

The purpose of this study was to identify levels of bisexual negativity (bi-negativity) within the LGBTQ+ and heterosexual communities and to determine if there are higher levels of negativity in one group over the other. Bi-negativity is any negative stereotype or attitude expressed towards bisexuality or bisexual individuals (Nielsen et al., 2022). It is important to note that, within the LGBTQ+ group, bisexual individuals make up one of the largest portions of the community (San Francisco Human Rights Commission, 2011).

Many hardships faced by bisexual individuals can be linked to bi-negativity. Housing and job discrimination, lack of acceptance, mental health conditions, and violence experienced by the bisexual community can be seen as the product of bi-negativity. Walters et al. (2013) indicated high rates of sexual and intimate partner violence among bisexual people when compared to others within the LGBTQ+ community. The rationale behind conducting my study was to investigate the notion of bi-negativity existing within both the LGBTQ+ and heterosexual communities and to provide more evidence that bisexual individuals face discrimination from both communities. By helping to expose this double discrimination, as coined by Mulick (1999), I hope my research could lead to further research that could work to improve the lives of bisexual individuals.

A study by Mulick (1999) revealed that bi-negativity and biphobia are expressed by both groups and, although the supporting data were from a small sample, that internalized biphobia/bi-negativity was possible. Internalized bi-negativity was described by Arriaga and Parent (2019) as negativity one holds or feels towards their own bisexuality or bisexual identity. Furthermore, Arriaga and Parent (2019) analyzed a possible relationship between instances of bi-negativity from both the LGBTQ+ and heterosexual communities and internalized bi-negativity. Their study showed support for this relationship as it revealed that bisexual men held more

internalized bi-negativity from harmful interactions with heterosexual people, while bisexual women held more internalized bi-negativity from harmful interactions with LGBTQ+ people.

Dodge et al. (2016) concluded that there were significant negative attitudes among the adult population towards bisexual individuals. Their results indicated that gender and sexuality had a significant relationship with reported attitudes with heterosexual men being more likely to express negative attitudes towards bisexual individuals and participants who identified as non-binary displaying the highest positive attitudes. Dodge et al. (2016) also reported that there is a significant absence of positivity in relation to bisexuality among adult populations.

Yost and Thomas (2011) also found similar results in bi-negativity among study participants' genders and while bi-negativity was generally disagreed with and not expressed by their participants, they were able to determine that heterosexual men showed more negativity overall towards bisexual men than the heterosexual women who were involved with the study. While this study only looked at the heterosexual community, it did highlight significant differences in levels of discrimination between bisexual men and women. Yost and Thomas (2011) demonstrated significant support for the notion that bisexual women are tolerated and accepted more than bisexual men and that bisexual women face less negativity overall.

My hypotheses for this study were that bi-negativity exists within both the LGBTQ+ and heterosexual communities and that the LGBTQ+ community expresses higher levels of bi-negativity. I believed that negativity existed within both populations, but I felt that it was even more important to highlight which group expressed the higher level of discrimination. In order to lessen the negativity pushed on bisexual people, it must be clear where the majority of negativity is stemming from. This information would indicate the community that requires the most focus and could provide a starting point for minimizing bi-negativity.

In addition to categorizing participants as belonging to either the LGBTQ+ or heterosexual communities, based on the results of the Dodge et al. (2016) study, I speculated that it was important to also explore differences in attitudes based on gender. Demographic questions to determine gender and community inclusion were asked, as well as three other demographic questions. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with several statements on the Gender-Based Attitudes Towards Bisexuality Scale (GBAB Scale; Nielsen et al., 2022). Their answers were then scored, based on guidelines provided by Nielsen et al. (2022), and levels of bi-negativity were determined.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

In total, my study had 254 participants. Of these, 26 participants were removed from scoring due to incomplete data on the bi-negativity scale, because they indicated that they were minors, or they did not indicate their sexual orientation-based community membership. Due to the nature of the study, participants who were unsure if they were part of the LGBTQ+ community or chose not to disclose were removed from data scoring, as the study is based on being in the LGBTQ+ community or not. The following analyses are based on the results obtained from the remaining 228 participants.

Eighty-seven participants identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community, 121 identified as part of the heterosexual community, and 21 indicated “unsure” or preferred not to answer. There was a wide age range of participants, with the youngest being 18 years old and the oldest being 80 years old. My sample consisted of 48 participants identifying as male, 138 identifying as female, 16 identifying as transgender or non-binary, 16 identifying as other, 4 that chose not to disclose, and 6 that did not answer. A majority of my participants were White/European

American ( $n = 180$ ). The next two most commonly indicated race/ethnicities were Latinx or Hispanic ( $n = 12$ ) and Black/African American ( $n = 9$ ). When asked about their highest level of education, 79 said they completed their bachelor's degree, 61 had their high school diploma or equivalent, and 33 finished their master's degree.

