Examining Responses to Women’s Same-Sex Performativity: Perceptions of Sexual Orientation and Implications for Bisexual Prejudice

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ABSTRACT

Heterosexual women’s public same-sex performativity (SSP) is thought to have significant negative impacts for queer women (e.g., Hamilton, 2007). SSP may (mis)inform observers’ assumptions about women’s same-sex sexuality more generally. In Studies 1a and 1b \((N = 541)\), we examined how heterosexual people perceive the sexual orientation and motivations of women engaging in SSP. We expanded on conceptualizations of SSP as harmful to queer identities by experimentally examining how exposure to SSP influences heterosexual participants’ bisexual prejudice. In Study 2 \((N = 222)\), we examined bisexual women’s perspectives on SSP and bisexual prejudice. Women who engage in SSP were often perceived as bisexual and as motivated by sexual experimentation and desire to shock onlookers. In Studies 1b and 2, we found that exposure to SSP increased endorsement of bisexual stereotypes and impacted bisexual women’s felt identity legitimacy. These findings raise concerns about the potential of SSP to inform and reinforce bisexual prejudice.

KEYWORDS

bisexuality; bisexual prejudice; same-sex behavior; performativity; women’s sexuality

Introduction

“We must have kissed or something because these guys came after us. They started behaving like hooligans, demanding that we kissed so they could enjoy watching ... this is not the first situation. Men see two women kissing and they start acting like we’re a show.”

-Melania Geymonat, as cited in Gajanan (2019)

Melania Geymonat and her girlfriend were harassed, physically assaulted, and robbed on a London bus in 2019 by a group of men who demanded a sexualized performance from the couple. The homophobic attack made headlines around the world and vividly illustrated the ongoing danger and harassment queer women face, particularly at the hands of men who feel
entitled to benefit from or enjoy women’s sexualities (e.g., Pharr, 1997). For lesbian and bisexual women, navigating same-sex sexuality in public spheres can be fraught with danger; for heterosexual women, however, publicly displaying same-sex sexuality may not carry this same threat.

Often in the context of college drinking, some heterosexual women kiss and fondle their female friends in public (Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Fahs, 2009; Hamilton, 2007; Wilkinson, 1996; Yost & McCarthy, 2012). Such incidences of same-sex performativity (SSP) have increased in recent decades (Diamond, 2005; Fahs, 2009; Lannutti & Denes, 2012; Levy, 2006). SSP is situated in specific contexts; broadly, within a society that objectifies women and places value on women’s ability to excite men rather than their own sexual desires, and locally, in college contexts with unique norms for sexual behavior (e.g., alcohol-fueled, highly sexualized parties; Yost & McCarthy, 2012, pp. 8–9). In these specific contexts, women’s social capital relies on their sexual desirability, which can be heightened by engaging in sexualized performances including SSP.

Though qualitative inquiries have examined women’s reported motivations for engaging in SSP, we know little about how others perceive these women and the public sexual performances in which they engage (e.g., Yost & McCarthy, 2012). Previous research has indicated that onlookers assume women engaging in SSP to be heterosexual (Lannutti & Denes, 2012; Rupp & Taylor, 2010; Yost & McCarthy, 2012). However, these studies have largely been limited to interviews and focus groups (with some exceptions, e.g., Lannutti & Denes, 2012), and have mostly examined the experiences of heterosexual performers; only rarely has emphasis been placed on observers of SSP. Though foundational and informative, previous studies have yet to empirically address potential attitudinal consequences of SSP, such as how SSP contributes to attitudes toward queer women. In the present work, we conduct a series of experiments to examine perceptions of SSP, and we cover new empirical territory by considering the perspectives of bisexual women. Specifically, we examine perceptions of women who engage in SSP with regard to their sexual orientation and motivations, and the potential impacts of their behavior for queer women, from the perspectives of both heterosexual and bisexual participants.

**Representations of SSP in popular culture**

Same-sex performances between heterosexual women have captured the public eye for decades. Portrayals of female same-sex sexual behavior are a staple of contemporary North American media; for example, pornographic magazine *Penthouse* displays two women sexually engaging with each other in approximately two-thirds of all their images (Jenefsky & Miller, 1998).
Penthouse’s propensity for commodifying girl-on-girl sexuality appears to have succeeded with consumers, as modern popular media have appropriated the trend, packaging performative girl-on-girl sexual behavior into mainstream shows like Friends and Riverdale, as well as movies such as Neighbors.

Scholars posit that these images function to titillate heterosexual male viewers and increase ratings for broadcasters (Diamond, 2005; Jackson & Gilbertson, 2009). Analyzing the objectification of queer women, Diamond (2005) points to media constructions of queer women as heterosexually attractive; consistent with other researchers (e.g., Ciasullo, 2001; Garrity, 2001; Jenkins, 2005), Diamond delineates how supposed queer characters are constructed within the norms of heterosexual attractiveness. Slim, pretty, and curvaceous, these women are deficient of any cultural signifiers of lesbianism aside from their sexual behavior and hardly ever resemble what are commonly referred to as “butch” lesbians (Ciasullo, 2001). Thus, scholars have suggested that depictions of SSP in mainstream media function to appease men rather than to accurately or thoughtfully represent women’s same-sex sexuality; in playing to the male gaze, these depictions are performative.

Women’s SSP in heteronormative party contexts is similarly directed toward the male gaze and is performed for a heterosexual male audience (e.g., Yost & McCarthy, 2012). It is this audience which makes the behavior performative. The performative nature of SSP is broadly understood in existing literature from both the perspective of the actors (women engaging in SSP, the majority of whom report performative motivations; (e.g., Yost & McCarthy, 2012)) as well as observers of the behavior (e.g., Jackson & Gilbertson, 2009). In the following sections, we examine how heterosexual women’s SSP similarly functions to appease men and, as a corollary, may obscure and misrepresent queer women’s sexuality. We review evidence of women’s motivations for engaging in SSP, the potential impacts of SSP, and the implications of SSP for beliefs about bisexuality.

We focus specifically on women’s SSP herein given both a general lack of research on men’s SSP as well as indications in the scant existing literature that men’s SSP experiences differ from women’s in a number of ways (Esterline & Galupo, 2013). There is no built-in audience for men’s SSP as there is for women’s; further, men’s SSP is primarily a source of humor and is often undertaken in the context of dares and/or games where the object is to get as close to kissing as possible, but not engage in any actual physical contact (Esterline & Galupo, 2013). The humorous nature of men’s SSP deprives it of implications for the participants’ sexuality (Esterline & Galupo, 2013); for women’s SSP, however, the implications are less clear.
**Heterosexual women’s motivations for engaging in SSP**

Women who have engaged in SSP report numerous motivations for doing so. Most commonly, women attribute their engagement in SSP to a desire for male attention; women also commonly report engaging in SSP as a result of social pressures, alcohol intoxication, and as a means to an end, that end often being access to some resource controlled by men, such as alcohol or entry to party spaces (e.g. Boyer & Galupo, 2015; Brown, 2014; Esterline, 2014; Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Fahs, 2009; Hamilton, 2007; Rupp & Taylor, 2010; Yost & McCarthy, 2012). Previous work has explored this exchange of sexuality for resources drawing upon sexual economics theory (SET; Rudman & Fetterolf, 2014). SET casts the exchange of sexuality for resources as a “vestige of patriarchy” (p. 1446) and describes how men utilize sexual economics as a barrier to sexual equality for women. For example, men may expect women to engage in sexually titillating acts, such as exposing their bodies or appearing sexually available, to gain access to party spaces or to consume alcohol for free. With men at the helm of the college drinking scene, the use of SSP as a means to an end (i.e., as an exchange for men’s attention or resources) can be understood as a patriarchal and male-driven behavior; in these contexts, women may be exchanging their agency for access to male-controlled resources.

Less commonly, some women report agentic sexual motivations for engaging in SSP. Women may engage in SSP in order to confirm their heterosexual identities via experimentation with same-sex behaviors (Yost & McCarthy, 2012); others report using the college party context as a safe space for identity exploration where they can briefly explore alternative sexualities without consequence (Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Rupp & Taylor, 2010). Some women report strategically using alcohol intoxication within this party scene to excuse uncharacteristic sexual behavior, including desired same-sex experiences (Vander Ven & Beck, 2009). While same-sex experimentation is a normative part of heterosexual identity development, and can be a beneficial pathway for better understanding one’s sexual desires, the public nature of SSP has been taken to suggest that this form of exploration in particular may not be very introspective (Yost & McCarthy, 2012); Yost and McCarthy further speculate that this testing seeks to confirm heterosexual identities rather than to legitimately explore alternative identities and is thus not truly open-minded exploration.

Sexual experimentation via SSP due to same-sex sexual desire appears uncommon, with only 3% of a sample of 100 heterosexual women who had engaged in SSP strongly agreeing that they felt attraction to the female partner with whom they had engaged in SSP (Brown, 2014). In fact, a majority of these women explicitly denied feeling attracted to their SSP partners. Most heterosexual women who engage in SSP also deny deriving
any sexual pleasure from their experiences (Brown, 2014; Yost & McCarthy, 2012). Many women report feeling objectified and exploited during SSP, and experience feelings of violation and degradation during the act, later utilizing terminology similar to that used by sexual assault victims when describing their experiences (e.g., “...it is so, in a way, I guess, degrading”; Yost & McCarthy, 2012, p. 18).

