

SPLITTING THE DIFFERENCE:

Exploring the Experiences of Identity and Community Among Biracial and Bisexual
People in Nova Scotia

by

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Dedications

For Mama, you are forever my inspiration and biggest supporter. You have sacrificed a lot for me to have this opportunity and for that I will always be grateful.

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Abstract

The term ‘bicultural’ has been gaining acknowledgment in sociological and psycho-social research and literature. It refers to identity construction which internalizes of more than one cultural identity by an individual. This thesis uses qualitative methods and a grounded theory research design to explore how bicultural (biracial and bisexual) people navigate identity and community in Nova Scotia. While similar research has been conducted on racial and sexual identities elsewhere, this study looks to fill some of the gaps in bicultural research by specifically dealing with it in an Atlantic Canadian context. Living in a social environment steeped in historical discrimination and political struggle exerts significant influence on the identities and communities of bicultural people in Nova Scotia. The thesis research findings suggest that while social environment often creates divisions and dichotomy when interpreting bicultural identities, bicultural people manage to maintain an integrated sense of self within this environment.

List of Abbreviations

BA	Bachelor of Arts
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
HRM	Halifax Regional Municipality
GSA	Gay Straight Alliance

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Chapter One: Introduction

During the infancy of this master's thesis, I recall a particular meeting with my academic advisors. I had just introduced the idea of comparing the experiences of biracial people and bisexual people in Nova Scotia to see if their methods of navigating identity and community were similar. Being a biracial and bisexual woman myself, I was personally and professionally invested in exploring the experiences of my peers, in order to contribute to both academic debate on the topic and to satisfy a curiosity about the role of "bi-ness" in the social world. I remember distinctly one of the comments that came from that meeting, warning me that trying to compare race and sexuality was like comparing apples and oranges. I agreed, but also realized that my actual intentions were not to compare race and sex so much as to explore experiences "in-between" these identity categories.

While I understand that issues of race and sexuality have been and will continue to be points of interest and contention in society, this project has attempted to bridge some of the gaps in understanding them and create common ground on which people who exist in-between, or on the outskirts of social groups, can conceptualize and understand elements of themselves and the social world. This thesis focuses on how they develop and interpret their personal identity (internalized feelings about themselves), social identity (socially ascribed identities that can reflect or oppose a personal identity) and sense of community (how they view and interact with communities and community members).

In an effort to accommodate the diversity of participants in my research in a respectful way, I will use the terms 'queer' and 'bisexual' to represent individuals who engage in sexual relationships with the same and opposite gender and the term 'biracial' to represent individuals whose ancestry is linked to African or Caribbean groups as well as to Europeans.

To represent biracial people and bisexual people, who both identify with more than one background or orientation, and switch between the two if necessary, I draw on the concept of ‘bicultural’ in this thesis (Kalsi, 2003). ‘Bicultural’ has been gaining acknowledgment in sociological and socio-psychological literature that explores the internalization of more than one cultural identity by an individual (Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, 2005). Authors such as Barber (2002) and Levine (1978) have argued that racial and sexual minorities constitute cultural minorities. Therefore, those who identify as biracial or bisexual can be referred to as bicultural. For the purposes of this project, the term ‘bicultural’ has been used to denote dual affiliation with different racial and sexual groups.

Sociological literature on the subject of biculturalism often focuses on the positive and negative issues associated with managing two (or multiple) identities and explores the complex relationship shared with other factors, such as class, gender, age and social environment (Collins, 2000). Socio-psychological literature on bicultural people focuses more on exploring the internal conflict individuals feel when trying to either keep separate or integrate their cultural identities (Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, 2005). When discussing the experiences of biracial or bisexual people, linear and dichotomous concepts/models are not adequate; bicultural identity is a complex integration of social pressures and messages reinforcing the duality of identity and the process of internalizing a dichotomous social perspective (Collins, 2000).

This thesis will address multiple aspects of this integration by situating literature, research questions, and analysis within the current social context in order to understand the role a dichotomous social climate can play on bicultural identity. The internalized feelings of bicultural people, balancing their self-identity and social-identity, have been explored in-depth to gain insight into the possible struggles associated with belonging to two socially

constructed identity categories. How this balance plays out in community involvement has also been explored within the specific social context of Nova Scotia. It is important to make clear that this thesis does not suggest that categories of race and sexuality are distinct entities, but instead holds the perspective that bicultural people create the reality in which they interpret their identity and community involvement.

Based on interviews with participants who self-identified as biracial or bisexual, I explore how they understand identity and community in Nova Scotia. This thesis specifically examines how research participants conceptualized and understand bicultural identity and what techniques they employ to manage their social worlds. It also explores how perceptions of identity affect, and are affected by, community involvement.

While much of the literature addressing racial and sexual minorities has focused primarily on the larger metropolitan cities of Canada, this project examines the influences of history, politics, social attitudes, identity and community for bicultural people in Nova Scotia. While the literature engaging biracial and bisexual experiences in Canada has grown in recent years, there are still significant gaps in exploring bicultural experience, especially in an Atlantic Canadian context.

This region is important to examine in this respect because of its unique history. Since the 18th century, black populations in Nova Scotia have grown, however the historical segregation of people and groups based on race has contributed significantly to the development of separate identities and communities in the province (Mensah, 2002). Gay and lesbian communities have a more recent history in the province and the presence of these groups has developed more from a shared political and social standpoint rather than the imposed cultural separation based on race. Human rights concerns during the 1960s and 1970s spurred the

formal establishment of gay and lesbian communities in Atlantic Canada and in turn bisexual identities emerged from these groups (McLeod, 1996).

When discussing race there are long-standing assumptions and ideas about race being connected to biology and physical characteristics that perpetuate the perspective that racial identity is fixed or stable (Esterberg, 1997). While such assumptions have been criticized for not taking into account the social, historical and political influences on ideas of race and racial identity, most people accept it as something they are simply born into (Samuels, 2009).

Queerness faces similar problems. As prominent theorist, Judith Butler, argues, the dominant “norm of hegemonic heterosexuality” assumes a natural correspondence between biological sex and social characteristics like gender and desire (Butler, 1990 p. 45).

Individuals, whether they are familiar or not with the plethora of social theory and literature about race and sexuality, interpret and draw conclusions about the social, political and psychological actions of the world in which they live. Unfortunately, the viewpoints presented in the social world often reflect the efforts of dominant groups to preserve the social hierarchies which exist to maintain the status quo (Johnson, 2006).

In this thesis I will explore how bicultural (biracial and/or bisexual) people navigate their identities and community involvement in Nova Scotia. Some propose that the complex lived experience of bicultural people give them a deeper and more holistic insight than people who belong to and participate in one socially accepted category (Meyers, 1997). Bicultural people inhabit a space where the very nature of their identity challenges and disrupts assumptions about race and sexuality. The fluidity of their identity is often labelled as unstable and dismissed as illegitimate (Herdt, 1984).

While exploring community involvement and participation, I was confronted with conflicting ideas about what place bicultural people claim in community membership. One

perspective places bicultural people as outsiders, as 'in-betweens' whose multiple identities are often dismissed by the groups with which they wish to be associated (Pradhudas, 1996). Others propose that bicultural people hold a unique and advantaged position in society, where they enjoy insider status within a number of social groups (Herdt, 1984). Both of these perspectives are based on a) who is seen to hold power in community interactions, b) whether social groups are active in accepting or rejecting individuals, or c) whether bicultural people have the power to choose group membership.

The overall aim of this thesis is thus to engage bicultural individuals' interpretations of their social environments. It is driven by an interest in how individuals derive their understandings of race and sexuality, how identity (whether seen as fluid or stable) interacts with broader communities, and what significant similarities or differences can be gathered from examining the experiences of both biracial and bisexual people.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

An exploration of the experiences of bicultural people and the techniques they employ when navigating identity and community involvement, requires the insights of diverse disciplines. It also requires incorporation of elements of racial and sexual theories, as well as historical and political descriptions of black and queer communities in Canada. I begin this chapter by highlighting the issues and experiences of both racial and sexual minorities in the province of Nova Scotia. Next, I explore various ideas about the hierarchies of social structure that shape oppression and privilege in relation to identity. Drawing on these perspectives, I situate the objective of the thesis within the historical, social and political spheres from which it emerged and is continually engaged.

Biculturalism: A Foot in Both Doors

For the purposes of this thesis, the term bicultural refers, not specifically to people who feel they manage two distinct cultures, but more generally to denote identity and community affiliation with two racial and/or sexual groups. Collins (2000) defines identity as a person's psychosocial relationship to a particular social system. Consequently, the term bicultural identity refers to people who feel a psychosocial relationship with two racial or sexual groups. Other theorists focus on the development and interaction of bicultural people within communities, these perspectives focus on how bicultural people adapt when confronting issues of cultural clashing, group mixing and identity integration (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005).

Creating Context: Nova Scotia

With a population of approximately 913,465 (Census of Canada: Nova Scotia, [CNS] 2006) Nova Scotia is host to cities, small towns and vast rural areas, encompassing diverse social and political attitudes emerging from a rich but sometimes sordid history of racial relations and emerging voices of sexual minorities.

The black population in Nova Scotia has been growing since the 18th century, beginning with domestic slaves, then black Loyalists during and after the American Revolution, Maroons from Jamaica, followed by those fighting against America during the war of 1812 and others who migrated through the Underground Railroad (Sutherland, 1996). According to 2006 census data (CNS, 2006), Nova Scotia's black population is now almost 19,230 in Halifax alone, which is approximately four percent of the city's population and the third largest black population in Canada after Toronto and Montreal (Milan and Tran, 2004).

However, unlike those cities, the segregation of black people in Nova Scotia is an integral part of the history of the province, with segregated schools operating into the 1980's (Shadd, 2003). Black people have also been subjected to a number of discriminatory policies and practices, beginning with the settlement of black Nova Scotians in rural areas where they worked the poorest land for subsistence wages (Sutherland, 1996). Perhaps the starkest illustration of segregation and discrimination was the existence and subsequent demolition of the black community of Africville, established in 1842 and 'relocated' in the 1960s. An historic foundation of the black communities in Nova Scotia, Africville was effectively destroyed (to give way for city planning, such as a garbage dump site) and its inhabitants displaced into housing projects by the city, thus dishonouring racial relations in Halifax, with this, and other, acts of institutional racism (Tettey and Puplampu, 2005). Today, incidents of racism are still common in the province. For example, national attention was garnered in 2010 with a cross burning in front of a mixed-race couple's home (Brooks, 2010).

While issues of segregation and discrimination have characterised racial relations, similar attitudes prevail about the acceptance and integration of other minority groups. Specifically, a strong emphasis on traditional family structures and the preservation of homogenous communities has contributed significantly to discriminatory attitudes toward, and the invisibility of, queer communities in the province (Brotman, Ryan and Meyer, 2006). Human rights concerns during the 1960s and 1970s spurred the development of more distinct gay and lesbian communities and action groups (McLeod, 1996). In 1969, same-sex practices were decriminalized for individuals over the age of 21; however it was not until 1996 that the Canadian Human Rights Act included sexual orientation as prohibited grounds for discrimination (Canadian Heritage, 2011).

The recognition of sexual minorities is therefore, rather recent in Nova Scotia, with the first 'Pride' week celebrated in 1988 (Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project [NSRAP], 2011). It can be said that the history of gay and lesbian communities evolved in Nova Scotia primarily out of this political struggle for recognition. In more recent history, this has fostered the development of a more inclusive queer community, opening its doors to a diversity of orientations; however, queer people are not counted in the census so the actual numbers in the province cannot be measured (Butler, 2007). Given the relatively recent emergence of the queer community in popular Nova Scotian culture, the documentation regarding the actions, spaces and needs of this community is still being developed. However, there are some telling examples that highlight the views of the province, such as the Halifax Regional Police diversity management report, published in 2004, which cited no community diversity initiatives focused on the issues of the queer community and no specific training to assist officers in dealing with gay/lesbian/bisexual/intersex/transgender issues (Butler, 2007). This may be partly due to the decentralization of the queer community. While the North End of

Halifax has become an informal area full of queer friendly spaces and supports (Butler, 2007), the community continues to find its place in the province.

