies or rituals he witnessed amongst the Ndembu in north-western Zambia were specifically designed to mark the progression —transition— from one phase of life or social status into another (Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* 7).

Drawing from van Gennep's terms for rites of passage, Turner notes three specific moments, or phases, that assisted with the transition from one position of status to another — separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation (Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* 94). The first phase involves removing the individual from their family group and the specific role they hold in the social structure. This separation is often on account of a breach in an accepted norm. Following separation, the initiates find themselves in an ambiguous position; they no longer hold the status that they had prior to this rite of passage, nor have they emerged from the ritual anew. Within this space a life-crisis forms — the identity one originally held is questioned — followed closely by the employment of resolution tactics which allow for the transition to occur. In the final phase of the rite of passage, the initiate re-enters the original structure with a new (often higher, but not always) status level (Turner, *Dramas, Fields* 232). By existing in the space in-between — the second stage of transition — and through performing the required acts of that given situation, one changes the final outcome of their identity. In that middle space (the liminal), one has no fixed identity — they are not what they once were and are not yet what they will become. It is only through performing that one emerges, and then transitions into a new space of being.

Recognizing that there was a distinct difference between cultures marked by varying degrees of industrialization, Turner utilized the concept of the "liminoid" to describe ritual-like types of action that occurred in spaces marked by the arts, entertainment, and recreation (post-industrial) as opposed to the rites of passage rituals he was studying amongst the Ndembu (Schechner 67). This idea represented liminal-like moments where agents experienced social dramas in more individualized ways, often entering into these spaces more freely, out of choice over obligation (Schechner 67). While the liminal speaks to an aspect of society, where the

liminal is performed in order to maintain specific cultural ties and positions of social status, the liminoid refers to a break from society, a momentary space for play. While there are definitive changes in the roles that one has within traditional liminal spaces (i.e.: the wedding ceremony signifies the change from single to married), the liminoid represent brief fissures in time and space where subversion can occur in the moment, but where no concrete changes in roles occur in the end.

Through the description of the liminal/liminoid spaces, an element of "outsiderhood" is enacted to refer to both the feeling of being different from those in one's original group, as well as, the literal, space and temporal position that the liminal figure occupies as being separate from the understandable, clearly delineated sections of society. However, Turner is careful to make a distinction between the liminal figure and those found on the margins — "marginals," who are "simultaneously members (by ascription, potation, self-definition, or achievement) of two or more groups whose social definitions and cultural norms are distinct from, and often even opposed to, one another" (Turner, *Dramas, Fields* 233). Marginals also find themselves in the strange in-between state that the liminal figure does, however, the liminal individual has the assurance that they can eventually resolve their ambiguity. Marginals have no cultural assurance that they will (re)gain a position of status once they move away from the margins. Those in the liminal/liminoid spaces acknowledge that there is a sort of cultural play at work, where notions of "make-believe" are always visible under the surface as these transition rituals are dictated by cultural requirements (Turner, *Dramas, Fields* 233).

Drawing on these anthropological accounts of spaces (and identities) that exist "in-between", Schechner positions the liminal within a conversation of everyday performances. The liminal is read as "a passageway between places rather than a place in itself" (Schechner 66).

Through this understanding, identities/acts/behaviours considered "in-between" often exist — or are understood in and through — two spaces that are read as being "concrete" and always-already. Performances/identities/behaviours within this space are seen as "threatening" and "monstrous" in that "it normally suggests that a frightening chaos is the alternative to the established order" (Carlson 19). This notion of "in-between" is especially interesting with reference to bisexuality, where bisexual individuals are often read as straddling two worlds — hetero- and homosexuality. Through analyzing the performance of bisexuality as situated within popular culture, it will be interesting to see whether Schechner's theory of potential chaos remains a tangible possibility when these very performances may be read as working to maintain social order and structure.

My use of performance theory and understandings of liminality in reference to bisexuality in popular culture is an exciting point of analysis. On the one hand, performance theory is useful because I analyze highly mediated, mainstream cultural examples. Here, "performance" is perhaps most obvious, as television and popular culture more generally are often understood as being "fake" and "performed" in the dramaturgical sense of the word. How is bisexuality literally scripted and performed in these series? How does the "reality" of "reality TV" (as *A Shot at Love* is promoted as) change our understandings of such performances? Since part of my dissertation will examine the thematic ways in which bisexuality is represented in popular culture, it will also be imperative to look at bisexuality as not only a "theatrical" performance but also as everyday performativities of gender and sexuality norms and ideals. As discussed above, queer theory will be useful in critiquing constructed notions and understandings of bisexuality and of bisexuality-in-reference-to other sexualities. Within this space and in conjunction with performance theory, the theory of "performativity" will be a necessary

inclusion in order to illustrate how the reiteration of certain traits/behaviours ascribed to bisexuality works to construct our understanding of "authenticity", especially in relation to viability.

"Performative" is best understood as a behaviour, act, utterance, and so on, that does something. While being an integral part to Performance Studies in general, "performativity" references an act that has an outcome, and in particular, that constructs and maintains our social reality (Schechner 123). First explored through the work of linguist J.L. Austin, "performative" was originally theorized in reference to speech-acts. In utterances such as "I apologize" or "I now pronounce you married", an act has occurred. It is not merely the description of actions, but these utterances are actions in and of themselves (Schechner 123). Austin goes on to discuss the ways in which these utterances had to be "authentic", as in, not found within the space of the theatre or dramaturgically performed, in order for their power to be asserted. This point of division — between theatre and "reality" — has been a major point of division amongst Performance Studies theorists and poststructuralist theorists more generally. In Austin's assumption that there is an "authentic" space where such performances exert discursive powers, he simultaneously maintains hegemonic understandings of a "natural" or a priori space/act/behaviour/identity that is before culture. Instead, through a poststructuralist approach, "meaning — and all and every meaning is contingent, temporary — is created in process through the complex interaction of all speakers (players) and their specific personal-cultural circumstances" (Schechner 125). In other words, intelligibility is constructed and maintained in and through specific historical, cultural, and political understandings.

Deconstructing the constructedness of subjectivities has been a foundational principle to poststructuralism as well as queer theory (as mentioned above). In particular, it is through the

work of Judith Butler's theorizing of gender and sexuality as social constructions, as influenced by the works of Simone de Beauvoir among others, that is most useful to this discussion of bisexuality and performativity. Butler argues that identities are socially and culturally constructed, and in effect, are inscribed on bodies in ways that perpetuate the belief of such identities (and acts, gestures, and desires) as being internal to or a natural eminence of certain bodies (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 185). Butler goes on to argue that these acts are performative in that "the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 185). In reference to gender, which is the main category that Butler seeks to deconstruct, the illusory creation of a particular gender core as found within a particularly gendered body works to maintain dominant power dynamics and understandings, and through this, facilitates compulsory heterosexuality⁵.

If we understand gender (and other identity formations, for that matter) as being contingent upon temporal and historically specific understandings, values, and ideals, then one can begin to process how such identities are in fact productions. One of the primary ways in which these acts/identities/behaviours both achieve the promotion of "naturalness" as well as risk the possibility of being discovered as cultural creations is through the process of repetition, where "repetition is at once a re-enactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 191). Since gender identity relies on the reiteration of specific ideals, attitudes, and values, there is the risk of mis-stepping, failing to repeat, choosing not to repeat, as well as

⁵ "Compulsory heterosexuality" can be traced throughout many works on the cultural construction of gender, and especially through Adrienne Rich (1980) and Monique Wittig's (1980) theorization of heterosexuality as a political ideology that is maintained and perpetuated through social, cultural, and political constructions of gender and sexuality more broadly.

generally performing discontinuities, which allow for the very instability and tenuousness of identity construction to be revealed (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 192).

This understanding of gender as being socially constructed, as well as how such constructions maintain and facilitate our understandings of sexuality more generally, is a crucial point of reference. As gender is constructed within a two-model framework that then facilitates a two-model understanding of sexuality (hetero-and homosexuality), there is the opportunity to read any discontinuities in the production/performance of such constructions as a failure of normative standards of being. It is through "the very nature of signification (as multiplicitous, inter-subjective, and constitutive), and the subject's inability to control signification, make subversion at once possible and unpredictable" (Sullivan 91). Any success that performative acts might achieve in producing normalized understandings of being are temporary and are entirely dependent on culturally and historically specific understandings of normality to begin with. As such, "no term or statement can function performatively without the accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force" (Butler, "Burning Acts" 205). It is through the regulation and discipline of bodies that not only produces and maintains normative understandings of being, but that also ensures the disavowal of bodies and identities that are understood as being "out of bounds".

It is this understanding of the constructedness of identities and power/knowledge relationships that will be useful in deconstructing how bisexuality has been represented within popular culture. While both positionalities — "normal" and "deviant" — are constructed through performative reiterations, it is only "deviancy" that is portrayed as inauthentic. Through this understanding, performances of bisexuality as well as performative iterations of what are considered to be "bisexual" qualities, can be understood as existing within larger historical and

culturally specific ideals and values, that not only perpetuate specific understandings of what bisexuality is understood to be, but that also systematically work to produce and disseminate normative ideals of sexuality, identity, and political and social value.

* * *

As I have displayed throughout this section, a proper analysis of popular culture representations of bisexuality involves an intricate weaving of theoretical arguments. While my dissertation is by no means limited to the overview I have provided above, it will base itself within this larger framework of theories of the abject and monstrous, as well as queer theory and theories of performance and performativity. Together these theories will allow me to not only analyze and deconstruct representations of bisexuality, but will also assist me in theorizing ways in which such representations maintain and facilitate larger social understandings and politics of sexual normality and deviancy within a specific social, political, and historical moment of sexuality mainstreaming.

Methods

The primary objective of this dissertation is to examine and critique cultural texts and representations of bisexuality, and more specifically, representations of bisexual women in mainstream, U.S. popular culture. This investigation will also analyze these texts in connection to the recent mainstreaming of gay politics and understandings, situating bisexual representation within a specific temporal and political location. Using a more qualitative approach, this project will not necessarily be concerned with how many times bisexuality is represented as X (although that may come into discussion as I begin to examine the cultural weight and prevalence of certain depictions). Instead, I am interested in how bisexuality is framed, in the contexts these representations surface from, and in their connections to larger ideological patterns.

Before moving into a contemporary historical contextualization of bisexuality in the following chapter, it is first necessary to detail the methodological outlook I will be employing throughout my analysis. Utilizing a discursive analysis throughout, I will be specifically addressing these representations, the political climates they surface from, and the ideological formations they are linked to through a deconstructive-intersectional approach.

Discourse Analysis

The aim of discourse analysis is to investigate discourses and relationships between discourses in relation to existing ideological patterns and powers. In a similar way to how deconstruction overturns and makes visible hidden systems of power (as I will detail below), discourse analysis primarily demystifies and works through truth-claims, including how power-relations are created and maintained through various texts, including visual representations, and the production, organization, and dissemination of meaning. Definitions of "discourse" are diverse and plentiful, but within this discussion, the most productive and useful theoretical contribution is found in the works of Michel Foucault. In theorizing discipline, knowledge-production, and power, Foucault discusses how meaning and knowledge are framed in particular and connected ways, ways that often constitute specific understandings and orderings (Clarke 54). These knowledge-formations themselves, then, articulate understandings about the world from a position of absolute truth, and in effect, remove the systems of power and sites of production from the knowledges themselves.

For Foucault, "[discourse] is constituted by a group of sequences of signs, in so far as they are statements, that is, in so far as they can be assigned particular modalities of existence" (Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 121). In other words, groupings of statements, representations, ideas, and so on, that are given recognition, circulate, disseminate, and regulate

specific truth-knowledges and how we see and understand the world. The importance here is that power exists not so much in the utterances themselves, but more so in the rules and structures that produce certain discourses and in their application (Mills 7). As these rules and structures create our understandings, discourses are then productive, producing meaning, knowledge, positionalities, objects, and identities. These productions, however, are always-already structured on the basis of being or producing "truth". This is the power of discourse — its power and productive capabilities are inherently tied to hegemonic ideologies that go unquestioned. To question given discursive formations is to begin to deconstruct the very power-structures that disseminate and allow these creations to be read as absolutes.

An important aspect to understanding discourses is that they are fluid, unstable, and often contradictory. While on the one hand, this makes countering various discourses difficult in that their evolutions and connections are muddled and difficult to deconstruct, on the other hand, this very slipperiness allows for the multiplicity of productive potentialities. Discourses can (and do) effect and institutionalize hegemonic power structures and ideals, but they can also be "a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (Foucault, *An Introduction* 101). This understanding has been especially useful to feminism and other projects theorizing power structures and the objectification and marginalization of certain identity groups — by recognizing the arbitrariness of these discourses, one is able to begin to deconstruct these truth-knowledge formations, and in effect, reveal the underlying motivations and seek out alternative possibilities.

In recognizing the arbitrariness of discourses, especially in discourses that perpetuate hegemonic and hierarchical understandings of the world, one is able to remove these

understandings from their apparent neutrality and fixity, and instead position them within key historical, political, cultural, and social shifts. Foucault's analysis of discourse moves from an archaeology, where the discourses themselves were examined, particularly their historical formation, to a genealogy, which analyzes the practice and various uses of discourses. In discussing pleasure, sexuality, and desire, Foucault states that the purpose of a genealogical investigation is not to historicize or discover a certain author or moment as the origin of a discourse — or an ideological outlook — as that would negate the multiple overlapping and contradicting forces that were, are, and will continue to be at play in the formations of power/knowledges. Instead, "the idea was to investigate how individuals were led to practice, on themselves and on others, a hermeneutics of desire [...]", that is, how this specific interpretation of desire — this discourse — was the one that was perpetuated (Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* 5).

Here, a genealogical outlook in particular, and the analysis of discourses more generally, involves tracing historical moments to flesh out the ideologies and institutions of power that are at play. Further, the analysis of discourses in connection to other ideologies and institutions of power, add to and propagate specific discursive patterns, whether accidentally or purposefully, whether through deviations from other discursive patterns or as trajectories towards future formations. It then becomes necessary to analyze discourses because they shape specific outlooks, and by extension, specific subjectivities which, for Foucault, are always constructed in relation to power. For Foucault, discourses and the acceptance of discourses as absolute truths "[narrows] of one's field of vision, to exclude a wide range of phenomena from being considered as real or as worthy of attention or as even existing" (Mills 51).

As a methodological outlook, "discourse analysis offers a means of exposing or deconstructing the social practices which constitute 'social structure' and what we might call the

conventional meaning structures of social life" (Jaworski and Coupland 6). It involves acknowledging how social events, attitudes, concepts, identities, and environments exist within and grow from already accessible texts, images, and verbal discourses. "Analyzing only individual and collective human actors no longer suffices for many qualitative projects" because it fails to see the ways people and the things we study "are all routinely both producing and awash in seas of discourses" (Clarke 145). Analyzing discourses allows us to trace larger systems of meaning and meaning production, nuancing the ways in which certain power structures work to create specific stories and events. Such an analysis is necessary for better understanding wider systems of oppression and inequality, and is an integral aspect to understanding both the representations of bisexual women as well as the cultural and political climates in which these discourses circulate.

Drawing from G. Tuchman, Adele Clarke states that discourse analysis allows researchers the opportunity to examine how the values and ideals of a certain society at a specific moment in space and time are inscribed upon and embedded within social texts (of both the fantastical and mundane varieties) (Clarke 149). By examining a variety of different texts pertaining to bisexuality in popular culture, I will be able to highlight how these meanings are structured and projected upon society at large. Utilizing the framework detailed by Jaworski and Coupland (1999), Clarke organizes discourse analysis around four main categories, each of which will be useful for analyzing representations of bisexuality in popular culture: sequence and structure of speech and conversations, focusing on the form of the representation; negotiating discourses in social relationships/interaction, focusing on interactions between/within discourses; producing identities and subjectivities through discourse; and how and why these discourses are produced (Clarke 154-155). In reference to specific representations chosen for this project, this

process involves (to name but a few examples) analyzing if there are differences/relationships between the structures of the texts themselves and the meanings they produce/circulate (in particular, the mode "reality" television plays in production of "authenticity"), discussing identity formations and what entails "bisexual identity" as produced in popular culture, and situating these representations within larger discussions of LGBTQ+ politics and meaning-making. In short, discourse analysis will allow me to not only detail how bisexual women are represented in popular culture, but will also be useful in analyzing the relationship between these representations and larger ideological thought-patterns and politics. In analyzing the discourses evident in representations of bisexual women in popular culture as well as the discourses that circulate in and around it, I will be approaching this analysis through a deconstructive-intersectional methodology. Incorporating deconstruction and intersectionality into my discourse analysis will allow me to deconstruct these representations and discourses, detailing their connections to larger systems of representations and understanding, while at the same time situate my analysis within a larger understanding of intersectional identity politics in connection to systems of hierarchical power and knowledge formation.

Deconstruction

Originating in the 1970s in reference to literature and philosophy, Jacques Derrida's "deconstruction" critically addresses binary oppositions and "questions how ways of thinking, telling truths, reading texts, and so on, have been socially constituted in particular contexts" (Ramazanoğlu 88). Beyond literature and philosophy, though, deconstruction is a useful tool in addressing all cultural texts, and has been especially useful to feminist and critical theorists in confronting hegemonic discourses. Through recognition of the constructedness of discourses and hierarchies, a deconstructive analysis allows the emergence of fluidity and multiple ways of

understanding and resisting ideological boundaries (Ramazanoğlu 89). With reference to representations of bisexual women in popular culture, deconstruction will be useful in teasing out the multiple, overlapping, hidden, and unknown themes, issues, politics, and meanings at play, as well as situating it within a specific political, temporal, and cultural position.

A key aspect of deconstruction is the recognition that meaning is always contingent on opposition, and opposition always entails hierarchy (Royle 5). As will be detailed throughout this dissertation, deconstruction is valuable to the topic of representations of bisexuality because bisexuality is most often understood by what it is not. In the scheme of sexual identity politics, bisexuality's meaning is inscribed in and through its relationship to the other and what it is seen as not being — namely, hetero- and homosexual. Through a deconstructive approach to understanding these representations, this oppositional hierarchy — where bisexuality is made always-already insufficient (when understood as existing at all) in comparison to both hetero- and homosexuality — will be made visible and overturned, revealing the discursive formations that reinscribe and maintain such understandings.

Texts do not derive meaning solely through their relationship to the oppositional; within this relationship, values, power, and ideologies also circulate and work to create meaning. It is then through deconstructing the texts and making these power-relations evident, that one is able to overturn oppositional power-structures:

On the other hand, we must traverse a phase of overturning. To do justice to this necessity is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand. To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn

the hierarchy at a given moment. To overlook this phase of overturning is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition. (Derrida 41)

It is not simply a process of flipping the oppositional power, but instead it's investigating and making evident the oppositional powers at play — for what purposes they serve, the social, political, and cultural positionalities they both construct and are constructed by, and so on and so forth. Just as the text is a part of its constructs, constructs are an integral part of the text.

As the texts themselves offer meaning and deserve further analysis, especially in relation to their oppositional relationships to other texts/discourses, another useful aspect of deconstruction is that it also seeks to understand/deconstruct/read these texts within the given contexts they both surface from and exists within. That is, what knowledges/discourses might a text be circulating within, and how may it be simultaneously resisting and resituating various "truths" itself? Deconstructive analysis seeks meaning within and outside of the text itself, and through this, the subtext and context become texts in and of themselves. It is in recognizing these very blind spots, omissions, tensions, and contradictions that are found within the text, subtext, and context that allow for the dehierarchization of meaning to occur (Agger 107).

In conducting a deconstructive analysis, the importance lies not in prioritizing one text or discourse over another but in dismantling the proposed structure of meaning itself to reveal the strategic constructedness behind given texts, hegemonic ideals, and discourses. The purpose of deconstruction is also not to seek an ultimate "truth" or to verify that one opposition bears more significance than the other. Instead, deconstructionists must continue to analyze texts as they appear, constantly making connections to other discourses and texts. This may seem like an endless spiral, and for the most part, the job of deconstructing is infinite — but it is this excess of possibilities, connections, meanings that is so exciting — "What deconstruction proposes is not an

end to distinctions, not an indeterminacy that makes meaning the invention of the reader. The play of meaning is the result of what Derrida calls 'the play of the world,' in which the general text, always provides further connections, correlations, and contexts" (Culler 134). And it is through these further connections, correlations, and contexts that significance and meaning of a text can begin to surface.

While deconstruction offers us a means of understanding and investigating texts, removing layers upon layers to reveal meanings and connections that elucidate larger ideological discourses at work, deconstruction itself is not a method. "Method" carries connotations of following a procedural manner of conducting analysis, of having a clear beginning and end (Royle 4-5). To follow through in such a linear manner, not being receptive to contradictions, omissions, and slippages in textual meaning, would be against the purpose of deconstruction. That having been said, while deconstruction is not a method in that there is no procedural way to use it, deconstruction does offer itself as a methodological approach, and will be useful as an overarching theme as I address and investigate my examples.

Deconstruction is useful to projects that address systemic oppressions and privileges, hierarchical relations, and intersectional understandings of identity because it counters objectivity and truth-claims that are built upon the exclusion of marginalized populations. In other words, through a deconstructive approach, the power-knowledge of discourses is weakened via the recognition of its very arbitrariness. A deconstructed text is then "reassembled in a way that shows some of its concealed meanings to be effective ones, thus helping us evaluate the cultural product critically and against common-sense receptions of it" (Agger 95). By illustrating the strategic choices made in the production, editing, dissemination, and reception of a text, as well as the political, social, and cultural discourses the texts create and are created by,

deconstruction aids in challenging hegemonic meanings and truths, and makes space for forming alternative perspectives and understandings.

Poststructuralist methodologies such as discourse analysis and deconstruction have been incredibly useful in illustrating not only the multiple systems of oppression and hierarchical dynamics at play within a given text, but also the intersecting viewpoints, possibilities, and readings available that make space for potentially transgressive possibilities. These methodologies are not without fault, however. While drawing attention to how certain categorizations, ideals, and understandings are cultural creations situated within historical power structures, these types of methodologies also run the risk of overlooking the material impacts/implications of such meta-narratives (Moose-Mitha 65). Indeed, while there may be many similarities between various groups of individuals and the acts of oppression which they may face, the universalization of such experiences simplifies how identities intersect. In this respect, my deconstructive discourse analysis must be heavily intertwined with understandings of intersectionality.

Intersectionality

An intersectional methodological analysis relies on the understanding that race, class, and gender (and I argue, dis/ability, sexuality, and many other identity categorizations/experiences) "are separate entities that come together — intersect — at specific experiential and structural points" (Ken 12). In order to properly analyze how female bisexuality is depicted in popular culture, it becomes imperative to acknowledge how such characters/individuals are themselves made up of many intersecting identity positions, as well as how the characteristics that are ascribed to bisexuals (fake, sexually voracious, temporary, deceitful, and so forth) are eerily similar to the current and historical characteristics placed upon many other minority groups.

Intersectionality was born out of the work of Black feminists in the 1970s and 1980s, work that called out the erasure and ignorance of race, Black women and women of colour, and their experiences from the discussions of mainstream, white feminism (Audre Lorde, Combahee River Collective, Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlé Crenshaw, among others). This work and activism specifically sought to give voice to Black women and their experiences with both race and gender, experiences and oppressions that are very different to those of white women. It also called attention to second wave, mainstream, white feminism's belief that all women share the same experiences based on gender alone, ignoring the ways in which race (and class, sexuality, ability, and so on) deeply effect one's lived experiences. In "Learning From the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought" (1986), Patricia Hill Collins theorizes "Black feminist thought" as a necessary intervention into mainstream, white feminist politics, that not only calls attention to the racial inequalities within feminism but that also purposefully centres Black women and their ideas within the larger discussion of gender equality.

In addition to situating Black women's knowledge, as produced and recorded by them as opposed to outsiders' observation and re-recordings, Collins also highlights the importance of recognizing differences amongst Black women (Collins 16). These differences not only produce multiple standpoints from which to describe the experiences of Black women, but they also necessitate acknowledging the different ways in which Black women experience oppression. As such, the recognition of the "interlocking" ways in which race, gender, class, sexuality, and other identity markers work together, in terms of both identity-formation and how oppressions manifest, is of central concern to Black feminist thought. For Collins, the role of interlocking oppression in Black feminist thought is particularly important because it shifts the focus away from positioning any one singular issue as being the ultimate and/or only source of oppression

for one (e.g.: gender within the mainstream, white feminist movement). By prioritizing one oppression over others, this approach "then handles remaining types of oppression as variables within what is seen as the most important system" (Collins 20). Instead, Black feminist thought recognizes that oppression occurs along multiple levels and through multiple identities, where "rather than adding to existing theories by inserting previously excluded variables, Black feminists aim to develop new theoretical interpretations of the interaction itself" (Collins 20).

This important theorizing on Black feminist thought laid much of the groundwork for intersectionality. In fact, after the introduction of the theory by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, Collins later renamed "Black feminist thought" to "intersectionality theory" (Mann and Huffman 62). In her 1989 work, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", Crenshaw states that there is a deep void in both feminist and antiracist theory and policy due to the fact that both movements are singular in their attention to either gender or race, as opposed to acknowledging the interactions between these two identity categories (among others) (Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing" 24). Drawing from Black women's experiences in the legal system, Crenshaw highlights how Black women's treatment in the system and the judicial rulings affecting them, are explicitly impacted by both their race and their gender in ways that are different from white women's experiences. Crenshaw notes that interventions —whether in the legal system, through feminist and/or antiracist activism —cannot be made unless the acknowledgement and understanding of intersecting identities, privileges, and oppressions are achieved.

An approach to understanding how oppression affects Black women and white women differently cannot be done by simply adding and subtracting identity markers/positionalities, as

this would assume that there is a shared starting point/mode of measurement that all women share, regardless of the very real differences they face. Instead, discrimination and oppression must be analyzed and understood through a multi-directional lens, which Crenshaw likens to a traffic intersection: "Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them" (Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing" 33). Here, "intersectionality", operating as both a theoretical outlook and a methodology, functions by unravelling the multiple ways in which identities, experiences, and histories not only connect, but also overlap and intersect with each other. The failure of feminism to address the intersecting ways in which identity and oppressions manifest not only provides an incomplete assessment of inequality, but it also "will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of colour", just as anti-racism "reproduces the subordination of women" when it fails to address patriarchy and gendered differences (Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins" 1252). As such, intersectionality allows for a more thorough and realistic understanding of privilege and oppressions, as well as the histories, discourses, and ideologies that produce power-relations and identity formations.

Some of the more prominent critiques of intersectionality include its lack of a clear and concise methodology (Nash) and its reinforcement of white women (within intersectional feminism) as the standard from which to describe deviations, difference, and "otherness", which "produces difference as a contradiction rather than as a [sic] recognizing it as a perpetual and continuous process of splitting" (Puar, "I Would Rather Be" 53). While these are necessary and important critiques, it is important to think of intersectionality as a world-view/overall framework for addressing and understanding systemic oppressions and privileges, where

"identity" is understood as being flexible, dynamic, and complicated, and where intersectional theories and methodologies must similarly be flexible, dynamic, and complicated. In light of this, intersectionality should be thought of as more of a "nodal point than as a closed system — a gathering place for open-ended investigations of the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other inequalities" (Cho et al. 788). While all of these identities and understandings of oppression and privilege are dynamic and changing, dependent on historic and temporal understandings of race, gender, class, and so on, intersectional research and activism is always structured around an understanding of power, power dynamics, and power structures. As such, the focus is not so much on categories and identities in and of themselves, but instead "how those categories and identities (and their specific content) are contingent on the particular dynamics under study or of political interest" and their relation to power (Cho et al. 807).

Through the work of Black feminists, and Crenshaw and Collins' theorizing of intersectionality in particular, the recognition of situated knowledges and the overarching and overlapping systems of domination and privilege has become a necessary and critical intervention into how feminism, as well as other critical activisms and theorizations, investigate and unravel identities and oppressions. Within this dissertation and my analysis of representations of bisexuality, intersectionality is an incredibly useful and necessary methodological outlook, as it sees identities, privilege, and oppression as always-already contingent upon specific, temporally located power-relations. Similarly, the representations of bisexuality chosen for this analysis are located within a very specific timeframe, and as such, the themes/tropes that the representations perpetuate must be understood within both historical understandings of bisexuality as well as current social, cultural, and political sexuality norms and

ideals. Moreover, intersectionality will be useful in recognizing the diverse and plural ways in which these themes/tropes in many of the examples reflect not only dominant understandings of bisexuality, but also dominant, hegemonic understandings of other identities. While intersectionality will be present throughout, I will be specifically looking at the intersections of bisexuality with gender, race, and ability/sanity in certain examples, where the themes/tropes evoked in representations of bisexuality are similar to those used to discuss/represent women, people of colour, and disabled/mentally ill people in very specific, often limited ways. Of course, bisexuality and representations of bisexuality also intersect with class, citizenship, and age, among other identity categories. My focus on gender, race, and ability/sanity in particular isn't to negate the other intersections, but instead highlights these specific intersections as being the most notable and prominent within my overall analysis.

* * *

To summarize, the discourse analysis that I put forth in this dissertation is done through the use and understanding of deconstruction and intersectionality. Both of these approaches will be utilized throughout to draw out the various power dynamics at play within mainstream representations of bisexuality in popular culture, as well as the plenitude of nuances, contradictions, and complexities to which these representations surface in relation to dominant discourses, politics, and ideals. As noted previously, deconstruction is not a method in that it cannot/should not/does not follow a pre-delineated formula for understanding texts. Although intersectionality is not argued as *not* being a method, intersectionality is similarly faulted for not providing comprehensive and detailed outlines for how to conduct research in its name. While these critiques are valid, for purposes of this project, deconstruction and intersectionality both serve as more theory-like methodologies, or overall points of view from which to navigate through these representations. Both intersectionality and deconstruction "embrace the view that

knowledge is socially constructed and socially situated, such that every knowledge producer not only shapes knowledge, but also has a partial or limited vantage point" (Mann and Huffman 65). As such, they will be useful in analyzing these representations of bisexuality, in addition to recognizing the specific ways in which the themes/tropes attached to bisexuality are historically influenced, temporally located social, cultural, and political constructions.

My overall methodological approach is to use deconstruction and intersectionality in analyzing bisexuality in the chosen texts through an understanding that both deconstruction and intersectionality are powerful, complex outlooks as opposed to preordained rules, both having the potential to excavate hidden knowledges, power structures, meanings, and positionalities. I will be looking at specific bisexual characters/persona on these series (Jenny, Alice, and Tina on *The L Word*, and Tila Tequila, Rikki and Vikki Ikki on the *Shot At Love* series), noting how their bisexuality is represented and made evident. I will be particularly highlighting common themes/tropes that are perpetuated throughout both series, and how those themes/tropes reflect dominant, mainstream understandings of bisexuality itself, and bisexuality in relation to both hetero- and homosexuality. Unravelling these common themes/tropes through deconstruction and intersectionality will show the strategic and purposeful ways in which bisexuality is imagined within popular culture and mainstream, Western culture more broadly, recognizing the power-relations and sexuality hierarchies at play in the formation of cultural norms and ideals.

Chapter Two: Contemporary Historical Context of Bisexuality in Popular Culture

As detailed in the introduction, representations and understandings of bisexuality have been influenced by key historical moments and debates, including (but not limited to) social and political "morality" dilemmas in motion picture production (from the 1930s to the late 1960s); the increasing mobilization and recognition of the gay and lesbian liberation movement (late 1960s into the 1970s) as well as the creation of the second wave of feminism, including Radical and Separatist Feminisms (late 1960s and into the 1980s); and the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s, its impact on the gay community, and the perpetuation of homo- and biphobic rhetoric surrounding HIV/AIDS (namely, that men who have sex with men were harbingers of this disease, sentiments which carry into today). These historical happenings and the understandings of bisexuality that surfaced in and through them, carry into current understandings of bisexuality, and therefore become necessary to recall as I begin to detail more current, popular culture examples of bisexual representations and the social and political awareness of bisexuality more generally.

While tracing the events and shifts in perceptions of bisexuality on a global scale is a necessary research endeavour, that specific project is outside the scope of this thesis. For purposes of brevity, I will focus primarily (unless otherwise stated) on popular culture examples from the United States, and will thus detail American historical happenings during the 2000s. With this in mind, however, the mass effects and widespread distribution, consumption, and idealization of American culture industries (and the cultural artefacts they produce), as well as Western values and ideals, cannot be underestimated. This fact alone is what makes popular culture representations that much more important to analyze and deconstruct — the mere

availability of these images on a global scale is relevant in itself, let alone any impacts they might have on diverse populations.

"Bisexual Chic"

The following discussion and analysis will be based on explicit examples of mainstream understandings of bisexuality in popular culture, that is, the dominant, two-gender model understanding of bisexuality as being attraction to both men and women. It is important to differentiate this "explicitness", especially in reference to and distinct from more subjective readings, or representations that offer "bisexual potentials". While such potentialities are necessary in fostering a wider understanding of sexual fluidity in popular culture (see: San Filippo), it is equally important to analyze these "explicit" moments of bisexuality, especially as presented in mainstream popular culture, as the very mainstreaming of these representations and ideals they perpetuate gesture towards hegemonic understandings of bisexuality and sexuality in society, politics, and culture at large.

Bisexuality's popularity in mainstream media has ebbed and flowed over the decades, most often in conversation with specific social and political understandings of sexuality during a particular time period. Bisexuality in the 2000s can perhaps best be described as a moment of "bisexual chic" as opposed to bisexual awareness. "Bisexual chic" is commonly understood as describing an increased popularity in/increased attention to bisexuality, especially in relation to mainstream popular culture. There have been many points of apparent mainstream popularity in bisexuality at different points throughout the twentieth century, including the early 1990s with the popularization of Freud's theories, rejection of "Victorian" views, and various novels, plays, and film successes at the time (Garber 19). But perhaps the most well known (in part due to wider media technologies) are the 1970s, and the official advent of the term "bisexual chic". The

phrase first appeared in the mid-1970s with the advent of popular celebrities who were openly bisexual and/or who embraced behaviour that was generally understood as being bisexual, including David Bowie, Lou Reed, Joan Baez, Janis Joplin, and Iggy Pop, among others (Rust, "Popular Images" 537). In addition, these popular culture icons existed in a period of sexual revolution, play, freedom, and a general sense of undoing strict boundaries and ways of understanding desire, and identity more generally. Within this space of exploration and discovery, bisexuality was seen as encompassing many of the idealisms of the moment, and was generally understood as being a "sign of the times" (Garber 20).

The height of bisexual popularity in the 1970s saw numerous magazine articles that announced this "new" sexuality, or at least adopted the popularized understanding of bisexuality, with titles including "The New Bisexuals" (*Time* May 13th, 1974), "Bisexual Chic: Anyone Goes" (*Newsweek* May 27th, 1974), and "Bisexuality: The Newest Sex-Style" (*Cosmopolitan* June 1974), as well as books and research projects dedicated to educating audiences about bisexual experiences and lifestyles (Garber 539). While bisexuality seemed to have a mainstay in the dominant cultural imaginary, this influx of bisexual awareness had less power when it came to the bisexual movement itself. This is perhaps in part due to the very "chicness" that bisexuality was (and continues to be) portrayed as; with the advent of AIDS in the 1980s, there was a cultural backlash against bisexuality and it was no longer read as "fashionable" (San Filippo 26).

The 1990s saw another emergence of "bisexual chic", although not on the same scale as the 1970s. Due in large part to the political and social work done by bi-activists during the 1980s, both with regards to AIDS awareness as well as bisexual visibility within the larger LGBTQ+ community, this decade saw many works published (for both the general and academic

public) by bisexuals on bisexuality (Rust, "Popular Images" 547). In addition to more attention being paid in academic communities, especially within queer theory, the 1990s saw yet again mainstream popular culture interest in bisexuality, including the popularity of a few celebrities who embraced bisexuality, such as Angelina Jolie, Madonna, Alice Walker, Ani DiFranco, Margaret Cho, Me'Shell Ndegéocello, and Sandra Bernhard, to name but a few⁶. Similar to ways in which "bisexual chic" was expressed in popular media outlets in the 1970s, many articles in the 1990s addressed bisexuality as a "new", unheard of phenomenon (Newsweek "Bisexuality Emerges As A New Sexual Identity", July 17th, 1995) (Rust, "Popular Images" 546). However, as Rust notes, one main distinction arises between the mainstream cultural interest in bisexuality in the 1970s and the 1990s – the "newness" of bisexuality in the 1970s borrowed on ideas of sexual openness and attraction to multiple genders that was evident within the sexual revolution, but removed itself from most of the political potential of the movement itself by instead popularly reading bisexuality primarily as simply a way to bring intrigue into the bedroom. Stemming from the political happenings of the 1980s, on the other hand, the increased interest in bisexuality in the 1990s recognized the political potential of bisexuality. Many popular, mainstream articles highlighted the opportunity for movement outside of dichotomous ways of thinking about sexuality and desire while also recognizing the fear that such an outlook may pose to "traditional" ideas with regards to marriage and sexuality (Rust, "Popular Images" 546).

This view of bisexuality as being both something to fear and desire, as well as something that is both visible and invisible, has undoubtedly followed throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century in various popular culture forms. Some of the most popular films of the 1990s with bi-representation (*Basic Instinct* (1992), *Chasing Amy* (1997), *Wild Things* (1998)),

⁶ As discussed in the introduction, bisexual visibility during the 1990s and onwards is most often made available through bisexual women. This includes the more recognizable bisexual celebrities, which is different from bisexual visibility in the 1970s, which included many recognizable bisexual male celebrities as mentioned above.

depict bisexuality as something that is both visible/invisible, desirable/feared. These sentiments undoubtedly stem from historically-based ideas surrounding bisexuality, but also gender, sexuality, and fidelity more generally. More specifically, understandings of bisexuality as being "confused", "temporary", and even "dangerous" within these popular culture examples, lends itself to the fear-mongering around AIDS and bisexuality in the 1980s as well as the new threat to "traditional" domestic partnerships that began to emerge in the 1990s and into the 2000s. It increasingly becomes evident that the apparent popularity of bisexuality in mainstream understandings of the term from the early 1900s, into the 1970s, the 1990s, and again into the early 2000s, have clear connections to the specific social, political, and cultural dynamics that were/are at play in each timeframe of bisexual "chicness".

Bisexuality in the 2000s

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw many important historical events, both in the United States as well as on behalf of the United States, including: September 11th, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the subsequent wars the U.S. waged on Afghanistan and Iraq in particular; the *Lawrence v. Texas* ruling in 2003, which legalized same-sex sexual activity in every U.S. state by striking down Texas' sodomy law (The Associated Press); the gay marriage rights movement, where Massachusetts became the first U.S. state to legalize gay marriage in 2003 (although this ruling was not put into effect until 2004) (Lavoie); the immense damage and fatality that resulted from Hurricane Katrina (2005) along the Gulf Coast, especially in Mississippi and Louisiana; the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, subsequent recession, and the after-effects; Barack Obama becoming the first African American President of

the United States in 2008; and the repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy⁷ in 2010 (although this repeal did not come into effect until September of 2011 (Bumiller). All of these events (among many others) have undoubtedly impacted and shaped the popular cultural imaginary in various ways, including larger social and cultural understandings about "terrorism", a feared "other", apparent risks to domestic and national security, and the breaking down of "traditional" values.

This brief overview of important historical moments in the United States will become necessary in understanding how these events impacted popular culture, and more specifically, how certain events (such as the mainstreaming of lesbian and gay rights) are both reflected in popular culture and even more so, how they reflect and produce particular images and ideals of an "acceptable" type of non-heterosexual sexuality. These reflections will become especially apparent in my analysis of bisexual representations in popular culture and the specific ways these representations help work to maintain and promote neoliberal, homonationalist qualities, often at the expense of more nefarious, queered identities and sexualities—in this case, bisexuality.

The main examples I will be discussing (*The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series) both premiered (and subsequently ended) in the first decade of the twenty-first century. While still massively underrepresented in comparison to straight and cis-gender characters, the first decade of the 2000s did see an increase in both the amount of LGBTQ+ characters (with gay men, and, to a lesser extent, lesbians, comprising the largest portion of this popular culture visibility) and

⁷ The "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy states that while a person's sexuality is not itself a bar from entry into the United States military, "homosexuality" is itself grounds for being barred from the military. Further, any applicants who wish to enlist will not be asked whether they are homosexual or bisexual or whether they have engaged in "homosexual conduct". Under section E1.2.8.2. of the Directive, "homosexual conduct" is defined as "[A] homosexual act, a statement by the applicant that demonstrates a propensity or intent to engage in homosexual acts, or a homosexual marriage or attempted marriage. Propensity to engage in homosexual acts means more than an abstract preference or desire to engage in homosexual acts; it indicates a likelihood that a person engages in or will engage in homosexual acts" (DODD 1304.26). Reversal of the policy had no effect on trans individuals, as the U.S. military continues to prohibit their enlistment.

the types of storylines queer characters were occupying. Undoubtedly flourishing from the above mentioned specific historical and political events that were taking place, especially those with regards to gay and lesbian civil rights in the United States, many of these representations⁸ offered more nuanced and diverse opportunities to both LGBTQ+ characters and personas, ushering in a new level of queer visibility. At the same time, this increase in LGBTQ+ visibility (especially lesbian and gay visibility in popular culture) has undoubtedly aided in achieving many of these political and social advancements themselves (Harris Interactive). As will be discussed throughout, but especially in my concluding chapter on the mainstreaming of gay politics, the connection between more nuanced lesbian and gay characters in popular culture, with storylines that aid in promoting that idea that "we are just like you!" (where "you" stands for heteronormative society), with the mainstream gay and lesbian civil rights movement cannot be overlooked. In addition this very connection of increased visibility and mainstreaming rights is premised upon differentiating lesbian and gay communities, actions, identities, and politics from their more "queered" siblings. Within this space, as I will argue throughout, bisexuality becomes even more surveilled and bisexual visibility becomes highlighted as one of the queered "others" that threatens to undo this more recent accent into sexual neoliberal rationality.

While popular culture in the 2000s saw a general increase in LGBTQ+ visibility, representations of bisexuality within this period continued to be underrepresented, and when representations were made available, many of them continue to perpetuate one-dimensional ideas of what "bisexuality" is. Below, I have outlined specific examples of bisexuality from the first decade of the 2000s; while this list is by no means exhaustive, they are examples and brief

⁸ Some of the most popular and recognizable examples during this decade include: *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Will and Grace* (1998-2006), *Queer As Folk* (U.S. version, 2000-2005), *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005), *Queer Eye* (originally aired as *Queer Eye For the Straight Guy*, 2003-2008), *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* (2003-), *The L Word* (2004-2009), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), *Grey's Anatomy* (2005-), *True Blood* (2008-2014), *Milk* (2008), *Glee* (2009-2015), and *Modern Family* (2009-).

analysis of some of the more popular or recognizable bisexual characters from this decade. In addition, these examples help illustrate the general climate regarding bisexuality and sexual fluidity within popular culture more generally, providing important media context for discussing *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series.

During the first decade of the 2000s, there were many films that explored sexuality and/or storylines that involved characters with marginalized sexualities. While four mainstream films in particular stand out in their exploration of bisexuality, there were other films depicting bisexuality (specifically, bisexual women) that opened in the 2000s, including *Kissing Jessica Stein* (2001), *Imagine Me and You* (2006), *Lost and Delirious* (2001), and *I Can't Think Straight* (2008). These films, however, were primarily titled as "lesbian" films, where "bisexuality" was often made available only as a reading as opposed to it being voiced explicitly. In addition to this, the above-mentioned films were independent and not highly recognized in mainstream markets, as well as being primarily marketed to (aside from *Kissing Jessica Stein*) queer audiences. For these reasons, I will not provide overviews of these films, as my central focus is on mainstream, popular, highly-viewed representations of bisexuality. While three out of the four following films deal with representations of bisexual *men*, my brief discussions of these films is not to confuse the main focus of this dissertation (on representations of bisexual *women*) but is instead done to provide a general overview of bisexuality in popular culture during the 2000s as a whole.

- *Frida* (2002) is based on the life of Mexican surrealist painter Frida Kahlo, and based on the biography *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* by Hayden Herrera. It has been historically noted that Frida engaged in relationships with both men and women throughout her life, and this aspect was represented in the film (including a brief

reference to a character resembling Josephine Baker, who was also thought to be bisexual). This film was generally received positively by critics, including six Academy Award nominations, one of which was for Selma Hayek's portrayal of Kahlo (Best Actress nominee) ("Frida —2002 Academy Awards Profile").