Women’s lack of positive experiences despite these supposedly agentic motivations may be suggestive of the notion that understanding women’s sexual performances as guided by agency “over-invests in a model of free will and choice in a marketplace of ideas and images that seek to define and construct girls’ sexuality” (Lamb, 2010, p. 300). That is, women’s agency in the male-dominated contexts in which SSP occurs may be inherently improbable due to patriarchal power dynamics. However, a small number of women report less aversive SSP experiences, derive sexual pleasure from SSP, and even report voluntarily sharing images of their performances (e.g., on Facebook; Rupp & Taylor, 2010).

Although a minority of women report positive experiences with SSP, Yost and McCarthy (2012) “caution...against labeling this experience a genuinely feminist, empowering one” (p. 21) given the problematic nature of self-sexualization which, even when experienced as empowering, is an experience of subordination and objectification. Though previous research provides evidence of women’s motivations for SSP and shows that motivations can be mixed, less is understood about how others perceive women’s motivations for engaging in SSP. In the current research, we examine perceptions of motivations for SSP to better understand how potentially harmful stereotypes about women’s same-sex sexuality might be reinforced by SSP.

**Theorizing the consequences of SSP**

Given women’s SSP tends not to be related to sexual desire or pleasure, SSP appears disconnected from the sexual identities of the women who participate. Indeed, the lack of identity consequence is cited as a benefit by women who engage in SSP; that is, women believe they can engage in same-sex behavior without adopting a queer identity (Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Rupp & Taylor, 2010). Though SSP lacks identity consequences for its participants, there may be harmful consequences for other women. Displays of SSP can affect queer women by unintentionally delegitimizing, trivializing, and depoliticizing queer identities in several ways (e.g., Diamond, 2005; Jackson & Gilbertson, 2009; Wilkinson, 1996). Diamond (2005) theorizes two routes of delegitimization of queer identities through heterosexual women’s same-sex engagement: (1) the use of women’s same-
sex sexuality as a tool for titillating men and (2) the obscuring of the socio-political context of “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich, 1980) by portraying sexual identification as a trivial matter of choice.

**A tool for titillation**

Many heterosexual women report using SSP to garner male attention (Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Fahs, 2009; Hamilton, 2007; Yost & McCarthy, 2012). Likewise, onlookers frequently attribute SSP to women’s desire for male attention (Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Rupp & Taylor, 2010). Women often describe their SSP encounters in terms of men’s reactions (Hamilton, 2007; Yost & McCarthy, 2012), reinforcing male attention as an integral motivator for the performance. Recalling the concept of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1989), the motivation of male attention can be considered in terms of the power embodied in men as the intended audience of SSP, as well as the objectification of the women engaging in the act (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Rupp & Taylor, 2010); indeed, a majority of women who have engaged in SSP speak of their experiences as objectifying (Yost & McCarthy, 2012).

A host of reasons can explain why men enjoy observing SSP. SSP signals sexual availability; women who engage in SSP are assumed to be heterosexual (Lannutti & Denes, 2012; Rupp & Taylor, 2010; Yost & McCarthy, 2012) and to be engaging in their performance for the benefit of male onlookers (Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Rupp & Taylor, 2010). This performance thus communicates that the women intend to arouse the men, suggesting sexual desire and availability on the part of the performers. Further, SSP directly conforms to a common male fantasy: observing women engaging in same-sex sexual behavior (Fahs, 2009; Jenefsky & Miller, 1998). SSP conforms to this fantasy more than does sexual activity between queer women, as the performers in SSP are assumedly heterosexual and thus theoretically available partners for male observers. Taken together, SSP’s connection to male attention and arousal may yield implications for how queer women are perceived and treated if men tend to understand female–female same-sex sexuality as a performance intended for their observance and serving to signal the (hetero)sexual availability of the women involved.

**Obscuring compulsory heterosexuality**

The construal of SSP as an inconsequential performance driven by motivations of pleasure, fun, and male attention (Yost & McCarthy, 2012) erases feminist politics as well as women’s oppression in the heteropatriarchy (Wilkinson, 1996). SSP depoliticizes queer identities by depicting sexuality as a trivial and fundamentally personal choice (Wilkinson, 1996), failing to
acknowledge the “pervasive but often invisible sociopolitical forces rendering heterosexuality a cultural imperative for women rather than a natural state of being” (Diamond, 2005, p. 108).

SSP depicts sexuality as a hedonistic choice (Diamond, 2005; Fahs, 2009; Hamilton, 2007; Wilkinson, 1996); this apolitical casting of sexuality ignores all context, negating the importance of such factors as hegemony, patriarchy, and economic and social inequality (Diamond, 2005). Women are assumed to be free to indulge in sexual liaisons as they choose, with whichever partners they choose. SSP is purported as a fun, safe add-on to heterosexual identities; tourism into the echelons of female–female sexuality situated as a choice which can be made devoid of any lasting effects (e.g., Esterline & Galupo, 2013). Heterosexual women can freely choose to engage in non-heterosexual activity; this ease of choice may lead to a perception that queer people are equally free to choose non-heterosexuality, or that, as in the case of heterosexual women’s SSP, same-sex behaviors are an “act” or performance. Indeed, many women who engage in SSP come away believing that they have tested different sexualities and simply decided on a heterosexual orientation (Diamond, 2005; Yost & McCarthy, 2012). In other words, women may engage in SSP while maintaining a location of privilege with their (heterosexual) identities, avoiding the risk for anti-gay aggression that queer women encounter for the same behaviors.

The depiction of sexuality as a matter of trivial choice obscures the sociopolitical context of compulsory heterosexuality, which essentially makes heterosexuality a cultural imperative (Diamond, 2005; Rich, 1980). Queer women’s mere existence challenges compulsory heterosexuality; in contrast, heterosexual women’s same-sex performance may reinforce it. Heterosexual women who partake in SSP engage in seemingly queer behaviors, but are often compelled to cater to and be subservient to men’s interests and remain heterosexually available (e.g., Yost & McCarthy, 2012), recalling Barry’s (1979) notion of male-identification, whereby women’s own desires and needs become secondary to those of men. In queer women’s same-sex behaviors, they intentionally reject men’s interest in them, a way of disconnecting from male-identification (Barry, 1979). Queer women’s same-sex behaviors prioritize their own desires – not those of men. Yet, due to the compulsory nature of heterosexuality, queer women are structurally and interpersonally punished for their radical act of refusing to cater to male arousal (e.g., denied equal rights; targeted with violence). Heterosexual women’s SSP has the potential to escape this punishment by (intentionally or unintentionally) catering to men’s desires; the male-identification of queer behaviors via heterosexual women’s SSP, however, may reinforce punishment for queer women’s subversion of compulsory heterosexuality, thus posing a threat to queer women.
**SSP and implications for beliefs about bisexuality**

We posit that SSP may be especially threatening to bisexual identities, as the performativity inherent in SSP may reinforce commonly held notions of bisexuality as illegitimate, unstable, and driven by promiscuity (e.g., Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Friedman et al., 2014; Israel & Mohr, 2004). Indeed, women who engage in SSP are perceived as more promiscuous than women who engage in identical kissing behaviors with male partners (Lannutti & Denes, 2012); the portrayal of women’s same-sex sexuality via SSP may thus reinforce this negative stereotype about bisexuality. Further, bisexual people are often being perceived as experiencing identity instability – that is, being confused, undecided, or in denial about their sexual orientation; further, beliefs about identity instability are often used to deny the legitimacy of bisexuality (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Dyar et al., 2017; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Roberts et al., 2015). However, bisexual individuals constitute the numeric majority of sexual minorities (Herbenick et al., 2010), and bisexual identities are particularly common among women (Copen et al., 2016). Stereotypes of bisexuality as situational, illegitimate, and unstable have significant consequences for the social position and well-being of bisexual people (e.g., Friedman et al., 2014; Matsick & Rubin, 2018). Bisexual individuals experience worse physical, mental, and sexual health outcomes than heterosexual people, gay men, and lesbian women (Ebin, 2012; Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2010; Kerr et al., 2013; Persson & Pfau, 2015). Further, given the dual discrimination faced by bisexual people from both heterosexual people as well as lesbian and gay individuals, many bisexual people lack buffers such as a sense of social support and belonging (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Ross et al., 2010), which typically protect against external stressors such as discrimination (Kertzner et al., 2009; Torres & Ong, 2010).