Bicultural Identity: Biracial and Bisexual

The social climate in which people live, work, raise their children, etc. has a profound effect on characteristics like the development of their personal and social identities. The role of identity is one of the key elements not only of this thesis but in gaining understanding of the social, mental and even physical well-being of individuals. By exploring how bicultural people develop and manage their internal self-identity in relation to the often socially constructed external identity given to them by others, we as social scientists can better provide services and support to a diversity of individuals and populations.

Understanding how identity is developed, managed and challenged by individuals and groups can provide insights into whether they view identity as a linear progression or a twisting fluid path influenced strongly by their social surroundings. For example, a history of racism, segregation and exclusion contributes to how racial identities and communities are understood and isolated (Mensah, 2002). Popular language and terminology can be shaped and challenged by sexual identity groups; for example, using the term 'gay' to describe all sexual minorities spurred the development of distinct lesbian and bisexual identities (Kulick, 2000). A person's identity is a core element of who they are and can influence and be influenced by their social environment.

It is important to understand how identity has been conceptualized over time in order to understand the role it plays today. Outlining some of the significant theoretical approaches to identity reveals that many perspectives have been developed in response to existing schools of thought, sometimes in contradictory ways. The characteristics and claims of identity theories differ, depending on the discipline and social context of the time. The major differences are

between theories that assume a developmental basis for identity and those that suggest a social construction.

The influential ‘stages of identity’ theory developed by Erik H. Erikson originated in the psychological/psychoanalytical field and focused on reaching a stable concrete identity (Esterberg, 1997 and Klimstra, Luyckx, Hale, et. all, 2010). Elements of this perspective have been adopted in the social sciences to suggest that a stable identity creates predictability when interacting with others, which, in turn, enables individuals to situate themselves in the social world (Stets and Cast, 2007). While this perspective has been disputed and reworked over time, Erikson’s developmental theory laid the groundwork for many other theories on identity development.

However, when the focus of an identity theory becomes more concerned with how individuals view and interact with their social surroundings than an internal struggle for identity, social scientists often lean toward a more social constructionist perspective, focusing on the fluidity of identity and how social elements influence individuals (Esterberg, 1997). The ‘social constructionist’ model of identity does not focus on the self; in a social constructionist sense, identity is formed through interactions with other people and the social world and is constructed as different labels are attached to people in different social positions that carry with them expectations of behaviour (Goffman, 1959). This perspective also asserts that those labels, expectations, and identities themselves are arbitrary and constantly changing, based on the movement of the social environment (Butler, 1990). Social, political, and historical contexts dictate how people are identified and available identities are based on the language and concepts of the time.

As a result, identities are complex and dynamic and do not lend themselves to being grouped together in exclusionary ways. When categorization is forced on individuals or

groups it can result in resistance or retaliation (Wong, 2002). In the 1960s, for example, homosexual women rejected the term 'gay' and demanded a more inclusive term ('lesbian,' at the time) which reflected their feminist ideologies and experiences (Kulick, 2000). Some theorists suggest that classifying people into hegemonic singular identities is a system that benefits particular groups who desire belonging to a group with limited membership (Butler, 1990); this does not benefit the majority of social groups, but instead focuses on keeping people and groups separate and highlights difference. This is evident in instances of institutionalized racism; for example, segregated schools during the 1800-1900s, where separate schools, distinct curriculum and different teachers were used to exclude black children and restrict them from higher education (Shadd, 2003).

Feminist theory has also contributed to the debates over identity construction and the influence of historical and social factors. bell hooks, for example, explores the intersection of gender and culture in the development of a strong identity for black women (hooks, 1981). hooks suggests that the continuing historical and cultural trauma faced by black women has led to the formation of strong bonds, or solidarity, between them (hooks, 1981). Oppression during slavery, as well as current sexism, racism and discrimination in the social hierarchy has contributed to black women's identity and experiences (hooks, 1981). The effect of discrimination and oppression on identity is two-fold; not only does it separate people from the powerful and privileged groups in society, but also solidifies a strong minority identity based on common struggle and disenfranchisement.

Queer theory has also delved into the issue of identity, adopting a model similar to that of radical social construction with which to explore the formation of sexual identities. Many queer theorists suggest that existing, binary sexual identity categories are exclusionary and limit personal development (Oakes, 1995 and Esterberg, 1997). As with many critiques of

identity, queer theories employ a deconstructive process, breaking identity down into its many personal and social parts in order to gain a more complete understanding of the mechanisms of development and interaction. This deconstruction suits the nature of my thesis well and was a determining factor in my decision to use queer theory as part of the research methodology.

Gender theory also adopts a social constructionist approach to the subject of identity. An influential theorist in the field, Judith Butler, asserts that the terms and labels used to classify people into identity-groups are problematic. The restriction placed on membership to a specific group does not account for the diversity of influences and experiences of its members, but instead attempts to homogenize their identity. Butler argues that identities are not inherently “normal” or “natural”, but rather, have been constructed to appear that way (Butler, 1990).

In the social constructionist interpretation, one particular identity can also be reinforced through the acceptance or rejection of other social categories. The exclusion of “other” social categories reinforces the strict formation of a certain identity, thus creating a binary that operates within a ‘matrix of intelligibility’ that Butler proposes is inescapable (1990, p. 69). Butler also suggests that there is “no place prior to the law which is available and can be retrieved” (1990, p. 70). In other words, identity operates within culture, and a pre-existing ‘reality’ does not exist outside of the experience of culture. For Butler, identities are discursive, and cannot be said to be formed in one specific way. Even subversive identities, which exist outside of the dominant culture, survive within a framework of what is intelligible in culture (Butler, 1990). Therefore, identities cannot exist before they are constructed, a view which departs significantly from that of development perspectives, thereby demonstrating the range and scope of identity development models which exist.

When discussing the specifics of biracial identity, it is important to first talk about race. We have not yet reached a time when North American society is prepared to disregard antiquated assumptions about racial categories, such as “black,” “white,” “Asian,” “Indian” etc. (Fordham, 2010). The physical differences between people have no intrinsic meaning outside of those bestowed by individuals and institutions. Racial categories evolve within historical, political, and cultural contexts that develop and shift over time (Phillips, Odunlami and Bonham, 2007). The social implications of adopting or accepting a racialized identity invoke very real feelings of belonging to a “race” of people who share that identity and racial experiences. This section will outline the complex experiences associated with being biracial, and highlight some of the major concerns facing people who claim this identity.

Theorist Rinaldo Walcott proposed that people find themselves within a “racially conscious society that, wittingly or unwittingly... asks them to fit racially somewhere” (2000, p. 120). It is difficult, if not impossible, to live in the present social environment and not be expected to associate with a particular racial category. Some developmental models suggest that biracial people are pressured to choose one identity, or race, over another, not allowing for multiple identities that include features of both (or multiple) racial heritages (Poston, 1990). According to this model, developing a biracial identity is associated with experiencing different phases of conflict, confusion and guilt, which end in either the choice of one racial identity over another or the slow and difficult task of accepting and presenting a multiracial identity (Poston, 1990).

While vestiges of these older development models are still present in social thought, they are rapidly giving way to more flexible accounts of identity for biracial people. Current models focus on the social aspects of identity, finding that people often shift or manipulate their identity depending on their social situation (Benet-Martinez, et al, 2002, p. 4). These

perspectives have moved away from the notion that identity is chosen, assigned or fixed and assert that it is constructed within the social world (Brunsma, et al, 2002).

A sociological approach to biracial identity, one based on the understanding that racial categories are constructed from social and cultural elements, suggests that the identity biracial people develop is therefore also constructed (Ogbu, 1993). Some theorists contend that common experiences of discrimination or rejection from dominant groups can develop a particular socially aware identity for biracial people, sensitizing them to the nuances between socially constructed categories of race (Shih, et.al, 2007). While this unique position can make biracial people more socially conscious of racial issues, it also places them in a position where they can experience rejection from families and groups as well as a disconnect between their racial and cultural identity (Phillips, Odunlami and Bonham, 2007). This gap can be further widened if biracial people assume a fluid and socially constructed perspective regarding their 'racial' identity, thus alienating them further from people or groups who hold strongly to their tangible interpretations of race.

The nature of how race is perceived and discussed plays a significant role in how identity is formed and interpreted; the social context, in which individuals exist, ends up being a major factor in how they view and navigate the social world. While identity development of biracial people and the social issues they face are well documented in literature from the United States there is little social and theoretical literature exploring the identity and experiences of biracial people in Canada. Another gap in the literature is the problematizing of the dominant perspective in discussions of biracial identity, which tends to focus on the inherent conflict and difficulty biracial people experience. Assumptions in the literature about the problems facing biracial individuals does not reflect the experiences and identity of this group but

instead creates a narrowed understanding that does not highlight the advantages or positives associated with a biracial identity.

While the interpretations and experiences of racialized identity are tied to distinct historical and cultural context, comparisons can be made to the development and navigation of other identities. For instance, like race, a number of social assumptions inform most understandings of sexuality; chief among them is that we live in a sexually dichotomous world where one is either heterosexual or homosexual (Dermer, Smith and Barto, 2010). Despite the fact that sexuality has been debated by countless theorists and researchers since the late 1800s, most ignore identities that exist between exclusive heterosexuality and exclusive homosexuality (Schneider, 1998). Sexual theorists and activists struggle to enlighten the public to the diversity of sexual orientations, preferences and behaviours. However, identities outside the dichotomy are often ignored or pathologized. When recognised as a sexual preference or “tendency,” bisexuality is assumed to reside in the homosexual sphere, based on the assumption that anything not heterosexual can be lumped together in the arbitrary “other” category (Meyer, 2005). Most often, bisexuality is assumed to be a transitional period, a stop-over on the journey from a heterosexual to homosexual identity (Rust, 1993). This assumption has caused bisexuality, and bisexual people’s experiences, to be overlooked, actively ignored and marginalized. (Firestein, 1996).

Queer theory, which offers a more fluid understanding of sexuality and gender, and the ‘queer movement’, which attempts to challenge hetero-normativity¹ by offering more inclusive ways of thinking about sexuality, have played a major role in changing the way we think about sexuality (Peters, 2005). As theorists move further away from a dichotomous

¹ Hetero-normativity is an institutionalized social assumption that heterosexuality is “normal” and that everything outside of this definition of normality is abnormal or deviant (Meyer, 2005).

model, the notion that bisexuality can be anything that exists between exclusive heterosexuality and exclusive homosexuality is starting to take root (Schneider, 1998). It is unclear how long it will take to accept the idea that bisexuality need not only be based on sexual attraction or sexual contact with both the male and female genders, but can also include other aspects of sexuality like fantasy (Schneider, 1998). Moving outside of the dichotomous view of hetero- versus homosexuality has helped to inspire new questions in sexual theories and research about a vast array of sexual identities (Davis, 2005). These identities, in turn, have begun to inform sexual theories and research, challenging the heteronormativity that still exists in many societies (Peters, 2005).

Black and Queer: Exploring Marginalized Community

While crafting this thesis to explore the experiences of identity and community involvement among biracial people and bisexual people, I became increasingly aware that aspects of community reside in a more complex social sphere than that of identity. Community involvement not only includes the feelings and behaviours of individuals but also the complex social dynamics of racialized and sexualized groups. There are many social elements that contribute to the development of a community, such as geographic location, social status, common interests and identity (hooks, 1990). Historically, minority communities have formed in response to discrimination and prejudice (McLeod, 1996). While some marginalized communities develop in isolation, segregated from dominant society, many find solidarity and strength in this; communities founded on segregation can develop strong support systems based on a common struggle to fight issues of oppression and discrimination (Valverde, 1985). Community can thus be used as a mechanism to fight assimilation and maintain the integrity of culture, or alternatively, to foster growth and acceptance of diversity and change (hooks, 1990).

