

CO-SEXUALITY: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNICATIVELY
ORGANIZING AROUND SEXUALITY

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Chapter I: Introduction

The construct of sexuality, at its core, functions as a tool for human organizing (Foucault 1978/1990). With the development of the binary sexual identity categories of “homosexual” (largely understood as romantic attraction to persons of the same biological sex) and “heterosexual” (largely understood as romantic attraction to persons of the opposite biological sex) in the medical sciences in the late 19th century came the social valuation of them. In terms of organizing sexuality on a broad social scale, the category of heterosexuality has come to be socially privileged as “normal” (Katz, 2007) while violations of heterosexuality have come to be socially stigmatized (Goffman, 1963). At its core, the heterosexual/homosexual binary that inherently privileges the former (Hancock & Tyler, 2001) fundamentally organizes us and reifies the institutionalization of heteronormative bias that undergirds day-to-day life (Warner, 1993).

Broadly, heterosexuality still remains the comparison against which all other categories of sexuality are constructed and held accountable (Foucault, 1978/1990), even as categories of sexual identity have become diversified. A good example of the privilege of heterosexuality is the use of the acronym LGBTQ (representing the categories of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer). Despite fundamental differences between these categories of gender/sexuality, the acronym hangs together because of how they are socially positioned (Marinucci, 2011); people identifying with or labeled as sexual minorities are organized such that they are pushed to the margins of society through the shared experience of discrimination and social violence as a result of their failure to adequately perform heterosexuality.

It is from the social margins that much of the scholarship related to sexuality and social organizing has developed (e.g., Rich, 1980; Rubin, 1984; Sedgwick, 1990; Warner, 1993). This foundational scholarship has demonstrated that the construction of sexuality and its subsequent institutionalization as an organizing tool affects lived experience on a daily basis. By “organizing,” I mean the process of ordering broader social narratives about sexuality into a system of representation (Ashcraft, 2004) that influences how sexualities are communicated and evaluated. How sexualities are communicatively represented has material consequences. For example, people classified as sexual minorities face political and legal repercussions (i.e., marriage equality; adoption rights) that negatively affect their social legitimation, ultimately marginalizing them and minimizing their social voice.

Critical feminist and queer scholars in particular have addressed the hierarchy of sexualities and its related systemic inequities. Much of this literature focuses on deconstructing the privileged category of “heterosexuality” as the “normal” or “natural” construct to organize around, exhibiting that it is unstable, disjointed, and in some cases, paradoxical (Katz, 2007). Further, socially acceptable performances of (hetero)sexuality have been demonstrated to be highly contextualized (Eguchi, 2009) and constantly in flux (e.g., Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), illuminating the systems of power that privilege and reward some groups while marginalizing others. While this scholarship is more often interested in issues of social justice than in the communicative act of organizing, it lays the foundation for an exploration of the powerful yet institutionalized hierarch of sexualities that organizes lived experience.

I argue that the process of organizing sexualities is far more complex than simply understanding where one fits in the heterosexual/other binary. Rather, the act of locating and identifying sexuality should be understood as a process: a system of communicatively positioning the self and others around an socially constructed ideal sexuality that can 1) never be reached and 2) is always in flux. This process is a fundamental part of the human experience; a core part of understanding the self and others. As such, I propose exploring and developing the concept of co-sexuality: the act of communicatively organizing around a sexual ideal.

Communication and Sexuality

I propose exploring the process of organizing around sexuality from a communicative perspective because of the inherent link between sexuality, discourse, and communication. First, I take the position that sexuality is not natural or biological; rather sexuality has been discursively constructed and maintained (Foucault 1978/1990; Sullivan, 2003). By taking this position, I implicitly acknowledge that the ways in which we discursively organize sexuality shifts as discourse shifts (Ashcraft, 2007). Put another way, I follow Foucault's (1978/1990) argument that sexuality is discourse; as we have discursively constructed and developed our "knowledge" of sexuality (that is, as we have further defined and labeled sexual identity categories as ways of knowing the world), this language works to regulate and maintain a social hierarchy of what is perceived as appropriate or inappropriate in terms of sexual acts and sexual identities. Simply put, the transformation of sexuality into discourse has allowed for the social organization of sexualities.

Discourse, as I am using the term, acts as a framework for understanding the world, providing resources that influence how we communicate and communicate about sexuality. Here, I follow Karen Ashcraft's (2007) definition of discourse, which she describes as "a (semi)-coherent system of representation that crafts a context for language use" (Ashcraft, 2007, p. 11). Sexuality as an overall discursive framework, as well as the identity subcategories (e.g., LGBTQ) that populate this framework, provides a vocabulary of meaning that allows people to understand their experiences as well as communicatively position their own sexual identities within a broader discourse of sexuality. The discourse of sexuality is not fixed, however; like all communicatively constituted constructs, the resources and vocabulary available within the framework of sexuality shift and grows over time as people's understanding and valuation of sexuality shifts.

As communication scholars have continued to study human sexuality, there has been a disciplinary shift towards exploring the construct of sexuality as both communicative and embodied (e.g. Ellingson, 2011). Broadly, the body has come to be viewed as an undeniable and invaluable site of knowledge in communication studies (Yep, 2013). Like the construct of gender, communication scholarship widely acknowledges that sexuality is performative in nature (e.g., Yep, 2013); just as we "do gender," (e.g., Butler, 1990) we also "do sexuality." Relatedly, how humans "do gender" is inherently intertwined with how we "do sexuality." Bodies become marked in ways that serve to communicate sex appeal, sexual preference, and sexual (un)availability (Brekhus, 2003). Embodied performances of sexuality are enabled and restricted by the same discourse that contextualizes all communication about sexuality. In terms of

exploring the process of co-sexuality, the continued disciplinary acknowledgement of the (sexualized) body invites an exploration of the ways that culture, the mind, and the body (Trimble, 2009) affect the ways that humans understand and position themselves and others as sexual beings.

As I developed the concept of co-sexuality from a communicative perspective, I followed Henderson's (2013) call to all sexuality scholars: although sexuality is inherently linked to communication, it must "blossom" beyond simply acknowledging it as "a distilled attribution practice ...[sexuality] needs to be shaken up to recognize people beyond habitual distinctions and to track the institutional lines of force that fuel and fix those attributions" (p. 2469). As such, the link between sexuality and organizing must be seen as an act of power and resistance; more specifically, a site of struggle (Fleming, 2007) that affects the lived experience of humans as sexual beings.

Co-Sexuality and Co-Cultural Theory

Co-sexuality is loosely based on foundational assumptions of co-cultural theory (CCT). Developed by Mark Orbe (1998), co-cultural theory rests on central tenets of muted group theory (Kramarae, 1981) and standpoint theory (Hartsock, 1983). Each of these theories explores how communication and the process of social ordering intersect. First, muted group theory argues that socially dominant groups subordinate and "mute" non-dominant groups by maintaining ideological and discursive norms from which non-dominant groups deviate (Castle Bell et al., 2015; Hogg & Reid, 2006). As such, marginalized groups are largely socially muted because they must conform to dominant social structures and their lived experiences are not reflected in those structures (Orbe, 1998). Similarly, standpoint theory critically explores how power structures influence

individual's social locations and the resulting material, social, and political consequences (Harding, 2004). Standpoints are not an automatic result of one's social position; rather, standpoints emerge from a critical awareness of systems of power that influence social positions and their related consequences (Wood, 2009). Further, standpoint theory acknowledges that individuals have multiple social locations and standpoints that intersect and are negotiated and organized in daily communication (e.g., Harding, 2004).

Drawing from these tenets, CCT provides a general framework for exploring how social organizing affects the lived experiences of social groups. Broadly, co-sexuality relies upon CCT as "a framework that promotes a greater understanding of the intricate processes by which co-cultural group members...negotiate attempts by others to render their voices muted within dominant societal structures" (Orbe, 1998, p. 4). Orbe (1998) chose the term "co-cultural" as a way of bringing linguistic equality, social acknowledgement, and voice to the multitude of social cultures within and beyond Western culture. Rather than perpetuate the negative connotations associated with terms like "subculture" or "subordinate" (Orbe, 1998), the term co-cultural recognizes that no group is inherently superior to another, yet can still be dominant. For example, certain cultures (such as heterosexual middle-or-upper class Caucasian males) have become privileged and given dominant status, ultimately placing other co-cultures in marginalized positions within dominant social structures. As such, co-cultures must communicate towards this dominant and central group from the social margins.

Most scholarship using CCT focuses on the communication strategies used by co-cultural group members located in the margins of society (i.e., people of color, women, sexual minorities, people from a lower socioeconomic background; Orbe, 1998) as they

negotiate their cultural identities within the power structures of dominant cultural groups (Orbe, 1998). Two of the primary factors that affect strategy choice are the individual's preferred communication outcome and the communication approach they choose to take. Preferred outcomes include a) assimilation (erasure or minimization of cultural differences), b) accommodation (mutual collaboration with dominant culture), and c) distance (distancing from dominant culture). CCT argues that each preferred outcome has three communication approaches which include a) nonassertive, b) assertive, and c) aggressive (Orbe, 1998). As the theory has developed, four additional factors that influence the selection of co-cultural communication strategies have been identified: a) field of experience (influential past experiences); b) abilities (the capability for co-cultural members to communicate in certain ways); c) situational context (environmental factors affecting communication); and d) perceived costs and rewards (positive or negative results of communicating in certain ways (Orbe & Roberts, 2012).

Ultimately, CCT has identified 26 co-cultural communication strategies that exist across communication orientations, though CCT continues to be expanded; Bell and colleagues (2015) have incorporated "rationalization," or "instances where individuals provide alternate explanations for communication rather than labeling them as forms of injustice" (p. 11) as an additional communication strategy.

What CCT offered to the development of co-sexuality is a targeted focus on how communication intersects within social hierarchies. Conceptualizing sexualities as co-cultures provides a vocabulary that acknowledges the intricate and complex process that constructs the lived experience of organizing human sexuality around a heteronormative center. In reality, certain sexual categories are dominant whereas communication is the

means by which co-cultures position and negotiate their sexualities. Co-sexuality draws from these central tenets of CCT to explore how groups organize in terms of convergence and divergence from the socially constructed norm.

Extant communication scholarship using CCT as a lens through which to explore communication between sexualities framed as co-culture has tended to focus on how sexual minorities negotiate the dominant culture in terms of: heterosexism (e.g., Camara, Katznelson, Hildebrandt-Sterling & Parker, 2012); microaggressions (e.g., Camara & Orbe, 2010); and heteronormativity (e.g., Dixon, 2009). However, co-sexuality diverges from this application of CCT in two primary ways. First, co-sexuality takes a step back from the narrowed focus of CCT in the sense that co-sexuality is interested in exploring the process by which all sexualities (including heterosexualities) are communicatively organized rather than an explicit focus on the lived experiences of sexualities located in the social margins. Giving voice to the lived experiences of sexual minorities is an admirable aim of critical and social justice scholarship; however, in the interest of exploring sexuality as a process, co-sexuality must incorporate all human sexuality as a site of organizing and potential marginalization. Put differently, co-sexuality acknowledges that people who identify as heterosexual must also communicatively negotiate and perform their sexuality within the social boundaries of the fluid construct of “sexuality” and pay heed to all of its associated rewards and punishments.

A second way in which co-sexuality diverges from CCT is in their treatment of the construction and maintenance of co-cultures. Orbe (1998) uses “co-culture” to signify “a co-existence of multiple groups within a pre-determined social hierarchy” (p. 2). Co-sexuality does not see social hierarchies as predetermined but rather as the outcome of the

process of social ordering. Here, I follow queer and feminist scholars (e.g., Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990) who done much to deconstruct seemingly fixed social categories perceived as essential, inherent, and unchangeable. Drawing upon this perspective, co-sexuality argues that co-cultures are constantly in process and the discourse that organizes them is never solid.

Both co-sexuality and CCT take the position that co-cultural group members have the social awareness to understand their social position as well as an understanding of the rewards and penalties associated with that location. Further, co-sexuality and CCT both argue that co-cultural group members have at least partial agency to decide how they want to communicatively position themselves in relationship to the dominant culture. In terms of socially organizing sexuality, co-sexuality builds upon these foundational claims as it begins to unravel the ways in which “dominant” and “non-dominant” sexual categories are constructed as well as how people position themselves and each other in relation to these taken-for-granted and immensely powerful constructs.

Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this dissertation is to introduce and explore the concept of co-sexuality, a term that represents the process of communicatively organizing around a socially constructed hegemonic yet unreachable ideal sexuality. This scholarship incorporates and extends extant communication literature related to sexuality, organizing, and power by focusing on the process humans of all sexualities engage as they “do sexuality.” This is a shift from a focus on the social positions and the associated loss of voice experienced by marginalized groups. At its core, co-sexuality can be understood as a way of making meaning; how we organize around sexuality remains one of the most

prominent sense-making tools in our daily lived experience. Co-sexuality seeks to engage this construct.

Co-sexuality addresses two core components of sexuality and organizing: 1) marking the boundaries within which sexualities are socially positioned within and 2) identifying the communicative processes that individuals use to position themselves and others closer to or further from the socially constructed “norm.” To the first point, what has been socially constructed as “normal” or “abnormal” sexuality is remarkably complex, intertwined with normative gender roles, religious and moral principles, scientific assumptions, and stereotypes related to age, race, ethnicity, and class. Further, what is perceived as “normal” sexuality shifts and changes over time as larger social Discourses (Ashcraft, 2007) allow and disallow for various performances of sexuality.

Put another way, human sexuality is never “just” sexuality, but a communicative performance reflecting the intersection of highly regulated social characteristics that bind together at specific moments in time to organize and position people closer to or further away from a socially constructed and fluid sexual “norm.” As such, co-sexuality acknowledges the subjective nature of the discourse of sexuality while simultaneously recognizing the powerful influence sexuality, both as an act and an identity, has on lived human experience.

To the second point, as sexuality and its related sexual identity categories continue to be contested constructs (Marinucci, 2011) how people make sense of and position their sexualities will be highly subjective. The communicative choices that individuals make will be contextual and individualistic to some degree; however, the Discourse of sexuality allows for there to be shared meaning and shared lived experience

as well. As such, co-sexuality seeks to explore ways in which people communicatively construct sexual identity categories (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual) as well as how and why they identify or disidentify with those categories.

Exploring Co-Sexuality: Into the Workplace

Exploring the social process of organizing sexualities is no small task, and care had to be taken to ensure this project was practicable. I took the position that co-sexuality is simultaneously constructed and reflected in communication at the macro, meso, and micro levels of lived experience. Our daily conversations work to organize sexuality in ways that simultaneously inform and are informed by larger social Discourses. As such, this project could have explored communicative processes related to sexuality and organizing in multiple contexts, social locations, and through the lens of a continuum of experiences. To be effective in constructing a theory of co-sexuality as a dissertation project, I chose to narrow the scope of this project.

The most extreme examples of socially ordering sexualities occur within social institutions, particularly the workplace. A great deal of extant literature in organizational communication scholarship has provided examples: the continued privilege of heterosexuality in organizational discourse and practice (Dixon & Dougherty, 2014); the sexualization, commodification, and bureaucratization of women's bodies (Clair, 1993); and the feminization and presumption of homosexuality of men working in female-dominated industries (Robinson, Hall, & Hockey, 2011) to name just a few. Because sexuality is most clearly organized and hierarchized within the workplace, I propose using people's workplace experiences as the starting place for exploring the process of co-sexuality. This will be discussed more in depth in chapter 2 of this dissertation.

I used a grounded theory approach to explore and develop a theory of co-sexuality from a communicative perspective. I chose this approach for two reasons. First, grounded theories are a good way for researchers to start a research “journey” addressing a particular problem or concern (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theorists attempt to make sense of the lived experiences of participants and ultimately construct a theory grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2014). Further, a grounded theory approach is particularly well suited for explorations of processes, as the construction of grounded theory focuses specifically on how individual events or experiences link to a larger theoretical whole (Charmaz, 2006). Because co-sexuality is interested in the organization of sexuality as a communicative process, grounded theory is well suited as a methodology. The specifics of how I used grounded theory to develop co-sexuality are discussed in chapter 3 of this dissertation.

This project contributes to several bodies of scholarship. First, the development of co-sexuality as a theory contributes to larger conversations across the social sciences regarding communicative acts of power and social ordering as an institutionalized process. A good deal of literature in critical, feminist, and queer scholarship tackles these issues, and co-sexuality could add perspective and voice from the discipline of communication. Further, co-sexuality contributes greatly to the organizational communication scholarship from which it draws. Because I focused on individual’s experiences within the context of an organization, this research will speak specifically to critical scholars interested in issues of sexuality, power, and organizing. Further, because I place this line of scholarship firmly within the critical paradigm, this project will result in the potential for pragmatic changes within the context of the organization as well.

The remainder of this dissertation project will provide both a review of relevant literature as well as a thorough dissertation of research methods. Specifically, chapter 2 focuses on the historical development of sexual identity categories in Western society as well as a history of organizing sexuality within the workplace. Chapter 3 provides a detailed overview of research methods including: sampling techniques, semi-structured interview guides for individual interviews, as details about data analysis and presentation. Chapter 4 provides the data analysis and presents a theory co-sexuality, and chapter 5 presents the implications and a detailed discussion of the process of co-sexuality.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

I begin with the assumption that hegemonic heterosexuality is an unachievable ideal, yet all are judged by their proximity to that ideal. As a result, all people have co-sexual identities, or ways in which their sexuality both converges with and diverges from a hegemonic yet ever-changing ideal. The term co-sexuality recognizes the need for all people to communicatively grapple with sexual diversity that can produce sexual marginalization and privilege.

As discussed in chapter 1 of this dissertation, co-sexuality is conceptually rooted in communication. The modern Western concept of sexuality itself is inherently communicative. How we think about, talk about, and otherwise engage sexuality as a way in which to organize comes from what Foucault identified as sexuality's transformation into discourse, or knowledge (Foucault, 1978/1990). Briefly, Foucault's description of the sexuality-communication link is the labeled "categories" of sexualities (for medical, religious, social, and political purposes) that we then use to identify others and ourselves. Put broadly, the act of identifying or disidentifying with the ever-growing list of sexuality categories becomes a sense-making tool by which we both communicatively converge and diverge from the perceived social norm. The complexity of this process stems from the contested nature of these categories, which will be discussed further in this dissertation.

To demonstrate its roots in communication theory and practice, the prefix co- in the term co-sexuality is drawn not only from co-cultural theory, but also from the broader concept communication. According to the Oxford dictionary, the prefix co- is defined as joint, mutual, or common. I argue that it is within communication that we locate the

shared and diverging experience of humans organizing around sexuality for two reasons. First, as already stated, sexuality and discourse are interwoven concepts (1978/1990). Second, the identity work that goes into sexual identity management is inherently communicative (Hall & LaFrance, 2012). How we understand and position ourselves around these categories is a communicative act.

The literature review portion of this dissertation is divided into four sections. First, I provide a historical overview of the development of human sexuality as a means of social organizing. In this section, I complicate the notions of “normal” human sexuality that undergird modern conceptions of human sexuality and serve to privilege and marginalize people’s sexual orientations and identities. Following this section, I explore how the privileging of certain forms of human sexuality emerged in discourse. Further, I will provide a brief overview of the development of the categories of sexuality in the Victorian era, specifically focusing on the work of sexologists Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis. In the third portion of this literature review, I delve into the modern vocabulary of human sexuality, interrogating the ways in which sexuality as a construct and its associated categories are positioned in day-to-day communication as both an identity and an act. Finally, I make the argument for the development of a theory of co-sexuality using the lived experiences of individuals within the context of their workplaces.

The Messy Construct of Human Sexuality

The primary goal I have for this portion of my dissertation is to explore and review the construct of human sexuality, as well as the “normal” and “abnormal” attributions given to certain forms of sexuality, by tracing the organizing process to its

scientific roots. If co-sexuality is the process of communicatively organizing human sexuality through convergence and divergence from a perceived norm, it is useful to interrogate the vocabulary that is used to engage in this process. Over time, a glut of terms have emerged that function as categorizations for the behaviors, social valuations, and identities associated with human sexuality. Despite the large vocabulary that serves as a powerful communicative sense-making tool for organizing individuals (Foucault, 1978/1990), human sexuality itself is one of the messiest and most frequently miscommunicated concepts in Western culture.

Queer scholar Eve Sedgwick (1990) attributes the inconsistency of the term “sexuality” to its use as a synonym for other terms. The word sexuality can represent any combination of gender norms (e.g., same-sex couples being described as the “guy” and the “girl,”), biological sex traits (e.g., naturalizing and normalizing heterosexual urges), object choice (e.g., “sexual orientation”), or the stereotyped behaviors and mannerisms associated with different sexualities (e.g., gay men’s feminized diction). Thus, according to Sedgwick (1990) the term “sexuality” has lost any individual or agreed-upon definition, a clear example of what Dougherty et al. (2009) call language convergence/meaning divergence. Despite this linguistic divergence, we organize around sexuality as though it were a taken-for-granted and fixed human experience.

Further complicating the definition of sexuality is the fact that all of its components are fluid, contextual, subjective, and socially constructed. For example, consider that the most common definitions of sexuality have two components: 1) an identification of the sex/gender of one’s object choice and 2) a positioning of sexuality as inherent within an individual (Marinucci, 2011; Sullivan, 2003). For example, lesbians

are most frequently defined as biological females/women who are naturally attracted to other biological females/women (Sullivan, 2003). However, voluntary lesbianism (heterosexual females/women choosing to identify as lesbian), also known as political lesbianism, emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s as part of a feminist movement that questioned the heterosexual bias found in dominant feminist discourse (Marinucci, 2011). In this case, the natural component of sexuality was ignored and replaced by the political use of this sexuality category. This is but one brief example of the complex and subjective ways that people communicatively converge and diverge from a perceived sexual norm while simultaneously using the term sexuality in complex and diverse ways.

Much of the instability undergirding the concept of sexuality emerges from the development of our vocabulary of human sexuality, which was constructed in inconsistent terms, and remains defined in fluid, rather than fixed ways (Katz, 1995). The clearest examples of these communicative inconsistencies are the complex categories that linguistically bound the varieties of human sexuality. The categories were problematically constructed to reflect the assumptions and social expectations of the time rather than on any historically “objective” scientific reality about human sexuality (Foucault, 1978/1990; Ryan & Jethá, 2010). Instead, the knowledge structure of “sexuality” and the associated categories constructed by science came to embody the constructed truths about sex and was “deployed” as a political tool in bourgeoisie society (Foucault, 1978/1990). The social ramifications of these foundational conceptualizations of sexualities as normal or aberrant (categorized based on certain moral, biological, or cognitive traits and intertwined with sex and gender roles) affect how we talk about

sexuality today. Below, I provide a brief review of how sexuality evolved as a tool for social ordering in Western society.

Darwin and Sexual Selection. Humans have been attempting to understand (and regulate) their own sexuality for centuries. Scholars who pursue this exploration tend to take one of two simplified positions: that human sexuality is biological, or that human sexuality is socially produced (Ryan & Jethá, 2010). While both sides are well developed (and the reality likely lies somewhere in the middle of these polarized positions) the biological position has been the bedrock for many taken-for-granted arguments about human sexual behavior (Padian & Horner, 2014). However, this argument tends to be a self-reinforcing cycle of logic, based on misguided Darwinian conceptions of human sexuality – that is, sexual selection (Ryan & Jethá, 2010).

The basic premise for sexual selection is that because the human female is exclusively equipped to birth and nurture offspring, she is highly selective when choosing a partner; males must compete, physically, monetarily, communicatively (Lange, Zaretsky, Schwartz, & Euler, 2014) for access to fertile females (Padian & Horner, 2014). This definition of sexuality presumes two things: first, that the sexual goals of males and females are inherently at odds; males want to reproduce with any female (i.e., the gender stereotype that all men are highly sexual), whereas females only want to reproduce with elite males that offer the best resources (i.e., the gender stereotype that women are “coy” about their sexuality) (Ryan & Jethá, 2010). Second, it positions heterosexuality, at least in terms of physical intimacy between males and females, as the sexual norm, and biological reproduction is the goal of human sex(uality). Thus, it is with Darwinian arguments that we find early examples of the hegemonic organization of sexualities that

the humans must communicatively grapple with to position themselves, suggesting co-sexuality.

There are many well-cited problems with Darwin's understanding of human sexuality (see Jann, 1994 for an interesting perspective). This foundational privileging of heterosexual coupling and reproduction essentially positions sex as prostitution; women exchanging their bodies for access to resources that only men have (Ryan & Jethá, 2010). Further, it cannot explain same-sex selection or intercourse for any other reason than reproduction. Despite these problems, it is this misguided yet powerful discourse that undergirded the sexologists who developed the vocabulary that we use to organize sexualities today.

Sexologists and the Sexual Categories. Most of the vocabulary we have to express our “knowledge” of human sexuality was developed during the Victorian era (D’Emilio, 1983; Ryan & Jethá, 2010) by a group of scientists referred to as sexologists. These almost exclusively White and English men sought to categorize sexuality and constitute what Foucault (1978/1990) called with disdain the “great archive of the pleasures of sex” (p. 63) (D’Emilio, 1983). During the late 19th century, social factors, such as the economic development of a middle class that could afford to be consumers of pleasure, a social shift in values that was far more open to the eroticization of the body, as well as a historical religious and social reverence for procreation, changed how society talked about sex (Katz, 1995).

It was during this time period that sexologists constructed and positioned the heterosexual/homosexual binary as the way of understanding and organizing human sexuality. This fundamental binary, which privileges heterosexuality as “normal,” was

already present in the law and moral teachings of the day (D’Emilio, 1983), and became firmly codified into common understandings of human sexuality through the work of sexologists. Sexologists Havelock Ellis and Richard von Krafft-Ebing stand out in the literature as having the greatest impact on the modern process of sexual organizing (e.g., Sullivan, 2003; Weeks, 2000). Both men sought to categorize the various forms of human sexuality as normal (heterosexual) or abnormal (homosexual), although their construction and use of these terms are messy, inconsistent, and often contradictory (Sullivan, 2003; Schaffner, 2011). Krafft-Ebing and Ellis’ development and use of the umbrella categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality are heavily reliant upon normative gender roles that privilege the classed and raced norms of the time. The idea that sex and gender are synonymous and binary and that human sexuality is fixed rather than fluid undergirds much of our vocabulary of sexuality today (Weeks, 2000).

Krafft-Ebing’s best-known work, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, published in 1886, was a massive work that carefully categorized and detailed all forms of human sexuality and had an enormous impact on the development and use of sexual categories in the English language (Schaffner, 2011). Firmly positioning heterosexual (i.e., opposite-sex) attraction as normative, Krafft-Ebing’s work actively positioned sexual “deviance” as an inborn “nauseous disease” (Krafft-Ebing, as cited in Weeks, 2000) that should be cured by science. Importantly, Krafft-Ebing argued that sexuality is not explicitly for the purpose of reproduction, but rather for physical pleasure (Weeks, 2000). “Deviant” sexual attraction (that is, non-normative sexuality) could be explained by what he and his contemporaries called sexual inversion. For Krafft-Ebing, sexual inversion was defined in gendered terms as “the masculine soul, heaving the female bosom” (Krafft-Ebing, as

cited in Weeks, 2000). In other words, Krafft-Ebing's justification for sexual "deviance" was based solely on the argument that biological sex should always predetermine sexual attraction and that sometimes biology simply gets it wrong. In terms of organizing sexualities, Krafft-Ebing's definition of sexuality presumes that a) opposite-sex attraction is normal and right, b) human sexuality is biological, c) gender and sex are synonymous, and d) any sexual "deviance" is a social wrong and should be righted. The taken-for-granted in Krafft-Ebing's description remains one of the ways human sexuality is understood today (Weeks, 2000).

During the same time period, Havelock Ellis' best-known work, *Sexual Inversion*, published in 1897, attempted to make a case for Krafft-Ebing's "deviant" sexualities, which he called "homosexuality." Ellis was the first to use this term. Ellis positioned all forms of sexualities labeled "deviant" as mere biological variations of what was constructed as "normal sexuality" – that is, heterosexuality (Weeks, 2000). This argument challenged many moralistic arguments against "deviant" human sexuality in a society where physical intimacy between men (same-sex attraction between women was not recognized at all) was considered morally degenerative (as Krafft-Ebing argued) and acts of "buggery" were made illegal (Sullivan, 2003). Indeed, in Ellis' time, laws regulating sexual acts between men came with harsh punishments, "sharpening the division between legitimate sex (sex between husband and wife within the family) and illegitimate sex (sex which threatened the emotional stability of the family, and the socially sanctioned sexual roles of men and women)" (Weeks, 2000, p. 25). Ultimately, Ellis' work had little impact on the societal positioning of heterosexuality as normal (Sullivan, 2003; Weeks, 2000).

Further, although he positioned homosexuality as a natural phenomenon rather than a moralistic failing, his work focused on the ability to categorize individuals rather than explore sexuality beyond acts of intercourse (Weeks, 2000).

Ultimately, Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, and the work of the sexologists contributed much to the way we understand and organize sexuality today: first, through the construction of the umbrella terms of heterosexual and homosexual, and further, by positioning heterosexuality as normative and homosexuality and all other forms of human sexuality as deviant (e.g., Marinucci, 2011). Their conflation of gender, sex, and sexuality, as well as the presumption that sexuality is biological and changeable reflects social norms of the 19th century, yet their arguments remain a part of the standard narrative of sexuality today.

The fixing of these sexual categories reflects the fluidity and subjective nature of the construction and embodiment of sexuality. By the 1920s or early 30s, the heterosexual/homosexual binary classification of sexuality developed in this era shed its medical listing in the dictionary and wove into daily discourse as a way of socially organizing sexualities (Katz, 1995). I will discuss the ramifications of this in the next portion of this review.

Heteronormativity and the Social Organizing of Sexuality

In this portion of my literature review, I will discuss how the vocabulary and the heterosexual/homosexual binary developed in the 19th century has influenced the social ordering of sexualities today (e.g., Foucault, 1978/1990). Despite the instability of both heterosexuality and homosexuality as agreed-upon categories, “heterosexuality” has become the presumed normative form of sexuality for all human beings. However,

normative heterosexuality means more than just intercourse between a female and a male; the gender and social roles associated with normalized conceptualizations of heterosexuality are invisibly codified into our daily lives. Below, I discuss the concept of heteronormativity as the way society has organized sexualities. In addition, I draw on some critiques of heterosexuality and heteronormativity from queer and feminist scholars who have worked to deconstruct this form of social organizing.

Heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is the lexicalized representation of the West's dominant system of organizing sexualities (Coates, 2013; Warner, 1993). Heteronormativity serves as an unreachable yet hegemonic set of idealized norms that structure our sexual beliefs, behaviors, and ideologies (Warner, 1993). At the core of heteronormative thought is the socially constructed sexual category of heterosexuality (Foucault, 1978/1990) as well as the biological, reproductive, and moralistic arguments that have been socially constructed to support heterosexuality as normal. Warner (2002) articulates heteronormativity as:

the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged...It consists less of norms that could be summarized as a body of doctrine than of a sense of rightness produced in contradictory manifestations—often unconscious, immanent to practice or to institutions. (p. 309)

Heteronormativity, in its most basic sense, is privileging heterosexuality as the social, moral, and essential human sexuality. Heteronormativity also presumes that only two sexes and only two genders exist (Giddings & Pringle, 2011). When this way of thinking becomes a taken-for-granted, legitimated standard against which we socially organize our

sexual beliefs and behaviors, socially organizing becomes heteronormative, often with violent results for those who do not conform to this norm (Yep, 2003).

Heteronormativity is communicatively regulated and reinscribed through acts of heterosexism and homophobia. Heterosexism and homophobia are linked concepts. Homophobia is “strictly defined as personal bias or irrational fear of same sex intimacy” (Camara, Katznelson, Hildebrandt-Sterling, & Parker, 2012, p. 314). Both heterosexual individuals and sexual minorities can feel and express homophobia (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009). Heterosexism reflects the cultural practices that work to marginalize and disadvantage sexual minorities, but does not necessarily reflect the same fear that drives homophobia (Herek, 2007). Griffin (1998) calls heterosexism a “pervasive social disease” (p. 33) that undergirds heteronormative bias throughout social institutions such as the family and the media.

The construct of heteronormativity is largely based on insights from Gayle Rubin’s (1984) description of the organization of human sexuality; what she refers to as a “sex hierarchy.” The “good sex,” according to Rubin (1984), is more than just heterosexuality; rather, it is a monogamous, married relationship that ultimately results in the production of offspring. The “bad sex” is any form of sexuality that involves fetishism, sadomasochism, prostitution or work in pornography, pedophilia, transvestism, or transgenderism. Between these two poles, listed in order from most “good” to most “bad,” are heterosexual couples that are unmarried, heterosexual people that are promiscuous, masturbation, same-sex couples in long-term relationships, and promiscuous homosexuals (Rubin, 1984).

Considering Rubin's (1984) "sex hierarchy" 30 years after its publication, I can make several claims about heteronormativity and the social ordering of organizing sexuality. First, sexualities are still constructed as a polarized binary, just as they were in 19th century sexology: normal (hetero)sexuality at one extreme, deviant sexuality at the other. However, how these extremes and the forms of sexuality that fall between are constructed is fluid and reflects social and moral norms of the day. Just as in the 19th century, what is communicated as "normal" sexuality in terms of gender roles and morality changes as society changes. For example, Rubin (1984) positions same-sex couples in long-term relationships as closer to the "bad" end of the sexuality spectrum.

However, the legalization of same-sex marriage in many states across the U.S., unheard of in 1984, adds another category to this spectrum. Given that marriage is the accepted form of legitimized relationship in America (Warner, 1999), married same-sex couples could arguably be positioned closer to the "good" end of the sexuality spectrum than the "bad." Although this hierarchy of sexualities seems somewhat simplified, this project seeks to determine not only what the organization of sexualities is, but the process by which sexualities are communicatively perceived and negotiated.

Questioning Heteronormativity. A great deal of scholarship has questioned the essentialism and thus inherent "rightness" of heterosexuality that undergirds heteronormative thought (e.g., Foucault, 1978/1990; Sedgwick, 1990). A common argument emerging from this literature is that heterosexuality is not an essential human trait, rather it is culturally constructed category codified by the sexologists as a way of evaluating and regulating human behavior (Foucault, 1978/1990; see Katz, 1995 for a full review). This scholarship, briefly and in oversimplified terms, argues that heterosexuality

would be better described as way of organizing human desires, impulses, and behaviors than as a normative and regulatable form of sexuality (Sullivan, 2003).