SSP may contribute to bisexual prejudice and concomitant health disparities by portraying women’s same-sex sexuality as merely a performance for male attention and, further, as something situational, illegitimate, and inconsequential. That is, if understandings of SSP inform assumptions about women’s same-sex sexuality more generally, SSP may reinforce widely held negative stereotypes about bisexuality. For example, if people come to understand women’s same-sex sexuality as performative, male-driven, and situational as a result of observing SSP, these assumptions may carry over into their beliefs about bisexual women, reinforcing stereotypes about bisexuality as unstable and illegitimate (e.g., Friedman et al., 2014). Similarly, the notion of androcentric desire (the stereotype that bisexual people of any gender are more legitimately attracted to men than to women; see Matsick & Rubin, 2018) may be supported by the fact that women who engage in SSP often do so for male attention (e.g., Yost &
McCarthy, 2012). The use of female same-sex sexuality in SSP as a means to a (heterosexual) end supports the stereotype of bisexual women as merely “heterosexual in disguise” (Yost & Thomas, 2012) because SSP prioritizes the sexual desires of the onlooking male over the women participants, suggesting primacy of heterosexuality. Thus, in several ways, SSP may reinforce widely held negative stereotypes about bisexual women. In the current research, we suggest that SSP may be one of many factors that drive heightened beliefs about bisexuality as an illegitimate and inauthentic sexual orientation.

The current research

Given the potential for SSP to inform observers’ assumptions about queer women and reinforce negative stereotypes, particularly about bisexual women, it is important to understand how women who engage in SSP are perceived with regard to their sexual orientation. If women engaging in SSP are perceived as heterosexual, this raises concerns about the invisibility of bisexuality (Lannutti & Denes, 2012); if these women are perceived as bisexual, concerns may be raised about how SSP reinforces negative stereotypes about bisexual women (e.g., as promiscuous; Friedman et al., 2014). It is also important to understand people’s perceptions of women’s motivations for engaging in SSP, as these motivations inform how stereotypes might be reinforced by SSP (e.g., if sexual desire is not implicated, stereotypes of bisexuality as illegitimate may be reinforced). Thus, in Studies 1a and 1b, we examined how heterosexual participants perceived women engaging in SSP in terms of their sexual orientation and motivations for engaging in SSP; we also tested whether exposure to SSP influenced participants’ endorsement of bisexual prejudice.

In Study 2, we examined the relationship between SSP and queer identities from the perspective of bisexual women. SSP research thus far has prioritized the perspectives of heterosexual perceivers of SSP or heterosexual participants of SSP. We suggest a nuanced approach to examining potential consequences of SSP includes assessing bisexual women’s perspectives; indeed, an approach of advocating for minority perspectives in intergroup dynamics research has proved informative in previous work on LGBTQ experiences (e.g., Matsick & Conley, 2016). In alignment with the central claims of feminist standpoint theory, that “knowledge is situated and perspectival and that there are multiple standpoints from which knowledge is produced” (Hekman, 1997, p. 342), the present research also aims to take into account the viewpoint of the threatened minority (bisexual women) to understand the realities of SSP. Given their minoritized experience, bisexual women are likely to be more attentive than heterosexual people to potential
cues of discrimination (e.g., Major et al., 2013), and may therefore perceive SSP as more harmful than do heterosexual people. We return to this discussion in Study 2 to elucidate our approach to understanding bisexual women’s perspectives.

The data used in these studies are a part of a larger project that also included an online qualitative component. The qualitative data are not analyzed or presented here.

**Study 1a**

We collected data from heterosexual college students – an ideal sample for the present research given that students are likely to have experienced the college party contexts where SSP tends to occur. We randomly assigned participants to one of three conditions, each of which differently described a female target’s actions at a bar; in one, the female target engaged in SSP. We hypothesized that participants would perceive the female target as heterosexual across conditions, as was indicated by Lannutti and Denes (2012). Given the potential for SSP to reinforce negative stereotypes about bisexuality, we predicted that participants in the female–female kissing (SSP) condition would endorse higher levels of bisexual prejudice than participants in the control and male kissing conditions. Additionally, given how SSP situates female–female same-sex sexuality as male-oriented (e.g., Yost & McCarthy, 2012), we predicted that participants in the SSP condition would endorse higher levels of androcentric beliefs than those in the other conditions. Finally, given that SSP tends to be perceived differently than other-sex performative sexual behavior (Lannutti & Denes, 2012), we predicted that perceived motivations would differ by condition.¹

**Participants**

The initial sample comprised 377 participants from a large research university’s subject pool. We excluded 29 participants from the analyses due to not meeting inclusion criteria (i.e., did not provide consent or identified their sexual orientation as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer), and removed another 17 for failing attention checks (e.g., selecting an incorrect response when asked the name of the target female in the vignette). We removed an additional 37 participants for insufficient completion (n = 4 completed the survey in less than 4 min, n = 33 did not complete key measures). The final sample consisting of 294 heterosexual participants (women; n = 150; 51.0%) ranged in age from 18 to 29 years (M = 18.69; SD = 1.39). Participants were able to indicate their gender as “man,” “woman,” or “trans*” (trans man, trans woman, transgender)” or were able to specify their gender identity
beyond these options. The racial/ethnic identities of participants were as follows: White \((n = 217; 73.8\%)\), Asian or Asian American \((n = 36; 12.2\%)\), Latino \((n = 13, 4.4\%)\), African American or Black \((n = 10, 3.4\%)\), multiethnic \((n = 9, 3.1\%)\), Middle Eastern American or Arab \((n = 8, 2.7\%)\), and one participant \((0.3\%)\) was Pacific Islander. Participants’ political orientation, measured on an 8-point scale \((0 = \text{extremely liberal}, 7 = \text{extremely conservative})\) was an average of 3.86 \((SD = 1.34)\), indicating the sample was slightly left of center.

**Design and procedure**

Participants completed an online study on Qualtrics for course credit. After providing informed consent, participants completed a demographic questionnaire. We then randomly assigned participants to one of three vignette conditions: female–female kissing (SSP), female–male kissing (male), or no kissing (control). Participants answered three reading comprehension questions about the vignette to distract them from the true purpose of the study and assess their attention. Next, we asked participants to indicate the degree to which they believed Anne (the target character in the vignette) was likely to identify with each of three sexual orientations (heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian). We also asked participants in all conditions to indicate the degree to which they perceived each of ten items to have motivated Anne’s behavior described in the vignette. Next, participants in all conditions completed measures of bisexual prejudice and perceived androcentric desire.

**Materials**

We randomly assigned participants to read one of three vignettes, borrowed from Lannutti and Denes (2012). These scenarios described college-aged women going to a bar together and dancing while men watched. In the control scenario, the women danced together while men watched. In the SSP scenario, two of the women danced intimately with one another and kissed while men watch, and finally, in the male kissing scenario, a man danced intimately with and kissed one of the women. No other details varied between the vignettes. The vignettes focused on one specific character, Anne.

**Measures**

*Perceived sexual orientation.* Adapted from Lannutti and Denes (2012), we used three 5-point Likert-type items (“Anne is heterosexual,” “Anne is bisexual,” “Anne is lesbian”) with possible responses ranging from 1
(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to assess participants’ impressions of the sexual orientation of the woman in the scenario.

**Motivations.** Participants indicated the degree to which they believed each of 10 motivations played a role in the encounter described in the vignette. Motivations included male attention, social pressure, alcohol intoxication, sexual experimentation, desire to fend off interest from men, sexual desire, instrumental value, social bonding, fun, and shock value. We adapted these motivational items from qualitative work on women’s motivations for engaging in SSP (Brown, 2014; Esterline & Muehlenhard, 2017; Fahs, 2009; Hamilton, 2007; Rupp & Taylor, 2010; Yost & McCarthy, 2012). Participants rated the extent to which they believed each of the items motivated Anne’s behavior on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely).

**Bisexual prejudice.** We included two measures of bisexual prejudice as each emphasizes a unique subset of bisexual stereotypes. The Adapted Anti-Bisexual Experiences Scale places greater emphasis on identity instability; the Bisexuality Indiana Attitudes Scale more strongly emphasizes stereotypes about bisexual women’s involvement in romantic and sexual relationships. Participants responded to Matsick and Rubin’s (2018) Adapted Anti-Bisexual Experiences Scale. This 17-item scale, originally modified from Brewster and Moradi (2010), evaluated negative attitudes toward bisexual women with items such as “Bisexual women are obsessed with sex.” Participants responded on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree); we averaged item scores to create an overall score, with higher overall scores indicating greater prejudice toward bisexual individuals. This measure contained three subscales: Sexual Orientation Instability (8 items; e.g., “Bisexuality among women is only a sexual curiosity, not a stable sexual orientation”), Sexual Irresponsibility (4 items; e.g., “Bisexual women are likely to have an STD/HIV”), and Interpersonal Hostility (5 items; e.g., “Bisexual women don’t belong in lesbian and gay social networks.”). In previous research, each subscale demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.90$, $\alpha = 0.83$, and $\alpha = 0.82$, respectively), and the global scale had an alpha coefficient of 0.94 (Matsick & Rubin, 2018). With the present sample, the subscale alphas were strong ($\alpha = 0.85$, $\alpha = 0.85$, and $\alpha = 0.83$, respectively); the global alpha coefficient for the scale was 0.93.

Participants also completed the Bisexuality: Indiana Attitudes Scale – females (BIAS-f; Friedman et al., 2014). Participants responded to this 27-item scale on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); we summed item scores to create an overall score,
with higher overall scores indicating more negative attitudes toward bisexual individuals. The scale demonstrated strong reliability among mixed samples of heterosexual and LGB respondents ($\alpha = 0.92$; Friedman et al., 2014). The alpha coefficient for the BIAS scale in the present study was 0.94.