Often the development and existence of communities is positive for those accepted into them. Communities can be places that simulate family, kinship and social networks that provide resources, support and understanding (hooks, 1990). However, communities are not always a place of warm welcomes and common interests. The nature of a community can also be exclusionary, insofar as they create their own boundaries and limitations around who is allowed to enter the group and who is not (McLeod, 1996). A person might seek membership in a given community but not fulfill its particular criteria for inclusion. These individuals may be identified as ‘outsiders’, especially if they do not follow the social rules developed by the community to define appropriate behaviour (Becker, 1973). While some communities are more inclusive than others, bicultural people often find themselves in a position of needing to adapt or manipulate their identity in order to find a community that suits their needs (Kalsi, 2003).

For example, in Nova Scotia, the perceived ‘black community’ has developed as the result of segregation and cultural resistance. During the American Civil War, when abolition was being supported by black and white citizens alike in cities like Toronto, the voices of black Nova Scotians went unheard because of the apathy of their (more politically influential) white neighbours (Sutherland, 1996). Actions (or inactions as the case may be) such as this represented less than subtle hints about the degree of support for black people in the province and spurred the development of segregated, isolated communities. However, historical segregation was not the only reason black communities developed independently. As a form of resistance to cultural assimilation, geographic isolation became a way of maintaining black cultural traditions (Mensah, 2002). However, cultural isolation has caused problems for individuals and communities alike. “Intra-group” discrimination, based on internalized racism, has created sub-groups within the black community, which alienates people from one another.

This form of discrimination is often felt strongly by biracial people who do not fit conveniently into the socially ascribed categories surrounding race (Storr, 1999). This type of exclusion represents a vestige of historical segregation of land, schools, religious and community institutions, which impacts present day social environments, communities and individuals (Walcott, 2000). This effect translates outside the “black/white” community and supports intolerance and an ‘us-versus-them’ mentality in Nova Scotia.

Community development, as a result of struggles against discrimination, unfortunately creates a fractured type of unity; solidarity marred by the scars of oppression and prejudice. Much like the history of racialized communities in Nova Scotia, gay and lesbian communities are grounded in discrimination (McLeod, 1996, p. 122). During the infancy of gay and lesbian community development, the rights of gay and lesbian people were ignored in the political sphere (McLeod, 1996). For example, it was not until 1969 that a bill was passed in the Canadian Human Rights Act to decriminalize same-sex behavior between two consenting adults (Canadian Heritage, 2010). Issues such as this spurred groups to form in order to gain support and expand human rights to include the concerns of gay and lesbian people in Nova Scotia (McLeod, 1996). These political groups began to gain social momentum as well, developing common interest groups, organizations, and newsletters in order to establish themselves and their rights (Firestein, 1996). Unlike racialized communities in the province, the ‘queer community’ was grounded in more organized, politically-driven solidarity, based more on common interest than historical oppression.

When bisexuality began to emerge as a recognized identity within queer communities, bisexual people found themselves caught in the middle of a dichotomous hetero/homo divide, often making it difficult to find a community that would accept their sexual identity (Valverde, 1985). Although the evolution of terminology and activism within the queer

communities in Nova Scotia has opened doors to diverse sexual orientations; connection to the heterosexual sphere keeps many bisexual people on the periphery.

Whereas the foundations of community development may differ, the issues faced by bicultural people in gaining membership to racial or sexual communities can be characterized by their apparently ‘dichotomous’ identities. Feeling and being perceived as belonging to both minority and majority groups can cause uneasy feelings among members. However, bicultural people are discovering ways to exist within the limited scope of these communities and deal with issues of discrimination that arises based on their identities.

Discrimination and Privilege

Discrimination against communities or individuals based on characteristics such as race and sexuality developed out of social hierarchies that thrive on the oppression of one group to elevate another (Johnson, 2006). Forms of oppression that influence who is discriminated against operate on economic, political, and psychological levels; these influences spawn stereotypes that are adopted by others and can become internalized by disadvantaged groups (Heldke and O’Connor, 2004). It is imperative that racism and homophobia be understood as perspectives that become integral to institutions and social structures and therefore, need to be examined in a systematic way (Johnson, 2006).

The oppression of racial groups is expressed through acts of racism and discrimination in overt and covert, intentional and unintentional ways. Racism goes beyond the feelings or behaviour of individuals; rather, it is incorporated into the social environment as “the systemic, institutionalized mistreatment of one group of people by another based on racial heritage” (Heldke and O’Connor, 2004, p.66). Similarly, the oppression of sexual minority groups and individuals manifests itself in the denial of equal legal rights in a number of areas, homophobia often being most obvious in the political/legal arena (Heldke and O’Connor,

2004). Hetero-normativity, assuming heterosexuality as ‘normal’ and homosexuality as ‘other’ or deviant, plays into this systemic oppression which elevates “normal” citizens above the “other”. Hetero-normativity can become internalized among queer individuals and communities manifesting itself in feelings of shame, guilt or anger (Dermer, Smith and Barto, 2010).

For bicultural people, the systems of racial oppression and sexual discrimination often need to be balanced within their identity, given their heritage/orientation in oppressive and oppressed groups. Some biracial people have faced discrimination from both sides of their racial heritage, with neither group accepting their identity as legitimate (Brunsma, et al, 2002). Bisexual people face a similar problem, given that bisexuality is often assumed to be a point in the transition to ‘full’ homosexuality (Meyer, 2005). There is an assumption that biracial and bisexual people are better equipped to deal with issues of discrimination given their unique (two-sided) social position (Shih, et al, 2007; Peters, 2005), however this is not always the case.

Bicultural people, residing in the racial and sexual sphere, hold a unique position that forces them to balance issues of discrimination and privilege based on the way their racial and sexual identities are viewed in the social environment. While literature on biracial and bisexual people often focuses on their ‘minority status’, it is important to keep in mind that elements of their majority status (white or straight in this case) can also play a significant part in their identity and community involvement. While bicultural people may also identify with and experience a host of additional characteristics relating to their religion, mobility, socio-economic status, gender, age, etc., it is the preoccupation of society with issues of race and sexuality that can lead to a continuing focus on the purportedly dichotomous aspects of their identities. However, it is important to remember that the experiences of bicultural people are

influenced by a host of personal and social dynamics occurring on individual and institutional levels.

That being said, one element of institutional or structural dynamics is privilege. Privilege can be categorized into two main types: “unearned entitlements,”— that is, things of value that should be available to all people, such as feeling safe in the workplace, that are sometimes restricted to certain groups—and “conferred dominance”— which gives one social group power over another (Johnson, 2006, p. 23) In order for one social group to be privileged, in other words, one or more groups need to be disadvantaged in some way (Johnson, 2006). Privilege is also characterized by the ability to deny or ignore the advantages and opportunities one is afforded (McIntosh, 1988). Thus privilege can be unseen by those who possess it; this lack of recognition contributes to the continuing (albeit sometimes unintentional) oppression of others (McIntosh, 1988).

People generally do not like to be reminded that they belong to a privileged group and benefit from the oppression of others (Johnson, 2006). It is critical however, that those individuals appreciate that membership in a privileged or dominant group allows people access to the privileges that particular group holds, whether they want them or not (Dermer, Smith and Barto, 2010). Perhaps, in part because of this desire to deny privilege, the fact that bicultural people might experience both privilege and discrimination has not been explored. More research is needed to fully understand the role privilege plays in the identity and lives of bicultural people. As Dermer, Smith and Barto explain, “because systems of privilege center on dominant groups, those who aren’t included have reason to feel invisible, because in an important social sense they are.” (2010, p. 102). Bicultural people do fit into this invisible area, but it is also possible to imagine that with more research, discussion and debate, they may not remain invisible for long.

Conclusion

A review of the literature on identity, race and sexuality has led to the formation of the following research questions, which guide this thesis:

1. How do bicultural people view the existence (or not) of defined communities in Nova Scotia?
2. How do bicultural people conceptualize their racial and sexual identity?
3. How do biracial and bisexual identities affect, and how are they influenced by, community?
4. How do bicultural individuals feel they fit within communities, or not? Do they develop their own?

Exploration of the historical context of Nova Scotia served to develop a clear foundation for developing the question guide and the analytic framework. The formation of ‘black’ and ‘queer’ communities in the province developed as a result of discrimination and as a way to protect the interests of particular social groups. Understanding the social environment in which the research participants live was imperative to formulating research questions that would get to the root of how participants conceptualized and navigated their identity and community involvement.

Examinations of identity models and specific issues affecting biracial and bisexual people not only revealed changes occurring in these fields of study but highlighted key issues, such as legitimacy, acceptance and prejudice, influencing the identity of bicultural people.

Literature on the topic of community formation and membership informed my analysis of how participants’ perceived community and the role their identity played in community membership. Similarly a review of literature exposed a number of issues bicultural people may experience with regards to feeling rejected or ostracized by particular communities or social groups.

Overall, the literature review was integral in grounding my research questions and the development of interview questions and also helped shaped my analysis of the experiences of bicultural identity and community in Nova Scotia.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this thesis was to explore how bicultural (biracial or bisexual) people integrate their personal and social identities while navigating their involvement in different communities. In particular, my objective was to gain an in-depth understanding of identity from the perspective of bicultural people. Exploring the interactions between different bicultural identities and community involvement in Nova Scotia provided rich data on these under-studied populations. To achieve this, I employed methods that evoke the stories of participants and highlight the similarities and differences between them.

Definition of Terms

In order to adequately explain the experiences reported by the participants in this study, I had to reach some conclusions about how to reference racial and sexual terminology, which was discussed using a range of terms and language. Therefore, when referring to my participant's identities, I have used the terms bicultural, biracial and bisexual. These terms were chosen as a reflection of the terminology and language used in current relevant literature. While other terms, such as 'multiracial' and 'queer', were used by participants during interviews, I believe these terms (out of the interview context) were too broad for the purposes of this thesis, which focuses on exploring the specific issues of bi-identity and community involvement.

Qualitative Method and Research Design

For the purposes of this research, I chose to employ qualitative methods to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the narratives of bicultural participants, how they felt about being bicultural in Nova Scotia, the scope and flexibility of their identities, and the issues that they faced in terms of community acceptance and discrimination. Qualitative research methods encourage participants to express, in their own words, how they understand, account for and

act within particular social situations (Miles and Huberman, 1994). As a qualitative researcher, my role is to facilitate the generation of information about the everyday lives of individuals while leaving their unique perspectives as unaltered as possible. Marshall and Rossman (1995) describe qualitative methods as particularly valuable for exploring relationships and processes. This approach was well suited to the purpose of my research, which was to explore the experiences of identity and community among bicultural people, as well as the techniques they employ to navigate their unique social environment.

My research design borrowed from the methodological principles of ‘grounded theory’, originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Fundamentally, this approach involves an inductive qualitative methodology, used to develop theory through the exploration of individuals’ experiences (Glaser, 2002). This approach draws theoretical understandings from raw data, to speak to current issues and the context of the research (Glaser, 2002). Doing so allows theory to grow with the data, as well as a tailored analysis that reflects the historical, social and cultural context of the project. There have been a number of variations of grounded theory; the perspective used in this thesis follows Straus and Corbin (1990) and includes a limited review of the literature to provide context, direct the sampling process, and facilitate questions.

Without the limitations of a defined theoretical approach, data analysis can lead to the emergence of theory that is literally grounded in participants’ experiences. Like Guba (1990), the flexibility of my design was evident in its emergence throughout the research process, which included minor modification to discussion questions and the interview process, in response to my interaction with research participants and after hearing their perspectives.