Participants were recruited with a link provided on the social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit and through the use of Sona Systems for the students in the Lindenwood Participant Pool (LPP). The LPP is a participant pool at Lindenwood University that consists of students enrolled in select courses in criminology/criminal justice, psychology, public health, and sociology, who voluntarily participate in research studies approved by the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board. Participants who accessed the survey via the LPP received 1 LPP point, which provided extra credit for participants' grades in specific courses. Participants who accessed the survey over social media did not receive any compensation.

### **Materials and Procedure**

I created my online survey using Qualtrics in order to test my hypothesis that bi-negativity exists in both the LGBTQ+ and heterosexual communities, with a stronger negativity present in the LGBTQ+ group. The survey consisted of an informed consent statement that required participants to indicate that they agree to take part in the study. This was followed by a disclaimer indicating that the material/language used within the survey itself may be sensitive and explains where the survey content came from. This disclaimer was included to inform participants that the statements were not a reflection of how I, or anyone else involved in the study, felt towards bisexuality and to reiterate where the statements came from.

A glossary of terminology used in the survey was provided next so participants can familiarize themselves with terms they would encounter while taking the survey. The main part

of the study consisted of 20 scaled questions from the GBAB Scale by Nielsen et al. (2022) which ask participants to indicate their level of agreement with each statement about bisexuality or bisexual individuals. These responses are scored from 1, *Strongly Disagree*, to 5, *Strongly Agree*. Participants were then asked five demographic questions, including: age, gender, race/ethnicity, education level, and inclusion in the LGBTQ+ community (see Appendix for a copy of my survey). This was followed by a debriefing statement.

If participants left 3 or fewer questions unanswered on the GBAB Scale (Nielsen et al., 2022), the missing values were substituted by their average ratings for the answers they did provide. This allowed me to score their data while staying as close as possible to how they may have answered had the question not been left blank. There were # participants whose data was manipulated in this way. My justification for not removing these participants from scoring was due to them filling out a vast majority of the survey and the likelihood that they accidentally skipped the questions. Upon completion of this study, the data were downloaded from Qualtrics and two separate analyses were conducted, one to assess total bi-negativity scores per each group and the second to assess differences in bi-negativity based on participants' genders.

For the first assessment, each participant's score was summed together within their groups and the means of the two groups were compared. The second assessment had participants separated by their indicated gender, with a focus on only those who identified as male or female, and their scores were summed per group and the means were compared. Both analyses were completed using an independent *t*-test with IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28).

## **Results**

### **Degree of Bi-negativity**

To test the hypothesis that bi-negativity exists within both the LGBTQ+ and heterosexual communities, I examined the combined average GBAB Scale scores from my participants that indicated they were a part of the LGBTQ+ or heterosexual community. The GBAB Scale dictates that any score higher than 20 is indicative of some level of bi-negativity. Low levels of bi-negativity range from 20 to 40, moderate levels of bi-negativity range from 41 to 80, and high levels of bi-negativity range from 81 to 100. In order to obtain the lowest score possible, 20, and to express no bi-negativity, participants needed to choose *Strongly Disagree* for all 20 of the bi-negative statements provided. The overall mean of the GBAB Scale score for both groups combined was 31.7 ( $SD = 15.1$ ), which exceeded a score of 20, but fell within the low range of bi-negativity. This lent support for my first hypothesis that both the LGBTQ+ and heterosexual communities would show some level of bi-negativity.

### **Degree of Bi-negativity Among LGBTQ+ and Heterosexual Community Members**

The second hypothesis I postulated was that levels of bi-negativity would be higher in the LGBTQ+ community than in the heterosexual community. The level of bi-negativity expressed by the LGBTQ+ community ( $n = 87$ ;  $M = 27.11$ ,  $SD = 10.11$ ) was lower than the levels shown in the heterosexual community ( $n = 120$ ;  $M = 35.29$ ,  $SD = 17.80$ ),  $t(195) = -4.186$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .543$ . The outcome of this test showed a statistically significant difference in bi-negativity scores; however, the difference was in the opposite direction than was predicted. These results contradict my second hypothesis that the LGBTQ+ community would show higher levels of bi-negativity.