- *Alexander* (2004) is a historical drama based on the life of Alexander the Great. Alluding to rumours about the real-life Alexander, the film portrayed the lead as having sexual relationships with both men and women, although the term "bisexual" is not uttered in this film. Interestingly, this film received widespread criticism, including from Greek lawyers who threatened to sue over the representation of Alexander as being bisexual (Lehner).
- Based on the life of sexologist Alfred Kinsey, the 2004 biographical drama *Kinsey*, focuses both on Kinsey's work on human sexual behaviour (including the popularized Kinsey Scale) as well as his personal life, including his own bisexual relationships. Similar to *Alexander*, this film was also met with backlash, including from various media outlets and Christian organizations (F. Rich).
- And finally, perhaps the most discussed film of 2005 and one in which bisexuality is both central and made invisible in the premise of the film, *Brokeback Mountain*. This film received widespread acclaim from fans and critics, including eight Academy Award nominations ("Brokeback Mountain —2005 Academy Awards Profile"). Although *Brokeback Mountain* was touted by many as the "gay cowboy" movie, completely erasing any possibility of bi-visibility, bisexuality can be read in numerous ways throughout the film (San Filippo 161). After their initial meeting and first sexual

experience together, both Ennis Del Mar and Jack Twist (the main male characters) go on to marry women, and both work to maintain their marriages and relationships with their wives as well as their relationship with each other (*Brokeback Mountain*). Negating the possibility that these men were bisexual or sexually fluid, many concluded that they were both actually gay but simply subscribing to social pressures and fears around homosexuality during this time period (the pair meet in the early 1960s). Throughout both the representation of sexuality amongst the main characters in the film, as well as how the film was critiqued and understood by mainstream audiences, any visibility of bisexuality within the film becomes discounted and space is instead made for more hegemonic understandings of sexuality and desire.

In the above mentioned films, aside from *Kinsey*, bisexuality is not stated explicitly, but instead the audience (or some audience members) assume bisexuality because of the simultaneous relationships with both men and women by some of the characters involved. It is also interesting that all the films take place in the past or reference specific historical moments/people. Perhaps bisexuality and/or sexual fluidity is more palatable when existing in the past, when illustrated by eccentric artists, intellectuals, and powerful officials (*Frida*, *Kinsey*, *Alexander*), or when depicted as a coping technique due to harsh climates and times (*Brokeback Mountain*)? While there is great potential in reading these texts (and others) through a bisexual lens, because bisexuality is so easily made "invisible" or negated through statements referencing its apparent "temporariness" it becomes much more important for popular culture examples featuring bisexual-potential to explicitly reference bisexuality.

Because most television series last multiple episodes and span many seasons, there is often much more space for portraying more multifaceted characters than film offers. In terms of

bisexuality, mainstream television shows during the first decade of the 2000s did offer audiences more representations of bi-characters, although the scope of these representations replicated many of the same tropes and stereotypes that have historically been attached to bisexuality, especially understandings of bisexuality perpetuated in and through popular culture. The following examples primarily highlight main characters in television series who identified as or were understood to be bisexual. In addition, a few supporting characters will be discussed, especially when their storylines were highly popularized and discussed by fans and the media.

- As part of the main cast, the character Willow Rosenberg of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) has been most often described by fans and media alike as being a lesbian, especially in relation to her character development in later seasons. However, throughout the first three seasons Willow is depicted as having romantic feelings for and relationships with primarily men, until she meets Tara, forming what is generally regarded as one of the first "lead lesbian" couples on television (Coddington). While Willow did not actively date or show attraction to women previous to meeting Tara (beginning of 2000), there were hints throughout the first three seasons that seemed to indicate otherwise. In Season Three, Willow encounters her vampire alter-ego from an alternate reality. This alternate-Willow is portrayed as being more sexually aggressive than the real-Willow, and is seen flirting with both men and women. Willow sees (and is at one point the object of the flirtatious affection of alternate-Willow) and exclaims "It's horrible! That's me as a vampire? [...] I'm so evil and... skanky [...] And I think I'm kinda gay" ("Dopplegämland"). Although alternate-Willow exhibits attraction to men and women, Willow still reads her as being "gay". Similarly, in Season Five, despite her previous attractions to and relationships with men, Willow explicitly identifies as now

being "gay" ("Triangle"). While the character actively voices her sexual orientation, her use of "now" ("well, hello? Gay now") implies that she was not gay at one point. In addition, her previous description of her alternate vampire self with "kinda gay" also leaves room for bisexual readings. Unfortunately, at no point is the term bisexual used to describe Willow. Instead, her sexuality is assumed straight until she meets Tara, and then is assumed lesbian until she self-declares herself as such. This is a common example of bisexual erasure in popular culture. Finally, it is also interesting to note that when bisexuality is made most visible in Willow, it is only through her alternate-vampire/monstrous state, in effect linking together her queerness/bisexuality with her monstrosity, a trope that will be discussed at length in Chapter Three (McAvan).

- While the widely popular series, *Will and Grace* (1998-2006), revolved primarily around the lives of roommates Will, a successful gay lawyer, and Grace, a straight interior designer, and referenced homosexuality more generally, the character Karen Walker (also part of the main cast) has been understood as being bisexual or "queer" (Mitchell 92), even though her bisexuality is hardly referenced except in moments of needed comedy. More specifically, Karen is best known to audiences as being a wealthy socialite, who often refers to her penchant for alcohol and prescription drugs, and who uses sarcastic, passive-aggressive comments for comedic relief. Throughout the series, Karen mentions several times that she is attracted to women in addition to men, in addition to a brief reference (in a 30 second clip) of a past relationship with a woman (Warn, "Karen Walker"). Aside from this, Karen's bisexuality is not taken seriously on the series. This could in part be due to network concerns over representing marginalized sexualities, including the main character, Will, who was constantly desexualized and whose gayness

was also often read through stereotypes (Warn, "Karen Walker"). However, unlike with Will, whose sexuality is still referenced and made central to his character, Karen's bisexuality or sexual fluidity is most often used as a joke or referred to as a temporary, playful desire, as opposed to a legitimate sexuality. In addition to this, it is interesting to read Karen's bisexuality through her other characteristics (including her sarcastic comments, dismissive attitude, exaggerated alcohol and drug use, and so on), many of which further work towards representing her as an excessive, comedic character in general, and in effect, similarly renders her sexuality as such. Although not based within romance or sexual connection but more so done to illustrate a previous event, *Will and Grace* did have one of the longest kisses between two women on network television (between Grace and Karen), a kiss which undoubtedly altered queer women's visibility in popular culture more generally (Warn, "Karen Walker").

- While there have not been any major plotlines in *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) that involve bisexuality, the topic does come up in at least two specific storylines. In Season Three (2000), Carrie dates a man who identifies as bisexual. At a get-together with her friends, Carrie shares this information and a series of biphobic comments are made with regards to both Carrie's current relationship as well as bisexuality more generally, including: "He's open to all sexual experiences. He's evolved. He's hot"; "He's not hot. It's greedy. He's double dipping"; "You know, I'm not even sure bisexuality exists. I think it's just a layover on the way to Gaytown" ("Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl..."). All of these comments reflect general stereotypes and assumptions about bisexuality, including sexual promiscuity, sexual trendiness, greediness, and temporariness. None of the comments regard bisexuality in a serious and nuanced manner. The next occurrence of bisexual-

potential is in the following season (2001), where Samantha has a brief relationship with a woman (lasting three episodes in total). Previously, Samantha described herself as a "try-sexual", referring to the fact that she is willing to try anything at least once ("Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl..."). Shortly after beginning to date a woman, Samantha declares to her friends that she is now a "lesbian" ("What's Sex Got To Do With It?"). In the next episode, Samantha ends the relationship because she is not a "relationship" person. More specifically, though, Samantha seems to become bored by the lack of sex that is occurring between her and her girlfriend, and how the relationship seems to only be about talking and sharing feelings and emotions (a common "lesbian bed death" stereotype) (San Filippo 207). Afterwards, Samantha returns to dating men and is no longer a "lesbian"; at no point is bisexuality mentioned. While these are just two brief occurrences of bisexuality in the series, they are important to mention because *Sex and the City* was seen as a modern program, highlighting women's friendships with each other, as well as illustrating unabashed discussions and representations of sex and women's sexuality. For bisexuality to be regarded in such limited and invisible ways on a generally sexually progressive series speaks to the larger social and cultural attitudes around bisexuality.

- While generally regarded as a series about gay men and their lives, the hit series *Queer As Folk* (2000-2005) based on the British series of the same name, also features two female series regulars (the characters of Lindsay Peterson and Melanie Marcus) who are in a long-term relationship with each other for most of the series. For the most part, the audience (and the other characters) assumes that Lindsay and Melanie are both lesbians, as there is no reference otherwise. In Season Four, however, Lindsay meets a male fellow artist, and the two have a brief affair together (he is only in five episodes of the

series, all occurring in Season Four), which culminates in Melanie and Lindsay separating. "Bisexuality" is never mentioned in reference to Lindsay, although comments such as "It's okay to like cock. And it's okay to like pussy, just not at the same time" (said by her best friend, Brian) do reference sexual fluidity ("Gay or Straight? That's the Question"). Lindsay continues to identify as a lesbian, even though her partner, Melanie, says that she cannot be a lesbian if she is having sex with a man ("Irritation and Separation"). In similar ways to *Sex and the City*, where the progressive nature of the series negates a progressive or nuanced reading of bisexuality, *Queer As Folk* introduces Lindsay's sexual fluidity as a means to create tension between the characters, as opposed to allowing it to exist and be examined in itself. Instead, Lindsay's attraction to men and women is seen as negative and deceitful. Her affair with a man immediately paints her as distrustful, not because she cheated, as Melanie had an affair with another woman earlier in the series and does not have her identity questioned in similar ways, but more so because she is seen as lying about her identity, as not "really" being a lesbian (even though Lindsay still claims this identity).

- Perhaps one of the most widely discussed moments of "bisexual chic" during the 2000s (outside of the Britney-Madonna kiss, which will be discussed further below) was the brief relationship between Marisa Cooper (main character) and Alex Kelly (recurring character) on the teen drama *The O.C.* (2003-2007). Alex is first introduced as a tough "bad girl" with an alternative style in comparison to the other youth in Orange County. As manager of a local nightclub, Alex hires Seth, one of the lead males on the series. The two begin to date, although Alex makes it explicit to Seth that she does not "do relationships". In order to make clear to Seth that their dating is casual, as well as to

display to the audience that Alex may not be straight, Alex casually kisses another man and another woman to prove to Seth that her kissing him the other night was "just a kiss" and nothing more ("The SnO.C."). While this hint towards Alex's sexual orientation is generally brushed away and assumed that she was simply trying to prove a point to Seth, the audience soon learns that one of Alex's ex-partners is a woman and her bisexuality is made more visible. In the episode "The Ex-Factor", Alex mentions to Seth that her "ex" has suddenly showed up for a visit. At first the audience doesn't know who her ex is, until Seth leaves and the audience sees that her ex is a woman. Upon learning that the ex is a woman, Seth breaks up with Alex for "lying" to him (since he assumed Alex's ex was a man, Alex was therefore lying by not providing a gender when referencing her ex, and thus was seen as omitting the truth about her sexuality). Although they both apologize to each other later, Seth and Alex decide that they are better as friends than anything romantic.

After breaking up, the following scene sees Alex and Marisa watching a movie together, both making lustful eyes at each other, hinting at sexual interest between the two. Previous to Alex, Marisa seemed to have no interest in women. The two women continue to become close, spending all their free time together, and in "The Lonely Hearts Club" they share their first kiss, which progresses into a monogamous relationship a few episodes later. "Bisexuality" is not mentioned once within this storyline, and more so, Marisa's relationship with Alex is described as a "phase" and "experimentation" by her mother ("The Rainy Day Women"). As Carrie Nelson notes⁹, the audience is

⁹ Interestingly, Nelson (2012) also discusses bisexuality in reference to another character named Alex from the Canadian television show *Degrassi: The Next Generation*. Unfortunately, the lack of mainstream popularity of this series (and this particular storyline more specifically) doesn't fit into the specificities of this research, although the nuances and time with which bisexuality is given on this show is worth mentioning.

meant to assume that this relationship is temporary, both because of the way Marisa and Alex's relationship is portrayed (tumultuous and rushed – they move in together shortly after dating), and since the main premise of Marisa's storyline is intended to revolve around an on-again/off-again relationship with Ryan (Nelson, "A Tale of Two Alexes"). Another illustration of this "temporariness" is that the character of Alex is only in thirteen episodes, all within the second season, and once she is written out, is never referenced thereafter.

- On another popular teen drama, *One Tree Hill* (2003-2012), audiences are introduced to the recurring character Anna Taggaro, a new student who has transferred from another high school where rumors were circulating about her sexual orientation (this is something the audience doesn't find out until later in the season, however). Throughout her storyline, Anna has romantic moments with both men and women, and "comes out" for the first time to her ex-boyfriend as being attracted to both men and women, something she states is "confusing" ("The Heart Brings You Back"). The series shows Anna struggling with her sexuality, which can be considered an honest depiction of fears and anxieties revolving around coming out and sexuality in general, especially for teenagers. In the episode titled "Unopened Letter to the World", the students film individual, private videos to put into a time capsule for the future students of 2055. In Anna's video she explicitly states that she is bisexual ("Unopened Letter to the World"). She then continues by saying "I'm gay... and straight... and a Latina and I hate labels" ("Unopened Letter to the World"). In the following episodes, Anna comes out to her brother as "gay", and later tells her parents that she "likes girls". While these moments don't necessarily negate her bisexuality (she could be using the label "gay" because it

may be more understandable to her family, since bisexuality is often misunderstood), it does cause confusion over her previous declaration of bisexuality. Important to note, however, is that the character of Anna was one of the first recurring bisexual women of colour on primetime television (Warn, "*One Tree Hill's Anna*"). Unfortunately, Anna is just as quickly written out, as her storyline lasts a total of fourteen episodes, all within the second season of the series.

- On one of the more popular television series being discussed in this section, medical drama *Grey's Anatomy* (2005-present), the audience is introduced to orthopedic surgeon Callie Torres, whose sexuality soon becomes one of the more recognizable traits of this character. After relationships with men, Callie begins to have feelings for a woman in the fourth season of the series (2007/2008). This attraction to both men and women continues to be a part of her storyline throughout the series, and Callie ultimately marries a woman, Dr. Arizona Robbins. Callie has been vocal in her attraction to both men and women, but interestingly, has not "come out" as bisexual on the series¹⁰, although she has told her father that he cannot "pray away the gay" when he visits her in hopes of convincing her that she is actually straight ("Invasion"). For the most part, Callie's interest in both men and women is not questioned, except when it comes to doubts that she will cheat on or leave Arizona ("Cause are you one of those fake lesbians, just having a vacation in lesbian land") ("Suicide Is Painless"). In addition, Callie's bisexuality/sexual fluidity is allowed more nuance and space to develop (especially prior to her marriage to Arizona), as Callie has been a central and popular character to the

¹⁰ While Callie has "come out" to her family as "gay" instead of using the term "bisexual" to describe her sexuality, she has more recently (after the 2000-2010 timeframe) explicitly stated that she is bisexual ("Bend and Break"). This is an especially important moment because it is one of the first times this term has been used in reference to Callie on the series, even though her character's bisexual storyline began seven years earlier.

series since first introduced, as opposed to quickly writing the character off or ignoring her sexuality altogether, which is all too common in mainstream representations of bisexuality. However, while Callie's sexuality is not ignored in the series, it seems like there is little room for Callie to now (at point of writing) discuss and develop her sexual fluidity any further since the series has moved towards homonormativity and has ultimately taken a conservative rendering of Callie and Arizona's relationship, which is similar to how many queer characters are de-eroticized once they enter monogamy and/or marriage in many mainstream television shows (San Filippo 235).

- Shortly after leaving the role of Alex from *The O.C.*, actress Olivia Wild went on to play another bisexual/sexually fluid character on the medical drama, *House, M.D.* (2004-2012). Dr. Remy "Thirteen" Hadley is described as a "secretive" character who is reluctant to share any personal information with her colleagues. In terms of her sexuality, her coworkers explicitly ask her if she is bisexual, and while she does not answer explicitly one way or another, she does not deny it either ("Don't Ever Change"). Much of Thirteen's sexual exploration is displayed on the show as resulting from her new-found fatal disease diagnosis (San Filippo 204). It is within this context that she embarks on a series of one-night stands, drug use, and general self-destructive tendencies, and where her bisexuality is primarily made evident to the audience. Finally, while Thirteen leaves the series (2011) having a girlfriend (a coupling that makes some space for non-heterosexual visibility), the bisexual-political potential is cut short both due to the fact that the characters exit the series altogether, as well as the fact that

Thirteen's girlfriend remains nameless and is not given any line of dialogue, replicating an all too common form of bisexual erasure¹¹ (San Filippo 204).

- The primetime crime comedy-drama, *Bones* (2005-present), references bisexuality through the main character of forensic artist Angela Montenegro. Portrayed as being sexually "fluid", "adventurous", and a "free spirit", it has been hinted at different points in the series that Angela is attracted to both men and women, although she does not explicitly state that she is bisexual (Warn, "'Bones' Digs Up"). As of writing, of her on-screen romances, only one relationship with a woman was part of the storyline, taking place in Season Four (2008/2009) of the series and lasting a total of ten episodes (Angela's female romantic partner is only in three of the ten episodes).
- Finally, rounding out the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, is the main character Kalinda Sharma, a private investigator on the legal drama *The Good Wife* (2009-present). Portrayed as being sexually attracted to men and women, many media reports have indicated that Kalinda is an "out" bisexual character, although Kalinda herself has not been as explicit in describing her sexuality. In "Net Worth", Kalinda is asked why she likes to have sex with men (by a woman who is trying to seduce her), to which Kalinda replies "I don't have a preference", which undoubtedly hints at bisexuality (or queerness more generally), without committing to the term "bisexual". Further, Kalinda's sexual encounters in the show are primarily framed as business-focused, where sex and seduction are key to Kalinda gaining information for cases she is working on

¹¹ A common use of bisexuality in popular culture is to include scenes or references to storylines that include "girl-on-girl" sex, desire, and attraction, without those scenes necessarily having any further context to the general storyline. This is highlighted by Thirteen's girlfriend remaining nameless – even though she seems to be central to Thirteen's life – as well as how bisexual characters are often times introduced and then quickly written out (*The OC*, *Desperate Housewives*, *One Tree Hill*). This is often done to increase audience ratings through titillation.

(San Filippo 235). While this character (and the series) was only introduced to audiences in late 2009, and despite the fact that Archie Panjabi (the actor who plays Kalinda) left *The Good Wife* in 2015 (resulting in Kalinda being written out), Kalinda is still worth noting, especially in highlighting the way her bisexuality is primarily framed as a tool of seduction for information procurement, a common trope in representations of bisexuality.

In addition to these bisexual fictional characters in television and film during the first decade of the 2000s, there were also other important moments regarding bisexuality that occurred during this time period, especially within the music industry. Playful references to bisexuality have been (and continue to be) a key part in the sexual imaginary of popular music. This type of "performative bisexuality" (Fahs), usually performed by women, has most often been used not to position bisexuality as a legitimate sexual identity, but more so to maintain heteronormative ideals by utilizing bisexuality as a tactic to employ in order to seduce heterosexual men (Nelson, "Performing Bisexuality"). The song that propelled Katy Perry into widespread popularity, "I Kissed a Girl" (with lyrics that include "No, I don't even know your name, it doesn't matter. You're my experimental game [...]" and "I kissed a girl just to try it, I hope my boyfriend don't mind it") famously gestures towards bisexuality but ultimately reiterates that her actions (kissing another woman) are not to be taken serious but just a momentary act of playfulness (Perry). In addition, Lady Gaga (who is openly bisexual) released "Poker Face" in 2008, which details how she would fantasize about women while having sex with men and have to put on a "poker face" so that her male partners would not catch on ("Lady GaGa Entertains").

But perhaps the most widely publicized moment of bisexual-like performance was in 2003 at the *MTV Video Music Awards*. In an event that is often full of sexually charged content,

made perfect for water-cooler conversations the following day, Britney Spears, Madonna, and Christina Aguilera's performance of "Like a Virgin" (featuring Missy Elliott) was perhaps the most talked about event of the evening. The performance begins with Spears singing in an all-white, 1980s-styled wedding dress, followed closely by Aguilera in similar attire. The song then suddenly stops and Mendelssohn's wedding march begins to play, as Madonna, dressed as a groom, makes her way towards the brides (who have now ripped off the gowns of their dress to reveal shorter, sexier outfits) and begins to sing her song "Hollywood". In a musical interlude, Madonna takes turns tangoing with both Aguilera and Spears, while the camera pans to the audience's reactions. Madonna then removes Aguilera's bridal garter, and then moves to Spears, gently touching her face and kisses her. The camera quickly pans to see the reaction of Spears' recently-made ex-boyfriend, Justin Timberlake (looking unamused), and then returns quickly to the stage to see that Madonna has also just kissed Aguilera — the crowd erupts in cheers.

Following this performance was a series of interviews, magazine covers and storylines, and general increased popularity for the three main performers; ultimately, it has been viewed as the most famous VMA performance of all-time (Jacobs). This is a key moment in "bisexual chic" — the entire performance is structured around teasing references to sexual fluidity but still maintains heteronormative ideals. The performance is based around a wedding, perhaps the most recognizable sign of heteronormativity; Spears and Aguilera are both wearing belts that read "BOYTOY", hinting at their roles as sexual provocateurs for straight male audiences; the three main performers are dressed in very gender-specific clothing styles, creating the image that Madonna is taking on the active, masculine role, while Spears and Aguilera are passive and feminine (and this is illustrated when Madonna is the one who initiates the kisses); the camera pans to see Timberlake's reaction, further maintaining ties to heteronormativity by focusing on

the male gaze; and so on and so on. This is a literal performance, and all references to bisexuality are equally read as performed, as done simply for voyeuristic pleasure, excitement, and notoriety.

These examples of bisexuality on television in the early 2000s serve as important backdrop to the discussion of bisexuality in popular culture, especially in relation to *The L Word* and *A Shot at Love*. As will be discussed at length shortly, both of these series were created in midst of the above examples, and have undoubtedly both influenced and subsequently shaped the future outlook of bisexual representation in mainstream media. Before discussing the two series more specifically, it is interesting to note that at least six of the above examples (both film and television) premiered and/or aired in 2004/2005. This peak in bi-visibility, or "bisexual chic", can be tied to the widespread popularity of the Britney and Madonna kiss, the premiering of *The L Word*, and growing legalization of same-sex sexual activity (2003) and same-sex marriage (2004). In some cases, stories involving bisexuality became a means of network competition between popular television shows (*The O.C.* and *One Tree Hill*'s bisexual storylines ran at the same time, airing within days of each other, with both characters being written out thirteen and fourteen episodes into their respective storylines). Returning to my earlier discussion of bisexual men in popular culture, and the fact that bisexual men tend to be represented in film over television, all of the popular male bisexual representations during the first decade of the 2000s occurred in film (as noted above). Finally, only five of the bisexual/sexually fluid characters mentioned (in both film and television examples) were visible characters of colour as well as all being women (Frida, Anna, Callie, Angela, and Kalinda), a fact which references the lack of roles for people of colour in mainstream popular culture, the lack of LGBTQ+ characters of

colour, as well as the hegemonic ways in which bisexuality is illustrated when it is made evident at all (primarily white, middle class, youthful, attractive, able-bodied women).

Bisexuality on *The L Word*

As stated earlier, *The L Word*, which ran for six seasons (2004-2009) on Showtime, primarily revolved around the lives of lesbian and bisexual women (and in later seasons introduced trans issues into its main narrative) in West Hollywood, California. The critically acclaimed drama received widespread attention, both for its representation of queer women's lives as well as for its popular use of sex and nudity in many of the storylines. Airing after *Queer As Folk*, which achieved success as being one of America's first dramas to focus entirely on the lives of gay men, and *Sex and the City*, a series about friendship, sex, and relationships amongst a group of women which received both audience and industry acclaim, *The L Word* was equally groundbreaking as the first series about queer women that not only highlighted sex, relationships, and friendship, but that also referenced current events and priorities within the mainstream LGBTQ+ community (including same-sex marriage, workplace disclosure of one's sexuality, and family planning/parenting rights, to name but a few examples).

A large component to *The L Word*'s popularity (aside from it filling a much-needed gap in terms of queer visibility in popular culture) is that it was successful with both straight *and* queer audiences. This is in part due to the initial comparisons with *Sex and the City*, where some of the first taglines used in *The L Word*'s press was "Same sex. Different city" (Warn, "Introduction" 3). Aside from the shared emphasis on female friendships/solidarity, it is interesting that *The L Word* would seek to associate itself more with a series that was quite heteronormative in its portrayal of women, sexuality, and their relationships, as opposed to *Queer as Folk*, which purposefully countered heteronormative ideals and centred nearly

explicitly on queer sexuality in ways that mainstream television had previously not seen before. This attachment to a series that is more palatable to mainstream audiences is an important reminder in understanding how *The L Word* was not only marketed, but how it was expected to be consumed. Aside from the fact that *The L Word* revolves around a group of attractive women who are all friends and share their lives with each other, this series also resembled *Sex and the City* through its focus on a more economically privileged group of women who are mostly white, all youthful and beautiful, with social clout, access to leisure and enjoyment, and, of course, fashion and trendiness.

In addition to its connections with *Sex and the City*, *The L Word*'s maintained visibility within the popular culture imaginary through strategic promotions and use of sexuality more generally – "Promos for *The L Word* featured a montage of sensual scenes set to sexy music featuring conventionally attractive women interacting with one another in various sexual and non-sexual ways designed to attract both gay and straight viewers" (Warn, "Introduction" 3). Undoubtedly tapping into the straight male cultural desire of beautiful women being sexual with each other for male gratification, *The L Word* managed to remain viable in popular culture due its use of familiar (normative) ideals and tropes but with a twist. This viability is made evident through "the fact that the series was renewed for a second season only days after its first episode premiered in January 2004 is partly attributable to the fact that it did *not* show the full diversity of the gay [sic] community" (Warn, "Introduction" 4).

In terms of other series that feature queer storylines, *The L Word* does differ quite dramatically. As was evident through many of the film and television shows described above, most storylines revolving around LGBTQ+ issues in mainstream popular culture (especially in the world of television) often focus almost entirely on "coming out", with additional storylines

including confusion over one's sexuality and (although less prominent) the domestication/de-sexualization of queer couples. Further, most of these storylines are short-lived, with characters often being written out shortly after introduction and/or used to facilitate main character storylines. Conversely, *The L Word* has been groundbreaking for queer visibility in popular culture by creating characters that are complex and multifaceted. In addition to dealing with an array of "real-life" topics (childbearing, gay marriage, abuse, and so on), it also is one of the few programs that depicts the happiness that many queer women experience — not just confusion, violence, and homophobia that is often found in queer representation in popular culture (Pratt 138-139).

Airing on the premium cable network, Showtime, *The L Word* had relative ratings success, with an average U.S. ratings nearing one million per episode (Weprin). While the ratings numbers may be moderate (especially when compared to basic cable series), *The L Word* achieved widespread recognition and status with both fans and within popular culture more generally. For fans, especially many queer women, *The L Word* is often seen as a series that was created for them and by other queer women (the creator and many of the writers and producers being queer women themselves). From numerous fan sites, interactions between the cast and fans (online chats, meet and greets), and viewing parties amongst queer communities, the amount of interaction between fans with the series gestures towards the significance of *The L Word* in terms of queer visibility. While this interaction with the series is not without its critiques, with many fans pointing out the lack of diversity in characters and the problematic representation of trans and bisexual characters and storylines (to name but a few examples), *The L Word* continues

to remain one of the most popular examples of queer visibility, in addition to being one of the few to focus entirely on queer women¹².

Throughout its six seasons, *The L Word* featured many different characters¹³ (both main, recurring, and minor) and storylines that referenced sexual fluidity and/or bisexuality explicitly. For purposes of this analysis, I will primarily focus on the main cast, as their storylines have had the most space to develop. The presence of these characters in nearly every episode of the entire series allow for more opportunities of bisexuality in the main narrative as a whole, as well as allowing the audience a greater ability become familiar with these characters and how their sexuality is portrayed in relation to their larger storylines and general characteristics. While I may reference other characters, for the most part my analysis is focused on the characters of Jennifer (Jenny) Schecter, Tina Kennard, and Alice Pieszecki, who have been central characters in all six seasons. I draw both on their specific storylines, as well as interactions these characters have with other characters on the show, especially in relation to their bisexuality. Finally, I analyze their bisexuality in connection with other personal characteristics, as bisexuality is often linked with other traits (promiscuity, deception, confusion, and so on).

Jenny Schecter is first introduced as naive and sweet, leaving her home in the Midwest for West Hollywood to be with her long-distance boyfriend, Tim. As Jenny's storyline develops, she begins to have feelings for a woman, and at the end of season one, she identifies as bisexual. In later seasons, Jenny primarily has relationships with women, no longer uses

¹² Since *The L Word* aired, there have been a few scripted series in the U.S. that have equally focused on queer women, including *South of Nowhere* (2005-2008), *Exes and Ohs* (2007, 2009), *The L Word* reality show spin-off *The Real L Word* (2010-2012), and *The Fosters* (2013-), all of which aired on premium cable networks.

¹³ Some recurring characters that could be read as being bisexual on *The L Word* include Cherie Jaffe (five episodes, mostly revolving around her cheating on her husband with Shane, the "lesbian lothario" of the series), Billie Blaikie (six episodes; portrayed as a wild, drug-taking party-promoter who helps Max with his transition), Dylan Moreland (fourteen episodes, most of which revolve around her sleeping with Helena – at her male partner's encouragement in order to extort money from her), and Paige (ten episodes; identifies as "sexually fluid"; the series hints that Paige is the one who burns down Shane's place of employment after Shane cheats on and then breaks up with her). Nearly all of these characters are portrayed in problematic ways, at various points in their storylines.

"bisexuality" to self-identify, and in a few instances, makes biphobic judgements about bisexuality. As will become evident throughout my discussion of Jenny, especially in earlier seasons where she is exploring her sexuality and has identified as bisexual, her sexuality becomes linked with not only stereotypical tropes (like confusion), but also become connected to more difficult and (arguably) problematic traits Jenny exhibits. Jenny is white, although racialized through her being Jewish, is in her mid-twenties, can be read as struggling financially in the first few seasons but then finds financial success, and appears to be able-bodied although deals with mental health issues, especially in earlier seasons.

The character of Tina Kennard is interesting in that the audience is made to assume that she is a lesbian upon first meeting her, as she has been in a monogamous relationship with a woman for several years. A few episodes into the first season, the audience discovers that Tina has been in relationships with men in the past, but makes no reference to bisexuality. It is not until Season Three, after Tina and her long-time partner, Bette, begin having relationship troubles and then separate, that Tina begins to date men and is more vocal about her attraction to both men and women, although she does not self-identify as "bisexual" and instead continues to identify as a "lesbian" even while dating men. Tina is white, in her early-to-mid-thirties, appears to be able-bodied, and she is financially secure and successful.

From nearly the first moment the audience meets Alice Pieszecki, her bisexuality is vocalized and made central to her storyline. She is perhaps most often associated with bisexuality from all the characters, and this is primarily due to her self-identification, which continues through the first half of the series. Following the death of her ex-partner and friend, Dana, however, Alice appears to no longer identify as bisexual. During the seasons where Alice does identify as bisexual, her storylines are often outlandish and exaggerated, often linking

together her sexuality with "odd" recurring characters and character traits that are read as "obsessive" and "neurotic". Alice is white, in her late-twenties/early-thirties, financially secure and successful, and appears to be able-bodied although deals with mental health issues in Season Two and Three.

My choice in analyzing these three characters is multifaceted —as stated above, Alice, Jenny, and Tina are all main characters for the entire run of the series; in addition, when their bisexuality is referenced or hinted at, it is often in connection with storylines that replicate themes and tropes commonly used in reference to bisexuality; and they are most often read as being (or having been) bisexual by both the other characters and fans of the show. While self-identification (or lack) of bisexuality in these three characters is important, due to bisexual erasure in general in popular culture and the tendency to rarely use the term itself, I will also be reading these characters as bisexual due to the mainstream understanding of bisexuality as being an attraction to both men and women. Finally, while these characters may no longer identify as bisexual because they have simply realized that they are actually lesbians, it is important to still make space for this bisexual reading due to the very fact that bisexuality is all too often understood as a temporary position. It is through this very understanding that the preference to not identify as bisexual can also be understood as a negation of bisexual potential, and an erasure of bisexual identity in popular culture more generally.

A Note on Max Sweeney

While there has been little work done about the interconnections between bisexuality with other identities in the queer community, especially in terms of similar forms of marginalization from the mainstream gay community, it has been noted that there are many intersections between both representations of bisexual and trans individuals, and, political and

social issues and rights between both of these groups (Alexander and Yescavage, *Bisexuality and Transgenderism*; Eisner; and Serano, *Excluded*). Some of the ways in which both bisexual and trans communities share parallel experiences, especially in relation to visibility and space within the LGBTQ+ wider social and political communities, include (but are by no means limited to) being seen as both "subscribing" to gender binaries *and* being read as "too queer" (especially in relation to the mainstreaming lesbian and gay "we are just like you" politics); social and historical ideas of "passing" (in terms of sexuality and gender) have been used to delegitimize both bisexual and trans communities; and the continuous lack of bisexual and (especially) trans characters and storylines, lack of nuanced storylines, and the continued perpetuation of biphobic and transphobic sentiments in mainstream media.

As stated in the introduction, due to both the space-confines of this project as well as the lack of bisexual men in popular culture, especially on television, the main scope of this research investigates bisexual women in popular culture. Having said this, I would like to briefly discuss the character of Max Sweeney, a trans-man on *The L Word*, highlighting some of the ways in which bisexuality is never even understood as a possibility for Max, primarily due to binary, transphobic ways of understanding gender, sexuality, and desire.

There are numerous issues with the portrayal of Max, most of which are transphobic and work to portray Max and his gender as comical and peripheral to the other characters and storylines. In congruence with this, Max's sexuality is nearly entirely erased. When we are first introduced to Max, it is prior to his transitioning and coming out as trans and at this point, he identifies as "Moira", a working class "butch" lesbian from Illinois, who has moved with Jenny to West Hollywood (the two are dating). After arriving in West Hollywood, and finding himself surrounded with feminine-presenting women with higher class status and mobility, Max begins

to voice feelings of being out of place, especially with regards to his gender. Shortly thereafter, through the encouragement of Billie, the event-promoter at The Planet (the local cafe/bar/lounge spot in *The L Word*), Max begins to take testosterone and comes out to his family and friends as "Max" and tells them that he is transitioning and asks them to use male pronouns when addressing him.

While there were a few other questionable elements to Max's storyline prior to this point, once he begins taking testosterone, *The L Word's* portrayal of trans issues begins to spiral into a series of problematic stereotypes and harmful storylines. Instead of taking the time to create nuanced and realistic storylines about important issues that face many trans individuals, *The L Word* portrays Max's life and issues/events he faces in exaggerated and often nearly comical ways, including continuously being mis-gendered by nearly everyone in his life; told he is betraying the "lesbian community" by not simply being a "butch" woman; equating his use of testosterone to his quick burst of anger and rage, including outbursts towards his partner Jenny; and, Max becoming pregnant, which was portrayed in the similar carnivalesque-frenzy that media outlets used to detail real-life Thomas Beatie's pregnancy.

In terms of Max's sexuality, when evident at all, it is portrayed in similarly complicated and delegitimize ways. As stated above, when we first meet Max, he identifies as a woman and as a lesbian. While transitioning, Max maintains relationships with women (including Jenny, and later Grace). He also has a brief sexual encounter with Billie, a man, and explains this to Jenny as occurring because Billie made him feel like a "real guy" ("Lifesize"). It isn't clear to the audience whether this is the first man that Max has been with, but any bisexual potential in Max is not given space here, and is instead reasoned off as Max more so gaining reassurance about his gender as opposed to being attracted to Billie. Afterwards, Max and Jenny continue to date,

although there is little intimacy between the two. In Season Four's "Legend in the Making", Jenny breaks up with Max, explaining that they no longer fit together:

JENNY. [...] because you identify as a straight man. So there's the mismatch, because you want me to be your straight girlfriend to your straight guy. And I identify as a lesbian who likes to fuck girls. And you're not a girl.

MAX. [in agreement] Yeah. ("Legend in the Making")

In this scene, Jenny calls Max "straight", and Max appears to agree with this statement. Shortly thereafter, Max dates his boss' daughter as a straight man (she does not know he is trans and their relationship ends as soon as she finds out), and later in Season Four, is intimate with his friend, Grace. At the beginning of Season Five, Max appears to be having feelings for another man (Tom). When asked about his attraction to a man, Max quickly denies it, but then comes to admit his changing attractions in general:

GRACE. Are you attracted to him?

MAX. [shocked] No, of course not!

GRACE. It wouldn't be such an outlandish thing. The last trans guy I dated...

MAX. [interrupting] Look, I'm not into men.

GRACE. The last trans guy I dated wasn't into men at all before he transitioned. She was a gold-star butch lesbian.

MAX. I'm not a gold-star either...

GRACE. Julie was, until she became Jake. Jake turned out to be a gay man.

MAX. [upon reflection] I heard this theory that, what's genetically encoded

in us isn't attraction to men or attraction to women but it's same-sex attraction.

GRACE. There you go. [both are smiling at this conclusion]. ("Lady Of The Lake").

This is an important scene in terms of Max's sexuality. Here, Max at first denies his attraction, but then, through Grace's encouragement and story-sharing, comes to understand his attraction to men. However, instead of Max simply being able to be attracted to both men and women, Max's attraction is articulated in binary ways, having shifted from "lesbian", to "straight", to "gay", and where "same-sex" attraction becomes understood as being based in biology, negating any other possibilities. Afterwards, Max and Tom date, and Max appears to the audience to be a gay man (including references made to other men flirting with Max, and so on). It is only through his trans identity that his sexuality and gender are questioned (including Jenny continuously referring to him as entering "motherhood" once he becomes pregnant, and Bette referring to Max as Tom's "girlfriend"). Within this space, Max never identifies nor is he read by others as being bisexual; neither he nor the audience are ever given space to investigate any bisexual-potential/possibilities that might exist within this character.

Bisexuality on *A Shot at Love*

The second television series I will be discussing throughout is *A Shot at Love*, in which the original version of the series aired in two seasons, followed by the spin-off *A Double Shot at Love*. The first season of the series (*A Shot at Love With Tila Tequila*) premiered on the American music channel MTV in October of 2007, followed by *A Shot at Love II With Tila Tequila* in April of 2008, and then finally, *A Double Shot at Love With the Ikki Twins* in December of 2008. All three instalments of the series saw a bisexual woman (or in the case of A

Double Shot, two bisexual women) vying for the love and affection of their potential suitors¹⁴ — two groups of sixteen, fifteen, and twelve (based on each respective season) straight men and "lesbian"¹⁵ women. Due to the fact that this series is one of the only series — from both fictional and reality series — on mainstream television to focus entirely on bisexuality¹⁶ and receive mass viewership (drawing over six million), and, how bisexuality is both represented on the series and how Tila Tequila herself has been delegitimized, in part due to her connection to bisexuality and its references to certain behaviours and actions (such as promiscuity, deceit, instability, and excessive sexuality, to name but a few), the *A Shot at Love* series is a valuable source in understanding larger beliefs and sentiments surrounding bisexuality in popular culture.

As the first and only¹⁷ reality dating show to feature a bisexual individual as the main star, all three seasons of the series modeled itself off of other popular reality dating shows, where there are various group-date outings as well as one-on-one dates between the star and the suitors.

¹⁴ While there is no available data on whether or not the contestants on the *Shot At Love* series received any monetary compensation for being on the show, it has been stated that contestants on *The Bachelor*, arguably the most popular reality dating competition and one that set the precedent for reality dating shows in general, receive no monetary payment for their time on the show (Gliatto and Lynch). However, contestants of reality shows, especially ones that are highly viewed, have the opportunity to receive payment after the series (although not from the series) through public promotion and endorsement deals. As such, while the contestants on the *Shot At Love* series are framed as being there for "love" only, the potential for celebrity status is also a possible incentive to taking part in the series.

¹⁵ On each season, the group of women vying for the affection of Tequila and the Ikki twins are categorized as "lesbians", although there are a few women who identify as bisexual. It appears that the primary reason for doing so is to maintain binary distinctions between the two groups of suitors, and especially to differentiate the women from the bisexual stars. Another reason for doing so could be to dissuade romance between the suitors themselves, although this did not always work.

¹⁶ Important to note, the Canadian fictional show *Lost Girl* (2010-2015) while not explicitly about bisexuality, does feature a bisexual character (Bo) as the central character of the series. While equal attention has been paid to Bo's attraction to men and women, bisexuality here still exists within the "imaginary" and "monstrous", literally, as Bo is a lethal succubus who straddles her humanity and monstrosity while interacting with both humans and other "fae" (non-human entities).

¹⁷ The *Shot At Love* series is also one of the only reality dating series (to date) to feature non-heterosexuality as its central focus. One exception to this is the 2003 reality dating show *Boy Meets Boy*, where a gay man is the central star searching for love amongst a group of men, with the "twist" being that the group of suitors is comprised of both straight and gay men (unknownst to the main star). Viewers are let in on the secret, learning that if the main star unknowingly chooses a straight man in the end the straight suitor wins a cash prize, and if a gay man is chosen the couple both win the cash prize and a paid-vacation (DiPasquale and Karnopp). The series aired on the Bravo network for one season (six episodes). There have also been reality series that replicate the "twist" of *Boy Meets Boy*, where the main star must decipher whether the potential suitors are straight or gay men (2004's *Playing It Straight* on FOX, and *Gay, Straight or Taken?* airing on Lifetime in 2007), although these series maintained heteronormativity by casting straight women as the ones searching for love.

Unlike other reality dating shows, however, *A Shot at Love* based itself within voyeurism and sex appeal, perhaps in part to having aired on MTV, a network known for pushing the envelope and appealing to a younger age demographic (approximately 18-24 years old). In particular, the main stars of the series — Tila Tequila and the Ikki twins — are all petite, sexy, and outgoing, and a major focus of the series is promoting these aspects by having them dress in more revealing outfits, having them partake in sexually suggestive events, and, of course, by having them reference their bisexuality in often stereotypical ways (including references to threesomes and to the stars being more sexually adventures than other — read: straight — women in general).

In the first season of the series, none of the potential suitors are aware that Tila Tequila is bisexual. Each group meets Tila and assumes that they are either on a traditional "straight" reality dating show, or, a cutting edge "lesbian" dating show. After finding out that Tila is bisexual (both to much surprise and excitement of the suitors), the series primarily consists of a series of "opposite sex" competitions and tasks in order to win the heart of Tila (and later, the Ikki twins). Aside from the stars of the series and continuous reference to their bisexuality, sex and sexuality are heightened at nearly every opportunity, including having all the contestants sleep together in one giant, heart-shaped bed and having a nightclub-like room which includes a dance pole upon which all the contestants dance and gyrate to win the stars' affections (although the cameras appear to focus primarily on the women dancing and stripping for Tila and the twins' pleasure).

Each episode is primarily comprised of a group competition between the men and women, where the winning group gains the more favourable date, while the losing group wins a shorter, less fun date with the stars. During the dates, the stars often choose one or multiple contestants to have one-on-one interactions with, while the others stare on in jealousy and plan

ways to win one-on-one interactions themselves. At the end of each episode, Tila and the twins contemplate who still has a "shot at love" with them. An eviction ceremony is held, and the stars hand out keys to their heart(s) to the suitors they still want to remain in the competition. As the series progresses and the numbers dwindle, the stars eventually go on one-on-one dates with the suitors, and then when there are four left, they visit each remaining suitor's hometown to meet their family. In the last episode, the stars have final dates with the two remaining suitors and then choose who has ultimately won their heart. It is then up to the chosen suitor to agree to date the star. Throughout the entire series, each episode is comprised of a series of "confessionals" from both the stars and the contestants that work to illustrate to the audience their "true feelings" about a given situation. The voiceovers and confessionals are then paired with specific scenes to allow the audience multiple perspectives from which to view and understand what is occurring. Each season ends with a reunion special, where the star and suitor of her choice interact with the other contestants, as well as answer questions from the host and audience members.

As the star of the first two seasons of the series (note: she does not find love in the first season), Asian American Tila Tequila (born Thien Thanh Thi Nguyen in Vietnam and emigrating to the United States shortly after birth; also known as Tila Nguyen) is no stranger to notoriety and controversy. Gaining a bit of success from modeling for *Playboy* and various import car magazines, Tila utilized social media to further her celebrity status, which included rebranding herself as "Tila Tequila" in reference to her apparent alcohol allergy (Brown). Joining the then popular social networking site *Myspace*, Tila quickly gained fans through posting both music and sexually explicit fashion shots, and by 2007 she had over 1.7 million fans subscribed to her page, becoming the most popular person on *Myspace* (Brown). Stemming from this increasing popularity, Tila quickly gained the attention of mainstream media, including

a profile in *Time* magazine, as well as making numerous lists in men's magazines of "hot" women (including *Maxim* and *Stuff*). From there, Tila continued to remain marketable and viable within the popular culture imaginary through selling calendars and posters, creating a clothing line, making guest roles in mainstream films, and maintaining a music career (Grossman). It is from this popularity that Tila gained the star role on the reality dating show *A Shot at Love*.