The research design of this project focused on creating a comfortable and personable environment for potential research participants. Given the sometimes sensitive nature of race and sexuality, it was important to create an interview guide that allowed participants some control over

how much personal information they shared, while still encouraging them to provide enough detail for the purpose of analysis.

The interview questions asked participants to draw out their perspectives on four main topics: 1) the social climate of Nova Scotia, 2) views on identity, 3) feeling about community and 4) experiences of discrimination and privilege. The questions and guide were intended to reveal not only the personal experiences of participants but also highlight insights into their interpretations of the social world and techniques they used to navigate social interactions. While the experiences and perspectives of the participants varied, I believe that they all felt a considerable degree of comfort and safety during the discussions (Appendix A – Interview Guide and Questions).

Employing a qualitative approach also required that I, as a researcher, reveal my personal connection to the topic of study. Being a queer woman of colour has inevitably influenced this thesis. It was the motivation for selecting the topic and gave me a greater appreciation of the need for research, of this kind, in Nova Scotia. I was open about my racial background and orientation with participants who asked me about it directly and I believe that those who did were more comfortable discussing their experiences with a peer who could “relate” to them. In order to avoid research bias when conducting the interviews I did not stray from the interview guide and focused on listening to and encouraging participants to share. I employed a similar strategy during data analysis, when I used detailed coding in order to ensure that the findings reflected the participants’ views and not my own.

During this process, I immersed myself in the data by transcribing all interviews and returning to the literature to inform the coding process. This allowed me to integrate literature with the personal bicultural experiences of participants. The codes used for data analysis (Appendix C – Code List) incorporated significant personal and social issues outlined in the literature and highlighted during participant interviews. The codes also reflected the main research question and

focused on issues of identity, community involvement and techniques of social navigation. Data were broken down into numerous codes and then re-grouped according to the issues and experiences most relevant to the research question and participants.

While the research design drew primarily from grounded theory, I also incorporated elements from relevant theoretical perspectives. In particular, I integrated components of critical race theory to explore participants' stories of discrimination, changing social structures, and pressures related to race (Parker and Lynn, 2002). As well, I adopted elements of queer theory that suggest sexual identity is culturally and historically constructed; incorporating perspectives that challenge the notion of "normal sexuality" and explored how this idea informed the interpretation of bisexual experience (Watson, 2005). Although critical race and queer theory informed biracial and bisexual experience respectively, several elements of each resonated with *all* participants.

This thesis set out to explore the experiences of identity and community among bicultural people in Nova Scotia and in doing so, gain insight into the personal experiences and social perspectives of people who often exist in-between established norms. Interviews with the participants were informed by relevant literature but also remained fluid in order to allow participants freedom to discuss their own views. Data analysis was undertaken with detailed tools in order to avoid researcher bias during development of the findings and to ensure that the participants' voices were 'heard'. While this thesis explored issues of race and sexuality (or other heritage or orientation backgrounds), the voices of the participants often placed those issues in the background, allowing for a unique exploration into the 'bi-ness' of bicultural experience and how this personal/social position plays into the structures of the social world.

Participant Selection

Two methods of recruitment were used to find bicultural participants for this project: posters and snowball sampling. Posters were placed at different locations around Halifax, including university campuses, local cultural centers, and organizations associated with racial or sexual groups, such as Venus Envy and the George Dixon Center. The posters provided the inclusion criteria (individuals who identified as 'biracial' or 'bisexual' and had lived in Nova Scotia for five years or more) as well as project and contact information. Interestingly however, this form of recruitment did not yield any responses from potential participants.

Given the lack of response, I implemented a second recruitment method, snowball sampling, which was much more effective. Snowball sampling is a somewhat informal method of gaining access to specific participants through social networks and word of mouth (Babbie and Benaquisto, 2002). This form of sampling was successful in recruiting 10 people to participate for this study. I began my recruitment process by contacting biracial participants that I had interviewed for my BA honours thesis in 2006 and bisexual people who I had worked with on LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) projects in Halifax. Through these contacts, I was able to set up interviews and then asked those participants to direct me to other interested individuals.

In total, 10 interviews were conducted with biracial and bisexual men and women from Nova Scotia. While recruitment was extended to the entire province, my participants all lived in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) at the time of the interviews. I did not exclude participants who had moved to the province from other parts of Canada, but limited participation to individuals who had lived in Nova Scotia for at least five years. This inclusion criterion was designed to ensure that the participants were aware of, and had experience with, the social context of the province. As well, in order to assure that participants' experiences

were grounded in an ‘emic’ (insider’s) understanding of the social context of Nova Scotia, it was crucial that all participants had lived in the province for at least the past five years.

Research Participants

The participants included five people who identified as biracial, four bisexual and one participant who identified as both biracial and bisexual. The participants ranged in age from 18 to over 50 years old and included three men and seven women. Participants were categorized based on self-identification with a particular group or groups.

The term biracial refers to a “person whose parents are of two different socially designated racial groups” (Root, 1995, p. 9). For the purposes of this research, ‘biracial’ refers to individuals of African or Caribbean and European ancestry; this racial heritage was chosen to reflect the racialized historical and cultural environments of Nova Scotia (Mensah, 2002). The term ‘bisexual’ refers to individuals who identify as having a sexual/romantic desire for both women and men, and who have adopted a bisexual or queer identity (Firestein, 1996). The term bicultural is used when referring to the participants as a collective group.

Data Collection

All 10 interviews were semi-structured, lasting approximately one-to-two hours. Before each interview took place, the participant was asked to review and sign a consent form, which included project and contact information (Appendix B). Participants were informed that the interviews would be conversational in nature and that they would be encouraged to discuss their feelings and experiences in whatever manner they felt most comfortable. The interviews were conducted at locations that were accessible and private for both the participants and me.

The interview guide (Appendix A) was developed from the original research questions outlined for this project. The open-ended interview questions and probes were tailored to facilitate a conversational-style interview, creating a relaxed and comfortable environment for

both the participants and me. The questions were phrased using sensitive and appropriate language and were designed to elicit comprehensive and detailed responses from participants. The comfort and freedom that participants expressed in their interviews helped me to gather rich data that reveals a great deal about the experiences of bicultural people in Nova Scotia.

Ethics

A proposal for this study was submitted and approved by the Dalhousie Ethics Committee before data collection began. All processes were undertaken in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on research involving human subjects.

Data Management and Analysis

The data management system created for this project was designed to maintain the confidentiality of participants and to facilitate data analysis. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim by myself. Following this, the transcripts were “cleaned” of all identifying information (names, employment, schools, etc.) to ensure confidentiality. The cleaned interviews were kept in two forms, electronically on my personal, password-protected computer and in print, on which conceptual/theoretical patterns and analytic codes were noted. The paper copies of cleaned transcripts were kept for the duration of data analysis and then shredded, leaving only the password protected transcripts for reference.

In addition to answering my initial research questions, exploring how bicultural people navigate identity and community, this study sought to gather information that might contribute to the development of theory and literature relating to the distinct identity issues faced by bicultural people.

After interviews were transcribed, the coding and categorization of the data were initially undertaken by hand, and then transferred to more accessible electronic documents, where they were prepared for further analysis. Preliminary coding divided the transcripts into five

categories: social context of Nova Scotia, terminology and language, identity, community involvement and discrimination. The coding process was the same for both biracial and bisexual interview transcripts, documenting similarities and difference with a focus on participants' methods of identity integration and navigating community involvement. Surprisingly, the code for discrimination yielded an additional code for privilege, which became an unexpected but integral part of the project.

Upon completing the interviews, I delved into the major themes that emerged. Social context emerged as a significant issue affecting all participants; the influence of racism and homophobia in Nova Scotia was an important feature in shaping their identity. Exploring the racial and sexual terminology that participants used revealed how labels have evolved and changed over time, creating generational differences in what is considered politically correct. Community involvement was not a significant issue for the participants, but interviews still provided some material to analyze the characteristics of majority versus minority communities and the role it played in identity. The most surprising and interesting theme, for me as a researcher, was revelations about the role that privilege plays in the structure of the social world and the lives of bicultural people.

Chapter Four: A Place to Belong

The findings detailed in this chapter outline participants' responses to questions about how they navigate their bicultural identity and community affiliations in Nova Scotia. The open-ended nature of the interview questions permitted the participants to draw from their personal lives as well as from the experiences of their peers and families.

Although the findings in this chapter are organized around the original research questions, additional themes that emerged during data collection are also included. This chapter begins by situating the findings within the social context of Nova Scotia. Next, I report participant responses to questions of identity, with a focus on self-representation and social influences on development and construction. This is followed by a description of the participants' experiences related to community with emphasis on acceptance, rejection and community membership. Finally, issues of discrimination as well as privilege are discussed.

Identity and Social Context: Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia (specifically HRM) was chosen as the site to conduct this research based on literature, which suggests that this province is a unique social environment to explore issues of race, sexuality, community development and membership. The findings of this study support the literature by suggesting that Nova Scotia, as a racialized and sexualized social context, is unique compared to other places in Canada.

According to the participants, Nova Scotia has well-defined racial and sexual communities, although they also acknowledged other communities within the province with well-defined characteristics, such as class, geography, spirituality, ethnicity and political affiliation. When discussing communities, participants used broad terms such as the "black and queer community" and often discussed them in relation to their location relative to

Halifax; for example, one participant talked about Preston (a small isolated community outside of Halifax) as being the most recognizable “black [neighbour]hood”. The ‘credentials’ required to gain membership in these communities were seen to be more difficult to acquire in Nova Scotia, as many communities are relatively small, close-knit and/or isolated. As one participant expressed, “I’m from Preston, and you know, we kind of keep to our own. If you’re not from the community or have family or whatever, you don’t go there” (James).

Participants discussed a number of forms communities took in the province outside of racial and sexual definitions. One participant discussed his involvement with a very active artist/performer community in Halifax; others mentioned a community of university students and the distinction between urban and rural communities in the province. However, the community recognized as the oldest and closely woven into the fabric of Nova Scotia was the ‘black community’. Participants felt that the province’s history and heritage played an important role in shaping how the black community developed and the characteristics associated with their membership in it. Surprisingly, this was not always based on skin colour but also on where individuals grew up. The biracial participants were not alone in understanding the history of race and racism in Nova Scotia. In response to a question about how communities are defined, a queer participant said, “...the African Canadian community, because it is so old and has been here for such a long time, is very much a part of the culture of Nova Scotia, very much a part of the city” (Cleo).

Participants defined the ‘queer community’ in Nova Scotia as being more recently developed and relatively small; it is centred on shared interests as well as social and political views. The close-knit nature of the community was seen as both positive and negative. One participant noted, “I definitely think there is a gay community... I mean it is great to have a close-knit group of friends but I mean, a lot of problems come with that too, because of dating

and stuff” (Vita). She expressed frustration in trying to navigate a social circle where potential partners had often had relationships with her friends or acquaintances, making it difficult to keep her relationships a private matter within the community.

All of the participants agreed that there are well-defined racial and sexual communities in the province and are communities that are more distinct than others that they have experienced in other cities and provinces. As one participant observed, “I know we [people from Nova Scotia] have all this nostalgic pride about where we came from and why; there is another part that is so un-accepting and so negative and they don’t open their doors to people” (Shanna).

How People Talk About Identity Labels

The participants frequently discussed the use and potential misuse of terminology, language, and labels used to denote racial and sexual identity. The data from interviews shows a substantial diversity with respect to opinions about what terms should be used and why.