Feminist and queer scholars in particular have gone to great lengths to deconstruct the essentialist heterosexual argument that tautologically supports heteronormative thought. For example, feminist scholar Adrienne Rich (1980) coined the term compulsory heterosexuality to denaturalize and reframe human organization around (hetero)sexuality. Specifically, she argues that taken-for-granted patriarchal social structures turn women away from seeking comfort and nurture from same sex others, despite the fact that their mothers were the first to provide this kind of care. For Rich (1980), heterosexuality is never essential; it is the result of a demanding patriarchy serving its own interests at the expense of women. Similarly, Gayle Rubin (1975) argued that human sexuality (e.g., kinship) has been socially organized under three principles: the incest taboo, obligatory heterosexuality, and an asymmetric division of the sexes (p. 188). Like Rich (1980), Rubin argues that the “principles of sexuality” are applied in a systemic and strategic way that serves the interests of men, while simultaneously silencing what have been classified as “deviant” sexualities.

Rebuttals to these critiques often argue that without the category of heterosexuality, there would be no other “standard” by which to construct alternate sexualities. This argument is a slippery slope: if we acknowledge that “sexuality is organized and regulated in accordance with certain societal beliefs about what is normal, natural and desirable” (Cameron & Kulick, 2006, p. 165) and heterosexuality is that standard, then all sexualities are organized around an ideal that is impossible to reach (Butler, 1991). Put simply, “any presumption of a “normative” sexuality is, necessarily, a

corollary of heteronormative culture. And as long as we concede that any normative state exists, we will always be divided into ‘us’ and ‘them,’ ‘in’ and ‘out,’ ‘right’ and ‘wrong’” (McCreery, 1999, p. 41). The binary organizing of sexuality that undergirds Western society actively serves to privilege some and diminish others. A theory of co-sexuality will explore the communicative process of negotiating this impossible to reach, yet highly regulatory normative state of sexuality.

The Current State of Sexuality

As of 2015, the “rigidly dichotomized” (Foucault, 1978/1990) umbrella categorizations of heterosexual or homosexual have expanded exponentially. New terminology and categories of sexuality have evolved that reflect a more nuanced and specific understanding of sexuality as an act, an identity, and in some cases, both. How these categories are communicatively constructed and contested affects how people position themselves and others. However, the categories and terminology associated with sexuality has, in some cases, resulted in individuals communicatively conforming to their perceptions of categorical definitions rather than the categories actually representing their sexuality. This is discussed below.

Sexuality (and Gender) Categories

The vocabulary that we use to organize human sexuality has both broadened and deepened. The binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality remain the primary categories that are used (Sullivan, 2003), with heterosexuality remaining the privileged category. However, a glut of categories has evolved that explicate the varieties of heterosexual and homosexual identities and behaviors. Many of these categories remain interconnected, and in some cases conflated, with gender identities and biological sex.

The acronym LGBTQ (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) has gained popularity as a way of referring to a group of people who are socially marginalized as a result of their sexual or gendered deviation to a perceived heterosexual, cisgendered norm. Some have argued against the use of LGBTQ, taking the position that lumping gender identities and sexuality categories together further conflates gender, sex, and sexuality. This “lumping” of categories becomes particularly problematic when trying to describe the lived experience of each marginalized group as well as when attempting to ascertain how each group is socially perceived (e.g., Worthen, 2013). While this argument may or may not be valid, my point in discussing LGBTQ is not to argue for or against its use. Rather, I argue that the use of the acronym LGBTQ is a demonstration of co-sexuality through its reinforcement of the “heterosexual/other” binary. Specifically, the way in which this acronym has evolved and is used represents the shared experience of diverging from a perceived sexual and gendered norm (Marinucci, 2011).

Although LGBTQ does go beyond the heterosexual/homosexual binary, it does not represent the full scope of terms available for describing sexuality and gender categories. According to Killerman (2015), the most commonly used terms available to describe categories of sexuality would construct the acronym LGBPTTQQIIAA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning, intersex, intergender, asexual, ally). Because people reference and position these categories in a variety of ways, it is important to have a brief description of these terms as a reference point for this study.

First, the terms man and woman represent gender identities, whereas male and female represent biological sex categories (WHO, 2015). Lesbianism generally refers to

females who are sexually attracted to other females (Sullivan, 2003). Gay can refer to male or female persons who are sexually attracted to those of the same biological sex, but more commonly refers to attraction between men (Marinucci, 2011). Bisexuality typically refers to sexual attraction to both biologically born men and women, whereas pansexuality (often confused with bisexuality) refers to the capacity for sexual attraction to all sex and gender identities (American Institute of Bisexuality, 2013). Transgenderism is an umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity or expression differs from their biological sex and may involve medical treatment to physically alter the body to match gender and sex, whereas transsexualism refers to individuals who do seek permanent change of their bodies (GLAAD, 2015). Queer is perhaps the broadest term of all and is used as an umbrella for all non-heterosexual orientations or gender identity in terms of behaviors or attractions (Gray & Desmarais, 2014). Questioning represents anyone who is questioning his or her gender or sexuality (Marinucci, 2011). Intersex refers to individuals who are born with chromosomes, genitalia, or other physical properties that do not allow them to be categorized as male or female, whereas intergender refers to individuals whose gender identity falls somewhere between the socially constructed gender roles associated with the binary sexes. Asexuality refers to individuals who have no to very little sexual attraction to any sex or gender (Killerman, 2015). Finally, an ally is any cisgendered or heterosexual individual who supports people identifying with or categorized as a marginalized category (Killerman, 2015).

Sexualities and gender identity categories that are positioned as normative have also been broadened. As stated earlier, cisgenderism or any of its variations (i.e., cis-man; cis-woman; Killerman, 2015) represents individuals whose gender identity and biological

sex match. Additionally, the word “straight” is often used to describe individuals who identify as heterosexual. However, heterosexuality, defined as sexual attraction between males and females, has non-normative varieties as well. For example, polygamy (marriage between one man and multiple women; marriage between one woman and multiple men; marriage between multiple husbands and wives) is socially reviled and has been made illegal in the United States (Stacey & Meadow, 2009).

Despite the growing list of categories, research has demonstrated that the categories of sexuality are still not sufficient for women attempting to communicate their sexual identities (Better, 2014). Further, women tend to communicatively erase previous sexual experiences with individuals whose gender identities do not correspond to their current sexual identity (Better, 2014). For example, a woman who was previously sexually active with a woman and now is in a relationship with a male is confused about how her sexual identity matches the prescribed categories of sexuality, and therefore privileges her sexual experiences with men. Ultimately, women are more concerned about their communication about their sexuality fitting the label rather than the labels being reflections of their behavior (Better, 2014). Co-sexuality is concerned with both the perception and use of the categories of sexuality, but also how people communicatively converge and diverge from these categories to position themselves in relationship to a perceived sexual norm.

This extensive list of gender and sexuality categories is not complete, nor are the definitions of these categories universally agreed upon. Indeed, the process of co-sexuality explores the ways in which these categories are understood, used, and positioned around a seemingly dominant heterosexual, cisgendered norm. Undergirding

the vocabulary and categories for sexual and gender identities is a social discourse that is expanding to incorporate more and more variations of “othered” (Brekhus, 1998) categories. However, the growing list of minority sexualities and gender identities does little more than reinforce the heterosexual/homosexual binary that is at the core of socially organizing sexualities.

From Act to Identity. As the vocabulary of sexuality has broadened, so has the meaning and usage of the various categories. Whereas once categories of sexuality were used primarily to describe the physical acts of attraction or intimacy, these categories can now also be used as identity categories; a means by which individuals group themselves and others to make sense of themselves and others as human beings (e.g., Gray & Desmerais, 2014). For example, identifying as “queer,” an umbrella term for all forms of sexual or gender deviance, has been demonstrated to increase feelings of empowerment through connection with a larger group (Riggs, 2010). Broadly, as an identity, sexuality is a more fluid concept (Diamond, 2005) because it represents a sense of self, rather than a fixed behavior.

Giddens’ (1992) concept of plastic sexuality is useful in explaining the transition from conceptualizing sexuality as just an act to the broader concept of sexuality as an identity. According to Giddens (1992), plastic sexuality is a component of an individual’s personality that is intrinsically intertwined with the project of the self. Like plastic, sexual identities are moldable but also durable. Giddens (1992) positions sexual identities as “the property of the individual” (p. 175), with the body situated as the location for a range of new potential sexual choices. Importantly, the concept of plastic sexuality recognizes that shifting the traditional conception of sexuality as an act to identity has allowed

sexuality to be decoupled from marriage, reproduction, and romantic love in what Giddens (1992) calls “the age of high modernity” (p. 166). This discursive shift from sexuality as an act to sexuality as an identity, plastic or otherwise, affords humans the ability to reframe and redefine the meanings surrounding sexual identity.

Given that the concept of co-sexuality is interested in the process that occurs as sexualities are communicatively organized, it is important to recognize the ways in which sexuality and its associated categories serve as both a representation of physical acts and sexual identities in day-to-day communication. As it stands, these terms are frequently used interchangeably in sexuality literature (see Cameron & Kulick, 2006; Tabatabai, 2012). While I would argue that these terms are not mutually exclusive, the concept of sexual identity moves beyond conceptualizing sexuality as only physical attraction or the act of intercourse into positioning sexual orientations as a part of the larger social process of identity construction. Put differently, sexual orientation is often a component of one’s sexual identity, and never representative of the individual’s entire identity (Thompson & Morgan, 2008).

Communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is how sexual identities are performed and perceived. Explicitly identifying as heterosexual is considered by most to be unnecessary, because heterosexuality is presumed until otherwise indicated. However, sexuality research has demonstrated that heterosexuality and associated normative gender roles are carefully negotiated depending upon the social context (e.g., Nagoshi, Terrell, Nagoshi, & Brzuzy, 2014). For example, body and verbal performances of sexuality and gender in the workplace are strictly regulated by dress codes (Brower, 2013; Skidmore, 1999) and gendered communication styles and topics (e.g., Kawale, 2004) than in other

social institutions. For sexual minorities, communicatively identifying with a sexual identity category is an even more complex process that involves a careful analysis of the interpersonal environment (Gray & Desmarais, 2014). The tactics used are contextual, because the act of identifying can result in a variety of possible social outcomes ranging from feeling a sense of purpose and connectedness with a larger social group (DiFulvio, 2011), and a higher meaning in life (Klar & Kasser, 2009), to feeling stigmatized from a larger heteronormative society. The communication of sexual identities is crucial for sexual minorities seeking other sexual minorities, since sexuality is not an immediately visible characteristic and heterosexuality is presumed.

In terms of perceiving others' sexual identities, scholarship has explored the communicative techniques used by those with high levels of "gaydar," or the ability to identify sexual minorities without knowing the sexual orientation – that is, the biological sex of previous lovers – of the person in question. "Gaydar" relies exclusively on evaluating non-verbal and verbal human communication and functions as a "sexual identity recognition tool" (Nicholas, 2004, p. 61). It is through diction, body language, terminology, dress, hairstyles, and other indicators that gaydar serves as a sense-making and categorization tool, although most of these indicators have been demonstrated as incorrect and have been criticized as a form of stereotyping and social discrimination (e.g., Knöfler & Imhof, 2007). However, "gaydar" is yet another example of how sexualities are identified and organized; the recognition of "non-normative" displays as representative of sexual identities serves to reify a normative state of sexuality (Lyons, Lynch, Brewer, & Bruno, 2014).

Sexuality and Intersectionality. While performances and perceptions of

“normative” sexuality serve as a way of understanding and positioning others, what is considered a “normal” sexual identity is highly contextual and subjective. The meanings associated with the growing list of sexual identity categories are not universal; rather, they are perceived through an intersectional lens. Put simply, the lived experiences of human beings from different races, classes, genders, ethnicities, nations, and ages (e.g., Collins, 2000) affect how sexuality is constructed, normalized, communicatively regulated.

The dominant system of organizing sexuality in the West (Warner, 1993), heteronormativity, is organized around a specific kind of body: the White male (e.g., Fox, 2007; hooks, 1994). This physical expectation renders all other types of bodies unable to successfully perform normative sexuality. Indeed, research has consistently shown that Black women, Black men, White women, and people of a lower class status have less sexual capital and sexual agency than White males and persons of higher class status (Gonzalez & Rolison, 2005), regardless of the sex of their romantic partner. Given the significance of the body as a place for making sense of, categorizing, and regulating the self and others (e.g., Yep, 2013), it is unsurprising that women, minority men, and particularly minority women of all sexualities whose bodies cannot conform to a White male norm find themselves a target of sexual harassment, discrimination, and sexual regulation (e.g., Berdahl & Moore, 2006).

Previous research has also indicated that race and ethnicity play a significant role in to whom, when, and how people communicate their sexual minority status. Although heteronormativity is undergirded by White masculinity, feminist scholarship has described deviance from heterosexuality as a White cultural norm as well (Anzaldúa,

1987). Thus, how racial and ethnic minorities communicate deviance from this norm is different than White sexual minorities. For example, Black sexual minorities often report that gender role norms in the Black community privilege heteronormativity to extreme degrees causing Black sexual minorities to more vigorously hide their sexual minority status than their White counterparts (e.g., Bowleg, 2013). Additionally, Black and Latina lesbian-identified females are more likely to report depression associated with their sexual minority status than White females; further, Latina women are more likely to report depression when they revealed their sexuality to nonfamily members than White or Black females (e.g., Aranda et al., 2015). Across multiple races, sexual minorities of color consistently report that White LGB communities are more normalized than other racial minorities (e.g., Bowleg, 2013), racing the construct of sexuality.

Further, Dougherty (2011) indicates that the intersection of class and sexuality can also have a tremendous impact on how identities are perceived and communicated. Dougherty (2011) describes an interaction with a lower-class young female neighbor who presumed that Dougherty identified as a lesbian because she observed Dougherty's farm being "worked by women." Dougherty (2011) posits that the young woman conflated gender roles and sexual orientation because she perceived that Dougherty, a woman, was violating traditional gender roles when doing the body work necessary to run a farm. In Western society, a woman doing "body work" reflects masculine gender norms, therefore women doing body work must sexually desire women just as heterosexual men. What is most important here is how these components of identity (class, sexuality, and gender) intersected as a way for the young woman to make sense of and position Dougherty's sexuality.

The growing list of sexual identity categories has expanded the vocabulary for human beings to both communicate and position sexualities. However, this vocabulary is still built upon the heterosexual/homosexual binary that serves to privilege and normalize one form of human sexuality over all others. Further, the ways in which these categories are communicated are highly contextual: for some, “sexuality” represents an act. For others, “sexuality” is an identity that can be communicated and categorized based on certain physical or socially constructed attributes. In any case, sexuality remains a highly contextual construct that is experienced differently based on social location and learned cultural norms. In the next section of this dissertation, I argue that the workplace is the institution in which sexuality is most clearly and firmly regulated and performed, making it an ideal location for the development of a theory of co-sexuality. This is discussed below.

Into the Workplace

Despite the instability of the construct and vocabulary of sexuality, it both visibly and invisibly regulates lived human experience on a daily basis. I argue that the most extreme examples for exploring the processes of communicatively organizing human sexuality occur within the context of the organization. Organizations are gendered, sexualized social institutions (Acker, 1990) that have a great deal of control over how sexuality is organized both inside and outside of the workplace. Briefly, organizations have the power to legitimize and regulate displays of sexuality, perceptions of sexual harassment, and expressions of sexual identity (Williams, Giuffre, & Dellinger, 2009). Further, individuals’ race and profession can influence how performances of sexualities are perceived, regulated, and, performed. For example, people doing body work have

different expectations for how to perform and regulate sexuality than those doing text work (e.g., Dougherty, 2011). In this way, organizations serve as fertile ground for exploring how people communicatively navigate and position the sexuality of themselves and others. Below, I discuss a body of scholarship that has engaged the various ways that organizations and the people within them work to organize sexuality. First, however, I will position the organization as an ideal location studying the process of co-sexuality.

Organizations as Sexual Institutions

Throughout Western society, there exists a persistent belief that asexual or sexuality-free work environments and worksites are essential for broader organizations to be productive and efficient (Burrell, 1984; Brewis & Sinclair, 2000). Broadly speaking, organizations have been socially situated into the public half of the public/private dichotomy (e.g., Mumby, 2000). The public sphere privileges displays of rationality and emotional control (e.g., Hochschild, 1983; Eschenfelder, 2012) that are presumed possible because of the leisure and personal care, including sex, that occur in the private sphere (e.g., Tracy & Rivera, 2010). However, a wealth of research argues that workplaces are not only sexual in nature, but that sexuality is an essential part of organizations (e.g., Acker, 1990; Gherardi, 1995; Willis, 2010; Woods & Lucas, 1993).

Broadly speaking, the strict regulation of displays of sexuality as well as the commodification of sexuality for profit reflects the heteronormative nature of organizations and their respective worksites (Gherardi, 1995). Organizational communication and management scholars have noted that the organizational privileging of heteronormativity can be seen both in the ways that organizations regulate their employees' behavior as well as in the lifestyles that organizations market to their

customers (e.g., Mumby, 2012). Organizations sell sexuality to their customers through their employees and through their products. As Bruni (2006) argues, when workers communicate with clients or suppliers, organizations require their employees to “deploy the sexual skills of their employees to soothe and satisfy customers. Sexuality is thus commodified and brought onto the public stage in accordance with the social norms that regulate it” (p. 304). In this way, organizations serve to reflect and reify the sexual expectations of society for profit.

As Western society becomes more tolerant of sexual diversity (Williams, Giuffre, & Dellinger, 2009), some organizations have become more fluid in terms of what kind of displays of sexuality and gender identities are considered acceptable. However, this fluidity has created more ambiguity than certainty about what is considered appropriate for employees. For example, some new management styles, which encourage employees to “be themselves,” caused employees to question the legitimacy of the sexual displays of other employees (Fleming & Spicer, 2008). Further, employees felt pressured to display hypersexualized selves to conform to the perceived organizational expectation, creating ambiguity and tension between employees and the organization (Fleming & Spicer, 2008). Similarly, gay employees in organizations that are purportedly more “gay-friendly” are still bound by heteronormative professional discourses that require the separation of sexuality and professionalism. As such, these employees are left trying to communicatively construct and negotiate their sexual identity in uncertain and ambiguous terms (Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009).

Ultimately, organizations are rife with mixed messages about how, when, why, what, or if sexuality should be communicated. Given the necessity of having a source of

income in a capitalist economy, employees will go to great lengths to conform to organizational expectations to protect their jobs (Weeks, 2011). As such, I argue that the highly sexual nature of organizations as well as the ambiguity associated with sexuality in the workplace constructs an ideal location for exploring the ways in which people communicatively navigate and position sexualities. Below, I discuss the various ways in which organizations regulate sexuality in the workplace.

Organizing Sexuality through Workplace Policy. Organizational policies are powerful tools that serve to regulate the behavior of the organization as a whole as well as the members that constitute it (Skidmore, 2004). Policies serve as a sense-making tool for organizational members; by referencing policy, many employees come to know what behaviors or identity expressions are considered “appropriate” by the organization (Williams, Giuffre, & Dellinger, 2009). As discussed in organizational communication scholarship, workplace policies are often undergirded by invisible heteronormative expectations that effectively “other” sexual minorities or privilege certain types of heterosexual-identified employees, such as those that are married and have children (e.g., Dixon & Dougherty, 2014; Kirby & Krone, 2002). By specifically marking categories such as women and sexual minorities, and leaving other categories, such as men or heterosexual married couples, unmarked (Brekhus, 1998), policies both reflect and actively regulate how sexualities are organized in the workplace.

Organizational communication and critical management scholarship have done much to demonstrate the many ways in which heteronormative values undergird organizational policies and influence how sexualities are organized in the workplace. A prime example is the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993. FMLA is a federal

policy that requires employers to provide qualified employees up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave to care for sick or injured family members and guarantee the absent worker a job when they are able to return to work (US Department of Labor, 2015). Implicit in this policy is the taken-for-granted definition of the word “family” as a heterosexual married couple or the biological relatives of the employee (Dixon & Dougherty, 2014; Kirby & Krone, 2002). Although recent changes to FMLA have resulted in the inclusion of adoptive children and legal same-sex marriages (US Department of Labor, 2015), FMLA continues to privilege traditional heteronormative family structures. For example, under FMLA, unmarried employees of any sexuality do not qualify to take leave time to care for their partners, which reflects and reinforces marriage as the privileged and legitimized form of relationship in the United States (e.g., Warner, 1999). In this way, FMLA and policies like it continue to ignore and delegitimize alternate family structures and reinforce the heterosexual/other binary, which employees must communicatively negotiate when requesting to take time off (Dixon & Dougherty, 2014).

Policies seemingly intended to make workplaces more egalitarian also reflect and reinforce heteronormative privilege. Specifically, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), first proposed in 1994, was intended to make it illegal for employers to fire or refuse to hire people based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (“Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 2013,” 2013). Although ENDA has never become law, it has been strongly supported by equal rights activist groups such as the HRC and The Gay and Lesbian Task Force (O’Keefe, 2014). However, as McCreery (1999) points out, the limited yet specific terminology in the bill (e.g., heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual) relies on the historically contingent vocabulary discussed earlier in

this chapter. As such, McCreery (1999) argues that “ENDA reinscribes heteronormative culture. By not acknowledging diversity of sexual practices – and not protecting workers who engage in them – the bill buttresses normative sexual mores and institutions” (p. 42), ultimately continuing to regulate and reinforce the binary “us” versus “them” nature of heteronormative culture.

As social acceptance of sexual diversity has become more common in the United States, workplace policies have seemingly become more inclusive, offering policy protections and equal benefits to employees identifying as sexual minorities (Williams, Giuffre, & Dellinger, 2009). Indeed, according to the Human Rights Campaign’s (HRC) annual Corporate Equality Index, which evaluates Fortune 500 companies and hundreds of private companies’ policies and practices related to LGBT rights in the workplace, 93 percent of companies evaluated had a non-discrimination policy that incorporated sexual orientation while 66 percent had a non-discrimination policy that incorporated gender identity (“Corporate Equality Index,” 2015). Although it is heartening that workplace policy protections for employees of all sexualities are becoming more commonplace, the mere existence of policies offering protections does not automatically change how the organization regulates or privileges certain forms of sexuality (Gusmano, 2008). The majority of extant literature exploring policies and the regulation of sexualities in the workplace has used the point of view of sexual minorities, who have described feeling as though they must conform to and display “compulsory heterosexuality” (Dixon & Dougherty, 2014; Eguchi, 2009; Giddings & Pringle, 2001; Rich, 1980); that is, pass as heterosexual or avoid discussions of their sexuality. In my own research, participants identifying as sexual minorities described silencing or actively regulating their sexuality

in the workplace despite (or in some instances, because of) the existence of non-discrimination policies, if they perceived policy protections as unclear or had not seen them applied by management (Compton, 2016).

Policies both reflect and regulate socially constructed sexual norms in the workplace. What is important to note for this project is that the existence of more inclusive policies in place makes the organization's regulation of sexuality less explicit, while the communicative practices associated with the regulation of sexuality in the workplace becomes more subtly woven into daily discourse and practice (e.g., Ward & Winstanley, 2004). Indeed, policies are very effective at hiding or repositioning an organization's culture. This is discussed below.

Organizing Sexuality through Workplace Practice. Workplace policy alone does not construct the social rules and norms that guide how individuals perceive what is considered normative sexuality in their workplaces. Rather, each organization has its own culture that cannot be changed simply by intervention from policy or management involvement (Dixon & Dougherty, 2014). Organizational culture as defined by sociologist Edward Schein:

is the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (Schein, 1985, p. 4)

Thus, the organizational culture sets the rules for how, when, or if individuals communicate about their sexualities and related gender identities. This phenomenon is

well cited in the “coming out” literature found in organizational communication and management literature, with strategies ranging from full disclosure to full concealment (see Gusmano, 2008; King, Reilly, & Hebl, 2008; Prati & Pietrantoni, 2014; Woods & Lucas, 1993 for examples).

Much of the work on sexuality and organizational culture has found that workplace cultures in the United States continue to privilege displays of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormative heterosexuality (Acker, 1990; Denissen & Saguy, 2014; Eguchi, 2008; McCreery, 1999; Giddings & Pringle, 2011). For those who do not communicatively conform to heteronormative and heteromale norms (Chan, 2001), the workplace consequences can be severe, ranging from harassment (Denissen & Saguy, 2014) to job loss (e.g., King, 2014) and even physical violence (Chan, 2001). These explicit discriminatory practices have been well critiqued and have arguably lessened over time (e.g., Williams, Giuffre, & Dellinger, 2009).

Despite a seemingly growing level of tolerance for all genders and sexualities, Embrick, Walther, and Wickens (2007) argue that the actions of employees frequently contradict purported tolerance and work to quietly reinforce heteronormative, heteromale norms. Indeed, invisible sexual prejudice has become quite common in many workplaces as heterosexual people actively construct reasons to treat those identifying with non-normative sexualities unfairly while appearing to treat them equally. Common workplace practices that are not representative of the liberal ideology communicated by cisgendered heterosexuals include: homophobic jokes used to privilege White male heterosexual employees and exclude homosexuals and women (e.g., Embrick, Walther, & Wickens, 2007; Denissen & Saguy, 2014); silencing or ridiculing

discussions of non-heteronormative sexuality (e.g., Giddings & Pringle, 2011; Ward & Winstanley, 2003); and regulating the dress of employees to privilege traditionally masculine or traditionally feminine attire (e.g., Giddings & Pringle, 2011). Further, sexual minorities find their voices silenced or invalidated by invisible workplace norms and policies (Hall & LaFrance, 2012; Ward & Winstanley, 2003). This invisible struggle to perform a legitimized sexuality has proven to be harmful to sexual minorities' workplace performance (Gates, 2012), which serves as justification for organizations to avoid hiring sexual minorities or to fire sexual minority employees (Hebl, Foster, Mannix, & Dovidio, 2002). Arguably, it is through acts of sexual harassment that sexuality and gender identity is most rigorously regulated in workplace environments. Below, I discuss issues of gender, sexual harassment, and power in organizational cultures.

Sexual Harassment. Sexual harassment is one of the clearest and most researched examples of the communicative creation of, conformance to, and divergence from a socially constructed gendered and sexual norm in a workplace context. In organizational communication scholarship, sexual harassment has long been recognized as communicative acts that work to privilege and punish certain sexually related behaviors within organizational contexts. Broadly speaking, sexual harassment typically reinforces heteronormative notions that men are sexual aggressors and women are paradoxically expected to be both chaste and sexually available at all times (e.g., Clair, 1993; Dougherty, 2001). Sexual harassment can occur in face-to-face communication, but recent scholarship demonstrates that it increasingly occurs through digital forums, such as social media, texting, and email (Mainiero & Jones, 2013). Regardless of how

sexual harassment occurs, it is destructive at the individual, organizational, and broader social levels (Dougherty, 2001).

Just as sexuality and its related sexual categories are not agreed-upon concepts, neither is sexual harassment. In United States law, two forms of sexual harassment are acknowledged: *quid pro quo* harassment occurs when one party pressures another to provide sexual favors in exchange for job security or benefits, whereas a hostile work environment results from sexually aggressive behaviors that create an organizational culture in which work becomes impossible (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2014). However, what constitutes sexually harassing behavior is often contested between organizational members (Dougherty, Baiocchi-Wagner, & McGuire, 2011) and particularly between men and women (Dougherty, 2001; Quinn, 2002). The consistent discrepancies between male and female perceptions of sexual harassment reflect a more fluid rather than fixed nature of gender roles and sexual expectations in organizations (e.g., Dougherty et. al, 2009).

Sexual harassment does not regulate performances sexuality in terms of biological sex alone; sexually harassing behavior regulates and privileges certain raced (e.g., Forbes, 2009), classed (e.g., Dougherty, 2001; Dougherty, 2011) and gendered (e.g., Harris, 2013) performances of sexuality. Indeed, social identities are a key component of sexual harassment, both in terms of who gets harassed as well as the contextual definition of sexual harassment (Dougherty, Baiocchi-Wagner, & McGuire, 2011). Most of the workplace sexual harassment literature focuses on the harassment of cisgendered women by cisgendered men (e.g., Dougherty, 2001; Hlavka, 2014) because women's sexuality is far more regulated in workplace contexts than men's (e.g., Dougherty, 2006; Foss &

Rogers, 1994). However, cisgendered men that are sexual minorities also tend to be victims sexual harassment in the workplace far more frequently than their heterosexual counterparts (e.g., Holland et al., 2015). Cisgendered men are less likely to report sexual harassment than cisgendered women because sexual harassment has been feminized and thus positioned as a sign of organizational weakness (e.g., Clair, 1998). As such, it is no surprise that male sexual minorities are statistically more likely to be sexually harassed in the workplace than their heterosexual counterparts; their sexuality deviates from traditional hegemonic masculine norms that eschew any display of femininity (Holland et al., 2015). In this way, sexual harassment works to reinforce and normalize heteronormative, heteromasculine organizational cultures.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, sexual harassment also reflects and regulates normative sexuality based on race and class as well. “Normal” sexuality – that is, heteronormativity – is undergirded by the privileges and presumptions of White masculinity. This is particularly true in the workplace, which is patriarchal in nature (Acker, 1990). As such, it is unsurprising that non-White employees are significantly more likely to victims of sexual harassment. This is particularly true for minority women in the workplace because they are both gender and racial minorities, putting them in “double jeopardy” (Berdahl & Moore, 2006). Simply put, sexual harassment serves as a regulatory tool for heteronormativity in the workplace; how individuals communicate their sexuality in the workplace is consistently regulated by racial, ethnic, classed, and gendered expectations that are defined in terms of White masculinity.

Forbes’ (2009) scholarship provides an excellent example of the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexual harassment in a workplace context. Forbes (2009) argues

that the dominant White and patriarchal nature of the organization consistently allows White males to commodify and sexualize Black women's bodies. Although Forbes notes that women of all races are subjected to sexual harassment (e.g., Dougherty, 2001), the prevalent social presumption that Black women are more sexually promiscuous and of a lower social class than Caucasian women coupled with the socio-historical commodification and objectification of Black women's bodies changes both the content and frequency of sexually degrading comments (Forbes, 2009; Timberlake & Estes, 2007). Forbes refers to the adherence to or divergence from the raced and gendered commodification of Black women's bodies as "co-modification," a complex communicative process that results in Black women reclaiming their sexual identities or (consciously or unconsciously) complying with this discourse. What is most important about Forbes (2009) work for the development of co-sexuality is her acknowledgement that Black women must perform and regulate their sexuality in the workplace under different social expectations than other female employees in an environment where White masculinity is the privileged regulatory gaze.

Performances of sexuality by Black males are also subjected to White heteronormative expectations. Harris' (2013) analysis of a sexual assault charge stemming from a university's recruiting process that offered heterosexual sex and a lucrative party lifestyle provides an example of both the gendered and racial regulation of sexuality. First, Harris (2013) argued that the sexualized nature of the interactions between the female college students acting as university "Ambassadors" and the recruits, many of whom were Black, indicated that the university was selling access to heterosexual sex as a potential benefit for players. This commodification of women not

only places women as consumable sex objects in this organization, but presumes that access to heterosexual sex was an incentive for both the women and the football recruits.

Further, Harris (2013) positions college athletics as a site for regulating race and sexuality; specifically, a site where presumed “violent” and “hypersexualized” Black males athletes could become “whitened” and thus “saved” (p. 582). Because males who are racial minorities are by definition unable to perform hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) they do not receive the sexual access to women that is associated with White male masculinity (e.g., Gonzalez & Rolinson, 2005; Kitch, 2009). Further, the racist association between Blackness, violence, and athletics allows for the presumption that Black males will be sexually violent off of the field. By using access to heterosexual sex and a lucrative lifestyle to Black football recruits, the university reinforced both the presumed lower-class status of Blacks as well as selling heteronormative social expectations in terms of race and class (Harris, 2013). In terms of co-sexuality, this scholarship implies that organizations rely on and commodify racist and classist presumptions about their employees. Thus, minorities must perform their sexuality in terms of White masculinity.

Given the “Whiteness” of normative sexuality and gender (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), it is unsurprising that racial and sexual minorities find themselves struggling to conform to an expected sexual norm. White women absolutely experience sexual harassment; however, minority women are more frequently the victims of sexually harassing behaviors (Berdahl & Moore, 2006). Simply put, sexual harassment is not a universal experience; rather, sexual harassment works to regulate performances of sexuality in complex and intersectional ways. Different bodies in different social

locations are actively regulated by raced, classed, and gendered norms (Dougherty, Baiocchi-Wagner, & McGuire, 2011) that work to reify or resist sexual norms in vastly different ways.

Towards Co-Sexuality

In this chapter of my dissertation, I argued that the construct of human sexuality is messy, contested, and unstable, yet a powerful way in which humans organize. I argue that the development of a theory of co-sexuality, the process by which humans organize their sexuality, will contribute much to our understanding of how power and sexuality are regulated through communication. Through a brief review of the 19th century development of the categories of heterosexuality (positioned as normative) and homosexuality (positioned as abnormal) I demonstrated that the categories of sexuality serve as a communicative means for privileging, disparaging, and ultimately regulating human sexuality at a social scale.

Despite the relatively recent development of these categories and their contested nature as biological or socially constructed, a physical act or an identity, and as reflecting contextual social norms rather than consistently observable facts about human sexuality (Katz, 1995), the heterosexual/homosexual binary developed in the 19th century remains the primary way in which we organize sexualities today. To demonstrate how this binary has come to structure sexualities, I discussed the concept of heteronormativity (Warner, 1991), which structures much of the human experience as a way of making sense of the world and as a way of organizing people. Although heteronormativity privileges heterosexuality as natural, normal, and right, heteronormativity privileges certain forms of heterosexuality and homosexuality as superior to others, as exemplified by Gayle

Rubin's (1984) "sex hierarchy." Given that the social perception and categories of sexuality have evolved, co-sexuality first seeks to interrogate what is communicatively constructed as normative sexuality today. Therefore, my first research questions are:

RQ1: How do employees communicatively construct "normal" sexuality in the workplace?

Next, I discussed the modern vocabulary and categories associated with sexuality. These categories, while far more nuanced than the umbrella terms of heterosexuality and homosexuality, still reinforce the binary between "normal" and "other." The use of these terms, however, have evolved from simply categorizing an act to describing an individual identity. More modern conceptions of sexualities position them as "plastic" (Giddens, 1992), moldable, and owned by the individual rather than a reflection of an essential or biological state. However, research has demonstrated that individuals are attempting to communicatively "fit" their sexualities to predetermined identity categories rather than the categories of sexuality reflecting their lived experiences (Better, 2014). Employees must communicatively navigate not only a changing vocabulary, but also a shifting social setting in which "normal" sexuality not fixed, but fluid. Thus, , I asked the following research questions:

RQ2: How do employees construct and maintain the boundaries of "normal" sexuality in the workplace?

Finally, I positioned the workplace as the social institution that most clearly provides boundaries for the regulation of sexuality. Through the use of heteronormative workplace policies and practices, sexualities of employees are regulated in ways that reflect the extreme regulatory power of communication. As such, employees must work

to navigate the boundaries of “normal” sexuality in complex ways. Thus, I ask final research question:

RQ3: How do employees pull toward or push away from sexual “norms” in their workplaces?