A post-hoc analysis that investigated gendered differences in bi-negativity levels showed results that fell in line with what was found in both the Mulick (1999) and Yost and Thomas's (2012) studies, although the gender difference was not statistically significant. That is, the men in my study tended to express higher levels of bi-negativity ( $n = 48$ ;  $M = 35.94$ ,  $SD = 19.437$ )

than the women ( $n = 138$ ;  $M = 31.63$ ,  $SD = 14.553$ ),  $t(185) = -1.445$ ,  $p < .075$ ,  $d = -.271$ .

Transgender, nonbinary, and other expressed genders were excluded from my analysis in an attempt to keep test conditions as similar as possible to the ones outlined in previous studies.

### **Discussion**

The results of this study supported my first hypothesis by indicating both the LGBTQ+ and heterosexual communities show levels of bi-negativity. However, the average score indicated a relatively low level of negativity. These results fall in line with those of Mulick (1999), who found a significant degree of bi-negativity expressed by the heterosexual population and a significant, though lesser, degree of bi-negativity expressed by the LGBTQ+ population. Mulick's (1999) findings also supported the notion of internalized bi-negativity felt by the small sample of bisexual individuals who took part in his study. The similarities between Mulick's (1999) and my results suggest that societal views of bisexuality have not shifted within the last 20 years.

There were a few limitations within my study such as the possibility of a biased sample. I recruited participants using my personal social media accounts which may have led to a number of participants being friends and acquaintances. These participants could have modified their answers based on how they expected I would want them to answer. Moreover, the proportion of the people who have access to my social media that are LGBTQ+ allies may be higher than the proportion of LGBTQ+ allies in the general population. In order to diversify the sample, I suggest recruiting participants using a non-personal social media account, and trying different recruiting methods, such as flyers, to reach more a representative audience.

My results did not lend support for the second hypothesis that the LGBTQ+ community would show higher levels of bi-negativity than the heterosexual community, indicating that the

heterosexual community is still showing higher levels of negativity and bisexual individuals are still experiencing instances of double discrimination. Despite the past studies showing evidence of higher bi-negativity in the heterosexual group (Mulick, 1999; Yost and Thomas, 2012), my hypothesis was to investigate the opposite. My reasoning behind this was based on past reports of strong discrimination from lesbian and gay communities (see for example, San Francisco Human Rights Commission, 2011). This discrimination included instances of bi-invisibility which involves the labeling of bisexuality as invalid and irrelevant.

Other differences between my results and previous studies could be attributed to the difference in the number of questions that the questionnaires contained. For example, Mulick's (1999) questionnaire contained at least double the number of questions to gauge negativity as my questionnaire, which may have allowed for a more accurate or nuanced representation of participants' attitudes.

The disclaimer statement may have influenced participant responses. This statement may have encouraged my participants to disagree with the 20 scaled questions, as it could have been interpreted as implying that the statements should not be agreed with. This disclaimer may have set a precedent for what a socially acceptable answer should be for the scaled questions. Similarly, another limitation of my study was the strong, and negative wording of statements provided for the scaled questions adopted from the GBAB Scale by Nielsen et al. (2022). These statements included "Bisexuality is unnatural," "People say they are bisexual to try to be unique," "Bisexual people are denying their homosexuality," and "Nobody is actually bisexual." The language could have caused some emotional responses and affected the degree to which participants agreed or disagreed with the statements. Modifying the language of the statements to be more neutral or including statements that use positive language such as "Bisexual people



make good partners, ” or “Bisexuality is valid,” could mitigate this effect. If the language used in the statements is modified to include positive statements or neutral language, this would also remove the need for the disclaimer statement.

Nielsen et al.’s (2022) study was designed with the purpose of discovering gendered differences in bi-negativity between men and women, as well as overall bi-negativity scores. In addition to their GBAB Scale, they also included two supplementary scales, Attitudes Towards Bisexual Men and Attitudes Towards Bisexual Women Scales. Both of these scales were also developed by Nielsen et al. (2022) based on modifications of existing scales provided by Mulick (1999) and Yost and Thomas (2012).

Yost and Thomas (2012) found that men showed more negativity towards bisexual individuals than women, with the highest levels of negativity expressed towards bisexual men. With these results in mind, I explored possible gender differences in my study as well with the post-hoc analysis I performed. While my results were not statistically significant, they were approaching statistical significance, with men expressing higher levels of bi-negativity. The number of women who participated in my study was more than three times the number of men. With this in mind, had the number of men participating been similar to the number of women, the results may have revealed a statistically significant difference in the levels of bi-negativity shown by these two genders.