While two of the participants found that the label of ‘biracial’ and ‘bisexual’ suited them, the remaining participants found these terms overly exclusive and limited in fully describing their identity. One participant considered the term bisexual to be “an out-dated term, I think it is really stigmatized and that is why people really avoid using it” (Cleo). Another participant explained that the term biracial made her “feel like it is better than some things people could call me, but I am not just two races, I’m a bunch. So I prefer to say I am multi-racial or avoid picking a label if possible” (Jasmine). Most of the participants talked about their desire for terms that were broader and more inclusive; terms such as ‘multiracial’ and ‘queer’ emerged as better suited to the personal identities and orientations of the participants.

Nevertheless, all of the participants talked about how impractical it was to avoid the use of these terms in everyday life. At some point in all of the interviews, participants revealed that others in their social environment had labelled them as biracial or bisexual or some other

racial or sexual category at one time or another. “It’s just like, ‘oh you need to file me into a certain folder’” (Sarah).

For most of the participants, this type of social labelling was met with frustration and a desire to educate others about the construction of identity. As one bisexual participant explains,

“I had to do a lot of educating with friends that were my age, about my identity and choice of partners. With the younger ones... they will ask questions, there is a curiosity that I don’t find with the older ones” (Cleo).

Seven of the ten participants talked about how they often chose to acquiesce to the limiting terms people used to describe their identity, in order to facilitate real world conversations about race and sexuality. As one participant described,

“I have never been personally attached to calling myself something, but I feel that it is difficult to go through the world without the labels. Saying that, I do use general categories like biracial, multiracial, and woman of colour to describe myself. It is just easier for people; they don’t know how to operate without the labels” (Jasmine).

The participants understood that most people are not intentionally ignorant of “politically correct” terms. Often people are simply not exposed to the diversity in language used to describe racial and sexual groups. One participant stated that, “often people from another generation don’t understand why something is inappropriate; things were different for them so they don’t always understand where you are coming from” (Rebecca). More than half of the participants (six) discussed changes in language and terminology over time. One participant talked about how terms that were once considered appropriate, are now considered disrespectful. “...[C]oloured and half-breed were things people used to say and at the time, those were not the most inappropriate terms that could be used. So things are changing, language will always change over time” (Jasmine).

While terminology and labels were often a point of frustration for the participants, they understood that the social world dictates the language of the time; participants were both patient and hopeful that, as the province played host to more diversity, terminology would become more sophisticated and nuanced.

Conceptualizing Identity

When participants were asked what identity meant to them, their answers varied, both between bicultural groups and within them; demonstrating that racial and sexual identities are highly complex. Regardless of how participants preferred to identify themselves, they said identity played a critical role in their lives; whether constructive or destructive, it represented a dimension of their lives that was shaped by both social and interpersonal forces.

“Identity is something that is really that important to me, but I understand that it is not for everyone... It is very important for me to be a part of a community because it makes me feel like a part of something and is a way to share experiences. I have invisible identities that are not visible from the surface, but challenge the assumptions people can make about me.” (Lily)

“I think it gives me a sense of where I fit in the world. So by that I mean how likely I am to be accepted or rejected at any given time or place, with any group of people. So having an identity gives me some... it does two things... So on one hand it gives me some sense of entitlement, with certain groups and places. And on the other hand it defiantly tells me I’m not entitled to that, I’m disentitled, I’m disenfranchised. So yeah, for me identity, when I think about it, it is a sense of where I am accepted and I am not accepted. And how am I going to navigate between that, in that world.” (Shanna)

Although the notion of identity as a form of connection was reported by both biracial and bisexual participants, the feeling of being connected by heritage or family history was specifically discussed by biracial participants.

Three of the participants talked about identity as a means by which they connect to others like themselves as well as providing them with a sense of history and heritage. Some participants actively sought these connections (e.g. joining community groups or exploring their heritage), while others felt as though they had little control over the forging of these

connections, as groups or communities actively sought to include them because of their identity. One participant talked about how her identity has been shaped by her heritage:

“... recently, I have been doing a lot of research on my family and I have been able to track four generations of my family... So I have this identity of being black, which has changed dramatically because now I feel my history. It’s not just, I’m not only black, I’ve got this history behind me.” (Shanna).

One of my youngest participants explained that she became involved with the queer community in Halifax “because I had a girlfriend that was really involved. I knew everyone in the gay community that was my age, I had them on Facebook and MSN and we knew everyone” (Vita).

With the exception of one person, all of the participants talked about how they understood identity as changing over time; a fluid construction deeply shaped by experiences. The single dissenting participant, a biracial man in his thirties, discussed how he identified exclusively as a black man and felt very secure in that identity, regardless of his physical appearance. “I’m black, always have been, always will be” (James). According to James, his identity was established when he was very young and reinforced by family, friends and his community throughout his life. He held fast to his identity as a black man and viewed identity in general as something that was decided and then defended.

“You can’t go around changing who you are, you know like when people try to be something they’re not, acting like they don’t remember where they came from or who their people are” (James)

James’ expression of identity was one of the most passionate and inflexible, as the remaining participants, both biracial and bisexual, did not express the same sense of resolute identity. While articulating diversity with respect to opinions about the utility and necessity of identity, the other participants agreed that their identity developed over time and most agreed that it continued to develop throughout their lives.

“Identity is a journey, not a destination” (Shanna).

“It is something that has developed over time, just like many other parts of me, my style, and education, confidence, they are all tied together and constantly evolving” (Jasmine).

Identity, therefore, was predominantly a way for the participants to situate themselves within the social world, to feel connected to others and have a sense of self. While all but one of the participants felt that their identities were continually changing and developing, all agreed that it was a combination of their family, peers and social environment which contributed to the shaping of their identity.

Influence and Development of Identity

All of the participants identified the perspectives and behaviour of family and peers as a major influence on the construction of their identity. One participant noted in regard to his peers that “... your friends who are close to you, whether they are gay or not, try and make you more comfortable and understand.” (Justin). Another participant explained how her identity encompassed more than just her racial background.

“My dad was always very positive about his racial heritage... we had family friends with different cultural backgrounds and sexual orientations and he always focused on diversity as a good thing. And growing up being around all of that influenced my identity for sure” (Jasmine).

However, while family and peers were often cited as a source of support and guidance, they could also challenge participants’ identity. According to the youngest participant,

“I mean it depends on the family of course, but I mean with my family it is like they are all pro-gay. But they don’t want to think that I am bisexual, that I am any part of that. And they are very uncomfortable even though they are not homophobic.” (Vita)

Another participant explains how her family dealt with issues of race,

“I think there was more of an attempt to not talk about it or acknowledge it... I don’t remember there being many discussions in my household about race. I feel like they didn’t really prepare me for what to expect being a biracial woman” (Rebecca).

Influences that shape identity did not only come from people in participants' lives but also from social messages and representations they were exposed to over time. Cleo, a participant from a rural background, expressed how the messages she received played a major role in shaping her sexual identity...

“If you are a feminine queer person, it is not that easy and you have to grow up in a very privileged environment to be allowed, at age nine, to say you like the little girl down the street or the little tomboy down the street. And because those choices are almost invisible, that male partners end up being part of that narrative and you are hard pressed to find femme dykes who have not had male partners in their past unless they grew up in a very privileged, educated environment where they were allowed to be who they were in those very formative years.” (Cleo)

The issue of representation was mirrored in my discussions with Rebecca, a biracial female participant, who also expressed that there had been few representations for her to relate to as a young woman. This encouraged her to seek out peer groups with similar identities and experiences, as a way to develop her own sense of self. As she says:

“When I moved up to Halifax, I was changing myself and my own identity. This was the first time I really had a lot of other black females around me. I remember starting to spend a lot of time with them and talking about my own racial background and heritage... wanting to be a part of that peer group was a longing I had that I didn't realise” (Rebecca)

When asked about the process of their identity development, six out of the ten bicultural participants suggested that a major part of this development involved “growing a thicker skin” (Jasmine). Most of the participants (with the exception of one) talked about how they had learned a great deal about feeling included or excluded at an early age. These experiences contributed to this “thicker skin” and a heightened understanding, and sometimes sensitivity, to issues of identity.

“As you grow up, you just kind of come to terms with the fact that there will always be people who don't like you or accept you. There was a time when it bothered me that I wasn't a part of that group [black community] but I got over it and found people who were a better fit” (Jacob).

The influences on the identity of participants, while varied, showed a common thread of peer, family, and social messages as major contributors. The participants experienced stages of influence, changing and developing as they moved through their lives, culminating in the growth of a ‘thicker skin’ or more refined perspective on the nature and importance of these influences. This developed perspective directly relates to the way in which participants embodied their identity and expressed it in the social world.

Expression of Identity

Biracial and bisexual participants understood the embodiment and expression of social identity to be based on different characteristics. Biracial participants were more likely to report that their social identity depended on their physical appearance. Jasmine, a biracial woman in her twenties, described herself as “having a visible identity”. This idea of having a visible identity (even if it did not correspond to the participant’s self-identity) was echoed by three of the other biracial participants. In this case, visibility involved aspects of skin colour (lightness/darkness), hair texture and facial features that identify an individual with a particular racial group. While experiences of visibility differed among the participants, a theme emerging from most of the interviews with biracial participants was the notion of being *instantly* visible as either an insider or an outsider.

“In a lot of community settings and a lot of those situations, there are some times when you know, it is okay to be there, but there are other times when I don’t know if I am too light... But you know at some point, I am not going to be wanted and I can’t be who I am”
(Shanna)

Bisexual participants experienced different issues related to appearance and visibility; if they did not express their identity in an overt and external way, it would often go unnoticed. Consequently, they found distinct ways to express their identity, as one of participants explains.

“I have been told that it [identity] has a lot to do with the energy I give off. That I have a very strong feminine energy and that it doesn’t really matter what I am wearing, it just tends to come off me. Sometimes, I highlight that with particular articles of clothing that are signs or signifiers that refer to that identity, but mostly, I would say that it is an internal vibe that comes out.” (Cleo)

Bisexual participants also discussed how their “invisible identity” often forced them to take responsibility for disclosing that identity to others. The relative comfort participants experienced in telling others about their sexual identity depended on the safety of the social environment; a safe space being “a place where you feel more free to be yourself; where there are like-minded people who will accept you” (Lily).

In contrast, one participant explained how “coming out” in high school was an awkward experience.

“I mean, there is a GSA (Gay Straight Alliance) at most every school but still people you know, you feel safer talking to them there but... even though there are teachers that come in I feel awkward them knowing. Even if they’re non-judgemental, I just don’t feel comfortable with them knowing” (Vita)

The issue of visible and invisible identity was a topic that caused many of the participants’ frustration and discomfort. Either they were automatically categorized based on their physical appearance, or their identity was overlooked, placing them in the often awkward position of disclosing their identity to others. These issues of visibility among my bicultural participants have had a distinct effect on the role of racial and sexual communities in their lives.

Identity Interactions with Community

When participants were asked about community, their stories of involvement and membership reflected a number of different experiences. The key themes they discussed were finding an identity reflected in others, sharing common interests and navigating diverse community affiliations.

A number of the biracial and bisexual participants explained that the role of community is to provide a way to relate to others, where they felt safe and had common experiences.

“I think it means that you can, you can find yourself in other people. Like whatever identity you want to have you can find yourself, you can see yourself in other people. So people can find comfort in that” (Sarah).

“I wish that we had a community. Of people that are like minded where we could just do the things people do’ worship together, eat together, play together, sit around and have debates together. Study together, build a home with, be able to say good morning and not feel weird. And some people have this, but not everyone” (Shanna).

Other participants rejected the idea of being involved in communities based on racial or sexual identity, choosing rather to be involved in `voluntary` communities that were based on common interests and activities. “I guess in terms of community, I got involved with sports teams and that brought me a sense of community” (Sarah). “I have been a student, a musician, as much as I am not proud of it, I was an addict for a while and have felt a sense of community in all those times in my life” (Jasmine).

The remaining participants’ relationship with communities of identity can best be described as ‘navigation between two worlds’. These participants moved in and out of communities over time, in an attempt to balance their identities and become accepted. These ‘navigators’ discussed the difficulty that sometimes arose in trying to bridge what could be two complex and opposing sides of themselves.