In the next chapter of this dissertation, I discuss the methodology by which I gathered and constructed a theory of co-sexuality. Using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; 2014), I describe co-sexuality, the process of communicatively organizing around sexuality.

Chapter 3: Methods

In this chapter of my dissertation, I first introduce the methodology of grounded theory (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006; 2014). To begin, I justify grounded theory as an appropriate methodology for the development of co-sexuality as a theory. Further, I provide a rationale for following constructivist rather than objectivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; 2014). Second, I describe the specific data collection techniques I propose for this dissertation. Finally, I discuss the way in which I plan to analyze the data collected.

Methodology

I chose to construct a grounded theory of co-sexuality for this dissertation. Grounded theory has a long history in the social sciences. Sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967) first developed grounded theory as a way of developing theories that emerge from, and are grounded in, qualitative data rather than using data to confirm preconceived hypotheses. Although Glaser and Strauss ultimately diverged in their use and development of grounded theory methods (see Charmaz, 2014), this methodology has been used and respected in communication scholarship for decades (Tracy, 2013).

Grounded theory, as a methodology, best fit this project for two reasons: first, grounded theory and its associated methods are designed to explore and analyze complex processes (e.g., Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006; 2014). Processes, as a unit of study, occur over time and include events or benchmarks that occur throughout (Charmaz, 2006). These benchmarks are related to the overall process and can help researchers understand the process as a whole, although processes are never completely fixed or determinable (Charmaz, 2014). A simple example of a process could be the

repeated behaviors and actions a restaurant server makes as they take orders, bring food and drink, and collect money from patrons, each of which is a benchmark of that overall process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For this project, I focused on processes; specifically how sexualities are communicatively organized within the context of an organization. Using grounded theory, I explored what process people follow to determine the sexual norm within the context of their organization and then communicatively converge or diverge from that perceived sexual norm. The tremendous push-and-pull around “normal” sexuality that participants described in their narratives indicated that grounded theory was an excellent fit for exploring sexual organizing as a process.

Second, grounded theory is a well-developed methodology that provides clearly defined data collection methods and analysis techniques. Although these techniques can be applied with some degree of flexibility (Charmaz, 2014), grounded theory arguably presents the clearest and most systematic methodological approach for qualitative scholars seeking to explore actions or processes (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, grounded theory provided both a practicable and flexible approach to data collection.

Multiple approaches to grounded theory have emerged as the methodology has evolved. Two approaches have emerged from different paradigms of thought: the objectivist approach emerging from the fundamental work of Glaser and Strauss, (1967) (e.g., Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and the constructivist approach of Kathy Charmaz (2006; 2014). The objectivist approach to grounded theory is in line with a positivist paradigm of thought. As Charmaz (2006) argues, “an objectivist grounded theory assumes that data represent objective facts about a knowable world. The data already exist in the world; the researcher finds them and ‘discovers’ theory from

them” (p. 131). Further, objectivist grounded theory treats data as real and finite rather than focusing on the processes of how data is produced. Social context, the researcher, and the interactions between participant and researcher are erased (Charmaz, 2014).

In contrast, the constructivist approach is rooted in the interpretive paradigm. This approach to grounded theory is interested in how participants construct meanings in specific contexts (Charmaz, 2006). Rather than simply reporting what participants believe as objective reality, constructivist grounded theory theorizes the interpretive work that participants do to construct contextual meanings. Further, this approach acknowledges that the resulting grounded theory is firmly grounded in the researcher’s interpretation (Charmaz, 2014).

For this project, I followed a constructivist approach to grounded theory, because it is more in line with my own philosophical assumptions. In this dissertation, I positioned my approach to scholarship in the critical paradigm, whereas Corbin and Strauss’ approach to methodology emerged from the positivist and post-positivist paradigm (Charmaz, 2006). Further, as was discussed in chapter two of this dissertation, sexuality is a highly contested construct. The vocabulary used to talk about human sexuality is messy and often becomes conflated with gender identity, gender roles, sexual orientation, sexual identity, or biological sex. Participants in this dissertation used the words “sex” and “sexuality” to mean many things including intercourse, political views, sexual identities, and as conflated with gender. Taking an objectivist approach to grounded theory – that is, presuming participants’ perceptions of human sexuality is representative of an “objective reality” – does not reflect the socially constructed nature of sexuality or its associated categories. Further, I was most interested in how meanings

of human sexuality are communicatively produced as well as why humans organize these forms of sexuality in certain ways. A constructivist approach is best suited to answer these questions.

In sum, I chose to use a grounded theory approach to my exploration of co-sexuality. Grounded theory is designed to explore and construct theories of complex human processes, which was well suited for this project. I took a constructivist approach to this methodology, because this approach is a better fit for the scope and the content of the project. Further, as a methodology, grounded theory provided both well-developed data collection and analysis techniques, which will assist me with completing this project in a reasonable amount of time. My proposed data collection and analysis techniques are discussed below.

Data Collection Methods

It is crucial to the success of any research project to choose data collection methods that will provide the richest and deepest insight into the questions being posed by the researcher. Researchers have a toolbox of methods to choose from when designing their study, but simply “applying” these methods indiscriminately and unreflexively limits how the researcher will interpret the data as well as what theoretical process the researcher will ultimately develop (Charmaz, 2014). The research question or problem must be the primary influence when considering which method to choose. Thus, the data collection techniques that I selected and describe below were carefully considered, reflect the requirements of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and were designed to provide the best depth and breadth of knowledge as I developed co-sexuality.

My Commitment to Reflexivity

Before discussing the specific methods of this project, I want to position the approach I plan to take throughout the entire process of data collection. No matter the method selected, issues of sexuality can be uncomfortable for people to discuss, particularly when there are differences in power between researcher and participant (Kvale, 2008). In the United States, sexuality is not a topic that is considered socially appropriate to discuss in all forums and with all audiences (Sullivan, 2003). Because any discomfort in discussing sexuality could affect how, why, what, and how much participants choose to share their experiences with me, I consciously tried to develop a rapport with participants (Tracy, 2013) and lessen discomfort between the participant and myself. To do this, I was cognizant of how my own educational, racial, classed, sexualized, and gendered position influenced my interaction with participants.

When considering my own self-reflexivity and social positioning in this dissertation project, I found McDonald (2013)'s concept of queer reflexivity particularly salient. Queer reflexivity broadly encourages scholars to not make assumptions about their participants' identities and to be consistently reflexive of their own social positions during the research process. There are four components to queer reflexivity: acknowledging that matching social categories between researcher and participant does not reflect inherently superior data; awareness that power dynamics between researcher and participant is not always clear, as some social identities may remain undisclosed; reflexivity about the development of the researcher's own evolving social identities; and avoiding making assumptions about self and participants based on social identities

(McDonald, 2013). I therefore attended to each component of queer reflexivity during the process of data collection.

Queer reflexivity is particularly relevant when I decided whether or not to disclose my own social location as (in no particular order) a gay and cisgendered woman scholar studying issues of sexuality and organizing. In terms of data collection for this project, I did disclose my sexual identity with participants when I felt that it was beneficial to the data collection process. In my past experience interviewing participants who identified as gay and lesbian, I found that openly disclosing that I identify as gay broke down a metaphorical wall between us. For these participants, my scholarly interest in sexuality and organizing seemed to make more sense and ultimately created a shared bond between us as people identifying with a socially marginalized sexuality. McDonald (2013) argues that disclosing sexual or gender identities is not problematic to reflexivity in data collection so long as there is no privileging of accounts. Specifically, I worked to avoid seeking out and privileging accounts that match my own social location as superior data; participants were composed of people identifying as a variety of genders and sexualities.

I also took into consideration that disclosing my sexual identity was not necessarily beneficial for all participants. Following queer reflexivity (McDonald, 2013), I made no broad suppositions about my research participants based on the categories with which they identify. For example, an individual identifying as gay may have found the disclosure of my sexual identity more silencing than a heterosexual-identified individual. However, I was also aware that choosing not to disclose this identity with participants could have influenced the invisible power dynamic between us

(McDonald, 2013). Therefore, I only revealed my sexual identity if it was salient to data collection and considered the choice to disclose my own identity categories as I analyzed the data. As I conducted interviews, I found that participants identifying as sexual minorities were far more interested in my sexual identity than those who identified as heterosexual or straight, though this was only directly asked or presumed (e.g., “you’re gay/not straight, right?”) and volunteered by me in five interviews, all with self-identified sexual minorities. As soon as this topic was breached, participants relied on my identity to find common ground with me and shared thoughts with me that perhaps would have otherwise remained unspoken. Although I cannot attribute participants’ willingness to share their lived experiences with me directly to the disclosure of sexual identity, I firmly believe that the richness and breadth of experiences shared with me were influenced by this act. No participant asked about my gender identity, though I believe this is because I present and comport myself as a cisgendered woman.

It should also be noted that my sexual identity is something that I am typically private about my sexual identity with strangers or acquaintances. My more private nature influences how I perceive others’ performance of sexuality as well as how they perceive mine. My lived experience as a “sexual minority” as well as my academic interest in sexuality has made me hyper-aware of performances of sexuality in myself and subsequently in others that lead me to conclusions about someone’s sexuality that may be different than their intent or another’s perception. Because I am the instrument of data collection and analysis for this dissertation, it is necessary to position myself in an effort to remain reflexive as well as be accountable to my highly contextualized analysis.

First, I generally choose not to be particularly flamboyant or comport myself in such a way that my sexual identity would be readily obvious. Many people have told me, after I share my sexual identity with them, “Oh, okay; I mean, I could see you identifying as just about anything.” In terms of my appearance, I do not typically adhere many if any of the (problematic) socially defined physical stereotypes associated with lesbianism or female homosexuality, such as short hair, a deep voice, or wearing particularly masculine clothing. I consciously chose to wear gender-neutral or feminine-styled business casual clothing with all participants I interviewed face-to-face or by Skype. I did this to create a space for participants avoid appearing that I had an agenda or a preconceived notion about what this interview should be about, but to allow them to make their own presumptions about me, as well as to co-construct the boundaries of the conversation.

Second, in terms of my communication, my passion for studying sexuality affects how I talk about it. However, I tend to talk about sexuality in impersonal or abstract terms with strangers or acquaintances at the outset of a conversation. I do this less out of fear of being harassed or physically harmed, but rather because I enjoy navigating the undefined spaces that exist when talking about sexuality. Because the topic can be socially taboo, I enjoy giving other people space to talk about their thoughts about sexuality without bringing my own into the mix immediately. I am aware that my own perceptions and strong opinions about sex and sexuality can be a powerful influence on these conversations. Additionally, it is undeniable that the political and social weight of a queer identity completely changes the terrain of the conversation in any context, inevitably enabling and constraining conversations. Though I can choose to reveal my sexual identity later in the conversation, I cannot take it back once I have discussed it. \

Finally, and importantly I am more than my sexual identity. There are other aspects of my identity that are just as salient as my sexual identity. In addition, several of these identities intersect with my sexual identity (scholar exploring issues of sexuality; employee advocating for sexual equality; musician seeking queer-influenced groups). Privileging *only* my sexual identity, especially when exploring co-sexuality, seems counterintuitive when the process of organizing around sexuality involves so much more than someone's sexual identity category.

Ultimately, though all participants self-identified their sexual identities to me in interviews, how I thought about them as sexual beings, analyzed their narratives, and thought about our conversations was deeply influenced by how I position and perform my own sexuality. In other words, I understood their narratives and experiences through my choices and position. Though I am committed to queer reflexology (McDonald, 2013), *who I am* affects every aspect of co-sexuality.

Initial Sampling and Participants

Initial sampling in grounded theory is a means for researchers to set sampling criteria for potential participants (Charmaz, 2006). Because I am interested in push-and-pull processes around “normal” sexuality for people of all human sexualities, not just sexual minorities, there were initially few restrictions on who could participate in this study. The first qualification for participants was that they must have at some point been a paid employee at any level of an organization. “Organization” has proven to be a contested term in organizational communication scholarship, with definitions ranging from use as a noun (an entity) to a verb (a process) to a form (structure) (e.g., Putnam & Nicotera, 2010). Although I have used this word in each of these ways throughout this

dissertation, for the purposes of recruiting participants, I position organizations as entities, specifically workplaces or sites of work where participants earn pay. Any individual who has been involved within an organization had the potential to contribute to this study, though every participant worked for a for-profit organization and earned a wage.

The remaining restrictions on participant recruitment were based on demographics. First, I restricted who could participate based on their age. To ensure that this project met the institutional review board's (IRB) regulations regarding protected classes, I only recruited consenting individuals over the age of 18. Additionally, I restricted recruitment based on geographical location of the participant's job; participants must have worked in the Midwest. Though I believe co-sexuality functions as a larger organizing process, I chose to focus on participants whose work experiences were in the Midwest region for two reasons: first, to improve participant recruitment. My own geographical location is in the Midwest, which makes individuals in this region more accessible to me. Second, for practical reasons; starting in the Midwest allows me to complete this project in a reasonable amount of time and to continue this line of scholarship in other geographic regions beyond this dissertation.

Organizational experience, age, and geographic location were the only restrictions on participants. As a result, I recruited participants from humans of any race, gender identity, class, and most relevant, sexuality. By reducing the limitations on potential participants, I had access to a wider range of participants and their lived experiences. Further, seeking individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds allowed me to avoid privileging individuals whose social identity matches mine (e.g., McDonald, 2013).

To recruit an initial group of participants, I used snowball sampling techniques (Tracy, 2013). Snowball sampling involves identifying individuals who meet the criteria for participation (i.e., over age 18 with experience in an organization in the Midwest) and then asking these individuals to suggest someone who also meets those criteria to participate in the study (Tracy, 2013). I had 12 initial participants either suggested by colleagues or who had expressed interest in participating in my dissertation project. Ten of the 12 initial participants gave me contact information for other potential participants. Of note, I transcribed and wrote memos for completed interviews while simultaneously recruiting and interviewing new participants.

Because sexual identities are not immediately visible, it was challenging to recruit based on sexual identities. To gain a diverse sample as well as to set parameters for initial sampling, I first contacted individuals who did blue collar or white collar. While the nature of my work at the university gave me more access to white collar workers, I also had a smaller number of people employed in blue collar professions who I contacted and subsequently helped me recruit other blue collar employees. Here, I was specific about recruiting an even number of perspectives: six of my initial participants worked in blue collar jobs, and six worked in white collar jobs. Additionally, six identified as heterosexual or straight, and six identified otherwise.

Theoretical Sampling and Saturation. Theoretical sampling follows initial sampling in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). As theoretical categories emerge in initial data collection and analysis, which occur concurrently (Charmaz, 2006), sampling criteria narrows and the research seeks out participants who would most likely contribute to the explication of these emerging categories. There is no procedure that explicates a

specific moment in the data collection process where initial sampling “switches” to theoretical sampling; rather, theoretical sampling is a strategy for defining and refining categories (Charmaz, 2014). Sampling and data collection is complete when emerging theoretical categories become saturated; that is, new data no longer provides fresh insight to theoretical data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

As I was simultaneously speaking to my 12 initial participants, transcribing data, and writing memos, themes began to emerge. It became clear that I needed to speak with more individuals who identified as sexual minorities, particularly those doing body work in service work jobs, to saturate emerging themes. To continue recruiting participants, I contacted my colleagues at the university’s LGBTQ Resource Center. This group is made up of diverse individuals, is very active on campus, and has ties to the local community as well as across the Midwest. They were able to assist me throughout all stages of the recruiting process. I also recruited using social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter. Using social media to identify participants allowed me to contact individuals of all sexualities doing all types of work from across the Midwest.

I concluded recruiting participants when I felt I had reached saturation. I had a total of 30 participants. Though not by design, 15 participants self-identified as heterosexual or straight, and 15 self-identified otherwise. Specifically, seven identified as bisexual, four identified as pansexual, one identified as gay, one identified as homosexual, and one identified as heteroflexible (attracted primarily to opposite-sex others, but open to relationships with same-sex others). Eighteen were white collar workers, and 12 were blue collar workers. Because I did not collect this information on the demographic questionnaire, I deferred to the participant’s description and

prioritization of their job duties to classify their experiences. For full demographic information complete with participants' own self-descriptions, have provided a complete list of participants' demographic information in appendix 3.

It should also be noted that participants who volunteered for this study were often quite well versed in sexual terminology and specifics of political movements (particularly the legalization of same-sex marriage). Some, but fewer, were well-informed about their workplace policies regarding sex and sexuality, and came to the interview ready to discuss these in nuanced ways.

Interviews. The most common method of data collection in grounded theory is what Charmaz (2014) calls intensive interviews. Intensive interviews use open-ended questions with the objective of understanding the participants' interpretation of their experience. This form of interviewing is semi-structured; that is, there is a pre-determined list of interview questions that have been carefully developed and are designed to elicit meaningful, focused responses (Charmaz, 2014). However, intensive interviewing allows for the researcher to explore or probe (Kvale, 2008) certain statements or topics as they arise during the interview to go beyond the initial or surface-level responses. Further, intensive interviewing allows the interviewer to show respect to and validate the participant by giving them agency by inviting them to co-construct the interview (Charmaz, 2014).

Individual interviews were all digitally recorded and lasted an average of one hour and 26 minutes. The shortest interview with a participant lasted 27 minutes, and the longest lasted two hours and 47 minutes. Multiple rounds of data were necessary to fully explicate themes and categories that emerged as interviews progressed. Five participants

contacted me independently after our initial interview to share an experience that had happened immediately after talking with me or to share something they had forgotten as we talked.

Interview Procedure. After providing all information required by the IRB, but before beginning the interview, I asked participants to fill out a brief open-ended questionnaire that asks their age, gender identity, sexuality, race, geographical location, class, occupation, and job title. In every instance but one, questionnaires were emailed or given to participants prior to our scheduled interview to allow plenty of time for participants to consider and respond to the questions as well as respect participant's time. Having this information for each participant allowed me to compare the experiences of participants in a more informed manner both during the interview as well as during subsequent data analysis. For each exemplar in chapter 4 of this dissertation, I have included participants' own self-descriptions of their identities obtained from demographic questionnaires.

Immediately before the interview, I encouraged participants to discuss their experiences and perceptions with me, but not beyond their level of comfort. I also discussed the project with them briefly; I shared that I am interested in how sexuality is talked about or avoided in their workplace and to begin thinking of ways that they perceive their co-workers' sexuality as well as communicate their own. After receiving their consent to proceed and answering any questions, I audio recorded each interview. At the conclusion of interviews, I debriefed participants and answer any remaining questions they have about the project. I also allowed them to share any information with me that they did not want to be recorded.

Analysis

Grounded theory analysis requires the researcher to analyze data as data collection is occurring. The analysis process requires the researcher to be close to the data at all times, flexible when attributing meaning to participants' experiences, with a consistent focus on finding codes and eventually categories that represent the best fit for the data (Charmaz, 2014). My data analysis procedure was a continuous process: I simultaneously transcribed audio and wrote memos about interviews while recruiting and interviewing new participants. I transcribed the first 4 interviews myself and sent the remaining files to Rev.com for professional transcription. Once returned, I listened to interview audio while following along with the interview transcripts. I listened and made corrections twice, then added to the initial memos I had jotted down after the immediate conclusion of an interview. Often I would have a new interview scheduled within a day or two of receiving a transcript, which allowed me to repeat this process. In total, I had 934 pages of interview transcriptions. I wrote an additional 354 pages of memos that I incorporated into the overall analysis. In sum, I had a total of 1,288 pages of data. Below, I discuss the specific aspects of my data analysis process.

Memoing. Memo-writing during the analysis process is a way for researchers to converse with themselves; to develop ideas or ask questions of the data as they try to make sense of it (Charmaz, 2014). I used memoing in previous research and have found it to be invaluable in organizing my thoughts, setting parameters for categories or themes, and finding negative cases (or instances where participants' experiences do not match the experiences of others; Creswell, 2013).

I used memoing extensively in this dissertation as a way of identifying and eventually defining the parameters for codes and categories (discussed below) and included these memos as part of the data analysis. I wrote memos in two stages. First, immediately after each interview, I wrote a memo of my reactions and questions about participant comments. Second, I added to initial memos after listening to and verifying transcripts. Often these memos included quotes that I found meaningful and that supported initial and emerging themes. It was through analyzing these memos that the push-pull structure of co-sexuality began to emerge. Ultimately, I used memos to work through and organize my ideas, reactions, and questions about participant responses during the data collection process, to find conceptual connections between participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2006), as well a way of organizing a draft of the analysis.

Coding. Coding, as defined by Charmaz (2006), is “a way of naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data.” (p. 43). Codes provide the “analytic frame” or a skeleton of a grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2014). It is through the process of coding that the researcher defines and ultimately makes sense of what is happening in the data. There are several ways to code data in grounded theory analysis. For this analysis, I followed Charmaz's (2006) two-stage method of initial coding and focused coding.

Initial Coding. Initial codes should be simple and precise, focusing on what is happening in the data (Charmaz, 2006). The process of initial coding requires the researcher to compare data with data in order to find a code that best “fits” what is happening, which is known as the constant comparative method. I used Charmaz's (2006) approach to the constant comparative method rather than the complex approach described

by Glaser & Strauss' (1967). Charmaz's (2014) approach allows for data to be compared word-by-word, line-by-line, or incident-to-incident (Charmaz, 2014).

For this dissertation, I used incident-to-incident comparisons to analyze the data. I began initial coding after I had completed the first 4 interviews. I first compared incidents based on job type, and then incidents based on participants' described sexual identities. As interviews were transcribed, I reread each transcript and its related memos to elucidate the process of co-sexuality. As expected, codes at this point were messy and broad, and changed as more interviews were transcribed and memos were composed. Though there were interesting themes that emerged from these initial sets of codes, ultimately I found that there were much richer themes and clearer views of complex processes when I stepped back even further from the data and allowed coded incidents such as "sexual harassment" or "self-silencing" to guide the analysis rather than pre-determined identity categories.

Initial codes were mostly based on specific behaviors, such as "dress" or "avoiding conversation" or on specific workplace descriptions, such as "non-discrimination policy" or "religious co-workers." Other initial codes included "heteronormativity," indicating when a participant specifically mentioned the word or implicitly referenced the sense of "rightness" associated with heterosexuality (Warner, 2002); "policy," which indicated when an organizational policy was referenced by a participant as meaningful to how they understood or organized around "normal" sexuality; "going along to get along," indicating when participants seemed to be refusing to upset workplace norms, and "Midwest," when participants specifically mentioned the culture of the Midwest as part of their narrative about "normal" sex or sexuality.

Focused Coding. Focused codes are more “directed, selective, and conceptual than word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident cod[es]” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). Once initial coding is complete, focused coding uses the most frequently used or most significant initial codes as a lens through which to analyze the data. Thus, after initial coding was complete I drafted a list of initial codes to begin focused coding, which guided the second, third, and fourth round of analysis. It was ultimately the goal of the coding process to raise focused codes to conceptual categories. Though the experiences described by participants were different, the structure of initial codes revealed a process or a “theoretical story” (Charmaz, 2006) that allowed me to expand my focused codes into a larger analysis.

As described by Charmaz (2006), memo-writing, described above, is one of the best ways for researchers to work through this process. Through the process of memo writing, as well as a number of conversations about the data and collegial input (Creswell, 2012), I ultimately recognized that the process of co-sexuality is a simultaneous push-and-pull around an unfixed center composed of sexual “norms” that are both contested and contextual. Participants used multiple explanatory devices and discursive techniques to bound, justify, and explain “normal” sexuality, as well as to position themselves and others around that norm. Thus, focused codes reflected “push,” when participants were pushing or pushed away from “norms;” “pull,” when participants pulled or were pulled toward “norms.” These emerged in the themes of “master narrative,” “masculine aggression,” and “silence,” all of which appear in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

Concluding Thoughts

I want to note that because I chose to follow the constructivist approach to grounded theory, I am cognizant that every method of data collection and analysis was ultimately influenced and co-constructed by me as the researcher (Charmaz, 2014). For example, an interview is not simply a monologue by a participant, but rather a discussion between people based on a pre-determined list of questions in an interview protocol. The resulting conversation is ultimately transformed when it is transcribed into a textual format for analysis (Creswell, 2013). I recognize that what participants chose to discuss with me as well as how they chose to talk about those topics does not represent an objective truth; rather, it reflects their own personal perceptions and unique social position and was affected by my presence and their perceptions of me. Together, we co-created the data that shapes the analysis in this dissertation. Though I am committed to minimizing bias and committed to being reflexive, my voice is a part of participant narratives as well.

Chapter 4: Analysis

Co-sexuality, the process of organizing around “normal” sexuality, is a complex communicative and embodied process with social, material, and political repercussions for people of all identities. Sexual “norms” are treated as a relatively fixed “thing;” a set of idealized and taken-for-granted expectations about people’s sexual identities, beliefs, and behaviors. However, as this dissertation explicates, the construction of “normal” sexuality is a process that is both contextual and constantly in flux. Co-sexuality represents the process of human organizing around a fluctuating sexual “norm,” ultimately navigating a simultaneous push away from and pull toward an unfixed center.

I chose to explore this process in the workplace because sex and sexuality are highly regulated in these contexts. Through both cultural and policy regulations, certain identities, conversations, and sexual acts are constructed on a continuum ranging from normalized to transgressive. Normalized and subsequently regulated conceptions of sex and sexuality work in complex ways to regulate people’s thoughts, actions, and behaviors ultimately benefitting the organization. To be clear: sex and sexuality are broad topics that can be discussed in various ways in workplace contexts. Participants used these words in a number of ways ranging from the cognitive (identities or orientations; opinions on political shifts such as the legalization of same-sex marriage), to the behavioral (physical acts of sex; verbal and physical sexual harassment). Though each participant’s workplace was unique, I explain the process of how employees organize and are organized around contextual sexual norms in the workplace using participants’ own words and definitions of sex and sexuality as grounded theory dictates (Charmaz, 2006).

I explicate the push-and-pull process of co-sexuality in three primary themes. First, participants constructed and organized around “normal” sexuality through the master narratives of the Midwest, which included Judeo-Christian norms and a cultural discomfort with difference. Second, participants described the normalization of gendered and aggressive (hetero)sexuality through talk, behavior, and body regulation. Finally, the push-and-pull process of co-sexuality is described in terms of silence: organizational silencing, self-silencing, and ultimately through reinforcing silenced sexual norms.

Before I can describe the process of organizing around “normal” sexuality at work, the sexual “norm” must be defined. I first discuss how participants described “normal” sexuality as “fixed” in their workplace through the lens of heteronormativity. Then, I discuss how participants most immediately described being unable to live up to this sexual norm, regardless of their sexual identity category, revealing the unfixed and fluid nature of sexual “norms.” I discuss this below.

“Normal” Sexuality At Work

Participants had to have an understanding of what expected sexual norms were in their workplaces in order to perform or communicate about sex or sexuality. Participants described sexual norms in their workplaces in two primary ways: by sexual identity category and as acceptable or unacceptable performances or talk about romantic relationships. Though participants’ jobs, work cultures, sexual identities, and gender identities varied greatly, how participants described “normal” sexuality was similar. Primarily, “normal” sexuality was described as heteronormative (Warner, 1999) or the

“rightness” (Warner, 2002) and normalization associated with the identity category of heterosexuality.

However, and central to the process of co-sexuality, participants described being surprised by the multitude of ways in which their “fixed” notion of “normal” sexuality was insufficient and called into question. This generally occurred when participants violated heteronormative expectations in their workplaces. Primary violations of “normal” sexuality included violating heteronormative expectations of cohabitation, reproduction, and marriage. Below, I discuss participants’ perception of “normal” sexuality in their workplaces, the process by which they communicatively define and bound those norms, and how violations of sexual “norms” imply the larger process of co-sexuality.

The “Normal” Sexual Identity Category: Heteronormative Heterosexuality

Given that the primary way in which participants described their own sexuality was by sexual identity category, it is not surprising that participants described the dominant sexuality in their workplaces by sexual identity category. Heterosexuality was named as the dominant identity category. However, heterosexuality meant more than physical attraction between opposite-sex others; rather, echoing previous scholarship exploring the regulation of sexual identities at work (e.g., Compton, 2016; Dixon & Dougherty, 2014), participants described heterosexuality in their workplaces as heteronormative (Warner, 1991), and in many cases, heterosexist.

Pete, a 27-year-old straight white male employed as a miner in Missouri, gave me an example of both heteronormativity and heterosexism in his workplace. Pete told me “Oh yeah. Being straight is definitely the expected norm.” Pete told his coworkers he was

straight and often talked about his opposite-sex partner because he did not want to “seem gay.” When I asked him why “seeming straight” was important, he told me he heard his coworkers use derogatory heterosexist language to disparage others frequently, both in and outside of the workplace. According to Pete:

We do an annual Christmas party. And one of the hourly guys had recently gotten divorced or broken up with his girlfriend or something. And typically people bring a date or whatever to this party. And instead of a girl, he brought a male friend of his. And there was some comments in the break room the next day about him possibly being a fag. ... I, I don't think anything happened with that. It was behind his back for sure. And I think it was half joking. But in the context, it was made to sound like something that wasn't okay if he was, in fact, gay.

Pete described himself as supportive of sexual diversity. He shared with me that he “feels some degree of discomfort when somebody's making a disparaging comment about somebody's sexuality,” but chooses not to speak out when he sees this happening, reinforcing the idea that heterosexuality is both an identity category but also a function of the powerful regulatory process of heteronormativity. To ensure that he did not appear to violate the identity category of heterosexuality and “seem gay,” Pete also made sure to introduce his girlfriend to his colleagues at the annual Christmas party so his colleagues “don't think I made her up or something.” In this way, Pete is not only internalizing the heteronormative expectation of heterosexuality as an identity category, but he is explicitly performing toward this norm, despite feeling supportive of sexual diversity. Indeed, no participant described explicitly telling their coworkers that they identified as straight or heterosexual and this action being sufficient to adhere to the heteronormative

sexual norm in their organization; heteronormativity included both explicit behavioral and communicative requirements. I describe these expectations below.

“Normal” (Hetero)sexual Behaviors: Cohabitation, Marriage, and Reproduction. Although participants overwhelmingly described the expected sexual identity category for coworkers as “heterosexual,” what this expectation meant to identity work and performances of sexual identities is most important to co-sexuality. For participants, being labeled or claiming the identity category “heterosexual” was not an adequate performance of their sexuality. Instead, participants described how their behaviors and performances of sexuality were enabled and constrained through romantic relationship status. The implication is that heteronormative heterosexuality is not only perceived as a relatively fixed set of sexual norms (e.g., identities and behaviors), but actually functions as a communicative process that is fluid and shifts based upon the communicative context. The fluid nature of heteronormativity often surprised heterosexual-identified participants who had not previously considered their sexuality as being in any way transgressive until certain events made aspects of their sexual identities salient in their heavily regulated workplaces.

The fluidity of heteronormativity became more obvious as I conducted interviews; several heterosexual-identified participants were quick to share that their coworkers commonly asked questions or expressed expectations about their personal heterosexual romantic relationships, which indicated their expected relational behaviors. Woman-and-female identified participants were more likely to experience behavioral regulation from their coworkers than male-identified participants, though men described moments when their behavior was also regulated. For example, women frequently described being asked

when they were going to have children or get married by their primarily female-presenting co-workers. Men, on the other hand, were often asked when they were going to “settle down” (a phrase I heard repeatedly) or find a girlfriend to have intercourse with by their male-presenting coworkers. Several male-identified participants told me that their coworkers suggested women for them to date and then talked about how uncomfortable these suggestions made them feel. Ultimately, for woman-and-female identified participants, regulation came in the form of disciplining the expectation of cohabitation and reproduction; for men, marriage, monogamy, and sexual conquests were the most salient issues to performances of heterosexuality.

Violating Heteronormativity: Cohabitation and Reproduction. In terms of the process of co-sexuality, the moments when sexual “norms” became the clearest for participants was when they behaviorally or communicatively violated heteronormative expectations, regardless of their sexual identity. For example, Amy, a 35-year-old African-American heterosexual woman employed as a professor in Kansas described her experience discussing her romantic relationship after starting a new job:

So when [my significant other] and I moved....I, we made a conscious decision not to move in together... I thought that moving to a new city, starting a new job and having a new roommate (laughs) would be too much change all at once. When, so and I refer to [my significant other] many times as my partner. But when people find out that we don't live together, I've been questioned about that, by graduate students, by faculty, like they're very confused. (laughs) Very confused... They just assume ... that was one thing I realized is that people assumed that we did move in together since we both

relocated. And then when they find out not, they're just like, "What?" [They asked], why not? They want to know why not, why haven't, why didn't he, why won't he do that? And then they're like, well, your lease will be up... so will you move in then? (laughing)

Amy's description of her violation of heteronormative norms in her workplace begins to elucidate the process of co-sexuality. First, Amy recognizes that her organization is heteronormative; there is an expectation of heterosexuality as an identity category in her workplace. By repeating the phrase "they just assume," Amy reveals that she recognizes that heterosexuality means more than just "attraction to opposite sex others." The assumption of cohabitation by her coworkers and the surprised reaction given when they realize she is not adhering to this norm revealed that she was violating this heteronormative expectation. Instead of being fixed, "normal" (hetero)sexuality is contextual and thus unfixed. Second, once Amy recognized that her conception of "normal" sexuality was not in line with that of her organization, she began regulating her behavior at work: though Amy talks about her male romantic partner at work frequently (reinforcing her heterosexual identity), she is reticent to introduce him to coworkers for several reasons, including the worry that they might say something to him that would indicate that their living arrangement was somehow not normative. Through Amy's avoidance of bringing her partner into spaces where her coworkers are present, Amy acknowledges and does not challenge the heterosexual norm in her workplace, ultimately co-constructing and maintaining that norm alongside her coworkers.

Female-and-women identified participants told me that having kids was talked about as an expectation in their workplaces, particularly by female or women coworkers.

Male participants did not mention this particular component of heteronormativity, simultaneously gendering and unfixing the construct of “normal” sexuality. For example, Jane, a 32-year-old straight white female employed at a radio station in Missouri told me that she has had to repeatedly tell her coworkers that she and her partner do not want children, which she described as “frustrating and annoying.” While Jane has worked at her current job, she has gotten engaged, married, and moved in with her now-husband. At every stage, coworkers have asked her about when she is going to have children, and at every stage, Jane has expressed that she and her partner do not want to be parents.

I've been there long enough and they know me and they know that [kids are not] what I want. But if I meet somebody who is in more of that whole like traditional family norm you know, that... they'll be like, "Oh well you're married. When are you having kids? Do you have kids? Don't you want kids? Why don't you want kids?" And I get a lot of that from more... more strangers and new people than anything else. Definitely not my friends but uh, you know I'll have the most random people ask me about that. Like even people in my office that I don't work with who, they'll just be a visitor and they'll start asking about it. And that's just like, "Wow. That's a really personal question to ask and you don't even know me."