For future research, I suggest asking participants to indicate their sexual orientation rather than only identifying their LGBTQ+ community membership. This would allow researchers to view the scores of bisexual participants separately and it would also allow them to gain some information on the existence of internalized bi-negativity. Lastly, I would encourage the investigation of other intersections such as race/ethnicity, age, education, etc. in an attempt to

better understand what groups and intersections present the highest levels of bi-negativity. As stated previously, being able to pinpoint the groups who present the most bi-negativity could provide a starting point for alleviating the negativity.

Research in this area is limited and often discounted, as it is focused on a group that is stigmatized and overlooked. Society could benefit from the future research of bi-negativity as it acknowledges the reality of biases and prejudices, and the first step to addressing a problem is recognizing its existence. Research of this nature not only highlights which specific groups perpetrate bi-negativity, it also provides a launching point towards future progress. I speculate that, with the right approach and a focused target, research in this field can help develop plans to manage and reduce or eliminate bi-negativity.

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## Appendix

### Bi-negativity Survey

#### **Disclaimer:**

The statements you are about to assess are directly from the Group-Based Attitudes Toward Bisexuality Scale (Nielsen et al., 2022). The language used in this scale may be offensive to some people. However, this scale is commonly used in this field of research, and I am using this scale so that I may compare my results with those reported in the literature. Please note that these statements do not reflect the thoughts or opinions of myself or anyone involved with creating the study. If you are bothered by the language in the scale, please feel free to withdraw from the study at any time simply by closing the browser window.

#### **Glossary of terminology used in this survey**

The following terms are used within this survey and several of the following statements. This is to provide reference to anyone who may be unfamiliar with the terms. Most definitions are provided by GLAAD, Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation.

**Bisexual** — An adjective used to describe a person who has the potential to be physically, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree. The *bi* in bisexual refers to genders the same as and different from one's own gender.

**Gay** — An adjective used to describe a person whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex.

**Heterosexual** — An adjective used to describe a person whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to people of a sex different from their own. Also: straight.

**Homosexual** — An outdated clinical term considered derogatory and offensive. Refer to the definition of gay.

**Lesbian** — A woman whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to other women.

**LGBTQ+** — An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and more. Used to express a person's gender identity or sexual orientation and is the label for the group of individuals who identify with any of the above-mentioned genders or sexualities.

**Societal benefits** — Social protections and privileges extended to people who fall under categories of social acceptability.

**Stigma** — Negativity or dislike that is associated with a specific quality, person, or circumstance.

1) Please indicate to what level you agree or disagree with each of the following statements from the Group-Based Attitudes Toward Bisexuality Scale (Nielsen et al., 2022):

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Bisexuality is not a stable orientation.					
2. Bisexual people are indecisive.					
3. Bisexual people seem desperate.					
4. Bisexuality is unnatural.					
5. People say they are bisexual to try to be unique.					
6. Bisexual people are denying their homosexuality.					
7. Nobody is actually bisexual.					
8. People say they are bisexual because it is trendy.					
9. Bisexuality is a stage before really coming out.					
10. Bisexual people want to date multiple people at the same time.					
11. Bisexuality does not exist.					
12. People who are bisexual are just experimenting with their sexuality.					
13. Bisexuality is just a phase.					
14. Bisexual men are actually gay.					
15. People say they are bisexual to avoid the stigma of being homosexual.					
16. Bisexual people are practicing coming out.					
17. Bisexual women are actually lesbians.					
18. Bisexuality is wrong.					
19. People say they are bisexual so they can get the societal benefits of being heterosexual.					
20. Bisexual people make bad relationship partners.					

- 2) Please enter your age. If you prefer not to say, please indicate that choice with N/A.
  
- 3) Please indicate which gender you identify as. If you prefer not to say, please indicate that choice with N/A.
  
- 4) Please specify your race/ethnicity. Select all that apply.
  - a. White/European American
  - b. Black/African American
  - c. Latinx or Hispanic
  - d. Asian
  - e. Native American
  - f. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
  - g. Other/Unknown
  - h. Prefer not to say
  
- 5) Please indicate the highest degree or level of education you have completed.
  - a. Some High School
  - b. High School/GED
  - c. Associate's Degree
  - d. Trade School
  - e. Bachelor's Degree
  - f. Master's Degree
  - g. Doctoral Degree
  - h. Other (please specify):
  - i. Prefer not to say
  
- 6) Do you consider yourself a part of the LGBTQ+ community?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Unsure
  - d. Prefer not to say