“Kind of a foot in both doors I guess, I am doing my own thing but if an issue comes up with somebody being gay or something in the news, I make sure that my voice is out there and that I’m supportive and that people hear me” (Vita).

“I will slide back and forth between the two communities; I have been here long enough and have heterosexual friends that mostly go to straight bars and activities like that, so I do go back and forth. In terms of, well I was an unusual straight woman when I existed in that world. So, I think the biggest issue that I had, or faced in the beginning was because I was so distinctly feminine that I think there was... well I think it was looked down upon, by both areas” (Cleo).

While the participants had varied reasons for seeking out or becoming involved in particular communities, the desire to be a part of something was a common theme in all the interviews. The underlying explanation, of what motivated their community participation, was to find a place where they felt understood or accepted.

Divergent Communities

In discussions of defined communities in Nova Scotia, participants tended to focus on racial (“black/white”) and sexual (“queer/straight”)² communities. However, they discussed the complexities of defining communities and specifically, the difficulties in defining majority communities (i.e. white and straight). Participants felt that these majority communities were too broad to truly be considered a community and the terms (white and straight community) were used primarily as a way to draw comparison to smaller or marginalized groups.

“Well you know how white people are, always trying to keep a brother down” (James)

“I think in a lot of ways there is a dichotomy, which is beginning to change. But up until recently it was very much seen as the gay community and the straight people, and where does everyone else fit” (Justin)

Participants discussed the ease with which these majority communities could be criticized because they did not represent a defined group of people and often centered on generalities and stereotypes. As one participant described,

“It is like the us and them scenario, no matter who “we” are, it is like the white community is the “them” always... it is easy to blame “them” for a variety of problems and be critical of what they do because it is not going to offend people in the same way” (Jasmine).

While the perspectives of both biracial and bisexual participants were similar when they discussed the differences and issues surrounding majority and minority communities, these

² While perceptions regarding the appropriateness of terminology to describe communities varied among participants, I have chosen to use the terms (black/white) and (queer/straight) as these terms were used by all of the participants at one point or another.

discussions diverged when they explored issues affecting membership. One of the major differences that arose between the biracial and bisexual participants was the issue of partners and how selection of a partner influenced their community membership. Among bisexual participants, the actual gender as well as the gender presentation of their partners had a significant impact on their acceptance and inclusion in the queer and straight community.

“Well I think definitely that having a male partner and being in a queer community is definitely problematic. Again, as I said your politics are suspect and of course in a straight community and having a female partner, again, your politics are suspect... But in terms of a sense of community, I mean queer communities by definition want you to have some queerness. And I have talked to other people who identify as queer who have no partners and there seems to be a suspicion of their politics too, not necessarily by other people but by the community at large” (Cleo).

Participants that had relationships with both men and women talked about how they experienced hostility from both communities and felt they had been labelled as traitors for not ‘picking a side’.

“There are a lot of problems with the term bisexual; there has been a lot of bi-phobia, in the queer community and the straight community. In the straight community people are homophobic, or make the assumption that you can still go back to men... in the queer community is it kind of the same, that you are not really a part of our community or that you can chose to not face discrimination if you chose not to. Kind of like a traitor to the community – but I joke about that” (Lily).

When asked if their identity had an influence on their community membership, with the exception of one, all of the participants felt that, at some point, they had been in a position of balancing two worlds.

“Because there are certain biracial people who very closely associate with both and don’t want to just acknowledge the black because they are hurting their white family members, so I know some people balance that issue” (Rebecca).

James was the exception to this sense of being “in-between”, as he was raised in a small, relatively isolated black community where he worked and lived always feeling that he was

fully a member of his community. "... a lot of people talk bad about my community, but that is where I was raised and where my people are, it is my home. I don't need to go looking for something else". (James).

During the discussions of community, participants focused on two major issues. The first was the underlying reasons they sought out or participated in communities, which were often directly connected to the identity of the participants or more diverse common interests. Secondly, participants discussed communities in relation to others in the social environment, comparisons between majority and minority communities, issues of discrimination from other groups and the underlying value associated with being a member of a community.

Discrimination and Advantage

It is not surprising that all of the participants in my study experienced some type of discrimination in their lives, as racism and/or homophobia occurred both within and outside racial and sexual communities. Discrimination was sometimes overt (e.g. name calling), but typically took covert forms, such as gossip and "just a feeling you get sometimes when you walk into a room, like everyone is staring and judging" (Jasmine). One of the bisexual participants explains that "there is still a lot of bi-phobia out there. That is something that everybody out there, well, people that are queer, have dealt with and experienced" (Justin).

The idea of possessing a 'legitimate' identity was experienced differently between biracial and bisexual participants, with the need to defend and/or explain your identity being discussed primarily by bisexual participants. Given that a bisexual identity can often be invisible, in order to be taken seriously, bisexual participants felt the need to be more assertive about their identity. When asked if his sexual identity was ever challenged, one participant answered,

“Yes, well even more so in the gay community. They don’t see it as necessarily legitimate. And that is why, in the past, across the spectrum of what people can identify, it is seen almost as a little shameful.” (Justin)

All of the participants agreed that, at some point, there is subtle pressure to affiliate themselves with the “minority side” of their identity. Biracial participants felt pressured to be involved and passionate about black issues, and little or no pressure to identify with the white “community”. “I know the white is there because my father was and all, but it wasn’t something I grew up with or ever felt connected to. The black community is my home and my people.” (James)

“When I was younger, I remember feeling like I wanted to be friends with the group of black guys in my school. But not because I had a lot in common with them or similar interests, but I got over that when I met people who were a better fit” (Jacob).

Similarly, bisexual participants often felt pressured to align with the queer community in the political fight for equal rights. However, some participants did not share the same fervour for political action and felt ostracized from queer social forums.

“I think I belong to the queer community here but I don’t always feel that I fully fit and there are definitely things that go on that I am not invited to. And for a while it sort of bothered me, but now I am involved in a bunch of different things in and outside the queer community” (Justin).

“I mean I feel a part of it [gay community] when I realize I know all these people are like me and I feel pride in that but, I don’t go out to all the functions they do and then I just feel kind of left out in a way” (Vita).

Not surprisingly, participants felt prepared to handle the discrimination and pressure to legitimize their identity or status. They understood the disadvantage they faced because these were topics of discussion and social awareness that they had grown up with. However they were less comfortable examining the topic of privilege and the role it played in their lives.

When asked directly if they had ever experienced discrimination based on their cultural identity, none of the participants hesitated to say that they had. However, when asked if they

had ever experienced advantages based on that identity they all initially answered “no”.

Nevertheless, throughout the course of the interviews, participants remembered situations in their lives where others had, in fact, treated them preferentially because of their identity.

“One of my professors said he had always... sort of admired me because he had two black daughters. So basically, the whole time I am in his class and the department, he may have seen me as “the black girl”, so I don’t think... I hope he didn’t favour or disfavour me because of that, but I don’t know” (Sarah)

In some cases, affirmative action was perceived by others as ‘special treatment’ and one participant felt that others resented her personally for this practice.

“Privilege is something people get mixed up; when they used to talk about affirmative action, they used to say people were getting opportunities no one else is having because they are black or a woman... and that is how out of touch it gets. So, we get the job and we’re surrounded by 40 other people who are doing the same thing and suddenly, we have been privileged. Hello!!! Since when is tokenism privilege!” (Shanna)

One dimension of a bicultural identity, perceived as advantageous by more than half the participants, was their unique position as a bicultural person, which gave them a broader and more multidimensional perspective of the social world. The youngest participant discussed how her experiences made it “positive for other people that I have an open mind and don’t judge them on their sexuality at all” (Vita). The oldest participant described herself as blessed,

“... because I do have a way of seeing the world that is really wonderful. I really feel like I see the world from this lens of it being bigger rather than smaller. To me that is a real privilege” (Shanna).

This particular form of advantage was described as internal and resulting from participants learning from their experiences and using that knowledge to develop ways of coping and navigating the complexities of race and sexuality. It also shaped their perspective and feelings toward others and gave them a greater understanding of the diversity of racial and sexual identity.

“Experiencing and working through all of these things has taught me a lot. And I feel like it had given me a different perspective than people who have not had to justify or really even think about their identity in the broader scheme of things” (Justin).

During the interviews, participants appeared more comfortable discussing issues of discrimination that they had suffered and dealt with; having to legitimize their identities to others and the pressure to align with minority groups were topics many of the participants discussed. However, the topic of advantage initially gave them pause. When they did discuss experiences, they either said it was rare and met with either frustration over being ‘tokenised’ or explained that, given their ‘bi’ status, they benefitted from a unique understanding of the nuances of alienation from social groups.

Conclusion

The main findings of this study touch on both the personal and social factors that influence identity and community involvement. Nova Scotia, as a social context, not only encourages defined communities, but these communities evolve from unique historical contexts and distinct assumptions. The identities adopted by the participants in this study not only help to situate them within the social world but also connect them to other people or ideologies that they find attractive. While most participants found that their identities were fluid and changing, all agreed that a complex combination of their social environment and experiences shaped their identities and/or what they could become. One of the most frustrating aspects of bicultural identity, which participants discussed, was the lack of legitimacy granted to their identities. They were often put in a position where they were challenged and asked to justify their identity to others. While this justification was not always a requirement for community membership, it was often a necessary part of the search to find a social group(s) where participants felt safe and accepted.

The communities where participants found the most comfort were often those not directly connected to their racial or sexual identity; instead, they found that social groups within family relations, occupations/schools and hobbies (such as artists and sports teams) were more ready to accept them. These social groups did not challenge the participants' identities but rather embraced their unique social position. When participants did find comfort and acceptance in racial or sexual groups it was often because they were (permanently or temporarily) associating more closely with one aspect of their racial or sexual orientation.

On the topic of privilege, the silence of most participants and reluctance of others to discuss it was telling; most focused predominantly on issues of discrimination and oppression and ignored the counterpart of privilege. When participants did discuss their connections and interactions with privileged or dominant groups/people these situations were characterised by feelings of (visible or invisible) dissociation from the majority. When participants were assumed to belong to a dominant group, which was more likely to happen with bisexual participants, there was an underlying sense of disillusionment that their true identity was being overlooked or ignored. Participants also felt that some occasions required them to act as educators, informing members of dominant groups about the social and cultural issues facing bicultural people. While this placed bicultural participants in a kind of "expert" role, it could also reinforce their 'otherness', dissociating them from the dominant group. While the responses of the participants were varied, we can begin to glean some patterns not only in what bicultural people experience, but in the experiences from which they are excluded as well.

Chapter Five: Conclusion: Finding a Middle Ground

It is clear to me now, sitting in a Toronto Public Library, surrounded by a culturally diverse mix of people, that my original research questions and thesis topic would not be applicable to all social environments. Nova Scotia was chosen as the site for this study for two main reasons. Firstly, the historical and political nature of the province lends itself to issues of racial and sexual alienation. Secondly, Nova Scotian society is positioned to make social changes, creating a more inclusive and diversity-friendly environment than currently exists. Although this can be said of many places, the record of social, cultural and political discrimination experienced by existing populations requires this province's leaders to advocate for social justice or risk becoming known as a place to be avoided by those seeking tolerance and acceptance.

While racism and homophobia arise from a general history of intolerance and segregation in Nova Scotia, these social issues have influenced all of the people who live there. In particular, the social environment of Nova Scotia affects the dominant population by shaping how they perceive and interact with those from marginalized racial and sexual groups. It is important not only to understand the effect that the social environment has on marginalized or minority groups, but how it creates a destructive and dichotomous "us-versus-them" mentality.