**Androcentric desire.** Borrowing from Matsick and Rubin (2018), participants responded to two items that measured the extent to which they believed the target to be sexually attracted to men and the extent to which they believe the target to be sexually attracted to women. Participants rated how likely they believed each item on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all sexually attracted) to 6 (very sexually attracted). For each participant, we calculated an androcentric desire score by subtracting their rating of Anne’s attraction to women from their rating of Anne’s attraction to men. Higher scores indicated heightened perceptions of Anne’s attraction to men versus women.

**Results and discussion**

We conducted a series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) entering the 3-level condition variable as a factor on our primary dependent variables of perceived sexual orientation, perceived motivations, bisexual prejudice, and androcentric desire. We utilized Tukey’s HSD for all post hoc comparisons.

**Perceived sexual orientation**

*Figure 1* presents the effect of condition on perceived sexual orientation. There was a significant effect of condition on perceptions of the target as heterosexual, bisexual, and as lesbian (all $p$ values < 0.05). Participants in the male kissing condition ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 0.53$) were more likely than those in the other conditions to perceive the target as heterosexual; those in the SSP condition ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.06$) were least likely to perceive the target as heterosexual. Participants in the SSP condition ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.64$) were more likely than participants in the control condition ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.70$) and those in the male kissing condition ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.77$) to perceive the target as bisexual. Perceptions of the target as a lesbian were highest in the SSP condition ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.90$) and lowest in the male kissing condition ($M = 1.72$, $SD = 0.83$). Thus, SSP was generally not read as a heterosexual activity, suggesting that, despite the heterosexualized context of college social life in which the vignette was set, engagement in SSP carried implications for how others perceived Anne’s sexual orientation.
Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for all motivation items by condition. All but one of the motivation items (desire to obtain a resource; \( F(2, 289) = 0.213, \ p = 0.809 \)) varied by condition (all \( p \) values < 0.05). Participants in the male kissing condition endorsed desire for male attention to a greater degree than those in the SSP or control conditions. In the male kissing condition, participants may have interpreted this item as referring to attention from the male kissing partner rather than onlooking males. Surprisingly, male attention was not implicated in the SSP condition, contrary to women’s own reports of male attention as a primary motivator for SSP (Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Fahs, 2009; Hamilton, 2007; Yost & McCarthy, 2012). Post hoc comparisons for social pressure were nonsignificant; see Table 1 for patterns of means. Participants in the SSP and male kissing conditions endorsed alcohol intoxication and sexual desire.

**Perceived motivations**

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for all motivation items by condition. All but one of the motivation items (desire to obtain a resource; \( F(2, 289) = 0.213, \ p = 0.809 \)) varied by condition (all \( p \) values < 0.05). Participants in the male kissing condition endorsed desire for male attention to a greater degree than those in the SSP or control conditions. In the male kissing condition, participants may have interpreted this item as referring to attention from the male kissing partner rather than onlooking males. Surprisingly, male attention was not implicated in the SSP condition, contrary to women’s own reports of male attention as a primary motivator for SSP (Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Fahs, 2009; Hamilton, 2007; Yost & McCarthy, 2012). Post hoc comparisons for social pressure were nonsignificant; see Table 1 for patterns of means. Participants in the SSP and male kissing conditions endorsed alcohol intoxication and sexual desire.
more so than those in the control condition, perhaps drawing from common understandings of college hookup culture which usually implicate both drinking and sexual desire (e.g., Garcia et al., 2012).

Participants in the SSP condition endorsed sexual experimentation to a greater degree than those in the other conditions. The notion of same-sex behavior – more so than other-sex behavior – as a form of sexual experimentation suggests perceptions of same-sex behavior as less consequential or serious than other-sex behavior. Participants in the SSP condition endorsed fend off male interest to a greater degree than those in the other conditions. In the SSP condition, participants may have interpreted this item as measuring the women’s sexual engagement as a way to ward off attention from onlooking men; in the female–male condition, participants may have interpreted this item as referring to interest from the male partner, thus low scores on this item would reflect the acceptance of male interest demonstrated by Anne’s sexual engagement with the male partner.

Participants in the control condition endorsed social bonding and fun to a greater degree than those in either kissing condition, suggesting that sexual behaviors, relative to non-sexual behaviors (i.e., control condition) generally were not interpreted as being motivated by social bonding or fun, in contrast to prior literature specific to SSP (e.g., Yost & McCarthy, 2012). Finally, participants in the SSP condition endorsed desire to shock or surprise others to a greater degree than those in the other conditions; that only same-sex behavior was perceived to be motivated by a desire to shock or surprise others may be due to perceptions of same-sex behavior as rebelling against social norms (e.g., Hamilton, 2007).

### Bisexual prejudice

There were no condition effects for the Adapted Anti-Bisexual Experiences Scale, $F(2, 289) = 0.30, p = 0.74$ or its subscales (all $p$ values $> 0.17$). There

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**Table 1.** Means (standard deviations) of perceived motivations by condition (Studies 1a and 1b).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived motivations</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>SSP</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>SSP</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desire for male attention</td>
<td>2.16 (1.03)</td>
<td>2.21 (1.11)</td>
<td>2.83 (1.02)</td>
<td>2.17 (0.96)</td>
<td>2.48 (1.04)</td>
<td>2.74 (1.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social pressure</td>
<td>2.15 (1.04)</td>
<td>1.81 (1.01)</td>
<td>2.13 (0.98)</td>
<td>2.29 (1.00)</td>
<td>2.11 (1.07)</td>
<td>2.52 (1.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol intoxication</td>
<td>2.63 (1.06)</td>
<td>3.26 (1.17)</td>
<td>3.21 (1.01)</td>
<td>2.40 (1.07)</td>
<td>3.53 (0.88)</td>
<td>3.19 (0.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual desire</td>
<td>1.89 (1.01)</td>
<td>3.20 (0.93)</td>
<td>3.43 (0.91)</td>
<td>1.79 (0.80)</td>
<td>2.91 (0.92)</td>
<td>3.33 (0.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual experimentation</td>
<td>1.64 (0.87)</td>
<td>3.03 (0.96)</td>
<td>2.27 (1.01)</td>
<td>1.63 (0.82)</td>
<td>3.14 (0.97)</td>
<td>2.48 (0.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fend off male interest</td>
<td>1.95 (0.97)</td>
<td>2.28 (0.97)</td>
<td>1.54 (0.86)</td>
<td>1.97 (0.93)</td>
<td>2.24 (0.96)</td>
<td>1.69 (0.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to obtain a resource</td>
<td>1.66 (0.90)</td>
<td>1.62 (0.88)</td>
<td>1.58 (0.85)</td>
<td>1.53 (0.77)</td>
<td>1.64 (0.93)</td>
<td>1.79 (0.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social bonding</td>
<td>3.86 (0.95)</td>
<td>2.88 (0.98)</td>
<td>3.13 (1.00)</td>
<td>3.77 (0.95)</td>
<td>2.86 (1.13)</td>
<td>3.15 (0.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>4.21 (0.70)</td>
<td>3.80 (0.83)</td>
<td>3.94 (0.85)</td>
<td>4.15 (0.82)</td>
<td>3.74 (0.80)</td>
<td>3.79 (0.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to shock or surprise others</td>
<td>1.61 (0.88)</td>
<td>2.22 (1.16)</td>
<td>1.71 (0.80)</td>
<td>1.51 (0.68)</td>
<td>2.47 (1.11)</td>
<td>1.73 (0.79)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. SSP = same-sex performativity condition; Male = female–male kissing condition. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Means within studies that do not share subscripts differ by $p < 0.05.$*
was also no significant condition effect for the BIAS-f measure, $F(2, 289) = 0.47, p = 0.62$, suggesting that observing SSP did not increase endorsement of bisexual prejudice compared to observing male–female performativity or no performativity.

**Androcentric desire**

Mean ratings of attraction to men and to women by condition are presented in Figure 2. Contrary to our hypotheses, condition did not influence perceived androcentric desire, $F(2, 289) = 1.39, p = 0.25$. Thus, across conditions, beliefs about bisexual women’s attraction to men versus women did not vary.

**Study 1b**

Though perceived sexual orientation was a variable of interest in Study 1a, SSP by definition occurs between heterosexual women. Thus, to specifically examine perceptions of heterosexual women who engage in SSP, in Study 1b we adjusted each vignette to specify “Anne is a heterosexual (straight) college student.” Further, we adapted our dependent measures of bisexual prejudice and androcentric desire to specifically examine the application of stereotypes about and attitudes toward bisexuality to Anne (the target character in the vignettes), rather than examining participants’ overall
endorsement of bisexual prejudice. Our hypotheses remained the same as in Study 1a.