As stated above, at the beginning of the first season, the contestants are not aware who they are meeting, and only know that it is a reality dating show. In the voice over that accompanies the scene in which Tila is about to come out to all the contestants, she states that she's nervous about how they will react, but also about how she will be perceived in general, as she has not yet come out to her parents ("Surprise! I Like Boys and Girls"). Once Tila comes out to the contestants as "bisexual", she is met primarily with positivity, especially from the men who think that bisexuality is "sexy". Upon finding out that Tila is bisexual and not in fact a lesbian, some of the women contestants feel betrayed, while others are upset that there are men involved in the process at all. During the scene in which they all find out about Tila's bisexuality, some of the men take it upon themselves to test and question the other women, since, although they are introduced as "lesbians", Tila's attraction to men and women suggests that perhaps the other women's sexuality might be a "lie" too (since they previously thought Tila to be straight) ("Can't We All Just Get Along?").

Tila describes her bisexuality in the popular understanding of the term — she equally likes men and women, although she likes different aspects of both. In keeping with this definition, she adds throughout the series that she is attracted to masculinity (but only in men) and femininity (but only in women). Tila then illustrates this by saying that she usually likes

"girly" or "lipstick lesbians" as opposed to more androgynous or "butch" lesbians. She also values traditional masculinity in the guys she is dating on the show. The entire series (including *A Double Shot*) responds accordingly, and we see this play out especially in the competitions which are usually hypersexualized and/or play off of sexual innuendos. The women's role is often to be the sexiest, most attractive option for the stars, while the men must prove their strength and reliability.

As the series progresses, Tila dates multiple people and ultimately chooses two final contestants to be with her in the end, Dani (a white, lesbian, who self-describes herself as "futch", a cross between "feminine" and "butch") and Bobby (a white, straight man). Tila then ultimately chooses to be with Bobby, although she later tells the media that she actually wanted to choose Dani but the producers made her choose a man ("Interview: Tila Tequila"). Season Two follows in the exact same format, except that Tila mentions that things didn't work out between her and Bobby and that she is searching for love again. This time, the contestants are aware who Tila is and that she is bisexual. Season Two ends with Tila bringing Kristy (an out bisexual, white, feminine-presenting woman) and Bo (white, straight man) to the finale, and ultimately choosing Kristy (although Kristy declines Tila's offer of a "shot at love").

The third season of the series saw the departure of Tila and audiences were instead met with not simply another star, but two. Titled *A Double Shot at Love With the Ikki Twins*, Season Three sees two white, blonde, attractive identical twin sisters, Erica "Rikki" Mongeon and Victoria "Vikki" Mongeon (stylized as the "Ikki" twins), as the bisexual stars on their quest for love. Gaining popularity in similar ways as Tila, the twins began modeling in various calendars and motorcycle and car scenes/magazines, and later, men's magazines including *Playboy* ("The Ikki Twins - Bio"). At the beginning of Season Three, the twins let the audience know that while

they are both bisexual, they have never before dated the same people as they have very different tastes in potential romantic partners. In spite of any complications this might cause (sisters dating the same people), they still must decide together who they will be keeping and eliminating week to week ("This Time, Let's Make It A Double!").

Although the group now understands that they are on a bisexual dating show, seeing as this is the third season of the series, in keeping with the element of surprise, the twins at first greet the contestants one at a time and pretend to be the other so that the suitors assume they are just dating one woman as in all the other seasons. It is only after meeting them all that the twins let them know that there are in fact two of them and apologize for being dishonest (again, a common theme in representations of bisexuality). Maintaining the male, heterosexual fantasy of being with twins, Rikki and Vikki nearly always wear the exact same outfits (with slight alterations) and are often seen holding hands together, especially at the eviction ceremonies. The twins continue to hold competitions for the contestants, and they go on dates together as well as alone with the suitors, until the final episode in which they choose Rebekah (a white woman, who has admitted to dating men in the past but is now looking for love with women) and Trevor (a white, straight man). As there are two stars, each one can choose who they want to be with romantically from the two remaining contestants. Both Vikki and Rikki end up choosing Trevor (with Trevor previously stating in his confessional that he has fallen in love with both women), and Trevor ultimately chooses Vikki, much to Rikki's disappointment.

The majority of discussions surrounding the *Shot at Love* series circulate around the first two seasons and focus on Tila Tequila in particular. Both in part due to the popularity of the series, especially the first two seasons, as well as Tila Tequila herself, *A Shot at Love* further propelled Tila into the spotlight, while Rikki and Vikki seem to have left celebrity-dom behind

them. The largest portion of critique revolving around Tila and the series is how Tila is "faking" her sexuality and that the series in general portrays bisexuality in problematic ways. Because of Tila's presence in popular culture, in addition to discussing the series *A Shot at Love*, I will also touch on the public persona of Tila Tequila herself. In particular, her public persona (comprised of both assumed characteristics and aspects Tila herself shares) have been used against her, both to question her sexuality as well as to delegitimize her in general, especially in terms of her "authenticity".

As will be discussed at length below, upon finishing the series, Tila has been a part of multiple sensational media storylines, including filing an arrest complaint with regards to her ex-boyfriend (NFL player Shawne Marriman) assaulting her, which was met with a lawsuit from Marriman in 2009 (both charges and the lawsuit were eventually dropped) ("NFL Star Sues Tila Tequila"); denouncing her bisexuality and claiming that she is actually a lesbian in 2009 ("Interview: Tila Tequila"); her highly publicized relationship with heiress Casey Johnson, including their whirlwind engagement and Johnson's death in December of 2009 (O'Connor); acknowledging on her *Myspace* account that she has dissociative identity disorder (she has also mentioned bipolar disorder), as well as a series of highly mediatized accounts (and dismissals) of one of Tila's alternate personalities attempting to kill Tila in 2010 (Capulet 301; Disgrasian); the public release of a sex tape featuring Tila in 2011, which she denied giving permission for its release (an additional sex tape followed in January of 2014) ("Porn Company"); a series of health scares, including suffering from an apparent accidental overdose, aneurysm, and then finally entering rehabilitation in 2012 (Z. Johnson); and gaining the media spotlight yet again through a series of nearly incomprehensible racist tweets and images, specifically vocalizing anti-Semitic (2013) and anti-Black (2014) sentiments (Sibor).

My aim in discussing Tila as a public persona is not to differentiate between what is and what is not "real" or merely done for publicity's sake, nor is it to condone or add to the public judgement of any of the questionable behaviours, statements, and actions of Tila. Instead, due to the fact that the *Shot at Love* series is a "reality" series and that the series is seen as her main breakthrough into popular culture, it becomes impossible to separate herself (as the general public knows her) from her bisexuality as illustrated on *A Shot at Love*. Further, due to the continuous questioning of her sexuality and her actions more generally, her position as being "fake", "unstable", and "excessive" not only speaks to individual circumstances, but undoubtedly circulates back to her presence on *A Shot at Love* and her sexuality more generally, where bisexuality/Tila Tequila/(lack of)authenticity all work together.

* * *

This chapter's aim was to provide a comprehensive background on the general popular culture climate regarding bisexuality during the 2000s, as well as to detail in-depth *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series (as well as Tila Tequila's public persona). It also worked to tease out some of the nuances that I will be elaborating on throughout the remaining analysis chapters. As will become more evident in the following chapters, bisexual women in popular culture, especially as witnessed in the 2000s, share similar qualities and replicate similar themes, some of which include femininity, seduction, instability, temporariness, deception, and so on. These themes (among others) will be analyzed at greater length below, especially highlighting how these themes become used over and over again in reference to bisexuality, to the point that it becomes difficult to separate these themes as being synonymous with bisexuality and bisexuality as being synonymous with these themes.

The following chapters will detail these representations of bisexuality and look at specific examples in conversation with "abjectness" and "authenticity". These are two themes in

particular that I see representations of bisexuality existing within. In addition, "abjectness" and "authenticity" (as well as other characteristics associated with the two) within popular culture work to perpetuate specific understandings and ideals, and with reference to sexuality and bisexuality more specifically, work to maintain distinct borders between what are and are not "acceptable" and even "legitimate" social and political identities and positionalities.

Chapter Three: Bisexuality as Abject, Excessive, and Monstrous

In this chapter I analyze examples that situate representations of bisexuality within the themes of the abject, monstrous, comical, and excessive. These themes work towards portraying bisexuality in very singular, limited ways, where bisexuality is often performed in order to reaffirm the apparent necessity of hegemonic norms. As stated previously, the following analysis' objective is to articulate how representations of bisexuality function, especially in light of the mainstreaming politics of the gay rights movements in the 2000s. While bisexuality's representation in relation to these specific cultural happenings will be discussed further in the concluding chapter, the following examples need to be understood within the wider framework of both historical happenings and the dearth of bisexual representations in popular culture discussed in Chapter Two as opposed to being thought of as individual instances.

My use of these specific examples is not to say that other representations of bisexuality are equally comparable. As an example, the abject carnivalesque food eating competition that takes place in *A Shot At Love* is unique to the reality, competition-style programming format. However, while fictional bisexual characters in other television series and films may not need to eat pigs' vaginas and bulls' penises in order to prove their worth, the themes that these scenes exemplify (excessiveness, sensationalism, performance, gimmickry, and so forth) simultaneously reinforce and reproduce common views of bisexuality more generally within mainstream understandings of bisexuality, sexuality, and identity. In addition, many of the themes I discuss throughout both analysis chapters intersect with each other on multiple levels. This preface is necessary in illustrating the very intricate ways in which abjectness and authenticity work together to perpetuate specific assumptions about bisexuality. For instance, the concepts of abject and monstrous (discussed in this chapter) invoke similar theoretical outlooks to (and have

at times been used to theorize) disability and mental health, which will be discussed in the following chapter as they also run parallel to concepts of "authenticity" and "truth/deception". While it is impossible to provide concrete divisions between the themes I will analyze, for purposes of organization, the concepts and theories that I draw on have been divided in accordance with the larger themes/tropes being discussed (bisexuality as abject, monstrous, excessive, *and*, bisexuality as inauthentic, performed, deceitful). However, I also provide some brief discussions where necessary on how these themes overlap and intersect while also acknowledging why I have purposefully chosen to place them where they are. Finally, although there are numerous examples that fit into the following themes and concepts I draw on throughout my analysis, I provide in-depth analysis on a limited number, while also briefly referencing additional examples. Limiting these examples will allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the specific scenes while situating them within the larger storylines and world-building of the series in question.

Of Bodies Parts, Abject Desires, and Bisexuality

While all the themes within this chapter intermingle and will be discussed throughout, this section primarily deals with matters of the abject. As such, the following examples all deal with bodily fluids and the sharing of such fluids through references to sex and insemination processes. In each scene, bisexuality, while not always blatantly referenced, is always-already situated in conversation with the abject because of its very position as a state in-between (as articulated by Victor Turner and Arnold van Gennep in my theory section). While the in-between, liminal state of bisexuality — not heterosexual or homosexual — offers a productive, deconstructive potential in terms of understanding sexuality more generally, within the scope of popular culture and *A Shot At Love*, *A Double Shot At Love*, and *The L Word* more specifically,

this liminality operates as uncertainty and confusion. In addition to this, as Kristeva notes, the abject is that which "does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 4). This "in-between" state of liminality, then, also aligns itself with the abject, those messy, scary, gross aspects of ourselves that simultaneously challenge us to conform to one side as well as reaffirming the possibility of the "other" side.

The very first episode of *The L Word* articulates bisexuality and its relationship to the abject and liminal through portraying it as a disgusting and indecisive weakness ("Pilot Episode"). While chatting at The Planet, the local, to-be-seen, West Hollywood hangout for hip, queer women, Alice and Dana are waiting for Tina to share how her insemination process went. After Tina states that the donor's sperm (who is also a friend of Tina's) was "lack-lustre", Alice says that one would never be able to tell that his sperm had "no motility" because of the way he "fucks".

DANA. Oh Christ, Alice! When are you going to make up your mind between dick and pussy? And spare us the gory, bisexual details, please.

ALICE. Well, for your information, Dana, I'm looking for the same qualities in a man as I am in a woman.

DANA. Big tits [said jokingly, while making breast hand-gestures].

ALICE. [looks annoyed and unamused by Dana's comment]. ("Pilot Episode")

This entire scene revolves around Tina (who, as the audience later discovers, has previously been with men) discussing the nuances of her insemination process and the "viability" of the sperm donation. The abjectness (that which is expelled from the body) of the sperm — literally in this case, as the donor deposited his sperm into a cup to be implanted into Tina's ovum — is paralleled with the "gory" reality of Alice's bisexuality. Not only are her sexual relationships

with men seen as disgusting by Dana, but Alice is also seen as wishy-washy and indecisive when it comes to who she should be involved with. Also, the very fact that Dana chooses to use the word "gory" propels the entire conversation into a new realm, where bisexuality is immediately one in the same with horror, repulsion, and the monstrous — concepts that will be returned to again shortly. In addition to this being the audience's first awareness that Alice is bisexual, this is also the first declaration of bisexuality on the series as a whole. While throughout the series the main characters of Tina and Jenny also occupy a space of bisexuality (in addition to other moments of non-monosexuality from more peripheral characters, which is almost never referred to as blatantly "bisexual"), the juxtaposition of this initial introduction of bisexuality in combination with "gory" details and "gross" discussions of bodily fluids works to establish bisexuality on *The L Word* as illegitimate, confusing, and unsavoury.

This scene is interesting in that sperm can be read as both a life-force as well as something "gross", something that is expelled from the body, something that is abject, especially when it has been separated from living bodies. In a scene just before the above conversation, Bette and Tina have just procured the "low motility" sperm sample from a friend of theirs and are on their way to bring it to their doctor to have it inseminated (which is where they discover that it isn't viable). While traveling to the doctors, Tina is holding the sperm sample between her legs in order to keep it warm and Bette, who is driving, says, "God, it's repugnant! I can't believe I used to swallow that stuff" ("Pilot Episode"). Although Bette identifies as a lesbian, as the series progresses, the audience learns that Bette did at some point in the past have a relationship with a man although it was portrayed as a one-time event, a way for Bette (and her boyfriend, who is also gay) to test their sexuality as opposed to hinting at bisexuality. At this point in the series, the audience assumes that Tina is also a lesbian. The audience has not yet seen or heard of any

previous references to Tina having been with men in the past, nor to the possibility that she may still be attracted to men. However, through reading the series as a whole in its production of singular representations of bisexuality, the audience later discovers that Bette is in fact the first and only (up to this point in the series) woman Tina has been with ("Looking Back"). And as the series continues, Tina voices her attraction to men in addition to having sexual and romantic relationships with them.

On the surface, Bette's proclamation that male ejaculation is "repugnant" can simply be read as an affirmation of Bette's own queerness. It could also be read as a jab-of-sorts towards Tina and her past relationships with men, as well as foretelling her future relationships with them. As Margrit Shildrick notes, the issue with the abject is not so much that it is horrifying in and of itself, "but rather that it might infiltrate the space of my own body and effect the very transformations that would unsettle my claim to autonomous selfhood" (Shildrick, *Dangerous Discourses* 22). While Bette may not necessarily be explicitly vocalizing fears that Tina's abjectness — her bisexuality — will seep into her life and "unsettle" the lesbian community she built (although these are sentiments that Bette expresses later in the series once Tina begins to date men again), this quote from Shildrick not only references the threat of the abject but also draws connections to some of the early days of the bisexual movement. As noted by Amanda Udis-Kessler (1995) and Paula C. Rodríguez Rust (2000), many lesbian communities (and especially lesbian separatist communities) in the 1980s viewed bisexuality as being threatening due to its apparent invisibility which would allow bisexuals (with their connection to men) to infiltrate lesbian spaces. In addition to this, as Rust (citing Robyn Ochs 1996) notes, certain lesbian and gay communities — communities that have been systematically marginalized and oppressed themselves — feared bisexual infiltration because of their apparent connection to

heterosexuality and heterosexual privilege (in terms of bisexuality being seen as a transitional phase, a "cop-out"/"escape hatch", and to being less committed to sexual minority civil rights) (Rust, "The Biology, Psychology" 413-414).

In addition to this, Bette's reaction to the semen sample can be understood as a way for her to distance herself from not only the substance but the threats that it symbolizes (both in terms of its connection to Tina's attraction to men as well as its connection to the threat of disease). Conducting a qualitative interview-style study in lesbian couples and their experiences in pursuing donor conception, Petra Nordqvist notes that there are key differences between two conception routes — clinical and non-clinical (Nordqvist). For the participants that chose a clinical process, Nordqvist (who draws on Mary Douglas' conception of "dirt") notes that many of the couples felt that the clinic had ways to "purify" the sperm samples, eliminating many of the preconceptions of "repugnancy" that sperm donations carry (Nordqvist 126). In contrast to this, non-clinical endeavours were read as being more "risky", and a strong sense of morality (that there is a right and wrong way to go about this process) acted as distinctions between the two conception options (Nordqvist 127). Finally, drawing similarities to the historical "bisexuality threat" to lesbian communities, clinics also offered lesbian couples "a context in which the polluting potential of sperm was seen as managed and even neutralised, and it provided a set of intermediary rituals which restored social boundaries around lesbianism and also intimacy and bodily boundaries" (Nordqvist 126).

Within the more complete picture of the series and its development of bisexual characters, the car scene then works to produce a few different understandings — ejaculation that is expelled by male bodies is not only disgusting but something to be avoided, the receiving/consuming/taking-in of male ejaculation (whether in theory or practice) is equally

sickening, and, in accordance with this, those that do purposefully interact with male ejaculation are read as unintelligible and even threatening within lesbian communities. In addition to this, the sperm sample Tina and Bette obtained is not viable; there is no longer that "life-force" aspect to it, making it useless as well as further adding to its "grossness" by virtue of its lost purpose. It is important to keep in mind that Tina — who can be read as bisexual on the series — is the one who will be inseminated by this repugnant/gross abjection. Within this world-building, then, Tina's past relationships with men — men that are read as expelling this repugnancy — already situates her within the realm of the abject. In relation to this, then, her active role as receiver of the sperm donation becomes situated within this understanding of bodies that expel and receive.

The abjection of ejaculation, insemination, bodies, and bisexuality returns again a few episodes later ("Lies, Lies, Lies"). In this scene, Alice and Tina are in Tina's washroom while Tina is urinating on a pregnancy stick. The two begin to talk about their past relationships with men and how they used to think one could get pregnant from non-intercourse sexual and non-sexual activities (giving oral to a man, touching the handle on the boys bathroom, and so on). This conversation is also occurring amidst a storyline in which Alice has decided that she is "done" with being with women and wants to be with men only (or, at least, for the time being). As will be discussed more at length below, Alice's decision to do so is because, according to her (and common gendered stereotypes) lesbians are overly dramatic, clingy, and emotionally involved.

TINA. Are you sure you want to go back to men?

ALICE. I'm positive. I've had enough drama and mind-fucks, and women are fucking crazy.

TINA. Ya, men are boring [smirks].

ALICE. Ya, well bring it on, because I could use a little nice, uncomplicated, boring boy/girl sex masquerading as love...that's fine with me.

TINA. [laughs, as the camera pans down to the used pregnancy test]. ("Lies, Lies, Lies")

What is interesting about this scene is that again, as in the previous scenes at The Planet and in the car, both Alice and Tina's bisexuality exist within the same conversation/action as Tina's insemination process. In addition to this, Tina's previous interest in men, as well as Alice's current decision about only dating men becomes framed by this larger scene that is replete with references to abjectness — the act of urinating, discussions of semen, blowjobs, fear and confusion regarding pregnancy, and so on. While this could simply be read as friends talking, it's important to remember the previous scenes in which bisexuality was evoked in relation to Tina and Alice. This scene also offers the audience with its first clue that Tina may be bisexual, although this is not a label she specifically uses. Finally, this scene provides us with an additional moment of analysis through Alice's claims that heterosexuality "masquerades" as love — is she stating that heterosexuality is fake? Or that she will be faking it while with a man because she craves the monotony that heterosexuality apparently produces, more so than explicit desire for men? As will be discussed further in the following chapter, bisexuality is often seen as being fake and/or a temporary sexuality. In addition to this scene reaffirming bisexuality's connection to the abject, this scene also appears to be portraying Alice — an out bisexual — as being open to feigning interest in men and pushing aside her attraction to women in an attempt to produce a sense of normality, or, stability for herself. In admitting that any love with men would be a "masquerade," Alice is also perhaps gesturing towards her "true" future self as a lesbian, as Season Three's dismissal of her bisexuality later confirms.

Excessive and Out of Bounds

The following scenes, while all appearing quite different upon first glance, all work towards understanding bisexuality as excessive and/or in relation to excess. Specifically, "excess" in terms of identity/performance, hypersexuality, and the consuming of the other (literally through food and metaphorically through symbolic offerings) work to present bisexuality as being always-already excessive and in conversation with excess. As with the above examples, concepts of the liminal and abject will be useful in further teasing out the nuances of the scenes in question. In addition to this, Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque will also assist in understanding the relationship that excess serves in maintaining strict, binary borders of intelligibility, that in effect work to maintain hegemonic power-relations, while still allowing for moments of deconstruction.

The notion of the "carnavalesque", the sentiment of upheaval, play and liminality found in the medieval carnival festivities and spectacles, is most often traced to Bakhtin's 1968 work, *Rabelais and His World*. Through his analysis of many key texts from the middle ages, and most specifically through the work of François Rabelais, Bakhtin provides the reader with not only a glimpse into a certain period in time, but also allows for one to move his notion of the carnivalesque into other, current spaces of upheaval, play, and liminality.

Providing a brief break from the drudgery of everyday life, the period of the carnival allowed for a reversal of the ordinary, where enforced normalization (as manifested through bleak power differences between the elite and feudal peasants) was reversed. This space provided moments of "popular resistance: inversions, sanctioned deviance, and reversals of norms opposed the official feasts and tournaments that celebrated the power of the elites" (Langman and Ryan 478). At its most basic level, the carnivalesque is characterized by

complete entrance into excess, satire, and the repressed, eliminating the borders that tend to clearly block one from entering into such environments on a daily basis. The carnivalesque renders a space of possibility for delving into areas of social, moral, political, and physical characteristics usually considered to be deviant and out-of-bounds. The visceral, the dirty, the abject, and the grotesque are the main attributes of the carnivalesque. Whereas the rational, day-to-day reality circulates around the "upward" — heaven, the mind, enlightenment, and so on — carnivalesque is a period in which the "downward" — earth, the body, and ambiguity — is celebrated and performed (Bakhtin 21). The vision of a grotesque body, a body that encompasses all that is abject and visceral, stands as a stark protest to the completed, whole, and rational body that is perpetuated outside the limits of the carnival. The grotesque body implies constant change, manipulation, metamorphosis and ambiguity. These features stand in to remind one of the complete failure of the "norm" in achieving utter perfection.

This space of ambiguity and potential upheaval from the status quo allows for exciting moments that resist normative understandings and approaches. The space of the carnival emerged as a form of resistance where "[t]he indulgence in the obscene, the vulgar, and the grotesque provided a sense of empowerment through reversal and the movement of subjectivity from the harsh realities of feudal life to dream worlds of equality, empowerment and satisfaction" (Langman and Ryan 486). Bisexuality, again, is often understood as liminal and ambiguous much like the space of the carnival, offering us opportunities to examine dominant understandings of sexuality more generally. However, while the following examples offer us this potential (especially in the discussion of hypersexuality as excess), as Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque reminds us, this space is temporary and always-already within the confines of normativity. Further, understanding the radical potential of certain performances can only be

understood in certain spaces, places, and times, and with the equal participation of the audience. As has been noted throughout, these representations already operate in a space of both hetero- and homonormativity, which doesn't necessarily negate its radical potential (as will be discussed in the conclusion) but does work towards producing it more so as spectacle that necessitates the need for norms as opposed to dismantling them.

The first example of such excessiveness, grotesque realism, and comedy involves Alice and her relationship with a man. As detailed above, Alice's bisexuality is often detailed in light-hearted, comedic ways. While this in part produces Alice as a likeable character, it also works to paint her bisexuality as being synonymous with the comedic encounters she is a part of. In this space, then, Alice is not only seen as "funny" but her attractions/relationships in connection with the comedic scenes also become read as "funny". As will become further evident through Alice's relationship with Uta the vampire, where the entire storyline is portrayed as a joke, one that cannot be taken seriously, these connections to the comical, outlandish, and carnivalesque first manifest in Alice's relationship with Lisa, a lesbian-identified man, which is the first relationship of Alice's that the audience sees unfold in full¹⁸. The character of Lisa makes space for readings of gender ambiguity (Beirne 25), as Lisa simultaneously confirms their¹⁹ identity as both a man and as a lesbian. In spite of this, Lisa is most often greeted with uncertainty by many of the other characters, where Lisa's sexual identity and gender are often questioned and ridiculed. As such, Lisa's role on the series works to "render cisgender lesbian characters as comparatively normative" (Beirne 25), and this is made further evident through Lisa's relationship with Alice.

¹⁸ Prior to Lisa, however, the audience meets Alice's ex-girlfriend, Gabby Deveaux, who Alice still appears to have feelings for, much to the disappointment of her friends (they feel as though Gabby didn't treat Alice well in the past) ("Let's Do It"). Alice and Gabby's flirtations span a few scenes over two episodes, with Alice ultimately deciding that Gabby has not changed and that she wants to pursue men more actively since they are "less complicated".

¹⁹ Within this discussion of Lisa and Alice, I use "they" and "their" as a singular, gender-neutral pronoun in reference to Lisa unless "he" is used in a quote from the series.

After feeling like she was pulled back and forth by her ex-girlfriend, Alice decides that she no longer wants to date women (for the time being) and instead wants something "uncomplicated" with a man (see a detailing of this scene above). Shortly after declaring this, while at The Planet with Shane and Dana, Alice meets Shane's friend, Lisa. The two appear to find each other attractive, and while Alice momentarily steps away from the group, Shane shares with Lisa that Alice has recently sworn off women:

LISA. That's a shame!

SHANE. [in agreement] Ya.

LISA. It's no reason to swear off being a lesbian [*sic*].

SHANE. I agree.

LISA. Maybe I can change her mind...

DANA. [following the conversation, looks confused] Wait, I'm sorry, I don't think...I don't know if you've noticed but you're a guy [laughs, gestures at Lisa knowingly].

SHANE. Lisa's a lesbian.

LISA. [sighs exasperatedly] I'm a lesbian-identified man.

DANA. [looks away confused].

LISA. I know [smiles]. ("Lies, Lies, Lies")

While Lisa appears to understand that the way Lisa identifies seems confusing to Dana, no further explanation (is this a gender orientation for Lisa? Sexuality-only?) is offered either at this point or throughout the storyline.

Alice and Lisa's relationship progresses, and Alice brings Lisa to play poker with all of her friends. When Lisa leaves the room to use the washroom at Tina's, the conversation quickly turns to Lisa's identity:

DANA. Okay. So what's the scoop? Is the lesbo-man dating the fake bisexual?

ALICE. [looks annoyed, throws a piece of popcorn at Dana who is smiling; none of the other women say anything to defend Alice] I am a bisexual.

LARA [Dana's girlfriend]. Okay, I'm confused.

DANA. Oh, well, Lisa over here is a lesbian-identified man.

LARA. So what is that, like a transsexual?

ALICE. No.

DANA. I wonder how he pees? Sitting down? I don't know...you think, Shane?

SHANE. [shrugs] I never pee with him.

[the group hears Lisa flush the toilet and expect him back soon]

TINA. [to Alice] I just want to know — are you into him as a lesbian or man?

[Alice appears to be thinking]

DANA. [interrupting] Maybe you should call yourself a "tri-sexual"²⁰.

KIT. Damn, what is it with you people and your need to take apart everything and process each little detail? [Lisa returns] If the dude wanna give up his white man rights to be a second-class citizen, then hey [to Lisa], welcome to our world.

DANA. Okay, she's got a point. I'm sorry, it's true. Cheers! [they all cheers together and welcome Lisa into the group]. ("Losing It")

²⁰ It isn't clear to the audience whether Dana is calling Alice a "tri-sexual", as in, attraction to men, women, and Lisa, or if she is saying "try-sexual", as in, Alice is willing to try/sleep with anyone. Either way, based on Dana's past jabs at Alice about "choosing" a side, it is clear that she is mocking her bisexuality.

From the outset, Lisa's identity is instantly made into a joke. In this particular scene, Alice's sexuality (bisexuality) is paired up with Lisa's joke-like identity. Both are made fun of by other characters on the series, and both (especially when paired together) produce a reading of not being real, not being authentic, and as being confused/confusing. Paired together, their relationship is read as temporary and strange, and most of all as not a "real" lesbian relationship nor a "real" heterosexual relationship. Their relationship, as well as their identities as lesbian-identified man and bisexual woman instead occupy a liminal space, a space between hetero-and-homosexual, a space of nothingness where only humour abounds and where radical potential to subvert dominant norms exists. However, the way in which both identities are reduced down to comical jokes works instead to portray homo- and heterosexuality as the norm and bisexuality and the lesbian-identified man as aberrations. In addition to this, the correlation of Lisa's identity with being gender and sexually ambiguous reads as being transphobic, where the jokiness of Lisa's identity (appearing to be chosen, fake, temporary) perpetuates transphobic stereotypes and representations (a theme which continues throughout the series in the characters of Ivan and Max). Finally, it is interesting that after Kit's defence of Lisa (although a defence that still relegates Lisa's identity within the realm of the absurd — as in, why would Lisa ever knowingly give up their "male" privileges) the others playing poker agree that Lisa should be able to identify however they want to, however Alice, whose identity is also questioned and made fun of, is not given this same recognition.

Although Alice seems to really enjoy dating Lisa and doesn't appear to have any issue with how they identify, their first sexual encounter together negates this acceptance and instead continues to place Lisa's sexuality (and Alice's through connection) within the realm of the comedic and carnivalesque, occupying a space of in-betweenness that perpetuates binary

understandings of gender and sexuality instead of upturning them. While attending an all-women party on a yacht, Alice and Lisa move to a spare bedroom and begin to engage in sexual activities. Things appear to be moving quickly and as Alice reaches into Lisa's underwear to grab their genitals, Lisa quickly pulls her hand away:

LISA. Wait.

ALICE. What? What?

LISA. I have something [Lisa reaches into a bag they brought and pulls out a dildo]

ALICE. You're kidding, right? [laughs]

LISA. Why would I be kidding?

ALICE. Well...because...because you're a man, ya know? You've got the real thing.

LISA. That's not...that's not how I want to make love to you.

ALICE. That's how I want you to, okay?

LISA. But it goes against who I am.

ALICE. [is now on top of Lisa] Listen, you're a man — a man named Lisa — but you're definitely a man.

LISA. I'm a lesbian...man [Alice begins performing oral on Lisa as the scene ends]. ("L'ennui")

The audience then sees Lisa and Alice exit the bedroom after they have had sex.

ALICE. [in bliss] Oh my God! [leans over to try to kiss Lisa but they refuse]

What? What's the matter? What?

[Lisa looks very upset and uncomfortable]

ALICE. Nonono, don't do this.

[Lisa storms away]

ALICE. [confused, yells after Lisa] But ya...ya had a good time! ("L'ennui")

In addition to this scene providing another example of Lisa's identity being made into a joke, the scene is also suspicious in that Alice continuously negates Lisa's agency in identifying and using Lisa's body in ways that they want, to the point of sexually assaulting Lisa. This assault is never mentioned as such on the series, though, as Lisa is a "man", perpetuating the stereotype that women cannot rape men and that men would never say "no" to sex. In addition to this stereotype, since Lisa's identity is already read as being a joke, their sexual request (to use a dildo with Alice) and their statements of refusal are also jokes that don't need to be taken seriously.

Lisa's identity doesn't seem to bother Alice in the beginning, although it does appear as though she reads Lisa as a cis-gender, heterosexual man and dates Lisa as such. Throughout Alice and Lisa's brief relationship, Lisa's identity in conversation with Alice's quest for the "uncomplicated" with men is based around gendered stereotypes, where it is believed that cis-gender, heterosexual men are not emotional and hate drama. The joke of their relationship is that since Lisa isn't heterosexual but instead a lesbian, they appear to be much more in-touch with their emotions and their partner's emotions (stereotypically more feminine characteristics) than a heterosexual cis-man is assumed to be. In addition to this, Lisa spouts liberal, progressive politics about relationships and gender expectations, and Alice is immediately smitten, although these same characteristic are what eventually lead to the demise of their relationship as Alice soon finds Lisa "too" clingy and emotional. Due to this, Alice soon seeks sexual refuge in the arms of a "real" man, who identifies as "straight" much to Alice's pleasure: "Wow, fascinating.

So you have no sexual ambiguity, no variation on your orientation, you're not hiding a vagina in there? One testicle?" ("Luck, Next Time"). It appears as though Alice begins to have a relationship with Andrew, the "real" man, without having officially separated from Lisa. When Lisa confronts Alice about this (in a scene that is absurd in itself, with Lisa telling Andrew that Lisa is Alice's "lesbian lover", which produces dismay from Andrew and embarrassment from Alice) Alice angrily tells Lisa that it's over, saying:

You know what, Lisa? when I first started seeing you, I wanted something simple and easy. And instead I end up with the most complicated interpretation of sexual identity I've ever encountered. You know, I mean, you do "lesbian" better than any lesbian I know. Okay, and I don't want a lesbian boyfriend! I'm sorry! I want a boyfriend who's straight or I want a lesbian who's a girl. ("Luck, Next Time")

Alice's interest in Andrew is based on the fact that he is "normal", that he has no sexual ambiguity, that he simply wants to have "regular" heterosexual sex. This is not only an interesting juxtaposition to Lisa and Lisa's identity, but to Alice's as well, as bisexuality is read as a sexuality of ambiguity. Although Alice has perpetuated claims of "genderless" attraction in her bisexuality ("I'm looking for the same qualities in a man as I am in a woman" ("Pilot Episode")), her relationship with Lisa counters this, where her quest for sex with a man and her "giving up" of women are based on limited, stereotypical views of gender. Since Lisa's identity is then presented as being "too" ambiguous, "this works to define Alice against Lisa; her bisexuality can be read as less strange or threatening, by comparison with the absurdity of a 'lesbian-identified man' (Moorman 170).

As this is the only relationship with an apparent cis-gender man that the audience sees (aside from a brief fling with Andrew after Lisa), Alice's bisexuality isn't actively read as bisexual, and so her sexuality presents as "less threatening" because it primarily performs as "lesbian", minus a brief dalliance and in spite of Alice's own proclamations of bisexuality. The only way in which Alice is given space to explore her attraction to men is to make it into a farce, a comedy, a grotesque story. In addition to this, the relationship between Alice and Lisa allows for a reading of triangulation as noted by Marjorie Garber (1995), one of the most popular stereotypes of bisexuality. Here, instead of Alice simultaneously being with a man and a woman, whether separately in a love triangle (like Jenny, Tim, and Marina) or immediately in a threesome, Lisa is presented as performing both roles through their biological maleness that is in conversation with their more feminine characteristics (their caring, emotional displays) and their identity as a lesbian. However, this is not adequate for Alice, as she mentions that she wants to be with a cis-woman who is a lesbian (interestingly, can't be bisexual like Alice) or a cis-man who is straight — nothing in-between, even though her own sexuality occupies a space of liminality within the larger structure of the series. In addition to this, as Jennifer Moorman points out, Alice's obsession with being with a "real" cis-gender, straight man *or* a lesbian even though previously claiming to not be concerned with gender, plus her relationship with Lisa, which presents as a one-off experiment with men, further perpetuates the popular stereotype of bisexuality as being confused. As such, "the show, via Alice's dialogue, keeps telling us that bisexuality is normal and valid, but its actual depiction of bisexuality remains unstable and conflicted" (Moorman 171).

Moving slightly away from the more comical presentations of identities as noted above, the following discussion of hypersexuality also situates itself within the realm of the excessive.

The premise of both *A Shot at Love* and its spin-off *A Double Shot at Love* is that sexy bisexual women (Tila Tequila in *A Shot At Love* and twins Rikki and Vikki Ikki in *A Double Shot At Love*) are searching for love from a group of straight men and lesbians, all who have to compete against each other in a variety of tasks in order to win over the stars' hearts. Advertised as the first (and only) bisexual reality dating show (and to date, the only reality show to focus entirely on bisexuality), this series replicates similar patterns as other dating shows — contestants compete for the affection of the main star, go on multiple dates with the star throughout the series, as the group of contestants dwindles through weekly eliminations, until there are only two competitors left for the star to choose from — but with a twist. Undoubtedly, the main twist is that the stars searching for love are bisexual women (and for *A Double*, bisexual twins). In addition to this and while more traditional dating shows also feature competitions amongst the competitors, *A Shot at Love* and *A Double Shot at Love* episodes are structured around outlandish competitions that appear to premise excessiveness, as opposed to romance, at its core.

One aspect of such excessiveness that becomes evident all throughout the series is that of hypersexuality. From intense close-ups of Tila Tequila and the Ikki twins' bodies, revealing clothing, mentions of all of their careers as models for various adult and sports magazines, and sexually charged dates with the contestants, the stars of the series are performed as always-already being sexually available and excessive. While this focus on sexual excessiveness is undoubtedly in part to the series being a production of MTV, a hip and youthful network that focuses on sexuality more generally, the focus on bisexuality in *A Shot at Love* and *A Double Shot at Love* works to both perpetuate as well as reaffirm popular understandings of bisexuality as being a sexuality of excess.

As many theorists of bisexuality itself have continuously noted, "bisexuality" is often conflated with hypersexuality, threesomes, and sexual adventure more generally (Garber; Pramaggiore; Burleson; Eisner; San Filippo; and others). And while hypersexuality is not problematic in and of itself, the ways in which it becomes regularly and often singularly used to define bisexuality often results in problematic outcomes. This stereotype works to produce a sexuality that, within more puritanical, traditional, and heteronormative cultural understandings, is always at a distance, always "othered". In doing so, many bisexuals are often relegated to the position of having to continuously restate that they are not sexual "deviants", regardless of the fact that people of all sexual orientations may subscribe to the sexualized labels used to denigrate bisexuality. Within this space, bisexuality is at a crux — to deny that one is sexually excessive is to deny that one is bisexual, since bisexuality is defined as simultaneous attraction to men and women, which undoubtedly conjures popular fantasies of threesomes and polyamory.

Representations of bisexuality, then, most often become based on this stereotype in order to blatantly make bisexuality evident, as opposed to being confused with other monosexualities. This is made no more clearly than in the *Shot at Love* series where the stars continuously date and are continuously intimate with the men and women contestants in order to make clear that they "really are bisexual". Throughout all the seasons of these series, Tila Tequila and the Ikki twins continuously state how sexually voracious they are, and often play it up through sexually-charged competitions, dates, and outings with the contestants. Further, the houses in which the series takes place holds a "secret" sexy room, dance-pole included. This house is announced as being Tila and the twins' house (in each respective season), again highlighting the sexual adventurousness of the stars. In addition to these acts and characteristics of the stars, the entire series is set up to respond to hypersexuality and accordingly, the audience sees the women

contestants competing to be the sexiest, most attractive option for Tila/the twins, while the men work to prove their strength and reliability. These elements not only reify stereotypical gender binaries but also perpetuate assumptions about bisexuality as being hypersexual. Finally, and perhaps the most obvious example of hypersexuality, the spin-off season has two stars — twin sisters — which not only reproduces the idea of bisexuality as being imagined in relation to threesomes but intensifies this through glorifying incest and the male sexual fantasy of being with sisters/having them fight over one man. In addition to having the twins literally share the same dates, where the same contestant will often get kissed by the twins one after the other (and in the final episodes it is hinted at that the twins are each sexually intimate with the remaining contestants, often edited as though the encounters occurred in succession), as well as choosing the same final contestant to be with, the themes of incest/threesomes/sharing sisters are continuously played up throughout the season by having the twins often holding hands together, wearing nearly identical outfits to each other, and having to watch as the other kisses/flirts with the contestants (of course, while their voiceovers confirm their jealousy of their twin in those moments)²¹.

While there has been a substantial amount of work done on conjoined twins, especially in relation to historical documentation and critical disability studies critiques of "freak shows", there has been little to no academic work done on twins in popular culture, and more specifically on the sexualization of twins in popular culture. The one exclusion to this that I was able to find is Lauren Rosewarne's *Part-Time Perverts: Sex, Pop Culture, and Kink Management*, and even then, the conversation is primarily about general representations of incest in popular culture

²¹ Interestingly, twins also appeared in Season Two of *A Shot At Love*, where twin brothers both compete for Tila's heart. Tila decides to eliminate one of the brothers during the first elimination and in her confessional (which is played during the eviction ceremony) she states that it was strange to have brothers there and that it would be weird to kiss one and then the other, adding "I mean, who dates brothers?" ("Another Shot of Tequila").

(spanning a total of five pages), with only a brief mention of "twins" in relation to a 2003 Coors' commercial (Rosewarne 48-49)²². Aside from this, there has not been much cultural analysis in general on the sexualization of twins in mainstream popular culture, with most conversations instead recognizing the popularity of female twins in male fantasies (which primarily seems to align itself with the fantasy of a threesome, where the man is the centre of attention, as opposed to explicit sex between the sisters)²³

In a discussion about the aftermath of being date-raped, Elena Carter critiques the notion of the "good girl" vs. the "bad girl" as a means to both reduce women down to their sexuality as well as punish them for it (Carter). Continuing this critique of the categorization of women in order to organize and control them, Carter highlights how being a twin seemed to exaggerate these sentiments even more, where Carter and her twin sister were often asked to define themselves (or others would do so for them) into the categories of "good" and "evil" twin, often with implied sexual undertones (Carter). In critiquing the objectification and overt sexualization of this question (and other similar ones), Carter (quoting Elin and Hennie Weiss) situates these questions and sentiments within a larger cultural obsession with identical twin sisters, one that reads them as not being individuals and instead always-already hypersexualizes them as a unit:

Sometimes men ask us if we've ever slept with the same man, or even if we've ever slept with the same man at the same time. The sexualization of identical twins is troubling to us because it suggests that identical female twins are not viewed as individuals, but as a pair or a twosome. It also creates the notion that identical twins are somehow more sexual than other women, or interested in

²² Acting as an homage to things all men apparently love (football, short skirts, food, and, of course, female twins), the use of identical twin sisters in the 2003 Coors' advertisement resulted in achieving the highest ratings ever for Coors' (up to that point) (Waxman).

²³ One mainstream article that moves slightly beyond this hetero-male fantasy of twins is Thomas Roger's "Gay Porn's Most Shocking Taboo" (2010) which details the growing popularity of "twincest", explicit sex between two twin brothers, in gay pornography.

having sex with the same partner. At the same time it endorses a creepy sexual or sensual bond between twins that borders on incestuous. (Carter)

This quote reproduces many of the same themes available in *A Double Shot At Love*, namely that of hypersexualization of twins through references to threesomes, fantasies of consensual incest, and the de-individualization of Rikki and Ikki.

Women's sexuality has historically been used as a means to pathologize them, especially when their sexuality is seen as being "hyper" or "excessive", often in similar ways to how bisexuality has been pathologized (when not ignored altogether) throughout many early sexuality studies (Angelides). While this pathologization of sexuality lends itself to the topic of mental health in relation to bisexuality that will be discussed in the following chapter, my decision to focus on hypersexuality here is due to its relationship with the abject, monstrous, and carnivalesque, especially in the ways it is performed in the above mentioned series. The overt sexualization of Tila Tequila and the Ikki twins on a dating show that foregrounds bisexuality at the core of its premise becomes unavoidably linked to bisexuality and understanding of bisexuality. On these shows, bisexuality is always-already hypersexual, and this hypersexuality is performed in such a way that its excessiveness becomes intrinsically aligned with deviancy, the grotesque, and the ridiculous.

In addition to Tila Tequila being both presented as and performing as hypersexual and excessive due to her bisexuality and her career as an adult magazine model, and later, pornography star, Tila's hypersexuality and excessiveness is further developed through racialization. In fact, Tila's rise to fame was in part due to her becoming the first "Asian Cyber Girl of the Month" for *Playboy* ("Tila Tequila Biography"). Tila Tequila's identity on the series (and in popular culture more generally) is also in part constructed through her race (she is

Vietnamese) and racialized tropes of Asian women, and more specifically, Asian women's sexuality as envisioned through an Orientalist scope.

In Rachel E. Dubrofsky's discussion of race and racialization on the reality television show *The Bachelor* (and its spin-off, *The Bachelorette*), she highlights how the Orientalist fantasy of "the harem" occupies the space of this reality dating program (Dubrofsky). The culturally imagined space of the harem is one where white, Western men have a bevy of Eastern women at their service. Within this Orientalist trope, "the powerful, masculine West dominates the weaker, feminized East" (Dubrofsky 37). While this trope is obviously evident in the fact that *The Bachelor* involves all-white male stars (minus Juan Pablo Galavis, the first Latino bachelor to be cast in all nineteen seasons of the series) with a plethora of beautiful women, all living in the same mansion, seemingly just waiting to be called upon by the bachelor, Dubrofsky also notes the ways in which the harem theme and Orientalism more generally persists throughout the series as a whole (from decor, date activities, travel destinations, and so on) (Dubrofsky).