Through this study, I interviewed biracial and bisexual people in order to examine how they managed to navigate identity and community in a social world, which encourages the separation of their identities. This approach permitted an examination of the mechanisms of coping, navigation, identity development and community membership across two often socially divergent spheres.

Foundations of Dichotomy: Nova Scotia

As a researcher, having been born and raised in Nova Scotia gives me a greater understanding of many subtle nuances and issues that exist in Nova Scotia that might be considered ‘off the books’. There is a great deal about Nova Scotian society, such as how people perceive each other and construct groups, which has not yet been documented. It is knowledge that I shared with the participants and when they discussed their experiences with black or queer communities in the province, I understood that they were using language familiar to people who live here, and not making grand universal statements that assume a single black or queer community.

When the participants discussed well-defined communities of ‘race’ and ‘sexuality’ they often highlighted the isolation and cohesion of these groups. For example, the discriminatory history of black communities in Nova Scotia is well documented (Walcott, 2000) and has created isolated communities (such as Preston) where, as one of the participants explained, members are wary of outsiders. This is also reflected in the social and political foundations of the gay, lesbian and overall queer community in Nova Scotia, which looks to protect its political interests by creating invisible qualification for inclusion.

Overall, as a social environment, Nova Scotia’s, history of discrimination and political resistant to social justice is reflected in the literature as well as in the stories of those who participated in my research.

Seeing the Self through Others’ Eyes: Self and Social Identity

The on-going process of developing and expressing socially or culturally-created identity is as unique to each individual as their fingerprints. However, the experiences and assumptions surrounding identity are so strongly influenced by social environments that, it is possible to draw comparisons between what are essentially apples and oranges (race and

sexuality). Bicultural people are often considered separate from those seen to belong to well-defined racial or sexual groups and their identity is often dismissed as in-between, transitional and unstable (Prabhudas, 1996). Yet, this in-between status might also be viewed as an advantage in the sense that a bicultural identity challenges dichotomous social norms and how identity is interpreted in the social world.

As outlined in the literature, traditional and contemporary theories concerning identity development cover a broad range of perspectives. The traditional models of identity development are rigid and linear. Within these models, individuals are assumed to pass through stages of development, arriving at the ultimate goal of an integrated identity; the general principle being that we all move towards a fixed and stable identity (Esterberg, 1997). While most contemporary identity theory dismisses this model in favour of more multidimensional approaches, elements of this line of thinking persist (Herring, 2007). One enduring proposal is that individuals *should* possess a stable identity. While this perspective was contested by the majority of participants, one biracial participant felt very strongly that his identity as a black man was stable.

The fact that biracial and bisexual identities are often still seen as unstable suggests that traditional models of identity development still exist in the social world. Bicultural people, therefore, are consistently challenged to justify their identity in relation to socially accepted categories. Clearly, this can result in social pressure to reject important elements of one's identity and to manipulate its expression in order to possess a 'legitimate' identity (Poston, 1990). The social environment, which includes individuals and groups who develop and perpetuate social norms maintain this pressure to conform.

During the interviews conducted for this thesis, several participants described the role that social messages and representations played in shaping, and sometimes censoring, their

development and expression of identity. These messages, which often conform to social norms of racial separation and hetero-normativity, dictate how race is understood within diverse communities and how sexuality is scripted and relationships managed. As a researcher, it is my position that many of these social messages and pressures become internalized by bicultural people, not only shaping how they view issues of race and sexuality but emphasizing the dichotomy they feel within themselves. This in turn can create the struggle for balance they expressed when discussing identity, contributing to the assertion that bicultural people grow a ‘thicker skin’ (Jasmine) in order to navigate the pressures of the social world.

While there are distinct socially driven differences between the characteristics of racial and sexual identity, this thesis research revealed more similarities between individual’s experiences of “in-betweenness” than one might expect. During interviews most participant’s highlighted social pressures to legitimizing their identity, suggesting that neither a biracial or bisexual identity was accepted without resistance. The mechanisms of legitimizing biracial identity often focused on appearance, while bisexual identity centered on partner selection or behaviour, there existed a common theme that bicultural identity is suspect and requires validation in order to gain membership to one’s chosen group.

One way this presented itself to biracial participants is in the social interpretation of their relative ‘whiteness’. Participants frequently sensed that ‘blackness’ or the experiences of black people were automatically associated with them, while their ‘whiteness’ was overlooked or ignored (Heldke and O’Connor, 2004). Many of the biracial participants agreed that socially they could identify as black and have it accepted. However, if they tried to identify themselves as white (interestingly, none of the participants ever chose this identity) it would be rejected by others. This contradiction is closely tied to the role physical appearance played

in the historical “one-drop rule”, a racist law assigning black identity (and therefore the position of slave) to an individual with any black ancestry, no matter how distant (Pugh, 1997). While this “rule” may no longer exist, there is a tacit understanding that the privilege of whiteness requires ‘pure’ bloodlines (Johnson, 2006). Unfortunately these racist assumptions have been internalized by biracial people and their dissociation with whiteness reinforced by social and cultural messages.

Bisexual participants also experienced scrutiny concerning their identity and felt the need to explain their sexual identity, sometimes to complete strangers. Given that bisexuality does not fit well into the binary structure of the hetero/homosexual dichotomy, a bisexual identity is considered debatable and unstable (Meyer, 2005). Some participants explained that people often treated them as either ‘fakers’ - pretending they were not truly homosexual - or ‘traitors’ - engaging in heterosexual behaviours or relationships. In western traditions, bisexuality is considered to dwell in the homosexual sphere (Meyer, 2005) so not only do bisexual people have to deal with issues of homophobia, but they must also work to legitimate their identities within the queer community.

While issues of legitimacy were personally difficult for the bicultural participants to manage they also encountered much farther-reaching issues just by virtue of their identity’s ‘bi-ness’. The nature of bicultural identity can be interpreted as challenging the dichotomous norms present in the current social structure. This is a fact to which they have no choice but to adapt. Biracial people are considered by some to benefit from a unique experience, living the racial reality of more than one group in their private lives (Heldke and O’Connor, 2004), while bisexual people are seen to challenge heteronormativity and resist the sexual heteronormativity of Western society (Peters, 2005). Given the increasingly diverse nature of the population in general, it is imperative to start recognizing the connections we have to various

groups in order to repair some of the damage caused by generations of alienation and prejudice.

This desire for connections represents a common finding that participants identified as the link between their identity formation and community involvement. Discussions of both identity and community were steeped in longing to find people and groups with common identity, issues and interests. For biracial participants, community involvement was a way for participants to connect with their history and heritage. They expressed this connection as finding strength and comfort in being connected to something larger than themselves. For bisexual participants the search for connections was driven by a need to find safe spaces, where they could express their identity and orientation among people who would accept, appreciate and reflect those expressions. In both cases, bicultural participants were often willing to manipulate their identity or face possible rejection, in order to find people and groups of which they could be a part.

While these connections were not always characterised by racial and sexual identity, the search for community connection was a common thread in all of the interviews. Another thread that linked participants' experiences was how this identity/community relationship could position them to balance two worlds. While the distinction between 'worlds' (i.e. racial and sexual) were often understood as social construction, the issues associated with navigating them were no less real. Bicultural people engage with a social world that views their identity as fragmented (Collins, 2000), requiring them to establish belonging, while maintaining their unique identity.

The techniques bicultural people use to navigate these worlds are diverse and instructive. Age, socio-economic status, marital status, and urban/rural location all play a role in determining how bicultural people maintain their identity in a world that is constantly, in

subtle ways, asking them to conform or accept the permanent position of outsider. Despite this struggle, based on the finding of my thesis research, I would suggest that bicultural people are successfully maintaining the stability of their identity within the context of dichotomous social norms and the desire for legitimacy.

Rejected and Accepted: Community Interactions

Social groups are defined as a collection of people that differ from other groups in their cultural forms, practises or ways of life (Heldke and O'Connor, 2004). Communities are based on social groupings facilitated by geography and at the mercy of entrenched systems of dominance and oppression. Dominant groups have the power to define what is considered normal and determine who should be ostracised or labelled as an outsider (Johnson, 2006).

In Nova Scotia, the 'black community' has developed not only because of historical segregation but also in resistance to assimilation and to maintain cultural traditions (Mensah, 2002). According to Storr (1999), in social climates within which cultural/racial divides are strongest, biracial people can face the most discrimination, as alienation can be based on both sides of their heritage. Bisexual people also find themselves in a position where they are forced to exist outside of the dichotomous hetero/homo split and must learn to manage the opposition and live between the two (Valverde, 1985).

Belonging to both dominant *and* oppressed groups situates bicultural people in a unique position, which can help them to navigate community involvement. Many participants reported that, despite initially feeling awkward or frustrated by introductions to communities, they were better able to access groups and places where they felt comfortable and safe. This safety depended on members of the communities reaching out to them or on their own tenacity in working through the awkwardness and/or rejection and proving to the group(s) that they deserved a place. While these techniques served participants well, it is unfortunate that

they must develop a ‘thick skin’ as a result of their marginalization from many social groups. However, the majority of participants defined their ‘thicker skin’ as an advantage of the bicultural experience.

It is important to remember that social groups only exist in relation to other groups; without this diversity, people would not be drawn into specific social groups in the same way (Heldke and O’Connor, 2004). One of the most interesting topics that emerged from the findings was the distinction participants made between majority and minority communities. Generally speaking, the majority community was described as white, heterosexual and without identity, while minority communities were portrayed as non-white, often isolated and definable. This divisiveness generated assumptions about the majority being privileged in extravagant ways and beliefs that ‘they’ are not able to understand the plight of other groups. As well, it created a view of minority people as disenfranchised and lacking in agency. Furthermore, it makes invisible the ways that other social locations affect the experience of privilege and oppression.

When the majority community was criticized (often harshly), participants assumed that they could not offend the majority (‘white people’ or ‘straight people’), because they belong to a group that is too large and dominant to be offended. While I listened to participants express opinions like this I wondered, “Is this discrimination? Does this way of thinking reinforce and maintain the dominant social structure? Has the dominant social structures - those that treat minorities as homogeneous groups about which many assumptions are attached - been institutionalized for so long that similar assumptions have become projected onto them?” Ironically, while this fosters a sense of pride in minority community membership, it also creates a sense of shame among some bicultural people, about their connection to the dominant, oppressive majority (white or straight in this case). These majority characteristics

are often shunned or hidden as a way for individuals to find support and belonging in minority communities (Johnson, 2006). Support for bicultural people can be found more easily in minority communities because of how the communities themselves developed. Often such communities are created as the result of common struggle or interests, which encourages strong networks of support and could be an attractive prospect for bicultural populations. In addition, the assumption that majority communities will not understand or be compassionate to the position of bicultural people perpetuates their lack of faith in finding relevant and helpful support systems within majority groups. Finally, social messages tell bicultural people that they exist in the margins, which might convince them to seek support in marginalized communities that share their sense of ostracism.

More than Half: Discrimination and Legitimacy for Bicultural People

Participants' experiences of discrimination and prejudice mirror that reported in the literature (Johnson, 2006, Heldke and O'Connor, 2004). The forms of discrimination they experienced ranged from overt to covert, unintentional to internalized (Heldke and O'Connor, 2004). Although participants felt well-equipped to deal with discrimination in the form of assumptions, stereotypes and negative behaviours from the majority community, the discrimination they faced from multiple communities was difficult to bear.