Jane's experience begins to describe the process of co-sexuality. In Jane's workplace, heteronormativity, for women and females, meant being married and having children, and Jane's partial violation of this norm caused confusion and pushback from her coworkers. Again, Jane's idea of what defined “normal” sexuality was not in line with her coworkers' definition, creating tension as well as revealing that heteronormative

expectations are contextual and unfixed. Though her coworkers' comments were designed to pull Jane toward her organization's heteronormative center, Jane pushed back and had to do so repeatedly to separate herself from this consistent pull from her coworkers.

It is also noteworthy that Jane felt that questions about having children were "really personal," indicating that she believed her sexual behavior should not be a part of the conversation for her coworkers or in her organizational culture. Heteronormativity, in Jane's workplace, meant talking about having and raising children. The organizational regulation of her sexuality that required her to have these conversations was uncomfortable for Jane. Though Jane told me not every coworker questioned the decision she and her husband had made, it took several years for her immediate work group to stop questioning her. Though Jane does not plan to have children simply because her coworkers expect her to, she actively avoids discussions of children with coworkers, going so far as to leave the room if the topic comes up. Violating heteronormative workplace expectations allowed both Amy and Jane a clearer picture of the sexual "norm" at work that they both worked to position themselves around.

Violating Heteronormativity: Marriage. Many male-identified participants, and some female-identified participants, described perceiving marriage as both an expected norm but also as idealized in their workplaces. These participants talked about marriage as though it was so normalized that it was inevitable, even for those who identified as sexual minorities. For example, Jim, a 26-year-old straight white male employed at a coal plant in Missouri, described the expectation of marriage in his workplace in terms of age:

You know marriage, that's the norm at the power plant. You know rural Missouri, um, you know maybe at headquarters. Um, headquarters could be considered a little bit more accepting of a ... I don't know a better way to put it, abnormal...um, more accepting of individuals that aren't heterosexual, with kids and families, and a lot of people at headquarters are younger as well. Not younger meaning younger than me but you know, my age almost, um, that might not have a committed relationship you know, be married, have kids. Um, but you know, it's, it's just the age bracket is, there's such a difference in, you know, normal for the 20 to 38 group than a lot of people have. Some people are married in that age group, some people don't get married until 30.

Jim's explicit description of marriage being "the norm" in his place of employment positions anyone not married as "abnormal," including employees who identify as heterosexual but are unmarried. Of note, Jim separates the level of acceptance for "abnormal" relationships between his company's headquarters, which he describes as more accepting, and the rural power plant in which he works on a daily basis, indicating that the expectation of marriage is more clearly communicated in different geographic locations. Additionally, Jim's qualifying that some younger employees simply do not get married until reaching a certain age only reifies the normalized status of marriage in his workplace.

Similarly, Nate, a 30-year-old straight white male employed in an advertising firm in Illinois, demonstrated the legitimization of certain relationship types by describing the relationship status of his coworkers rather than their sexual identity:

So it's owned by two guys and they're both, uh, they're both straight and married, and then there's another dude who's straight and married, a girl with a boyfriend, a single guy, a single guy, a guy with a girlfriend, myself, a guy who's engaged to a woman, and then a woman who is married to a man. So, um, basically that leaves it to I guess two people who, uh, you know, and once again, it's not like I like sit back in my chair and like, "Who could be gay at this organization?" Right? Like ... (laughing) um, but yeah, so maybe, maybe two people could be based on my (laughs) assessment.

Nate's positioning of his coworkers in terms of their relationship status reveals not only that heterosexual and monogamous relationships are the sexual norm discussed in his workplace, but also that being single could potentially equate to identifying with a non-normative sexual identity. Notably, Nate's only "proof" of his coworkers' sexuality was the sex of their partner. Though Nate says he does not actively think about others' sexual identities, the "single" status of his two listed male coworkers is abnormal enough for him to take note that they could be different and thus pushed away from the "norm." Of note, both Jim's and Nate's narrative indicate that "normal" sexuality is not simply one's sexual identity category; relationship status and behavior are a key component of heteronormativity.

Sexual minority employees also perceived that marriage is an expectation in their workplaces. After the legalization of same-sex marriage by the Supreme Court in 2015, sexual minorities in monogamous relationships now have access to this form of socially legitimized union. As such, the expectation of marriage works to regulate sexual minority employees in a new way. For example, Keri, a 28-year-old white bisexual woman who

works as an instructor in Illinois described the evolution of heteronormativity in her workplace:

I would say that being homosexual now is even, like, you know, people are, like, more okay with it more, and that there's more of a blow-back against many polyamorous people. So I think there's a real emphasis right now on, like, monogamy, and having a partner, and, like, all this emphasis on, like, finding your one true love, and it needs to be, like, authentic and all of this stuff. So I think, like, the fairy tale story is very much what is normal and any deviation from the fairy tale story is what's going to be taboo, or you're going to be seen as, like, a deviant in some way. So I think that if you're not looking for your soulmate life partner to complete you to have a monogamous relationship with, then that's the new other. Because I think that, especially with gay marriage being legal now, there's this whole new impetus for people to do the normal thing and to rank certain families as real families and other families as not real families. I almost kinda feel like I lost my queers a little bit, like ... I mean I'm happy for people cuz I think that rights are important, but at the same time I just feel like ... I don't know ... Should we be working for more normalling? I don't know.

Keri articulated what many non-heterosexual participants described feeling both inside and outside of their workplaces: the social pressure to perform the “marriage” component of heteronormativity – the expectation that people, regardless of sexual identity category, want to be in committed, monogamous relationships and eventually have children. Keri’s description of this expectation as a “fairy tale story” that makes her feel like she has “lost

her queers a little bit” reveals how powerful this normalizing ideal can be, and hints at how “othering” not conforming to these expectations can be.

Heterosexuality, as a sexual identity category, was described as dominant and normalized in participants’ workplaces, which participants said resulted in heteronormative workplace environments that affected participants of all sexual identities. Heteronormative heterosexuality was described as a relatively fixed set of ideas about expected behaviors and norms, but functioned as an unfixed communicative process that was contextual to individual work cultures. The unfixed nature of sexual “norms” is central to co-sexuality; participants described “normal” sexuality as a relatively fixed “thing” but organized around it in contextual ways. For example, “normal” sexuality functioned differently for participants with different gender identities (e.g., reproduction) and sexual identities (e.g., marriage), affecting how “normal” sexuality was constructed, enacted, and regulated in organizations. Often, participants’ conception of “normal” sexuality was in contrast to the organization’s conception, which became clear in moments when they violated sexual norms. The fact that all participants described sexual norms so consistently but had narratives describing instances in which they simultaneously adhered to or diverged from sexual norms in their workplaces indicates that the process of co-sexuality is an important, complex, and ongoing process that participants work to navigate.

Ultimately, heteronormative heterosexuality, as described by participants, was an unreachable sexual “norm” in all workplaces, even for heterosexual participants’ whose sexual identities were aligned with the described dominant sexual identity category. It was primarily through communicative and behavioral violations (e.g., performances and

discussions of cohabitation, reproduction, and marriage) that participants came to realize how heteronormative heterosexuality functioned in their specific workplaces, and the contextual and fluid nature of “normal” sexuality became evident. Below, I discuss the complex process of co-sexuality for participants who worked to position themselves around complicated, often contradictory sexual norms in their workplaces.

Co-Sexuality: A Push-Pull Organizational Process

Co-sexuality is ultimately a complex process of pulling or being pulled toward sexual “norms” and simultaneously pushing away or being pushed away from them. Generally, how participants thought about and described the process of positioning themselves or being positioned around “normal” sexuality was different based upon sexual and gender identities, but also on job type. Participants recognized that talking about or enacting sex or sexuality in organizationally “appropriate” ways in their workplaces was important to their identity work as well as to their material income. Because participants perceived diverging from sexual “norms” in their workplaces as upsetting to workplace harmony, participants often pulled toward or pulled others toward whatever the sexual norm was in their workplace. However, because “normal” sexuality was ultimately an unfixed sexual ideal for participants, this process was often full of tension, inequity, and contradictory expectations. Specifically, participants discussed their frustrations with how to talk about and embody sex and sexuality in ways that allowed them to both uphold their own beliefs and understanding of sex and sexuality, but also to adhere to often oppressive and highly regulated organizational norms.

The simultaneous push and pull process of co-sexuality was evident in three ways: first, through use of the master narrative of the Midwest, which was composed of

narratives about Judeo-Christian religious norms and a cultural discomfort with difference. Participants explained “normal” workplace sexuality in terms of this master narrative, attributing the construction of oppressive workplace sexual “norms” to larger oppressive cultural norms. Participants then described how they worked to position themselves in proximity to this oppressive “norm.” Second, participants described sexual “norms” in terms of gendered and aggressive (hetero)sexuality. Specifically, masculinized (hetero)sexual aggression was normalized in both workplace conversations and behaviors. Participants of all sexual and gender identities worked to position themselves around these norms that were toxic for many and could never be reached by any. Finally, participants described the push and pull of the process of co-sexuality in terms of silence. Silence functioned as a three-part process. First, participants of all sexual identities described ways in which organizations silenced conversations and acts of sex and sexuality through policies and practices. Second, participants also described acts of self-silencing, though heterosexual participants tended to describe self-silencing as a choice whereas sexual minority participants described this as a necessity. Finally, participants described ways in which they internalized the sexual “norm” of silence and consciously and unconsciously worked to maintain those boundaries. Ultimately, the process of co-sexuality benefits the organization. I describe how within each of the subsections and also within the discussion section of this dissertation. I discuss this below.

Constructing, Pulling Toward, and Pushing Away from Sexual Norms through the Master Narrative of the Midwest: Religion and Discomfort with Difference

The first way participants described the push-and-pull process of co-sexuality was through discursively positioning themselves around what I am calling the master narrative of the Midwest, which is composed of Judeo-Christian norms and a cultural discomfort with difference. Participants identified and bounded sexual norms in terms of this master narrative and subsequently pushed away or pulled toward those norms. Master narratives are shared cultural stories that become taken-for-granted explanatory tools, both maintaining and changing shared social understandings (Nelson, 2001) of various groups or identities. Indeed, master narratives often become internalized based upon identity category (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, social class, group affiliation, relationship status, religion) and “command identification and integration into the personal narrative” of these group members (Hammack, 2011, p. 313). Tannen (2008) articulates how master narratives emerge in individual stories: little n-narratives, which are the individual’s personal experience are shaped by big N-Narratives. Big-N narratives contextualize and provide a storyline for little-n narratives. Master narratives, which are often not directly discussed, reflect the consistent “storyline” found within Big-N narratives that, in turn, shape little-n narratives. It is important to note that master narratives are not always upheld in personal narratives (Bergen, 2010; Smith & Dougherty, 2012). This is evidenced by participants in this dissertation, whose narratives often pushed away from rather than pulled toward the master narrative of the Midwest.

Participants drew upon two master narratives of Midwestern culture: Judeo-Christian religious norms and cultural discomfort with differences, particularly sexual, gender, and racial identities as part of the process of co-sexuality. Ultimately, this master narrative affected how participants understood and performed their sexuality in their

workplace as well as how they positioned themselves around this norm. The use of a master narrative as an explanatory and regulatory device also benefitted organizations, which could attribute responsibility for its regulation on sexual norms in a larger cultural narrative.

It is important to note that although all participants lived and worked in the Midwest, participants in Missouri, Illinois, and Kansas are the most heavily represented. All participants referred to the master narrative of Judeo-Christian regulation and intolerance of sexual diversity as a key explanation, or in some cases a justification, for why the sexual norm was both heteronormative and strictly regulated. Participants also described the Midwest's culture as homogenous with a perception that Midwesterners feel discomfort with difference of any kind (i.e., racial, gendered, sexual). For all participants in this dissertation, master narratives of Midwestern cultural norms, specifically those related to sexual norms, created tension for participants. Participants described feeling simultaneously compelled to adhere to the strict and oppressive master narrative as well as to push away from it as larger social conceptions of "normal" sexuality shifted and became more inclusive. In these moments, participants both described their perception of the sexual norm and then adhere or diverge from that norm. I discuss this process below.

The Master Narrative of Religion and Midwest Sexual Norms. Participants were quick to point out that religion, specifically Judeo-Christianity, was a powerful regulatory force in the process of constructing and maintaining normative sexuality in the Midwest and in their workplace. All participants mentioned the interconnection of religion and sexual norms in the Midwest, with many saying things like "I mean,

eventually... we're going to bring religion into this, right?" (Nate, 32, heterosexual, white, male) when I asked them to describe "normal" sexuality in their workplaces. As we talked, participants used master narratives of Midwestern religious norms without explanation, presumably because of my own Midwesterner status and therefore shared cultural understanding of their meaning, indicating the master narrative of religion and Midwest sexual norms. Though most participants were referring to religious norms in a negative light (e.g., homophobic, heteronormative, explicitly intolerant), a few participants relied on the Bible and religious teachings as a lens through which they understood and positioned their own and others' identities.

The master narrative of religious norms in the Midwest served as a site of struggle for participants in which the simultaneous push-pull of co-sexuality became evident. Just as heteronormativity is a construct that is fluid, rather than fixed, the master narrative of religious norms in the Midwest is also in flux. Essentially, participants were organizing around a contested sexual norm. Sweeping social changes such as the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015 has challenged foundational assumptions of sex and sexuality found in the master narrative of Judeo-Christianity. The strict, oppressive, and binary way in which sexuality was conceptualized by participants as the master narrative of Judeo-Christian norms likely transcends the Midwest. Because of the powerful regulatory force that Judeo-Christian sexual norms were perceived to have in this geographic region, however, participants relied on this master narrative as both a tool to explain sexual norms and position themselves around it. Ultimately, religious norms, as described by participants, affected the process of co-sexuality through constructing and maintaining

larger cultural sexual norms but also conversations and behaviors about sex and sexuality at work.

Two participants who adhered to their understanding of Judeo-Christian sexual norms worked for religious organizations in the Midwest and were active members of their churches. These participants varied greatly in their interpretations of “normal” sexuality in their religious texts as well as sexual norms in their respective Midwestern churches. However, both participants described understanding sexuality and gender as synonymous and relied heavily on an expectation of heterosexuality and gender roles as part of the process of understanding “normal” sexuality. For example, Rina, a 64-year-old heterosexual white female recently employed as a pastor in Nebraska, described her understanding of normal sexuality in the church:

We probably think about gender first. Um, and then, you know, obviously, Cristin, I come at this from a faith perspective. And so, you know, I understand that sexuality is, um, is in the nature of how we are mind, you know. Almost the first thing we know about, you know, from Genesis 1 is, you know, that, A, we are created in the image of God, which is extremely important, and then the second thing is that we're created male and female.

The normative “faith perspective” that Rina described relies exclusively on binary conceptions of gender/sex and sexuality, as well as intertwining (and in some ways, conflating) sexuality and gender/sex: women are women, men are men, and women are sexually attracted to men; there is no legitimized, normative alternative to heterosexuality. Pulling toward “normative” sexuality is essential to Rina’s job: she performs wedding ceremonies, gives marriage and relationship advice, as well as

ministers to parishioners who are questioning their gender or sexual identities, all in the context of the Church and its “faith perspective.” How Rina positions herself and others around “normal” sex and sexuality can influence people to push or pull toward or away from around this norm in ways that most other participants did not.

Rina told me that she was beginning to push away from the traditional “faith perspective,” and was actively working to understand and legitimize same-sex attraction and non-binary gender identities as normative in order to be more inclusive and understanding of a changing population and social norm. Simultaneously, she described attempting to change the sexual norm in her church by encouraging more acceptance of same-sex couples requesting to have wedding ceremonies and the difficult process of convincing the many opposed church members and pastors that their duty to the church is to serve its community members. However, because “oh yeah, these same people make donations that are my salary; there is money on the line,” Rina felt she had to tread carefully and was conscious about how she pulled toward the “faith perspective” when approaching these changes. Rina articulated that her growing acceptance of sexual diversity could be articulated to reticent parishioners and pastors in two ways: first, the “faith perspective,” as described, did not reflect the laws of man (e.g., the legalization of same-sex marriage), which the church is meant to uphold; and second, that the church serves as a place of inclusion, and that her “faith perspective” served to exclude anyone who did not fit into a strict binary gender/sex(uality). Rina told me she was uncertain how hard she was willing to push against the “faith perspective” because of the hard work she had done to be legitimized as a female pastor as well as the potential material consequences that could result if she upset the wrong person.

For Rina, the push and pull of co-sexuality is clear. First, the boundaries associated with the process of co-sexuality are shifting for her: as Rina deepens her understanding and acceptance of diverse, non-binary identities, her shifting concept of “normal” sexuality could broaden her approach to ministering to parishioners as well as how Rina positions her own identity around this norm. However, the pull of the traditional “faith perspective” that Rina herself is only beginning to question has real-world consequences for her professional legitimacy and her job and income.

Generally, religion was perceived as having a powerful negative, restrictive and, in some cases, oppressive influence on the construction of normal sexuality in the Midwest that people subsequently organized around. Participants described religion as regulating all forms of sexual behaviors and discourse, regardless of sexual identity category. For example, according to Pete (27-year-old straight white male) “Anyone raised in a Catholic environment, sex is absolutely sinful outside of marriage... Yeah, there’s a lot of pushback against that for sure.” Though Pete was generally opposed this view, he told me that he did not speak about his “transgressive” sexual behaviors, pulling toward this religious sexual “norm” with people he knew or suspected to be Catholic. Like Pete, Jane, a 32-year-old straight white female employed at a radio station in Missouri, was frustrated with the regulatory power that religious norms had on her city. As an example, she told me about a non-discrimination ordinance offering protection to LGBTQ citizens that passed in her city and was immediately revoked:

It's like it [city ordinance] goes through and then somebody says, "No wait we've got to vote on this again." And then it turns into a big deal for all of these, uh you know, I don't want to stereotype people, but they're mostly like Christian right

wings, folks who come in here that are like, 'Oh no. We can't have that. We can't let, you know, transgender people have any rights or we can't have women out there showing their titties even if they're just breastfeeding.'"

The push-pull process of co-sexuality is evidenced in two ways in Jane's narrative. First, Jane's language use is primarily indicative of pushing away from religious sexual "norms": by placing responsibility for lack of inclusion in public policy explicitly on religious individuals (it is a "big deal for all these...Christian right wings;" "oh no. We can't have that;"), she is pushing herself away from these "norms." However, Jane's narrative also reveals that she is pulled toward the master narrative of religion and Midwest sexual norms because she implicitly places these norms as dominant (Orbe, 1998) and at the center of "normal" sexuality.

Second, the process of co-sexuality is also occurring in Jane's city as well. The passing and subsequent revocation of the non-discrimination ordinance exposed a push and pull over the process of regulation of "normal" sexuality and gender between religious (and thus, following the master narrative, intolerant) community members and those who were supportive of expanding the heteronormative sexual or dichotomous gendered "norm." Passing the non-discrimination ordinance threatened the dominance of religious sexual norms, and, from Jane's perspective, revoking the ordinance was powerful pushback against change and pull toward the "faith perspective" from Christians who did not want to lose their power to regulate and legitimize normal sexuality.

What is most interesting and meaningful about participants' descriptions of religion regulating sexual norms in the Midwest and in their respective workplaces is the

issue of dominant voice: both groups felt as though the opposite group had more regulatory power over normative sexuality. Jane, who identifies as straight, told me she felt “voiceless” when it came to this issue; no matter how loudly she and likeminded others spoke, the dominant voice – one she attributed to Christian right wing residents – had the power to regulate sexual norms. On the other hand, participants who constructed rigid religious sexual norms positively and positioned their identities and behaviors within the boundaries of this norm described being frustrated with the growing number of socially legitimized sexual identities and social support for diverse identities that they perceived as pushing away from this norm.

A good example of a participant who performed their sexuality in terms of religious norms and expressed discomfort with change is Hallie, a 31-year-old white pansexual-identified female who told me she was a devout Catholic and was employed by a Catholic organization. Hallie is an interesting case: though she privately identified as pansexual, publically she presented and communicated her sexual identity as heterosexual to adhere to the master narrative of normal sexuality espoused in and by her Midwestern church. Hallie’s narrative agreed with other participants in that the master narrative of religion-as-intolerant was a key component of the process of constructing and maintaining normative sexuality in the Midwest. She actively worked to conform to this identity. However, Hallie told me she was frustrated with the growing social pressure she perceived to be on the Church to be more inclusive to sexual and gender diversity, despite her own self-described pansexuality. Hallie described her beliefs as close to Rina’s “faith perspective,” and feeling that “my personal opinion about a lot of those things is probably not very popular, uh, at this time,” pulling herself toward Judeo-Christian sexual norms.

She went on to describe her frustration with people constructing new “terminologies” that explained sexual and gendered behaviors that were not aligned with “how God made them,” again pulling herself toward Judeo-Christian sexual norms. Hallie’s language, however, indicates that she privately pulls toward use of “new terminologies” (e.g., pansexual) to self-identify, pushing away from the master narrative of Judeo-Christian sexual norms.

Additionally, Hallie told me she felt like she could not share her frustration with “new terminologies” or her opinion about changing sexual norms outside of work because she would be “shouted down” by a growing narrative in her community that pushed away from the Judeo-Christian sexual “norm.” Contrastingly, participants like Jane, above, told me they felt “voiceless” in the face of the master narrative of religion, perceived to be the dominant regulatory force shaping normative sexuality in the Midwest. Despite differing perspectives, both Jane and Hallie are struggling with the push and pull of co-sexuality.

Though this study cannot explain the nuances of these differing perspectives, the fact that both groups 1) used the master narrative of Judeo-Christianity to explain sexual norms in the Midwest, 2) felt both pushed toward and pulled away from Judeo-Christian sexual “norms,” and 3) felt disempowered to uphold/change those norms, speaks to the connection between religion and sexuality and the larger connection between sexuality and power. I interpret the underlying message of these narratives to be that sex and sexuality are ultimately something that should be regulated; it is how sex and sexuality are regulated that is in debate. It seems the power of the master narrative of religious

sexual norms in the Midwest is contested and a site of struggle, yet still serves a powerful organizing function.

Discomfort with Difference in the Midwest. A second master narrative that participants drew on as part of the process of co-sexuality was the Midwestern cultural standard of discomfort with individual differences, particularly sexual diversity. Though participants did not explicitly draw together discomfort with difference and the Midwest in the same way they drew together religion and the Midwest, the master narrative emerged in the consistent way participants talked about sexual diversity. Heterosexual or straight-identified participants were quick to point out their relationship with the LGBTQ community. Most were in support, and all talked about comfort with the LGBTQ community as different than the cultural norm. Similarly, sexual minority participants framed moments of inclusion as different from the cultural norm. Again, all participants framed sexuality in terms of Midwestern discomfort with difference without explanation, likely because of my own Midwestern status and presumed shared cultural expectation.

The master narrative of Midwestern discomfort with difference led participants to describe normative sexuality as more restricted and rigidly heteronormative than in other parts of the country, subsequently influencing how people thought about, talked about, and embodied sex and sexuality. The push-pull dynamic of organizing around “normal” sexuality in Midwestern culture was described as an individual resistance to larger cultural norms, with the implicit acknowledgement that those cultural norms set boundaries that must be adhered to in the context of the workplace. All participants told me in some way that the Midwest was not what they would consider accepting of sexual diversity, which affected heteronormative sexual “norms” in their workplaces. Some

participants, typically heterosexual-or-straight-identified, described their perception of the Midwest as a general feeling. Other participants, usually sexual minorities, described overt examples of discrimination.

The majority of heterosexual-or-straight-identified participants described their own opinions and conceptions of “normal” sexuality as removed from or in opposition to the Midwestern master narrative of discomfort with difference. The push-pull process of co-sexuality is evident in these narratives as well, though required participants to frame Midwest cultural norms in negative light in order to push themselves away from Midwestern norms and pull themselves toward their own “superior” conception of “normal” sexuality. For example, Nate, a 30-year-old straight white male employed in an advertising firm described his experience:

Obviously I'm a Midwesterner, so I associate with that group, however much I loathe it and, uh (laughs) ... I think the, and I don't, maybe I just have like an inflated sense of, of myself, but I feel like I am a lot more, um ... I hate the word acceptance because it insinuates that someone was doing something wrong to begin with. But I feel like, um, like just myself in general, like I celebrate people who are different than me, as opposed to questioning them or trying to impose my will upon them...Um, so when I think about Midwesterners, unfortunately I don't think of that mindset. I think of someone who has been ingrained with a certain type of perspective that is difficult to shake. And I see it at work all the time, that intolerance.

Nate's narrative represents the push-pull dynamic of co-sexuality: first, Nate begins his statement by associating himself with the Midwest without description and immediately

pushes himself from it, implying that though he can objectively be placed as a Midwesterner, he does not identify with the master narrative of discomfort with (sexual) difference in this region and in his workplace. Second, he constructs his celebration of individual difference as superior to the Midwestern narrative of discomfort with difference. Interestingly, Nate's statement of "maybe I just have... an inflated sense... of myself" functions to make his conception of sexuality morally superior and simultaneously seem self-deprecating. By doing so, Nate allows himself the freedom to challenge the Midwestern master norm of discomfort with difference but not be taken too seriously or pushing back too hard. Finally, by describing intolerance as "ingrained" in Midwestern cultural norms and in his workplace, Nate gives himself the freedom to make his perspective unique and thus superior to the dominant majority.

Evan, a 32-year-old heterosexual Caucasian male employed as a waiter and bartender in Missouri described his perception of intolerance and Midwest cultural norms similarly to Nate. Like Nate, Evan found that Midwestern sexual norms affected his workplace, and that he was simultaneously pushed toward adhering to the larger master narrative of discomfort with difference and his own more inclusive conception of "normal" sexuality. Specifically, when I asked Evan to talk about his perception of the sexual norm in his workplace, he first described his difficulty identifying with certain clientele:

Well I think, specifically being in a college town, we have a little bit more even mix. We have a little bit more, uh, um, openness and more uh, you know, liberal and progressive views, politically, but we're, everywhere you know, everywhere else around us it seems uh, like, just like, they seem like country boys. And

they're, they go to church, and they listen to country music, and they like, hate gay people. And black people. Um, and it's odd to meet those people, when they come in or whatever, because I don't, it's hard for me to relate to that at all. At all. Uh, you know, I'm a brewer and I drink craft beer, and they drink 18 Budweisers. You know? It's, I'm different. But, it's, like, my job.

Evan described feeling as though he and his coworkers were likeminded in their acceptance of sexual, racial, and religious difference, though he primarily attributed this to the size and education level of the specific city where he worked. Effectively, Evan pushed himself closer to the cultural norms of his organization and his city, but pulled himself away from the master narrative of discomfort with difference in the Midwest, particularly the (sexual, racial, cultural) norms of more rural locations. Evan positions his personal beliefs and behaviors as “progressive” rather than the more derogatory “country boy” attitude he perceives in clients living in the rural Midwest. Importantly, at the end of his statement, Evan states that he feels pulled toward the negatively framed Midwestern master narrative of discomfort with difference because it is his job to connect with clients following this master narrative. Evan’s narrative demonstrates that the push-pull dynamic of co-sexuality is particularly salient in the workplace.

Perceiving discomfort with difference as the cultural norm in the Midwest and pushing the self away from this norm was something sexual minority participants did as well. Sexual minorities tended to have a harder time negotiating discomfort with difference in the Midwest. For example, Amythest, a 30-year-old white bisexual female employed as a barista in a coffees shop in Missouri said:

It's like I have guilt about it because of the way that other people have treated me

in the past because of it [being bisexual]. And then I feel like those stories people come up with, like how can you like both men and women or like, "Oh, if you're dating a guy, you just want be with a girl and if you're dating a girl, you just want to be with guys." It's just like I actually date people because I just like, like who they are as a human...I would say, I would say I was probably more raised and influenced and, and the families around me [in the Midwest] were influencing me to be heterosexual and to grow up and get married, and to have children, and have steady jobs and be safe. You know, financially. Um, what's normal in my view, I don't have that. Like I don't, I don't really have that, I guess... I just don't believe in normal. I don't really believe that normal exists. Um, I think that it's a, it's societal construct to make people feel like they are doing okay and they are doing the right thing, and they are safe, and they are secure, and their, their asses are covered. Yeah, but it's like, who the fuck is really normal?

It is clear that Amethyst has experienced others' discomfort with her sexuality in the Midwest. Amethyst's "guilt" related to her sexual preferences is indicative of her feeling pushed away from the Midwestern sexual "norm" and her inability to pull toward heteronormative expectations. She has been made to feel that her attraction to people because of their personality rather than their biological sex is abnormal; embodying the Midwestern conception that "normal" sexuality is something she simply "doesn't have" the ability to do. To cope with being pushed away from Midwestern discomfort with difference, Amethyst frames "normal" sexuality in the Midwest as illogical and a "societal construct" designed to make heterosexual people feel "safe" and validated in

their sexuality and their behavior and subsequently push everyone else away. Because Amethyst doesn't have that, she instead discounts "normal" altogether, claiming "I just don't believe in normal." By reframing "normal" sexuality as an impossibility for people of all sexualities, she rejects her pushed-away position and instead pulls herself toward her own more inclusive version of "normal."

A primary way in which participants described the simultaneous push-and pull of co-sexuality came from the use of two master narratives. Participants drew on two primary master narratives of the Midwest to communicatively construct, bound, and explain "normal" sexuality in their workplace as well as position themselves around that norm: Judeo-Christian norms and Midwestern culture's discomfort with difference. The master narrative of Judeo-Christianity in the Midwest, called the "faith perspective" by Rina, was described as extremely powerful, as well as restrictive and heteronormative. However, participants identified that this master narrative was in flux. Generally speaking, larger U.S. culture is becoming more inclusive of sexual minorities (e.g., the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015) and shifting conceptualizations of "normal" sexuality away from the traditional "faith perspective." These cultural changes have put pressure on the Church to become more inclusive of diverse sexualities (and genders). Participants in this dissertation, regardless of their faith or opinion of larger social progression toward inclusiveness, described feeling as though they had no power to control the narrative and struggled to position themselves around a religious sexual "norm" that was in flux. Ultimately, participants felt a simultaneous push and pull toward a fluctuating conception of "normal" sexuality as expressed by Judeo-Christianity.

The second master narrative, discomfort with difference in the Midwest, was primarily used to allow individuals to push away from larger cultural sexual “norms” in the Midwest. First, participants constructed the culture of Midwest in a negative light; second, participants constructed their individual perceptions of “normal” sexuality as progressive and positive; and finally, participants positioned their own beliefs as superior to the larger master narrative of discomfort with difference in the Midwest. In this way, participants pushed away from the master narrative and pulled themselves toward a “superior” position. However, participants also noted that the master narrative of discomfort with difference in the Midwest was prevalent in their workplaces, and thus they felt pulled toward connecting with or accepting this norm in order to function at work. The simultaneous push-pull of co-sexuality, as exemplified by these master narratives, begin to demonstrate the complexities of negotiating personal beliefs and understandings of sexuality in the face of larger cultural “norms” that are not aligned with the other. The push-pull of co-sexuality was also evidenced through participants’ navigation of normalized sexual conversations and behavior in their individual workplaces, which was described in aggressive and masculine terms. Complying to these norms often meant accepting or engaging in behaviors or conversations that were not in line with personal beliefs or conceptions of “normal” sexuality. I discuss this below.

The Normalization of Gendered and Aggressive (Hetero)Sexuality

The second way in which the push-pull process of co-sexuality emerged was through participants descriptions and stories about navigating aggressive masculinized (hetero)sexuality in their workplaces. Though heteronormativity has, to this point, been described in gender-neutral terms, participants’ actions and behaviors in their hegemonic

heteronormative workplaces were quite masculinized. Heteronormativity, while privileging opposite-sex physical attraction, also reflects the privilege of masculine sexuality, makes women objects of consumption, and normalizes masculine aggression – specifically, the idea that women, females, and in some cases, feminized gay men, want to be aggressively flirted with, objectified, and generally sexually harassed in the workplace. Of note, the idea that aggressive harassment is a wanted behavior was not exclusive to heterosexual or male-identified participants. Though participants’ narratives reflected sexual “norms” in their workplaces as implicitly masculine and aggressive, they also demonstrate a push away and pull toward this norm. Participants’ descriptions ranged from male-identified participants expressing discomfort and pushing away from sexually aggressive behavior toward women and females to and woman and female identified participants simultaneously pushing away from masculinized sexual aggression and pulling toward this normalized behavior themselves. The normalization of gendered and aggressive (hetero)sexual harassment became clear in three ways: normalized talk about aggressive masculine sexuality, normalized masculinized sexual behavior, and the (hetero)sexualized regulation of women’s bodies for masculine consumption. I discuss these below.

Normalized Talk about Aggressive Masculine Sexuality. In some organizations, talking openly with coworkers about explicit sexual acts was quite common. These conversations were a primary way in which masculine sexual aggression was both normalized and, in many cases, idealized. Primarily, conversations with content reflecting aggressive masculine sexuality normalized the idea that male (hetero)sexuality is privileged over female sexuality. In many cases, women were also implicitly described

as sexual objects. Often, the explicit sexual acts described in these conversations were made consistently more aggressive and extreme, forcing more and more explicit and graphic talk, and occasionally dramatic reenactments, in order for coworkers to “keep up.” However, many participants described feeling uncomfortable both hearing and participating in these sexually aggressive conversations, again elucidating the push-pull experience of co-sexuality.

For example, Jack, a 34-year old straight white male employed as a homebuilder in Missouri and doing construction work across the Midwest, told me repeatedly about how he personally respected both women and sexual minorities in and out of the workplace. Jack also told me he recently began identifying as a feminist and was particularly aware of rampant sexism and homophobia in his profession. He told me his behavior in the workplace had changed to be more inclusive of difference and to insist his coworkers do the same. Jack told me:

There's no women in our trade at all. And, the small occasion when there is one or two? They're the best at what we do. I actually envy that. They're really good at what us men think we can do. They always have the upper hand on it. They're always better than we are. Because they accept everything and they don't judge and they don't give a shit...But if you don't sexually harass women [male coworkers are] going to be like, "Dude, what the fuck? Come on. You don't see this hot piece of ass walking by?" I mean, like, when I was younger yeah, I would have shamed [coworkers not harassing women]. But now that I do what I do and own what I own and I've come this far, um, I would not anymore. But yeah, all

the guys would heckle. And they would probably say, "What the hell? She's fine. Are you a fag?"

Jack's narrative appears contradictory, simultaneously positioning women and females in his profession as "better than" the males in his profession, yet gives males the power to set and reinforce the aggressive, normalized, and toxic (hetero)sexual norms and sexist gender dichotomies in his profession. Put differently, Jack feels internally pushed to be more respectful toward women in the workplace, yet recognizes the pull toward performing his masculinity through derogating women and treating them as sexual objects that are meant to be harassed. The positive reinforcement of aggressive masculine sexuality in Jack's profession emerges through the process of male coworkers shaming other males who do not harass women through homophobic (and thus feminized) comments ("are you a fag?"). Again, women, females, and feminized (gay) men are derogated, reinforcing the idea that ideal masculinity eschews femininity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and pushes Jack and his male coworkers toward this aggressive masculine sexual norm.