Participants

We used the same data collection procedure as in Study 1a. The initial sample comprised 328 participants; we excluded 24 participants from the analyses due to not meeting inclusion criteria (i.e., identified their sexual orientation as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer), and removed 16 additional participants for failing attention checks. We removed 19 participants for insufficient completion (n = 10 completed the survey in less than 4 min, n = 9 did not complete key measures), and excluded 22 participants from the analyses due to missing data via listwise deletion. The final sample consisting of 247 heterosexual participants ranged in age from 18 to 36 years (M = 19.59; SD = 2.15). Forty-nine percent (n = 121) of participants were women, 50.2% (n = 124) men, and 0.8% (n = 2) transgender. The racial/ethnic identities of participants were as follows: White (n = 168; 68.0%), Asian or Asian American (n = 41; 16.6%), Latino (n = 14, 5.7%), multiethnic (n = 11, 4.5%), African American or Black (n = 10, 4.0%), Middle Eastern American or Arab (n = 2, 0.8%), and Pacific Islander (n = 1, 0.4%). Participants’ political orientation, measured on an 8-point scale (0 = extremely liberal, 7 = extremely conservative) was an average of 3.83 (SD = 1.34), indicating the sample was slightly left of center.

Design and procedure

We followed Study 1a’s procedures, but with two minor adjustments to the materials and measures. First, we specified that “Anne is a heterosexual (straight) college student” in all the vignettes. Second, we specified “Anne” as the target of the item wording in some of the measures, as described in more detail below.

Measures

Perceived sexual orientation

Given that Anne was explicitly described as heterosexual in this study, the measure of perceived sexual orientation from Study 1a was adjusted to read “How likely do you think it is that Anne is actually… [heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian].”

Perceived motivations

We used the 10 motivation items from Study 1a.
Bisexual prejudice
Participants responded to the same measures of bisexual prejudice as in Study 1a; however, in the present study, we adapted the item wording such that the terms bisexual people and bisexual women were replaced with “Anne” to assess the application of these items to the target of the vignette. That is, rather than targeting bisexual prejudice generally, the items were adapted to examine the application of stereotypes about bisexual people to the target. For example, the item “Bisexual women are likely to have an STD/HIV” was adapted to read “Anne is likely to have an STD/HIV.” The Adapted Anti-Bisexual Experiences Scale demonstrated strong global reliability ($\alpha = 0.88$); reliabilities for the subscales of Irresponsibility ($\alpha = 0.82$), Hostility ($\alpha = 0.76$), and Instability ($\alpha = 0.70$) were acceptable. The BIAS-f was also adapted to replace the “bisexual woman” target with “Anne” ($\alpha = 0.89$).

Androcentric desire
Using the same format as in Study 1a, participants responded to two items indicating the degree to which they believed Anne was attracted to men and to women.

Results and discussion
We followed the same analytical procedures as in Study 1a.

Perceived sexual orientation
Figure 1 presents the effect of condition on perceived sexual orientation. There was a significant effect of condition on perceptions of the target as heterosexual, bisexual, and as a lesbian (all $p$ values < 0.05). Participants in the male kissing condition ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.53$) were the most likely to perceive the target as heterosexual, while those in the SSP condition ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.01$) were the least likely to do so. Participants in the SSP condition ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.73$) were more likely than those in the other conditions to perceive the target as bisexual. Perceptions of the target as a lesbian were higher in the SSP ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.07$) and control conditions ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.01$) than in the male kissing condition ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 0.72$).

Despite being explicitly told that the target was heterosexual, perceptions of the target’s sexual orientation varied by condition. Participants were no more likely to perceive the target as a lesbian when engaging in SSP versus engaging in no sexual behavior at all, giving credence to the claim that SSP is not read specifically as a lesbian activity (e.g., Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Rupp & Taylor, 2010). Mirroring the results of Study 1a, and contrary to
our hypothesis and to the findings of Lannutti and Denes (2012), participants did not perceive the target as heterosexual across all conditions, even when the target’s sexual orientation was explicitly stated to be heterosexual. Participants in the SSP condition were most likely to deem the target bisexual, suggesting that engagement in SSP may have identity implications even for women assumed (or explicitly stated to be) heterosexual. Thus, contrary to the notion of SSP as an opportunity for inconsequential identity exploration (Yost & McCarthy, 2012), the present results suggest that SSP may be read as an indicator of bisexual identity.

**Perceived motivations**

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for all items by condition. All but one of the motivational items, desire to obtain a resource, $F(2, 244) = 1.74, p = 0.178$ demonstrated significant effects by condition (all $p$ values $< 0.05$). Participants in the male kissing condition endorsed desire for male attention to a greater degree than did participants in the control condition. Endorsement of desire for male attention in the SSP condition did not differ from either the male kissing or control condition, defying previous work suggesting that onlookers frequently attribute SSP to male attention (Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Rupp & Taylor, 2010). Participants in the male kissing condition endorsed social pressure to a greater degree than did participants in the SSP condition; endorsement of this motivation in the control condition did not differ from either of the other conditions. Again, this finding contrasts with previous work on SSP which implicates social pressure as an important motivator for engagement in SSP (Brown, 2014; Fahs, 2009; Yost & McCarthy, 2012); thus, participant perceptions of the role of social pressure in SSP differ from those of women who have experienced SSP. The greater attribution of social pressure in male kissing relative to SSP may reflect notions of SSP as deviant (e.g., Hamilton, 2007); because deviant behaviors go against social norms, participants may perceive a lack of social pressure enforcing such behavior. Participants in the SSP condition attributed alcohol intoxication to the target more so than those in other conditions, suggesting greater associations between heterosexual women’s same-sex engagement – more so than heterosexual behavior – and alcohol intoxication.

Participants in the male kissing condition endorsed sexual desire to a greater degree than those in the other conditions; thus, sexual desire was implicated less as a motivation for SSP than for heterosexual kissing, suggesting, in alignment with prior literature on women’s SSP experiences, that heterosexual women’s sexual desire was not implicated in SSP (e.g., Brown, 2014; Yost & McCarthy, 2012). Participants in the SSP condition endorsed sexual experimentation to a greater degree than those in the other
conditions; thus, women’s kissing a female partner was seen as more experimental than kissing a male partner, corroborating stereotypes of androcentricity in bisexuality as well as the notion of bisexuality as an unstable and experimental orientation.

Participants in the SSP condition endorsed *fending off male interest* more so than did participants in the male kissing condition; scores in the control condition did not differ from either kissing condition. Thus, participants perceived same-sex kissing as an attempt to fend off men, defying the notion that SSP serves the male gaze. Participants in the control condition endorsed *social bonding* and *fun* to a greater degree than those in the other conditions; thus, sexual behavior regardless of partner gender seems to be dissociated from the notions of social bonding and fun more so than non-sexual behavior. Finally, participants in the SSP condition endorsed *desire to shock or surprise others* to a greater degree than those in the other conditions; same-sex behavior in particular was perceived as motivated by a desire to shock or surprise others.

**Bisexual prejudice**

A significant effect of condition was observed for global scores on the Adapted Anti-Bisexual Experiences Scale, $F(2, 244) = 7.02, p = 0.001, \eta^2_p = 0.054$. Participants in the SSP condition ($M = 2.94, SD = 0.70$) endorsed higher levels of bisexual prejudice toward Anne than those in the control condition ($M = 2.49, SD = 0.89$); those in the male kissing condition ($M = 2.77, SD = 0.70$) did not differ from either group. Significant effects of condition were observed for the subscales of Instability, $F(2, 244) = 18.75, p < 0.001, \eta^2_p = 0.133$ and Irresponsibility, $F(2, 244) = 3.35, p = 0.037, \eta^2_p = 0.027$. Though no post hoc tests for the Irresponsibility subscale were significant, there was a trend toward higher means in the male kissing condition. Scores on the Interpersonal Hostility subscale did not differ by condition, $F(2, 265) = 0.50, p = 0.610, \eta^2_p = 0.004$. Subscale differences by condition are represented in Figure 3.

On the Instability subscale, participants in the SSP condition ($M = 3.57, SD = 0.61$) endorsed higher levels of prejudice than those in the male kissing condition ($M = 3.16, SD = 0.73$). Group differences in prejudice endorsement were thus driven by the Instability subscale, which targets stereotypes about bisexuality as an unstable, illegitimate orientation, including, for example, the notion of bisexual women as merely “heterosexual in disguise” (Yost & Thomas, 2012). This finding suggests that observing heterosexual women engaging in SSP reinforces negative stereotypes about bisexual women, particularly regarding the stability or legitimacy of their bisexual orientation.
A significant effect of condition was also observed for the BIAS-f measure, $F(2, 244) = 4.58, p = 0.011, \eta^2_p = 0.036$. Participants in the SSP condition ($M = 65.57, SD = 11.51$) endorsed higher levels of prejudice than those in the control condition ($M = 60.06, SD = 13.60$); those in the male kissing condition did not differ from either group ($M = 62.20, SD = 10.29$). The trend of these results also indicates that observing heterosexual women engaging in SSP may reinforce negative stereotypes about bisexual women.

**Androcentric desire**

The androcentric desire measure demonstrated a significant effect of condition, $F(2, 244) = 15.13, p < 0.001, \eta^2_p = 0.110$. Mean ratings of attraction to men and to women by condition are presented in Figure 2. Participants in the male kissing condition ($M = 2.51, SD = 1.55$) endorsed the highest levels of androcentric desire, while those in the SSP condition ($M = 1.01, SD = 1.71$) scored the lowest. These results indicate that the target was perceived as being most attracted to women in the SSP condition relative to other conditions, but was still perceived as being significantly more attracted to men than to women across all conditions.