This critical analysis of "the harem" trope on *The Bachelor* is pertinent to *A Shot At Love* and *A Double Shot at Love* due to the fact that they are all reality dating shows. What is interesting, though, is how this concept simultaneously becomes reified and reversed through Tila Tequila. Tila, a woman of colour, is the one in control (in addition to the producers, although editing and producer-control is not unique to *A Shot At Love*) of the situation, including having a large group of potential love interests at her call. However, in similar ways to how the trope of "the harem" is used to produce a very particular, sexually-motivated imagining of Eastern women, representations of Tila Tequila also always-already exist within Orientalist imaginings.

Within Western popular culture, representations of Asian women often become based upon racialized, Orientalist imaginings, where such representations always-already situate Asian women within the realm of sexuality (Yamamoto; Shimizu; Rajgopal). In particular, these imaginings, whether representing the timid and subservient, the coy and alluring, or the excessive and dangerous, often work to reproduce similar tropes of Asian women's sexuality which exists primarily to uphold white, Western masculinity. As Traise Yamamoto notes, while these popular culture representation may appear to be diverse, it often conflates Asian and Asian American women into a homogenous category that all work to maintain "normative" ideas of Whiteness and sexual power and "the promises of liberal multiculturalism" (Yamamoto 43).

This is the space, then, in which Tila Tequila's sexuality needs to be understood. However, it is equally important in situating Tila's agency within this conversation, as an active entrepreneur in the performance of her sexuality. In *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene*, Celine Parreñas Shimizu analyzes performances, production, and consumption of Asian and Asian American women's sexuality from screen to stage, artistic productions, and independent and mainstream film and pornography (in addition to other cultural sites) (Shimizu). While recognizing the gendered and racialized historical spaces of these representations, productions, and processes of consumption of Asian women and hypersexuality, Shimizu also highlights the subversive possibilities available, especially in accounting for variety and nuance in the consumption and performance of racialized, hypersexuality. By articulating these representations only in terms of "good" vs. "bad", "problematic" vs. "positive", one risks simplifying the meaning production to that of only racism, sexism, homophobia, as opposed to recognizing the intricate ways marginalized communities interact and take part in such representations. In articulating these nuances, Shimizu calls for the

application of "productive perversity" which involves productively engaging with these "bad" representations in order to work towards establishing "a different identity along with established sexual images so as to expand racial agendas beyond the need to establish normality and standardization. To engage hypersexuality as a politically productive perversity pays attention to the formulations of sexual and racial identity that critique normative scripts for sexually and racially marginalized subjects" (Shimizu 21).

In returning to Tila Tequila, it is important to recognize the variety of ways in which her performance of hypersexuality can be understood. As a reality series star, in addition to her career in adult modeling and pornography, Tila's performance of hypersexuality can undoubtedly be read as a very specific and purposeful representation of herself. In a "productive perversity" reading of Tila Tequila on *A Shot At Love*, a series which is premised (at least in appearance) on her very active role as suitor, an alternative envisioning of her hypersexuality becomes a possibility. In this space, the active performance of her sexuality in connection with her role as a power-figure, who has a large group of potential love interests at her whim, offers a reversal of sorts to the popular Orientalist trope of "the harem" (as discussed above). Here, the simultaneous recognition and use of Tila's sexuality as being ascribed to gendered, racialized, and biphobic imaginings offers the potential to create "new morphologies in representation and in history" (Shimizu 26).

Shimizu's concept of "productive perversity" is radical and offers exciting opportunities to discuss representations of bisexuality more generally, which I will return to in my concluding chapter. However, while still keeping in mind the "productive perversity" possibilities of Tila's hypersexuality on the series, I want to return to how these representations, in connection to larger, recycled themes/tropes, *do* work to maintain the status quo. This return seems especially

pertinent in that Tila Tequila has stated that she is not as "excessive" as she was made to appear on *A Shot At Love*: "I want my real fans to know that the crazy *Girls Gone Wild* chick on the show, that's not me. It was frustrating as hell. But I know how much it did for me, so I'm not complaining" (Tequila 77). In this quote, Tila both notes that she recognizes the ways in which she was portrayed on the series as well as critiques that depiction of herself. While she ultimately doesn't seem overly troubled with the representation of her as "wild", acknowledging that such a portrayal has benefited her professionally, the fact that she states that it is not how she "really" is further hints at the purposeful ways in which she was depicted by the series. As will be discussed below, these depictions of the hypersexuality of Tila Tequila herself as well as the hypersexuality of the scenes she is in contribute to the maintenance of very limited, homogenous representations of not only bisexuality, but gender and race as well.

Within all of the seasons of the *Shot At Love* series, the performance of this hypersexuality/bisexuality in relation to the carnivalesque and excess (object) becomes especially apparent when Tila and the twins meet the remaining four contestants' parents and families in each respective seasons. Each season of the series sees Tila Tequila or the twins going to meet the family and friends in the hometowns of the final four contestants. In nearly all the visits, but especially when Tila/the twins are visiting the families of the male contestants, hypersexuality and general excessiveness (arguably, loud, rude, uncomfortable behaviour) is performed to the extreme. It isn't clear why this excessiveness appears to be extra performed, although it seems to be done as a way to scare and/or make the families (who are often more conventional/"traditional") uncomfortable. It is almost as if they are playing up not only the stereotypes that surround them personally (as adult and sports magazine models and reality television stars) but also to reaffirm mainstream understandings about bisexuality as being

hypersexual, risqué, and carefree. This performance becomes particularly interesting in relationship to the countless times both Tila and the Ikki twins continuously claim the legitimacy of their bisexuality, their need to be taken seriously, and their search for long-term love interests on the show.

Each meeting of the parents sees Tila and the twins (in each respective season) announcing their bisexuality to the family and friends of the contestants almost immediately upon meeting. This does not appear to be done as a means of affirming their sexualities, but more so to gauge the reactions of the family members. In these meetings, bisexuality is literally performed as a means to create drama, which again, is a far cry from the legitimacy this series and the stars claim.

I will be highlighting two scenes that display hypersexuality and general themes of excessiveness below, but in order to detail the extent to which these themes play out when the stars are meeting the families, I will briefly provide a quick summary of some of the more excessive moments, as well as examples that present themselves continuously throughout the meetings. While meeting the family and friends of the contestants, Tila Tequila and the twins are seen to be continuously flirting with not only the contestant they are "dating" (in front of the families who often look uncomfortable by the excessive displays of affection) but their families as well, often telling family members how "hot" and "sexy" they are. This flirting often escalates to provocative dancing with family members while their dates look on, and in Tila's case, providing erotic dances for certain family members (a lap-dance for Dani's grandmother in Season One; grinding with Kristy's brother in Season Two). Both Tila and the twins also ask many of the contestants' family members if they are also bisexual, and when told "no" by many, the stars work to encourage bisexuality in them (Dani's grandmother is asked if she is bisexual in

Season One by Tila; also in Season One, Tila vocally wishes Ryan's sister was bisexual since Tila finds her attractive; Scott's entire family is asked about their bisexuality by the twins in *A Double*). And finally, general sexually charged behaviour and debauchery is evident throughout – Tila Tequila "accidentally" gets whipped cream on her breast and asks Bobby's younger brother to "help" her wipe it off, as Bobby's mother appears to look upset at the situation (Season One); she spansks Kristy's father's buttocks (Season Two); she simulates performing fellatio on a pickle and then asks Brittany's father, who is visibly uncomfortable, if he would like "some of my pickle?" (Season Two); she rubs her breasts in Kristy's aunt's face (Season Two); and Rikki has Scott's mother and aunt take shots of Manischewitz from her breasts (*A Double*).

Two scenes in particular stand out as examples of carnivalesque and hypersexual behaviour and general performances of excessiveness. In Season Two, Tila travels to Paramus, New Jersey to meet Jay's family (one of the two last male contestants on the show at this point) ("Keep It In The Family"). Almost immediately upon meeting them, Tila proclaims how attractive they all are, specifically stating that Jay's mother and step-mother are "MILFs" ("mothers I'd like to fuck"). In addition to Tila Tequila's sexuality being seen as intriguing and fun, Jay's family (who are Jewish) also seem to find Tila's race to be an "exotic" factor and point of difference. In particular, while having dinner together, Jay's mother notes that she has continuously told her son that marrying a Jewish woman won't do since, "all day all you want is soy sauce and teriyaki sauce!" and so marrying an Asian woman, like Tila, would be perfect for him. Tila laughs it off in the moment but in her confessional (which accompanies this scene) she admits that the comment from Jay's mother was "weird" and seems uncomfortable by it. In similar ways to how Tila Tequila's sexuality becomes understood through stereotypes, so too

does her race, resulting in a tokenization of her identity as well as referencing larger cultural motifs of the fetishization of Asian women.²⁴

Shortly thereafter, Jay and Tila begin to make-out at the dinner table, and Jay's mother says something about how her son should share. This comment could have been made about something else entirely, but the scene was edited in such a way that it appears as though she is referring to Jay sharing Tila with her/the other family members. This is confirmed to the audience when Jay's father then points to his wife, Jay's step-mother, and says to Tila, "why don't you come to her?" Tila then goes over to Jay's step-mother, dances on her, and then proceeds to kiss her while the rest of the family watch and Jay yells "get her!". Tila then moves on to Jay's mother and kisses her. In her confessional that accompanies this scene, Tila states, "wow, that was kinda hot. It felt more like a family orgy and not so much a family dinner" ("Keep It In The Family"). The scene continues to perform hypersexuality (as well as references to fetishizing incest) as Tila tells Jay's two mothers to show her their breasts (which they do) and then they kiss each other. The scene ends by having the group together in a hot-tub, while the audience sees Tila Tequila passed around from person to person, at times sitting on their laps, interspersed with clips of Jay's two sets of parents making-out together (and the two mothers kissing each other again), as well as Tila and Jay making out while his family watches. Tila's confessional ends this scene by stating that Jay's family was "wild" and "unconventional" and that "overall, being in Jersey with Jay's family felt like a porn convention" ("Keep It In The Family").

²⁴ It is worth noting that this is not the only example of racialization during the "meet the family" episodes. While the twins are visiting Scott's family (who are Jewish), the twins (perhaps on encouragement from the producers) interact with the family in very singular ways, often essentializing their Jewishness for entertainment purposes – the twins bring the family a bottle of Manischewitz, which is referenced throughout; the twins ask to be taught how to dance, and the group dance the Horah while "Hava Nagila" plays in the background (a dance traditionally performed at weddings and other celebrations); and Vikki is raised on a chair (again, a custom of celebrating the honoree at celebrations). The entire scene is performed as a means to create "entertainment" and "humour" through exoticizing and essentializing Judaism. Scott himself states in his confessional (upon reflection of the events) that, "we haven't been this Jewish in years" ("Family Matters").

In *A Double Shot At Love*, Rikki and Vikki travel to Pennsylvania to meet Trevor's "conservative" family. Trevor's family is shocked to see that he has brought home twin sisters as his romantic love interests. The topic of bisexuality quickly comes up as the twins discuss the premise of the series and their sexuality. This is evidently an issue for Trevor's family, as Trevor's father makes it clear that he is uncomfortable with the fact that they are bisexual as he doesn't think it's "morally" right ("Family Matters"). The twins try to express that just because they are bisexual doesn't mean that they don't believe in monogamy and that their interest in Trevor is real. In spite of this proclamation and desire to want to be taken seriously by Trevor's family, the remainder of this scene continues to present bisexuality as hypersexual, performed, amoral, and unconventional (especially in juxtaposition with Trevor's traditional family). While still all together at the dinner table, Trevor proceeds to kiss both of the twins in succession while his parents react shocked (gapping mouths). Finally, the scene ends with the twins offering to "help" with cleaning up, which results in them both standing at the sink rinsing dishes while Vikki continuously slaps Rikki's buttocks. Rikki then continues to drop cutlery on the kitchen floor so that Vikki will have to bend over to pick it up and each time she does so, her skirt rolls up to show her underwear ("Family Matters").

Both of the above detailed scenes exist within the larger contexts of the series, which sees both Tila Tequila and Rikki and Vikki continuously state their quest to find "real" love. In addition to this, they all declare (in their confessions to the audience watching as well as to the contestants they are dating) that they above all want to be taken seriously, and especially in terms of having their bisexuality seen as legitimate. These proclamations of authenticity (which will be discussed further in the following chapter) are performed not only through their affirmations but also by eliminating contestants that are seen to be not taking the experience seriously. And

yet, while meeting the families of the final four contestants, Tila Tequila and the twins perform acts that can be read as unreliable and sexually charged/motivated (as opposed to a "pure" motivation of traditional conceptions of "love"), again collapsing their bisexuality with these "inappropriate" acts. In addition to actions of Tila Tequila and the twins as being read as "excessive", within these scenes, they always exist in conversation with the other identities/sexualities, where the "traditional" family structures, dinners, and actions participate in normalizing heteronormative ideals in juxtaposition to the voracious, "othered" sexuality of Tila Tequila and the twins.

Organs of Affection

While hypersexual representations of bisexuality on *A Shot At Love* and *A Double Shot At Love* may appear to be quite obvious in that it is a reality dating show on MTV (not known for its subtlety), I argue that themes of "abjection" and the "carnavalesque" also appear frequently throughout, further assisting in the perpetuation of bisexuality as being always-already excessive and performed. My discussion of hypersexuality fits in with both of these themes, especially in conversation with envisioning women's sexuality as excessive, as well as the above conversations on underlying incest fantasies scattered throughout *A Double Shot At Love* and the racialization of Tila Tequila's sexuality. In addition to hypersexuality's connection to the abject and carnivalesque, there are undoubtedly more blatant examples available in the *Shot At Love* series. The following examples combine consuming food with the contestants' quest for love with the stars. As Kristeva notes, "food becomes abject only if it is a border between two distinct entities or territories. A boundary between nature and culture, between human and the non-human" (Kristeva 75). This is precisely what takes place in the following examples as Tila,

the twins, and later Alice and Jenny from *The L Word*, defy borders through literal and imagined consuming of the other, where the road to romance is paved with the abject.

In Season One's "The Cat Fight", the episode begins with Tila leaving a note in a bottle (something that happens in each episode) that tells the contestants that Tila is "exotic" and she needs someone who has "exotic tastes". While this concept of "exotic" undoubtedly plays on Tila's race, the scene instead presents "exotic" as being in reference to Tila's frequent travelling schedule as a celebrity. As the group goes to meet Tila (who is waiting for them outside where the competition will be held), Tila tells them that because she travels so much, she doesn't always get to eat the foods that she likes so she has to make sure that they can all handle "life on the road" with her ("The Cat Fight"). In order to prove not only their love for Tila but their ability to be adaptable and proper travel companions, the contestants compete in a food eating competition, where the fastest man and the fastest woman move to the next level of the competition. The catch: the food they need to eat are bull's penises and testicles. Throughout the scene, most of the contestants are disgusted while they are forcing themselves to eat, continuously gagging, as well as vomiting. As Amanda and Bobby win and move on to the next level of the competition, they discover that they need to eat more animal body parts. In this second-level of the competition, each item Amanda and Bobby have to eat corresponds to Tila — animal eyes (Tila says that they should only have eyes for her), an animal heart (because the competition is about love), and a shot of animal blood (which is a play off of the title of the series).

A similar competition occurs again in Season Two, where shortly after competing in a "bi-athalon" —a cleverly named competition that occurs in both seasons of *A Shot At Love* as well as in *A Double Shot At Love* that sees the contestants competing in sexually-themed events

like searching for a "pearl necklace" (sexual slang for the ejaculation of semen on another person's neck/chest) and diving into a pit of "blue balls" (sexual slang for testicular pain apparently caused by sexual frustration) — the contestants again must eat "gross" items to prove their love to Tila ("Hard to Swallow"). After first competing in the "Conveyor Belch" event (men vs. women), where a conveyor belt brings out various shots of unpleasant items (including fish sauce, tartar sauce, mustard, hot sauce, and clam juice) for the group to consume, the winning team (the women) move on to compete against each other for one-on-one time with Tila. Not to be outdone by the bull's penis and testicles from the first season, Tila has the women eating pigs' vaginas. Throughout the entire scene, the contestants struggle with consuming the items Tila has for them, gagging and vomiting throughout, to the point that Tila calls the entire event a "puke-atorium" in her confessional ("Hard to Swallow").

Finally, *A Double Shot At Love* sees the contestants compete in two "food" eating competitions. In "Lickety Split", Rikki and Vikki have the competitors split up into groups of two, with each team ordered to lick all of the icing off of two twin mannequins in the fastest amount of time. The competition is called "Licky the Ikky", a word play on "lick" and the twins' stage last-name. Each mannequin is dressed exactly like the real twins are in this scene, except that the mannequins' outfits are made entirely out of icing. While less outwardly abject than the "food" eating competitions on *A Shot At Love*, this scene does still conjure sentiments of the abject, grotesque, and hypersexual, where spit and icing intermix as the competitors try to "clean" the twin mannequins, and where the entire competition is sexualized and based on symbolically licking the twins, in addition to voyeuristic aspects of the twins watching their symbolic selves be consumed. The following episode sees a familiar return to the outwardly "gross", where the remaining contestants must take part in the "Mind, Body & Soul" food eating

contest ("The Truth Will Set You Free"). As there are five contestants remaining at this point, they are ordered to eat five chickens' hearts (each one representing the existing contestants, perhaps symbolizing their fear/"chickenness"), two lambs' hearts (representing the twins, perhaps referencing their apparent innocence and purity), and "a whole lot of guts 'cause that's what you'll need to get through this challenge!" ("The Truth Will Set You Free"). And again, the entire scene proves difficult for most of the competitors, with nearly everyone gagging and vomiting throughout.

All of these scenes equate the suffering of the contestants with their "true" feelings for Tila and the twins. As each competitor gags and vomits while consuming the items laid out before them, Tila and the twins assume that they must really be invested in the experience and desire spending alone time with them (often the prize for winning these events). Moreover, Tila, Rikki, and Vikki stand-in as sort of sadistic puppeteers, who cheer on the competitors to consume more and more gross items (or on the "Licky the Ikky" competition, to lick faster) or else deal with the consequences (not spending time with the stars and therefore risk being eliminated later on). In addition to this, the stars' desire (their bisexuality) becomes interconnected with the performance of the entire spectacle of the abject, the consumption of the strange and gross, and suffering. This is especially clear when in Season One, Tila prefaces the competition with her "exoticness". This episode again highlights Tila's race and the ways in which she is racialized and exoticized — the note she leaves the contestants tells them that she has "exotic tastes", which, through the eating competition, the audience correlates with "gross", abject, and nearly inedible (for many of the contestants) items. Here, Tila is "exotic" because she is considered "worldly" due to her work in the entertainment industry (having to travel), her bisexuality, and due to the fact that she is not white. Since her "exoticism" is immediately tied

with the disgusting food eating competition, the disgusting food is then inherently tied with Tila and with her bisexuality (see: bell hooks' (1992) discussion of the commodification and consumption of race and otherness).

Slightly different from the above examples, where literal animal body parts are eaten in an attempt to convey dedication to Tila and the twins, *The L Word* also provides an interesting example of proving one's worth through the consumption of body parts. In this case, however, the abject nature of consuming body parts is off-set with the comical, where the body parts are anatomical, edible chocolate lollipops. Season Two sees Alice and Dana having deep romantic feelings for each other, where they have kissed a few times but have not proceeded any further because of Dana's engagement to Tonya (although Alice and Dana end up having sex later in the episode in question). In this episode, Alice, Dana, and Tonya are in a sex shop looking for gifts to add to the bachelorette gift-bags ("Labyrinth"). Tonya, a character who is often known for being boisterous, sees a chocolate penis lollipop and jokingly begins to perform fellatio on it. Dana, who appears to be embarrassed by this, asks Tonya to stop, which then encourages Tonya to tease Alice about her bisexuality since Tonya assumes Alice will be better able understand what she is doing:

TONYA. [to Alice] She's not a fan...but I guess this is a little more up your alley, isn't it, Alice? [she hands Alice the chocolate penis]

ALICE. Actually, Tonya, this might be a little bit more up my alley [picks up a chocolate breast]

TONYA. More than this? [holds up the penis, looks a little antagonistic towards Alice]

ALICE. Ya, maybe a little.

TONYA. Oh really?

ALICE. Mmhmm [they are bickering back and forth at this point]

DANA. Okay, stop it! Both of you! [pulls both chocolate body parts away from Alice and Tonya; looks at Alice and holds both lollipops up] Which one would you rather put in your mouth, huh?

[Alice looks confused, slightly hurt by Dana; Dana waits for an answer]

TONYA. [seems to sense something between Alice and Dana] *Sighs heavily* I don't understand you bisexuals, I mean really. Make up your minds already. Right, honey? [pulls Dana away from Alice]

DANA. [to Alice] Make up your mind already. ("Labyrinth")

After Dana tells Alice to make up her mind, the audience sees Alice pull the chocolate breast away from Dana just as she leaves with Tonya, and while Dana doesn't see this, the audience then sees Alice take a bite out of the chocolate breast.

In this scene, in similar ways to how the food eating competition plays out on *A Shot At Love* and *A Double Shot At Love*, where contestants prove their worth and adoration of Tila and the twins through their consumption of the body parts, Alice is pushed to also prove not only her worth (to Dana) but also her "true" attraction. Here, Alice's bisexuality is reduced down to body parts, where instead of allowing her the space to be attracted to personalities or connections — a more "genderless" attraction that she voices in Season One — Alice is forced to reduce her attraction down to what body part she "would rather put in [her] mouth". Sexuality in general becomes a matter of consuming the other — literally in this scene through the edible body parts. Alice's bisexuality is not only seen as confusing and indecisive in this particular scene, but also greedy and gluttonous, where Alice's wants to have *and* eat the cake, metaphorically speaking

(chocolate penis and breast in this case). This is also one of the first instances where the audience sees Alice begin to move away from her bisexuality and closer towards "making up her mind" and "choosing" a side.

There is yet another example from *The L Word* of body parts and offerings, one that is more in line with the grotesque performances on the *Shot At Love* series although it does not similarly produce the act of eating the other. The assigning of animal body parts/bodily substances that symbolize aspects of Tila/the twins and/or the quest for love — the animal eyes, heart, and blood ("The Cat Fight") and chickens' hearts, lambs' hearts, and "guts" ("The Truth Will Set You Free") shares an eerie similarity to Jenny's confession of devotion to Tim in Season One, where the use of abjectness/body parts are used to perform/project their desires and affection.

Shortly after Tim discovers that Jenny has not only been cheating on him but that she has been cheating on him with a woman, confirming that she is not just attracted to men, Jenny begs Tim for forgiveness, stating that she will never be unfaithful to him again. She pleads with him, saying, "Tim, you have to understand that this was a big mistake. It was like...watching yourself and seeing yourself doing something terrible and not being able to stop it" ("Lawfully"). Interestingly and in connection to Jenny's statement of not feeling like herself, when Tim finds Jenny and Marina being intimate together, on the floor of Jenny's writing studio is her most recent story titled "The Demons That Tempt Me" (which will be detailed in the following section of this chapter). Jenny continues to plead for Tim's forgiveness and in the process lies to him about the extent of the relationship with Marina, stating that what he saw was the only time they had been together. Tim doesn't see any point in continuing the relationship and gets in his car to drive away from Jenny. Jenny continues to plead:

JENNY. Please, this doesn't have to...if you can just forgive me, Tim, please, this doesn't have to end. We can just...keep on going as we planned and nothing has to change, right? [desperate and crying] Tim, please, please don't leave me.

'Cause if you leave me, I think that I'll die. Tim, please look at me [Tim looks at Jenny] I love you...and I just want to be your wife.

TIM. You want to be my wife?

JENNY. Yes. More than anything else.

TIM. Get in the car. ("Lawfully")

Later in the episode, Jenny and Tim drive away from Los Angeles and elope in a moment that expresses the pure desperation of Jenny in hopes that he will forgive her and the devastation, shock, and anger of Tim. Their union is short-lived, though, as during their first night as a married couple, Tim leaves Jenny while she is sleeping. The next day, Jenny (who has no note from Tim nor any money/means to travel back home) decides to hitchhike while writing a "love note" of sorts to give to Tim upon her return to Los Angeles. The audience hears Jenny's voice reading the note throughout the remainder of the episode, spread out over multiple scenes, including her trying to find a ride, her traveling with two teenagers, and her arrival back in Los Angeles where she places her note to Tim in a mailbox. The note reads as follows:

Tim, for you my heart ripped from my chest. Eviscerated I am. And if I could, I would plunge my fingers through my chest and rip out my heart and give it to you. A pulpy mass of morbid diathesis. In addition to my heart, there are some small organs I want to give you: glands, sweet breads, variety of meats. I'm offering these gifts, rare gifts. I know they don't amount to much in the face of what you've given me. I've heard these organs can't survive outside of the body

for more than a few hours, but I'll try to get there as soon as I can. Whatever happens, it will be on me and my heart. ("Lawfully")

In a similar way to how Jenny's story of a demon possessing her (as detailed shortly), tempting her to do things she doesn't want to do — that is, cheat on Tim but also remove herself from the possibility of heteronormativity — Jenny's letter to Tim again situates herself, her actions, and her body into the realm of the abject. In both of these scenes, Jenny details how she is removed from the actions that she is doing, how she wishes that she could resist, and how there is something vile in her, something rotting that removes her intended self from her literal self. The line that particularly stands out is when she calls her heart "a pulpy mass of morbid diathesis". While reading her note to the teenagers she is travelling with, the teenage boy (Malcolm) asks her what this means:

MALCOLM. Oh, what's 'diathesis'?

JENNY. Um...it's like a...susceptibility to disease. It's like, all those parts of me that are...susceptible to invasion.

MALCOLM. Wow...morbid diathesis...morbid diathesis, morbid diathesis, morbid diathesis [they are both high on mushrooms]...but that would mean it would be putrid. What good would it do to offer Tim a pile of sick meat?

JENNY. [sighs heavily and starts to tear up]. ("Lawfully")

As Malcolm comments that what Jenny is offering (her heart) isn't worth offering at all due to the fact that it wouldn't be of any use to Tim since it is spoiled and at risk of disease, Jenny seems aware that she cannot do anything to fix things with Tim since she is always-already rotten. Her heart's "susceptibility to disease" is understood as her inherent brokenness, her inability to have a "healthy", "normal" love, which in this case, stands in for heteronormativity.

Here, her brokenness, rottenness, and risk of being invaded is her queerness. She sees her body as being weak, one that is easily tainted by her inherent monstrous (demon-possession desires, as listed below). Her susceptibility is her weakness to Marina, her sexual exploration, her attraction to women, and her bisexuality.

In both the food eating competitions on the *Shot At Love* series as well as Jenny's letter to Tim, bodily innards are placed on display, given as gifts, and tokens of affection. Tila, Rikki and Vikki, and Jenny all place symbolic capital in these bodily organs, connecting their affection for the contestants/Tim with the items. In addition to this, in all of the examples, suffering is paramount, where the contestants must suffer through eating these items to prove their worth to Tila and the twins, and where Jenny "eviscerates" herself, at least symbolically, in an attempt to give Tim all that she is/has. Bisexuality in these scenes manifests itself through the grotesque presentation of abject items, some symbolically putrid some comical (as in the case of Alice and the chocolates). These scenes cannot be removed from the discussion of bisexuality in that their entire presence is literally based upon it, where Jenny's storyline exists around struggling with her infidelity that is seen as being caused by her newly discovered bisexuality, Alice is having to prove her bisexuality through consuming chocolate body parts, and Tila and the twins are searching for love from groups of men and women who must prove their worth in a variety of bizarre ways.

The Horror of Bisexuality

In this final section of analysis detailing how bisexuality is represented in abject, liminal, and excessive ways, the figure of the monstrous becomes one of the most haunting stereotypes in which bisexuality often falls into. The figure of the monster as representing queer desire and/or literal queer subjects is a common trope that is found throughout mainstream popular culture

representations. As Harry M. Benshoff (1997) notes, the classical/traditional system of Hollywood movies (and, as I argue, mainstream North American popular culture more broadly) usually insist on maintaining heterosexuality and heteronormative values throughout. Within this understanding and especially within horror films (where there are literal monsters) the figure of the monster, "is traditionally figured as a force that attempts to block that romance. As such, many monster movies (and the source material they draw upon) might be understood as being 'about' the eruption of some form of queer sexuality into the midst of a resolutely heterosexual milieu" (Benshoff 4). Here, the figure of the monster threatens to undo dominant norms (similarly to how the space of the carnival for Bakhtin offers political moments of upheaval), again, in similar ways to how bisexuality operates in juxtaposition to hetero- and homosexuality. However, in the space of dominant popular culture narratives, the monster's undoing is needed to maintain these dominant norms and ideals. The following examples explore themes of death, monsters, and possession in relation to bisexuality. As the following scenes display, the monster/abject other becomes all but de-fanged/neutered in order to perpetuate bisexuality as "other".

As stated above, one of the most terrifying aspects of the abject is that it threatens our borders between the self and other, life and death. The episode that displays this threat to borders in relation to bisexuality takes place in Season Three, and revolves around the storyline of Dana's death due to cancer ("Losing The Light"). Following her diagnosis and quick deterioration, Dana is hospitalized and the other women of the show take turns watching over her bedside. In this particular scene, Dana is near death, falling in and out of consciousness and surrounded by machines pushing her body to continue to work. Tina, who has separated from Bette and is now seeing a man, stops by to drop off some things for Dana and Alice (who is

stationed at Dana's side). Tina is dressed up and the audience is made aware that she is about to go on a date with a man. This would be the first man that she has formally dated since separating from Bette. Expressing her nerves, she asks Alice how she looks: "How do I look? Am I too dressed up? I feel dressed up" ("Losing The Light"). Alice assures her that she looks beautiful, and Tina leaves the hospital room. Immediately after she leaves, Alice leans over to Dana and says:

ALICE. You're right. Bisexuality is gross. I see it now.

DANA. [gives Alice a small smile]

ALICE. Did I make you laugh? I think I made you laugh [smiling]. ("Losing The Light")

Not only does the fact that Alice calls bisexuality "gross" situate it within the spectrum of the abject, but also the fact that she is saying this to her friend, who is straddling life and death at that very moment — corpse-like (in fact, dies by the end of the episode) — moves this statement to another level of meaning. Kristeva notes, "a decaying body, lifeless, completely turned into dejection, blurred between the inanimate and the inorganic, a transitional swarming, inseparable lining of a human nature whose life is undistinguishable from the symbolic — the corpse represents fundamental pollution" (Kristeva 109). Shortly after dying, before the body begins to decompose and waste away, the corpse is still recognizable as human, minus the ability of motion. It is a transitional stage where all that is left is a body without a soul (as Kristeva argues), a disquieting reminder that we are all made up of the abject. We spend our lives dispelling all that is seen as abject in order to remain alive, when in the end, we are only recognizable via our abject state. Here, where the figure of the corpse acts as the most abject

form the body can take, is where Alice denies her bisexuality, further situating it within the realm of the abject.

It appears as though Alice's own internalized biphobia is vocalized as a last attempt to make Dana laugh, to find some of the humanity that Dana once exhibited. It is through admitting that Alice was wrong about bisexuality, that she really is a lesbian, that she attempts to shed some of her own abjectness — her "grossness" — in an attempt to encourage some of Dana's humanity to surface, which would then simultaneously push Dana's abjectness — her near death state — further away. It is interesting that this deathbed joke made at the expense of an entire sexuality group was not met with any outside disdain — no LGBTQ+ organization spoke out publicly to condemn this "joke" (Kristal 2). In addition, this scene works to symbolize the connection between the two — the negation of bisexuality and the agreement in its "grossness", with the loss of humanity and subsequent death of Dana. It is also interesting that from this point on in the series, Alice no longer appears to identify as bisexual, but instead, as a full-blown, bona-fide, rational lesbian. It is as if her purging her abjectness, her monstrous qualities, purified her and allowed her to see the proverbial lesbian light.

Another example of Alice's bisexuality that again falls under the heading of monstrous/abjectness behaviour also takes place in Season Three of the series, slightly before the death of Dana. This time, however, her monstrosity is symbolized, not-so-subtly, by her relationship with an apparent vampire ("Lifeline"). After going through a difficult breakup with Dana, Alice decides to attend a "bisexual speed dating" event at The Planet. One of the women she meets, Uta, is a vampirologist who teaches courses on "the queer vampire in literature and film" and "demon desire, about the vampire as a lesbian predator" at one of the local colleges. At first Alice is intrigued by Uta — she is mysterious and sexy. But soon after their first date she

begins to believe that Uta may be a real vampire — she prefers night dates to day ones, she has pointed canine teeth and bites Alice's neck (which Alice later reasons off as being a hickey), and, according to Alice, she lacks a reflection (Alice casually holds up a mirror to test this vampire fact, but just as Alice checks the mirror Uta — who is standing behind Alice — bends over so the mirror cannot reflect her anyways, although Alice does not know this) ("Lifeline"). In spite of all of these "signs" and Alice's own apprehension, Alice decides to go home with Uta after their date and the two engage in epic bouts of sex. Alice calls her friend while Uta is in the other room and says, "She has unbelievable stamina! I don't know if I can keep up with her! It's like...I just feel like...I mean, I don't know. She seems legitimate; she's got a teaching certificate and everything [...] I think she's the real thing" ("Lifeline"). The camera then pans to Uta Refson's certificate on the wall. Over the phone, Alice's friend Helena is reading out vampire characteristics so that Alice might be able to detect whether Uta is human or not. Uta returns, and they begin to have sex again. This time, the audience sees Uta lift Alice into the air, validating one of the qualities Helena stated: vampires are a lot stronger than they look. Alice is then chained from the ceiling, and they begin to engage in sexual acts once again, but not before Alice notices the reflection of Uta's certificate in a nearby mirror which shows Uta Refson's name backwards as "Nosferatu"²⁵ ("Lifeline").

While Uta is described as a "lesbian vampire" in the episode synopsis, the fact that she is at a bisexual dating event, trying to engage a bisexual woman (Alice), cannot be ignored. Within these scenes, bisexuality becomes simultaneously paired with monstrosity and the abject (via vampirism) and the carnivalesque (via comedy) through both Uta and Alice. This entire

²⁵ *Nosferatu*, a 1922 vampire horror film, is critically acclaimed and one of the most infamous horror films of all-time, inspiring many other vampire films utilizing similar motifs found in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (which *Nosferatu* highly borrowed from) (Ebert). Since then, the term "Nosferatu" itself has also become synonymous with "vampire".

storyline is played off as a joke — Alice's seemingly outlandish assumptions that her date is a vampire, Uta's meeting of the obligatory vampire rules, her name spelled backwards is the most (arguably) famous vampire in horror cinema, and so on. In addition to this, whenever Alice suspects that Uta may be a vampire, stereotypical horror music plays in the background to increase both the dramatic and comedic elements of the scene. Finally, Uta's home decorations mimic those of classic vampire films — red curtains to keep out the sunlight, very little lighting with candles burning all over the bedroom, and whips and chains scattered around. All of these elements make it clear to the audience that this relationship between Uta and Alice is not one based on reality.

The use of the vampire to symbolize excessive, "deviant" sexuality (including S/M kink and bisexuality) is a popular trope in and of itself. The figure of the vampire and bisexuality share many commonalities, including both being culturally described as sexually excessive, mysterious, and tempting, as well as both being tied to triangulations of desire, where the vampire's attraction (for both nourishment and sexual inclinations) is depicted as being open to all genders. Despite these more obvious commonalities, bisexuality has ironically been systematically erased in many academic works on vampires (Garber; Richter, "Bisexual Erasure"). Instead of articulating the bi-potential of vampires in many popular culture examples, many of these representations are labelled a "lesbian vampires", regardless of the fact that the representations in question involve attractions to/sexual relations with both men and women. Further, the connection between bisexuality and vampirism produces very specific connections with bisexuality's history as "villainous" and diseased (AIDS). As Garber notes, the vampire and the "deceitful" bisexual closely align, as "the stigmatization of the bisexual as secretly the 'other kind' rather than 'your own kind' — the drama of the stealth bisexual — is what makes the AIDS

carrier-vampire connection particularly egregious and pertinent to bisexuality" (Garber 100-101). The relationship between Uta and Alice, then, needs to be understood within this larger cultural context of symbolic connections between bisexuality and vampirism.

In addition to subscribing to one of the more popular tropes in vampire popular culture lore, the relationship between Uta and Alice also serves to reinforce common stereotypical assumptions about bisexuality more generally, including hypersexuality, instability, and fakery. As will be discussed in the following chapter, all of the episodes in Season Three that lead up to Alice's meeting of Uta produce the image of Alice as being unstable and "crazy" due to a recent separation from her girlfriend, Dana. Within this context, then, the creation of a vampire storyline appears to be less bizarre (though, not entirely) and out of place for the series, and instead is understood as symptomatic of Alice's instability in general. As Alice is operating in a state of unpredictability, her decisions become a reflection of this. So while Alice questions whether Uta is human or vampire — a question that in itself is nonsensical and one that only Alice voices, although her friends also meet Uta — in the end, Uta is just that seductive and Alice cannot resist.

Just as the monstrosity that vampires carry only comes into existence via the action of biting, murdering or turning an innocent victim, bisexuality is also seen as something that can only exist through action — engaging in sexual scenarios with men and women. It is this space of sexual acts — where bodies are continuously in contact with the other, where fluids are exchanged — that the bisexual is popularly created. This is a space of pure abjectness, where the bisexual then becomes the entity that carries all the features society wishes to dispose of. They are only able to continue existing within society through their relations with others, through their

contact with pollution — similar to the monster/vampire's ability to thrive via its constant consumption/production of the abject.

Bisexuality in this storyline (through Alice's identity, the bisexual speed dating event, and bisexual imagery in vampire-related popular culture) becomes intertwined with risk-taking, sexual adventure, the imaginary, and the ridiculous. These sentiments are evident at various points through Alice's movement through abjection, monstrosity, comedy, and instability throughout the series, including her relationship with Lisa, and is nowhere else more evident than while she identifies as bisexual (the first three seasons). In fact, Season Three portrays Alice as being at a peak point of mental instability, but a point nonetheless that works towards ushering her storyline towards clarity, which, by the end of Season Three, includes dismissing her bisexual identity (in Dana's death scene).

Perhaps the most blatant comparison *The L Word* has made between bisexual women and the monstrous occurs in the first season of the program through Jenny and her relationships with Marina and Tim. Throughout the prior episodes of this season, bisexuality has been hinted at in the character of Jenny Schecter. Having just moved from Iowa to Los Angeles to be with her male fiancé, Tim, Jenny soon begins to have feelings for a woman, Marina Ferrer (who we later discover is married to a man). Her character is portrayed as a naïve, young woman, swept-up into a whole new culture involving lesbians, with the result ending in her having a secret affair with Marina behind Tim's back. Immediate connections can be drawn from this storyline to vampirism, a form of monstrosity that is highly sexualized in modern popular culture. A young and innocent woman, enters the city of lost angels, and encounters an older, seductive woman, who seems to mesmerize her and slowly draws her into her circle of deviance. Jenny is continuously fighting with herself, trying to maintain her sense of normality, but she cannot

shake the mysterious, beguiling sexuality of Marina. In the end, Jenny completely loses herself in desire and lust — that is, until, she finds out that Marina is in a committed relationship of her own. Trickery, sexuality, lust, and turmoil abound in this storyline which runs throughout the entirety of the first season, but nowhere is the link between bisexuality and the monstrous more clear than in episode five.

"Lies, Lies, Lies", sees Jenny having dinner with her former college professor, Nick Barashkov. It is clear through the dialogue between the two that Nick has been a writing mentor to Jenny, often encouraging her dark writing style. It is also made clear to the audience that Jenny and Nick have had sexual encounters in the past, although it isn't obvious whether these took place while Jenny was with Tim or not. Throughout the dinner, Jenny states that she has been struggling with her writing, while Nick probes into her personal life, hoping to uncover an interesting event or story that can then inspire Jenny to write ("Lies, Lies, Lies"). Jenny mentions, "I've been doing these really terrible things..." The scene then ends, and we assume that Jenny is about to tell her friend that she is involved in a sexual and romantic relationship with a woman. When it returns to the restaurant, the following conversation ensues:

NICK. Wow...that's...interesting! You've fallen in love with a woman!

JENNY. No, no, no. I don't know if it's love. It might be sort of like this, fantastic, sort of like, demon possession sort of thing. Oh stop it, don't look so shocked.

NICK. I'm not shocked. I'm surprised, I'm excited. It's exotic...

JENNY. Oh shut up you pervert.

NICK. A demon possession...That's it! That's what you have to take and run with. When you write about her...What's her name?

JENNY. Marina.

NICK. When you write about Marina, you must dig, you must delve, you must open up and eviscerate everything. You do your best work when you lay bare your remarkable emotions. ("Lies, Lies, Lies")

Near the end of this episode, after Jenny has returned home from her dinner with Nick, she begins to write feverishly. Writing:

I'm sitting in the chair, writhing in agony. A demon, a minor demon, is pinning me there, fucking with my head.

"Abraxas," he says, "I'm Abraxas".

The demon of lies and deceit.

"So, what do you want to know about lies, my dear?"

I'm not a liar. I try again to get up. This time I'm flayed, splayed...I feel myself screaming.

"I'll tell you about lies. There are white lies and black lies, and many shades of gray lies. Some lies are justified — lies told out of kindness; lies that preserve dignity. Lies that spare pain. Everybody is a liar, dear. Look at that one — she's about to tell her lover something patently untrue. Look at their gestures — see how they touch each other too intimately. How they avert their eyes and cover their mouths. And lick their teeth, and hold their chins. They embellish their stories with far too much detail". ("Lies, Lies, Lies")

Jenny is narrating throughout the scene, although her voice is overlapped with Nick's at certain parts. The audience also sees the story being told visually, where Abraxas is portrayed by

Nick, the demon tempting Jenny to lie and deceive her fiancé, Tim, and the types of lies being told are visualized through the other main characters of the series. The scene continues on, although the audience no longer hears her narration. Shortly thereafter, Tim arrives home relieved to see Jenny there (he was concerned that Jenny was cheating on him with Nick because of their past encounters). As the scene and episode end, Leonard Cohen's "In My Secret Life" plays, referencing simultaneous layers of "secrecy". At the most basic level, Jenny's writing is private, a way for her to get out all of her lived secrets in a cathartic manner. The song can also be referencing the other "secrets"/lies that are being referenced during the narration of her story, where the audience sees the other characters telling small lies to each other (as an example, we see Shane guess a much younger age for Alice's mother as a way to flatter her). Most obviously, the song can be alluding to Jenny's relationship with Marina, her secret life being romantically involved with a woman, but also the secrecy of her infidelity. The use of "In My Secret Life" can also be understood as referencing Jenny's identity. At dinner, Nick does not believe that Jenny is content living the life she is living with Tim, and states that "commitment is dreary" and that it isn't her "thing". Within this understanding, then, the "secret life" that Jenny is living is that of tradition, commitment, hegemonic heteronormativity. Finally, while the concepts of "secrecy" and "deception", which become intertwined together throughout Jenny's storyline, also fit in well with the upcoming discussions of "authenticity" and "truth", their connections to the present themes of monstrosity and deviancy cannot be overlooked.

Secrets and deception are some of the more notable "monstrous" qualities, especially when paralleled with the more "humanistic" ones that focus on understandings of purity, authenticity, and honesty. Not only are these qualities — ones that Jenny exhibits throughout her character development — in alignment with this understanding of monstrosity, but they are also

popular assumptions about bisexuality and bisexual behaviour more generally. Bisexuality-as-monstrous, then, becomes hyper-apparent in this specific scene, where the audience is witnessing a literal monster-story of possession that unabashedly connects with Jenny's storyline of discovering her bisexuality. Here, Jenny's apparent bisexuality is symbolically seen as only able to exist via demon possession. No reasonable, "normal" individual would willingly choose to embark on the journey Jenny is on. In addition to this, Jenny's bisexuality always-already exists within the realm of secrets and deception due to her infidelity. Jenny's deviancy is linked with being possessed by a demon — a monster. But is also linked with her bisexuality — monstrously bisexual/bisexually monstrous. The only way she is able to commit the acts she does is because there is something within her — something that is not natural — that is fighting to take over her body, challenging her to commit fully to her monstrosity. In similar ways to how Alice's foray into monstrosity (via vampirism) is short-lived, Jenny's monstrous bisexuality is also quick to disappear; as of the first few episodes of the second season, Jenny begins to question her bisexuality, and vocally identifies as "gay" and "a lesbian" by episode eight of the season ("Loyal"), and in fact punishes bisexuality in others in later seasons. However, while this literal connection between monstrosity and bisexuality may be argued to be coincidental, through the comedic (Alice) and dramatic (Jenny) storytelling elements, as long as bisexuality remains an aspect of their identity there will remain elements of monstrosity, since bisexuality becomes aligned with monstrous qualities within the popular imaginary.

* * *

Throughout this discussion, my goal is not to directly link bisexuality to the horrific, abject, comical, or excessive (or vice versa). Instead, I use these themes to deconstruct how bisexuality has been represented in popular culture over and over again without much question. While these representations undoubtedly maintain and further contribute to dominant stereotypes

of bisexuality and understandings of sexuality more generally, they also offer the potential to undo some of these dominant narratives. By recognizing how bisexuality is represented as abject, monstrous, comical, and excessive, one is better able to question "why" these representations exist (and continue to be perpetuated) at all. In doing so, as will become more evident in my conclusion, the illusion of hegemonic norms and ideals (especially in relation to hetero- and homosexuality) as being unquestionable "truths" can instead begin to be excavated. As Shildrick (2002) notes, embracing instead the "ambiguity and unpredictability of an openness towards the monstrous other" — in this case, bisexuality — allows us to acknowledge "both vulnerability to the other, and vulnerability of the self" (Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster* 3).