Within this narrative, Jack also works to construct his feminist beliefs as superior to the sexual norm in his workplace. However, feminism and positive talk about women and sexual minorities do not resonate with his coworkers and stand in contrast to the idea that masculine sexual aggression is the norm. As we talked, Jack repeatedly told me that sexist and homophobic behavior "really pisses me off" and that he had often threatened violence against his coworkers and subordinates to regulate their behavior and push back against derogatory, sexist, and homophobic conversations. Ironically, it is through the use of masculine aggression and the threat of violence that Jack pushes back against

aggressive masculine (hetero)sexuality, ultimately at least partially reinforcing aggressive masculinity as normal.

Evan, a 32-year-old heterosexual Caucasian male employed as a waiter and bartender in Missouri, told me that service industry work, particularly restaurant work, was especially saturated with explicit and aggressive sexual talk. Evan told me that because of the stressful nature of working in the restaurant industry coupled with coworkers constantly moving and shifting around each other, sexual talk becomes a way of releasing frustration and often evokes laughs and smiles. Evan told me the aggressive and goading nature of sexual talk was much more extreme than in other restaurants in which he'd worked, which he partially attributed to the "raunchy" talk he often heard from his boss, one of the restaurant owners. When I asked Evan to give me an example of some of the aggressive and explicit talk he had heard in his workplace, he told me:

I've heard people just talking about, I don't know, double fist fisting, and, and like, I don't know. All of the crazy things that you can imagine about. Felching. Felching is, this is so gross. Felching is when like, a man cums in an orifice, and then you like suck it out. So it, for like, it's big in the gay culture I guess. But it's, it's possible with straight sex, heterosexual sex...I learn all the terms! I learn all the crazy, crazy sexual terms that I have no idea about. I mean, I watch pornography stuff like a little bit, but like, I didn't know about felching!

Though Evan told me sexual talk was more regulated when customers were in the restaurant, he described being surprised at just how "raunchy" some of these conversations were. Of note, Evan describes the "raunchy" explicit talk of sexual acts in his workplace in predominantly homosexual male terms, with heterosexual sex noted as

an afterthought. Evan's description of common workplace conversations reifies aggressive masculine sexuality as normal in two ways. First, Evan's narrative exemplifies the masculine and physically aggressive nature of "normal" sexuality (e.g., double-fisting). Indeed, Evan never mentioned women directly in our discussion about "raunchy" sexual talk in his workplace, reifying the notion that male sexuality, particularly aggressive male sexuality, is normative. Second, the fact that Evan refers to sexual acts primarily associated with sex between two men as "crazy" and "so gross" reinforces the idea that homosexual sex is transgressive to "normal" (hetero)sexuality. According to Evan, coworkers rewarded each other with high fives and laughs the more sexually explicit the (masculine and aggressive) conversation became, particularly if it involved gay male sex.

Further, it is important to note that not every employee was comfortable with this level of sexually aggressive talk. Evan told me that employees who were the most uncomfortable with this level of explicitly sexualized talk often did not last in the organization very long because they did not participate in these conversations and instead remained silent and pulled away from the larger group. In this way, sexual norms had the power to silence employees; even Evan who identified as "open-minded" felt pushed to participate in sexualized conversations in order to "keep up." Evan's description of this feeling signifies the push and pull that "normal" sexuality has in the workplace; though he wanted to establish good relationships with his colleagues, normalized explicit male sexual aggressiveness did not resonate with his own conception of what was appropriate in the workplace.

A number of participants, such as Matt, a 32-year old Caucasian heterosexual male employed at a manufacturing plant in Missouri, described themselves as a lone voice in their workplaces, more interested in discussing production or client satisfaction than any topic related to sex or sexuality. Though Matt described his workplace as being filled with aggressive sexual talk from both male and female coworkers, Matt described sexual talk differently between men and women. Matt told me:

With people, I mean, obviously you get a bunch of guys together and some good looking girls working, like, in the same area, and there's going to be plenty of talk going on about things, but uh, other than that, I don't know. I feel like I'm the voice of reason in between everybody I work with. Between all the macho mens, and then me. Yeah, no, I guess I'm the new hybrid macho.

It is clear from Matt's statement that explicit heteronormative sexual talk and masculine aggression has been normalized in his workplace. It is notable that Matt specifically says "when you get a bunch of guys" but only "some good looking girls" together that it breeds a workplace environment that is saturated with sexual talk. This narrative 1) privileges male sexuality because it 2) presumes and normalizes the fact that all men are inherently going to talk about sex, regardless of appearance, as well as 3) presumes that only good looking girls talk about or are the object of sex talk and, most problematic 4) the presence of good looking girls encourages men's sexual talk in the workplace. In addition, Matt works to pull himself away from the normalized sexually aggressive "macho mens" he sets up in his statement, describing himself as "the voice of reason," or the one male-identified employee who did not want to talk about sex or sexuality, making

him “the new hybrid macho.” In this way, Matt is able to push himself toward a masculine identity, but pull himself away from aggressive masculine sexuality.

Through conversations about sex and sexuality in the workplace, the taken-for-granted privilege of masculine sexuality as well as aggressive masculine sexuality becomes both clear and normalized. It is noteworthy that most of the participants who described feeling the push and pull in conversations about the normalization of aggressive masculine sexuality identified as male, reflected in the exemplars above. I interpret this to mean that the push-pull associated with masculinized sexual aggression and co-sexuality presents generally along gendered lines; employees identifying and presenting as male are expected to talk about their (hetero)sexuality in a different, more aggressive way than their female or woman counterparts. Indeed, men are expected to talk about (hetero)sexual sex, and work to push each other or goad each other into bigger, more explicitly aggressive sexual talk when individual men try to pull away from this norm. Women and female participants primarily described masculinized sexual aggression, which presented in two ways: men or masculinized women aggressively harassing them, or normalizing and engaging in masculinized sexual aggression themselves. I describe this below.

Normalized Masculinized (Hetero)sexual Aggressive Behaviors. Masculinized sexual aggression was also normalized in participants’ discussions of acts of sexual aggression and harassment in their workplaces. Though participants did not always use the term “sexual harassment,” they did draw connections between their experiences with aggressive sexual behaviors and gender: participants spoke of experiences of sexual aggression almost universally in terms of expecting female employees to be faced with

physical or verbal sexual advances from male employees. The perception of sexual aggression and harassing behaviors as females being the target of male aggression both reflects heteronormativity as the sexual norm at work and tautologically reinforces heteronormativity as that sexual norm in gendered and potentially destructive ways.

First, by conceptualizing heterosexual male-to-female harassment as normative, the act of sexual aggression becomes a masculinized behavior. Second, the male-as-sexual-aggressor-to-female narrative that defines sexual aggression and harassment reinforces the idea that women and feminized bodies are the targets of aggression. However, any form of sexual aggression does not seem rational in modern workplaces, where sexual harassment policy violations can result in strict disciplinary consequences, including job loss. Based on participant narratives, it became clear that women and feminized bodies are perceived as wanting to be sexually harassed by participants of multiple gender and sexual identities because it validates women's sexual worth, which I discuss later.

In terms of co-sexuality, normalized masculine (hetero)sexual aggression shaped participants with a variety of sexual and gender identities' workplace experiences. Many female-or-woman-identified participants described feeling pushed to accept sexually harassing behaviors from coworkers of all gender identities, though they wanted to pull away from this norm because it was harmful to their productivity, their happiness, and in some cases, their safety. For example, Amethyst, a 31-year-old white bisexual woman employed as a barista at a coffee shop in Missouri told me:

There was a male customer who I'm pretty positive is schizophrenic, who like wrote me a love letter and didn't ever like touch me, but like did other things and

like yelled at me once, and said things that were not okay to me and like a couple of other people. And then, chased someone while he was in his car and they were closing the store. They were on the sidewalk and they started running. Um, why the fuck did it take [Coffee Shop] like two months to get him banned? ... [Coffee Shop] is fucking bullshit. I don't know what the policy is, but I know that I shouldn't have to go to work and feel fucking threatened. When I'm fucking working and that's my livelihood. That's how I make my money.

Amethyst went on to say that she was told by her female boss, to whom she reported the harassing customer's behavior, that the customer was "harmless" and suggested that the customer was simply flirting with her. By downplaying the threat this male customer posed to Amethyst and her coworkers, Amethyst's boss was both reifying the idea that male (sexual) aggression is normal and pushed Amethyst to accept this norm. Amethyst's angry description of this event demonstrates that though she wanted to pull away from even tolerating this behavior as normative, the fact that she required the income from this job for her livelihood grudgingly pushed her to continue working around this customer for two months. It is important to note that the organization benefitted from Amethyst's experience; Amethyst continued to put up with this aggressive customer because she needed income. The organization did not ban this customer for 2 months until the majority of employees reported him to the manager. In the interim, Coffee Shop not only made money off of this customer, but they normalized and reinforced the sexual norm of accepting masculinized sexual behavior for their employees.

One of the most powerful and emotional conversations I had about aggressive masculinized sexual harassment was with Jamie, a 27-year-old straight white woman

employed as a graphic designer in Kansas. She told me that two people were sexually harassing her in her office. The first was her female boss, who used graphic sexual jokes and inappropriate touching of male and female employees to build her reputation as a “cool boss” and, according to Jamie, be “like one of the guys.” Jamie’s female boss is a clear representation of masculinized sexual aggression: her aggressive behaviors were not only normalized but also idealized. First, Jamie’s description of her boss wanting to be “one of the guys” automatically masculinizes aggressive sexual behaviors. Second, Jamie attributes her boss’ behavior as attempting to pull herself closer to the masculinized aggressive (hetero)sexual norm. Third, Jamie’s narrative implicitly positions masculine behaviors as superior to feminized behaviors, again normalizing sexual aggression.

Besides her boss, a coworker named Jimmy, who was the only human resources staff member in her organization, was also sexually harassing Jamie through constant sexual innuendos and touching. Jamie described feeling very uncertain about what to do to advocate for herself in this situation, given that the two people she could hierarchically turn to were the two people who were harassing her. Speaking about an incident of harassment involving Jimmy, the HR manager, who had cornered Jamie alone after work and physically encroached on her personal space, Jamie told me:

I was like, "Okay, is this in my head? Nobody else is acknowledging this. I understand I have a very big personal bubble. I don't like people touching me. Okay, maybe I'm overreacting to this," and I think that's where, you know, being a woman in our society today is we, we start to think that it's in our head and, you know, so it's, you know, which means he was free to continue advancing. The thing is they start, like, especially when I'm like, "Okay. I do realize that I'm not

friendliest person. I do realize that I'm not, like, I'm not a physically, physical person. I get this." I had a lot of conversations in my head with, like, "Okay, is this normal? Is this not normal?" I mean, I grew up with a lot of guy friends and I'm like, "None of these people touched me." Like, at the same time, I'm like, "Okay. This is a person you're supposed to go to in the case that something like this happens," and, uh, you know, I was almost to the point where I was going to go to Tasha [Jamie's sexually harassing female boss] and say, "Hey, you know, Jimmy is in my personal space. Do you think you could talk to him about this? Because I really honestly can't say anything." ... I'm uncomfortable, but I'm trying to pretend, like, I'm pretending that this is normal? I don't understand what's happening...

The push and pull of co-sexuality for Jamie is clear in her statement. Jamie told me that in addition to a sexual harassment policy, her organization also had a policy that disallowed romantic relationships between coworkers. Jamie perceived her organization as a space where sex and sexuality were frowned upon. However, throughout her narrative, Jamie keeps coming back to the question, "is [Jimmy's sexually aggressive behavior] normal," pulling herself toward this norm and "pretending" that it was but simultaneously finding herself pushed toward the feeling that something is amiss, particularly in the context of her seemingly highly regulated workplace. Specifically, Jamie first pulls herself toward accepting Jimmy's behavior as normal because none of her coworkers seem to notice or acknowledge Jimmy's behavior as aggressive. As a result, Jamie attributes her feeling of discomfort to her own personal space preferences. Importantly, Jamie also pulls herself to accept Jimmy's (as well as her female boss

Tasha's) behavior based on gender norms ("being a woman in our society today...we start to think that it's in our head"), reifying the idea that masculinized sexual aggression is normal, and as a woman, she is likely overreacting. However, because other males in Jamie's life never exhibited sexual aggression toward her in any context, Jamie pushes herself by questioning Jimmy's behavior, and even considered turning to the other sexually harassing figure in her workplace for assistance. When I asked Jamie why she did not talk to her boss, I was surprised at her answer. Evidently, romantic relationships between coworkers are forbidden in her organization. Jamie was concerned that complaining to her boss could be (incorrectly) considered admission of a romantic relationship and cost her her job and source of income. The financial risks associated with talking to her boss pulled her toward trying to cope with Jimmy's harassment. Of note, Jamie was tearful and upset throughout this over two-hour interview, demonstrating to me the emotions associated with the push-pull of co-sexuality.

Some of the most surprising comments related to the normalization of masculinized (hetero)sexual aggressive behaviors in the workplace came from a group of female or woman-identified participants who regularly saw and condemned sexually aggressive behavior from their (usually male) colleagues, but then described engaging in this behavior themselves. This is, to me, the clearest and most troubling example of the complexity of the push-pull process of co-sexuality. One of these participants, Kim, a 22-year old straight White female employed as a creative designer in Missouri and Illinois told me that she really did not like the overt sexuality in her workplace. Kim described being frustrated by the fact that her organization had no sexual harassment

policy. However, Kim actively worked to rationalize, protect herself from, and engage in this sexual norm in her workplace:

[Coworker] gets harassed all the time. But like she's flattered by it because she just lost a ton of weight... Like overall to me it's just weird but I, I guess I put up with it, but it never is directed towards me. I mean one time it was directed towards me, but it was in like this funny weird way, but I like laughed it off. Like it doesn't offend me when people do that to an extent... I guess I have been sexually harassing a coworker for a really long time because he's very like religious and, you know, very saving for marriage, and he's about to get married, and he's like our best web developer... I go, "Dude, I'm gonna get you a stripper, like thank you so much." And he's like, "No, you really don't have to." So it's like been a running joke that we're gonna get him a stripper. Like and she's just gonna be there one day like when he walks in for work, and then she's gonna walk in like a client and just start unzipping.

The process Kim uses to describe pulling herself toward the sexual norm in her workplace is threefold. First, though she repeatedly condemned and pushed herself away from normative sexually aggressive behavior, she rationalized it first by framing it as complimentary to a female colleague, and second, by minimizing and excusing the harassment directed toward her by saying it occurred in a "funny weird way" and by "laugh[ing] it off." By reframing sexual harassment as potentially positive (i.e., complimentary or funny), Kim is able to pull herself toward accepting this norm through the process of framing masculine aggression as a wanted behavior. However, as we talked, Kim recognized that her own behavior reflected sexual aggression, though she

framed it as both helpful and amusing to her male colleague. The male target of Kim's sexually harassing behavior is important; though she did not identify his sexual identity in our conversation, the fact that she knew he was not actively having sex because he was "saving himself for marriage" discursively emasculated him because this behavior ran counter to the aggressive masculine norm in her organization. Though it is unclear whether or not Kim consciously understood that she was upholding the toxic sexual norm in her workplace, she did indicate to me that she would work to stop this behavior now that she recognized that she was contributing to an unhealthy norm.

Similarly, Sandra, a 36 year old bisexual white female employed as a bartender in Ohio, told me that the sexual norm in her workplace was constant conversations about sexual acts, coworkers having sex in the workplace, and frequent aggressive verbal and physical sexual harassment between employees of all sexualities, though generally she attributed sexual aggression to men (as described below). Though Sandra initially told me that she was disgusted by this behavior and pushed herself away from accepting this behavior as normative, particularly sexual aggression, her narrative revealed that was pulled toward accepting this behavior as normal, and enacted it herself. Sandra told me:

Like, I used to work with this guy that was, like, a giant pervo [who aggressively flirted with female coworkers]...And then one day, I was like, "You're disgusting." And he was like he was like, "Some of these women are, you know, their husbands don't pay attention to them. They're coming to work. They've been doing this." He made a really, like, good point, like, he was, like, a vigilante pervert, because he was like, um, you know... "And their kids or teenagers don't want to spend time with them." He's like, "And you know, they're coming to

work, and they're starting to get wrinkles...and I'm the person that, you know, hits on them and makes them feel better about themselves." And he's like, "I'm going to go ahead and do that." And I actually, like, he was very sincere about it. And I thought about it, like, man, like he's right. And I started realizing that he doesn't mean it when he hits on all those people, it's just he was actually trying to, you know ... same as me. Like, even though girls are like, "Oh, I don't like girls. I'm super straight," it's like they... These girls at my work, I kid you not, will, like, I can tell that they're like waiting for me to be like, "Oh, your hair looks cute."

Sandra went on to describe her normalized aggressive sexual interactions with female coworkers:

I would say that touching is by far um, you know, once you cross the touching line, like mind you, I touch [one female coworker], like I tickle her and stuff but I don't just, I would never like grab her boob or something. And she, ah, wants that... I would never just like go do that to someone, so I would assume maybe like some abrupt thing someone might say, you know, without like testing the water and like. You know the same as like when I wait on people I feel out this is someone that wants me to talk to them or is this somebody that is pissed off, they had a bad day at work, they just want their beer and to read the paper and for me to leave them the f alone.

The push-pull around normative masculinized (hetero)sexual behaviors presents in a fascinating way in Sandra's narrative. First, she describes the aggressive sexual behaviors of her male colleague in negative terms, pushing herself away from him and labeling him a "pervo." However, Sandra, like Kim, rationalized this sexually aggressive behavior

through her male colleague's claim that women want to be harassed because it is flattering and reinforces their (hetero)sexual desirability to men. Sandra pulls herself even closer to this norm by going a step further; by accepting and rationalizing that male sexual aggression is wanted behavior from female coworkers, Sandra herself told me she tickled, flirted with, and sexually touched them as well.

The implications of this behavior are twofold: 1) female coworkers are "waiting" for Sandra, a bisexual female, to be aggressively flirtatious with them and 2) because females are "waiting" to be touched, certain kinds of touch are implicitly acceptable (tickling) but not all ("grabbing her boob"). Indeed, rather than transgressive behavior being talked about in strictly gendered terms, how and what bodies of all genders did in the workplace was most important to normalized behavior. Genitalia, rather than gender identity, set the boundary for what appropriate bodily touch was. In terms of how touching should happen, Sandra argues that tickling is an acceptable way to learn what kind of touch is welcome, but grabbing a female coworkers' breast would not be something Sandra would do immediately; just as one has to communicatively "test the water" and feel out whether or not a client wants to converse, one also has to physically "test the water" by tickling a coworker to determine whether or not grabbing her breast would be acceptable. The push and pull of Sandra's narrative comes in how she talks about her own behavior. By saying "I would never just...go do that to someone," she is pulling herself toward the norm of women wanting to be sexualized, but positioning herself as willing to take the time to figure out in what way, she pushes herself away from the more aggressive sexual harassment in her workplace.

In terms of co-sexuality, sexual aggression was something many participants described as normalized, but also problematic, within their workplace. Sexual aggression was described by participants in both heteronormative and masculinized terms, making the privilege of male sexuality a taken-for-granted in both conversation and action and making females the target of aggression. The overarching idea that pulled employees toward not only accepting masculinized sexually aggressive behavior, but also engaging in it, was that harassment is a wanted behavior in the workplace. Indeed, it was not only heterosexual men who engaged in sexual aggression; Kim harassed her (emasculated) male colleague, and Sandra harassed her (heterosexual-identified) female colleagues, both following the assumption that harassment was a positive behavior. Though it did not appear in the data, I would have been interested to learn how masculinized sexual aggression was talked about or embodied between men who are sexually attracted to other men.

The Masculinized Regulation of (Hetero)Sexual Bodies. In workplace contexts, bodies are highly regulated, primarily along binary gendered lines and through the lens of the male gaze (Trethewey, 1999). Grooming, dress, and comportment of all employees are constructed in terms of masculinity; auspiciously through the lens of professionalism (Acker, 1990; Clair, 1993; Trethewey, 1999; Wood & Conrad, 1989), an inherently masculinized construct (Adams, 2012). In terms of the process of co-sexuality, it is important to note that it is heterosexual masculinity that serves as the standard for regulating bodies, particularly feminized bodies, in strictly heteronormative terms.

It is not surprising, then, that several female or woman-identified participants, and one male-identified participant, noted that bodies, particularly personal dress, was

constructed in (heterosexual & white) masculine terms in their organizations. Whereas white heterosexual males were the unmarked and privileged norm (Acker 1990; Brekhus, 1998; Trethewey, 1999), participants were cognizant that women and racial minority bodies were consistently and more aggressively regulated, and that sexual and gender minorities, faced with guidelines built upon male/female binaries and heteronormative expectations, were made invisible. Participants also repeatedly noted the heterosexist ways in which participants' bodies were regulated: women's bodies were regulated to be sexually appealing to heterosexual males. The regulation of professional bodies presented as masculinized, (hetero)sexual, and aggressively regulated in two ways: first, through the regulation of physical bodies, and second, through the regulation of dress.

First, women and female identified participants described having to regulate their physical bodies in terms of the male gaze. The pregnant female body is one of the most visibly transgressive to the masculinity and sexualized bodies in workplace contexts (Gatrell, 2011). Rina, a 64-year-old heterosexual white female recently employed as a pastor in Nebraska, talked at length about the transgressive nature of both being a woman and being pregnant in her profession:

In some way it was around sexuality, you know, when, my last year in seminary ...and I'm serving a student church...pregnant with [my son] and 'great with the child' as the scriptures say, someone in the church said, well, not to me, but I heard about it, complained that "she got to continue to serve the community, well, now that she's obviously pregnant," because of course, I mean, what, what they were getting at, when you're pregnant, you, you, you walk around with a big sign on your back or, you know, serve a little bubble over your head that says, "I've

had sex." You know, sexuality becomes visible and evident and obvious in a way that it never was before.

Though more women have entered Rina's profession since her time in seminary, she told me they remain rare and must push for professional legitimization and gender equality in their churches, both with male colleagues and with parishioners. Because sex and sexuality were considered taboo topics in her organization and profession, a visibly pregnant female body meant that pregnant pastors were pushed away from both sexual and gendered norms, threatening their legitimized professional status further. Rina went on to tell me that she received numerous intrusive questions, complaints, and requests for other (male) pastors during her pregnancy, finding herself angry that she had to pull toward sexual norms by relying on her heterosexual, married relationship with her husband and co-minister as an explanation and source of professional legitimation.

Men were also required to regulate their bodies for sexual consumption. For employees doing service work, particularly those working in restaurants or bars, having an idealized sexual, raced, and gendered body was crucial to their financial and social success in their profession. The push and pull associated with adhering to this norm was challenging for sexual minorities, and particularly sexual minorities who were also racial minorities. When they found their bodies were inherently pushed from the white (hetero)sexual norm, these participants struggled to pull themselves closer to the norm through other means. Philip, a 34-year-old African-American bisexual male, told me that the ideal male body in his LGBTQ bar was not only (hetero)sexualized, but raced as well, and adhering to the physical expectations was impossible for a person of color:

So, whoever's the whitest with the most muscles, who represents the most masculinity, like, they're the ones that usually can do no wrong. I think it's social norms, I think, you know?...Like, you see so much more diversity in bars and other cities like New York and LA...Like, [here] everybody likes Jackson, because Jackson is 6'1", hairy, um, backwards baseball hat, and bulging biceps, like, that's what they think is attractive here, in Missouri. Like, straight-boy, home-grown, and like, not too muscle-y, and too thin...And he's bearded, and you know, he's bartended in this town for, like, 12 years, so everybody knows him already. So, Jackson makes the most money. He's the fastest, and he gets tips the most. You can't [compete]. So, you just have to figure out who you are, and don't be concerned with what other people are doing. So, I don't know, I think people naturally think I'm sort of funny being snobby, so I, like, I just became that.

Philip told me that he was very aware that, in the Midwest, his slender African-American body would never be the white, well muscled, hairy, “straight boy” sexual ideal that his coworker Jackson embodied. By nature, Philip’s body was pushed away from the idealized sexual body, potentially undercutting his ability to make money. To pull himself closer to the norm in his organization and receive better tips, Philip primarily changed his discourse to supplement his body; he made his personality more aggressively sexual, telling raunchier jokes, flirting with customers, and also dressing his body in more flamboyant ways that he told me encouraged tips from customers and ultimately gained him favor with his bosses. Ultimately, Philip was aware of his pushed-away position from the physical ideal and therefore communicatively performed an identity that

complimented the physical norm but did not and could not challenge it because of raced, gendered, and (hetero)sexual norms.

A second way in which bodies were regulated for masculinized consumption was through dress codes, which were the most common way that participants talked about masculinized body regulation in the workplace. Allen, a 27-year old straight white male, argued the dress code in his organization was problematic because it “spells out what is acceptable clothing for males and females, and that reinforces this false binary and what it looks like. It doesn’t provide a lot of wiggle room for people who don’t fall within that binary.” In terms of co-sexuality, dress codes pull employees of all gender identities toward a binary at the center that does not make sense for many of them. A number of other participants noted the sexist, and in most cases heterosexist, professional dress codes in their organizations. Generally, women’s dress codes were far more specific than men’s, regulating culturally sexualized parts of women’s bodies such as breasts or legs.

For example, Amy, a 35-year-old African American woman employed as a professor in Kansas described negotiating the tumultuous relationship between her professionalism, race, and her body. On the day she got her professional headshots for her new job, Amy told me that she grabbed whatever “professional” clothing she had that was clean because she had just moved into her new home.

We get the pictures back and there is cleavage in the pictures. Now she sends the pictures automatically to our like department and they just like put the pictures up on the website. And I realize then there was cleavage. (laughs) And I'm like "Oh, my God, that is not okay."...I'm thinking about you know, black woman sexualized stereotypes and I'm like "Oh, my God. I'm going to be that

[person]."...Anyway, I'm trying to figure out what to do about it, but I also don't want to bring it to anybody's attention and I can't talk to anybody about it (laughs) at work... in the meantime while I'm silently trying to figure this out, I'm in a meeting and we're talking...about requiring dress codes for our students and how to talk about professional attire...and I'm like, is this lady like, dropping a hint at me?

The appearance of (sexualized) cleavage, particularly on an African American female body, in the context of professionalism, was “not okay” for Amy. The stereotypes surrounding the hypersexuality of African American women have been shown to be particularly destructive in workplace contexts; organizational communication research has demonstrated that black women often find themselves regulating their bodies far more strictly than their white female counterparts or even their African American male counterparts because of the expectation of sexually aggressive comments from white men (e.g., Forbes, 2009). Amy’s narrative reflects a good deal of self-discipline and a deep understanding of her professional body as gendered (Acker, 1990; Wood & Conrad, 1983), raced (Forbes, 2009), and sexualized (Trethewey, 1999) and thus pulls her bodily performance to reflect professional norms. Amy told me she worked furiously (and quietly) to ascertain how much her professional reputation would suffer if she did not immediately remove and retake the headshot wearing less revealing “professional” garb, which she ultimately did so as not to be pushed away from being perceived as professional.

Gender, sexuality, bodies, and dress codes also intersected in professional development settings in which policies and practices were established. Callie, a 31-year-

old pansexual woman employed as a librarian in Missouri, told me about a training session in her workplace where the appropriate construction of bodies, dress, and gender comportment was specifically addressed in her organization:

At staff development day, which is really, generally, just about motivating people and then some additional trainings to enrich our jobs, um, during [the boss's] presentation in her initial address, I guess, to everybody, she talked about (laughs) cleavage. Or appropriate necklines...Um, but, you know, I walked away thinking that it was sexist. And like, not the place for this conversation. And I felt like, that for the few people that that was probably addressing or however many they thought they were addressing that maybe that could have just been handled one on one...

Callie's narrative first argues that discussing "cleavage," which is both gendered and sexualized, was sexist because it exclusively targeted female and women employees and their professional dress. She told me that cleavage was considered "distracting" to male coworkers and clients, taking for granted both the idea that men are expected to be sexually aggressive as well as heterosexual. The fact that Callie says this training session was "not the place for this conversation" tells me that she pushes away from the normalized idea that women should have to regulate their bodies more than their male counterparts and that she resists the public hypersexualization of her female coworkers. However, her claim that there were only a few people breaking this rule and that they could be regulated one-on-one rather than publically tells me that either Callie pulls toward the norm that women should not be showing cleavage in the workplace, possibly because of the taken-for-granted notion of aggressive male sexuality.

In terms of co-sexuality, the masculinization of heteronormativity affected the process by which participants communicated about and embodied their own sex and sexuality. The normalization of gendered and aggressive (hetero)sexual harassment became clear in three ways: first, normalized talk about aggressive masculine sexuality, normalized masculinized sexual behavior, and the (hetero)sexualized regulation of women's bodies for masculinized consumption. Normalized talk about aggressive masculine sexuality primarily emerged in conversations between male coworkers. The explicit and sexist nature of these conversations reified male (hetero)sexual privilege as well as pushed other males toward accepting and performing this sexual norm. When male participants pulled away from this talk, they were aggressively disciplined and feminized by male coworkers. Normalized masculinized (hetero)sexual aggressive behaviors were reflected in stories from participants of all gender and sexual identities.

However, it was primarily women and female identified participants who described pushing away from the taken-for-granted notion that aggressive, potentially dangerous masculine (hetero)sexuality is "normal" but still described feeling pulled to accept these behaviors as though they were. Further complicating their experiences was an underlying presumption that sexual aggression was a wanted behavior. The normalization of this aggressive behavior was reflected by female-and-women participants who were sexually aggressive to feminized men and women. Finally, the masculinized regulation of bodies in the workplace reflected the normalization of straight, white males. Though inherently pushed away from this idealized center, gender and sexual minorities were expected to dress and comport themselves in ways that adhered to aggressive (hetero)sexual masculinity.

Silenced Sexual “Norms” and Organizational Control

The third and most powerful way participants talked about the push-pull process of co-sexuality in their workplaces was in terms of negotiating silenced sexual norms. Overwhelmingly, participants described not wanting to upset workplace balances and potentially threatening their social status or job. The desire to remain secure in the workplace pulled participants toward remaining silenced about topics of sex or sexuality in the workplace. However, participants of all sexual identities also described ways in which they wanted to push back against silenced sexual norms, particularly when the topic became more salient, such as when new policies were passed or when the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in 2015.

Silence is crucial to the process of co-sexuality: because sex and sexuality are silenced, the sexual “norm” remains undefined; employees can never be sure how, when, if, or in what way to speak about or enact sex or sexuality, or if these acts would be considered transgressive. The fluid nature of heteronormativity ultimately works to benefit organizations; because “normal” sexuality is unfixed, what is considered transgressive is also unfixed. In this way, sexually silenced “norms” work as a powerful form of organizational control (e.g., Deetz, 1992). Though organizations position themselves as asexual, organizational communication scholarship has long noted that employees are sexual beings (e.g., Horan & Chory, 2009; Rich, Schutten, & Rogers, 2012). Thus, how employees navigate talking about or enacting sex or sexuality in a sexually silenced context is a complex process that has material and emotional outcomes for organizations and employees.

The process of organizing around sexual silence in organizations evolved in three primary stages. First, participants described experiencing organizations explicitly silencing sex or sexuality in workplaces through policies or workplace practices. Second, participants described self-silencing about topics related to sex or sexuality in their workplaces for reasons of personal or group preference, perceptions of professional expectations, or personal safety. One participant also described simultaneously silencing himself in the presence of a sexually silenced self. Third, participants of all sexual identities ultimately internalized and reified the cultures of sexual silence in their workplaces, shutting conversations down or carving extra-organizational spaces to talk about or enact sex or sexuality that functioned away from our outside of the workplace. In this step, (hetero)sexual privilege became clearest, but also the most unstable. How participants negotiated cultures of sexual silence in their workplace ultimately served to silence others and maintain sexual norms in the workplace, again benefitting the organization. I describe this process below.

Organizations Silencing Sexuality. Participants of all sexual identities described ways in which their organizations silenced conversations about or acts of sex and sexuality through various means, including organizational policies, organizational practices, or conversations between managers and employees. In terms of co-sexuality, explicit organizational silencing of sexuality serves as an important component of the process of constructing and bounding sexual norms in the workplace. Of note, heterosexual participants tended to describe organizations silencing all acts or conversations about sex or sexuality, whereas sexual minority participants were more likely to talk about organizations silencing acts or conversations about sexual diversity.

Though I thought I might find a difference between descriptions of organizational silencing between blue collar and white collar employees' narratives, I did not; the processes by which sexuality was explicitly silenced were common across all job types.

An example of a participant who had specific policies and training regarding sex and sexuality was Rina, a 64-year-old heterosexual white female recently employed as a pastor in Nebraska. Rina told me that issues surrounding sexuality in interactions with members of the congregation were very important in her profession, and that she was explicitly given "boundaries" about what she could and could not say or do in regards to these topics or behaviors:

The denomination, ah, our profession does require us to have boundary training every three years. And, uh, originally, that boundary training was about making sure that we didn't, um, have inappropriate sexual relationships. And the, the policy is that even if we're talking about an unmarried member of the church and an unmarried pastor that, any relationship, sexual relationship between, a pastor and his or her parishioner is inherently, a relationship of, um, a sexual relationship is inherently an abuse of power. So there are pretty firm rules about, uh, sexual relationships, you know, even beyond adultery or, you know, any of the, the kind of the obvious ones.

Rina was pulled toward the sexual norm of silence about sex or sexuality in her profession because sex and sexuality have been negatively associated with power. Talk or acts of sex or sexuality are described as "inappropriate" and an "abuse," regardless of the relationship status of the pastor or parishioner. Rina told me that pastors who are found to be in violation of the "boundary" of sexual silence norm are pushed away from the

Church, even for infringements that may be considered small by many. An example Rina gave me of a violation of professionally-determined “boundaries” was developing platonic friendships with parishioners because a) this relationship is still associated with power and 2) these relationships could change into sexual relationships. In this way, “boundary” training effectively silenced sexuality in the workplace.

Like Rina’s description of “boundary training,” professional training sessions were also described as a site of organizations silencing sexuality in the workplace. Keri, a 28-year-old white bisexual woman who works as an instructor in Illinois, told me that training sessions in her workplace specifically addressed the regulation of sexual behavior:

We were explicitly told to our face multiple times, "Do not sleep with students." So, definitely, it's been made clear to us about, like, power positions. If you have power over someone, bureaucratically, that you should not have a sexual relationship with them.