**Study 2**

In Study 2, we assessed the impact of SSP from the perspective of bisexual women.
Using the vignettes from Study 1a, in which the target’s sexual orientation was unspecified, we examined how close participants perceived themselves as being to Anne and to bisexual people in general, as well as how close they perceived Anne as being to bisexual people in general, in order to understand whether participants would psychologically distance themselves, and the bisexual community, from SSP. We left Anne’s sexual orientation unspecified in order to examine whether bisexual women perceived SSP as a queer or heterosexual activity.

We also examined internalized negative attitudes toward bisexuality as a dependent variable. Given the potential for SSP to reinforce negative stereotypes about bisexuality, we hypothesized that exposure to SSP would increase internalized binegativity relative to the male kissing or control conditions. Further, to more directly examine the impact of SSP on participants’ bisexual identities, we included a measure of felt legitimacy, developed for the current study, which examined how SSP impacted participants’ understandings of their own bisexual identities. Given the potential for SSP to convey bisexuality as an illegitimate, performance-oriented orientation (e.g., Fahs, 2009), we hypothesized that exposure to SSP would decrease felt legitimacy relative to exposure to the male kissing or control condition.

In addition, given the potential for SSP to convey women’s same-sex sexuality as merely a performance for male onlookers, we further elucidated the role of the male onlookers in the vignette by asking participants to report the degree to which they believed Anne’s behavior was a performance for these onlookers. We hypothesized that performance motivations would be more strongly endorsed in the SSP condition given the common understanding of SSP as a male-oriented activity (e.g., Rupp & Taylor, 2010).

**Participants**

We recruited bisexual women online using various recruitment methods through social media (e.g., Reddit, Lehmiller.com). We advertised the study as an examination of bisexual women’s first impressions of other women. The initial sample comprised 589 participants recruited through online snowball sampling on social media sites. We excluded 276 participants for insufficient completion of key measures \((n = 255)\) for survey completion rates below 90%, \(n = 21\) listwise deletion for missing data on key measures) and removed another two participants for failing attention checks. We removed participants who did not consistently identify as bisexual across two identical multiple choice questions (one appearing at the beginning of the survey and one appearing at the end) and one open-ended sexual orientation item \((n = 65)\) who did not initially identify as bisexual; \(n = 12\)
who initially identified as bisexual but later identified otherwise). Participants were again able to select their gender from the options of “man,” “woman,” or “trans* (trans man, trans woman, transgender)” or were able to specify their gender identity beyond these options; those who did not identify as women \( (n = 11) \) were removed. One participant’s data was withdrawn upon request.

The final sample included 222 participants ranging in age from 18 to 54 \( (M = 25.27, SD = 6.94) \). Participant racial/ethnic identities were as follows: White \( (n = 161; 72.5\%) \), Latino \( (n = 18; 8.1\%) \), multiethnic \( (n = 17; 7.7\%) \), Asian American or Asian \( (n = 10; 4.5\%) \), African American or Black \( (n = 7; 3.2\%) \), and Middle Eastern or Arab \( (n = 5; 2.3\%) \). Four participants did not report their race/ethnicity. Participants’ political orientation, measured on an 8-point scale \( (0 = \text{extremely liberal}, 7 = \text{extremely conservative}) \) was an average of 2.39 \( (SD = 1.46) \), indicating the sample was moderately left of center.

**Design and procedure**

We used the same general procedures from Studies 1a and 1b. After completing the demographic questionnaire, participants who did not identify as bisexual were directed out of the survey and informed that they did not meet the requirements for participation. Participants read the vignette and completed the perceived sexual orientation and perceived motivation measures. Next, they completed measures of performance motivations (a single item) and internalized binegativity. To avoid order effects, participants then completed three measures in randomized order: androcentric desire, closeness, and felt legitimacy. Participants also completed a bisexual stigma consciousness measure. Participants completed a second demographic block to verify their bisexual identity before being debriefed.

**Measures**

For organizational clarity, we present and discuss the measures as being (1) perception-focused and (2) identity-related for participants.

**Perceptions**

*Perceived sexual orientation.* Participants responded to the item “How likely do you think it is that Anne is \( \text{[heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian]} \)?” from Study 1a.

*Perceived motivations.* Participants rated the 10 motivations from Studies 1a and 1b.
**Androcentric desire.** Participants responded to the two androcentric desire questions (specific to Anne’s attractions) from Study 1b.

**Performance motivation.** To specifically examine the role of the male onlookers in the vignette, participants responded to the single item “do you think Anne’s behavior was a performance for the male onlookers in the story?” Response options ranged from 1 (definitely not) to 4 (definitely yes).

**Perceived closeness.** Participants reported their beliefs about how close they felt to the target, Anne, as well as to the bisexual community. Participants also reported the closeness they perceived there to be between Anne and the bisexual community. Perceived closeness was measured through an adapted Self/Other Inclusion Scale, which assesses one’s sense of interpersonal connectedness with others (Aron et al., 1992). We provided participants with the following prompt: “Which diagram best represents the closeness you perceive there to be between [you and Anne, you and bisexual people in general, Anne and bisexual people in general].” For each item, we presented a picture of seven Venn-like diagrams to represent different degrees of overlap between two circles, ranging from circles that are far apart in distance (scored as a 1) to circles that are completely overlapping (scored as a 7). Participants selected one of seven images. Greater numbers indicated greater perceived closeness. Due to a technical issue, data from the first of these questions (“closeness between you and Anne”) were missing for most participants and were thus excluded from the analyses.

**Identity outcomes**

**Internalized binegativity.** Participants completed the Bisexual Identity Inventory – Internalized Binegativity Subscale (BII; Paul et al., 2014). This subscale measures internalized negative attitudes toward bisexuality with items such as “I wish I could control my feelings and aim them at either men or women, but not both” and “My life would be better if I were not bisexual.” Participants responded to these items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Item scores were averaged to create an overall score, with higher scores indicating greater internalized binegativity. This subscale has demonstrated good internal consistency, with alpha coefficients ranging from 0.84 to 0.87 (Paul et al., 2014); in the present study, \( \alpha = 0.85 \).

**Felt legitimacy.** Participants responded to 11 original items which assessed how Anne’s behavior impacted their own bisexual identity. Considering their bisexual identity, participants were asked to respond to items such as
“Behavior like Anne’s makes me less proud of my identity” and “Behavior
like Anne’s leads people to take my identity less seriously.” Participants
responded to these items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly
disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). After reverse scoring three items, scores were
averaged to create an overall felt legitimacy score, with higher scores indi-
cating lower felt legitimacy. Internal consistency with the present sample
was 0.88.

We conducted a post hoc exploratory factor analysis on the eleven felt
legitimacy items to examine potential underlying dimensions. One item,
“Behavior like Anne’s is irrelevant to my identity,” was not loading prop-
erly and was removed from the analyses, therefore ten items were retained.
A promax rotation was employed. The overall Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO)
measure was 0.88, a classification of “meritorious” to “marvelous” accord-
ing to Kaiser (1974). Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was statistically significant
($\chi^2 (55) = 1240.69, p < 0.001$), indicating that the data were appropriate
for factoring. The factor analysis revealed two components with eigenvalues
greater than one which explained 44.33% and 7.32% of the total variance.
Overall, the two-factor solution explained 51.64% of the total variance; the
scale items and factor loadings are available in online Supplemental
Material. The two factors were labeled others’ perceptions (Factor 1) and
self-perceptions (Factor 2). We created composite scores for each factor
based on the mean of the items which had their primary loading on each
factor. The others’ perceptions factor ($M = 2.20, SD = 0.61$) demonstrated
excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.91$); internal consistency for the self-
perceptions factor ($M = 1.86, SD = 1.06$) was acceptable ($\alpha = 0.72$).

Results

We followed the same general analytical procedures as in the previ-
ous studies.

Perceptions

Perceived sexual orientation. Figure 4 presents the effects of condition on
perceived sexual orientation. There was a significant effect of condition on
perceptions of the target as heterosexual, bisexual, and as a lesbian (all $p$
values $< 0.05$). Participants in the male kissing condition ($M = 4.07,
$SD = 0.79$) were the most likely to perceive the target as heterosexual, while
those in the SSP condition ($M = 2.85, SD = 1.07$) were least likely to do so,
suggesting a need for behavioral confirmation of bisexuality (i.e., women
are presumed straight unless otherwise indicated; Swan & Habibi, 2015).
Participants in the SSP condition ($M = 3.94, SD = 0.60$) were more likely
than those in the other conditions to perceive the target as bisexual,
suggesting perceptions of same-sex behavior as a signal of bisexual identity among bisexual women. Finally, participants in the SSP condition ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.81$) were the most likely to perceive the target as a lesbian, while those in the male kissing condition ($M = 1.71$, $SD = 0.81$) were the least likely to do so. Taken together, these results suggest that engagement in SSP has implications for perceived sexual identity among bisexual women.