Chapter Four: Bisexuality as Inauthentic, Deceptive, and Performed

This chapter will primarily focus on the theme of "authenticity" in relation to representations of bisexuality in popular culture. The focus on authenticity may seem odd in that popular culture is more so known for its production of entertainment often at the loss of more "truthful" and nuanced stories and representations. My focus on authenticity, however, is necessary and relevant, both due to the types of stories being told as well as the role in which authenticity — and its counterpart, fakery — play in the larger cultural understanding of bisexuality more generally. Most obviously, *A Shot At Love* and *A Double Shot At Love* are presented as "reality" television programs. Although there is a general understanding that reality television is often scripted in order to prompt specific moments of drama for entertainment purposes, the fact that it involves real people and focuses on bisexual-identified individuals in their apparent truthful search for love cannot be overlooked. On the other hand, *The L Word* makes no similar claims to authenticity and "truth". However, given the dearth of LGBTQ+-specific programming in popular culture, *The L Word* becomes an interesting and important catalyst for telling stories of lesbian and bisexual women that have previously not been given similar space to be told. In this light, *The L Word* is positioned to not only tell entertaining stories but — and perhaps even more so — to also tell stories that matter to and relate to lesbian and bisexual women, again positioning it within the realm of "authenticity-making".

As has been illustrated throughout, the concept of authenticity becomes strategically connected to larger understandings of bisexuality through the very popular stereotypes of bisexuality being a temporary sexuality (on its way to lesbian/gay or straight), a sexuality that is performed (for a variety of reasons), and a sexuality that is always-already read as being hypersexual, and, in relation, promiscuous, which works to reify conceptions of "monogamy"

and "infidelity". These dominant understandings of bisexuality, especially within popular culture, function on the idea that there is a legitimate, authentic, and truthful sexuality that subscribes to linear, hegemonic understandings of gender, sexuality, and attraction. Here, the liminal, ambiguous space that bisexuality presents positions it as counter-to legitimacy, authenticity, and truth. All of the following examples further illustrate these conceptions of bisexuality, and in many cases, these representations utilize the "inauthenticness" of bisexuality in order to maintain dominant gender and sexual norms and ideals.

Understandings of authenticity (or lack thereof) neatly align with Erving Goffman's (1959) discussion of the performances found in everyday life. Before discussing authenticity's relationship with performance, it is first important to discuss what "authenticity" actually refers to. At its most basic level, "authenticity" refers to an inherent "truth" that is generally regarded as being unquestionable. Theo van Leeuwen notes multiple ways in which authenticity can be defined – something is authentic when it is not a copy of something, when its origin is not questioned; authenticity can refer to a reconstruction or representation that appears to be truthful to the original; and authenticity can be secured through authority by being "authorized" (van Leeuwen). While these definitions are helpful in understanding authenticity more broadly, it is van Leeuwen's final definition of authenticity that proves most fruitful for this discussion of bisexuality. Van Leeuwen's final account of authenticity defines it as being something that is "true to the essence of something", where "[o]ne such essence is the 'self,' constructed as a unified character" (van Leeuwen 393). Situating this definition within a larger discussion of identities, then, implies that in order to be "authentic" one needs to exhibit an inner truth that cannot be refuted. Further, this self needs to be "unified" — whole, cohesive, and without reference to difference or apparent disjointedness.

Through this understanding, "truth", and therefore authenticity, is only able to exist through cohesion, unity, and wholeness. Dominant understandings of bisexuality, especially mainstream understandings that are often based and replicated within popular culture, including fakery, transience, and deception, appear to negate any possibility of "truth" or "authenticity". Bisexuality's inherent slipperiness, its fluidity, causes confusion and uncertainty within normative, monosexual understandings of desire and sexuality. This uncertain nature of bisexuality is even highlighted in nuanced discussions of sexual fluidity. As mentioned briefly in the introduction, Lisa Diamond's discussion of sexual fluidity notes how bisexuality and sexual fluidity differ (although with possible overlap) (Diamond 2008). Two ways in which the two differ, according to Diamond, is through bisexuality's apparent "confusion", even amongst bisexual scholars, and, the stereotypes that surround bisexuality:

No wonder there is so much confusion about bisexuality — even researchers who have been studying the topic for decades disagree on the answers to these questions. Some see bisexuality as a straightforward sexual responsiveness to both sexes; others view it as the potential for such responsiveness. Some view bisexuality as a form of 'gender-free' sexuality in which the femininity or masculinity of a partner is irrelevant. Others see it as a heightened appreciation for *both* masculinity and femininity. Still others view bisexuality as humans' basic sexual nature, before socialization molds us toward one gender or the other. Others believe that there is no such thing as bisexuality, and that all individuals are basically oriented toward men versus women, regardless of what they might like to believe or how they might have experimented over time. (Diamond 94)

In addition to highlighting all the ways in which bisexuality is confusing and nearly impossible to understand, Diamond also mentions the "long-standing stereotypes that have proliferated in both the lesbian-gay community and mainstream society" as being proof that bisexuality is unintelligible and therefore that there is no one unified, true, or authentic form of bisexuality (Diamond 95). It is for these reasons that Diamond prefers not to use bisexuality to talk about sexual fluidity, but instead "nonexclusivity", as it captures "a wide range of experiences, and because it does not come with the same historical and cultural baggage attached to the word 'bisexual'" (Diamond 96).

Although Diamond does acknowledge that, while all these uncertain elements of bisexuality may be puzzling, they may still be "truths" to certain individuals. As such, it is unfortunate that the uncertainty of bisexuality cannot be read as legitimate and authentic in and of itself. Diamond's assertions that sexual fluidity and bisexuality are not (or at least not always) one and the same are valid arguments, especially if one defines bisexuality hegemonically, through normative and binary understandings of sexuality and gender. However, by positioning bisexuality as "confusing" and negating its usefulness in discussing sexual fluidity, Diamond in effect maintains dominant, stereotypical understandings of bisexuality. Funnily enough, in a discussion that aims to legitimize — authenticate — sexual fluidity, it is bisexuality's apparent inherent fluidity (both in appearance and intelligibility) that negates bisexuality as being useful in this authentication.

Again, this understanding of bisexuality is established through normative understandings of sexuality more generally, especially in relation to hetero- and homonormativity's attachment to monosexuality. These normative understandings exist within a larger hierarchical understanding of identity and authenticity, and as such, authenticity in and of itself becomes a

tool for further maintaining and legitimizing these hierarchies. In discussing notions of Black authenticity, E. Patrick Johnson extends authenticity's place in maintaining hierarchies by articulating how authenticity, or being "authentic", has become "yet another trope manipulated for cultural capital" (E. Johnson 3). While also highlighting the ways in which claiming authenticity can also enable "marginalized people to counter oppressive representations of themselves", E. Johnson continues to articulate how authenticity and the ways in which society gauges authentic states of being as being arbitrary and based within hegemonic power relations (E. Johnson 3).

Although identity categories may be used to create feelings of unity, belonging, and community, they are by no means cohesive understandings or definitions of a specific identity category that all participants subscribe to evenly. And even if there was a singular understanding and experience shared by those occupying the same identity grouping, this shared understanding would not necessarily transfer over to outsiders, to non-group members. How, then, would authenticity and authentic subjectivity be defined? E. Johnson discusses how definitions of "blackness" and more specifically "authentic blackness" have always been contested by both Black and white Americans, although for very different reasons. For Black Americans, many mainstream, dominant understandings of "blackness" do not "validate their social, political, and cultural worldview" (E. Johnson 4). Drawing on Wahneema Lubiano's work, E. Johnson goes on to state that this lack of resonance with certain conceptions of blackness is often dependent on who is doing the evaluating — or, authenticating — of blackness (E. Johnson 4). Returning again to authenticity's role in maintaining power relations and hierarchies, "authentic blackness" is then subsumed within hegemonic understandings of race, which works to maintain white supremacy and essentializes blackness in singular, stereotypical ways. These understandings have very

different effects on Black and white communities, where "whiteness" is maintained as the ideal through its apparent stability and where the multiplicity of white supremacist tropes surrounding blackness "have historically insured physical violence, poverty, institutional racism, and second-class citizenry for blacks" (E. Johnson 4).

While E. Johnson's theorizing of the authentication of blackness is unique to discussions of race, white supremacy, and anti-blackness, his work is also useful in highlighting how hegemonic and hierarchical ideals and understandings of "authenticity" more broadly become realized. As such, how might one understand the ways in which "authentic bisexuality" is presented and performed, especially in relation to sexualities that are always-already read as being authentic? As I have been arguing throughout, these dominant understandings of bisexuality, understandings that are often very singular, work to facilitate a conception of bisexuality as being lacking, deviant, and excessive. These conceptions predominantly rest upon bisexuality's non-monosexuality, on its sexual fluidity and its plurality. As authenticity works to maintain hegemonic ideals more generally, authenticity's attachment to singularity, unity, and cohesion appears to leave bisexuality out entirely. Since to be authentic is to recognize an inner truth, the *one* true self/identity (of a specific category at least), bisexuality's fluidity and plurality negates the possibility of an authentic "truth", while homo- and heterosexuality's authenticity exists because of its apparent singularity and stability. Bisexuality, then, can never be read as "authentic". However, the hierarchization of identities is a precarious endeavour, where hetero- and homosexuality's (and other dominant identity categories) positionality at the top of the ladder must always-already be defined by its others. In the case of bisexuality, while bisexuality may not be "authentic" like hetero- and homosexuality, conceptions of "authentic bisexuality" still need to flourish within the larger cultural imaginary, often reducing bisexuality down to

monosexual and stereotypical understandings. Bisexuals, then, are often faced with the difficult decision of simply "being" or "being legitimate" (authentic) (Gurevich et al. 232). As claims to authenticity (and "passing", as will be discussed below) often coincide with increased social, cultural, and political mobility and gains, it appears as though marginalized identities must (at least at first) subscribe to some of the dominant understandings already circulating. However, this is a dangerous endeavour, as doing so "risks reifying precisely those binary structures it seeks to undermine" (Gurevich et al. 236).

Bisexuality within popular culture is made intelligible— authenticated — through its attachment to concepts like deception, transience, instability, and excessiveness. Due to binary understandings of gender, in addition to hegemonic monosexuality and biphobic understandings of sexual fluidity, it appears as though bisexuality runs the risk of disappearing in the popular imaginary if it does not subscribe to these ideals. As such, bisexuality within the popular imaginary must continuously reiterate and perform very specific understandings of sexuality, sexuality that is defined against hetero- and homonormative ideals. Erving Goffman's discussion of performances of the self is useful in thinking about performances of bisexuality, particularly in how subscribing to these normative and stereotypical understandings produce authenticity.

Claiming certain characteristics or identities conjures up social and cultural understandings of those specific characteristics and identities, and in doing so, intricately weaves together presentations of the self with expectations of the other. Claiming bisexuality, then, immediately connects to popular understandings of what bisexuality looks like and what bisexuality is not. By specifically claiming bisexuality, or any other identity category, Goffman states that one immediately "forgoes all claims to be things he [sic] does not appear to be and hence forgoes the treatment that would be appropriate for such individuals" (Goffman 13). In

addition to this, by claiming that one is bisexual (and not straight or lesbian/gay) one must subscribe to the pre-established understandings of what a bisexual looks like/how a bisexual acts or else risk being misread, and by extension, not authentic. If one's performance is read as or discovered to be "fake", it casts doubt not only on that specific performance but also on other performances/areas of their life (Goffman 65). This proves to be a slippery slope for bisexuality, as bisexuality is already viewed within the popular imaginary as being fake and on its way towards straight or gay/lesbian, as numerous popular culture and social texts prove (as in the case of the 2005 *The New York Times* article "Straight, Gay or Lying? Bisexuality Revisited"). It then appears to be a lose/lose situation, in which claiming "bisexuality" as an authentic identity often means subscribing to dominant understandings of bisexuality, understandings which then eliminate "authenticity" from being a possibility.

Before extending this analysis of the precarity of "authenticity" and "authentic bisexuality" through the analysis of *The L Word* and *A Shot At Love/A Double Shot At Love*, I would like to briefly return to Goffman's discussion of "fake" performances and specifically highlight the threat that such performances bring to both the performer and the audience. As will be elaborated on in the section on "passing", performances that are read as fake not only threaten the authenticity of other aspects of the performer (as in how the apparent fakeness of Tila Tequila's sexuality extended to general questioning of all areas of her life) but these performances also threaten the knowingness of the audience. By, at least momentarily, stumping the audience into believing the performance as authentic, the authorization of what is considered "legitimate" becomes threatened (Goffman 59). In doing so, power relations and status quo ideals may also weaken, or at least be recognized as being unstable and constructed to begin with. In order for a performance to come off as "authentic", then, it must be believed to be

truthful and honest in its presentation by having successfully replicated pre-established understandings and ideals.

While the following examples all share similarities in their use of mainstream understandings of bisexuality and sexuality more generally, the ways in which authenticity (or lack thereof) is illustrated on *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series do present themselves differently. The primary reason for this is due to the different structures that each series operates through – *The L Word*, a fictional, dramatic rendering of sexuality, and, *A Shot At Love/A Double Shot At Love*, "reality"-based competitions. The fact that the *Shot At Love* series are reality television programs provides another interesting element in the examination of authenticity. The main aspect of reality television is that it presents "real" people – as in, not professional actors – in situations that are presented as being unscripted. On the *Shot At Love* series, the audience is presented with non-professional actors as the leads (although Tila Tequila and Rikki and Vikki Ikki are undoubtedly, at least in part, highly mediatized public figures), along with the remaining cast also being filled by non-professional actors. This is perhaps one of the more desirable aspects of reality television – the relatability of the viewers to those on screen. The casting of "average" citizens not only reminds the viewer that they too might have similar opportunities one day, but also that the non-actors might be generally more believable because there is no apparent pre-established script.

Of course, reality television, like all other aspects of television and popular culture more widely, are highly produced and mediated, where "producers are not above tweaking the cast members' environment in order to generate interesting results" (Andrejevic 104). Perhaps the most important way in which producers present interest and "authenticity" is through the role of the confessional and non-actor-to-camera monologues. Borrowing from more factual,

documentary-style media examples, the role of the monologue, where contestants talk to a camera about their feelings regarding certain events on the series, became a reoccurring element in reality television from *The Real World* (another MTV production) in the early 1990s onwards (Aslama and Pantti 176). As will be expanded upon below, the role of the monologue/confessional is to present one's "true" feelings on a subject matter/event/other contestant. These scenes in reality television appear even more unscripted than the rest of the series, as the characters often divulge feelings and thoughts that they may not want the other contestants to know about. These scenes serve "the purpose of giving the viewers the ultimate opportunity to assess the key characteristic of authenticity: the participant's integrity and credibility when it comes to feelings" (Aslama and Pantti 181). These scenes not only work to present the characters themselves as authentic, but the entire incorporation of these scenes further works towards presenting the series and reality television itself as more "believable". As Minna Aslama and Mervi Pantti note, the role of the confessional/monologue offers a paradox of sorts, where one talking about their innermost feelings and thoughts becomes a calculated endeavour that is deemed necessary in order to "sell"/perform (arguably, *inauthentic*) authenticity to viewers (Aslama and Pantti 181).

As the concepts of authenticity through a larger theoretical understanding of performance will weave throughout, I also look at narratives of "coming out" and the confessional, as well as briefly touching on concepts of "passing" and "deception". Finally, I look at representations of mental health in relation to bisexuality, where the trope of using stigmatized understandings of mental health to represent "instability" and "confusion" are replicated in specific representations of bisexuality in order to delegitimize the characters and their identities (both as mentally ill/suffering and as bisexual). While my discussion of mental health and bisexuality may seem

out of place within this chapter, I argue that it is best suited within this discussion of "authenticity", especially in relation to "coming out", "passing", and "deception" as these are all aspects that intricately relate to both depictions of mental health and bisexuality. Ultimately, my goal in discussing authenticity in relation to representations of bisexuality is not to disregard any of the following representations as being entirely "fake" and "inauthentic", nor is it to uncover a unified understanding of bisexuality and authentic bisexuality. Instead, I aim to detail the very specific ways in which authenticity in relation to bisexuality is utilized to maintain dominant understandings of desire and sexuality, and more specifically, how it works to further establish normative, monosexualities as the ideal, even through the guise of sexual acceptance and liberalism.

Come Out, Come Out, Whoever You Are

The concept of "coming out" in terms of queer sexualities has been discussed at length both within academia and mainstream culture more generally. The discussions around "coming out" and "coming out" narratives often vary between critiques and support of, where the process of "coming out" is understood as an aspect of heteronormativity that reaffirms heterosexuality as the "norm" from which other sexualities differ, and on the other hand, where "coming out" assumes increased visibility, recognition, and rights for sexual minorities. Further, processes of "coming out" are inherently tied to binary identity distinctions, where the proclamation of "I am ____" is met with the understanding that "therefore I am not ____". "Coming out" can then be understood as a speech act (Sedgwick; Butler, "Bodies That Matter"), the discursive practice of "coming out" performs/produces what is being said ("I am bisexual" produces a bisexual subject) (Butler, "Bodies That Matter" 241).

Butler's discussion of discursive performativities exists within a larger discussion of how sex as a bodily marker becomes "absorbed by gender" and functions as a norm through constant reiteration (Butler, "Bodies That Matter" 239). In terms of bisexuality, these processes of reiteration work to normalize a singular understanding of bisexuality, which, as I have detailed throughout, works in part through these representations that repeat very specific understandings of bisexuality itself and bisexuality in conversation with other sexualities. Reiteration and discursive performatives function in an interesting way for bisexuality, where the bisexual subject is not only formed through declaring "I am bisexual" but also, and perhaps even more so, by continuously denying "truths" about bisexuality. Since hegemonic understandings of gender and sexuality operate in normative and binary ways, where one's sexuality is understood primarily through romantic attachment to another, bisexuality must continuously "come out" or else risk being read as hetero- or homosexual based on the presenting gender of their romantic/sexual partners. As Elizabeth Whitney states, "[i]n order for bisexuality to be taken seriously, it must be performed as such to prove it is 'real.' This proof would also validate the very stereotypes about bisexuality which are so often imposed upon the identity; that bisexuals are inherently promiscuous and are simply out to get it wherever they can" (Whitney 117). It then appears that in order to prove that one is bisexual and to position bisexuality as an authentic positionality one needs to simultaneously conform to dominant stereotypes and assumptions about bisexuality, since that is the primary way in which bisexuality is read as intelligible, *and* continuously deny those signifiers while still claiming bisexuality, since it is those very signifiers that are interpreted as producing an inauthentic identity.

The following examples will look at how "coming out", both as first-time and confirmative statements, work to produce "truths" about bisexuality, positioning it as authentic or

inauthentic, often in conversation with normative understandings of gender and sexuality. My discussion of the confessional aspects of these examples operates within this understanding of discursive performatives, where "coming out" — in effect confessing that one is bisexual and not hetero-/homosexual — again surfaces as a form of "truth-telling". The space of the confessional and discussions of truth become especially apparent through *A Shot At Love* and *A Double Shot At Love*, where Tila, the twins, and the contestants on each series use "private", on-camera moments to confess their "true" feelings to audience members (and producers) only.

Narratives of "coming out" and "deception" are intricately tied together within understandings of bisexuality. The following section of this chapter will look at ways in which deception and passing are frequently used in conversations of bisexuality, especially as means to situate it as an inauthentic, illegitimate sexuality. While the following examples reference deception and fakery, they also exist as moments of "truth", where moments of proclaiming/confessing bisexuality is always-already read as "uncertain" and "confusing" and is always in juxtaposition to more "concrete" and "legitimate" sexualities.

As stated previously, while bisexuality can be read through the main characters of Tina, Alice, and Jenny on *The L Word*, processes of "coming out" look very different for each character. From the first episode Alice actively identifies as being bisexual, and while she also uses "lesbian" and "gay" interchangeably with "bisexual" at times, she verbally maintains her bisexuality until the end of Season Three and then primarily identifies as a "lesbian" thereafter. One of the main storylines in Season Five is that Jenny's apparently "fictional" story, "Lez Girls", is being turned into a film, much to the dismay and anger of the other characters who believe the story exaggerated descriptions of themselves and their lives. The pre-opening credits scene of "Lady of the Lake" opens to a black background, with Alice's voiceover telling her friends about

a dream she had about Jenny's "Lez Girls". The audience then sees the dream play out, and it appears as though it's a lesbian *Charlie's Angels* montage of sorts, where Alice, Helena, and Shane are the angels, with Charlie being voiced by Bette and Tina playing John Bosley. However, since the dream is about Jenny's story-turned-movie, Alice, Helena, Shane, Bette, and Tina are instead named after the characters in "Lez Girls" —Elise, Helen, Shawn, Bev, and Nina, respectively. Also, instead of being called "angels", Alice/Elise, Helena/Helen, and Shane/Shawn are called "lesbians" and "Bev's Lesbians". Bette/Bev tells the "lesbians" that they have a new mission that involves their "gaydar" guns. Tina/Nina tells the trio that their target, Jenny/Jessie, has just entered the room. The trio continuously try to aim their gaydar guns at Jenny to decipher her orientation, which is apparently their mission. Helena/Helen takes the first shot but misses, and instead it focuses on Alice/Elise, resulting in "bisexual" coming up on the gaydar gun. Next, Shane/Shawn zaps Jenny and the gun's reader flickers, showing "straight", "gay", "bi" come up and then disappear, alluding to the fact that Jenny is not readable by the gun ("Lady of the Lake").

While performed for comedic entertainment, this scene is interesting in that both Alice and Jenny's sexualities come into question. Although Alice mentions that the characters in her dream were from "Lez Girls", the conflation of Elise/Alice is blatant, where Alice's previously blatant declarations of bisexuality are again confirmed, even though Alice now primarily identifies as being a lesbian. Similarly, Jessie/Jenny's indecipherable sexuality is connected to the earlier storylines of Jenny and her sexuality confusion in Season One and Two. Jessie/Jenny is confusing to "Bev's Lesbians" because she cannot be read, literally, since their gaydar guns cannot decipher her sexuality. Here, Elise/Alice's sexuality is confirmed — made legitimate —

through the gun while Jessie/Jenny's sexuality is too confusing for even the highest of technology to decipher.

This reliance on something else to confirm the existence of bisexuality and sexuality more generally is a common trope on *The L Word*, where not only the presence of a romantic/sexual partner is used to connote bisexuality, but where tech, myths, and visual indicators all work to indicate one's "true" sexuality. Season One sees two such examples — primarily revolving around Jenny's "coming out" storyline — where sexuality "comes out" as intelligible through finger lengths and physical appearance. Differing from Alice's outward performances and declarations of bisexuality, Jenny begins her storyline as identifying as a straight woman, who then begins to question her sexuality after falling in love with a woman in Season One. Season One and the beginning of Season Two sees Jenny actively identifying as bisexual and open to romantic and sexual attraction to both men and women. The first clue that the audience is given that Jenny may not be straight is in the premiere episode, where all the characters who are at a party begin to discuss a recent study that states that one's sexuality is discernable through their finger length. A party-goer begins holding up people's hands, examining whether the women's ring fingers are longer than their index fingers, which "a scientist at the *National Inquirer*" claims to be a sign of lesbianism ("Pilot Episode"). The women (and Tim) all examine their finger lengths, confirming their levels of gayness as Tina jokingly declares "Oh my God, look! I'm gay too!" to which Bette sarcastically replies, "God, otherwise I'd have to leave you" ("Pilot Episode"). The party-goer then examines Alice's hand and says that she "makes the team" but just barely, which appears to disappoint/embarrass Alice, perhaps since she isn't as "gay" as all her friends. Jenny, who is both new to Los Angeles and this group of friends, is the next to have her hand examined:

PARTY-GOER. Wow, that's so weird. Her index finger and ring finger are exactly the same length.

TIM. What does that mean?

ALICE. Maybe she's bisexual [smirking]. ("Pilot Episode")

Tim busts out laughing, as if there was no way Jenny could be anything other than straight, while Jenny appears to be semi-amused by the whole conversation and unaware that she will soon meet Marina for the first time.

What is interesting about this scene is that levels of gayness and/or desire for the same-gender is classified by finger length and made legitimate through "science". This scene also produces a series of "coming out" moments, where Alice "just makes the team", simultaneously referencing her liminal sexuality and her future negation of it, Tina "comes out" as and confirms her lesbianism, even though the audience later learns about her attractions to men in addition to women, and where Jenny is kind of pushed out of the closet through the fact that her finger lengths reference bisexuality, a sexuality that Jenny herself is not even aware that she inhabits. Here, sexuality is rooted in biology and science, and one's sexuality is confirmed — both to the characters and the audience — through this "coming out" game. This biological determinant is especially telling and authentic-making for those with more liminal and ambiguous sexualities, since their sexualities are always-already read as confusing and uncertain.

Later in Season One, liminal and ambiguous sexualities are again made legitimate through indicators other than one's own proclamations and self-identity. In "Looking Back", the final episode of Season One, all of the women (minus Bette) are on their way to Dinah Shore, a popular lesbian weekend in Palm Springs. The entire episode is based upon various moments of coming out, where the car ride there sees the characters sharing their coming out stories with

Jenny, the group tries to teach Jenny about lesbian culture, and where Jenny tells a group of strangers about her recent heartbreak from Marina, the first woman Jenny has loved and been romantically and sexually involved with. In essence, this is Jenny's "coming out" moment, where the audience sees her actively embracing her attraction to women and her newfound sexuality.

Shortly after arriving at Dinah Shore, Jenny appears in awe at the sheer abundance of women unabashedly loving women. While having drinks by the pool, Alice points out two women to Jenny in an attempt to give her insight into the land of lesbianism:

ALICE. Alright, look, right there. See? That's what I call a 'hundred footer'.

JENNY. What's that?

TINA. It means you can tell she's a lesbian from a hundred feet away.

ALICE. Is it her hair? Is it her jog bra? Is it her mandals [man-sandals]? I

dunno! I can tell she's a lesbo from across a football field. ("Looking Back")

The group all laugh knowingly and in agreement with Alice's observation. The woman they pointed out presented in a more masculine-presenting, "butch" fashion, while Alice and the other main characters of *The L Word* all present in a more feminine fashion (and, interestingly, aren't considered "hundred footers"). Jenny, excited by this newfound knowledge, walks a few feet away from the group and asks them to tell her what she is/if she is readable as any specific sexuality.

ALICE. Nooo, you're in transition. It's impossible.

JENNY. No! C'mon!

ALICE. No! You need, like, a guy or a girl with ya to tip you one way or the other. it's not...right? [gestures for agreement from the other women at the table]

TINA. Yup!

JENNY. Fuck! [said light-heartedly but disappointed to not be able to be a part of the game]. ("Looking Back")

As the entire episode is comprised of various "coming out" moments, this scene not only illustrates binary understandings of gender and sexuality more generally, but also acts as a moment of "coming out" or queer recognition for Jenny as she is learning the rules, language, and traits of being a part of a queer women's community. This scene also highlights the common trope for bisexual visibility as only being distinguishable through the gender of the sexual/romantic partners. As Jenny's storyline at this moment is in a state of confusion and instability, Jenny herself is read by her friends as being in flux and transient. Although there is nothing about Jenny's appearance that is really any different from any of the other women in the group, as they all (except Shane, arguably) present as feminine, Jenny's visual presentation as an indicator of sexuality is the only one that is read as uncertain. Is there a "bisexual look"? In this scene, Jenny's appearance isn't even given the option of appearing "bisexual-like", even though Tina and Alice also occupy bisexual spaces, but is instead used to reify common understandings of bisexuality as being invisible.

So what does a bisexual look like? And how does one present/pass as gay/straight and not bisexual? More so, how might one pass as bisexual? In all the examples I have been analyzing, the bisexual-identified/bisexual-appearing individuals have all been feminine-appearing. In their discussion of queer femmes, Alice MacLachlan and Susanne Sreedhar (2012) articulate the often complex and contradicting ways in which cis-femme queer women navigate "coming out". As femininity is expected of all women within a heteronormative, patriarchal culture, subscribing to and successfully performing femininity is seen as reifying social (read:

heteronormative) norms, even if one is queer-identified (MacLachlan and Sreedhar 53-54). Due to this, many non-feminine presenting queer women may feel as though femme queer women have "straight privilege", as they may be able to better "pass" (whether actively or assumed) as straight, negating some of the repercussions that queerness carries within heteronormative cultures. At the same time, "coming out" and maintaining a sustained, consistent state of "being out" is nearly impossible for many femme queer women (MacLachlan and Sreedhar 55). Within this space, many femme queer women must constantly demonstrate, confirm, and reconfirm their queerness to others. "Truth" and "authentic" queerness rests upon whether or not femme queer women can accurately perform preordained imaginings of queerness. Bisexual women and femme queer women both occupy a liminal space of having to choose between authentically presenting themselves as is (in whatever manifestation that is) *or* being read as "legitimate" and "authentic", and perhaps reaping benefits of such assumptions, as in the case of assumed heterosexuality. In light of this, "[...] fully reneging on that privilege by working to demonstrate, even *prove*, their queerness to others — if that requires they cover or minimize their femmeness, to do so — may end up feeling less authentic, and more akin to passing, than the alternative" (MacLachlan and Sreedhar 59).

Since queer femme women are often the primary (and in many cases, only) representations of queer women in popular culture, femme-presenting bisexual women run the risk of being confused for femme-presenting lesbians. One feature that does work to separate the two, however, is by emphasizing monosexuality (Michel 56). As has been illustrated throughout, especially via the characters on *The L Word*, where nearly all of the characters (lesbian and bisexual) are feminine-presenting, one's bisexuality is only able to exist (or be readable by audience members) if one is *simultaneously* attracted to/sexually and/or romantically

involved with both men and women. In addition to this, while feminine-presentations may risk femme queer women's ability to be continuously read as queer in everyday life, it does not similarly threaten femme queer women within popular culture, or, at least, not lesbian-identified femme queer women. Again, as nearly all representations of queer women within mainstream media are feminine, femininity's situatedness within heteronormative ideals is only a concern when it comes to bisexual women. Since nearly all the characters on *The L Word*, as an example, are feminine-presenting, their sexuality — their authenticity — is almost never questioned. The only times in which it appears to be, or when it isn't clear to the others, is when this femininity is attached to bisexuality, and therefore always-already uncertain, as both the above example of Jenny's unintelligibility and the following example illustrate.

Perhaps feeling aware of this invisibility, Season Two begins to see Jenny move away from identifying as bisexual and by mid-season, Jenny actively identifies as a lesbian ("Loyal"), an identity she claims throughout the remainder of the series, in spite of dating a transgender man²⁶. As the previous scene details how Jenny is illegible as lesbian or straight (never bisexual), "Lynch Pin" also finds Jenny discussing sexuality in terms of physical appearances and yet again, sees her sexuality in a state of unintelligibility via her lack of physical markers. At this point in the series, Jenny has recently broken up with Gene and Robin, the two people she began dating once she embraced her bisexuality after her relationships with Marina and Tim. Jenny and Shane are now roommates in the house that Tim and Jenny previously shared together, along with a third roommate, Mark, a straight, cis-gender man who is intrigued by the lesbian culture he has found himself within. One evening, Mark witnesses Shane, Alice, and two other

²⁶ Interestingly, in Season Three, Jenny acknowledges to Max that, "when I realized that I might be gay, I...I didn't rule out men...." ("Lead, Follow, Or Get Out Of The Way"). Although Jenny identifies as being "gay", she does still make space for her attraction to men, and yet "bisexuality" is not mentioned as a viable sexuality, again perpetuating the common occurrence of bisexual erasure in popular culture.

women skinny-dipping in Bette and Tina's pool, which is visible from Mark, Shane, and Jenny's backyard. Mark pulls Jenny aside, who is also in the backyard with him, and asks her if the women swimming are all "gay" ("Lynch Pin"). Jenny confirms that they are, and Mark then asks her if she is also gay:

JENNY. No...I don't know...what do you think?

MARK. [looks her over] If I saw you at a bar I would assume you were straight.

JENNY. Mmhmm.

MARK. But that doesn't really mean anything.

JENNY. No, it doesn't.

MARK. You never know these days, do ya?

JENNY. No, you don't. Except! You knew they were.

MARK. It's true.

JENNY. So, what do you think it is?

MARK. I don't know...I'd say it has something to do with their attitude. It's not that they're masculine or anything, 'cause actually, some of them are pretty feminine, ya know...but they have these haircuts, these very cool haircuts. [Jenny rolls her eyes at him]. K, don't get me wrong! It's not more...it's obviously more than a haircut, but it's...no, it's true. It's this...something they exude...[struggling to find words] I'm gonna try to put my finger on it. ("Lynch Pin")

Although Mark is quick to tell Jenny that Shane, Alice, and the other two women's queerness is not necessarily a direct result of their haircuts, but instead some "attitude" or "essence" that they exude, the emphasis is still placed upon their appearance, where the signifier of a "queer" haircut is the first clue that Mark has in terms of figuring out their sexuality. Jenny, with her long,

straight hair and "straight" appearance, does not exude a similar queer "essence", despite being queer herself. Shortly after, the audience sees Shane finding Jenny sitting alone in the kitchen:

SHANE. What are you doing still awake? ... huh?

JENNY. Will you cut my hair?

SHANE. What kind of haircut do you want?

JENNY. Short.

SHANE. Okay. do you want me to do it right now?

JENNY. Ya, ya I do, if you're not too tired.

SHANE. I'm not too tired.

JENNY. K.

SHANE. Are you sure?

JENNY. Ya. I just feel like I...need to change. ("Lynch Pin")

As Shane begins to cut Jenny's hair, the camera focuses on Jenny's face and she appears to be emotional and sheds a few tears, while also appearing to be hopeful.

While this scene is undoubtedly connected to Jenny's Season Two storyline of dealing with her childhood sexual assault and seeking control over her own life, as the cutting of the hair symbolizes a moment of catharsis for Jenny, the fact that this scene is juxtaposed with the conversation Mark and Jenny just had about queer visibility cannot be overlooked. While Mark states that it is more than their "lesbian" haircuts (while still referencing hair as being a key indicator of gayness), the following scene with Shane and Jenny appears to further highlight this connection between physical appearance and sexuality. As Jenny was illegible as being queer with her long hair, her short hair moves her into a space of queer visibility. Her long hair — a sign of her femininity — operates as a threatening to her queerness because of its connection to

heteronormative ideals and its assumed sign of straightness. Here, she is no longer in a liminal, unintelligible space, contingent upon her relationships to other bodies, but instead, "comes out" as/is recognizable as a "lesbian", as the following episode sees Mark filming a documentary about living with two "lesbians" and an episode after that sees Jenny vocally identifying as "gay" and "a lesbian" ("Loyal").

Before moving into a discussion of the confessional and its relation to "coming out" narratives on *A Shot At Love* and *A Double Shot At Love*, *The L Word* offers a few more examples of "coming out", especially in relation to negation of one's self-identity. Here, I read "coming out" not only as a first-time declaration, but as moments of continuous declarations and confirmations. In particular, when bisexuality is brought into conversation, whether as direct statements or references to certain characters' attractions, it is common to see the characters who identify as bisexual or who move in a space of bisexuality being denied their right to identify how they choose. This was illustrated multiple times in the former chapter through the character of Alice, where on multiple occasions, Alice's bisexuality was not only questioned by other characters (namely, Dana) but was also denied as a possibility altogether.

By denying bisexuality (or other identities, as the case of Tina will illustrate) to characters who self-identify as such, bisexuality becomes linked with deception. As will be discussed at length in the following section, deception in relation to bisexuality operates as a means to simultaneously deny agency and legitimacy (to the bisexual) and also produce legitimacy and authenticity (for hetero- and homosexuality). This is exemplified on multiple occasions through Jenny's Season One storyline, especially as she begins to date other people after Marina and Tim. In "Limb From Limb", Tim (who is living in the main house while Jenny pays rent to live in the studio in the backyard after their separation) sees Gene, a new man that

Jenny is dating, leaving her studio. Tim comes storming into Jenny's studio and demands to know who was leaving her studio. Jenny is confused as to why Tim is so angry, since they are no longer together.

TIM. What?! Jenny, this is my house, I think it's my business if you're *fucking* [emphasis added] some other guy in my house! [yelling]

JENNY. No, you and I are getting a divorce.

TIM. Look at me! [throws her basket of toiletries on the floor] Because you fell in love with another woman!

JENNY. And that relationship has ended and now I'm dating other people. What difference does it make if I'm dating a man or a woman, Tim?

TIM. The difference is that we were engaged. You were supposedly in love with me. You swore that if you were ever gonna be with a man again *I* was the man you were gonna be with...the only man! ("Limb From Limb")

While Tim's denial of Jenny's bisexuality is also tied to his feelings of betrayal, his ability to accept that Jenny is attracted to women is only allowed to exist if her attraction to men ceases to exist altogether. Here, Jenny's bisexuality is not only denied but is also not even read as being a viable option for her from Tim's point of view, since it was not even something that he was able to conceptualize prior to seeing Gene. Jenny's attraction to both men and women is understood as another lie, another extension of the deception that Jenny performed during their relationship.

This deception via identification occurs again through Gene, as Jenny and he continue to date even though Gene is uncertain of her attraction to him. In the Season Two opening episode, Gene tells Jenny that she is actually gay since they never have sex:

GENE. [...] But we don't have sex. Okay, there it is. I'd like to be having sex with the woman I cook for, make mixed-tapes for...you don't want to have sex!

And...I know why, it's because you're gay, alright? That's it! I..I'm sorry to break it to you, but you are a girl-loving, full-on lesbian!

JENNY. I don't think that's for you to say.

GENE. Well deal with it, alright? Good luck [walks away]. ("Life, Loss, Leaving")

In similar ways to how Tim was upset when Jenny started dating Gene, we again see a man angry over how Jenny is performing her sexual identity. Further, Gene claims that Jenny is being deceitful towards him and that she isn't bisexual but is actually a lesbian, despite the fact that Jenny does not currently identify as a lesbian and voices attraction to Gene. While the larger storyline may be referencing that Jenny is actually a lesbian and going through a state of transition, at this point, Jenny herself identifies as bisexual and in this scene reconfirms that through denying Gene's comments. In addition to Jenny having to reaffirm/continuously come out as being attracted to both men and women, this scene further perpetuates the myth that bisexuality is a fake and temporary identity. In fact, Jenny Schecter's entire storyline — from her first exploration of her sexuality, her identification as bisexual, and her later identification as lesbian (who has not ruled out men) — is premised upon these very popular understandings of bisexuality (fake, deceitful, confused, and temporary).

The connection between deception and self-identification/"coming out" narratives resume again through Tina and her attraction to men and women, an attraction that is read by her friends as being a "betrayal" to lesbianism. As stated previously, unlike Alice and Jenny, Tina does not actively use "bisexuality" as a self-identification, although she does voice her attraction to men in

addition to women. While no mention of Tina's continued attraction to men is made throughout the first three seasons (aside from Tina mentioning that Bette was the first woman she had ever been with), Season Three sees Tina begin to explore her bisexuality more fully. As will be detailed more at length in the following section, Tina is emotionally unfaithful to Bette with a man on the Internet, which then causes Bette and Tina to separate and for the friends to primarily side with Bette (which does not happen when Bette herself cheated on Tina in Season One). After flirting with a few men, Tina begins to date Henry and this relationship continues throughout Season Three and most of Season Four, until Henry declares that Tina isn't actually interested in him anymore, stating "once a lesbian, always a lesbian" ("Literary License To Kill"). Prior to their separation, though, Tina's sexuality and attraction to men is continuously questioned by her friends, including their denial of self-identification.

"Layup" offers an example that best illustrates this connection between deception and self-identification is in Season Four, as all the women are gathered to play a game of pick-up basketball. As Tina has been ignored by many of her friends who have primarily sided with Bette since their separation, Tina arrives late to the game after the teams have already been divided. Alice's team is comprised of Kit, Helena, Bette, Shane, and Jenny²⁷. Just before they are about to play, Tina jogs up to join the game, much to the apparent disappointment of many of the others, who didn't invite Tina (it was Helena who invited her):

BETTE. Hey, what are you doing here, Tina?

TINA. I, uh, decided to play.

BETTE. Where's Angelica? [their daughter]

TINA. She's with Angus and Hazel. She's fine.

JENNY. But it's a lesbian game, Tina.

²⁷ Max is also present at the game, but is left to babysit Shane's younger brother, Shay.

KIT. Hey! What about me? [said in a sing-song voice]

ALICE. You're an honorary lesbian, Kit, c'mon.

TINA. That's fine, Jenny. I still identify as a lesbian.

JENNY. Ya, but when you walk down the street with your boyfriend, holding your boyfriend's hands, enjoying all the heterosexual privileges, you stopped being a lesbian.

KIT. Oh, it depends on what colour heterosexual you are that gets you all them privileges.

SHANE. You know, I don't think it makes a goddamn difference.

HELENA. I don't know, I mean, if Tina wants to identify as a lesbian, isn't that her choice?

ALICE. Why don't you just be a bisexual?

TINA. Actually, I think of 'lesbian' as a political identity, to tell you the truth [is defensive].

JENNY. No it's not! It's not about who you vote for, it's about who you fuck.

("Layup")

The other team then calls Tina over to join them so that they can begin to play.

This scene is full of dynamic points of analysis, including self-identification/"coming out", negation of bisexuality, sexuality as being defined by one's sexual/romantic partners only, bisexuality as being "not queer enough"/full of heterosexual privileges, and bisexuality as being deceptive. While Tina is currently dating a man and has attraction for both men and women, she still chooses to identify as a lesbian. This is met with strong opposition from Jenny, who states that sexuality is only "about who you fuck", despite Jenny herself telling Gene that her attraction

to him is still present and relevant even though she didn't have sex with him in Season Two. Aside from Shane's nonchalant comment about not caring whether Tina is dating a man or not and Helena's statement about self-identification, none of the other women present defend Tina, her sexuality, and her ability to self-identify, including Alice, who also exists within a space of bisexuality on the series. Further, while Tina is reprimanded for her heterosexual privilege and told this is why she cannot claim lesbianism or play lesbian basketball, Kit — a heterosexual woman — is allowed to play with the group. While both this example as well as the previously mentioned examples of the dismissal of Jenny's sexuality may offer as illustrations of biphobia, within the larger arc of the series and the characters' storyline trajectories these scenes simultaneously negate bisexuality as a sexuality that one can identify with, *and* also reaffirm the common conceptions of bisexuality as non-existent, temporary, and uncertain through these very negations. These representations depend on bisexuality's apparent need to constantly "come out" (or else risk being made invisible/misread) as an example of why it should be negated to begin with.

The Confessional

Where "coming out" implies telling others about a truth that is considered to be a core aspect of one's self, the "confession", on the other hand, is best understood as a secret that is shared as a means of cleansing one's self of guilt/shame/deception. The confessional has become a popular and important element in reality television, and is often read as hyper-truthful moments of sharing on behalf of the shows participants. "Confessions" often take place outside of the events and activities on the series, where, in the example of *A Shot At Love* and *A Double Shot At Love*, the stars and contestants recap in apparent privacy the day's events in addition to their "true" feelings that could not be shared with the others. These confessions are then edited in

with footage from the events being discussed, where the confessional itself or voiceovers from the confessionals are juxtaposed providing a hyper element of "truth" to audience members and not to the other series participants. While these confessions are framed as diary-like entries that the self confessing is seen as initiating, "the 'private' on-camera confessions are actually interviews with production technicians" and participants are often baited with themes and topics as well as direct questions, although these encouragements are usually left out in the editing (Dubrofsky 19).

As Foucault theorizes, the confession is a ritual between at least two people, where the subject — the confessor — is produced in and through their statements, which are judged accordingly as truth or falsity (Foucault, *An Introduction*). Moreover, this ritual of confessing and judgement is intricately bound to power relationships, "for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile" (Foucault, *An Introduction* 62-62). It is these confessions in which "truth" is produced, as discourses of the self become organized and understood through hegemonic systems of knowledge-production, thereby establishing regulatory norms by which one must subscribe. Sexuality in particular held a prominent space in role of the confessional, as through the codification of sexuality (scientifically and socially), the confession of sex and sexuality — especially sex and sexuality coded as "perverse" and "peculiar" — was understood as a means of revealing one's inner most secrets and in doing so, aiding in the formation of subjectivity (via judgement/confirmation from those in positions of power) (Gurevich et al. 229). Again, the production of self through such "normalizing" procedures are always-already understood in relation to produced social norms, where the very

act of confessing produces the act/desire/thought-statement as "perverse" and othered through the utterance itself.