Keri was laughing when she recounted the above story, telling me that while undergraduate students and their instructors do not sleep together because of this rule, graduate students and their professors of all sexualities sleep together all the time with no organizational consequences. This is interesting to the process of co-sexuality for two reasons. First, it is clear that organizations like Keri’s and Rina’s inherently connect acts of sex and sexuality to an abuse of power, pushing employees away from even considering acts of sex with a subordinate and pulling them toward a silenced sexual norm. However, the way Keri describes how this policy is used indicates that hierarchal status contextualizes how sexual norms are constructed. I interpret Keri to mean that

graduate students and instructors are perceived as having more agency and are thus closer in power status to professors, pushing graduate students and instructors away from the silenced sexual norm because this sexual norm is perceived as different for them. Second, Keri's description of the contextual way in which this strict organizational policy was interpreted elucidates how employees internalize and use policies beyond their explicit discourse (e.g., LeGreco, 2012). This implies that organizations must look beyond their policy texts to understand the nuances of co-sexuality because policy alone does not create sexual norms, but do contribute to the construction and maintenance of them.

The above examples primarily describe policies designed to construct a sexual norm that disallowed acts of sex or sexuality in the workplace. However, many participants described ways in which organizations used policies to create sexual norms in which conversations or talk about sex or sexuality were also disallowed. For example, Jane, a 32-year-old straight white female employed at a radio station in Missouri, described feeling pressured to conform to silenced norms by organizational policies when the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in 2015. Though Jane wanted to celebrate with her colleagues, professional and organizational regulations disallowed this behavior:

Because we work for [Radio Station] the radio's on all the time and I heard the news [about the legalization of gay marriage] break on... on [Radio Station] and I immediately ran into my boss's office right around the corner and I was like, "This is the best day ever." And she was like, "Yeah I know." And we had a little conversation ourselves; I mean that was kind of the extent of it. It wasn't really like all over the office like, "Woohoo." Although I did make a little rainbow piece

of paper, cut it out and taped it to my shirt. I had to. I'm not even sure a lot of people even noticed it because it was real small. My markers were pretty thin... I think we were all really happy about it. Um, everybody that I talked to was really happy about it. Um, but we also tried to... I mean because of FCC regulations and stuff, try not to portray our own views to the public or like, each other. There are a few folks that will, you know, will have further discussions but it's pretty limited. Like discussions on things like political issues that may have to do with sexuality and things like that. Usually we'll kind of do it in like a little hush-hush thing like in passing you know. If anything like that comes up but uh, we're all pretty separated as far as our offices go so there's not really a lot of risk of people overhearing.

The push and pull process of co-sexuality is clear in Jane's narrative. First, the FCC's rules construct a sexual "norm" in Jane's workplace that disallows personal views about sex or sexuality to be shared with the public, which she indicated translated into personal conversations about sex or sexuality being discouraged in her specific organization. However, in moments where topics of sex or sexuality become particularly salient, Jane and her colleagues pulled away from the silenced sexual "norm" by having conversations through Jane's "little rainbow piece of paper." However, Jane and her colleagues do not pull too hard away from the silenced sexual "norm;" conversations are described as "hush-hush" and Jane's rebellious rainbow flag was likely unnoticed because of its small size. The silenced sexual "norm" in Jane's workplace created a powerful boundary that she and her coworkers found small spaces to pull against, but only temporarily and in relatively quiet ways so as to not disrupt the organizational norm.

Finally, several sexual minority participants described occasions where their managers or supervisors specifically told them not to bring up issues about sex or sexuality in the workplace. Managers specifically targeting sexual minorities to silence them is important to the process of co-sexuality because it reifies the notion that sexual minorities face more complex boundaries when trying to adhere to privileged and normalized heteronormative heterosexuality. For example, Ashley, a 27-year-old pansexual transwoman employed as a web designer in Missouri described being very happy in her organization, telling me that she felt “grateful to have found a company...that is so aligned with what I consider to be an important...identity aspect.” However, when I asked Ashley how she knew her identity was supported, and specifically if she could speak openly about sexuality and gender identities, she told me:

When I was hired, um, I, I've been told if anything ever does come specifically from my gender identity, um, that it wouldn't be tolerated. Um, but also knowing, you know, how, how my, my boss reacted, you know, when I specifically brought up same sex marriage, um, you know, politics, um, that it was, you know, silenced.

When Ashley was hired, she told her managers about her gender and sexual identities, who told her they did not care so long as she did not disrupt workplace norms. In Ashley's organization, the sexual “norm” was silence about sex, sexuality, and specific to Ashley, sexual diversity. However, for Ashley, silence worked two ways: the silenced sexual “norm” worked to protect Ashley from coworkers who could say negative or derogatory things about her gender or sexual identity. Thus, Ashley pushed herself toward complying with the silenced sexual norm because she was “grateful” for this

protection. However, like Jane, when larger social issues of sex or sexuality, particularly the legalization of same sex marriage, became salient, Ashley pulled away from the silenced sexual norm and openly talked about same-sex marriage with her coworkers. According to Ashley, her boss directly told her to stop talking about this topic, both in front of her coworkers and also in a private meeting. In terms of co-sexuality, Ashley is left in an in-between space; both pulling towards silenced sexual “norms” and pushing away from them have negative and positive consequences that are different for her than for her cisgendered, heterosexual colleagues.

Similarly, Sara, who describes herself as a 24-year-old white cisgender/tomboy bisexual employed as a graphic designer, told me that silence about sex and sexuality was the sexual “norm” in her organization, and her organization actively worked to silence sexuality in their office to minimize disruptions for everyone. Of note, Sara thought sexual silence was more regulated for sexual minorities than her heterosexual or straight identified coworkers. However, Sara told me the silenced sexual “norm” was problematic for many employees when the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in 2015:

We try to keep the office very, like, politically, you know, um, neutral and try not to talk about things because we, we know how people, ah, how people feel, um, about certain issues, but when there was, um ... Uh, when June 26th happened, um, we were told that it was probably not a good idea to talk about that in, like, our normal, general chat channels because of the way people might feel about that, and I think the fact that people feel that they object to the rights of other people, um, based on whatever ways that they have, that they don't and people could be happy, legally, into one of, like ... You would want to celebrate with

them, but like at least recognize that this is a significant and newsworthy event, but no.

As Sara described this event, she became more and more agitated. First, it is important to note that Sara described the silenced sexual “norm” in her workplace as a product of self-silencing between colleagues. Sara and her colleagues, regardless of their sexual identities or opinions about topics related to sex and sexuality, were willing to push toward silenced sexual norms to maintain workplace cohesion, and implicitly deferred to heteronormative privilege. However, when historic events about sexual diversity became salient in the workplace, Sara and some of her colleagues pulled away from this norm and were effectively silenced by their organization. Sara’s surprise and outrage that avoiding disruption of heteronormative workplace norms was more important to the organization than “celebrating...a significant and newsworthy event” made Sara think about sexual “norms” in her workplace in ways she had not before. Though Sara told me she was hurt by this event, she pulled closer to the silenced heteronormative center temporarily to protect her job until she and her colleagues carved a separate space out for themselves, which I discuss later.

Participants with various sexual identities described the ways in which their organizations silenced acts of and conversations about sex or sexuality. Organizational silencing of sex and sexuality was accomplished through constructing silenced sexual “norms” in policies and trainings. Additionally, managers or supervisors shut down or forbade conversations or acts of sex and sexuality. In terms of co-sexuality, sexual minority participants described being either specifically targeted by their organizations and silenced or, more generally, have greater difficulty navigating silenced

heteronormative workplace norms than their heterosexual or straight counterparts, though heterosexual participants experienced the push-and-pull of navigating silenced sexual “norms” as well.

It is important to the silencing component of the process of co-sexuality that the way in which participants talked about organizational silencing indicated that they had internalized organizationally-silenced sexuality as “normal” in their workplaces. Participants spoke of the organizationally bounded silence sexual “norm” as taken-for-granted except in moments when sex or sexuality, particularly sexual diversity, became particularly salient. In these moments, participants pulled away from silenced sexual norms in various ways, though all participants pushed toward the silenced sexual “norm” to keep their jobs, ultimately benefitting the organization. Not all participants described organizational acts of silencing, however; many described silence about sex and sexuality in the workplace in terms of self-silencing. I describe this below.

Silencing the Self: Sex and Sexuality. Many participants told me that they chose not to talk about sex or sexuality in the workplace for personal reasons ranging from their personalities to adhering to their perception of professional conduct as asexual. Self-silencing was always described as a conscious act by participants. However, how participants described self-silencing was different based on sexual identity category, affecting the push-pull process of co-sexuality. Heterosexual participants, whose sexual identities pulled them closer to the sexual “norm,” had more freedom to choose how they talked or enacted sex or sexuality at work. Contrastingly, sexual minorities sexual identities pushed them away from heteronormative workplace norms and thus their (coerced) “choice” to self-silence was a function of self-protection. Participants’

narratives elucidated this process well; heterosexual-identified participants primarily described self-silencing in terms of personal preference, whereas sexual minority participants primarily self-silenced to protect themselves from possible discrimination. In addition, whereas sexual minority participants could readily speak to their conscious acts of self-silencing, heterosexual-identified participants tended to have not thought about their acts of self-silencing until our conversation, not only revealing the taken-for-granted privilege that heterosexual participants have in workplaces, but also revealing the complex ways in which people of all sexualities organize around sexual norms. Finally, one participant described a coworker as being “silenced” through her lack of ability to speak the language and whose voice was co-opted by a sexually aggressive male coworker. Though this narrative was unique, it is important to the process of co-sexuality.

Many heterosexual-or-straight-identified participants attributed their self-silence about sex or sexuality as a component of their personality. For example, when I asked Pete, a 27-year-old straight white male employed as a miner in Missouri if he talked about sex or sexuality with his coworkers, he said:

Not really. That I can think of. Um, I don't know. I've always been one of those people who tries to keep work and life separate, so if someone brings up something like that in conversation, I'll kind of, I'll talk to them. But I'm not really the type to bring up personal matters at work.

Pete's narrative does two things. First, it positions “work” and “life” as separate arenas, and specifically sex and sexuality as a “personal matter,” placing it firmly in the private (or “life) sphere rather than the public (or “work”) sphere. Second, Pete's narrative reveals that he perceives he has agency over how or if he talks about sex or sexuality at

work. By first privatizing sex and sexuality, Pete gains control over how or if his opinions about or enactments of sex and sexuality are talked about and frames this as larger component of his “private” personality. He also gives himself the agency to break this silence: if someone brings it up to him, he will talk about it, but only if he chooses to. Put differently, Pete’s “personality” is to pull himself toward the norm of sexual silence, but will push away from this norm if he chooses to, a privilege afforded those positioned closer to the sexual norm.

Similarly, Jim a 26-year-old straight white male employed in a coal plant in Missouri, also told me that he did not talk about sex or sexuality at work because of his personality, but also because he wanted to be perceived as professional. When I asked him how or if he chose to talk about sex or sexuality, he told me:

Um, it's not really my personality to bring [sexuality] up in the work site. Um, I kind of have my own opinions. Um, but I don't feel like I need to share unless somebody wants to know. And then at that point sometimes I'm even a little bit more reserved. Because I don't want somebody to force their opinion on me. Um, so it's, it's weird in a sense because you know I'm gonna try and stay out of the way of causing that conflict if there could be one. I mean my personality agrees with the professionalism of a workplace. But it also agrees with professionalism elsewhere as well. I mean in a setting when you're out with friends that you know, you don't want to cause conflict because you're having a good time. You don't want to hurt people's feelings. Um, in some settings it's probably a good idea to be professional. Even in social settings. Um, so I definitely agree with that.

Jim, like Pete, first attributes his self-silencing about sex or sexuality to his personality, pulling himself toward the norm because he is naturally inclined toward the silenced sexual “norm.” However, it is clear that Jim could push himself away from the silenced heteronormative sexual norm, hinted at by his statement that he has “his own opinions” about the topic. Ultimately, Jim frames his self-silence as a choice; both because he wants to be perceived as “professional” and also because he wants to protect himself from the opinions of others. Finally, and most important, Jim’s narrative also begins to reveal how organizations benefit from the act of self-silencing about sex or sexuality. It is important to Jim that he does not cause conflict, implicitly placing sex or sexuality as a topic or act that could disrupt workplace stability. By Jim choosing to self-silence despite his opinions that may contrast sexual “norms” in his workplace, Jim is pulling toward and ultimately maintaining the boundary that “normal” sexuality sets in his workplace.

Other participants, such as Kelly, a 29-year-old Caucasian heterosexual female working for a library system in Missouri, attributed sexual silence to a perceived cultural norm reflecting the personalities and communication preferences of the collective. I asked her what kinds of conversations she and her colleagues had on a daily basis, and if sexuality ever came up. She responded:

Um, we like organization. We like details, generally. Um, we like people but we're very task oriented so, you know, we like to solve problems. We're not so much, like, “people people” in a way that, you know, we just want to sit and chat and actually talk about feelings, and each other, and relationships. But, we are very interested in serving each other's needs, I guess...Information needs.

What I learned from Kelly later in our conversation was that library patrons were

frequently sexually aggressive toward employees and, as a result, she and her colleagues of diverse sexualities had an implicit agreement to make their private conversations as sex-or-sexuality free as possible so as not to make the work environment potentially more toxic. It is important to the process of co-sexuality that this implicit agreement was presented as a taken-for-granted norm and was attributed to the collective's personality in the above quote, rather than framed as a choice made by the group, because it reveals the organizational power of this co-constructed silenced sexual norm. First, Kelly's narrative reveals that sexual silence in her organization is, in some ways, a functional norm that she and her colleagues pulled toward; Kelly told me it was out of "respect" for each others' privacy and personal boundaries that they chose to speak exclusively about work issues. Second, this silenced sexual norm is also dysfunctional; when patrons made aggressive sexual advances toward her, Kelly told me she felt like she could not talk about the experience with her coworkers because of this implicit agreement. The requirement of self-silence made her uncomfortable and at times made her want to push away from the silenced norm. Again, the organization benefits from this implicit agreement between employees to self-silence; the organization presumably must deal with potentially disruptive clients (though Kelly told me that she was mostly just expected to accept harassment as normal). Employees constructing and maintaining silenced sexual norms with each other allows the organization the freedom let employees self-regulate through concertive control; employees uphold their own norms rather than the organization stepping in to regulate transgressive behaviors, often in more extreme ways than the organization would (Barker, 1993).

Sexual minorities, on the other hand, described their choice to self-silence in terms of self-protection rather than attributing it to their personality, professionalism, or respect for others. For example, Keri, a 28-year-old white bisexual woman working at a Midwestern university told me that heterosexual relationships were clearly privileged in her workplace. She described being frustrated with the fact married heterosexual-or-straight identified women could openly talk about their partners and aspects of their sex lives because these relationships were legitimized and normalized in her workplace. When I asked her if she wanted to talk about her own relationships or sex life, she told me:

Yeah, I feel like there's a lot that maybe would come up and I would want to talk about it. I wish it was a less taboo thing, but I don't even feel like it's just a third floor thing [where Keri works]. I feel like, unless I have, like, an established, almost like intimate relationship with somebody, like, like, maybe we would talk abstractly about somebody else's sex, but I don't know that I would talk about, like, my sexual experience and my sex life at work or with somebody that I didn't have almost unconditional love and trust with. Just because I think that makes you so vulnerable in a lot of ways, so I feel like there are a lot of times when I would want to talk about sex at work, maybe, or something might come up, but it's just like, my filter says, "Don't say that, don't talk about that."

When I asked Keri to tell me why she thought talking about sex or sexuality could make her vulnerable, she told me that most of her coworkers presumed she was straight because until recently she had been in a heterosexual relationship with a coworker. Keri went on to say that she self-silenced because other queer-identified employees had been

targeted by both heterosexual and sexual minority coworkers, their sex and sexuality used as “ammo” to destroy their personal relationships amongst colleagues but also with management.

Primarily, Keri perceived that her sexual identity as well as any conversation she might have about non-heterosexual sex acts pushed her away from the sexual norm; again, the organization benefitted from Keri’s silence and agreement not to upset sexual “norms.” For example, had Keri decided to put herself and risk and push against silenced sexual norms in the workplace, she may have caused a confrontation or even quit her job, both of which the organization would have had to expend resources to rectify. However, her narrative revealed that she had internalized this expectation and that her “filter” kept her from pushing away from this norm. In terms of co-sexuality, the idea that her sexuality could be used as a weapon against her, resulting in potential loss of status or job, coerced Keri into adhering to the heteronormative sexual norm in her organization. To pull herself closer to the sexual norm, Keri silenced herself from correcting people’s perception of her heterosexual status, despite her wanting to talk about sex and sexuality in the workplace.

A third and unique way that one participant described sexual silence in his workplace reveals the push-pull struggle between individual sexual agency and language, and silence. Matt, a 32-year-old Caucasian heterosexual male, told me he was uncomfortable with the physical act of sex being common in his workplace and his profession. As we talked, he told me he had repeatedly heard stories about a female coworker who repeatedly engaged in sexual behaviors at work, but did not speak English well:

Um, well, there's an Asian girl there that everybody, I don't know if it's true or not, but when I first started they were like, \$5 she'll suck your dick. I just thought everybody was joking around about it and stuff, and then, I know, it's bad, right? So then, our, one of our techs back in our department like, disappeared for a little while and she was gone too, and supposedly, according to him, and I don't talk to her, I mean, I can't really understand her. She doesn't really speak, she speaks very, very, very broken English. And supposedly they went and fucked in the bathroom. There's a lot of stories about people just, I don't know, taking a break to get things done (laughs). But I think that happens a lot like, in the manufacturing world when there's a mix of guys and girls. I'm sure it happens in everything, but uh, yeah. Manufacturers are a rude, crude lot of people for sure.

Silencing is happening in two ways here. First, Matt's narrative is an example of the push-pull of self-silencing, described earlier. Specifically, Matt told me that he had not reported this explicit sexual behavior to management, despite how taken aback by it he claimed to be. Speaking directly about Matt's behavior: initially, he had a hard time believing that sexual acts were common in his workplace and rationalized the (hetero)sexual norm as people joking to pull himself back toward the sexual norm. When Matt broke from his story to say, "I know it's bad, right?" he demonstrated his desire to push away from this sexual "norm" with me. However, explicit and abusive sex acts were the norm in his workplace, which Matt did not question or report to his superiors, making his self-silencing an act of compliance and pulling toward the sexual "norm" in his workplace. Privately, Matt pushed away from this sexual norm; publically, his inaction pulled him toward it.

The second and potentially most important component of silencing in this narrative is the “Asian girl” that Matt refers to. Because she cannot speak “clear” English, her voice is inherently silenced. Rather than this woman self-silencing, which in other participant narratives has presented as a conscious choice, she instead faced the reality of being a silenced self; an individual whose voice is not or cannot be heard. Indeed, the only voice that this person has is the male tech who claims that she sexually pleased him. Interestingly, Matt, who appears to push himself away from the sexual “norm” in his workplace that takes advantage of silenced selves, justifies and pulls himself back toward sexual norms by attributing these acts to something that happens when there is “mix of guys and girls,” particularly in his profession that is composed of “rude, crude” individuals. Through this justification, (hetero)sexual sex seems almost inevitable, and thus justifiable.

Self-silencing, as well as silenced selves, was common in participant narratives. Heterosexual-and-straight identified participants tended to speak about self-silencing as a choice; sexual minorities tended to self-silence as a precaution. In terms of co-sexuality, this difference is important, as it explicates the privilege and power that socially normalized performances of heterosexuality have to organize employees’ conversations and behaviors in their workplaces. As long as heteronormativity remains the sexual ideal, this process will always be more complicated and treacherous for sexual minorities, though no human of any sexuality can ever truly perform ideal heteronormativity because it is constantly shifting. It is important to note that organizations benefitted from the act of self-silencing. Specifically, through acts of concertive control (Barker, 1993), employees regulated each other’s self-silencing behaviors, pulling all employees closer to

the silenced sexual “norm” despite many internally wanting to push away from this norm and find voice. The organization, as a result, had to spend little or no resources maintaining silenced boundaries that were strictly regulated by employees themselves.

Co-Sexuality: A Cycle of Sexual Silence. In terms of co-sexuality, the taken-for-granted and internalized way participants described organizational silencing and self-silencing about sex and sexuality as a component of “normal” sexuality is crucial to the process of organizing around sexual “norms.” Though the specifics of how participants pushed toward or pulled away from silenced sexual “norms” varied, primarily based on sexual identity, participants of all sexual identities consciously and unconsciously worked to reify the silenced sexual “norm” in the workplace in ways that ultimately benefited the organization.

The cycle of sexual “silence” presented in three primary ways. First, heterosexual and straight identified or presenting participants had the privilege of talking about certain aspects of sex and sexuality, particularly their relationships and families, that sexual minority participants did not. Because participants had pulled toward heterosexual relationships as “normal,” sexual minorities were effectively pushed away from sexual norms and silenced. Ultimately, heteronormative privilege was unconsciously reified. Second, participants described actively shutting down conversations about sex or sexuality when they pushed the boundary of sexual silence as defined by their contextual workplace sexual “norm.” Finally, sexual minority participants described carving spaces inter-and-extra-organizationally where they could pull away from silenced sexual “norms” and construct their own “norms” that allowed conversations about sex or

sexuality. However, these participants regulated conversations and acts of sex and sexuality at work and directed those who transgressed this norm to their separate space, ultimately pushing their colleagues and their own behaviors toward the silenced sexual “norm” in the workplace. I describe this below.

Normalized (Hetero)sexual Voice; Silenced Sexual Diversity. Overwhelmingly, heterosexual or straight-identified participants told me that they did not think any topic related to sex or sexuality were appropriate or salient topics in their workplaces. However, as we talked, several of them described talking to and connecting with coworkers about activities they had done with their families, their relationship status or their significant others, or their children, all topics they came to realize were related to their sexuality. The taken-for-granted nature of this conversation and the unreflexive way in which it was described to me reveals the power of hegemonic heteronormativity as a sexual norm within organizations – those who identify with the dominant sexual culture (Orbe, 1998) receive the privilege of voicing their sex(uality), while all others are silenced or made transgressive.

An example of this unreflexive heteronormative privilege comes from Kelly, a 29-year-old heterosexual Caucasian female, who told me that she and her coworkers talked about their families frequently:

We talk about my kids all the time, and we talk about ... I mean, like, I think that a lot of my coworkers just about ... Like, telling funny stories about [my husband] and what he's done, and I mean, like, no sex stories or anything, but you know?...I just heard about a few kids that [my coworkers are] having, you know, a pretty happy marriage and stuff. I would say [we talk about it] everyday though, at least

multiple times a day. People ask me about my kids all the time. I never realized how easy it was, you know like, to make small talk until I had children. There's always something to talk about with the kids. "That's [my daughter]. She's getting older." You know, like, people come up and they're like, "How are the kids?" That's their first question, and I'm like, "Oh, good." I don't have to worry about what to talk to you about because I can tell them about my kids and family.

When I asked Kelly how her coworkers sexually identified, she told me that knew most of them were heterosexual because of the sex of their partner or spouse, or, more important, did not know because they did not talk about it. Though unintentional, Kelly's above narrative reflects the cycle of sexual silence in two ways. First, the comfort with which she is able to discuss her spouse and family life demonstrates that she is empowered and legitimized to do so within the parameters of the sexual norms in her organization. Second, the parameters of the (hetero)sexual "norm" in her organization are reflected in the content of the taken-for-granted normalized conversations about (hetero)sexuality and sex that Kelly describes ("telling funny stories about my husband;" "we talk about kids all the time"). Specifically, Kelly says that "sex stories" would be considered transgressive. However, through enthymematic reasoning, Kelly's narrative implies that heterosexual sex is normative through mention of children. Most important, Kelly's narrative reveals that there is a privileged space for certain kinds of communication about sex or sexuality. It is clear that she understands and maintains those boundaries as well as benefits from both the privilege of heterosexuality and, specifically, having kids. Kelly's narrative unconsciously pulls her within the parameters of the

heterosexual heteronormative center, where certain conversations about or acts of sex, and possibly sexual minorities, cannot fit.

Ultimately, the organization benefits from conversations like the ones described in Kelly's narrative in two ways. First, because Kelly "always" has something to talk about with co-workers or clients, she is able to use this taken-for-granted part of her identity to connect with others and provide better service, which benefits the organization financially. Second, because her sexual identity category, her relationship status, and her performance of sexuality (having children) is in line with organizational sexual "norms," she can unthinkingly speak about sex or sexuality within the parameters set by "normal" sexuality without disrupting it. Those whose relationships or behaviors are in violation of those norms could potentially cause an upset to organizational workflows which could be problematic for the organization.

One of the most self-reflexive moments a participant had during an interview came from Mimi, a 46-year-old white heteroflexible female employed as a diversity coordinator in Missouri. Mimi, who is married to a male-identified individual, initially told me that she did not talk about sex or sexuality at work because she did not find it to be appropriate and because she was a private individual, similar to the narrative of self-silencing described by other participants. However, as we talked, she acknowledged:

You know, but here's the thing I just realized. Ha! So, while I don't explicitly talk about my sexuality [at work] ... Anytime I've ever referred to my husband, I am in fact referring to my sexuality. And, that's something, you know I've kind of been struggling with for a while; feeling like I should say, you know, "My partner." I want to sort of like revoke some of that heteronormative privilege that I have. At

the same time, partner doesn't feel like ... You know, like the right term. Like, it doesn't resonate with me... So, anyway, I realized that I invoke heteronormative privilege every time I say "My husband", and I am in fact talking about my sexuality in that in that way.

Mimi's narrative centers around the taken-for-granted language of heterosexuality, elucidating her unique position amongst participants in this study to have voice as someone whose chosen identity category and sexual behavior is closer to, but not directly in line with, heterosexuality. Specifically, Mimi brings to light the privilege associated with the push-and-pull of navigating terminology associated with sexual identity categories and relational categories. First, Mimi acknowledges that by simply bringing up her husband, she was referencing (hetero)normative sexuality and was able to pull toward the heteronormative center without thought. Mimi had not consciously recognized that "husband" (in relation to her female sex) signified a privileged relational category associated with a privileged sexual identity category that gave her "heteroflexible" identity voice where many other sexual minority voices are silenced. Second, because the alternative relational identifier "my partner," a neutral and inclusive term (Qvist, 2013) was not the "right term" for Mimi, she defaulted to the implicitly normative and privileged relational term "my husband," which signified a heterosexual relationship and identity from coworkers. This is particularly interesting, as she could have used the gender-neutral term "spouse." Though Mimi pushes away from heterosexual privilege, Mimi's unconscious choice of vocabulary speaks to her access to privileged sexual "norms" that other non-heterosexual participants do not have access to which allowed her

to comfortably and unthinkingly rely upon the dominant sexual culture's implicit language and allowed her to pull closer to the center (Orbe, 1998).

Both Kelly and Mimi provided examples of how heterosexuality is implicitly privileged in their workplaces. Though each workplace has parameters defining what "normative" behaviors and interactions regarding sex and sexuality are, these participants both had the ability to unthinkingly voice aspects of their sexuality in casual workplace conversations, revealing the privilege and normalization of heterosexuality, marriage, and reproduction in Midwestern workplaces. Kelly, who identifies as heterosexual, unconsciously used her sexuality, specifically her experiences as a wife and mother, as a way of connecting with others, pulling herself toward the heteronormative center to find common ground through heteronormative experiences that ultimately benefitted her employer. On the other hand, Mimi, who identifies as "heteroflexible," implicitly relied on the language associated with her heterosexual-appearing marriage to pull toward the heteronormative center. Mimi unthinkingly referred to her opposite-sex partner as "my husband" which has traditionally been associated with heterosexuality and thus heteronormative privilege. Both participants benefitted from using the dominant sexual culture's language in ways that benefitted the organization and upheld heteronormative privilege in the workplace.

Shutting Down the Conversation. Several participants, the majority of them identifying as heterosexual or straight, described stopping conversations about sex or sexuality once the participant perceived the conversation to be pushing the contextual boundaries set by the silenced sexual "norm" in their workplaces. Though sexual "norms" and their relationship to silence functioned differently between organizations,

the conversations that were silenced as a result of this process were generally about sexual diversity. In this way, heteronormative privilege was reified and silenced sexual norms were upheld.

For example, Evan, a 32-year-old heterosexual Caucasian male employed as a waiter and bartender in Missouri, described shutting down coworkers' conversations about sex and sexuality at work once he felt they crossed a certain "line." Evan told me that conversations about sex and sexuality, particularly sexual acts between men, were common in his workplace. Employees often goaded each other into more aggressive and more extreme conversations, as described in the previous section of this analysis. Evan told me he participated in these conversations because they were a source of stress release and humor. It was clear from his narrative that he was adhering to and reinforcing the boundaries for silenced sex(ual) talk in his workplace:

To me, when someone is like, shutting something down, and I do it sometimes, it's because it's gotten...too loud. And crossing a line. Because with this place, I mean, people have conversations when there's people in the restaurant. Now, they probably can't hear you, you know, if someone was close and the conversation's getting a little loud then you gotta shut it down. That's, I, I don't think that that's like violating a norm, but like, talking openly and loudly about sex, like gay sex when there's people in your restaurant, that's, that's like violating, that's violating I think, because they don't know you. You don't know them.

Though Evan frequently pulls toward the explicit and graphic sexual norm of his workplace by engaging in sexualized talk, he pushes away from this norm when he perceives that his colleagues have "crossed a line" in front of customers. Evan, and

presumably his colleagues (when “someone is like, shutting something down”) have internalized the boundaries of when, rather than what, talk about sexuality should be silenced. The fact that Evan describes the normalized explicit sexual talk in “this place” as something that would likely be constructed as a “violation” for most customers, reveals both the cycle of sexual silence as well as points to how the organization benefits from this cycle. First, the fact that Evan specifically mentions explicit talk about “gay sex” as a “violation” for customers simultaneously reifies the heterosexual norm in his workplace but presumably also across the Midwest; Midwesterners are uncomfortable with sexual diversity and likely do not want to talk or hear about it. Though it is unclear if only explicit conversations about gay sex are shut down (which I doubt), the fact that Evan mentions gay sex reifies the idea that conversations about sexual diversity are not appropriate and pushes sexual minorities from the sexual norm. Second, the fact that the sexual “norm” in Evan’s workplace is for coworkers to talk about explicit sexuality makes the importance of “shut[ting] it down” even more crucial when customers are in the restaurant, as this norm is perceived as “violating” larger Midwestern norms bounding “normal” conversations about sex and sexuality. Finally, the organization benefits from employees like Evan who both participate in the culture of explicit sexual talk that gives them stress relief and bonds them with their coworkers as well as setting silenced boundaries for that explicit sexual norm when it could potentially be threatening to the organization’s income.

Similarly, Kelly, a 29-year-old heterosexual female employed as a librarian in Missouri, described silencing conversations about sex and sexuality, specifically sexual diversity, in her workplace when they became “unprofessional.” In Kelly’s organization,

there were specific spaces as well as ways in which sex and sexuality could be talked about between coworkers, which she and her coworkers were careful to monitor. When I asked her to tell me how she and her coworkers regulated these conversations, she told me:

I think it comes back to the way you would talk about it...We definitely discussed the organization and its position on the LGBTQ non-discrimination policy, you know? ...You know, it's like a current event that we all discussed in the staff room, never on the floor...and I would say that as long as you can, kind of, back out when it starts to become confrontational and calm down and go back to work, then it's fine. But, if we're getting into shouting matches, that would be inappropriate and unprofessional. Completely inappropriate, you know? And yeah, we'd shut those, those employees down.

Again, sex and sexuality was primarily talked about in Kelly's organization only when the conversation became salient. In the example Kelly provided, the topic was again related to sexual diversity. Kelly has internalized the norms and boundaries of how sexuality is talked about in her workplace, rather than if. Kelly and her coworkers push toward the sexually silenced norms in her workplace by moving the conversation to the staff room and "never on the floor." This was not organizationally mandated; Kelly and her coworkers chose to separate these conversations from patrons on their own. Kelly and her coworkers do push away from sexual silence when they become particularly salient; specifically, Kelly mentions an LGBTQ non-discrimination policy that she and her coworkers talked about at length. It is interesting to the process of co-sexuality that Kelly immediately recognizes that topics related to sexual diversity can cause emotional

outbursts from employees, and, regardless of one's opinion on that topic, the organizational norm of sexual silence should be privileged over those conversations. In this way, Kelly and her coworkers self-regulate and mind the boundaries of "professional" and "appropriate" talk about sex and sexuality in the workplace, ultimately benefitting the organization.

Participants primarily identifying as heterosexual or straight described recognizing the boundaries of sexual silence in their workplaces and shut down conversations about sex and sexuality when they began pushing away from that silenced norm. Participants described topics related to sexual diversity as the most transgressive to sexual norms in the workplaces and actively worked to silence them. Again, the organization benefits from organizational members who internalize the normalized sexually silenced "boundaries" in the workplace and work to regulate them. However, some sexual minority participants described creating spaces in which they could talk about these topics outside of the purview of organizational norms. I describe this below.

Moving Sexuality Outside of the Workplace. In several organizations, sexual minority employees described feeling oppressed by the sexually silenced norm and worked to carve a space for conversations with coworkers about these topics. Though these separated spaces did allow sexual minority and allied participants a way to push away from silenced sexual norms in their workplaces and pull toward a sexual "norm" in which topics of sex and sexuality were voiced, the separated nature of these spaces ultimately reified and pushed employees toward the silenced sexual norms in the larger organization. In fact, the organization benefitted from sexual minority employees creating

these spaces, as these employees would remove those who pushed the silenced sexual “norm” in the larger workplace and recruit them into these smaller, separate spaces.

For example, Sara, a 24-year-old white cisgender/tomboy bisexual employed as a graphic artist in Missouri, told me the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015 caused a great deal of conversation among her coworkers. Sara’s coworkers primarily communicate electronically through electronic chat channels, most of which are public and readable by all employees (including managers), and a few private channels dedicated to specific work groups or managers who have access to private employee information. When the Supreme Court ruling was announced, Sara told me the public channels were flooded with people talking positively about the ruling as well as their acceptance of sexual diversity. Sara’s boss immediately shut down this conversation in the public channel by claiming they might be offensive to other employees. As a result, Sara and her colleagues created a separate space:

[Our boss is like] "Hey, please don't talk about this," but, um, I think we also maybe, not like, not like struck back, but we've also...We created a, um, a private [chat] channel where people have to be invited in, and you can't see it unless you're invited in, and that one is specifically to talk about LGBT issues as they come up in, um, in culture, in day to day, and just, like, talking about issues like that, and that's perfectly fine, I guess, because, I mean, I ... because it was just, like, bound to happen. If, like, if you're gonna talk about it, you know, maybe not say it where people can be offended kind of thing. It's like something that we all kind of ... I think we have, like, one, like, policeman, I guess I'd say, but I think we all kind of like enforce culture together, it seems, because we ... You know,

now that we know that, talking about sexual diversity issues is not okay in the general channels, we've entirely moved it to private channels or just one on one messages, and we don't keep that out there at all. Or we talk about it after work over beer, um, so, I mean, it's, it's something that I think was created but we all enforce, so to say.