**Perceived motivations.** Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for all items by condition. All but one of our motivational items, *desire to obtain a resource*, $F(2, 219) = 1.21$, $p = 0.299$, demonstrated significant effects by condition (all $p$ values < 0.05). Participants in the male kissing condition endorsed *desire for male attention* significantly more so than those in the SSP or control conditions. Participants may have interpreted this item with regard to the male participant in the male kissing scenario, leading to greater scores in this condition; it is noteworthy that this item was endorsed at levels below the mean of the scale in the SSP condition despite male attention being so commonly reported as a motivator for SSP.
Participants in the male kissing condition also endorsed social pressure to a greater degree than those in the SSP condition. The greater attribution of behavior to social pressure in the male kissing condition may be indicative of bisexual women feeling a need to conform to heterosexual social pressures, which include engaging in sexual behavior with men.

Participants in both the male kissing and SSP conditions endorsed alcohol intoxication and sexual desire more so than those in the control condition; intoxication and desire were thus implicated as a motivation for all sexualized behaviors, regardless of partner gender. Participants in the SSP condition endorsed sexual experimentation to a greater degree than those in the male kissing condition, suggesting perceptions of same-sex sexual behavior as more experimental than cross-sex sexual behavior, even among bisexual women. Participants in the SSP condition and control condition endorsed desire to fend off interest from men to a greater degree than did participants in the male kissing condition; participants in the male kissing condition may have interpreted this item with regard to interest from the sexually involved male, leading to relatively low scores on this item.

Participants in the control condition endorsed social bonding more so than participants in either the male kissing or SSP conditions; social bonding was typically perceived as motivating sexual activity to a lesser extent than non-sexual (i.e., control condition) activity. Participants in the control condition endorsed fun the most, followed by those in the male kissing condition and finally those in the SSP condition, suggesting that fun was not perceived as a primary motivation for sexual behavior regardless of partner gender, but even less so for sexual behavior with women. Finally, participants in the SSP condition were significantly more likely to endorse desire to shock or surprise others than were participants in either the male kissing condition or the control condition, suggesting that bisexual women perceive same-sex sexual behavior as something that some women engage in order to surprise others.

### Table 2. Means (standard deviations) of perceived motivations by condition (Study 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived motivations</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>SSP</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desire for male attention</td>
<td>1.64 (0.98)</td>
<td>1.90 (1.03)</td>
<td>2.55 (1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social pressure</td>
<td>1.84 (0.91)</td>
<td>1.53 (0.78)</td>
<td>1.91 (0.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol intoxication</td>
<td>2.19 (1.01)</td>
<td>2.57 (0.86)</td>
<td>2.75 (0.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual desire</td>
<td>1.58 (0.92)</td>
<td>3.24 (0.91)</td>
<td>3.54 (0.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual experimentation</td>
<td>1.39 (0.72)</td>
<td>2.81 (0.95)</td>
<td>2.26 (0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fend off male interest</td>
<td>2.22 (1.07)</td>
<td>1.95 (1.02)</td>
<td>1.35 (0.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to obtain a resource</td>
<td>1.36 (0.73)</td>
<td>1.21 (0.51)</td>
<td>1.28 (0.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social bonding</td>
<td>4.00 (0.80)</td>
<td>2.55 (1.13)</td>
<td>2.72 (1.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>4.36 (0.69)</td>
<td>3.62 (0.84)</td>
<td>4.04 (0.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to shock or surprise others</td>
<td>1.36 (0.81)</td>
<td>1.81 (0.96)</td>
<td>1.45 (0.74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* SSP = same-sex performativity condition; Male = female–male kissing condition. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Means that do not share subscripts differ by \( p < 0.05 \).
**Androcentric desire.** Endorsement of androcentric desire varied by condition, $F(2, 219) = 65.57$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.375$. Mean ratings of attraction to men and to women by condition are presented in Figure 2. Those in the male kissing condition ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.50$) endorsed this construct to a greater degree than did those in the control condition ($M = 0.76$, $SD = 1.45$), who in turn endorsed androcentric desire to a greater degree than did those in the SSP condition ($M = -1.17$, $SD = 2.02$), indicating that perceptions of women’s attraction to men or women were driven by what their sexual behavior evidenced. Thus, women’s engagement in SSP appears to have implications for how bisexual women perceive the target’s sexual attractions.

**Performance motivation.** A significant effect of condition was observed for the item “do you think Anne’s behavior was a performance for the male onlookers in the story?” $F(2, 219) = 4.97$, $p = 0.008$, $\eta^2_p = 0.043$. Participants in the SSP condition ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 0.57$) endorsed this item at higher levels than participants in the control condition ($M = 1.70$, $SD = 0.63$); those in the male kissing condition did not differ from either group ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 0.69$). Thus, it seems that bisexual women do not perceive SSP to be particularly driven by male onlookers; means across conditions were below the midpoint of the scale, suggesting male onlookers were not perceived as playing a large role in motivating any target behaviors.

**Perceived closeness.** There were no differences by condition in the perceived closeness of the participant to bisexual people in general, $F(2, 219) = 0.249$, $p = 0.780$. Perceived closeness between the target and bisexual people in general did vary by condition, $F(2, 219) = 8.60$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.073$. Participants in the SSP condition perceived the target as closest to bisexual people in general ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.46$); those in the control ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.49$) and male kissing ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.67$) conditions did not differ from each other. This pattern of results indicates identity implications of SSP (i.e., women who engage in SSP are perceived as closer to bisexual women) and suggests that bisexual women read same-sex behavior as a bisexual, rather than heterosexualized, display.

**Identity outcomes**

**Internalized binegativity.** Endorsement of internalized binegativity did not differ by condition, $F(2, 219) = 0.92$, $p = 0.399$, suggesting that observing SSP relative to the other conditions does not impact bisexual women’s negative attitudes about their own bisexuality. The means for internalized binegativity were low across conditions (all $< 1.71$), indicating a potential floor effect.
Felt legitimacy. Scores on the overall measure of felt legitimacy did not differ by condition, \( F(2, 219) = 1.75, p = 0.177 \). Differences in the felt legitimacy factors by condition are presented in Figure 5. The factor of others’ perceptions differed by condition, \( F(2, 219) = 3.70, p = 0.026, \eta^2_p = 0.033 \). Participants in the SSP condition (\( M = 2.43, SD = 1.11 \)) endorsed these items at higher levels than participants in the control condition (\( M = 1.98, SD = 1.06 \)); participants in the male kissing condition (\( M = 2.12, SD = 0.95 \)) did not differ from either group. This pattern suggests that bisexual women perceive SSP as having slight negative implications for how other people, generally speaking, perceive bisexuality and bisexual identities. Self-perceptions did not differ by condition, \( F(2, 219) = 1.23, p = 0.295 \), suggesting that participant’s self-perceptions of their bisexual identity were not impacted by exposure to SSP versus male kissing or the control condition.

General discussion

Across three studies, we examined perceptions of women who engage in SSP. This research entered new empirical territory by experimentally examining perceptions of the motivations of women who engage in SSP and by investigating bisexual women’s perceptions of SSP. Study 1a examined how a woman of a non-specified sexual orientation was perceived by
heterosexual people when she engaged in SSP. Study 1b, also conducted with heterosexual participants, specified the target woman as heterosexual. In Study 2, we examined how a woman of a non-specified sexual orientation was perceived by bisexual women when she engaged in SSP.

**Perceived sexual orientation and attraction**

We hypothesized that women engaging in SSP would be perceived as heterosexual given prior literature describing women’s engagement in SSP as normative and carrying no implications of a queer identity (Rupp & Taylor, 2010; Yost & McCarthy, 2012). Across all three studies, women engaging in SSP were perceived as bisexual, even when explicitly described as heterosexual (Study 1b). When the target’s sexual orientation was unspecified, she was also likely to be perceived as a lesbian when engaging in SSP (Studies 1a and 2), indicating that SSP is perceived as a queer, rather than heterosexual, activity. Further, in Study 2, participants in the SSP condition perceived the target as closest to bisexual people in general. These results – that SSP was perceived as indicative of queer identities – highlight the need for greater consideration of the identity implications of SSP. The present findings suggest a need to reconsider the notion of SSP as a normative and identity-inconsequential activity. Bisexual women (Study 2) were about as likely to perceive the SSP target as bisexual as were heterosexual participants (Studies 1a and 1b), suggesting that SSP is read as an indicator of queerness, and particularly of bisexuality, across heterosexual and queer participants. Perceptions of SSP as a specifically bisexual activity may be driven by androcentrism; women are perceived as heterosexual until there exists behavioral confirmation of same-sex sexuality (e.g., Swan & Habibi, 2015), yet the heterosexual assumption is not discounted by this queer behavior, but rather complemented by it.

The finding that women engaging in SSP were perceived as bisexual contrasts with prior literature; Lannutti and Denes (2012) used the same vignettes (with sexual orientation unspecified) and found that women engaging in SSP were perceived as heterosexual, suggesting a shift in perceptions of this behavior in recent years. Increasing cultural awareness of and support for LGBTQ identities and issues in recent years (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2017) may explain this finding in part, as increasing awareness of bisexuality would likely lead to a greater likelihood of perceiving certain behaviors as indicators of bisexuality and may also reduce the likelihood of attempts to deem bisexuality invisible. We thus infer from this pattern of results that (1) contrary to the beliefs of women who engage in SSP, SSP does not exist without identity implications, and (2) given women engaging in SSP were perceived as bisexual even when explicitly
labeled as heterosexual, SSP may be a source of information from which onlookers develop (likely misinformed) impressions about bisexuality.