While the role of the confessional holds a very important place in reality television as it becomes one of the primary ways in which "authenticity" and "truth" are especially highlighted in a space that functions on the surveillance of performances/not-performances (Dubrofsky), the confessional in relation to the production of normalizing understandings of sexuality becomes especially apparent on *A Shot At Love* and *A Double Shot At Love*. Tila, Rikki, and Vikki's confessions simultaneously work to position bisexuality as something that needs to be confessed, especially in relation to the initial secrecy surrounding their truths, and also further contributes to normalizing understandings of sexuality more generally. In this space, bisexuality is the questionable, the perverse and peculiar in relation to heterosexuality, and to a lesser extent, homosexuality, as they are the assumed "truths" at the beginning of each series. Bisexuality is the secret, and in performing its secrecy, hegemonic understandings of sexuality remain intact, even on series that work to produce counter-knowledges.

As the entire series of *A Shot At Love* and *A Double Shot At Love* are reality television shows, "realism", "authenticity", and "truth" are made to appear to be central concerns of the series, whether it is Tila declaring that she's a "real" bisexual, the contestants declaring their "true" reasons for being on the series (love), or the inclusions of "raw", "authentic" outbursts and general behaviour. The role of the confessional, however, works to perform hyper-authenticity and truthfulness as they are portrayed as glimpses into the stars' and contestants' innermost feelings, feelings that they may not be able to share with the others and feelings that they may only discover themselves after reflection. These scenes are necessary in constructing the narrative throughout, especially in highlighting and explaining the stars' and contestants' "true"

motives in the accompanying footage (Dubrofsky 18). Finally, the confessional creates a secret club of sorts between the stars/contestants and the audience watching, including them in the dating process as knowledge-holders, further building upon their belief of authenticity in both the participants and series itself.

As the confessional works to present Tila, Rikki and Vikki, and the contestants as more authentic (or inauthentic, in some cases) in their quests for love, these scenes must also be understood within a wider cultural understanding of bisexuality more generally. These scenes of authentic declarations and truth-statements become always-already understood through Tila and the twins' sexuality, a sexuality that is already regarded as "suspicious" and/or "inauthentic" within the larger cultural imaginary. The role of the confessional (and "coming out" more generally) on *A Shot At Love* and *A Double Shot At Love* is to provide the audience with the "actual" truth in many cases, and in doing so, is closely aligned with the concept of "deception", again, a common trope in representations of bisexuality. While concepts of confession/deception are evident throughout both the dating competitions, it is perhaps most evident in the opening episodes when Tila and the twins meet the contestants.

In "Surprise! I Like Boys and Girls", Tila first meets 16 straight men who think she is also straight. Tila maintains her secret bisexuality throughout the meeting, and after interacting with all the men, she eliminates five of them and tells the remainder to return the next day for a pool party. Afterwards, she meets 16 lesbians who assume she is also a lesbian and many are excited to be a part of such a groundbreaking show, as contestant Ashli exclaims in her confessional, "The first show about lesbians in love! Just to be a part of something so groundbreaking like this is just an honour" ("Surprise! I Like Boys and Girls"). Tila also eliminates five of the women contestants and again invites them back the following day. While

neither group is aware that she is bisexual, the audience is in on Tila's secret through her confessional voiceovers. The following day, all the men are at Tila's pool party, and Tila tells them that she hasn't been entirely honest with them and that she has a secret. As Tila is saying this to the men, suspenseful music is played in the background. Interspersed with this, Tila's voiceover confessional explains to the audience how nervous she is in this moment and that she hasn't even come out to her parents yet ("Surprise! I Like Boys and Girls"). Before Tila tells the men what her secret is, the women walk into the backyard as the men watch them in excitement and confusion. Overlapped with their entrance, some of the women's confessionals detail how they felt uncomfortable by all the men just staring at them, making some of them feel like "a piece of meat", followed by one of the male contestant's confessionals, where he explains that he thought all the women meant that now each man would have a woman to themselves ("Surprise! I Like Boys and Girls"). The episode ends with Tila proclaiming that she's "a bisexual", as the camera scans both groups for their immediate shocked reactions.

The following episode picks up where the season premiere ended, with Tila telling both groups that she's bisexual. Tila states in both her confessional and to the group that this is the first time she has come out, although it isn't clear if this is implying publicly as a celebrity or altogether ("Can't We All Just Get Along?"). While most of the men don't seem to mind Tila's confession, linking her admission to popular conceptions of bisexuality (sexually adventurous, threesomes), many of the women voice (through their overlapped confessionals) their disappointment in this discovery primarily. These disappointments are primarily framed by having to compete with and be near men, and, as contestant Steffanie states, there is a sense of betrayal by Tila's omission of her true sexuality: "It's kinda messed up! You know, it's messed up to like, introduce all these guys...it's kind of, it's kind of like a betrayal, in a sense" ("Can't We

All Just Get Along?"). Tila's omission of her true sexuality causes some of the men to wonder if the women contestants are equally lying and whether or not they are also open to being with men. Through both popular understandings about bisexuality and Tila's own deception, the other women are thought to possibly be "malleable" in their sexuality as well, since bisexuality is seen as malleable (when it's convenient) and duplicitous (when it's a problem). This "malleability" or temporariness of bisexuality is displayed throughout the episode, as although Tila continuously states her attraction to both men and women, she also tells the contestants that she is on a "journey" and "trying to find myself", which implies that while she is open to dating both men and women, she is ultimately looking to discover which gender she is more attracted to, eliminating any confusion that bisexuality is understood to produce. This sentiment is then affirmed in the reunion episode, "The Final Round", where there was no mention of Tila's sexuality or bisexuality throughout the entire reunion (aside from a brief mention that Tila was "America's bisexual sweetheart"). This is connected to the fact that since Tila chose a man, her sexuality no longer needs to continuously be stated and reaffirmed as it is no longer confusing. While her bisexuality was titillating and interesting while she was on the show because she was simultaneously making out with men and women, once she chose a man (Bobby), the ending much resembled any other conventional, hetero-romantic dating show (at least until Season Two of the series).

While the initial deception of *A Shot At Love* is not as apparent in the second season of the series, since the audience and contestants are already aware that Tila is bisexual, this theme is highlighted again in *A Double Shot At Love* with the introduction of twin sisters. In this case, however, instead of deceiving the contestants about their sexuality and later confessing to being bisexual, the twins explain in their confessional that they will be pretending to be one person for

the beginning of the series, switching places with each other so that they both get to meet the group although the group thinks they are meeting only one bisexual woman ("This Time, Let's Make It A Double!"). Rikki and Vikki switch places throughout the premiere episode, meeting all the contestants individually while the other sister watches on a monitor from a secret room. The twins individually eliminate a few of the contestants, while telling the remaining ones to return the next day for a pool party. The next day, in similar fashion to how Tila disclosed her secret (also at a pool party), Rikki tells the group that she has something to tell them, "I know that relationships are built on honesty, but the hard truth is that I've been keeping a secret. And I think it's time to share it with all of you [...] I was born with another part" ("This Time, Let's Make It A Double!"). The group reacts surprised and this scene edited with some of the contestants confessionals where they are guessing what it is: a woman says a third nipple, and some of the men guess that Rikki is transsexual and that they "hope she doesn't have a penis" ("This Time, Let's Make It A Double!"). Rikki senses what they are thinking and she tells the group that she isn't a man and the group cheers and applauds this truth. Rikki continues, "But I do have a secret. Yes, I am Rikki, but there is someone that I want you to meet", as Vikki walks out. As the group looks on in both shock and pleasure, once the twins are joined together they state in unison, "This season, we're gonna make it a double!", to which the contestants cheer and the men high-five each other in congratulations ("This Time, Let's Make It A Double!").

Although both Tila and the twins began their quests for love with lies, and while both bisexuality and female twins hold highly sexualized spots in the popular imaginary, it was Tila's sexuality that appeared to cause the most shock and was more so read as "betrayal" than a playful joke like the twins' confession was understood to be. In this space, Tila's bisexuality is read as beneficial to some of the men, who assume the possibility of threesomes, and as lacking for some

of the women, who feel denied the truth, while the twins' confession is portrayed as being equally beneficial to both groups as there is more opportunity for them to be successful in love. In spite of this, however, both deceptions and confessions on behalf of Tila and the twins become amplified through their connection to bisexuality, a sexuality that is understood itself to be deceptive.

Performing Deception

As has been illustrated throughout in varying degrees, the role of "deception" has become an integral aspect of representing bisexuality within popular culture. More specifically to this chapter, deception becomes always-already linked to bisexuality's visibility and intelligibility, thereby connecting to larger themes of coming out/being out. The difficulty in coming out and being out is not unique to bisexuality. Many other marginal identities may face similar issues with coming/being out, especially when one's identity is made invisible and not readily recognizable by societal norms. As such, understandings of "coming out" are intricately tied to notions of "passing". Where coming out implies an active, vocal admission of a truth, passing implies deception and the negation of an apparent truth. Passing has been theorized in relation to many different identity positionalities, including, but not limited to gender, race, disability, citizenship, ethnicity, class, and sexuality (Halberstam *Female Masculinity*, *In A Queer Time And Place*; Muñoz; Samuels; Serano *Whipping Girl*; Siebers; Lingel; Cooley and Harrison; Dawkins; Harrison; to name but a few examples). At one end of the axis, passing can reference feelings of "fitting in" by "passing" as the dominant group, which often offers safety and legal/social rights, as well as increased visibility. On the other hand, passing is often read as being deceptive, where one's "real" state has been hidden. This "hiding" and deception is seen as being done purposefully, as a means of "tricking" dominant groups and "selling out" the identity

groups from which they are seen as belonging to. While placed within this larger discussion of authenticity, "passing" can also be connected to the previous chapter on monstrosity, specifically through monstrosity's connection to lies and deceit (as especially evident in Jenny's story about possession), where the very monstrosity of one rests in the ability to falsify emotions and feelings and manipulate others, and, arguably, pass as non-monstrous/human.

Although not officially classified yet as "passing", the historical origins of the term can be traced to the late eighteenth century and the medical and scientific obsession with measuring and organizing "anatomical differences in order to justify oppression and other forms of minoritization" (Harrison 42). Drawing on Sander Gilman's work, Nancy Arden McHugh articulates "passing" as originally (officially established in the nineteenth century) referring to the negative act of disguising one's "real" race (McHugh 21). Within this space, disguising one's racial self (often either through having features visibly read as being "Western European", although non-Irish, and/or, through cosmetic surgery) was seen as an active threat against not only White-classified Europeans but also the overall social and cultural hierarchical order (McHugh 21). Although conceptions of passing have since transferred over to other identity positionalities in addition to the original form of racial passing, these additional forms of passing still continue to be based upon hybrid spaces/identities and visibility. Within this space, one's inner self — their identity — is seen as having corresponding effects in their appearance, mannerisms, and general social characteristics. As such, much of passing's success is dependent on presenting a self that is void of "othered" characteristics and physical markers. Of course, as in similar ways to Goffman's discussion above, in which "truthful" performances must be read as such by an audience, visibility and "passing" are also entirely dependent on the appraisal of the viewer.

Due to passing's position within the matrix of visibility via socially recognizable norms and values, passing is undoubtedly connected to power relations and social and cultural hierarchical structures. In light of this, passing's political potential often falls within one of two camps — passing as simply maintaining *or* passing as having the ability to dismantle existing power relations. On the one hand, "passing preserves social hierarchies because it assumes that individuals want to rise above their present social station and that the station to which they aspire belongs to a dominant social group. It stamps the dominant social position as simultaneously normative and desirable" (Siebers 101). Passing may also produce psychological and physical injuries (Siebers 117). This could be due to the threat of being discovered as "fake", as well as the personal knowledge that one's identity as-is is not sufficient enough according to society's standards. At the same time, successfully passing also offers access to social, legal, political, and cultural rights and freedoms that may have not been previously available to marginalized identities. Passing offers a revolutionary undoing of social hierarchies due to its very ability to permeate structures that appear to be stable, and in effect, illustrating their very constructedness, their ability to be manipulated, and permeability (Siebers 117). Ultimately, passing's potential rests in its ability to expose secrets, secrets of social constructedness, secrets of the "natural" or "real" identities that are upheld without question, as well as the legal rights and definitions assigned to those "natural" and "real" identities (Dawkins 155)

Up until this point, passing has primarily been discussed in terms of active and purposeful acts of passing. In terms of bisexuality and bisexual visibility, while active passing (as either straight or lesbian/gay) is a possibility, because of bisexuality's apparent invisibility in addition to the popular envisioning of bisexuality as a temporary sexuality, "coercive passing" becomes a more useful and accurate term for acknowledging bisexual passing. According to

Shiri Eisner, "coercive passing" refers to the process of being actively perceived by others as something different from what one perceives themselves to be (Eisner 107). Here, the apparent invisibility of bisexuality often results in bisexuals being coercively organized into groups that are more hegemonically recognizable — straight or gay/lesbian, again, often based on the sexual/romantic interest of the bisexual person. Bisexuals successful passing, regardless of whether it is purposeful or coerced, then seems to rest entirely on their current sexual/romantic partners if a bisexual woman is with a man she passes/is passed as straight and if she is with a woman she passes/is passed as a lesbian. Because bisexual visibility is seen as being almost entirely based on sexual/romantic unions, where bisexuality itself becomes only visible through dramatic and sensational moments (threesomes, infidelity), a false impression is created that presents bisexuality as "only exist[ing] within these particular 'disruptions' but not outside of them" (Eisner 113). It is this very reliance on "disruptive" moments and the lack of a "public sphere in which to practice a sexual identity that isn't labelled licentious or opportunistic" that often leads many bisexuals to "actively" pass as gay/lesbian or straight, although "active" here also lends itself towards coercion (Lingel 389).

Although passing in and of itself is not readily available in *The L Word* and *A Shot At Love*, at least not blatantly or actively²⁸ (aside from Max Sweeny), there are many evident moments of passing's counterpart, deception, evident throughout both series. While space and time do not allow me to trace all the examples in which passing-as-deception appear (as there are arguably countless), I will highlight a few notable examples, in addition to the examples I have already discussed throughout both analysis chapters, many of which specifically note how

²⁸ While the figures being analyzed on *The L Word* and *A Shot At Love* may not appear to partake in active passing, Jenny, Alice, and Tina are all arguably coercively passed as either straight or lesbian at different points in their storylines, as has been evident throughout but especially in the above highlighted basketball example of Tina being called "straight".

deception is intricately tied to bisexuality within many popular culture examples. Although the brief examples I will highlight below are from the *A Shot At Love* series, *The L Word* is also full of important moments of deception that specifically connect the characters' sexuality with their deceitful acts. In addition to Jenny's sexuality surfacing through her deceiving Tim by having a simultaneous relationship with Marina, as well as Tina's bisexuality being made visible through her desires to be with men while still with Bette, there are numerous other examples of bisexual deception on behalf of many secondary characters that occur throughout. A few brief examples include Cherie Jaffe, a rich Hollywood-ite who has an affair with Shane in Season One unbeknownst to Cherie's husband; the discovery in Season Two that Marina had a husband was met with more shock than the fact that Marina herself was in another relationship with another woman while she was with Jenny; and Season Three's Dylan Moreland, a documentary filmmaker who, under the encouragement of her boyfriend, seduces and frames Helena for extortion. Returning again to Eisner, all these examples make clear that bisexuality, or the simultaneous attraction to/relationships with both men and women, which, is the recognizable mainstream definition for bisexuality, most often appears in moments of "disruptive" and deceptive acts. Of course, many of the other characters on the show also perform deceitful acts, many of which include infidelities (it is a primetime, premium cable production, after all), their acts of deception do not similarly correspond to their sexual identities in ways that bisexuality is often produced/performed through these actions.

On the *A Shot At Love* series, in addition to having the main personas Tila, Rikki, and Vikki, begin their quests for love under the guise of deception (Tila's sexuality, and later Rikki and Vikki's performed singular identity), the motives behind the contestants' behaviour also resulted in claims of deception. At many points throughout *A Shot At Love With Tila Tequila*,

and especially in the second season *A Shot At Love II* due to Tila's increased fame from the first season and her broken heart, as well as *A Double Shot At Love*, Tila, Rikki, and Vikki continuously assume that the other contestants may have ulterior motives. Since the three stars claim to have all been betrayed and led astray by love in the past, the contestants are often called out and questioned about their "true" motives for being on the show. This is an amusing reversal, in which bisexuality — commonly read as being deceptive and "fake" in itself — is here the ultimate judgement of what is a "truthful" claim of love and motive to be on the show. This is also held in contrast to the blatant deceptions Tila and the twins perform themselves, which is played off as "fun" and part of the titillation as opposed to being deceptive, where Tila and the twins' deceptions become synonymous with sexual playfulness and adventure as opposed to being done out of malice.

While Tila, Rikki, and Vikki search for "truth" from the contestants throughout both *A Shot At Love* and *A Double Shot At Love*, the reunion episodes of each series are especially interesting for their explorations of truth and deception in relation to sexuality and attraction. Perhaps one of the most interesting examples of bisexuality as deception occurs in the second season of *A Shot At Love*, where after admitting that things did not work out between Bobby and herself, Tila embarks again in her search for love. In a slight twist from the first season, Season Two sees another bisexual woman added to the mix as a contestant vying to win Tila's heart. While there may have been other bisexual women present in the first and second seasons, Kristy appears to be the first openly bisexual contestant of the series and sees her bisexuality as an important advantage due to her relatability with Tila ("Another Shot of Tequila"). Kristy's assessment appears to be true in that she and Tila appear to get along quite well throughout the entire season, and Kristy is selected as one of the final two contestants. Left to decide between

Kristy, a feminine-presenting bisexual woman, and Bo, an athletic straight man, Tila ends up choosing Kristy and asks her if she's interested in taking "a shot at love" with her ("Fire and Ice"). Kristy declines her chance at love with Tila, much to Tila's confusion as this has been her first indication that Kristy wasn't as interested as she may have thought. Kristy explains, "I'm so sorry! I've never been there before! I tried. I'm scared and I'm confused about this. That key's [that the contestants are given that symbolize the key to Tila's heart] not just a key; that's a key that I have to live up to. And I can't be that woman for you yet" ("Fire and Ice").

Although Tila seems surprised at hearing that Kristy's feelings do not match her own, the audience is well aware that Kristy has been questioning her involvement with Tila several episodes before the finale. Through confessionals and voiceovers, Kristy states that she has only ever "hooked up" with women before and that she doesn't know if she is ready for a romantic relationship with a woman ("On Pins and Needles"). In addition to these more secretive admissions of insecurity, Kristy attempts to tell Tila (in their final one-on-one date before the final selection ceremony) herself that she is "unsure about my lack of experience with women" and that she doesn't want to hurt or disappoint Tila ("Fire and Ice"). Tila reassures Kristy's worries, stating that all relationships are new learning experiences and that regardless of the gender of one's love interest, one just needs to take a chance. This seems to quell Kristy's nerves until just before the selection ceremony when her confessional yet again tells the audience about her doubts: "then it just, like, hit me like a truck! Do I want a man or a woman? I don't know. One minute I'm thinking one thing and then one minute I'm thinking another [...] now I'm more confused with what I truly want and if it's right for me and if it's right for her [...] right now it would be a lot easier if she didn't choose me" ("Fire and Ice").

Upon finding out that Kristy does not want to be in a relationship with Tila and that Tila has yet again lost out on an opportunity at love while on the series, Tila appears heartbroken and humiliated. These feelings visibly carry over into the reunion episode, where all of the former contestants are reunited with Tila to discuss some of the more popular and entertaining moments of the season ("A Shot At Love II: One Shot Too Many"). Within the episodes leading up to the reunion special, there were many moments of "truth-telling", but these were often done through the role of the confessional, where only the audience (and producers) are privy to Tila and the contestants' inner thoughts and feelings. The reunion special acts as an airing out of all the secrets and "true" feelings that Tila and the other contestants previously were not able to share. This is apparently the first time that Tila and Kristy (and the other contestants) have all seen each other in over two-months since the filming of the series. As stated, Tila is visibly angry, and much of the reunion is spent talking about her jilted love experience, in addition to Tila vehemently accusing Kristy of deception, having felt led on by her throughout the series. Kristy repeats her previous explanations, saying that she needed to go on the show and accept the key each time because she wanted to get to know Tila and give this opportunity a chance. Kristy continues to compare her experience and choice to Tila's own choices, saying that Tila had the opportunity to get to know everyone and that is what Kristy was doing, exclaiming "I can't believe you're this bitter about it when you've done it to 60 people!" ("A Shot At Love II: One Shot Too Many"). The two breakout into a general yelling match, with Tila calling Kristy "fake" multiple times. Tila then takes a moment to address the audience watching in-studio, stating that Kristy's motives were fame and not love and that she purposefully misled Tila, even reading a love-note that Kristy wrote to Tila while on the show together. Kristy confirms that she did care for Tila even though she ultimately decided to not be with her romantically and that she didn't

feel as though she had the time or space to directly tell Tila about her true feelings during the duration of filming (which is stated to be 35days). The episode comes to an end with Tila storming off stage while exclaiming that Kristy is "confused" and needs help (Ibid). Kristy is angry and confused and points out the hypocrisy behind Tila's accusations as Tila was dating multiple people at the same time. While the credits roll, Kristy is heard backstage through her microphone that is still on, apparently unbeknownst to her, saying, "I'm not having some fucking bitch talk like that to me on national television! And you know what? What goes around comes around. She breaks hearts! Let the bitch get her heart broken. You want the truth? She's a bitch!" ("A Shot At Love II: One Shot Too Many").

Reality television dramatics aside, Kristy, her relationships with Tila and the audience through her confessionals, and the reunion episode itself are extremely telling in terms of bisexuality and sexual/romantic acceptability. While Tila and Kristy both identify as bisexual, throughout the series it appears as though it is only acceptable for one bisexual to present themselves as "rational" and "respectable". Although there are many moments in which Tila herself is questioned, her direct relationship with another bisexual person presents more so as a duelling match as opposed to shared understanding (as Kristy had originally hoped). Kristy's "confusion" throughout, while voiced to the audience and even Tila at certain points, is ultimately framed as deceptive and a direct extension of her sexuality. Within the two, Tila's bisexuality is ultimately framed as more acceptable primarily due to her choosing to be with one partner at the end — a monosexual ending to a bisexual love story. Kristy, on the other hand, is portrayed as not only deceitful in her love for Tila, but through proclamations of her "confusion" and Tila's comments of her general "fakeness", Kristy is presented as having tried to be bisexual — passing — but ultimately failing. While "passing" and "fakeness" are themes and

understandings that are generally tied to bisexuality more broadly, due to Tila's reliance on a monosexual ending, they are instead used to differentiate between the two bisexuals. As stated throughout, since bisexuality is generally read in terms of simultaneous relationships with both men and women, it then appears as though Tila performs bisexuality within the cultural imaginary only up until the finale when she makes her final, monosexual decision. Kristy, on the other hand, arguably performs lesbianism throughout, and is only found "deceitful" and having failed her attempt at "passing" when she is discovered as being deceitful and unsure about her feelings for men and women. The inclusion of Kristy's off-camera comments about Tila at the reunion is particularly interesting, in that it serves to further embed Kristy's villainous behaviour within the audience's imaginary. As Kristy makes valid points throughout the reunion interview, stating that Tila herself dated multiple people and that she had a choice in her actions, the final comments from Kristy work to situate her as vengeful, especially in relation to Tila's tearful, broken-hearted demeanour.

The production of deceitful, passing (non?)bisexuals appears again in *A Double Shot At Love*, when one of the contestants of the series, Angela, exclaims that she is actually "straight" when evicted during the first episode of the season ("This Time, Let's Make It A Double!"). At this point in the series, Rikki and Vikki have not yet divulged to the group that they are twins. During the eviction ceremony, after Angela's proclamation of straightness, Rikki is standing alone shocked and begins to cry while telling the remainder of the contestants that this endeavour is not a joke to her and that she is honestly searching for love. During the reunion special, Vikki and Rikki's first question is for Angela, wanting to know why she would appear on a bisexual dating show if she was straight. Angela, appearing to be curious about her sexuality, states, "well...I came on this show with an open mind and basically, I was kinda maybe trying to switch

teams...try it out" ("Happy Hour: A Double Shot At Love Reunion"). Rikki and Vikki tell her that they weren't on the show to be someone's "social experiment", that they were really searching for love, and that if Angela was unsure about her sexuality she should "go to your local bar, kiss some girls, see if it's for you. Don't go on here and try to break our hearts over it" ("Happy Hour: A Double Shot At Love Reunion").

While the twins were, in effect, partaking in their own sort of "social experiment", whereby they date and compete for the same people, Angela's search to discover her own sexuality is not permitted. Interestingly, while Angela proclaims straightness in the first episode, her attempt to pass as non-straight in addition to her claims of uncertainty during the reunion special, instead work to conflate her deception with bi-curiosity. In similar ways to how Kristy's deception worked to legitimize Tila and her quest for a monosexual romance, Angela's deceit and sexual curiosity worked to portray the twins as authentic and truthful in their search for love, in spite of any other moments of deception that may have occurred on their part throughout the season. These moments of exploring the differences between "truthful" and "deceitful" motives for being on these series, become important moments for analyzing differentiations between sexualities and attractions. Moreover, deception and/or failing to pass/perform properly often results in that deception becoming an integral feature to one's overall self/character. This is especially evident in Tila disclosing that during the Season One finale she actually wanted to choose a woman, Dani, but was instead forced by MTV to choose Bobby (Pozner 262). While the audience has general knowledge of the production aspects behind most "reality" television series, Tila's admission blatantly acknowledges the constructedness of the series, and in effect, casts her entire quest for love and herself as being "fake".

Framing Instability: Bisexuality and Mental Health

As I have detailed throughout, the "authenticity" or lack thereof of bisexuality is evident throughout many examples from both the *A Shot At Love* series and *The L Word*, especially through the themes of confessing, deception, and passing due to dominant conceptions of bisexuality as being a sexuality that is deceptive because of its temporariness/non-existence and its non-monosexuality, often associating it with infidelity and polyamory. Another important lens through which bisexuality is imagined is through representations and stigma-based understandings of mental health. Representations of mental health in popular culture are often based around sensational, dramatic, and limited understandings of mental health, that often focus on the production of "crazy" in order to facilitate provocative storylines. Moreover, representations of "crazy" or "mentally unstable" characters often evoke tropes similar to those of dominant understandings of bisexuality, where the apparent "instability" of mental illness references deception, transience, confusion, and excessiveness. Finally, representations of mental health — arguably, an invisible disability/illness — become focused on always needing to be performed, always reiterated, and always "coming out" in order to be read as both "authentic" and as existing at all, again motioning towards similarities with bisexuality.

Before moving into my analysis of the intersections between representations of mental health and bisexuality in popular culture, it is first important to situate my discussion within a larger understanding of "invisible" disabilities/illnesses and mental illness/"madness". My use of both of these terms, as well as the social constructs that privilege able-bodiedness and sanity (ableism and saneism, respectively) are necessary in highlighting the interconnections between bisexuality and mental health, especially through their relationships to (in)visibility, coming out narratives, and their vilification in popular culture.

Expanding on my discussions above, it becomes evident that invisible disability and mental health present similar issues in terms of social intelligibility that other visibly marginalized individuals face, especially in relation to notions of "passing" and "coming out". Connections between invisible disabilities and queerness have been more specifically highlighted by many theorists (Thomson; McRuer; Siebers; Shildrick *Dangerous Discourses*; Caldwell; among others) due to the apparent lack of visible cues that the two identity positionalities carry, which then "always presents the dilemma of whether or when to come out or to pass" and what effects both decisions may hold (Thomson 14). While invisible disabilities/illness, mental illness, and queerness may share larger understandings of visibility, passing, and coming out, these groups within themselves are incredibly diverse and nuanced, and as such, experiences of "passing" and/or "coming out" will look different throughout. For example, deciding to "come out" as having AIDS or schizophrenia or being transgender carries very different social and cultural risks and stigmas than coming out as having arthritis or anxiety or being gay. One similarity that these groups do share, however, is that they are all deeply imbricated in larger discussions of social and cultural politics of acceptability. As such, by highlighting these tangents of similarities between these identity groups, narratives of visibility and intelligibility become situated within a larger discussion of power relations and hierarchies, where their very constructedness and role in maintaining hegemonic ideals and narratives of worth is more recognizable.

Continuing on the earlier discussion of the similar challenges that both femme queer women and bisexuals face in terms of recognizability and reiterating/performing their identities, Ellen Samuels (2003) discusses similar connections between lesbian femmes and invisible disabilities. Drawing on Marjorie Garber's "category crisis", Samuels highlights the ways in

which "visibility politics" have become central in both dominant and subcultural discourses (lesbian and disability included), which has created an almost "exclusive focus on visibility as both the basis of community and the means of enacting social change" (Samuels 244). Within these communities, "coming out" is seen as necessary, while "passing" (whether active or not) is seen as abandoning one's community and subscribing to normative/hegemonic ideals. Although both femme lesbians and invisibly disabled people share marginalization based on structures of visibility and can face discrimination in both their own communities as well as dominant culture, Samuels does note that femme lesbians most often experience marginalization within lesbian communities, from those who read femmes as complying with patriarchal standards of beauty and acceptable femininity, while invisibly disabled people often face more discrimination from the dominant culture due to accessibility issues and rights primarily being framed around visible markers of disability (Samuels 246). Nonetheless, the preface on (in)visibility as well as shared connections to "coming out" and "passing" that both femme lesbians and invisibly disabled people share (as well as other marginalized communities that lack socially and culturally recognizable visibility markers) is important, and allows for not only the undoing of norms (including those surrounding visibility), but also makes space for shared community building.

Samuels' discussion on the intersections between femme lesbians and invisible disabilities connects not only to the earlier discussion of the similarities between femme queers and bisexuals, in which both groups often have to navigate subscribing to dominant (and often limited) understandings of being femme/being bisexual or risk social, cultural, and political invisibility, but also helps to bridge the gap between queerness and disability more generally by queering disability and understandings of "coming out" and "passing". This queering of disability, or, "cripping" queerness, as Robert McRuer (2006) theorizes, allows for a more

intersectional, nuanced approach to understanding identities in general and the ways in which ableism and heteronormativity are often bedfellows in neoliberal politics of acceptability more broadly. Stemming from this, I argue that normative understandings of monosexuality are also deeply imbricated in maintaining hegemonic, normative ideals, and as such, bisexuality offers another important element in deconstructing these normative and normative-making systems. This connection is especially clear through the following analysis of representations of bisexuality as "crazy", in which systems of monosexuality, hetero- and homonormativity, and saneism operate together to maintain the status quo.

"Saneism" refers to "both discrimination against those who have been given a psychiatric diagnosis (who may or may not be perceived as 'mentally ill' in some or all situations), as well as discrimination against people who are perceived to be 'mentally ill,' delusional, mad etc. (who may or may not have a psychiatric diagnosis, or be psychiatric users/consumers/survivors)" (Wolframe). The pathologization of certain behaviours and identities results not only in maintaining hierarchical and normative understandings and ideals, but it also results in the implementation of prejudicial social, political, legal, and medical prescriptions of propriety that often results in real repercussions for those who are considered to be "mad" or exhibiting "mad" behaviour. Moreover, other marginalized identities run the risk of being pathologized under such limited and problematic understandings. One example of this is through recognizing the connections between conceptions of "madness"/"irrationality" and sexuality:

While homosexuality was removed from the list of psychiatric disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), in 1986, you can still be psychiatrized if you're distressed or depressed or unsure about your sexual identity.

Furthermore, many forms of sexual and gender identity are still listed in the DSM.

Being transgender is still considered a mental illness, for example (it's called "Gender Dysphoria" in DSM-IV). So is being asexual (DSM-IV calls it "Sexual Aversion Disorder"). In some cases, a person's sexuality or gender, especially if fluid, can be considered the symptom of a disorder, such as Borderline Personality Disorder, which is characterized by an "unstable self-image" (APA). Being non-monogamous or polyamorous is also sometimes labelled "promiscuity," considered "self-harm," and counted as a symptom. (Wolframe)

It is Wolframe's last example that specifically connects to larger, mainstream understandings of bisexuality, as bisexuality is most often understood and represented as being "confused", non-monogamous, and "sexually adventurous".

Bisexuality's connection to mental health and "madness" appears not only throughout popular culture, as will be discussed shortly, but also throughout modern medical-based understandings of sexuality more broadly. Steven Angelides' *A History of Bisexuality* (2001) traces the ways in which bisexuality has often functioned as a "sexual other" throughout main key moments of subject-making, including through sexology and psychoanalysis. As Angelides' research is broad and complex, I will highlight only a few examples of bisexuality's connection to mental health. With roots in nineteenth century studies of sexuality and psychoanalysis, and continuing into the mid-twentieth century, when bisexuality as a *sexuality* was mentioned at all (as it was most often used to define intersexuality at this point) it was always in relation to hetero- and homosexuality. Because of the ability to be attracted to members of one's own sex, bisexuality was almost always discussed in connection to homosexuality, where it was often seen as simply being an extension of homosexuality or "pseudohomosexuality" and not an identity in its own right (Angelides 46). As such, since homosexuality was considered to be an "infantile"

state of being, in which homosexuals were "inverts", bisexuality was also understood as being a "broken" or not fully advanced state of being. This belief transferred over from sexological studies and into psychoanalysis, in which homosexuality remained a stunted and unevolved sexual identity, and, by effect, so did bisexuality. For Sigmund Freud, the "father of psychoanalysis", and his theory of sexuality development, "bisexuality was not even representable as a form of 'arrested development'" but instead existed "so far back on the evolutionary line, it was no more than the nebulous and archaic residuum of a state of primitivity"(Angelides 62). "Any manifestation of these prehistoric roots", of which included bisexuality, resulted in "nothing short of neurosis, regression, inversion, and even hysteria" (Angelides 62). These understandings of sexuality continued throughout much of the first half of the 1900s, where bisexuality-in-relation-to-homosexuality was made always-already neurotic and incomplete. As Angelides highlights, the term "bisexuality" in terms of sexuality was only ever used to describe sexual practices and not "ego structure" (Angelides 101). Because of bisexuality's connection to the perverse, irrational, and stunted-development, situating it as a legitimate sexual identity would be too threatening to heterosexuality. By denying the fact that bisexuality also implies the possibility of opposite-sex attraction in addition to same-sex, sexology and psychoanalysis researchers were able to maintain the hierarchization of sexuality and "heterosexual purity" (Angelides 93).

The following examples fall into a long line of popular culture representations of bisexuality as "crazy", where the space of "mental instability" is always-already understood and related to bisexuality and its perceived characteristics, in addition to bisexuality itself acting as a cause for/symptom of being "crazy". Undoubtedly stemming from the pathologization of homosexuality and bisexuality within sexology and psychoanalysis, as listed above, many

popular culture examples from the mid-twentieth century also rely on the trope of the "neurotic" and generally "deviant" sexual misfit. Under the Motion Picture Production Code (from the 1930s to the late 1960s), openly bisexual characters were not allowed at all for decades, and when they were finally allowed, it was only under the caveat that they be portrayed negatively "in order to discourage 'sexual perversion' among viewers" (Bryant, *Bisexual Characters* 60). Along with associating bisexuality with literal monsters (vampires, as one example), bisexuals were most often portrayed as "psychos, murderers, and misfits" (Bryant, *Bisexual Characters* 60). Even after the Production Code was dissolved, bisexuality-as-mad/duplicitous/dangerous remained throughout popular media. Jonathan David White (2002) notes how in similar ways to Marjorie Garber's discussion of the bisexual vampire, in which social and political fears surrounding AIDS and transgression was played out on screen through the seductive, "double agent" vampire (Garber 97), fears around bisexual men being "vectors of HIV transmission in the mid-1990s" often portrayed bisexual men as violent, sexualized murderers (White 41). While bisexual women as predators were especially visible through the role of the vampire, *Basic Instinct* ushered in a new era of portraying bisexual women as devious and mentally unstable (White 50). In these examples, bisexuality becomes synonymous with violence, deception, pathology, and general instability. These popular culture tropes greatly resemble representations of "madness" in popular culture, where mental illness is most often portrayed as "volatile, manipulative and violent and/or savants, prophets or 'mad geniuses'" (Wolframe). The following examples will highlight the connections between monosexual and saneist understandings of bisexuality and mental illness, illustrating how the two often become intertwined within the popular culture imaginary through shared tropes of instability, confusion, deception, and inauthenticity.

On *The L Word*, representations of mental illness as main storylines occur primarily through the characters of Jenny and Alice^{29,30}, although these representations are quite different from each other. Just as many of Alice's storylines are played up for comedic effect (including dating a vampire and a lesbian-identified man, as referenced in the preceding chapter), representations of Alice's mental health are similarly depicted as comedic, outlandish, and excessive. Jenny's mental health, on the other hand, while also read as excessive, is instead represented as more insidious, dangerous, and unstable. Further, while Alice's mental health struggles are framed as situational, lasting a short time, Jenny's mental health is framed as intrinsic (although, arguably, also manifested through a specific event), and while the main arc in her struggles with mental health is depicted in the first few seasons of the series, her "instability" and "craziness" becomes tangential to Jenny's character throughout the entire series. These differences aside, the heightened focus on mental health for both Alice and Jenny occurs in the first half of the series, where both Jenny and Alice (to varying degrees) are seen as struggling with and/or coming to terms with their "true" selves and their sexuality.

²⁹ *The L Word* does offer two other main-character representations of mental health through Kit (introduced in Season One), a Black, straight woman who has an alcohol addiction, and Tasha (introduced in Season Four), a Black, lesbian who has PTSD due to her job as an officer in the military. Kit in particular is highly racialized through stereotypical portrayals of Blackness (Esposito and Love 2008) and her alcoholism is not read as a mental health issue but instead as a character flaw, especially in Season One of the series. Later in the series, Kit is seen as positively overcoming her "weakness"/addiction. Tasha's PTSD storyline is treated the most seriously and sympathetically from all of the mental health-related storylines, perhaps, in part, related to the neo-liberal patriotism of her storyline, since her illness is seen as resulting from "doing her duty" for America.

³⁰ Two secondary characters/storylines involving bisexuality and representations of "craziness": After her tumultuous relationship with Jenny, Season Two finds Marina no longer on the show as she has returned to Italy due to suicide attempts brought on by a "nervous breakdown" ("Life, Loss, Leaving"). Following this discovery, Bette and Kit meet with Marina's relative to finalize the sale of The Planet (from Marina to Kit). The audience learns that this relative is actually Marina's husband, and he tells Bette and Kit that their judgment and "conventional" American thinking put Marina in the hospital ("Lap Dance"). Season Four sees the introduction of Paige who identifies as "sexually fluid", with attraction to men and women ("Lexington and Concord"). Paige and Shane date for the remainder of the season until the beginning of Season Five when Paige catches Shane cheating on her ("LGB Tease"). Shortly following, Shane's business (Wax) is set on fire, and an investigator asks if Shane knows who might've done it. Based on the last scene, this scene heavily hints that Paige is the arsonist seeking revenge for Shane's deception. Shane says that she doesn't know who could have done it, and the audience is left to assume that Shane doesn't want to out Paige. After this, there is no direct mention to the arsonist until the final season's "interrogation tapes" revolving around Jenny's murder (originally made available on Showtime's website; now found on *YouTube*). In Shane's tape, she confesses to burning down her own company (dexter09890). Unless people sought out these online videos, however, the "Paige as crazy and vengeful" storyline remains intact.

As stated previously, Jenny's character is first introduced to the audience as a young, naive, bright-eyed hopeful who is excited about moving to Los Angeles to be with Tim. Almost immediately upon her introduction, the audience sees Jenny beginning to have feelings for a woman, Marina, and as the story progresses, the audience sees Jenny struggle with her sexual awakening, infidelity, and massive life changes in general. Although Jenny's struggle with mental health and representations of her "craziness" pick up in Seasons Two and Three, there are clues available throughout the first season that hints towards this trajectory. Jenny tells Marina that being with her is "confusing to me and it makes me feel insane", which, while being a colloquialism, also references Jenny feeling "out of control" and emotionally upended ("Longing"). Another early example appears when Tim, who has left Jenny in Lake Tahoe after eloping, becomes concerned over Jenny since she hasn't yet returned to their shared home. Tim decides to call Jenny's mother to see if she has been in touch with her (she hasn't), and during the conversation (of which the audience only hears Tim's remarks) he states, "No, I don't think she's insane at all...no, I think she knows exactly what she's doing, Sandy" ("Losing It"). The audience is left to assume that Jenny's mother has questioned Jenny's mental health state, in effect referencing the possibility of past occurrences of mental instability. Finally, Jenny's writing style throughout the first season hints heavily towards her apparent emotional instability. While her morbid curiosity and emotionally heavy writing style can be reasoned away as creative passion/genius, Jenny's writing is seen as an extension of herself, expressing her innermost feelings and thoughts. This is evident through Jenny's demon possession story and her story to Tim in which she gifts him her rotting organs, highlighting her feelings of not being in control and an inherent brokenness. These themes are amplified through the last story Jenny writes in

Season One, where still struggling with her sexuality, she writes feverishly as her voiceover narrates to the audience:

I, Jennifer Schecter, am not too sure of who I am because there are several of me. They float up from me like phantoms, and slink off to commit acts for which I may or may not be responsible. Jennifer Diane Schecter is not at all sure whether any of this happened or whether it was simply a tale as told to J.D.S. by J.D. after a poem by J. I, J.D.S., Jennifer Schecter, have so many selves, that I don't know where I begin or if I end. ("Limb From Limb")

Jenny's recounting of the different identities that form her as a whole need to be positioned within her larger storyline of sexual awakening/confusion, infidelity, and personal change as this has been Jenny's primary story arc from the beginning of the series up to this point. As the entire premise of her Season One storyline revolved around her discovering she is also attracted to women and indulging in her new feelings, Jenny's feelings of being split into different identities — some who do things she may not want them to do — directly connects to her desire being split into multiple directions (men and women). There is no cohesion for Jenny — she can't be bisexual because it is unstable and confusing and she can't be whole without deciding what she is, perpetuating common stereotypes of bisexuality in general. This scene relates to representations of mental health via her articulations of there being several selves, again reifying her instability and the connection between her sexuality and her mental health, where both are bad/wrong because of their relationship to each other. And as this scene takes place in the season finale of Season One, it gestures towards Jenny's "instability" going into Season Two, foreboding her coming struggles.

The beginning of Season Two again sees Jenny struggling with her sexuality, although this struggle is not as central as the preceding season, and instead, Jenny's main story arc revolves around her dealing with traumas of the past. This storyline begins without Jenny knowing it, as it is slowly excavated through her writing, which allows forgotten memories to surface. While in a writing class, Jenny reads her story, "The Hunter and The Hunted", as the audience sees visual representation of the story being read — it is set in a carnival and there is a young girl running through it lost. Jenny confirms to her writing instructor that her story isn't a work of fiction, leaving the audience to assume that the young girl is Jenny ("Lap Dance"). Jenny is encouraged to write fiction instead, and in keeping with the carnival theme, Jenny writes a short story where two young girls are playing a shooting carnival game where you have to hit a duck that is moving. The audience sees that the two young girls are holding semi-automatic weapons and as the duck moves across adult-Jenny comes into view as the bull's-eye. The two girls encourage each other to hit her and one of them shoots Jenny in the heart. Jenny is bleeding, but doesn't scream or say anything, and instead runs away ("Lynch Pin"). Although the second story is supposed to be fiction, the fact that Jenny's initial carnival story was based on reality and that Jenny is currently being portrayed as uneasy, confused, and searching, clues the reader into the fact that Jenny is suffering and dealing with something deep.

The carnival stories seem to produce flashbacks in Jenny, as throughout the season, the audience sees Jenny remembering a young girl (assumedly her), running scared through a carnival, although Jenny does not seem to understand why she is having these memories or what they mean. Due to this, Season Two Jenny is portrayed both in appearance (often wearing dark colours with heavy black eye-makeup) and personality as brooding, quiet, and emotionally detached from the other characters, including her new girlfriend, Carmen, who tells Shane that

Jenny is not able to recognize "the real deal" in reference to love because "she is so...lost in her own darkness, I think she likes it in there" ("Late, Later, Latent"). Jenny's apparent instability removes her from "normal" feelings and states of being, like love and social interaction, leaving her to be more and more secluded, spiralling in her thoughts and emotions.

Although Jenny has these brief memories, the connection between them and a traumatic event in her past only seems to be officially made when Jenny feels violated by her straight, cis-male roommate, who has been videotaping Jenny and Shane without them knowing. This event opens up a flood of emotions and memories for Jenny, ones that she is compelled to sort through. As Jenny is a child in her memories, Jenny begins to search through her and her family's past via photos and conversations about her genealogy in hopes of figuring out what her brief flashbacks are in connection to. As Jenny traces through her family's history, further unravelling the traumatic events of her past causing her to become more and more emotionally unstable, her Judaism is seen as one of the primary ways through which she remembers, drawing parallels between her mental health/emotional instability and her Jewishness. Nearly all of the following examples portray mental health/instability and Judaism in corresponding ways, including the repeated presence of spoken Yiddish and Klezmer music, familial trauma in Auschwitz, Jenny's relationship with her family and faith (through both her flashbacks and her time back home), and the title of an episode ("L'Chaim", which is often a toast, directly translating "to life") and Jenny's performance alter-ego "Miss Yeshiva Girl" ("yeshiva" referring to the study of traditional Jewish religious texts).