This separate space allowed sexual minority and allied employees a location in which to talk about topics related to sexual diversity outside of the purview of managers or other potentially heterosexist employees. Put differently, this space provided Sara and her colleagues a way to push back against the silenced sexual norm in the organization.

However, Sara and her group actually work to regulate the sexually silenced norms in her organization more stringently than her bosses. Sara told me that her group's "policeman" looks for employees who are talking about sex, sexuality, and specifically sexual diversity in the larger chat channel and invites them to the separate group. Ultimately, this action pushes vocal colleagues to adhere to sexual silence in the larger chat channel. In fact, Sara mentions that her entire group of coworkers in the private channels work to "enforce" the organization's sexually silenced norm so as not to "offend" anybody and because "now we know that talking about sexual diversity issues is not okay in the general channels." This behavior is a tremendous benefit to the organization, which now has internal assistance regulating chat channels.

Similarly, Callie, a 31-year-old pansexual woman employed as a librarian in Missouri, told me that about half of the employees in her organization were heterosexual-presenting women over 50 who she perceived to be "uncomfortable" talking about any topic related to sexuality. As a result, Callie perceived that the sexual "norm" in her

workplace was to silence conversations about sexuality. Callie told me that several of her younger coworkers had made subtle comments to her about wanting to discuss sexuality and sexual diversity, particularly after the Supreme Court's decision to approve same-sex marriage in 2015. Callie decided to coordinate a voluntary after-hours book club to welcome this conversation between coworkers:

We had a book club [where we discussed a [book about human sexuality]]. It opened a lot of discussions just between employees. I think a lot of us felt very um, close to one another, so we felt like coworkers, but we would also sometimes go out for drinks...And so we also considered each other friends. So that book discussion, which was focused on sex and sexuality, um, that seemed to be, it led to other discussions after that. And even some people who came into the library, like, one friend of mine, um, who works as a substitute in the...system, when he was there, we would sometimes have conversations about these things, too.

Again, Callie and her book club successfully pushed back against silenced sexuality in their workplace by creating a separate space in which conversations about sex and sexuality, particularly sexual diversity, could be given voice. However, by deferring to heterosexual-presenting colleagues' discomfort with these conversations and moving these conversations outside of the workplace, Callie's book club simultaneously deferred to and reinforced heteronormativity and pulled her colleagues back toward remaining silent about these topics in the workplace. Again, the organization benefitted from Callie's actions; the book club was a way of managing employees' desire to talk about potentially controversial topics that could disrupt heteronormative organizational norms. By independently creating this space as well as moving it away from and after work, the

organization did not have to manage these conversations in the same way they might without Callie and her colleagues.

Though both Callie and Sara described feeling the benefits of having a private space in which to talk about sex, sexuality, and sexual diversity with coworkers, they also acknowledged that they were doing far more identity work than their heterosexual or straight-identified colleagues. Neither participant mentioned the benefits to the organization they had provided; rather, both talked about the importance of creating separate spaces so as not to “offend” coworkers or disrupt the organizational norm. Ultimately, both women wanted to keep their jobs and implicitly perceived that by disrupting or pushing against heteronormativity, they were risking their positions. In fact, the number of sexual minority participants as well as heterosexual or straight-identified participants who described wishing they could have more opportunities to bring up political opinions or inclusive conversations about sexual diversity was overwhelming. However, these participants remained silenced because they perceived that this kind of talk would not be tolerated by all coworkers or management. Organizations should take note that participants want to have these conversations and should consider functional ways of facilitating them in respectful ways that do not threaten people’s jobs.

In terms of co-sexuality, the push-and-pull of negotiating sexual silence is crucial to the overall process. Ultimately, the organization benefitted from the process of silencing sexuality in the workplace, as participants worked hard not to disrupt heteronormative organizational norms so as to keep their jobs. The process of sexual silence involved 3 steps: first, participants described ways that their organizations explicitly silenced sex or sexuality in workplaces. Organizations typically did this

through policies or workplace practices that silenced either sexual minorities or conversations about sexual diversity. Participants learned what the organizationally set boundaries were in terms of sexual silence and described pulling toward these norms despite, in many cases, wanting to push away. Second, participants also described self-silencing about topics related to sex or sexuality in their workplaces. Heterosexual or straight-identified participants tended to describe this as a choice; sexual minorities described self-silencing as a precaution, again explicating that the process of co-sexuality is more challenging for sexual minorities than heterosexual or straight-identified employees.

In the third and most important step, both explicit organizational acts of silencing as well as internal acts of self-silencing, participants of all sexual identities consciously and unconsciously internalized and pulled toward an organizational norm of sexual silence and actively worked to monitor and pull toward silencing sexuality. Some participants, who primarily identified as heterosexual or straight, shut conversations about sexuality down when they pushed too hard against silenced sexual norms. Sexual minority employees carved extra-organizational spaces to talk about or enact sex or sexuality that functioned away from or outside of the workplace. In this step, (hetero)sexual privilege became clearest; upsetting heteronormative organizational norms or possibly “offending” coworkers or clients with talk of sexuality, particularly sexual diversity, was repeatedly described as pushing the boundaries of “normal” sexuality in the workplace. How participants negotiated cultures of sexual silence in their workplace ultimately served to silence others and maintain sexual norms in the workplace. Organizations benefitted from the process of sexual silencing and coworkers and

employees self-monitoring, because they did not have to spend resources maintaining the boundaries of sexual silence.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This dissertation introduced and explored the topic of co-sexuality, a term that represents the process of humans communicatively organizing around social constructions of “normal” sexuality. Though organizing around taken-for-granted socially constructed sexual ideals can function as a larger social process, I chose to explore and develop co-sexuality in workplace contexts because of the powerful ways in which sex(uality) is regulated both explicitly (e.g., policies) and implicitly (e.g., concertive control) within and by organizations. Further, because our work or professional identities are a central lens through which we understand and position ourselves and others (e.g., Tracy & Trethewey, 2005; Wieland, 2010), exploring the process of organizing around a constructed sexual norm in workplace contexts is particularly salient to overall discussions of sexuality and identity work at the micro, meso, and macro levels. First, I will summarize my analysis in terms of my research questions. The remainder of my discussion will be focused on the implications of my analysis, specifically implications for sexuality scholarship, implications for co-cultural theory (Orbe, 1998), implications for organizational practice, and suggestions for further developing co-sexuality through future research. I discuss this below.

In order to determine participants’ perception of the normative sexual “center” that employees organize around, my first research question asked how participants described “normal” sexuality. Participants of all sexual identities were overwhelmingly consistent in their description of “normal” sexuality, all describing “normal” sexuality as the identity category of heterosexuality. Ultimately, participants either implicitly or explicitly positioned heteronormativity, or the privileging of heterosexuality and the

sense of “rightness” associated with doing so (Warner, 2002), as “normal” sexuality in their workplaces.

Though participants spoke of heteronormativity as a relatively fixed set of expected behaviors associated with heterosexuality as an identity category, what became clear almost immediately was the contextual and fluid nature of “normal” sexuality in individual workplaces. Heterosexual participants, many of whom were confident they would not be able to contribute to this dissertation because they had not actively thought about their own sexuality and how they organized around sexual “norms,” described ways in which their behaviors were in violation of heteronormative expectations in their workplaces. Violations of workplace sexual “norms” happened along gendered lines.

First, women-and-female participants were expected to live with their opposite-sex relational partner if in a committed relationship. When participants chose to live independently, coworkers of all sexualities expressed surprise, reflecting a contextual sexual “norm.” For example, “normal” sexuality in some organizations meant talking about sex and sexuality frequently and graphically; in other organizations, it meant oppressive silence. Second, women-and-female identified participants were more likely to be expected to have children and faced questions if they chose not to. Participants told me that it was primarily women-and-female coworkers who asked questions of participants about when they were planning to have kids and expressed surprise or disapproval if the participant had no plans to reproduce. Third, male-identified participants as well as women-and-female identified participants told me that marriage was both an expected norm as well as idealized in their organizations. This was true for both heterosexual and sexual minority participants, who described the pressure to find a

partner and marry now that the Supreme Court has legalized same-sex marriage in the United States. Of note, marriage legitimizes sexual minorities to perform their sexuality using heteronormative traditions (Warner, 1999) ultimately reinforcing this workplace sexual “norm” and likely larger social sexual “norms.”

Importantly, heterosexual-identified participants who recognized that their behaviors or communication were in violation of sexual “norms” in their workplaces worked to fix their behaviors and adhere to those “norms.” However, in many cases, adhering to sexual “norms” meant navigating tensions between personal conceptions and organizational conceptions of “normal” sexualities as well as simultaneously considering the social, political, and monetary effects of challenging or failing to uphold those sexual “norms.” Thus, co-sexuality is ultimately a push-and-pull toward and away from contextual sexual “norms.”

The process of simultaneously pushing-and-pulling toward and away from sexual “norms” addresses my next two research questions. RQ2 asked how participants constructed and maintained the boundaries of “normal” sexuality in the workplace, while RQ3 asked how employees pull toward or push away from sexual “norms” in their workplaces. Though these are two separate questions, my analysis reveals that they are intertwined pieces of the larger process of co-sexuality and thus I will discuss them together for both clarity and parsimony.

There were three primary ways in which participants constructed and maintained the boundaries of “normal” sexuality as well as pulled toward or pushed away from those norms. First, participants constructed and bounded “normal” sexuality through the use of master narratives. Master narratives are shared cultural stories that become taken-for-

granted explanatory tools, both maintaining and changing shared social understandings (Nelson, 2001) of various groups or identities. Put differently, Big-N Narratives implicitly set the context and storyline for individual narratives; the repeated nature of Big N-Narratives shaping little-n narratives indicates that participants are drawing upon a master narrative (Tannen, 2008). Because of the taken-for-granted way in which all participants talked about religious and cultural norms with me, I concluded that they were drawing upon what I refer to as master narratives of the Midwest.

The two master narratives of the Midwest included Judeo-Christian sexual norms as well as a cultural discomfort with (sexual) difference. Judeo-Christian sexual norms were described in terms of the rigid “faith perspective,” which first equated gender and sex, constructed them as a strict binary, and finally positioned “normal” sexuality explicitly as attraction between the two sexes. Though two participants spoke positively about the “faith perspective,” most did not. Similarly, the cultural norm of discomfort with (sexual) difference bounded “normal” sexuality by acknowledging the implicit privilege of heterosexuality and binary gender norms, though without direct reference to religious norms. Again, most participants described both Judeo-Christian and Midwestern cultural “norms” as oppressive, intolerant, and in many cases, homophobic.

Master narratives can be both upheld or contested (Bergen, 2010; Smith & Dougherty, 2012), which was evidenced in the push-and-pull process elucidated in participants’ narratives. Because of the negative way in which most participants constructed “normative” sexuality using both master narratives of the Midwest, participants of all sexualities were able to position this norm as something that they did not agree with or support. Some sexual minority participants specifically described their

“non-normative” sexuality as something that made others uncomfortable, and the inherent ways in which they were being pushed, rather than choosing to push, away from sexual “norms.” In all cases, participants constructed their own beliefs about “normal” sexuality in contrast or opposition to religious “norms” or discomfort with difference, citing preference for sexual diversity, inclusion, or by questioning the meaning of “normal.” Subsequently, participants positioned their own norms as not only different, but superior to those dictated by the two master narratives of the Midwest. This process effectively allowed all participants to push themselves away from oppressive sexual norms and pull themselves toward a new, “superior” sexual norm. However, participants of all sexualities pulled toward the norms constructed by the master narrative of the Midwest when it directly impacted their job duties or when participants perceived that pushing against norms threatened their jobs or income.

The second way participants constructed and maintained the boundaries of “normal” sexuality as well as pulled or pushed away from them was through the normalization of gendered and aggressive (hetero)sexuality. Though participants primarily discussed heteronormativity in gender-neutral terms, it became clear through their narratives that men’s sexuality was privileged over all others’ sexuality. Specifically, participants consistently talked about sex and sexuality in terms that made women objects of sexual consumption and normalized masculine aggression; specifically, the idea that women, females, and in some cases, feminized gay men, want to be aggressively flirted with, objectified, and generally sexually harassed in the workplace. Masculinized sexual aggression became particularly evident in three ways. First, through normalized conversations about masculinized aggressive (hetero)sexuality; second,

through normalized masculinized (hetero)sexual behaviors, and finally, through the masculinized regulation of (hetero)sexual bodies. Of note, normalized masculine aggressive (hetero)sexuality was evidenced by participants of various sexual and gender identities, not just heterosexual males.

Masculinized sexual aggression was normalized and quite evident in conversations between heterosexual-identified male-identified participants, particularly those in service work professions. These participants described ways that their (usually) male coworkers goaded one another into telling more and more aggressive sex stories such as talking about graphic gay male sex acts in extreme detail as well as pressuring other male coworkers into openly harassing and sexualizing women. Participants described feeling pulled to adhere to this aggressive sexual norm from their coworkers who feminized participants or their coworkers (“are you a fag?”) if and when they pushed against aggressive masculinized sexualized norms in the workplace. Participants also felt pulled toward engaging in extreme sexual talk in order to “keep up” and fit in with their coworkers and aggressively masculine sexual culture.

Masculinized (hetero)sexual aggression was normalized in acts of physical and verbal harassment between coworkers as well. Acts of harassment or sexual aggression do not make sense in modern workplaces where there are strict sexual harassment policies that threaten serious repercussions for employees found in violation of that policy. Participants’ narratives revealed that aggressive sexual acts happen frequently because women and feminized men were constructed as wanting to be the recipients of masculinized sexual aggression. Descriptions of masculinized (hetero)sexual aggression were found most often in stories told by women-and-female identified participants. These

participants described wanting to push back against coworkers and clients who made them feel uncomfortable, and in some cases, physically threatened. The participants' primary means of pushing back, reporting aggressive sexual behavior to the organization, was either fruitless or impossible; either the organization normalized this behavior ("he's just flirting with you") or the recipient of the report was a harasser themselves. In other words, the organization normalized masculinized sexual aggression (Clair, 1998) and made it nearly impossible for participants to push back against this norm. In order to keep their jobs and their source of income, these participants had to pull toward coping with this masculinized aggressive sexual norm.

However, some women-and-female identified participants also described ways in which they utilized and thus normalized the same masculinized aggressive sexual behaviors with coworkers in their workplaces. Again, at the core of this behavior was the idea that women and feminized men wanted to be harassed, though the process followed by women-and-female identified harassers was more complex. First, these participants noted times when men committed aggressive harassment against a female coworker, describing it in negative terms (e.g., gross, unprofessional), pushing away from sexual aggression as acceptable or "normal." However, because the recipient of sexual aggression got something out of the event (e.g., humor, flattery, pride), these women-and-female identified participants used the same sexually aggressive behavior and justified it as beneficial to the recipient. In this way, women-and-female participants pulled toward aggressive masculinized (hetero)sexual harassment and ultimately normalized this behavior.

Finally, several women-and-female identified participants and one male-identified participant described the aggressive regulation of bodies through a (hetero)sexual male lens in their workplaces. Bodies were normalized along gendered, raced, and (hetero)sexual lines. First, the pregnant female body was seen as transgressive and thus pushed away from sexual “norms” in the workplace, particularly in male-dominated and sexually oppressive workplaces like the Church. African-American bodies were regulated in (hetero)sexual and White terms; one bisexual African-American male participant found that his body could never be the white, muscled, (hetero)sexual “norm” that was appealing to customers and worked to pull toward that norm through other discursive means (e.g., a flamboyant personality; choice of dress).

The primary way in which participants described feeling pulled toward regulating their bodies in terms of aggressive masculine sexuality was through dress and dress codes. Dress codes were discussed explicitly in terms of a gender binary; there was no space created by organizations for trans or genderqueer bodies. All but one participant who talked about body regulation and dress codes identified as female or as a woman, and all noted that women and females are expected to regulate their bodies in far more stringent terms than their male counterparts. Of note, the regulation of (hetero)sexualized body parts (e.g., legs, breasts) were most frequently mentioned by women-and-female-identified participants. Cleavage was specifically mentioned multiple times. Heterosexual-identified African-American female participants described being conscious of how they had to dress their bodies to accommodate the hypersexualized male gaze (Forbes, 2009) and avoid stereotypes casting them as “unprofessional.” These participants felt pulled to adjust their bodies and behaviors to this sexual “norm” in order

to protect themselves as well as their reputations, even if they pushed against the idea that their bodies were “meant” for (White) (hetero)sexual male consumption internally. On the other hand, Caucasian and White women described dress codes and body regulation as something that has a time and place, pushing against the explicit regulation of female employees’ bodies in front of an entire organization at a training session, but implicitly pulling toward the norm of regulating women’s bodies if done “appropriately.” Though all participants ultimately pulled toward regulating their bodies and upholding dress code policies in their workplaces, the taken-for-granted understanding of how bodies function in the workplace is fundamentally different between races and genders.

Acts of silence served as the third, final, and most powerful way that participants constructed and maintained the boundaries of “normal” sexuality as well as pulled toward or pushed away from those silenced norms. The process of organizing around sexual silence in organizations evolved in three primary stages. First, participants described experiencing organizations explicitly silencing sex or sexuality in workplaces through policies or workplace practices. Participants of various sexual identities were quick to point out ways in which their organizations set sexual “boundaries” between employees and their coworkers or clients. These boundaries forbade certain kinds of talk about sex or sexuality that might be seen as expressing a viewpoint to the public that was not aligned with the organization or possibly developing into inappropriate friendships or romantic relationships. Organizationally regulated boundaries of sexual silence were more salient and stringent for sexual minorities; some participants described being targeted by managers and told specifically not to “cause trouble” by talking about their non-binary identities. Participants of all sexualities knew the boundaries of sexual silence

well, and actively and implicitly worked to pull their behaviors and communication in line with these organizationally set “norms” to protect their status as well as their jobs.

However, participants pushed back against silenced organizational norms in moments where topics about sex or sexuality became particularly relevant, such as specific policies regarding LGBTQ employees being considered by the organization or the legalization of same-sex marriage by the Supreme Court in 2015. It was in these moments when the boundaries of sexual silence became most clear, and also the most powerful. When participants did push back, they did so quietly and in minimally disruptive ways, such as putting small gay pride rainbows on their shirts or talking quietly with a coworker in a secluded area. Ultimately, all participants described pulling toward organizationally silenced “norms” even if they disagreed with organizational boundaries of sexual silence.

In the second stage of organizing around silence, participants told me that they independently silenced themselves about topics related to sex or sexuality in their workplaces. Self-silencing was described differently by participants of different sexual identities. Participants who identified as heterosexual generally described self-silencing as a choice or preference, leaving the door open for these participants to engage with a coworker or client if the topic came up but allowing themselves space to refuse or shut down the conversation. Sexual minority participants, on the other hand, described self-silencing as a precaution. Indeed, one sexual minority participant told me that even though she wanted to discuss sex and sexuality at work, she was afraid that her words would become weaponized and used as “ammo” against her, causing her to pull toward silenced sexual norms.

A final and unique example of self-silencing did not fit within sexual identity boundaries, but it hints at another way that silencing occurs. I call this type of silencing the silenced self. In this case, a heterosexual male participant first described his own self-silencing as a personal choice, but also noted that his non-English speaking female coworker was rumored to provide sexual favors to male employees. In this case, the participant's coworkers provided the non-English speaking employees' highly sexualized voice for her; because she did not speak the language, her voice was inherently silenced.

In the third and final stage of organizing around silence, participants of all sexual identities ultimately internalized and reified the cultures of sexual silence in their workplaces, shutting conversations down or carving extra-organizational spaces to talk about or enact sex or sexuality that functioned away from our outside of the workplace. In this step, (hetero)sexual privilege became clearest as well as the most beneficial to the organization. First, though many heterosexual-identified participants told me that they did not think any topic related to sex or sexuality was appropriate in the workplace (and self-silenced as a result), several described talking about their opposite-sex significant others, their families, and particularly their children in a taken-for-granted way. Heterosexual participants unthinkingly used these conversation topics as a way of connecting or finding common ground with coworkers and clients. Conversations like these not only reflect the privileged, legitimized, and normalized position that heterosexuality had within workplace contexts, but also implicitly gave them a voice that sexual minorities did not have.

Second, participants described "shutting down" conversations about sex or sexuality in the workplace when the participant perceived that they were pushing too

much against silenced sexual norms in the organization. Participants described violations occurring both in terms of volume and location; when conversations about sex or sexuality were too close to customers' or clients' ears, participants stepped in to silence or "shut down" these conversations, effectively pulling coworkers of all sexual identities closer to the individual organization's silenced sexual norm.

Finally, several sexual minority participants described wanting to push back against oppressive silenced sexual norms in their workplaces. To do so, they created a separate space in which conversations about sex and sexuality could be had outside of the purview of the organization. In some cases, these separate spaces were both outside of the physical organization as well as after the workday had concluded. In other cases, conversations about sex and sexuality occurred in a private chat channel and were only viewable by employees invited to join the group. Though participants described feeling positively about pushing back against oppressive silenced sexual norms, they also told me that members of their group "policed" individuals speaking out about sex or sexuality in the general organization and subsequently recruited them into their private groups. In this way, the groups resisting and pushing back against silenced sexual norms ultimately reinforced those silenced boundaries. Organizations benefit from this process, as they do not have to expend resources to silence sexual conversations; employees regulate and maintain silenced boundaries themselves.

There are several important and meaningful implications of this analysis. First, I will present the process of co-sexuality. Next, I will discuss implications for sexuality scholarship. Third, I will discuss implications for theory. Fourth, I will discuss

implications for practice. Finally, I will discuss limitations and strengths, and conclude with suggestions for future research exploring and applying co-sexuality.

Co-Sexuality: Organizing Around Sexual “Norms” At Work

Sex and sexuality are powerful organizing forces within the context of the workplace. Policies, practices, and organizational cultures intertwine to create boundaries and “norms” that influence how employees regulate their behaviors and discourse. Though sexual “norms” varied between participants, particularly as related to job type and sexual identity, all participants in this dissertation, whether they were aware of it until our conversation or not, had in some way regulated their behaviors around sexual “norms.” Additionally, many participants actively worked to regulate their coworkers’ behaviors as well. Co-sexuality, as presented in this dissertation, is composed of three interconnected tenets. First, co-sexuality argues that there is a socially constructed, fluid set of sexual “norms” that participants organize around. Second, participants organize around fluid sexual “norms” through discursive and embodied means. How employees interpret sexual “norms” affects how they use their language or regulate their bodies to position themselves in relation to that contextual sexual “norm.” Finally, co-sexuality is not simply an effort to position oneself as close to the central sexual “norm” as possible; rather, co-sexuality is a simultaneous push-and-pull process toward and away from “normal” sexuality in the workplace. Employees must negotiate internal and external factors to navigate sexual “norms” in their workplace. For many, this push-and-pull process resulted in rigorous identity work; for others, “normal” sexuality is a taken-for-granted norm. I discuss these tenets below.

Organizing Around the Sexual “Center”

One of the primary tenets of co-sexuality focuses on the idealized and normalized behaviors that compose the sexual “center” we organize around in the workplace. Based on the data from this dissertation, there are two primary arguments that can be made about the sexual “center.” First, the “center” is socially and contextually constructed, which affects how individuals position themselves and each other. The sexual “center” was consistently described as privileging heterosexuality over other sexual identities, affecting the distance from the sexual “center” around which all sexual identities were implicitly positioned. Second, and more important, the “center” is fluid rather than fixed. The normative and idealized sexual “center” was ultimately described as being composed of inconsistent and sometimes contrasting normative expectations that affected employees’ day-to-day-work experiences. I discuss this tenet below.

A Socially Constructed (Hetero)Sexual Center. Participants of all sexual identities consistently constructed “heterosexuality” or “heteronormativity” as “normal” in their workplaces. Participants talked about heteronormativity as though it was a relatively fixed “thing;” an agreed upon set of appropriate workplace behaviors, topics of conversation, and relationships. Despite the fluid meaning of this sexual “norm” (discussed in the next section), heterosexuality or heteronormativity being socially constructed as “normative” had tremendous implications for how participants talked about their understanding of their own sexuality in relation to the “norm.”

Specifically, whereas sexual minority participants’ narratives reflect an implicit understanding of being implicitly positioned away from the “normal” sexual center, heterosexual and straight identified participants tended to be more surprised or taken aback when their heterosexual identities and behaviors were in violation and

subsequently pushed away from workplace sexual “norms.” For example, recall that the first thing Jane, a 32-year-old heterosexual white female told me in our interview was: “Um, normal [sex and sexuality] seems like such a non-relevant topic to my place of work that I'm not really sure how helpful I'll be to you.” Jane was one of the many heterosexual-identified participants who took sexual “norms” for granted and it was not until our conversation that she came to recognize that her own sexuality had been regulated (e.g., having kids) by her coworkers.

On the other hand, sexual minorities were consistently conscious of their sexual identities positioning them away from the “normal” sexual center. For example, Amethyst, a 30-year-old White bisexual female told me that when it came to being “normal” in her workplace, “Um, what's normal ... I don't have that. Like I don't, I don't really have that, I guess.” Amethyst went on to say that while she did not understand the concept of “normal” sexuality, she knew she could never meet heteronormative standards.

Simply put, heterosexual participants understand “normal” sexuality as something they are implicitly positioned near, whereas sexual minorities understand that their sexual identities implicitly position them away from sexual “norms.” However, as I discuss next, sexual “norms” were neither agreed-upon nor consistent within and between workplaces. Instead, sexual “norms” were fluid and contextual, affecting how, when, or if participants regulated their behavior.

A Fluid Sexual “Norm.” The second component of central sexual “norms” that employees organize around in their workplaces is that these norms are fluid, not fixed. Despite the consistency with which participants described “heterosexuality” as the

privileged and “normal” sexual identity in their workplaces, how “normal” (hetero)sexuality functioned was different between participant of various sexual identities, but also between their workplaces, gender identities, and racial identities.

It became clear that “normal” sexuality involved expectations beyond opposite-sex relational partners and the “sense of rightness” associated with making these relationships privileged (Warner, 2002). For example, participants who worked in service industry jobs, particularly food service jobs, tended to have more explicit and graphic conversations about sex and “normalized” sexualized touching between one another. An example of the fluid sexual “norms” described in this industry came from Evan, who told me that talking about explicit gay male sex was “normal” between coworkers, but when other employees did not want to contribute to these conversations, they were considered a bad fit for the organizational culture. On the other hand, when those same “normalized” conversations got too “loud,” the same employees who talked explicitly about gay male sex shut down those explicit conversations. The norm of “explicit sex talk” did not remain constant, even for those who participated in these conversations. Who, what, and when those conversations were “normalized” changed based on the communicative context.

That is not to say that “normal” sexuality did not tend to privilege aggressive masculine (hetero)sexuality, whiteness, marriage, and reproduction. The argument that co-sexuality rests upon is that sexual “norms” function differently for different individuals with different social identities in different contexts. In other words, though “heteronormativity” was a relatively fixed set of beliefs and behaviors that participants’

described as a taken-for-granted, internalized sexual “center,” how those norms functioned within the context of the workplace was fluid rather than fixed.

The first tenet of co-sexuality argues that the central sexual “norms” that we organize around in the workplace implicitly place certain sexual identities away from the heteronormative center. In the data presented in this dissertation, sexual minorities were positioned further away from the heteronormative center than their heterosexual or straight-identified counterparts. However, employees of all sexual identities are forced to organize around a fluid construction of “heteronormativity” that are contextualized by organization, gender identities, and racial identities. Employees must navigate these fluid sexual “norms” in both discursive and embodied ways, which serves as the second central tenet of co-sexuality. I describe this below.

Organizing through Discursive and Embodied Means

The process of co-sexuality happens through both discursive and embodied actions. Participants in this dissertation demonstrated that organizing around fluid sexual “norms” happened through conscious and unconscious choices in language use as well as through conscious and unconscious body regulation. In every instance, how participants communicated about or embodied sex or sexuality affected their position around sexual “norms” and was part of their larger identity work processes within the workplace. Though discursive and embodied acts of organizing around “normal” sexuality often happened simultaneously, the clear divides in how participants described their language use and their embodied practices allows me to present them independently.

Discourse and Language Use. How employees use their words allows them to navigate fluid sexual “norms” and position themselves in proximity to the sexual

“center.” Participants in this study demonstrated that their language use often implicitly and unconsciously privileged traditional heterosexual relationships. Participants used their words to position themselves around sexual “norms” in two primary ways: first, through claiming sexual identities by acknowledging partners’ genders or self-identification; second, through choosing words that allowed participants to retain their privileged position while simultaneously pushing against sexual “norms” in the workplace.

Claiming sexual identities happened implicitly for many heterosexual-or-straight identified participants who told me that they talked about their opposite-sex spouses and children as a means of connecting with other employees or clients. By bringing up husbands, wives, and children, “normalized” heterosexuality was reified and these employees were able to comfortably talk about sex and sexuality in privileged ways sexual minorities were not.

Language use also allowed several straight-identified white male participants to simultaneously stand up for disempowered individuals (e.g., women, sexual minorities) and retain their aggressive masculinity. For example, recall Matt, who told me that he was the new “hybrid macho” who both cared about and was worried when his Asian female coworker was being hypersexualized by his male coworkers. Through his language choices with me, Matt was able to show support for his female coworker. Through his language choices with his coworkers, he was able to keep up with the jokes and sexual innuendos that were “normalized” without being physically aggressive toward her.

Another example of straight-identified white male participants retaining their privileged positions while navigating sexual “norms” was Jack, who told me that he had threatened to “punch” his coworkers for being sexually deprecating to women and sexual minorities. Jack told me he did this often, and that his coworkers had learned “not to mess with him.” Though Jack (purportedly) never actually punched any of his coworkers, by threatening physical violence he was able to maintain his masculine dominance and authority in his workplace while simultaneously protecting those who did not have the same privilege.

On the other hand, sexual minority participants tended to either be explicit or silent about their sexual identities. How they used their words allowed them to both seek information about sexual “norms” in their workplace as well as work to position themselves around that norm. A good example of someone who used language to organize around sexual norms in a fluid way was Hallie, who privately identified as pansexual but publically identified and presented as heterosexual. Hallie’s language use is contradictory but allows her to navigate restrictive religious “sexual” norms and more inclusive sexual “norms” very well. Specifically, Hallie, who both identified as a Catholic who worked for a Catholic organization, argued that she supported the Church’s construction of “normal” sexuality, believed that gender and sex were synonymous, and that heterosexuality was an inherent human quality. At work, she used her words to exclusively present as heterosexual. However, her private use of the identity term “pansexual” allowed her to simultaneously acknowledge her sexual attraction to people of all sexualities and gender identities and position herself towards a more inclusive sexual “norm” in contexts where sexual diversity is privileged. Hallie used her language

in such a way that she fits with multiple constructions of “normal” sexuality and give herself privilege in all situations through the use of her language.

Embodied Sexuality. Bodies were also an important part of how employees position themselves around “normal” sexuality. Bodies of different shapes, sizes, and colors are valued differently in organizational contexts. In terms of organizing around “normal” sexuality, bodies became salient in two specific ways in this dissertation: first, racial minorities’ narratives revealed ways in which their bodily regulation was different than White participants. Second, women-and-female employees described ways in which their bodies were more regulated than their male counterparts. In both instances, the physical body was altered to adhere to or position the self closer to the organization’s sexual “norm.”

First, African American participants described implicitly understanding that their bodies were not and could never be aligned with the sexual “norm” in their workplaces. For example, Philip, a bisexual-identified African American male employed as a bartender told me that ideal bodies in his workplace were White and well-muscled. Philip knew that his slender, African American body would never be able to meet this norm. Instead, Philip consciously changed the way he dressed to accent parts of his body and to be more sexually appealing to customers. The primary tactic he used to position himself closer to sexual “norms” in his workplace was discursive, however; because his body would never be ideal, he changed how he flirted with and sold drinks to customers to get their business and earn more tips.

Women-and-female identified participants also described regulating their bodies at work, specifically under the purview of the male gaze. As has been described in

organizational communication scholarship (e.g., Clair, 1998; Trethewey, 1999) women's bodies are concurrently sexualized and heavily regulated to accommodate men's privileged sexuality in the workplace. Multiple times, participants noted that policies and managers in their workplaces strictly regulated "cleavage". Cleavage (and other bodily regulation) was a particularly salient issue for African American female-identified participants who consciously worked to appear as professional as possible to not be hypersexualized and thus delegitimized by their White and male counterparts (e.g., Forbes, 2009). Of note, individuals who did not fit into the gender binary were left out of policies spelling out dress code expectations in the workplace and were forced to regulate their bodies in terms of a strict binary.

Co-sexuality argues that participants use their words and their bodies in their workplaces to navigate fluid sexual "norms" that affect their position around this "norm." Through conscious and unconscious language choices, employees can determine sexual "norms" in their workplace as well as reify, challenge, or vacillate between fluid constructions of "normal" sexuality. Employees also regulate their bodies, specifically their dress, to conform to sexual "norms" in their workplaces. In this dissertation, racial minority bodies and women's bodies were constructed as "different," requiring more effort and conscious altering of bodies to conform to sexual "norms" in the workplace. However, it is important to note that participants were often conscious of their language choices and their body regulations in ways that reflected both a pull toward and a push against the sexual "norm" in their workplaces. The simultaneous push-pull around "normal" sexuality is the third and final tenet of co-sexuality, which I discuss below.

A Simultaneous Push and Pull Process. The final and perhaps most important tenet of co-sexuality is that this process functions as a simultaneous push and pull around fluid sexual “norms” in the workplace. Though other scholarship has explored the push-and-pull pressures faced by employees based on their gender identities (e.g., Patrick, Stephens, & Weinstein, 2016), push-and-pull processes around sexuality are not yet a common part of the literature. There are likely instances where employees simply denounce sexual “norms” in their workplaces and completely push away from them entirely. However, given the regulatory power that “normal” sexuality has in the organization, these cases were not represented in the data collected for this dissertation. Rather, the narratives given by participants demonstrate that the process of co-sexuality is an ongoing struggle between conflicting organizational “sexual” norms as well as self-conceptions of “normal” sexuality that do not align with sexual “norms” found in the organization.

Participants claiming various sexual, racial, and gender identities employed by diverse organizations all told me that the sexual “norms” in their workplace were not something they universally agreed with and subsequently worked to pull toward. Many heterosexual and straight-identified participants described being frustrated with the homophobia, sexism, and intolerance that defined “normal” sexuality in their organizations. In our conversations, they worked to position those sexual “norms” in a negative light and to position their own more inclusive conception of sexual “norms” as superior. In the context of the workplace, however, these participants recognized that pushing against these sexual norms would threaten their social position and possibly their job. These participants were faced with pulling “enough” toward a sexual “norm” that

they did not agree with to protect themselves, while pushing back against these “norms” in ways that were “enough” to let them have a counter voice. A good example of this is Jane, a 32-year old heterosexual White female who made a small rainbow flag and wore it around her sexually silenced workplace on the day that the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage. Though talking about sex or sexuality was disallowed in Jane’s organization, she pushed back against this “norm” by wearing her flag and saying supportive things in “hushed” conversations. The gentle manner in which Jane pushed back allowed her pushback to go unnoticed and allow her to stay pulled close to sexual “norms” in her workplace.