Biracial people feel social pressure to choose an identity in order to fit racially, somewhere (Walcott, 2000). This choice is often heavily weighted towards their minority status, not allowing biracial people to identify as anything other than biracial or black. This is a unique form of discrimination, one that pushes biracial people into a racial category which, in so doing, eliminates a part of who they are and excludes them from claiming a white identity based on historical, social and cultural issues associated with racism and the role of skin colour. The biracial participants of this study reported that they were expected to

associate more closely with their black heritage and did not generally identify themselves as 'white'. This is reminiscent of the historically problematic 'one-drop rule' that identified a person with any black blood as 'black' (Pugh, 1997); in essence keeping biracial/mixed race people from passing as white in a racially segregated society. While this practice was based on biology, it has manifest as social discrimination. The goal of keeping the "races pure" was not only a prejudiced assumption that black people tainted white identity but an entirely unrealistic goal. The fact that elements of this "rule" still exist for biracial people is both sad and alarming; while biracial people may feel comfortable with a black social identity, because it is presented to them overwhelmingly through social pressures and messages, it rejects the notion that identity should be a choice.

A similar, covert form of discrimination presents bisexual people with social pressures and messages that assume that their identity represents a transitional phase, leading inevitably to full homosexuality, or that bisexual people are just "experimenting" with homosexuality and will inevitably return to a fully heterosexual identity (Rust, 1993). These assumptions disregard individual diversity with respect to expressions of sexuality and the fluidity of sexual orientation. It also gives other power to legitimize and determine a person's sexual identity. This represents hetero-normativity to the extent that heterosexuality is assumed to be "normal" and everything that falls outside of it is deviant/ "homosexual" (Meyer, 2005). It becomes heterosexist behaviour when bisexual people are treated in a disrespectful or prejudiced way based on their identity or the identity that other people assign them.

Invisible Advantage: Role of Privilege in Bicultural Identity

On the heels of discussions of discrimination, I asked participants to identify any forms of advantage their bicultural identity had bestowed upon them. I wish now that I had phrased my interview question differently, delving more into the structural forms of privilege and the

role it played in their lives. For instance, I would have asked participants how they think their race or sexuality are taken up in and by institutions and everyday processes like applying for a loan, seeing themselves reflected in media, speaking up in school etc. However, after data analysis and a return to the literature, I feel as though it is a topic I must address in this thesis, as I believe it contributes something important to the discussion of biculturalism.

Consequently, this section attempts to highlight issues relating to bicultural privilege and the balance a bicultural position can require in a social world where privilege is gained by oppression.

Privilege, as an institutional structure, is granted as a result of power bestowed upon a person and groups by the dominant society, giving them advantages, entitlements or dominance over other people or groups (Dermer, et al, 2010). Discussions of privilege in the literature often focus on the advantages of dominant majority groups or individuals (white/male/heterosexual) over the oppressed and disadvantaged ‘other’. It is important to note, however, that while individuals typically receive privilege and endure oppression, these are not individual experiences, but social issues grounded in a hierarchy that requires some groups to be disadvantaged in order for others to be privileged (Johnson, 2006).

Very little literature documents the possible privilege experienced and/or perceived by bicultural people; there appears to be an assumption that minority groups or individuals do not experience any forms of privilege. This assumption is fuelled by a focus in the literature on the diverse forms of discrimination and disadvantage; however a gap exists in documenting the resistance bicultural people exhibit in an effort to balance the conflicts of their privileged and disadvantaged status.

Privilege is a difficult social element to research given that people do not like to identify their advantage because it means some other individual or group is being disadvantaged.

Privilege can be granted to people whether they want it or not, simply by being a member of a privileged or dominant group (Dermer, et. al, 2010). People are generally resistant to vocalizing or even understanding their privilege and it can invoke defensive or angry responses when it is discussed. However, not being aware of privilege is an integral aspect of privilege itself and is coined the 'luxury of obliviousness' (Johnson, 2006 p. 78). Ignorance of issues such as racism and homophobia, even when it does not directly affect the individual, can be an act of oppression, because these systems rely on people's apathy in order to continue.

When asked about the advantages their bicultural identity bestowed, the participants discussed the idea of having a unique insider perspective and ability to navigate the social world more easily because they have been forced to develop useful social techniques, such as a 'thick skin' when it came to rejection. While this is an interesting perspective, it cannot be classified as privilege because in order for a social category to be privileged one or more groups have to be disadvantaged in some way (Johnson, 2006). Instead it is a form of personal advantage, valuable in shaping the perspective the participants used to interpret the social world.

None of the participants discussed a desire to participate in forms of structural privilege, such as the ability to "pass" as member of a privileged group; in fact, very few bicultural participants discussed any forms of privilege in their interviews. The examples of heterosexual or white advantage they did mention were often shrouded in guilt and frustration. These feelings of guilt, associated with privilege, could stem from the detriment it causes to other social group, or could be feelings of shame tied to the idea that they are traitors, betraying their minority status. Or, as one participant, who did discuss structural privilege in

relation to the views people have regarding affirmative action asked, “Since when is tokenism privilege!” (Shanna).

Wanted or not, bicultural people are privileged in particular ways given the value placed on expressions of heterosexuality and whiteness in society. However, their experience is unique because their forms of privilege are tainted (in society’s eyes) by their homosexuality and blackness. That said, they possess a unique identity that forces them to balance both privilege and oppression; whether they recognize that duality or not, it characterises their social identity, shaping the assumptions and ideas that follow them in the social world. This can be difficult, and many individuals will push their possible privilege aside and focus on the oppression and discrimination they experience because it is socially acceptable and safe. Not only is it socially safe for bicultural people to focus on their discrimination, but it is also a social expectation, given that they are considered members of minority groups and are not welcomed into the privileged sphere of the dominant majority.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to address some of the gaps in bicultural literature and research. Exploring the experiences of biracial and bisexual individuals in Nova Scotia served to illuminate some of the social issues within this province and give voice to two growing demographics that often slip through the cracks. This research would not be applicable in all social contexts, but Nova Scotia has a unique social history, one steeped in racial and sexual segregation. The social nature of this province has fostered the growth of defined and separate communities; over time, this separation has become an internalized mechanism, keeping communities culturally protected from assimilation by keeping the “others” out. Bicultural people are familiar with feeling like the “other”; they are not only concerned with navigating the self and social identity but also try to situate themselves in a social world that

marks them as “in-betweens”. Unfortunately, some will label bicultural people as fakers or traitors, feeling as if they are just pretending to be bisexual or hating that they can pass for non-black in a world that values those characteristics highly. However, the frustration often directed towards bicultural people would be better directed elsewhere. The social focus on the issues of categories and group affiliation distract people from the social structure of inequality in which they live.

In Nova Scotia, racial communities have been segregated and culturally separated over time while queer communities are labelled deviant and politically outcast, keeping marginalized groups fractured and the dominant groups in power. Bicultural people are forced to walk invisible lines between communities and negotiate the social world to try and find a place they feel safe and accepted. This becomes difficult when concepts like majority and minority are couched in ‘us’ versus ‘them’ terms, placing bicultural people in a position where they must balance both discrimination and privilege.

The discrimination bicultural people experience goes beyond issues of racism and homophobia; while these experiences are very real, they speak to a larger system meant to build power for some by sacrificing the freedoms of others. A particular form of discrimination felt by bicultural people is the lack of legitimacy given to their identities. Having to prove or justify one’s identity is unfair and discriminates against bicultural people.

The most surprising and personally influential aspect of this thesis (for me) has been the topic of privilege. This aspect was surprising because the participants did not recognize how significant a part it played in their lives, not on a personal but institutional level. Not only was the role of privilege overlooked by participants but also in the literature. Privilege is an underrepresented social mechanism directly connected to discrimination but predominantly discussed for a small (white straight male) population. One way to sustain privilege is

ignoring its existence, reinforcing the structure that disadvantages one or more groups in order to advantage others (Johnson, 2006). Everyone is affected by privilege because the social world is based on its distribution and continuation. Unfortunately, there is a social stigma associated with being 'privileged' and until this can be eliminated, the discussion of privilege will continue to be one-sided and the status quo maintained.

Overall, much more theorizing of and research on biculturalness is needed. The backgrounds or orientations of people are not as important as the focus on how bicultural people manage and navigate a social world that has been structured to exclude their identities and force them between the cracks.

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Appendix A -Interview Questions and Guide

1. What does having an identity mean to you?
 - a. Probes – general – discuss how they view identity in society
2. How do you identify yourself?
 - a. Probes – If you were to describe yourself to someone what would you say?
3. How do you express your identity?
 - a. Probes – appearance? family? Relationships?
4. Does the way you think about your race/sexuality affect your identity?
 - a. Probes –If yes, in what way?
 - b. Probes –If no, why not?
5. What does a ‘community’ mean to you?
 - a. Probes – what elements defines a community? (racial, sexual, geographic)
 - b. Probes – do you think different communities exist in Nova Scotia? What types?
6. Do you see defined communities here in Nova Scotia?
 - a. Probes – what are they based on (race, sexuality, employment, etc)
7. Do you feel that you belong to any communities?
 - a. Probes – Do you participate in any activities, organizations, and belong to any social groups?
 - b. Probes –If not, why not? (Skip to question 9)
8. Do you find that your identity affects your community involvement?
 - a. Probes – If yes, does it make it easier or harder? More options or less?
 - b. Probes –If not, why do you think that is the case?
9. Do you think how you express your identity affects communities to which you belong?
 - a. Probes –If yes, in what ways?
 - b. Probes –If no, why not?
10. Do you think being biracial/sexual limits your involvement in communities?
 - a. Probes –If yes, in what ways?
 - b. Probes –If no, why not?
11. Do you think being biracial/sexual is an advantage in participating in communities?
 - a. Probes –If yes, in what ways?
 - b. Probes –If no, why not? Is it a disadvantage?
12. Do you have any questions or additional comments?

Appendix B - Consent Form



RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a sociological study examining identity and community for bicultural people in Nova Scotia. This consent form outlines what is involved in participating in this research. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw from the interview at any time, if you feel uncomfortable. You may also skip any question you feel uncomfortable answering.

Title of Research:

Lost in the Gray: Exploring the experiences of bicultural identity and community in Nova Scotia.

Contact information:

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Purpose of the study

This study will help us to better understand the experiences of bicultural (biracial or bisexual) people in Nova Scotia. Additionally, it will look at some of the ways bicultural people maintain identity and create a sense of community. The study is not evaluative or judgemental and is instead exploratory in nature. This study aims to learn from you and from the experiences and opinions you are willing to share.

What will you be asked to do?

You will be interviewed for about an hour. I will ask questions about your experiences with identity and community. To ensure accuracy, interviews will need to be recorded. If you do not wish to have your comments recorded then it will not be possible for you to participate.

However you can leave the interview at anytime and can also point out material that you feel is sensitive, which will not be discussed. You can also identify any information you wish to have removed from the transcribed version.

Your interviews will be confidential, meaning that I will not give anyone the name of participants and a pseudonym (fake name) will be assigned. I will be the only person who is aware of your actual identity. Your name will not be included in my thesis or other academic publications. All interview recordings will be deleted once transcribed and written transcripts will be secured in a locked location. Excerpts of some interviews will be used in my Master's thesis and may be used for publication in academic journals but will not include any of your personal information. Library and electronic access to the final thesis and any resulting academic articles using this data will be available upon request.

Problems or concerns

If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Patricia Lindley, Director of Dalhousie University's Office of Human Research Ethics Administration, for assistance at (902) 494-1462, patricia.lindley@dal.ca

If you have any difficulties, after the interview, with the topics discussed you can contact myself or the Metro Help Line, Halifax (902) 421-1188. Hours: 8:00am – 11:30pm daily. Metro Help Line offers counselling and a number of additional resources in the metro area.

Consent:

I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this study.

_____ **I give my informed consent to participate in this research.**

_____ **I give my informed consent for the researcher to use quotations.**

Signature: _____ **Researcher's signature** _____

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix C - Code List

- Identity General
- Racial Identity
- Sexual Identity
- Family Influence
- Peer Influence
- Privilege
- Discrimination
- Nova Scotia
- Community
- Racial Community
- Sexual Community
- Personal Development
- Social Development
- Terminology
- Partners
- Community Membership
- Racial Appearance
- Sexual Appearance
- Two Worlds