Additionally, in Studies 1b and 2, we found that androcentric beliefs, or perceptions of women’s attraction to men versus women, were driven by what was evidenced by their sexual behavior. That is, women (heterosexual [Study 1b] or of non-specified sexual orientation [Study 2]) were perceived as being more attracted to women when engaging in SSP than when not, suggesting that women’s engagement in SSP has implications for how others perceive their sexual desires. This pattern of findings again suggests that, in contrast to prior work on SSP, women’s engagement in SSP seems to carry implications for how others perceive their sexuality.

**Perceived motivations**

Contrary to our hypotheses and to previous research (e.g., Rupp & Taylor, 2010; Yost & McCarthy, 2012), the attention of male onlookers was not generally perceived as playing an integral role in women’s SSP, indicating that SSP was not understood by our participants as a male-oriented performance. When we inquired specifically about the male onlookers in the vignette (Study 2), we found a trend toward attention from male onlookers as a motivator for SSP. Though the absence of perceived male-oriented motivations may reflect positive notions of women’s sexual agency (i.e., women are engaging in SSP for their own enjoyment rather than the enjoyment of men), it may also be a function of male-identification (whereby women’s own desires and needs become secondary to those of men; Barry, 1979) such that these male-oriented motivations are not even recognized as such, but are instead understood as an aspect of women’s own desires (see Rich, 1980).

Across the three studies, women engaging in SSP, more so than women engaging in public kissing with men, were understood as being motivated by sexual experimentation and a desire to shock or surprise others. Given that these women were generally perceived as bisexual, these findings regarding perceived motivations support the notion that SSP reinforces stereotypes about bisexuality as an experimental and thus illegitimate orientation, as well as an orientation driven by attention-seeking (e.g., Friedman et al., 2014). However, differences in perceived sexual desire between SSP and public kissing with a male partner emerged only when the target was explicitly described as heterosexual (Study 1b), suggesting that, when not perceived as heterosexual, women’s engagement in SSP is understood to be motivated by sexual desire. Though these findings contrast with women’s reported experiences of SSP, which they often describe as deprived of any desire (Brown, 2014; Yost & McCarthy, 2012), they suggest that women’s
same-sex attraction is seen as legitimate. Thus, though SSP appears to reinforce some negative stereotypes about bisexuality, it may also have the potential to normalize and legitimize women’s same-sex sexuality.

**Bisexual prejudice**

In Study 1b, we demonstrated that SSP has the potential to reinforce some common stereotypes about bisexuality; participants exposed to SSP in Study 1b perceived the target as bisexual (despite being explicitly labeled as heterosexual) and endorsed the application of stereotypes about bisexuality as an unstable orientation, indicating that SSP has the potential to reinforce these stereotypes about bisexuality, which are often used to deny the legitimacy of bisexual orientations (Brewster & Moradi, 2010). That this pattern of results did not hold when the target was not explicitly identified as heterosexual (Study 1a) suggests that the effect is specific to observing an explicitly heterosexual woman engaging in public same-sex behavior, which is inconsistent with her sexual orientation. Observing a woman of an unknown sexual orientation engaging in the same behavior, as in Studies 1a and 2, did not result in heightened bisexual prejudice, perhaps because these behaviors are no longer inconsistent with a known sexual orientation in this situation. However, that participants perceived the target as bisexual even when explicitly identified as heterosexual, and despite the heteronormative context of the vignettes, provides insight into the complications of the idea of a “known” sexual orientation.

Further, in Study 2, we found that though SSP did not impact bisexual women’s self-perceptions of their bisexuality, it did raise concerns about how others perceived their identities – though not to a significantly greater extent than did a female–male kissing scenario. Given that bisexual women indicated some concerns regarding other’s perceptions of bisexual identities as a result of SSP, but did not indicate worse identity outcomes (e.g., decreased self-perceived legitimacy of bisexual identity), the direct implications of the present findings for the well-being of bisexual women are unclear. Further, the finding that concerns regarding others’ perceptions of bisexuality in the SSP condition were higher, but not significantly so, than endorsement of these concerns in the male kissing condition necessitates further examination of the potential role of public sexual performances overall – rather than SSP specifically – in reinforcing bisexual prejudice.

Nonetheless, the present work demonstrates that heterosexual women’s SSP should be given consideration as a potential source of bisexual prejudice. Greater consideration should be given to the identity implications of SSP overall; while SSP has generally been understood as identity-inconsequential, the present work demonstrates previously unexplored identity-
related implications both for the women engaging in the behavior and for queer women.

**Limitations and future directions**

Some limitations of the present work should be considered. First, though a college student sample was ideal given their likely exposure to the situations in which SSP tends to occur, our convenience samples of students in Studies 1a and 1b were primarily White and liberal-leaning. Results may thus not generalize to behaviors and attitudes in more ethnically and politically diverse populations; however, the patterns of results might be amplified in more diverse populations given that, for example, the political right tends to endorse greater levels of sexual prejudice (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2017). Second, the framing of our demographic question regarding participant gender introduced assumptions into our data which may have impacted the present findings; the assumption was inherent in our demographics that individuals who identified themselves as “women” or “men” were cisgender. We note the problematic nature of this assumption of cisgender as the default.

In addition, we did not ask participants in Studies 1a or 1b to report whether they had ever engaged in or observed SSP, which may have proved informative. For example, if a heterosexual participant had previously engaged in SSP, they may have considered their own motivations for doing so and their own heterosexuality when responding to the survey. Further, it would be interesting to understand whether bisexual women’s perceptions of SSP vary with an explicitly heterosexual target female, something which we did not examine herein. Bisexual women may be less hesitant to deem SSP strictly negative – and more likely to condemn the behavior due to its perceived consequences – when they do not perceive potential motivations of sexual exploration and identity formation (i.e., when a target is strictly heterosexual). Future research should also explore why bisexual women might connect women who engage in SSP with a bisexual identity but not make the same connection for women who kiss men in public; theoretically, these behaviors could be read as equally indicative of bisexuality. In this vein, future research could aim to directly test how perceived sexual orientation influences a number of outcomes in SSP (e.g., stigma toward target). Additionally, the vignette-based nature of the study is such that participants did not have visual info to draw from about the targets; as a result, it could be the case that in the unspecified sexual orientation SSP condition participants were not imagining the scene as we were intending (e.g., presumably femme/straight-appearing women), which could bias responding. Finally, future research should investigate contextual
differences in perceptions of SSP; in the present work, we limited the stimuli to heteronormative contexts where SSP has previously been situated (i.e., an unmarked bar). Future work could manipulate these contexts to include queer spaces (e.g., a gay bar), which would theoretically remove the male gaze and thus likely impact perceptions of SSP.

Of note, the present work did not specifically consider gender differences in perceptions of SSP. Given that much previous literature on SSP has not considered male perspectives and has instead focused on the women who engage in SSP, we did not have specific hypotheses for gender comparisons. In the extant literature, sex differences have been briefly explored; Lannutti and Denes (2012) found that men perceived SSP as more atypical than did women, but did not find sex differences in their other measured of perceived sexual orientation or perceived promiscuity of the target woman engaging in SSP. We understand that further gender comparisons could be useful to future research. Thus, we explored potential gender effects by conducting sensitivity analyses for our main effects of condition in Studies 1a and 1b. These analyses are available in online Supplemental Materials. Generally, gender did not exert demonstrable effects in Study 1a; in Study 1b, some observed were stronger for men than for the sample overall, while some effects were rendered nonsignificant when examining only men. Future research should aim to elucidate the role of gender in perceptions of and responses to SSP, and could interrogate male perspectives in order to better understand the functional role of SSP in heteropatriarchal relations.

**Conclusion**

The results of the current studies evidence that women who engage in SSP are often assumed to be bisexual, and that exposure to SSP has the potential to increase endorsement of negative stereotypes about bisexual people. Across the three studies, women engaging in SSP were perceived to be bisexual, pointing to heightened visibility of bisexual identities and negating popular constructions of SSP as inconsequential for identity. Bisexual women indicated some concerns regarding the potential for public same-sex behavior to reinforce negative stereotypes about bisexuality, but these concerns were not specific to same-sex behavior. Further, bisexual women who observed SSP did not indicate worse identity outcomes (e.g., decreased self-perceived legitimacy of bisexual identity); the direct implications of the present findings for the well-being of bisexual women are thus unclear. We hope these findings help spark future research to better understand how seemingly inconsequential sexual behaviors, situated within heteropatriarchal
contexts, can have broader implications for people’s attitudes toward sexuality and sexual identities.

Notes

1. We included homophobia (measured using the MHS-L; Morrison & Morrison, 2003) as a potential difference variable in Studies 1a and 1b. Homophobia was generally nonsignificant as a moderator and was thus removed from the analyses. Analyses including homophobia are available in Supplemental Materials.

2. We examined stigma consciousness (measured using the Bostwick’s (2012) Stigma Consciousness Questionnaire for bisexual people) as a moderator of felt legitimacy. Internal consistency was low for this measure in the present study; stigma consciousness was nonsignificant as a moderator and was thus removed from the analyses presented here. Analyses including stigma consciousness are available in Supplemental Materials.

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