While references to Judaism alone can symbolize an attempt to create a multi-dimensional, intersectional character, due to their one-off appearance in this specific storyline as well as their connection to Jenny's mental health trajectory, they instead appear as strategic

conflations between mental instability and Jewishness. This conflation is not uncommon, as Sander L. Gilman notes how stereotypes surrounding the "neurotic" and generally mentally unstable Jew have permeated Western culture, primarily highlighting nineteenth and twentieth century European writing (anthropological, medical, and psychiatric studies) (Gilman). While the view that Jews were especially prone to mental instability became understood as commonplace in European psychiatry in the late 1800s, Jews were previously pathologized in anthropological writing and studies, where many anthropologists believed that the "cause of the greater incidence of insanity among the Jews is their endogamous marriages" (Gilman 155). This view was then transferred over into psychiatry, where even more "liberal" professionals viewed the mental health of Jews as being intrinsically tied to their sexuality and marriage patterns. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, influential in his field for his studies of sexuality, compared the "degenerate" sexuality of Jews (via endogamous marriages) to the inbreeding evident in the upper class (Gilman 155). In addition to this, though, Krafft-Ebing also prefaced Jewish "mysticism" as being a cause for mental illness, as it stood in stark contrast to the "rationality" of Christianity and therefore rational Christian minds. Here, Jews are seen as weak and more prone to mental health illnesses due to *both* endogamous marriage and their religion/faith-structure more generally, whereas the upper Christian class, while "degenerate" through their inbreeding, are saved via their connection to "rational" Christianity. The Jew is made always-already insane, with no room for reprieve.

The pathologization of Jews during this time period occurred from the Jewish viewpoint as well. However, unlike viewpoints of non-Jewish intellectuals who argued a connection between Jewish mental instability with endogamous marrying patterns, Jewish writers and scientists theorized Jewish propensity towards mental illness as instead being evident because of

their historical and current struggles/lack of freedom, persecution, and their assimilation in Western culture, thus resulting in self-hate and a predisposition for mental illnesses (Gilman 156-160). As Gilman argues, Jewish intellectuals, especially those theorizing mental illness more widely, became forced to simultaneously make space for the mentally ill Jew while also differentiating themselves from them. By providing sociological explanations for the apparent increase in Jewish mental instability, these intellectuals were able to remove elements of Jewishness from the equation (by stating that it was not a result of endogamous marriage nor Jewish "mysticism") while still recognizing the "mad" Jew. Moreover, they "[...] identified various subgroups of Jews (the merchant Jew, the Eastern Jew, the disenfranchised Jew, the immigrant Jew) as those at greatest risk, scrupulously exempting themselves. By differentiating themselves from the Jew as mad, they strengthened their tenuous position in the power structure of medicine" (Gilman 162). Here, Jewish intellectuals were forced into accepting a version of the common understanding of Jews as mentally unstable, as they were already in a tenuous position within the hierarchical power-structure of European society that viewed Jews as always-already being deviant. It was the questioning and challenging of these very power-structures that produced the stereotype of mental instability to begin with, where this form of anti-Semitism came during a time when Jews were demanding more social and political rights and freedoms. By creating the idea that Jewishness was synonymous with insanity and mental instability, those in privileged groups were able to maintain their positions in society while simultaneously denying rights to Jews based on "scientific" and "academic" proof. Within this space, where the Jew is made crazy via their very existence, "Jews could be dismissed as unworthy of becoming part of the privileged group because of their aberration" (Gilman 162).

Before returning to Jenny's story arc, it is important to preface that it was Jewish sexuality (endogamous marriage patterns) – a sexuality read as being perverse – that was believed to be threatening to non-Jews, thus necessitating the creation of the stereotype of Jewish as being synonymous with mental instability. Although faith was brought in by some intellectuals in order to situate the Jew even further within the realm of madness (since their beliefs were understood to be irrational, they must also be), their sexuality remained "the implicit charge that runs through all the literature on the insanity of the Jews" (Gilman 158). Although Jenny's storyline does not feature endogamous marriage, bisexuality is made "othered" and, at times, perverse, through dominant understandings of sexuality and the hierarchization of monosexualities more generally. Jenny's sexuality in particular is portrayed as unstable and confusing, and is even voiced as the reason for her "sickness" by her mother (as detailed below). These representations of Jewishness also need to be understood within the story arcs in which they appear, where had these references to Judaism continued throughout the series, they would not appear as out of place and as sensational as they do. Although it can be argued that this storyline presents different facets of Jenny's identity, where "anxieties of Jewish sexuality and femininity" as being intertwined creates a more realistic whole (Abelkop). The short-lived status of this exploration as well as the confusing nature to which these representations are juxtaposed together instead works to negate some of the more nuanced reading possibilities. Instead, Jenny arguably becomes racialized and is portrayed as exotic and foreign throughout this storyline and the confusing connections between mental illness and Judaism. Her Jewishness is portrayed as being both a catalyst to remembering the traumas of her past, and, as inherent to her trauma and mental instability itself.

One of the first examples of a correlation between Jenny's mental instability and her Jewishness is in "Land Ahoy", as we see Jenny with many old family photos spread out in front of her. Jenny begins recording a message to her mother on a camera she has set-up while holding up a photo of an older couple (possibly her grandparents/great-grandparents). In the background Klezmer music plays as she begins to speak to the camera:

Hi mom. As you can see, I have all our family pictures here. And I'm videotaping this because I have a couple of questions for you about zayde. I would like to know if zayde lost his mind when he began to transcribe the Torah by hand, or did that cause him to lose his mind? Do you remember the day they took him away? And then I wanted to ask you questions about grandma, or grandma if you're watching this [gestures to the camera to her grandmother who may be watching]. I wanted to ask you questions about your experience in Auschwitz. I wanted to know...if when you arrived in Auschwitz did they separate you from your daughter? And I wanted to know if you remembered the name of the Unterscharführer who took your arm and branded you with that tattoo? Do you remember his eyes? Do you remember if he used a steal plate or did he use a needle? ("Land Ahoy")

Jenny's questions to her mother suggest that she is seeking confirmation that perhaps her own mental health can be traced through her family lineage, wondering if her mental health struggles are due to biological predisposition and/or due to transgenerational trauma because of her family's past. Here, Jenny recognizes that she is struggling emotionally and mentally, although she is not entirely sure why. As Jenny attempts to make sense of the flashbacks and feelings she

is having, she continuously returns to her family, her family's past, and her Judaism, often reciting prayers in Hebrew and playing Klezmer music.

The following episode takes place during a Pride festival, and Jenny further embarks on her journey of discovery through a sadomasochism (S/M) Pride-related event ("Loud And Proud"). Shortly after entering the club, Jenny takes her time watching various states of S/M taking place, before deciding to take part in it herself. As she is strapped down to a table, Jenny appears emotional and begins crying. This scene is juxtapose with flashbacks that the audience sees — Jenny is being held down in a barn by a bunch of men, one of whom is wearing a shirt with a sinister-looking clown on it (relating to Jenny's previous images of a carnival). Although no specific mention is made in this scene or afterwards, it appears to the audience that Jenny was sexually assaulted by that group of men when she was younger. Returning to the present, Jenny releases herself from the cuffs, upset by what she has just remembered. Another flashback appears and the audience sees young Jenny standing in a field looking at a carnival. She is covered in dirt and her clothes are ripped, referencing the fact that she was just assaulted. The carnival background then disappears and young Jenny is looking at a tent which holds a Jewish family/group of people dancing and gathered around a table of food. The scene cuts back to present day Jenny, who breaks down sobbing as she has finally pieced together these parts of her traumatic past. The episode ends with grownup Jenny in the same position (ripped clothes, dirty hair/face) as her younger self, looking on at the family, symbolizing her lost innocence ("Loud and Proud").

Jenny's revelation continuously returns to story elements previously witnessed by the audience — references to the carnival and Judaism can be found, respectively, through both the clown on one of her assaulter's shirts and that her assault seemed to take place near a carnival,

and, the presence of a Jewish family celebrating in a tent. Both the representation of the carnival and a family joyously celebrating reference key spaces that are commonly understood to be safe, fun, and comforting, as well as also referencing youth and innocence. It remains unclear to the audience whether the family young Jenny saw in the tent was her own or not. It also isn't clear whether the scene represents Jenny feeling abandoned by her family, since they all appear to be celebrating while Jenny looks on distraught, although it is confirmed in Season Two that Jenny was made to feel as though the assault was her fault ("Labia Majora").

After discovering her past sexual assault, Jenny's storyline of struggling with mental health takes a confusing turn, as the following episode, "L'Chaim", sees Jenny stripping at what appears to be the same club that held the S/M Pride-related event. The episode begins with Jenny arriving at the club, as the S/M Master from the previous episode confirms to the assumedly bar owner that Jenny is worth putting in his show and that "she's a very sick girl", a statement that makes Jenny smile ("L'Chaim"). Later in the episode, the audience sees Jenny singing to herself in Yiddish while she looks through drawings (assumably done by herself). One of the drawings appears to be of her assault, while the other shows an older Jenny standing on a stage in front of leering men with the caption "Skokie, Illinois — 1999" written below it. There is then a flashback related to the picture of the men leering, cheering, booing — generally making loud noises and catcalling the person on stage ("L'Chaim"). This element of the story seems entirely out of place, as there has been no provided context for this image nor the flashback. The audience is left to assume that Jenny associates similar feelings of being vulnerable at the hands of men with both situations.

The flashback of leering men begins to make a bit more sense later in the episode (although still without prior context), as Jenny invites her friends to the bar to see her perform.

Jenny's friends appear to be confused, as the entire club is primarily full of men watching women strip on-stage and Jenny has never made any mention of stripping before. Shortly after her friends have arrived, an announcer comes to the stage introducing Jenny as "Miss Yeshiva Girl". Jenny sits fully clothed on the side of the stage where the audience can't see her, slowly throwing pieces of clothing items (although not the ones she is wearing) on stage, teasing the men in the audience. She then walks out in baggy jeans and a simple t-shirt and stares at the audience, who is beginning to get angry over her lack of nudity. Walking up and down the stage to Klezmer music, Jenny displays confidence and strength, recognizing that she is in control of this situation. The audience (both in the scene and those watching the series itself) and her friends, on the other hand, are left confused since there are no clues as to why Jenny has decided to do this. Jenny then strips completely naked and stands on display while the audience cheers ("L'Chaim"). In the following episode, as Shane has come to pick Jenny up from the club after another performance, Jenny explains her motivations:

JENNY. Because. When I'm in there, it's my fucking choice when I take off my top, and when I show my breasts. It's my fucking choice when I take off my pants and I show my pussy. And I stop when I want to stop and it makes me feel good because I'm in charge. And it helps me remember all this childhood shit that happened to me. You know, like, I have to! It's important. Do you remember what happened to you as a child?

[...]

JENNY. No seriously! Hear me out. Do you remember the shit that happened to you as a child that makes you not want to trust people as an adult? ("Lacuna")

Jenny tells Shane that she is lucky to remember her childhood memories, even the "horrible, oppressive" ones, as it gives Shane a better chance of being "a normal, productive person".

SHANE. Well, do you know what happened to you?

JENNY. I don't know. You know, like, I remember things and then, like, I think 'is this true? Did this stuff really happen or am I making it up?' Because...you know, the older I get, things...the memories sorta become a little blurry and then, it's like...I can't...I don't know...you just don't know the truth anymore!

("Lacuna")

Later in the episode, Jenny is at an event where singer-songwriter Kinnie Starr is performing a spoken-word piece, "Buttons", reciting powerful lines about violence women face daily. As Margaret McFadden (2014) notes, Starr's words are amplified in the scene so that the audience can make connections between the poem being performed and Jenny's current struggles with figuring out her traumatic past – "Boy on the street's got his eyes pinned onto me / Buttons unbuttoned in his head, he wants to see" and "This is not fair, because he penetrates me with his stare" (McFadden 28). This seems to be a pivotal moment for Jenny, as shortly after the event the audience sees Jenny heading home on a bus, while disjointed flashbacks of Jenny's assault appear in addition to Jenny imagining a younger version of herself also on the bus, which propels adult-Jenny to hug her younger self in consolation. Once at home, Jenny appears emotionally distraught while having a bath. Shane and Carmen, who are worried about Jenny's increasingly unstable state, continuously knock on the bathroom door to see if Jenny is alright. Since Jenny has not verbally confirmed whether or not she is okay, after hearing a small noise from her, Shane decides to enter the bathroom, finding that Jenny has cut her thighs with a razor blade. Jenny breaks down sobbing into Shane's arms as Shane comforts Jenny, stating that they will get

her help to which Jenny replies, "Fuck. I need help. Don't I? I'm really fucked up" (McFadden 28). This scene is juxtaposed with the birth of Angelica, Bette and Tina's baby. Both scenes are abject in their presentations of blood and various states of purging and both scenes represent various manifestations of new beginnings. In Bette and Tina's case, their lives are no longer childless, as Tina actively ushers in life/a new beginning for them. Jenny's scene, on the other hand, gestures towards the death of her innocence, but also represents the possibilities of new beginnings through the acknowledgement that her present state of being is not viable.

Taking place months following the Season Two finale, Season Three sees Jenny living back at home in Skokie, Illinois. The audience meets Jenny's mother, who is dressed conservatively and is telling Jenny that they still have a lot of preparing to do before they go to synagogue and have Jenny's last dinner in Skokie afterwards. Jenny tells her mother that she had her last therapy session that day, to which her mother mostly ignores and instead tells Jenny about the young man that her father has invited to dinner that night for Jenny. Jenny begins to voice discomfort over this due to her sexuality:

MOTHER. Don't start, Jenny. We all know you were sick.

JENNY. That's not part of my 'sickness' [using scare-quotes over "sickness"].

MOTHER. Oh! And is that what Dr. Perets has been telling you?

JENNY. Dr. Perets doesn't have a problem with my sexual orientation, mom.

MOTHER. [sighing] Well, uh...then I have to tell you that I think Dr. Perets is as sick as you are. ("Labia Majora")

Later in the episode, Jenny meets Moira at a lesbian bar. While dancing and kissing, Moira notices that Jenny has cuts/scars on her abdomen. Moira assumes that someone did that to Jenny, but Jenny confirms that she did it to herself. Nothing else about her mental health nor her

past are mentioned until Jenny brings Moira back to her parents' home and are walked in on by Jenny's parents while her and Moira are having sex. Jenny's step-father demands that Jenny get out of their house immediately, which Jenny felt was his true desire all along stating, "Actually, you wanted me out of this house from the moment I set foot in here. What is it, Warren? Am I too fucked up for you? Am I too perverted? Look at me. Do I remind you of how messy and out of control your life is?" ("Labia Majora"). In both scenes with Jenny's family, Jenny's sexuality (at this point in the series Jenny identifies as a lesbian although she has apparently not ruled out men ("Lead, Follow, Or Get Out Of The Way")) is always-already connected to her mental health, to the point that her "craziness" is understood by her family to be a symptom of her sexuality, and where her sexuality is believed to be "crazy".

At this point in the series, Jenny's mental health struggles are primarily read as being resolved or at least are not discussed or referenced explicitly throughout the remainder of the series. Jenny's mental health struggles are also never explicitly defined, falling into the common trope of representing women (especially racialized and queer women) as "generically crazy", which becomes presented as a personality trait or characteristic as opposed to a legitimate mental illness. The only other more direct references to Jenny's Season Two storyline is later in Season Three when Jenny meets with the mother of her hospital roommate (assumingly a psychiatric hospital because of her previous storyline), who is also a publisher with Simon and Schuster. In this scene the publisher is telling Jenny that fiction is not the way to go, and that instead, because of her mental health struggles and sexual abuse Jenny should write "survivor memoir" as it will reach a wider audience ("Lifesize"). The final semi-direct reference to Jenny's struggles occurs in Season Four, after Jenny has released her memoir, *Some of Her Parts* (a reference, perhaps, to the poem she wrote Tim in which she gifts him her organs). Because of the success of her book,

Jenny is interviewed by Stacey Merkin from *Curve Magazine*, a real, popular lesbian magazine, who builds trust with Jenny in order to find out more personal information ("Livin' La Vida Loca"). In the article, Stacey continuously draws comparisons between how her own girlfriend, Lindsey, handled her sexual assault and how Jenny handled hers, painting the picture that Lindsey's way of handling it was the proper way because of how kind and generous she is, while Jenny's was depraved and wrong due to her deception and infidelity with Tim, as well as her cutting. This storyline then spirals into Jenny tracking down Stacey's girlfriend, befriendng her under a guise (goes by the name "Debbie" and adopts an older dog in order to visit the veterinarian clinic Lindsey works at), continuously fostering trust between them in order to ultimately cause Lindsey to cheat on Stacey with Jenny so that Jenny can prove that Lindsey isn't as sweet as the article made her out to be, a storyline that continues throughout most of Season Four.

Jenny in Season Two was purposefully written to create a more sympathetic and popular character, as Jenny in Season One was read as "confused" and generally unlikeable by both fans of the show and media ("The Reinvention of Jenny Schecter"). This occurred through having Jenny overtly come-out (as lesbian), negating any of the previous "messiness" of her bisexuality in Season One, casting Shane (one of the more popular characters) as her roommate (Warn, "The Reinvention of Jenny Schecter"), in addition to having Jenny grapple with gendered and sexual violence (through both predatorial Mark and her past assault), themes that worked to garner more sympathy and understanding from the audience. While these additional elements to Jenny's overall storyline may have made her character slightly more sympathetic throughout Season Two, her previous deception and confusion in the first season and her continued instability in the following seasons continued to foster her unlikeability throughout the series. Aside from the two

brief examples mentioned above that more explicitly showcase Jenny as "crazy", as well as her entire Season Two storyline, Jenny's mental instability is more so referenced through her mannerisms and characteristics, as for the remainder of the series she is portrayed as deceptive (a theme that was established in Season One as she came to terms with her bisexuality), selfish, irritable, overly dramatic, and unstable. These characteristics become the defining characteristics for Jenny and her outlandish storylines until the beginning of Season Six, where the audience learns that Jenny has died, possibly being killed by one of the other main characters as they all had various motivations due to Jenny's deception and devious behaviour, which are highlighted throughout the final season. The murder of Jenny itself subscribes to many common tropes, including acting as a moralistic warning by punishing the "bad girl" for her transgressions (Abelkop), and more specifically, a "bad girl" who is bad because of her sexuality and her apparent mental instability. Jenny was portrayed as unredeemable throughout most of the series, and her murder – done at the hands of one of her closest friends, no less – only worked to further establish her as deviant and unlikeable.

Unlike the character of Jenny and her mental health storyline, Alice is one of the more popular and likeable characters on the series, whose mental health storyline is portrayed as more sympathetic, although comical. Alice's representation of mental health struggles, while also replete with stereotypes and tropes that connect to bisexuality, is depicted in entirely different ways for many reasons —although Jenny is white, she becomes ethnically exoticized and racialized in the series through her Jewishness, resulting in her mental health struggles always-already being connected to not only her sexual abuse but also her family's history and her Judaism. Alice's mental health struggles are depicted as entirely singular and situational, the result of a bad break-up, with no references to past family histories, faith, or ethnicity. In

connection to this, although Alice displays erratic and emotionally/mentally unstable behaviour that is often quite exaggerated, her struggles are understood as being relatable (due to love) and her behaviour returns to "normal" once she moves on from her heartbreak, unlike Jenny, whose "craziness" is made integral to her character development even when it isn't explicitly referenced. Where the two do meet, however, is how the main arches in their storylines surrounding mental health struggles deal with and reference bisexuality. As stated above, Season Two begins with Jenny struggling in general, not knowing where she situates herself regarding her sexuality. While Jenny begins to identify as a lesbian (although open to dating men) in Season Two, her emotional and mental health struggles are, arguably, themes that have occupied Jenny's storyline from the beginning of the series (deception, feeling confused and out of control) where her bisexuality first appeared. Alice's mental health struggles occur in a space where Alice still actively identifies as being bisexual, which continues until the end of Season Three where Alice is both "normal" again and recognizes bisexuality's "grossness" ("Losing The Light").

The last few episodes of Season Two represents Alice, who at this point in the series is dating Dana, as becoming more and more jealous, worrisome, and clingy towards Dana over fear of losing her. Season Three, taking place six-months after the Season Two finale, sees Alice doing her radio show, telling her listeners (and the audience watching *The L Word*) that Dana broke-up with Alice because Dana felt she needed closure with her ex-girlfriend, Lara ("Labia Majora"). Alice is both hurt and annoyed that Dana and Lara are still dating considering how much time has passed. The audience then sees her pop a pill from a prescription bottle, the first of many references to psychiatric drugs in Alice's storyline. The next example occurs a few scenes later in the same episode, while the group of friends are at The Planet discussing words they like to use when referencing their vaginas. Alice, who has walked in mid-conversation, sees

Dana and Lara and makes an awkward reference to Dana's pet-name for her vagina. Dana and Lara leave, and the rest of the group look uncomfortable although try to comfort Alice for her faux pas, as Alice tries to excuse her behaviour because of the medications she is on: "I'm on Methylphenidate. Classical side-effects are...include Tourette's [sighs deeply]" ("Labia Majora").

Later on, while mid-pose at a yoga class with Helena, Alice begins sobbing uncontrollably. Helena, concerned, asks if Alice is still upset over Dana, to which Alice replies while still crying, "I dunno. It could be these new drugs I'm on. I just...I feel a little unpredictable. But I dunno, maybe...maybe it's just making me spontaneous, ya know [...]" ("Labia Majora"). As the two leave the yoga studio, Helena invites Alice to a dating event to try and break her out of her sadness over Dana (the event where she meets Uta, the lesbian vampire).

ALICE. You know, my life is shit, Helena. Okay? You saw me in there. I'm good for five minutes on these meds and then...

HELENA. And then it wears off...

ALICE. Ya!

HELENA. That's the trouble with medication. Maybe you should just s... [was about to say "stop" but is interrupted].

ALICE. I should take more. I should take a higher dose! Yes! Of course. It's...I just...it's very not precise, this pill-popping business, ya know? [opens a pill bottle, putting it to her mouth, implying that she took more than one]. Are you judging me? I mean, I would understand if you were but... [leaves before Helena can answer]. ("Labia Majora")

Leaving the yoga studio, Alice is driving erratically, assumingly from all the meds she has just taken. Coincidentally, she sees Dana driving beside her and begins to yell her name while speeding to try to catch up with her. Dana looks frightened and speeds up to get away. This upsets Alice and she begins swearing at Dana, "Fuck you! Fuck you!" ("Labia Majora"). Both the yoga scene and this car chase are portrayed in comedic ways, where Alice's sobbing, pill-popping, and erratic driving and behaviour, while excessive, are downplayed in their seriousness. During the car chase scene, Dana calls Alice to ask her if she is "insane" because of the way she is behaving and tells Alice to stop chasing her. As they are yelling at each other over the phone, Alice receives an incoming call from Helena, who after a session with a psychic, wonders if Alice is the blonde that she is destined to fall in love with. Helena, unaware of what Alice is currently doing, asks Alice what her natural hair-colour is. Alice, very calmly and rationally begins listing off the different interpretations of her hair colour (blonde, dirty blonde, depends on the angle). Alice then asks Helena to hold as she has lost Dana and wants to ask Dana where she is so that Alice can continue to follow her ("Labia Majora"). Alice then heads over to Bette and Tina's, where they are currently being visited by a social worker to see if Bette is fit to adopt Angelica. Alice, who is still driving erratic and appears unstable, crashes into the social worker's car in the driveway, and then proceeds to blame the social worker. As this scene offers multiple serious and dangerous elements, including erratic driving, stalking (which continues as Alice spies on Dana and Lara and has an entire Dana-shrine at her home, including pictures and a life-sized cardboard cut-out of Dana), and self-medicating, it is confusing as to why it was presented in such a light-hearted and comedic way, articulating her actions as a "harmless" reaction to a broken heart.

The following episode finds Alice seeking support at a Gay and Lesbian Center. She tells the group that she believes she is an "OLA" — an obsessive love addict — and that everything will be okay because Dana will eventually find her way back to Alice because their "love was too intense" ("Lost Weekend"). Helena picks Alice up from her meeting and brings her back home, where Helena has arranged to have a cleaning service tidy up Alice's home. Helena stumbles upon Alice's shrine to Dana and is shocked, exclaiming "It's a fucking shrine, Alice! A bordering on psychotic, serial killer, obsessive-type shrine!" ("Lost Weekend"). Alice at first shrugs Helena's declaration away, appearing to think that there isn't anything wrong with what she has done. It is only when the cleaning service begins to dismantle the shrine (upon Helena's request) that Alice becomes frantic, begging for it to be left intact. Alice and Helena eventually come to a compromise as Alice is ordered to get rid of everything except the life-sized cutout of Dana, pushing Alice to recognize that she is spiraling and encouraging her to get over Dana.

Alice's personal inroads to getting over Dana involve publicly (on her radio show) acknowledging her dependency on medications. The camera pans to a collection of at least five prescription pill bottles in front of Alice as she begins narrating her experiences with various medications:

Today on 'The Chart', we're looking at 'how do you end a vicious cycle'. Oh, and for those of you out there in radio land who are sick of hearing me rant about my ex, Dana, you'll be happy to know this is not about her. This continuum of connectedness is about the cause and effect of one psychotropic drug after another, to the point where you're medicating your medication. Why don't we start with the very first antidepressant I tried...it made me just a little intense. ("Lobsters")

As Alice describes her first antidepressant, the audience sees a flashback juxtaposed with her narration, which shows Dana and Lara getting out of their car. We then see Alice (who was presumably hiding nearby) head towards their car once they've stepped away, slashing and deflating their tires.

So then I said to my doctor 'can you just give me something strong? Really strong, that'll just make me happy? Is that too much to ask?' Sooo, he gave me lithium. So this one really just made me hallucinate that I was happy. Then the withdrawal from those two drugs gave me ADD. So, I got the ADD drug! You know the one Gerber-Munster wrote me a prescription for the new SSRI, which he highly recommends but said 'under rare cases' may cause me to commit suicide. So, I was a little scared to take those, which meant I wasn't on anything which meant, I actually felt like having sex again! Which, really made me want to kill myself. ("Lobsters")

With each drug Alice lists, a flashback accompanies her story: lithium shows Alice happy and appears to be having dinner with someone, although the audience quickly learns that her dinner partner is actually the life-sized Dana-cut-out; the ADD-medication sees Alice at a pharmacy standing next to a teenage boy who asks Alice if she snorts her medication like he does his, upon recognizing that they are on the same prescription; the SSRI flashback shows Alice throwing said pills into the garbage as she is too afraid to take them; and finally, the flashback that accompanies Alice's description of when she was on nothing shows her masturbating while crying as the camera pans to the life-sized Dana-cut-out in the room with her as she masturbates, which causes Alice to cry even more whenever she looks at it.

While Alice may have addressed her medication usage, she continues pining over Dana, continuously talking about her (much to the annoyance of her boss), appearing hurt and jealous over Dana's relationship with Lara, and making references to Dana and Lara about facts that Alice should not be aware of, further making Dana and Lara uncomfortable since they are aware that Alice is stalking them. This continues until it appears as though Alice is ready to date again, going to the bisexual speed-dating event and meeting Uta. After having sex together (as detailed in the previous chapter), Alice feels free and is able to get rid of her life-sized cut-out of Dana. Alice feels strong and secure in this decision until later, when Alice is telling Uta about her rough break-up and her shrine to Dana, Uta mentions that Alice has "endowed mojo into this life-sized voodoo doll. You don't just throw it away! You have to properly release it and let her go" and tells Alice to get in contact with her once she has officially dealt with Dana ("Lone Star"). Alice begins to worry over her decision to get rid of cardboard-Dana as Dana has recently been diagnosed with breast cancer and the act of discarding the cut-out becomes symbolic for discarding/risking Dana's life. Alice frantically heads over to the garbage dump and searches through mounds and mounds of waste, in an impossible effort to save Dana. Cardboard-Dana is not found, perhaps symbolically referencing her worsening condition. As stated previously, Season Three ends with Alice back to "normal" as she cares for the ailing Dana, culminating in Alice moving herself away from bisexuality shortly before Dana's death.

Although Alice's struggles with mental illness do not necessarily manifest because she is bisexual, her bisexuality becomes connected to her "madness" primarily through their apparent shared characteristics of instability, confusion, and temporariness. Further, as Alice works through her mental health struggles, slowly moving away from irrationality, she ultimately finds redemption (and sanity) through her negation of her bisexuality at Dana's deathbed. After Alice

removes herself from bisexuality, there are no other mentions of her volatile, "unstable" behaviour. That is, until, Jenny is murdered. In the interrogation tapes that were released online-only after the series finale of *The L Word*, Alice's bisexuality is briefly brought up in connection to Jenny's murder.

SERGEANT DUFFY. You know, Tina Kennard says you're the only one of the group that identifies as bisexual.

ALICE. Umm...

SERGEANT DUFFY. Does that create problems for you?

ALICE. No. I'm totally more attracted to women, I mean, I find women fascinating and intriguing. You know, I...women drive me crazy. I fall in love with women, but I...I look at men! I mean, not...not every kind of man. I mean, definitely hairless...you know, Greek, god-like bodies...but, ya I'm sure in some arbitrary, parallel universe, if I wasn't in love and in a relationship with the girl of my dreams, then yeah I...if I wanted to have a fling with a certain, you know, non-smelling guy...I don't want to have to tell myself "Hey Alice! You're not allowed, you're a lesbian". You know, I don't live like that! I don't want to box myself in.

SERGEANT DUFFY. No, of course not.

ALICE. What does any of this have to do with who killed Jenny? Any of it?

SERGEANT DUFFY. So you think somebody killed Jenny? (kaydaramo)

While viewers of the series may not even be aware that Alice was a suspect in Jenny's murder, since these tapes were not an official part of the series, the correlation between Alice's bisexuality and deviancy/instability becomes especially apparent through the connection to

murder. Although mention of Alice's bisexuality appears to be completely out of place, within a larger understanding of bisexuality as already being an unstable identity positionality it begins to make more sense. In addition to this, viewers of the confessional learn that no one else in the group identifies as bisexual, not even Alice herself when she is asked. This scene then works to not only present bisexuality-as-unstable (through accusation of murder) but it simultaneously works to negate bisexuality as a viable sexuality altogether. Connecting Alice's struggles with mental health back to Jenny's storyline, bisexuality and mental illness are represented in similar trope-like ways that work to represent Jenny and Alice as untrustworthy, unstable, neurotic, and confused, even when their mental illnesses are seen as manifesting and ending quite differently. As both their bisexuality and mental illnesses are relatively short-lived on the series, or are at least only referenced within these specific storylines, this temporariness is used as a way to delegitimize and negate any "truth"/"authenticity" of both bisexuality and mental illness, in effect, reifying the authenticity of homosexuality and sanity.

Although there are no outward presentations of mental health struggles on *A Shot At Love* and *A Double Shot At Love*, it is important for me to mention Tila Tequila's admission of mental health illnesses after the airing of the series, as the disbelief surrounding her mental health aligns itself with similar disbeliefs of bisexuality. As mentioned in my historicization of contemporary popular culture representations of bisexuality, Tila Tequila has publicly mentioned that she has both dissociative identity disorder and bipolar disorder (Capulet 301). In addition to this admission, along with the previously mentioned series of sensational storylines Tila has been involved in, and the fact that Tila herself admitted to the "fakeness" of *A Shot At Love* through her inability to choose Dani at the end, Tila Tequila, her bisexuality, and her mental health struggles are most often portrayed as being fake and as catalysts for further media attention.

This is an all too common theme visible in celebrity women's struggles with mental health (see: Brittny Spears, Lindsey Lohan, Amanda Bynes³¹), as their struggles become read as being fake grabs for attention, indications of falsities in other areas of their lives and/or other aspects of their identity, or, often both.

Again, my point in highlighting these stories and Tila Tequila's admission of mental health struggles is not to further judge or sensationalize her stories, but instead to call attention to how her "authenticity" is framed equally throughout each occurrence. As Tila's fame became amplified through the high-ratings achieved by the *A Shot At Love* series, her authenticity undoubtedly became framed by both her time on the series and her bisexuality itself. On the series, Tila is responsible for continuously performing her sexuality through constant iterations of "I'm a bisexual". This is the only way in which her sexuality is read as legitimate due to bisexuality's apparent inherent illegibility. At the same time, through her need to constantly state that she is bisexual, her sexuality is read as being literally performed and by extension, fake. Numerous claims that Tila was faking her sexuality followed while the series aired (Richter, "Ambiguous Bisexuality" 126). Further, Tila's representation of bisexuality on the series, arguably based within stereotypical understandings of bisexuality, became used as examples of "not authentic" bisexuality (Lambert) and/or the "bad" side of bisexuality. In all these instances Tila Tequila, through both her sexuality and herself as a whole, becomes continuously framed and understood as being "fake" and "inauthentic". Almost any development relating to Tila Tequila following the end of the series, many of which were highly sensational, then also become framed within this "inauthenticity".

³¹ Interestingly, these celebrities have also been met with sensationalism in the media over their presumed bisexuality (Sieczkowski; Ryland; note that Amanda Bynes had "several lesbian relationships [...] just prior to her involuntary psych ward stay", as well as my earlier discussion of Brittny Spears).

Tila's admissions of dealing with bipolar and dissociative identity disorder become understood through the lens of fakery and performed for media attention. When Tila is read as being "crazy", it is seen in relation to her general instability and erratic behaviour, again, where this generic brand of "craziness" is used as a way to further discount and discredit her. As media reports often portray celebrities as pre- and post-"crazy", where there is an authentic and "normal" self that is portrayed as existing before suffering from a "breakdown", Tila is understood as always-already being inauthentic, where there is no pre-bisexual/mentally ill person the media hopes she will return to, no "normal" Tila. While this vilification of Tila Tequila serves to not only undo any progress and advancement Tila has made, it also works to undo any of "progress" that *A Shot At Love* held as being the first reality television show about bisexuality, that is, at least within the popular imaginary. Representations of Tila's bisexuality and her mental health struggles, in addition to both Jenny and Alice's storylines from *The L Word* work to illustrate the very limited ways in which one can exist viably.

* * *

Within the ever increasing normalization of homosexuality through hetero- and homonormative understandings of sexuality and desire, the politics of acceptability demands that there always remains "other", queerer identities from which understandings of "proper" and "rational" sexuality is measured upon. The following concluding chapter will focus on the specific events and movements of the 2000s that have further assisted in maintaining and perpetuating understandings of "proper" and "improper" sexualities. Bisexuality becomes one such example that assists in the maintenance of hegemonic norms through differentiation – "Those of us inhabiting the place of the queer may be able to cast off that queerness and enter the properly political sphere, but only by shifting the figural burden of that queerness to someone else" (Edelman 27).

Conclusion: Bisexuality in a (Hetero/Homo-)Normative World

Throughout the preceding chapters, I have critically analyzed representations of bisexuality in popular culture in connection to larger, hegemonic understandings of sexuality in general, and monosexuality in particular. The purpose of detailing the multitude of ways in which bisexuality is represented in popular media was not to provide claims of "positive" or "negative" representations in and of themselves, as this would imply that there is a particular way in which bisexuality should manifest. Instead, by analyzing these representations as situated within a specific cultural and political moment that is influenced by historic and current understandings of bisexuality, it becomes evident that these representations do not simply serve to entertain but become strategically employed to mobilize specific hetero- and homonormative ideals and values. More specifically, by analyzing representations of bisexual women on *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series (*A Shot At Love With Tila Tequila*, *A Shot At Love II With Tila Tequila*, and *A Double Shot At Love With The Ikki Twins*) specific patterns of bi-visibility emerge, patterns that often depict bisexuality as excessive, temporary, and, ultimately, "othered" from mainstream understandings and representations of hetero- and homosexuality.

My analysis has been guided by theories on the abject, performance/performativity, and queer theory, and has been formed through an intersectional and deconstructive discourse analysis. Together, these theoretical and methodological contributions created a strong framework to position my examination of these representations within larger, dominant conversations and understandings of bisexuality and hetero- and homonormative ideals. I began my analysis of *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series by providing an overview of some of the social and political happenings during the time-period in question (roughly 2000-2010).

Through this historical contextualizing, it becomes evident that not only do the series under

investigation standout from other representations of bisexuality during this period, but they also aired during a time in which the mainstream gay rights movement was making visible cultural and political waves in the United States. My first analysis chapter is predominantly framed by the abject, where bisexuality becomes represented, performed as, and/or tied to themes of the "gross"/abject, excessive (sexually and otherwise), comical/exaggerated, and the monstrous. My second analysis chapter positions authenticity as its thematic guide and specifically draws on understandings of bisexuality as being always-already deceptive and therefore "fake" and in need of "coming out"/"confessing" the "truth".

Continuing from both analysis sections, this concluding chapter further positions these representations within the specific cultural and political happenings surrounding the mainstream gay rights movement during the 2000s. Western culture's influence through popular culture is undeniable, and as such, it becomes all the more necessary to critically analyze popular culture representations, especially those that function to maintain and perpetuate neoliberal ideologies. After briefly discussing some critiques of this move towards neoliberal ideation of heteronormative values in certain LGBTQ+ communities, I will then situate *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series within two of the biggest political gay rights movements of this time-period (same-sex marriage and the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"). As this terrain may seem bleak in that representations of bisexuality are used to further differentiate it from hetero- and homonormativity, and thus, from normative understandings of sexuality more broadly, I will conclude this chapter by drawing on theories of "productive perversity" and "disidentification" to make space for using these representations and understandings to forge a path for a bi-political critique of and intervention into these hegemonic understandings of sexuality and normativity.

Extending Normativity to the Mainstream Gay Rights Movement

The U.S. mainstream gay rights movement of the 2000s primarily focused on achieving rights and status only accessible to straight individuals. In particular, the two dominant agendas of the mainstream gay rights movement at this time were achieving same-sex marriage rights and openly serving in the U.S. military. These rights have often been framed as "basic human rights" which necessitate "basic human dignity", and therefore, by gaining these rights both politically and culturally, the mainstream gay rights movement effectively gained this "dignity" by distancing itself from previous non-normative understandings of its sexuality. Moreover, these goals of the movement were and continue to be prioritized over other injustices facing members of LGBTQ+ communities (housing inequality; violence against trans people, in particular trans people of colour; employment discrimination; and so forth). Instead of focusing the movement on these issues, issues that continuously marginalize and place certain members of the LGBTQ+ communities at risk, the mainstream gay rights movement focused its efforts on gaining entry into social, cultural, and political structures that have historically been based on creating distinct lines of separation between normative/acceptable identities and their deviant counterparts. It is this subscription to heteronormative ideals and values surrounding the self and other, ideals and values that are made "normal" through its separation from and marginalization of others, that produces homonormativity.

These "normative" ways of envisioning equality, sexuality, and identity more broadly do not exist outside of historical, cultural, and social constructions of the self and other. As these constructs are often made invisible in order to maintain hegemonic understandings and power-relations, it is important to remember that "we see the 'norm' as that which binds us, but we also see that the 'norm' creates unity only through a strategy of exclusion" (Butler, *Undoing Gender*

206). The preservation of these norms exists not only through constant performance of these ideals, but also relies heavily on those who fail (whether through perceived inability, choice, or force) to subscribe to these norms. In addition, the success of normativity relies on the illusion of access, where the rights and privileges that accompany subscription to normative values must be seen as attainable. As discussed in my introduction, this is evident time and again by opening the doors of normativity, and, thus, equality, to a select few outsiders who make strides to subscribe to these pre-established rules and ideals. In terms of queer identities, this exists in the "good" gay, who is rational (not excessive), subscribes to traditional family values (doesn't display their apparent sexual difference), and who positions themselves as "just like you" (as in straight, and therefore not "queer").

Homonormativity through neoliberalism often relies on an understanding of "flexibility", where one must simultaneously seem "open"/progressive and yet still subscribe to dominant narratives and ideals. Drawing on the work of Emily Martin (1995), both J. Halberstam and Robert McRuer utilize the idea of "flexible bodies" to discuss ways in which "flexibility" has been employed by urban, white, able-bodied, economically privileged gays and lesbians to promote a mode of visibility that further distances them from and marginalizes trans, queer, and disabled communities (Halberstam, *In A Queer Time And Place*; McRuer). Within this space of flexible bodies, "the out heterosexual works alongside gay men and lesbians; the more flexible heterosexual body tolerates a certain amount of queerness" (McRuer 12). Here, flexible heterosexuals — heterosexuals who appear tolerant, accepting, and even, perhaps, curious of non-straight sexualities — align themselves with homonormative-subscribing gay and lesbian individuals under the guise of creating equality. At the same time, these "acceptable" gays and lesbians must be flexible in their queerness in order to comply with already existing

heteronormative ideals, where heterosexuality flexibly contracts and expands to accept a certain level of queerness, while homosexuality flexibly complies (McRuer 18). In relation to the mainstream gay rights movement, in order to attain these rights, homonormative gays and lesbians must not only comply with existing ideals but must also display "flexibility" to other queer members, often through the banner of championing for "LGBTQ+ rights", regardless of the fact that many queers become marginalized through these very movements³².

Bisexuality's position within this understanding of "flexible bodies", where "flexibility" implies sustaining normative understandings and politics under the guise of openness and equality, presents an interesting predicament. On the surface, bisexuality's ability to form relationships with/attractions to people of multiple genders seems like a near perfect example of "flexibility", or, at least, "sexual flexibility". And yet, as has been noted throughout, it is also this very "flexibility" that removes bisexuality from normative understandings of "proper" sexuality. Here, bisexuality's flexibility is read as gross, exaggerated, and even dangerous, and is outside the usefulness that neoliberal understandings of flexibility serve. Not only are the normative ideals made out of reach for bisexuality, but dominant understandings of bisexuality itself become a way in which normative understandings and politics of sexuality are maintained.

In order to be successful in attaining social, cultural, and political recognition and rights, it is imperative that one subscribes to the already-existing norms and ideals that have been established. As such, "political groups that mediate between queers and normals find that power lies almost exclusively on the normal side. The more you are willing to articulate political issues in a way that plays to a normal audience, the more success you are likely to have" (Warner 44).

³² As Halberstam discusses, bodies "that fail to conform to the postmodern fantasy of flexibility that has been projected onto the transgender body may well be punished in popular representations even as they seem to be lauded" (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* 77). It will be interesting to see how transgender individuals become represented in popular media since the success of same-sex marriage and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell", as the current trend of mainstream acceptance and popularity of Caitlyn Jenner and *Transparent* are often unattached from many of the pressing issues facing members of trans-communities, and specifically trans-women of colour.

Since homosexuality and heterosexuality both share attractions to only one gender (monosexuality), homosexuality appears to be best suited to seek out and attain rights and statuses previously reserved for heterosexuality. However, aside from being monosexual (and even here, many gays and lesbians may experience bi/polysexual attraction, as has been illustrated through some of the characters on *The L Word*), gay and lesbian individuals who are made the face of the "gay rights movement" must also adhere to other normative qualifiers. As "those whose sex is least threatening, along with those whose gender profiles seem least queer, are put forward as the good and acceptable face of the movement" (Warner 66), the mainstream gay rights movement evokes an image of gay and lesbian citizens who are monogamous, often white, middle-to-upper class, gender conforming, and able-bodied. In relation to this, all other sexual and gender outsiders are positioned as being in opposition to these normative values and ideals. Bisexuality's ability to be attracted to multiple genders always-already references cultural imaginings of sexual excess, polyamory, deceit, and transience, all of which stand in direct contrast to hetero- and homonormativity.

Not only does hetero- and homosexuality often need to counter itself against non-normative sexualities, like bisexuality, in order to maintain the status quo, but they also need to actively negate the possibility of bisexuality altogether. Kenji Yoshino (2000) makes these connections explicit by articulating how the very erasure of bisexuality in mainstream discussions and representations actually facilitates hetero- and homonormativity. Noting that there are multiple ways in which bisexuality is erased, Yoshino specifically focuses on "the political explanation", which "posits that bisexuals are being erased because the two most powerful sexual orientation constituencies — self-identified straights and self-identified gays — have mutual investments in the erasure of bisexuals. I call this the epistemic contract of bisexual

erasure" (Yoshino 388). As such, hetero- and homosexuality have shared interests that necessitate the erasure of bisexuality through "contractually" obliging on pre-established norms and values (hetero- and homonormativity). In addition to both having similar interests in the maintenance of norms, hetero- and homosexuality also share strategies in how they marginalize bisexuality. Yoshino organizes these strategies into three groupings: "class erasure", which denies the entire existence of bisexuality; "individual erasure", which recognizes that bisexuality exists but questions whether or not a certain person is bisexual (with claims that they are actually gay/straight); and "delegitimation", which recognizes bisexuality but also actively stigmatizes it (Yoshino 365-396). As I have illustrated throughout, all three examples of bisexual erasure are evident in *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series, including how bisexuality is often referenced in limited, stereotypical ways, how the bisexuality of Tina, Alice, Jenny, Tila, Rikki, and Vikki are doubted/negated by popular readings of their bisexuality as being performed, and ultimately, how bisexuality in these series is erased altogether as the characters/persona involved are ultimately read as hetero- or homosexual.

If bisexuality was represented in more nuanced ways, that legitimized how one can be attracted to multiple genders without having this attraction always-already connected to tropes of promiscuity, infidelity, and selfishness, then bisexuality would be made available as a viable sexuality. Doing so would then negate the perceived "truth" of hetero- and homosexuality's reliance on monosexuality being a fixed, "born this way" state. Therefore, it becomes necessary to position more normative sexualities against bisexuality in order to maintain its cultural significance and hegemonic influence. Returning again to the mainstream gay rights movement, same-sex marriage is framed as an immutable right that should be granted to gays and lesbians because of their perceived stable monosexuality that is devoid of the stereotypes that frame

dominant understandings of bisexuality. As such "[t]o the extent that bisexuals are viewed as intrinsically promiscuous, assimilationist gays will be loath to recognize them as political allies, as such an affiliation might corroborate, rather than rebut, the stereotype of gays as promiscuous" (Yoshino 427). Due to the mobilizing power that popular media has, it becomes all the more apparent that representations of bisexuality, especially during this timeframe, are illustrative of not only what homosexuality (and heterosexuality) is not but also what it entails to ultimately be read as a legitimate, stable (sexual) identity.

Homonormativity on *The L Word* and *A Shot At Love*

There have been many examples of more mainstream gay rights/homonormative ideals represented throughout the six seasons of *The L Word*. At face-value, there has been little attention given to queers of colour, working class and lower-income queers, and all references to trans characters and gender non-conformity has been disingenuous and problematic at best. This is in addition to the singular, often stereotypical, and limited ways in which bisexuality and discussions of mental health and (invisible) disabilities/illnesses have been represented throughout the series, as I have noted throughout. Of course, it can be argued that with communities as large and diverse as LGBTQ+ communities are, it would be nearly impossible to represent all queer identities within the series. However, because of the dearth of queer representations in mainstream popular culture to begin with, it becomes all the more necessary to question why these specific representations of queerness were chosen for *The L Word* in place of others? These representations of queerness perpetuate homonormativity by projecting marginalized sexuality that is in line with already established heteronormative values, ideals, and politics. More specifically, *The L Word* demonstrates that upward mobility, social and political access and savviness, white privilege and cissexism, and other neoliberal values, can easily be

transferred to and supported by model minorities, that is, as long as those model minorities work to maintain heteronormative ideals. This is best exemplified in many of the storylines that run throughout the series that focus on domesticity, monogamy, fidelity, marriage, pregnancy and childcare, and professional mobility, to name but a few examples. Since these norms are represented by non-heterosexual characters, the storylines surrounding them present elements of queerness while maintaining heteronormative values. It is here that homonormativity projects normative values and ideals through a "queer" lens while heteronormative values become articulated and represented as simply "values", representing *the* main way through which certain queers gain access to certain privileges that accompany neoliberal heteronormativity.

The L Word's emphasis on monosexuality throughout the entire series has been one of the main ways in which hetero- and homonormative ideals have been represented. The primary way that this has been done is by making monosexuality the "normal" and stable sexuality, often in reaction to bisexuality's apparent slipperiness. Throughout the series, "bisexual instability" through the characters of Tina, Alice, and Jenny is utilized as a precautionary tale of sorts, where their bisexuality is always-already connected to disastrous, outlandish, and generally problematic outcomes. As my analysis has pointed out, the audience is met with these singular understandings of bisexuality in strategic and telling ways. Jenny's Season One exploration of her sexuality through her attraction to Marina (while engaged to Tim), as well as Alice's brief relationship with Lisa, is continuously paralleled with the "normal" domesticity of Bette and Tina (although to varying degrees). Throughout these storylines, while Bette and Tina do encounter some troubles (namely, Bette's infidelity) their relationship is always presented as the ideal lesbian relationship that emphasizes homonormativity. A prominent example of this is how Tina leaves her high-profile job to "ready" herself for pregnancy, while Bette maintains

traditional head-of-household duties. This is in addition to the general focus on having children, creating a family, and maintaining stability that dominates their storyline. In relation to this, Alice's storyline is framed as comical and unrealistic, while Jenny's storyline is framed as deceitful and disastrous. Meanwhile, Bette and Tina are continuously framed as normal and ideal. Even when Bette sleeps with another woman, it is framed in a sympathetic manner, where her infidelity is seen as an extension of her high-stress job, feelings of needing to take care of Tina, and her grief over Tina's miscarriage.

This sympathetic telling of Bette's infidelity differs greatly from the representation of Tina when she online-cheats on Bette, and later, when Bette and Tina are separated and Tina begins dating a man. Tina's attraction to men is seen as treacherous and nearly unforgiveable, causing her to lose almost her entire community of friends. This sentiment is echoed by *The L Word* creator, Ilene Chaiken, when discussing the short-lived nature of Tina's bisexuality and her attraction to men:

I got so much anger for letting the [sic] Tina go back to men. Because I was in control of it, I buckled under the pressure. When I had originally envisioned that story I had just thought of Tina as a person who would have a relationship with Bette and then when that relationship broke up, her next relationship would be with a man and I thought I'd get to tell that story. And I didn't get to really explore it in that way. (Michelson)

Here, Chaiken expresses her initial desire to want to explore Tina's attraction to men more fully, but instead, due to the apparent pressure of audience members, Tina quickly returns to Bette, and seems removed from any possible future attraction to men. Of course, part of this fan reaction could be due to the fact that Bette and Tina were initially presented in such a normative,

endearing way, as well as the fact that Tina's bisexuality was made nearly invisible until her voicing her attraction to men again in Season Three. However, this feeling of bisexuality as being deceptive and treacherous is an all too common trope that is continuously represented in popular culture and believed in mainstream culture more widely. In continuing her discussion of the reaction to Tina's bisexuality as well as the intense backlash that Romi Klinger (one of the central figures on Chaiken's reality program *The Real L Word*; also one of the only openly bisexual figures on the series) received, Chaiken states "It could be for all kinds of reasons but certainly some of it has just been that reaction that you're talking about from a community that feels if you're not with them, you're against them" (Michelson). This sentiment of "if you're not with us, you're against us" in terms of bisexuality within certain lesbian communities reifies my earlier discussion about lesbian distrust of bisexuality in the early days of gay and lesbian mobilization, which pushed many bisexual women out of lesbian communities and into forming their own bisexual social and political groups. This also reifies how bisexuality is not seen as useful or as a desired ally within mainstream gay rights movements.

While it has been argued that *The L Word* utilizes "narrative structures that actually mimic and help to reify the structures of heteronormativity" (Chambers 90), I believe that these narratives are better understood as reifying hetero- *and* homonormative structures and ideals through their connection to bisexuality on the series. Undoubtedly, these heteronormative-presenting and reifying narratives exist, in large part due to the hegemonic cultural understandings of these themes (marriage, family, child-rearing, and so on) as always-already being heterosexually-based. However, these narratives are also incredibly tied up with cultural norms of acceptable queer sexualities, where lesbianism on *The L Word* is presented as the cultural norm in reaction to bisexuality as the outcast. Samuel Chambers discusses this

reification of heterosexuality on *The L Word* as particularly existing through "[...] the bizarre fixation on straight sex, the (re)production of heterosexual desire, the consistent construction of narratives of straight romance and the presumption of a straight audience" (Chambers 93) and specifically references Jenny and Tim's relationship in connection to some of these examples. But claiming that the interactions between Jenny and Tim work to maintain and perpetuate heterosexual norms ignores the very blatant fact that Jenny and Tim's relationship on the series is primarily presented as *always* being in relation to Jenny's attraction to women and her relationship with Marina. Therefore, it is not adequate to claim that Jenny and Tim *only* reify heterosexuality any more than it would be for one to claim that Jenny and Marina *only* reify homosexuality, because that does not make space for the triangular way in which both relationships connect through Jenny's bisexuality. *The L Word*, then, works to reinforce the cultural norm of monogamy as a way to preserve the cultural institution of the family (through socially-sanctioned displays of romantic relationships i.e., marriage) by symbolically connecting hetero- and homosexuality as both sharing and adhering to similar values and ideals, and, simultaneously, by divorcing any assumed shared similarities between homosexuality and bisexuality.

Similar storylines that normalize mainstream homonormative ideals occur throughout, including (but not limited to) the birth of Bette and Tina's child which reifies the homo-nuclear family structure (in this example, in direct relation to Jenny's mental health crisis and self-injury) and the subsequent storylines of childrearing, adoption, and joint-custody; the continuous focus on being "out and proud" (even if that includes publically outing closeted queers) through various events, Pride parades, and references to The Human Rights Campaign (the largest LGBTQ+ non-profit that has been critiqued for their political and corporate alliances (Clifton));

and the continuous emphasis on monogamy (even when infidelity is present) and dyad domestic partnerships as being the ideal. While gay marriage in and of itself is directly referenced only a small number of times (through Dana and Tonya's engagement/wedding planning and Shane and Carmen's halted nuptials), the importance of gay marriage to mainstream, homonormative ideals is evident throughout. A few examples of the emphasis on same-sex marriage rights include the necessity of Shane and Carmen having to travel to Whistler, British Columbia in order to marry because same-sex marriage is not yet legal in the state of California (episode aired in 2006), and, the lack of legal rights that Bette has to her daughter, Angelica, because she is not considered to be her legal parent, in large part due to the fact that Bette and Tina cannot marry. Further, Jenny and Tina's attraction to men is framed as "heterosexual privilege" (without any discussion of bisexual erasure) because those relationships are seen as more socially acceptable. This is in addition to the ability of opposite-sex partners to marry, thereby gaining rights and privileges not allotted to same-sex couples. This is perhaps most visibly evident through Jenny's quick marriage to Tim. However, in order to highlight the importance and necessity of same-sex marriage on the series, Jenny and Tim's marriage is played off as a ridiculous solution to Jenny's bisexually-influenced adulterous ways that is immediately understood as being inauthentic and short-lived.

Continuing in the discussion of the perpetuation of hetero- and homonormative ideals in the mainstream gay rights movement, I would like to briefly highlight one of the other high-profile objectives of this movement during the 2000s: critiques of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" military policy and the pressure to get it overturned. Established in February of 1994 under the presidency of Bill Clinton and lasting until its successful repeal in September of 2011 under President Barack Obama, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" sought to end discrimination against gay,

lesbian, and bisexual military service members by lifting the ban against them and by making it illegal for the military to ask questions about service members' sexuality and sexual orientation (Harrison 189). In spite of this seemingly positive intention, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" simply affirmed that gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals could not be outright questioned about their sexuality, while discriminatory practices remained legally intact through the prohibition of acts and speech that were deemed "homosexual" in nature. These restrictions impacted "gay, lesbian, or bisexual servicemembers' [sic] speech always and everywhere: restrictions apply twenty-four hours a day; on base or off base; on duty or off duty; in public discourse or private conversation with doctors or clergy or even in diaries" (Scheper 443), resulting in mistreatment and thousands of service members being discharged from the U.S. military.

The repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" has been presented by the mainstream gay rights movement as a necessary step towards equality, where gay, lesbian, and bisexual service members could serve openly just like their straight counterparts. Here, equal access to serve in the military is joined together with the other major issue in the mainstream gay rights movement, same-sex marriage, where gaining rights to both is seen as achieving "equality", but where this "equality" is only measured by and through heteronormative and patriotic ideals (marriage, monogamy, family, national identity, and so on). This appears to stand in contrast to the more progressive beginnings of queer visibility and the sexual revolution that fought against assimilationist politics, hegemonic ideals, and conservative agendas. In similar ways to how championing for same-sex marriage rights ignores the fact that the institution of marriage is steeped within racism, colonialism, and patriarchy, the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" has been

critiqued for aligning itself with the "racism, violence, and neocolonial murderousness that is enacted by the United States and its military" (Eisner 302)³³.

Gay service in the U.S. military and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is a prominent part of one of the storylines on *The L Word*, beginning in Season Four and continuing well into Season Five, initiated by the introduction of Tasha Williams, a Black lesbian who has served in Iraq and who has made military service her career. Tasha's introduction on the series appears to be an attempt to include more diverse characters, with Tasha's race, economic background, and military involvement paralleled with the predominance of whiteness, economic mobility, and liberal attitudes of the other main characters. Shortly after her introduction, Tasha and Alice become romantically involved, and their initial interactions are framed by these differences, with Tasha pointing out Alice's privileged position and opinions, especially in relation to Alice's anti-war/anti-military beliefs. These differences also seem to initiate Tasha's main storyline, as Alice's sexual openness (both her own and with Tasha in public) causes military personnel to become suspicious of Tasha's sexuality, leading to her being investigated for "homosexual conduct" ("Literary License To Kill"). In Season Five, Tasha is officially discharged from the U.S. military, and must appeal this decision in military court by providing proof that she is not a lesbian ("Lady of the Lake"). While Tasha continuously expresses discomfort towards Alice's openness and it appears as though Tasha will deny her homosexuality in order to stay in the military, the storyline changes direction once Alice is called in to military court ("Lay Down the Law"). As she sees Alice, someone she cares deeply for, questioned about her and Tasha's sexuality, Tasha has a change of heart, where continuing to work in the military no longer seems

³³ Similar critiques have been made about the mainstream movement to lift the ban on transgender service members, specifically noting how this movement has not been initiated by trans communities, nor does it address any of the pressing issues affecting trans communities, including violence, poverty, unemployment, and imprisonment (Geidner; Meronek).

like an option. As Alice leaves the courtroom, Tasha discloses to the court that she is in fact in love with a woman, and Tasha is subsequently officially discharged from the military.

Afterwards, Tasha runs outside to Alice, telling her that she has won. At first, Alice assumes that "winning" means that Tasha is able to remain in the military, but she soon realizes that Tasha "won" because she chose to be open about her sexuality and love for Alice instead of being a part of a system that denies her those rights. The episode ends with Tasha and Alice embracing and kissing each other at the army base in front of other military officials ("Lay Down the Law").

While Tasha's main storyline about being investigated for "homosexual conduct" and her discharge from the U.S. military does not necessarily fit into my overarching examination of representations of bisexuality, its presence and the subsequent effects that it had in maintaining and perpetuating neoliberal ideals of queer inclusion make it a necessary aspect to analyze. Having said this, Tasha's entire storyline and a large portion of Season Five as a whole deal with themes of "coming out" and publicly outing closeted queers, with Alice being one of the main instigators of such outings. At this point in the series, Alice appears to more often identify as "lesbian" or "gay" and not bisexual, despite the fact that Alice ultimately does still claim this identity (as seen in Alice's interrogation tape released following the series finale). Her "out and proud" attitude follows many of her actions, and in Season Five Alice publicly outs two high-profile professionals, in addition to her openness serving as a catalyst for Tasha's military discharge. Here, Alice continuously subscribes to the homonormative idea that everyone should be out and proud, an idea that ignores the fact that not everyone has the same social, political, economic mobility to do so safely. Alice appears to not be aware that publicly outing people can have serious repercussions until Season Six, when Alice (who is now a talk-show host) receives

a note from a fan mentioning that their brother was killed by the man to whom he wrote a letter declaring his love ("LMFAO"). Alice makes connections between this man being killed for coming out and Alice's role in publicly outing people, stating that her past transgressions of outing were "political", but that she now realizes that some people stay in the closet for fear of their safety because homophobia is still rampant in the U.S. ("LMFAO"). While this entire storyline seems strange and ironic, in that it could be argued that Alice herself is closeted about her bisexuality and yet outs others for their own closetedness, its connection to the larger storyline of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (through Tasha's outing) and being "out and proud" is a necessary element in further stabilizing the homonormative goals of *The L Word*.

As Jeanne Scheper argues, the introduction of Tasha and her military storyline provided an important visual representation of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in mainstream media that had influential effects on the national organizing efforts seeking to repeal it (Scheper). Aside from using a sympathetic, likeable character to display the realities facing many gay, lesbian, and bisexual service members in the military, *The L Word* further influenced the social and political conversations and homonormative landscape by being strategically aligned with the HRC (Human Rights Campaign), the largest and most widely recognizable LGBTQ+ advocacy non-profit in the United States. The HRC and "Showtime Network partnered together for four seasons of the show, hosting events with complimentary admission across the country. Donations collected would go towards the HRC to promote, 'equality and fairness for all Americans'" (Scheper 449). This exchange between Showtime, its series *The L Word*, and the HRC served as a marriage of convenience. Here, both Showtime and *The L Word* are presented as progressive, where both value the hetero- and homonormative understanding of "equality". This is achieved through Showtime airing the series and providing funding for the HRC and

through *The L Word* representing stories that specifically align with the efforts and politics of the HRC. At the same time, the HRC remains one of the most recognizable organizations advocating for LGBTQ+ rights, and is therefore able to promote political agendas that best suit their needs and the needs of homonormativity, as well as supporting the guise of American progressiveness and altruism.

While Scheper goes on to state that *The L Word* and Tasha's storyline in particular actually make a critical intervention into the normative structures of LGBTQ+ mainstream advocacy, with one prominent example being the purposeful situating of race into conversations about gay rights, conversations that often fail to be intersectional (Scheper 447), I argue that this intervention does little to undo the overarching normative structure of the series itself as well as its political and economic alliances. Aside from the mutually beneficial relationships forged between Showtime, *The L Word*, and the HRC, *The L Word* negates any of the intersectional and nuanced work Tasha and her storyline produce by providing a simplistic, homonormative solution that ignores any of the real effects that could follow Tasha's discharge. Once Tasha is officially discharged, there appears to be no other reference made to Tasha's role in the military, despite the fact that she had spent much of her life making this her career and that it (up until this point) comprised Tasha's entire storyline. Instead, the love between Tasha and Alice is presented as being more important than Tasha's career, pension, benefits, and any personal attachment and affiliation she felt towards the military. In addition to this, "truth" and the importance of "coming out" are held at a premium, despite the fact that Tasha's disclosure of her sexuality could have a harmful impact on her, especially as a lesbian of colour. Ultimately, in similar ways to how themes of monogamy and traditional family ideals on the series help to perpetuate homonormative ideals, especially through bisexuality's marginalization, *The L Word* further

works to situate mainstream gay rights social and political outlooks as normative through references to being "out and proud" via the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell".

By creating current, often relatable and more nuanced characters and storylines than previously seen before on television, *The L Word*'s influence is undeniable by historically changing the popular culture landscape of representations of queer women. In addition to being one of the all-time highest rated Showtime shows, the series has been broadcasted in over 40 countries, and has initiated a reality television spinoff (*The Real L Word*) (Anderson-Minshall 2011). *The L Word* has also been touted as one series that helped change public opinion about LGBTQ+ people and same-sex marriage rights in particular (Collins and Blake; Dockterman). It is for this very influential presence in both popular and mainstream culture that *The L Word* cannot be overlooked in its representation of bisexuality. As *The L Word* has not only promoted and supported hetero- and homonormative ideals and values, but also specifically influenced mainstream understandings of sexuality in general and *normative* sexuality in particular, representations of non-monosexuality (bisexuality) can only be understood as examples of otherness in relation to hetero- and homosexuality's shared normativity.

The ways in which hetero- and homonormativity are represented on *The L Word* are more evident than how they are represented on *A Shot At Love* and *A Double Shot At Love*. This is primarily due to the fact that the *Shot At Love* series are a very specific genre of television (a reality-based dating competition), while *The L Word* is a serial drama, where the storylines unfold over multiple episodes (and in some cases, seasons), providing much more space and time for intricate storylines and character development. However, the reification of hetero- and homonormative ideals is undoubtedly central to the *Shot At Love* series through the overarching themes of monogamy and "settling down". Here, both "monogamy" and the idea that one must

"settle down" in terms of traditional romantic narratives become specifically linked with bisexuality's apparent polyamory and instability. As Tila, Rikki, and Vikki date and form romantic connections to multiple contestants at the same time, bisexuality-as-polyamorous becomes further solidified within the larger popular imaginary. Moreover, as the straight and lesbian contestants are prohibited from dating anyone else but the main stars, the two groups become additionally connected through their shared monogamy (Richter, "Ambiguous Bisexuality" 131). Through their shared monogamy, hetero- and homosexuality *in relation to* bisexuality operate as stable, rational sexualities. This is even evident in *A Double Shot At Love* when the contestants date both Rikki and Vikki, as their polyamory is seen as an extension of the twins and their desires, as opposed to being out of the contestants own volition since they were not originally made aware of the twin-twist when auditioning for the series.

In relation to the "traditional" romance narratives being evoked through homo- and heterosexuality on the series, bisexuality's "chic" factor, in addition to the already established popular understandings of bisexuality, and the series' presence on the youth-driven MTV network, all encourage readings of bisexuality and Tila/the twins' romances as being "trendy", superficial, and temporary. As the straight and lesbian contestants are connected through monogamy, monogamy is maintained as the norm and homo- and heterosexuality becomes additionally presented as "truthful" and "authentic". As stated, when Tila and the twins confessed their bisexuality to the straight men and lesbians, their bisexuality was presented as "shocking" to the contestants, with many of the straight men finding this a sexy and exciting addition to the competition and with many of the lesbians finding this to be deceptive. In both cases, straight and lesbian sexual identities are represented as stable and authentic, and not deceptive and out of the ordinary. It is through learning this confession, in addition to their

shared stable sexualities and their quest for romance with Tila/the twins, that the straight and lesbian contestants become intricately connected together and separated from bisexuality (Richter, "Ambiguous Bisexuality" 131).

The *Shot At Love* series further maintains hetero- and homonormative ideals through the sensationalism of the series as a whole via its outlandish competitions and sexual provocativity. The maintenance of hetero- and homonormativity is also realized through the dominant social and political gay rights mobilization that was happening as the series aired. Since bisexuality is presented in such chaotic and "confusing" ways, Tila and the twins through their sexuality are presented as cautionary tales of debauchery. The frivolity of not only their sexuality but the entire presentation of the dating competition stands in stark comparison to the more "legitimate" social, legal, and political mainstream movements that sought to gain status through the understanding that gay and lesbian individuals are "just like" straight individuals. In connection to this understanding and in similar ways to the role of bisexuality on *The L Word*, bisexuality on the *Shot At Love* series becomes removed from the possibility of being "just like" homo- and/or heterosexuality because of its very positionality as being "not normal".

The cultural impact of the *Shot At Love* series and Tila Tequila (the more publically outspoken and recognizable star of the series) is not as widely accepted as that of *The L Word*. Where *The L Word* was presented, consumed, and remembered as enjoyable and revolutionary, providing much-needed representation of queer women's sexuality, the *Shot At Love* series' sensationalism has primarily produced understandings of it being "trashy" entertainment without any real substance. Even with *The L Word*'s misgivings, the series was praised for providing much-needed visibility of queer women, illustrating topics, experiences, and relationships that not only are specific to lesbian and queer women, but that also speak to "all women (and men) at

the same time" (Warn, "Introduction" 3). On the other hand, due to its often over-the-top presentation as well as Tila Tequila herself, an adult entertainer who appears unapologetic in her sexuality and has been culturally presented as outlandish and "unstable", the *Shot At Love* series has been often argued as holding no cultural relevance, let alone any political and social value. This is despite it being widely popular, averaging over 6 million viewers in its first season (Seaton). However, it is this very popularity of the series, in addition to it being the only series to-date that appears to focus exclusively on bisexuality, that solidifies the series as not only culturally relevant but also politically and socially influential.

The *Shot At Love* series helped to perpetuate hetero- and homonormative ideals by aligning hetero- and homosexuality as normative sexualities (in relation to bisexuality) as well as by highlighting the role of monogamy in forming such normativity. Despite the backlash that followed the series, as well as the often negative conceptions of Tila Tequila in mainstream media, Tila has been a vocal advocate for mainstream gay rights, especially same-sex marriage and the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell". In 2008, with the legalization of same-sex marriage in California, Tila Tequila received much media attention (and backlash) for telling *US Weekly* that she believes the *Shot At Love* series helped the movement by showing viewers same-sex attraction and relationships (Access Hollywood). Tila again vocalized her commitment to gay rights in 2009, when she wrote a public letter on her blog to President Obama demanding that the President make right on his promise to repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (Richter, "Ambiguous Bisexuality" 135). In the letter, Tila aligns herself with the larger gay rights movement by openly declaring her bisexuality and by voicing her distaste for a policy that promotes discrimination and the forced hiding of non-heterosexual sexual identities (Richter, "Ambiguous Bisexuality" 136). Despite the backlash that Tila received for not only articulating an outspoken,

political identity and claiming that the *Shot At Love* series aided in the advancement of gay rights, the sheer popularity of the series and notoriety of Tila Tequila remain important aspects worth analyzing. To put it into perspective: while *The L Word* is regularly touted as normalizing representations of queer women in popular culture, its series finale drew 756,000 viewers, making it the third highest-rated episode of the entire series run (Weprin). While the fact that *The L Word* aired on premium cable does play a part in the number of viewers it receives, its viewership is by no means comparable with that of *A Shot At Love With Tila Tequila*. This fact alone – that millions of viewers witnessed the first series to openly discuss bisexuality and position it at its centre – produces its relevancy. And yet, despite not being read by mainstream media as "progressive" and the fact that it was a massively popular series for MTV with millions of viewers worldwide, the series and Tila Tequila *have* influenced the gay rights movement, if only as a reminder to the public that this (the series and Tila) is *not* an accurate representation of queer sexuality.

Although the series itself ultimately works to uphold hetero- and homonormative ideals, through the lesbian/straight alliance and the focus on monogamy as a way to normalize one's sexuality, the series is also used to advance homonormative ideals through the presence of bisexuality, a sexuality that is presented as being sexually excessive in comparison to the straight and lesbian contestants. Moreover, the role of "choice" on the series in terms of Tila, Rikki, and Vikki's choice of who they ultimately want to form a relationship with (a straight man or a lesbian), stands in direct opposition to the homonormative focus on "born this way" in allegiance with "we are just like you (straights)". This "choice" that the series displays and that bisexuality in general is seen as consisting of does not fit in with the "flexible bodies" that the mainstream gay rights movement seeks to present, despite "choice" itself being an indicator of both freedom,

flexibility, and equality. And so, bisexuality in general becomes positioned as the queer outsider within the mainstream gay and lesbian debate, with fingers pointing (whether literally or symbolically) to representations of bisexuality in popular culture as notable examples of this. Since it is a distancing from bisexuality's apparent perverse outsidership that assists in the maintenance of hetero- and homonormative ideals and values, it becomes all the more important to focus on this very "perversity" in order to call attention to the strategic ways in which it is employed to facilitate specific political agendas. In doing so, a "productive perversity" (Shimizu) can emerge and that makes space for a disidentifying subject "who tactically and simultaneously works on, with, and against a cultural form" (Muñoz 12).

Reimagining Bisexuality in Popular Culture: Disidentification and Productive Perversity

My critique of hetero- and homonormativity as being illustrated through the mainstream gay rights movement is not done to discount the very real importance of LGBTQ+ rights, including many of the legal rights that the institution of marriage provides (economic, legal, social, and political). Instead, like many queer scholars and activists have highlighted, the issue with prefacing these homonormative ideals, like same-sex marriage and access in the military, is that these ideals are often upheld *through* the further marginalizing of queer identities that do not fit into dominant norms. Moreover, the mainstream gay movements have prioritized same-sex marriage as "the last hurdle" for gay rights, which simultaneously upholds traditional, racist, patriarchal ideals of family structure and partnership while also ignores the fact that many members of the LGBTQ+ community do not even have access to basic necessities, let alone the fact that many queer individuals do not support the institution of marriage (nor military involvement) itself. Here, "[g]ay marriage does not promise a radical challenge to sexual or family politics; it merely seeks a broadening, and very much legitimate *inclusion* of lesbian and

gay citizens into the traditional definition of family" (Chambers 179-180) In this space, economically privileged, often white, politically and socially mobile gays and lesbians prioritize heteronormative ideals (homonormativity) at the cost of further marginalizing queers of colour, economically disadvantaged queers, and trans and bisexual individuals.

My critique of the normalization of homonormative ideals in the mainstream gay movement is to purposefully call attention to how bisexuality, a marginalized identity in both the movement and in mainstream understandings of queerness more broadly, is represented in popular culture in ways that maintain and uphold homonormative agendas/ideals, which in turn support larger national neoliberal sentiments. However, to end my critical analysis of these representations here would be bleak. Perhaps there is a way to make space for these representations that not only calls attention to how they have been politically mobilized against bisexuals, but that also recognizes exciting potential in these representations to counter dominant understandings of sexuality and normative ideals. Before discussing any "productive perversity" that representations of bisexuality may hold, José Esteban Muñoz's theory of "disidentification" (1999) holds fruitful potential for thinking about representations of bisexuality in ways that doesn't necessitate complete dismissal nor complete acceptance of these often stereotypical imaginings.

Developed as a need to add to the discussion of ways in which queers of colour and marginalized communities more broadly respond to dominant representations, representations that often present in more limited, hegemonic ways, José Esteban Muñoz theorizes "disidentification" as a way to rethink these representations:

The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's

universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture.

(Muñoz 31)

Further, disidentifying with a representation (or a "moment, object, or subject") for marginalized individuals is not simply a matter of completely resisting or completely accepting these representations as being "good" or "bad", but instead reworks and connects with existing representations in ways not generally imagined (Muñoz 12).

Disidentification is an active performance, where marginalized individuals and communities play and negotiate with pre-established ideals and norms in ways that simultaneously recognizes the inherent power-imbalances and hegemonic narratives being presented *and* makes space for radical reconceptions of the self through these very same narratives. Returning again to my earlier discussion of "passing", which can be both rejection of and subscription to dominant norms and understandings of gender and sexuality, Muñoz discusses the similarities between passing (especially in relation to drag) and disidentification by recognizing that both allow for "identifying with and rejecting a dominant form" as well as often serving as "strategies of survival" (Muñoz 108). In enacting a reading of disidentification, these representations hold the potential to not only strengthen bisexual communities and provide diverse identity narratives more broadly, but also provide a necessary escape from historically-rooted stereotypes and assumptions of bisexuality (when representations are available at all). This in itself is a "strategy for survival", especially in light of many of the disparities facing

bisexuals, including: bisexual women experiencing higher rates of intimate partner violence in comparison to lesbian and straight women (Walters et al.); bisexual men and women (with bisexual women in particular experiencing the highest rates overall) being more likely to fall below the U.S. federal poverty line in comparison to straight men and women, and, gay men and lesbians (Badgett et al.); increased overall health disparities for bisexuals in comparison to gay, lesbian, and heterosexuals (Gorman et al.); and as recent studies from the U.S., U.K., and Canada all highlight, increases in mental health issues amongst bisexuals³⁴. While representations of bisexuality in popular culture are only one aspect of why bisexuals experience these increased disparities, these representations mirror cultural attitudes and ideals more widely, and as such, they undoubtedly affect and are affected by dominant conceptions of bisexuality and sexuality more broadly.

Employing disidentification to the representations of bisexuality on *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series recognizes that these representations are constructed by hegemonic understandings of gender and sexuality and a politics of respectability. At the same time, disidentification makes space for seeing nuances in these representations, for repurposing these dominant narratives (or at least some of them) in ways that are useful, enjoyable, and reflective of bisexuals themselves. Disidentification makes space for simultaneous repulsion of these representations and pleasure through them. As such, disidentification connects beautifully with Celine Parreñas Shimizu's discussion of "productive perversity". As discussed in Chapter Three, Shimizu uses "productive perversity" to challenge understandings of "bad" images by making space for identifying with these images in ways that are productive, exciting, and radical.

³⁴ Steele et al.: study looks at health disparities amongst lesbian, bisexual, and straight women in Canada, noting that bisexual women reported poorer physical and mental health outcomes compared to lesbians and heterosexual women; Ross et al.: study focuses on bisexual youth in Ontario; Colledge et al 2015: study focuses on bisexual women in the U.K.; and Fredriksen-Goldsen et al.: study compares "health-related quality of life" between bisexual women and lesbians in Washington state, noting increased likelihood of mental distress and poorer general health in bisexual women compared to lesbians.

Specifically, Shimizu (as an Asian American woman) uses productive perversity to *challenge* and draw *pleasure* from representations of Asian women in popular culture, images that are often always-already sexualized and exoticized, and that are based within historical racist and colonialist imaginings (Shimizu 4). Through productive perversity, one is able to better critically engage with these representations in ways that recognize the ideological roots of such images and ideals. Further, productive perversity illustrates "a commitment to deciphering one's subjection for the purposes of crafting new self-formations – and utilizing how sexuality may open other possible subject positions beyond subjugation" (Shimizu 25). Since bisexuality is also always-already hypersexualized in popular culture, with many of the themes discussed throughout this dissertation extending from such sexualizations, productive perversity offers an exciting way to re-imagine these representations in more fruitful ways.

So what might a politics of disidentification that recognizes the productive perversity in representations of bisexuality entail? At the forefront, these tools are created for marginalized communities to navigate within and around representations used to illustrate marginalized identities but most often created by non-marginalized producers. In terms of bisexuality, since these images are not³⁵ created with active involvement from bisexual communities (even in the case of the *Shot At Love* series, it isn't evident how much control Tila, Rikki, and Ikki had over their own representations), disidentification and productive perversity allow for bisexuals to engage with these images in ways that simultaneously recognize the strategic deployment of such representations within larger understandings of "normative" sexualities, and the mainstream gay rights movement in particular, but that also make room for finding pleasure and possibilities

³⁵ Although it has been noted that *The L Word* was (at least in part) "written and directed primarily by queer women" (Moore and Schilt 159), it isn't clear how much input they gathered from bisexual communities in particular. This becomes all the more apparent by critiques of the show's depiction of bisexuality (both the articles from Lo 2005 and Kristal 2008, as well as the articles' comments from self-identified bisexuals, reflect this disconnect with the show's portrayal of bisexuality).

within these very same representations. As the scope of this dissertation is not to provide reimaginings of all the representations already detailed throughout but instead highlights how bisexuality is represented in these highly popular programs in connection to a larger social and political culture that prioritizes hetero- and homonormative ideals of sexual propriety, I will only provide a few examples of disidentification and productive perversity from *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series. With this in mind, however, I encourage these examples to be thought of on a larger platform of bisexual representation and visibility more generally.

The *Shot At Love* series, and especially the first and second seasons starring Tila Tequila, offer a plenitude of ways to rethink representations of bisexuality in attempt to unearth their productive perversity. Part of the general distaste towards Tila Tequila is due to her public attention-grabbing antics, as previously noted, including a slew of racist and generally problematic comments. However, the understanding of Tila Tequila being fake, problematic, and excessive gained public footing through her attachment to bisexuality on the *Shot At Love* series. As such, my use of disidentification and productive perversity is used to rethink bisexuality through the series and Tila-as-bisexual, as opposed to Tila Tequila herself.

In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999), Muñoz analyzes Pedro Zamora's presence on the MTV reality series *The Real World* and highlights the ways in which Zamora's work on the show can be understood as politicized, despite the fact that reality television and popular culture more broadly are generally considered to be apolitical. Zamora, a gay Cuban American living with AIDS, joined the popular reality television program for the 1994 season, where several strangers from different walks of life live together for months. Through a disidentification reading of Zamora and his activism, Muñoz discusses how despite Zamora taking part in the "multicultural frame of the corporate entity MTV" (an act that could

easily be seen as anti-progressive), Zamora's work on the series was, in fact, radical, because it provided access to conversations and topics on race, queerness, and AIDS to those who may not have regular access to such topics/representations. As such, "Zamora's activism preaches to the not yet converted, and in doing so may not seem as radical as the work of other activists, but should be acknowledged as frontline struggle and agitation" (Muñoz: 146).

As is probably already evident, there are a few similarities between Pedro Zamora's presence on *The Real World* and Tila Tequila's presence on *A Shot At Love* and *A Shot At Love II*. Both represented queers of colour on two popular reality television programs, programs that both happened to be MTV creations, and both had their identities (Zamora's queerness and HIV status, and, Tila's bisexuality) made central to their storylines. There are also notable differences between the two, including the fact that Zamora was an AIDS activist and educator well-before he joined the series, where politics and activism were central to many of his endeavours. In addition to this, Zamora's presence on *The Real World* has been predominantly well-received and even highlighted by President Bill Clinton upon Zamora's death (Clinton). Tila, on the other hand, was not notably politically active prior to her joining the *Shot At Love* series, and neither the series or herself as a public persona have been held in high regard. In spite of this, however, disidentification allows for a more nuanced reading of both Tila-as-bisexual and the series, with the most obvious intervention being that bisexuality was given the spotlight to millions of viewers worldwide in unprecedented fashion. Outside of the representations themselves, the simple fact of hearing declarations of "I am bisexual" continuously in popular culture holds radical possibilities in that it articulates it as actually existing. These declarations seem loud and monumental when compared with the incredible lack of bisexual representations to begin with, including representations that hint at bisexuality as these examples still make bisexuality

invisible through the negation of declarations of identity. Further, Tila has been publically vocal about how she sees herself and the series as making important contributions towards LGBTQ+ visibility and politics. In addition, she has also publically discussed how she originally wanted to choose Dani in the Season One finale, but was instead highly encouraged by MTV producers to choose Bobby. These very public proclamations have, arguably, illuminated some of the intricate workings of both LGBTQ+ politics and the production of popular culture and images, where certain voices are presented/erased in strategic and constructed ways, all while feigning "realism".

In terms of "productive perversity", Jenny's storyline in Season One of *The L Word* could be particularly productive, especially in recognizing the limitations in prioritizing monosexuality. This is apparent in Jenny learning that she is sexually and romantically attracted to women in addition to men, which was primarily presented as a dilemma in need of resolution. The audience witnesses Jenny struggling to work through her own feelings, in addition to maintaining her performance of heterosexuality. By reading this storyline through productive perversity, however, it becomes apparent that the dramas and heartbreak that unfold through Jenny's bisexuality are not actually a result of her bisexuality, but instead the strict ways in which sexuality is allowed to function, in addition to the moralizing ways in which Western culture upholds monosexuality at all costs. Another example of productive perversity and disidentification is through the recognition that Tila and the Ikki twins are presented as being in control of their sexuality and their desires. At the same time that their bisexuality is presented in stereotypical ways, the stars of the *Shot At Love* series are also presented as in-charge, a powerful reversal of both gender and sexuality hierarchies. And finally, productive perversity is evident through Jenny and Alice's mental health storylines, and the public reactions to Tila's admission

of dealing with mental health issues, reactions which connect to already-established understandings of Tila being "fake". While these examples are also replete with stereotypical understandings, as both are presented as "perverse" and "excessive", they also offer the opportunity to highlight intersections between gender, race, sexuality, and mental health, intersections that are not only often made invisible (especially in popular culture) but that may also work towards addressing hegemonic norms and constraints more generally.

Of course, recognizing radical reimaginings of these representations though disidentification and productive perversity is not to excuse the very real implications that these representations have, nor the fact that more nuanced and diverse representations of bisexuality are needed altogether. Instead, as I have done throughout, the usefulness in pointing out and recognizing the hegemonic ways in which bisexuality is performed in mainstream media does not negate the fact that these representations can be read in powerful ways, especially if those readings are done through a recognition of the constructedness of such understandings. It is in fact through this very recognition that normative understandings of gender and sexuality can be questioned more fully. By recognizing this, representations of bisexuality and larger cultural understandings of bisexuality more generally can be understood in relation to these gender and sexuality norms, where bisexuality is often used to further marginalize bisexual communities at the cost of maintaining hetero- and homonormative ideals and politics. Through this critical analysis, bisexuals may be able to make spaces for themselves that recognize the issue lies not necessarily in these specific representations but instead in their purposeful constructedness and strategic use. The goal is not to search for a representation of bisexuality that is "natural" or "more legitimate" than those discussed throughout this dissertation, as doing so risks creating a "fixed" image of bisexuality and thereby creating "its own regulatory regime", which would only

work towards stabilizing gender and sexuality norms as opposed to undoing them (Gurevich et al. 236). Instead, by recognizing that there needs to be more diverse representations of bisexuality due to the homogenizing way in which bisexuality is currently and primarily represented as, in addition to also making space for connecting with already existing representations, the ability for these specific representations to be seen as also being legitimate ways to identify and live, especially in their ability to counter dominant narratives of "proper" sexualities, becomes an exciting possibility.

Bisexuality in a Thematic Perspective

Throughout this dissertation I have provided an in-depth, deconstructive critical analysis of representations of bisexuality in popular culture, as framed within an understanding of hetero- and homonormative ideals and the prioritizing and *naturalizing* of monosexuality. A deconstructive reading of these representations allows for the unearthing of ideological powers – these representations are not singular events, nor do they exist unaffected by outside forces and understandings. Further, my use of intersectionality highlights how these representations of bisexuality are always-already in conversation with social, cultural, and political understandings of gender, race, and (dis)ability. As these representations are presented as reliable cultural norms, where bisexuality is represented on *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series in recognizable ways, their presence in popular culture works towards further establishing bisexuality as excessive, deviant, temporary, and generally non-normative in connection to hegemonic understandings of sexuality more broadly. Bisexuality in these representations is continuously framed in similar, often stereotypical ways – bisexuality is deceitful, bisexuality is hypersexual, bisexuality is deviant/monstrous, bisexuality is unstable, and bisexuality is inauthentic. As such, I uncovered many recognizable themes/tropes that are used continuously

to present bisexuality in limited ways. In many of the examples I have detailed, bisexuality and the themes/tropes mentioned exist in unison, where bisexuality cannot be understood without its reference to these themes/tropes, and where these themes/tropes (within these specific examples) help to represent bisexuality (or at least an imagining of bisexuality) more clearly to audiences. My critical analysis of these representations – as being always-already in conversation with the historically rooted understandings of bisexuality that are connected to the normalization of monosexuality – is necessary not only to highlight the specific ways in which bisexuality is represented in popular culture, especially during the 2000s, but also to bring attention to how such representations and understandings of bisexuality have been used to maintain Western hetero- and homonormative ideals, especially in light of the mainstream gay rights movement.

Finally, I provided a glimpse into possible reclamations of these representations through disidentification and productive perversity. In the examples highlighted throughout, bisexuality is presented as a failure of normative understandings of sexuality. But, as J. Halberstam notes, while this failure comes with a plethora of negative stereotypes and effects, failure also "allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development" (Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* 3). Bisexuality (both in terms of the representations discussed and more broadly) can be understood as failing in multiple ways, from the ways in which it is primarily represented as failing (failing monogamy, failing at being truthful, failing at being a long-lasting identity), which then result in bisexuality's apparent failure to subscribe to sexual norms and ideals, effectively failing at being "legitimate". While this failure holds real risks for bisexuals, as being read as illegitimate works to further marginalize and harm bisexuals, it also holds the possibility for building bisexual visibility that is politically separate from

normative understandings of sexuality. In this way, bisexuality and these representations hold the potential to be both positive/negative, legitimate/illegitimate, and harmful/productive.

My examination of these representations not only provides important historicizing of bisexuality's role in contemporary popular culture, but it also highlights the specific, thematic ways in which bisexuality is predominantly illustrated in connection to hetero- and homonormative ideals and politics. This is necessary and critical work for bisexual activism, as well as providing important interventions into queer theory, Cultural Studies, and Media Studies. Further, this work provides an important foundation for future research on bisexuality in popular culture. Specifically, it would be interesting to see how, if at all, representations of bisexuality have changed since *The L Word* and the *Shot At Love* series, especially since the success of same-sex marriage and the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in the United States. Do similar themes continue to follow representations of bisexuality, even if (and this is a big *if*) there is no socially and politically recognizable need to prioritize homonormativity? Is bisexuality still relegated as a queer outcast, an outcast that perhaps remains highlighted in order to maintain current homonormative advances? While answers to these questions are still unknown, this research discussing representations in the 2000s, representations that reflect historically-established understandings of bisexuality as being untrustworthy, dangerous, and generally deviant (see earlier discussions of lesbian distrust of bisexuals in the 1970s/1980s, bisexuality's connection to HIV/AIDS, and bisexuality's role in vampire and "femme fatale" popular culture storylines) in addition to monosexuality's reliance on the othering of bisexuality in order to remain seen as "natural", offer telling hints as to how bisexuality is represented after 2010.

The representations analyzed and the themes in which these representations reproduce may appear to be problematic in that they tend to rely on stereotypes and perpetuate specific

understandings of bisexuality as sexually excessive/deviant. The problematic elements that these representations hold, however, is not due to the representations in and of themselves, but is instead tied to larger, hegemonic understandings of sexuality, understandings that are inherently tied to hetero- and homonormative ideals, where monosexuality is always-already the proper, ideal way to be sexual/romantic. Through this understanding it becomes evident that "[i]f identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subject, a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the ruins of the old" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 203). By recognizing how these representations take shape, a critical understanding of these representations within the current political and social sexual normalizing climate holds the power to not only undo conceptions of normative sexuality, but also allows for these very representations themselves to be read as legitimate possibilities. And so, by articulating how bisexuality is represented in popular culture, and by highlighting the specific and purposeful ways in which these representations are presented, bi-political interventions into dominant understandings of sexuality become a possibility. This is a possibility that not only demands more nuanced representations of bisexuality, in addition to the already existing ones, but that also challenges and works towards breaking down hetero- and homonormative ideologies by situating bisexuality as a productive, exciting, and radical way of being.

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