Sexual minority employees also experienced the simultaneous push-pull process of co-sexuality, though because they are inherently positioned away from the fluid heteronormative center, the process was somewhat different for these participants. These participants were pushing back against organizational sexual “norms” that “othered” a part of their identities, whereas heterosexual or straight-identified employees have the privilege to choose how and when they push back against sexual “norms.” In this dissertation, one powerful way sexual minority participants pushed back against sexual “norms” in their workplaces by creating separate spaces to talk about sex and sexuality. However, these same sexual minority employees actively regulated other employees’ conversations about sex and sexuality in the workplace and moved those conversations to these separate spaces. In this way, sexual minorities are pulling toward the sexual “norms” in their workplaces while simultaneously pushing back against them. Simply put, the push-pull process of co-sexuality was different for participants of different sexual identities.

Co-sexuality, the process of organizing around “normal” sexuality at work, rests on three central arguments: first, that sexual “norms” are constructed in heterosexual terms but are inherently fluid; second, that employees use their language and their bodies to position themselves around these contextual and fluid sexual “norms;” and finally, that this process is a simultaneous push-and-pull toward and away from sexual “norms.” In the narratives found in this study the inherent privileging of heterosexuality in organizations leads to sexual minorities doing more work to position themselves closer to the sexual “norms” in their workplaces. In the next sections, I discuss the implications for sexuality scholarship and the implications for co-cultural theory. Finally, I discuss the limitations, strengths, and future research plans for co-sexuality.

Implications for Sexuality Scholarship

Broadly, co-sexuality contributes to an ongoing conversation about processes of power and identity work that organizes lived human experience. Human sex and sexuality are powerful lenses through which we understand the world and its inhabitants biologically, cognitively, and communicatively (Ryan & Jethá, 2014). Again, although sex and sexuality are broad topics that were discussed in many ways by participants (e.g., political views, identity categories, stereotyped behaviors, clothing, physical acts), at the center of co-sexuality is the process of pulling or being pulled toward unfixed sexual “norms” as well as simultaneously being pushed or pushing away from those norms.

There are three primary implications for sexual identity scholarship in this dissertation. The first implication centers on the idea that heteronormativity is both a relatively fixed “thing” as well as a process. The second implication focuses on how improved data collection techniques could further explore issues of identity work in the

workplace. The third implication explores how co-sexuality affects the workplace. The organization simultaneously benefits and as it risk from the process of co-sexuality, reflecting a macro-level push-pull around “normal” sexuality. I discuss these implications below.

Heteronormativity and Social Identities. The first implication of co-sexuality on sexuality scholarship focuses on deepening and broadening the concept of heteronormativity. In this dissertation, I conceptualized “normal” sexualities (e.g., heteronormative heterosexuality) as both a relatively fixed “thing” as well as a fluid and contextual process that shifts based on the communication context. Continuing to conceptualize heteronormativity in this way deepens the possibilities for sexuality scholars across disciplines. Heteronormativity is often treated as a fixed construct in sexuality scholarship, defined both in terms of the privileging of heterosexual identities and relationships, as well as the sense of “rightness” associated with doing so (Warner, 2002). I do not disagree with this definition; the consistency and immediacy of “heterosexuality” being described as “normal” by participants indicates that they also perceive heteronormative heterosexuality as a relatively fixed thing. Heteronormativity presented as a stable sexual construct when participants used this term as a stand-in for the taken-for-granted identity categories, performances, and communicative sexual “norms” in their respective workplaces. Of note, nearly all participants used the term “heteronormative” at some point in their conversation with me, and talked about it as though we shared the same understanding of what this term meant.

However, the ways in which “normal” sexuality functioned for participants points to a fluid and contextual sexual “norm” that participants identifying with various sexual

identities struggled to navigate in different ways. Before I discuss the intersectional and fluid ways in which heteronormativity functions, I will first discuss the greatest similarity for participants of all sexual and gender identities: the expectation that *all* humans want to find a monogamous partner and get married. Participant narratives point to marriage being *the* way that human beings to perform their sexual identities in legitimized and thus heteronormative ways. Indeed, some sexual minority participants were already exemplifying traditional heteronormative marriage as a source of legitimation: Hallie, who identified privately as pansexual but presented as heterosexual, and Mimi, who identified as heteroflexible but presented as heterosexual. These two participants were able to perform their sexualities in heteronormative terms only by regulating their performances of sexuality to appear heterosexual. This has tremendous political implications: if sexual minorities and gender minorities pull toward engaging in more “heteronormative” behaviors and reify them as the only option for legitimation, alternative sexual behaviors for other LGBTQ community members including polyamory or asexuality become further marginalized (Warner, 1999) and the process by which sexualities are legitimized or normalized become more and more exclusionary. If marriage is the only legitimized form of relationship, by definition, no other form of relationship can be accepted. Within the context of the workplace, the exclusive legitimation of marriage could have tremendous implications for employees who do not fit within these specific heteronormative boundaries.

However, differences in sexual “norms” and the process of navigating them were also different for participants of different social identities. The clearest differences were between sexual identity categories, likely because of the focus of this dissertation project

as well as the focus on sex and sexuality in my questions to participants. Sexual minorities differed from their heterosexual counterparts in several ways, the most obvious being that their sexual identities inherently pushed them away from the heteronormative center. However, navigating heteronormativity went beyond just sexual identity categories. For example, sexual minorities 1) were “othered” by the master narratives of the Midwest that privileged heterosexuality and shamed sexual diversity, 2) were shut out of “normative” conversations about sex and sexuality in the workplace, particularly as related to romantic relationships and 3) self-silenced themselves to protect themselves rather than by choice. In other words, participant narratives repeatedly note that sexual minorities, by definition, cannot align themselves with sexual “norms” that marginalize them and thus must navigate heteronormativity at a perpetual distance.

Navigating heteronormative expectations also required participants to manage inconsistent “norms” based on other social identities beyond just sexual identity categories; women and female-identified participants described their coworkers expecting them to have kids, with regulatory comments coming most often from female coworkers. Male participants were asked when they were going to either find a romantic partner or a wife, particularly by male coworkers. Male participants were consistently encouraged by their male coworkers to be sexually aggressive toward women in both talk and behavior, and used heterosexist and feminized language to derogate their male counterparts into doing so. Female and women identified participants were interpreted as wanting to be the focus of sexually aggressive behaviors, internalizing and reifying those behaviors toward other women and feminized men. Transgendered individuals were individually targeted by their organizations and told not to disrupt workplace harmony in ways that their

cisgendered coworkers were not. Participants of all gender identities had to navigate sexual “norms” that were not necessarily congruent with their own ideas or identities, and the process of navigating these norms had unique obstacles and consequences that were contextually based on their organization and their gender identity.

“Normal” sexuality also functioned differently for non-White participants. Each of the three participants of color I spoke with, all identifying as African-American noted the specific ways in which they were pushed away from sexual “norms” in their workplaces. The women-and-female-identified participants of color I spoke with talked about being conscious of the hypersexualized stereotypes associated with their bodies and working to regulate their dress in ways that desexualized themselves, highlighting the intersectionality between gender, race, and sexual “norms.” The single African American male I spoke with was the only participant who described sexual “norms” in explicitly raced terms. Sexual “norms” were crucial to his ability to do his job in an LGBTQ bar, and he acknowledged that his body would never be able to embody “normal” sexuality in his workplace because of his race. He also noted the extreme racism he met with dealing with other LGBTQ people in his workplace. The process by which participants of color navigated “normal” sexuality required them to dress or communicate in ways that positioned themselves closer to a White, masculine, heteronormative center that they could never reach.

Simply put, heteronormativity is a fluid set of “normative” expectations that are constructed on more than sexual identity categories and must be approached intersectionally; sexual “norms” function differently for different individuals who are forced to push against or pull towards that center in contextual ways. Ultimately,

heteronormativity is not just about sexual identity categories and the feeling of “rightness” associated with privileging one identity; heteronormativity is about how different identities, including sexual identities, gender identities, and racial identities, interact and struggle for legitimacy in a Midwestern society that privileges Whiteness, aggressive masculine heterosexuality, Judeo-Christian religious norms, and silences diversity. Ultimately, heteronormativity and “normal” sexuality functions as a different process for people who reflect a variety of different identities (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005).

Data Collection and Identity Work. The second primary implication of this dissertation for sexuality scholarship contributes to identity work scholarship as well as provides suggestions for data collection. This implication emerged from the similarities and differences in how sexuality was discussed between participants and provides insight into how sex and sexuality work to organize human experiences. Prior to each interview, I asked participants to fill out a qualitative demographic questionnaire that asked them to describe their occupation and job title, their age, their race, their sexuality, their gender, their social class, and their level of education. The open-ended responses allowed me to compare participant experiences in more nuanced ways than with predetermined identity categories and labels. Though I expected differences to emerge between how participants described social identities, particularly gender identity and sexual identities, I found much more overlap between all participant experiences and their description of the processes of organizing around sexual norms than I expected to; all participants experienced the simultaneous push-and-pull of co-sexuality. From a meta perspective, how “normal” sexuality in workplaces was constructed and maintained was remarkably

similar across participants, as well as how participants chose to push away from or pull towards “normal” sexuality. The primary differences between participant narratives emerged based on sexual identity as well as job type, though in nuanced and contextual ways. I describe this below.

Sexual Identities, Data Collection, and Identity Work. Though all participants described the push-and-pull of co-sexuality, how participants talked about it was different. First, in terms of sexual identities and identity work, it was clear to me almost immediately that participants who identified as heterosexual or straight thought about sex and sexuality socially and in their workplaces differently than participants who identified as sexual minorities. While this may seem unsurprising, the flow of conversation with these participants was particularly notable to this and future sexuality scholarship. Consistently, heterosexual or straight identified participants qualified their participation with phrases similar to what Jane told me: “Um, this seems like such a non-relevant topic to my place of work that I’m not really sure how helpful I’ll be to you.” It was these participants who spoke to me for the longest amounts of time (the longest being nearly three hours). Further, the pace of interviews with heterosexual or straight identified participants started off with very short or vague answers, but frequently resulted in participants having self-reflexive moments of their own sexual privilege towards the middle of our interview (e.g., Mimi’s comment “here’s the thing I just realized”) followed by deeper and more complex discussions of how sexuality organized their workplace experiences.

Sexual minority participants, on the other hand, tended to have clear contributions and opinions almost immediately after we began speaking. Again, this is unsurprising;

sexual minorities (and individuals of any minority identity) tend to be far more cognizant of their socially marginalized position (Herek, 2007; King, Reilly, & Hebl, 2008) and subsequently how they navigate that position. However, for sexuality scholars, particularly those interested in communicative processes and identity work, the salience of one's own sexual identity to their presentation of self and perception of others is relevant for both identity work scholarship and specific data collection processes. First, because identity work relies on both internal and external factors to ultimately answer the essential question, "who am I?" (Gill & Larson, 2014), the fact that heterosexual or straight identified participants did not see their sexual identities as salient in their workplaces or in conversation with me speaks to larger social Discourses (Fairhurst, 2004) and socialization processes. Organizations described in this dissertation explicitly and implicitly privileged heterosexuality, allowing heterosexual or straight identified participants the luxury of not thinking about their sexualities in the workplace. However, the moment heterosexual or straight identified participants realized that their personal behavior had violated heteronormative expectations (e.g., cohabitation, marriage, and reproduction), their sexual identities became salient and they did work to either adhere to heteronormative expectations or at least pull toward that norm.

I encourage future scholars to continue the work of disentangling how, when, and why people of all sexualities reflect upon their own identities and social positions. To continue this work as well as for more meaningful data collection, it may be beneficial for future scholars to consider asking strategic questions not only about how participants sexually identify and their definitions or explanations of what their sexual identities mean

to them, as I did in this dissertation, but also to ask how often participants actively think about their sexual identities in a variety of contexts.

Job Type and Normal Sexuality. Second, job type also seemed to have an impact on how sexual “norms” were constructed as well as the salience of sexual identities for participants. Participants who specifically worked service work jobs, such as food or health service, described their organizations as being explicitly saturated with sex in ways that participants who worked in office jobs or for government agencies did not experience. Though I did not ask for this information on demographic questionnaires, which I encourage future scholars to do, it seemed that participants who worked in service industry jobs staffed with primarily part-time employees consistently had the most extreme and explicit stories to tell as well as the most extreme norms to pull toward, regardless of their sexual, gender, or racial identities.

Though the overall push-pull process of co-sexuality was similar across all job types and social identities, how co-sexuality functioned in these organizations was different in terms of how sex and sexuality were communicated. In these organizations, explicit acts and conversations about sex and sexuality were expected and individuals who were uncomfortable with or chose not to participate in these conversations or acts did not “fit” with the organizational culture. This was in contrast to the expectation of silence about explicit sexual behavior or sexual acts in white collar or text work jobs, and even some working in service industry jobs with primarily full time employees. The key implication here is that what kind of work is being done absolutely has an impact on sexual identity salience (e.g., working part time at an LGBTQ bar vs. working as a graduate instructor), which in turn affects how heteronormativity functions (e.g., goading

employees into more and more sexually aggressive sexual talk vs. shutting down conversations) and how employees push away from or pull toward that norm (e.g., through dress, body, communication).

Power, Sex, and Sexuality. The third, and potentially most important implication of this study centers on how power functions as a central component of the ways in which “normal” sexuality was constructed, maintained, pushed toward, and pulled away from. I believe that power is inherently intertwined with the process of co-sexuality for both organizations and individual identity management. In terms of organizational power, the primary implication is that it is organizations, not employees, who benefit from the push-pull process of co-sexuality. *Every* participant, regardless of their self-described social identities (e.g., sexuality, race, gender), in some way acknowledged that their communicative and embodied behaviors relative to sex or sexuality were regulated by cultural expectations of “normal” sexuality in their workplaces and thus in some way gave the organization the power to regulate their behavior.

Benefits to the organization became clear in all three iterations of co-sexuality. First, participants constructed and bounded “normal” sexuality through use of the master narrative of the Midwest, which included Judeo-Christian norms and a perception of cultural discomfort with difference. Second, participants also normalized masculinized aggressive (hetero)sexual talk and behaviors. Because participants were quick to explain often intolerant, oppressive, and often heterosexist organizational norms in terms of larger cultural narratives or gendered behaviors, the responsibility of co-constructing these oppressive cultural norms was placed *outside* of the control of the organization.

Though norms might be *regulated* by policies or practices, organizations themselves were not seen as the cause of heterosexism or aggressive masculine sexuality. By participants not placing any (or little) responsibility on the organization for co-constructing oppressive or harassing norms, organizations are given the power to choose whether or not their policies reinforce or challenge oppressive sexual “norms” attributed to Midwestern culture and given a pass to reinforce cultural norms when it serves them best. Ultimately, organizations benefitted from participants who took for granted the existence (or lack) of organizational policies or practices oppressively regulating how participants talked about and enacted sex and sexuality. Though of course organizations are situated within a larger social context, participants’ constructions of “normal” sexuality as being extra-organizational gave organizations far more agency to regulate sexual “norms” – often silencing conversations about sexual diversity which could disrupt the heteronormative expectations described by participants.

Third, organizations also benefitted from the employee-regulated process of sexual silence. Because employees stringently maintained the boundaries of sexual silence, the organization did not have to use resources reinforcing or, in some organizations (usually service work jobs), defining those boundaries. Though participants of various sexual identities justified their self-silencing or silencing of the other in different ways, all participants worked to maintain silenced boundaries in their organizations in some way. The threat of “upsetting work norms” was a powerful motivator for employees who feared any number of unspoken consequences. Thus, whether it was “shutting down” conversations that had “gotten too loud” or creating separate spaces for conversations about sexual diversity to be held outside of the purview

of management, organizations benefitted from employees who refused to push the boundaries of sexual silence and instead regulated their own voices and behaviors as well as the voices and behaviors of others. Organizations ultimately benefit financially from 1) employees who police each others' communication and behavior around customers, 2) not having to expend resources to regulate sexual boundaries and 3) maintaining a sexual norm that did not disrupt organizational productivity.

Beyond the implications of organizations benefitting from employees regulating their own and other employees' behaviors, sexuality scholars should also consider exploring how stiff the boundaries of behavioral expectations were for participants. The clearest example of strict boundaries was found through acts of self-silence or silencing others. Generally, silence is nebulous, neither inherently good or bad; though the argument can easily be made that shutting down an aggressively harassing coworker or silencing verbal derogation could be beneficial to both the organization and its employees, the aforementioned behaviors were not demonstrated or described by participants. Rather, silence became a fixed set of boundaries that were regulated by employees without flexibility, even in organizations where talk about sex and sexuality was both expected and common. Exploring those boundaries and their construction would be useful for both sexuality scholars and practitioners alike.

The primary implication for sexuality scholars regarding power and individuals comes in terms of individual sexual identity management. This implication emerged from the language used by participants in our conversations. Two participants particularly stand out: Hallie, who privately identified as pansexual but publically identified and presented as heterosexual; and Mimi, who identified as heteroflexible but presented as

heterosexual. Though the way I have presented my analysis and categorized participant voices would place these two participants as sexual minorities, both of these individuals were able to perform their sexuality much closer to the heterosexual center that was privileged in their workplaces as well as in larger Midwestern culture. Their choice of language when referring to their relational partners (e.g., my husband; my boyfriend) as well as their explicitly espoused or presumed and uncorrected sexual identity categories allowed them access to the power associated with heteronormativity, but also gave them voice to talk about experiences of being oppressed – and both participants were conscious of this power. While sexual minorities doing work to “pass” as straight has been studied extensively in sexuality scholarship, what these participants’ narratives imply is that there is power associated with sexual minority identities. Though this power was undefined in the data collected for this dissertation, it is clear that these participants were able to vacillate between sexual identities contextually with relative ease. Specifically, having access to the power of the marginalized is appealing to both of these individuals. Sexuality scholars should turn the tables on “passing” literature and explore the contexts and methods by which individuals “pass” as a sexual minority, or construct their sexual identity as closer to a homonormative, rather than heteronormative center.

Co-Sexuality: Implications for Theory

Co-sexuality has the potential to add to existing theoretical conversations as well as contribute to the expansion of existing theories used to explore communication and identity work. Because co-sexuality draws on central tenets from co-cultural theory, it is only logical that there are implications to co-cultural theory (Orbe, 1998) when put in conversation with co-sexuality. Beyond co-cultural theory, however, co-sexuality has the

potential to contribute to theories such as social identity theory (SIT) (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) and particularly the communication theory of identity (CTI) (Jung & Hecht, 2004). I describe this below.

Implications for Co-Cultural Theory. Co-sexuality is informed by and based loosely upon principles of co-cultural theory (Orbe, 1998). Co-cultural theory rests on two central tenets of muted group theory (Kramarae, 1981) and standpoint theory (Hartsock, 1983) that also inform co-sexuality. Co-sexuality draws from and expands upon these central tenets, as well as provides its own unique theoretical contributions to co-cultural theory that, as presented in this dissertation, can continue to be developed.

First, muted group theory (Kramarae, 1981) informs co-cultural theory (Orbe, 1998) through its argument that marginalized groups must use the “language” of dominant groups in order to have any voice, even if this “language” does not accurately represent the lived experiences of marginalized individuals. Co-cultural theory expands this tenet and argues that simply because a group is dominant, it is not necessarily superior to the marginalized group (Orbe, 1998). Co-sexuality draws from this argument and pushes it forward by contextualizing the meaning of “dominant” groups. Co-sexuality’s contribution to this tenet is that though a group may be dominant, dominance is not necessarily described as either bounded or preferable to members of the group positioned as dominant.

In this dissertation, participants described heterosexuality and heteronormativity as “normal,” expected, privileged, and thus dominant. This was evident in several ways; participants explicitly explained the dominance of heterosexuality. Additionally, participants identifying as sexual minorities used “dominant” language to speak of their

relational other (“my husband”) rather than using gender-neutral language (“my spouse”), indicating the taken-for-granted dominance of this group. However, heterosexual and straight-identified participants consistently discussed social privileging of heterosexuality in negative terms, positioning their own inclusive and accepting conception of “normal” sexuality as both different than and superior to the dominant group. In this way, individuals from the dominant group (heterosexual-identified participants) seemed to discursively remove themselves from their privilege to ally themselves with the marginalized, which gives a kind of power and voice to the margins by proxy.

The important thing to note here is the vacillation and power imbalance between dominance and marginalization. Though dominant heterosexual-identified participants expressed support for marginalized groups, they never lost their dominant privilege, while marginalized group members (e.g. sexual minorities) could never gain that same privilege. Dominant group members have the ability to comfortably use their voice and language to stand with marginalized groups; marginalized group members had to consciously use the language of the dominant group, usually sexual identity categories or terms (e.g., “heteroflexible,” “husband,”) to position themselves closer to the dominant center. However, it was clear that there is power in marginalized positions, as both heterosexual-identified and sexual minority participants moved back and forth between marginalized and dominant positions.

Second, standpoint theory (Hartsock, 1983) argues that an individual’s social location has political, material, and social consequences. Dominant groups have much easier access to privileged positions of power and resources, whereas marginalized groups must struggle to get access to resources. Co-cultural theory (Orbe, 1998) argues

that marginalized groups “speak toward the center” in order to get access to those resources. Co-sexuality expands this position by arguing that dominant and marginalized groups speak toward each other, particularly when what group is conceptualized as “dominant” is in flux. Specifically, when LGBTQ-identified individuals have the most salient identity and are the dominant voice, even if just momentarily, dominant groups will speak toward that dominant center.

The idea of dominant and marginalized groups speaking toward each other was most evident when participants talked about the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015. The overwhelmingly positive reactions that participants of various sexualities had toward the social legitimation of sexually diverse individuals being granted access to a traditionally heterosexual practice elucidates and reinforces the idea that larger social conceptions of “normal” sexuality are shifting, but slowly. The fact that the legalization of same-sex marriage was described as a “victory” by participants as well as participants experiencing their conversations related to this event being “shut down” reinforces the idea that heterosexuality is still privileged. However, within these narratives there is also the recognition that marginalized sexualities are beginning to become socially legitimized, which indicates why dominant and marginalized groups are beginning to speak toward each other.

First, showing support and inclusion of sexual minorities is becoming normative and a common moral argument. Though sexual minorities are still marginalized by heterosexual dominance in both number and social status, there is power for heterosexual-identified and sexual minorities through use of the rhetoric of support and inclusion. Heterosexual-identified individuals get the moral benefit of positioning

themselves away from negatively constructed, old-fashioned and “traditional” exclusionary practices and constructing themselves as allies. Second, sexual minorities get access to the language of traditionally heteronormative experiences such as marriage (e.g., “wife,” “husband”). They are able to speak toward the dominant center in ways they could not before.

Ultimately, there is power to be found in the margins. Participants such as Hallie and Mimi, both who identified personally as sexual minorities but present as heterosexual, had the agency to move back and forth between both positions of power through their language use and performances of sexuality. In this way, they are speaking toward both the dominant and the marginalized position of power.

Co-sexuality contributes to two central tenets of co-cultural theory (Orbe, 1998), which itself draws from muted group theory (Kramarae, 1981) and standpoint theory (Hartsock, 1983). Co-sexuality contributes the idea that “dominant” groups are contextual and unbounded rather than fixed and also the idea that dominant and marginalized groups speak toward each other when groups recognize the power of the other. Co-sexuality has the potential to further contribute to other theoretical perspectives in the future.

Implications for Social Identity Theories. Two identity theories in particular can be put into conversation with co-sexuality: social identity theory (SIT) (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) and the communication theory of identity (CTI) (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Broadly, SIT argues that people classify themselves or are classified by others into different categories or social groups. This allows people to recognize the self in social contexts as well as identify or disidentify with other social groups. In simple terms, those who are part of “in-groups” work to strengthen the prestige of said group and discredit or

socially diverge from out-groups. Additionally, social identification lets people learn what *to* do and what *not* to do in terms of performing identities (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

CTI, which developed from SIT, takes a more extreme position on social identities and their management, arguing that social identities *are* communication. CTI posits that at every level of our identities (personal, enacted, relational, group) we are communicatively navigating perceptions of the self, the other, and the collective and performing our identities within these social contexts. Many times, our identities may not be congruent (e.g., working for a pharmaceutical company while holding personal beliefs that are anti-drug) and instead cause discomfort or dissonance that must be managed. These identity dissonances, called “identity gaps,” often require complex negotiations of identities and are never truly resolved (Jung & Hecht, 2004).

There are overlaps and unique aspects to both of these theories that can be put into conversation with co-sexuality. First, SIT argues that it is through identification with social identity groups that makes coherent group identities a possibility. Importantly, identification with social groups is not predicated on interactions with others sharing that social identity; rather, “through self-stereotyping, the individual typically adopts those characteristics perceived as prototypical of the groups which he or she (*sic*) identifies” (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 27). In terms of identity performativity, one noteworthy example is found drag kings and queens, who dress their bodies and speak in ways that reflect an extreme reflection of stereotypical or “prototypical” behaviors found in the opposite sex (e.g., Marinucci, 2011).

However, Butler (1984) talks about identity performativity and drag as a universal experience, arguing emphatically that *all* gender and sexuality identity performance is an act of drag. It is at this intersection of Butler's "drag" performativity, SIT, and co-sexuality can inform each other. The "prototypical" ways in which people communicate their sexual identities (e.g., SIT) are defined by the same socially constructed boundaries that enable and constrain "normal" sexuality (e.g., co-sexuality). How people perform their identities in various contexts is, in essence, an act of drag (Butler, 1984). Further, co-sexuality agrees with Butler's fundamental argument that *all* (sexual and gender) identities performative; while research has tended to focus on marginalized groups, performativity is just as present in dominant groups as in non-dominant groups. A good example of identity performativity in dominant groups is found in hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), or the process by which males attempt to perform their masculinity in ways that garner them social respect and dominance. Thus, through the lens of co-sexuality as influenced by Butler, SIT could be a very useful tool for exploring not only *how* people perform their identities in various contexts, but also the similarities and differences between *what* those identities look like.

CTI can be put into conversation with co-sexuality in a way similar to SIT. CTI argues that it is in the "enacted" frame of identity where identities are performed and negotiated; where in individual self-concepts found in the personal frame of identity are navigated in the face of relational and communal frame identities (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Arguably, it is in the enacted frame where co-sexuality occurs; where the identity work of determining the established boundaries of "normal" sexuality occurs and people work to

perform their identities within the relational and communal frame. Exploring how the process of co-sexuality occurs using the framework of CTI could be very useful.

It would also be interesting to place co-sexuality specifically in conversation with the concept of identity gaps as proposed by CTI. Many participants in this dissertation described the tension associated with navigating the push-pull of co-sexuality in their workplaces, particularly when they did not personally agree with a specific workplace policy or practice. In other words, participants were describing navigating an identity gap specifically associated with positioning themselves around “normal” sexuality in the workplace. Thus, co-sexuality can use the framework and central tenets of CTI to explore how individuals navigate the push-pull of co-sexuality specifically in terms of identity work.

Political Implications of the Language of Co-Sexuality

Though there are many implications of co-sexuality for language, I want to discuss the fundamental ideas and epistemology of co-sexuality to further clarify how this term could be used or misused. I also want to discuss the hiccups and potential uses for co-sexuality I noted while trying to develop this concept. Below, I discuss the original idea for the concept as a political device and a linguistic tool, my own reservations with making this commitment to a shift in language, and future ideas for co-sexuality as a new way of talking and thinking about sex and sexuality.

The idea of co-sexuality was sparked by my desire to create a way of talking about sexual identities with linguistic equality. Though co-sexuality developed into a *process* or a verb rather than a change in vocabulary or a noun, I still believe it is important to confront the false and discriminatory heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy in

the English language. I also want to create a way to move beyond the cumbersome and ever-growing list of queer identities that are bounded together by the acronym LGBTQIA+.

Though I acknowledge that LGBTQIA+ is socially recognizable and has served as a way of uniting marginalized persons, the acronym conflates gender, sex, and sexuality identities and functions as an instrument of power itself. Consider the way in which the acronym is ordered: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning), intersex, asexual. Just as heterosexual and homosexuality are hierarchically ordered, so is this acronym, which creates its own set of political and social ramifications.

Consider also the frustration people of all sexual identities have trying to use an acronym that continues to grow. Comedian Patton Oswalt does an excellent job of addressing this issue in his 2016 standup special *Talking for Clapping*. Oswalt bemoans the ways that new identity terminology has create a space for people who have “mastered” the language to act superior to those who have not. Worse yet, these linguistic “experts” accuse those who have not mastered it of discrimination, regardless of the accused’s support or association with the queer community. Oswalt was particularly offended when world-renowned drag star RuPaul was publically chastised for using the term “tranny,” exclaiming: “She laid down on the barbed wire of discrimination in the ’70s and ’80s so this generation could run across her back and yell at her for saying ‘tranny?’” (Oswalt, 2016). I, too, have been angrily accused of using transphobic language by an undergraduate student in a class discussion of a novel that specifically dealt with the emotional and challenging process of gender transitioning. It is not a good feeling to be accused of being discriminatory while trying to not only be inclusive but teach inclusivity as praxis. Language and intent must find a better way of co-existing, and I believe co-sexuality is a way to begin this process.

What, then, does co-sexuality do for the political language of sexuality? Shifting the

verb “co-sexuality” to the noun “co-sexual” could have tremendous political implications. First, it creates a way of talking about sexual identities currently forced to function within the parameters of the false and hierarchical hetero/homo dichotomy instead as co-existing cultures with their own rituals and systems of thought that interact with one another. “Co-sexual” as an identifier or as a noun shifts the focus away from the problematic taken-for-granted about sexual identity categories that mire down conversations about sexuality. Further, using “co-sexual” as an identifier or a noun creates an inclusive rather than convoluted space for referencing a social group. This is not to take away from the identity categories that make up the acronym LGBTQIA+; rather, it is an additional term that provides verbal parsimony. This, to me, is the co- sexuality’s greatest potential for understanding, activism, and creating a space for avoiding straw person arguments.

Second, and related, rather than becoming entangled in the multiple and often contested definitions and contextual boundaries of identity categories in an attempt to find shared meaning, this term allows conversations about a different but equally important group of political issues related to social positioning and encourages an *intersectional* exploration of how cultures of sexuality function and interact. Instead of simply focusing on sexuality categories and the unfixed boundaries of where identities begin and end, the language of co-sexuality allows us to see convergence and divergence in other areas, like social class, race, geography, etc. In other words, the language of co-sexuality allows us to focus on sexual identities as salient identity categories while simultaneously allowing us to talk about something other than who is attracted to whom and what the political consequences of those identities are. Though the complexities about whether or not one “fits” into a sexual identity category and how that identity affects lives is very important, the language of co-sexuality allows for an exploration of the ways in which human sexuality is negotiated in ways that

may have nothing to do with specific and politicized identity categories.

Why, then, have I not used the term “co-sexual” in this dissertation? Through my own language choices, it would be an easy and fair criticism to say that I have actually *reinforced* the idea of sexuality as a hierarchy rather than constructing a way of creating linguistic equality. Specifically, throughout this dissertation I have carefully and repeatedly used the terms “heterosexual or straight identified” and “sexual minority” to identify participant groups. Is this framing not just as problematic (not to mention wordy) in many of the same ways as saying “LGBTQIA+?” In some ways, yes it is; referring to a group as a “minority” associates the stigma, marginalization, and “otherness” to this group that I am seeking to avoid.

However, I have chosen to frame sexuality as I have for *explicitly* political reasons. First, it is not my place to take away the hard-fought politicized sexual identity categories that make up the current terminology. This is the same reason I personally choose to identify as *gay* rather than as a *lesbian*; the struggle of the lesbian feminist activist movements in the 70s and 80s imbued meaning to the term “lesbian” that I do not feel I have earned the right to carry and that do not necessarily resonate with my self-perception. Additionally, “gay” is a (more) gender-neutral term that allows me to speak about my sexual identity without necessarily bringing in the political implications of my gender identity as intertwined with my sexual identity.

Second, I absolutely do *not* want the language of co-sexuality to be used to further marginalize, harm, or derogate anyone of any sexuality. Because nothing about co-sexuality is power neutral, there is a very real possibility that the language of co-sexuality could be used to further push people to the margins. Calling *all* humans “co-sexuals” could give the (false) impression that all sexual identities are treated equally in Western

culture; that stigma, derogation, and violence towards sexual minorities no longer exists. The potential power that co-sexuality has to create an even ground between humans and to start new conversations could function to silence and disenfranchise the real lived experience of humans of all sexual identities. I openly acknowledge that this terminology takes us to tremendously treacherous political ground.

Finally, I chose not to use the language of “co-sexuality” in this paper for pragmatic reasons. Using brand-new terminology in this project could have potentially caused further confusion over meaning. Given the tremendous influence words and communicative behaviors have on identities and identity practices, I recognize that it is not my place alone to construct the boundaries of linguistic equality, nor is it my place to be the sole interpreter of this language. It is, however, my intent to present this language as an option for further development. Please note that I am *not* suggesting removing or silencing the language that already exists; rather, I am suggesting that co-sexuality provides a way of supplementing this conversation.

Implications for Practice

This dissertation provides practical and meaningful information about how sex and sexuality function as an organizational process within the context of Midwestern workplaces. There are three primary implications of this dissertation and the process of co-sexuality for organizations. Broadly speaking, these implications affect how organizations regulate and maintain practices and policies within their purview. Simply stated, organizations must acknowledge and respond to the fact that that sexual norms are changing culturally. If organizations benefit from their employees placing regulatory power over sex and sexuality on cultural norms centered *outside* of organizational control, organizations must also respond in kind when those larger cultural norms shift.

Participant narratives in this dissertation point to the undeniable fact that sexual “norms,” particularly those related to acceptable relationships and identity categories, are rapidly changing.

First, this dissertation provides compelling data indicating organizations simply cannot separate sex(uality) from workplace environments. Again, sex and sexuality are broad concepts that presented as conversations with political, social, or identity work implications as well as physical acts in the workplace. As evidenced by participant narratives, *every* workplace described by participants was, in some way, saturated with conversations about or acts of sex(uality). The reality of sex and sexuality being prevalent within organizational contexts is not surprising; just as individuals bring their racial, gender, familial, ethnic, religious, and all other social identities and experiences into their workplaces, so too do they bring their sexual identities. It is *inevitable* that the process of co-sexuality will occur within organizations; organizations can consciously shape how this process occurs through organizational policies and practices that create spaces for conversations about sex and sexuality.

Second, and related, participants frequently brought up the legalization of same-sex marriage by the Supreme Court in 2015 as a moment in time when sex and sexuality was a topic in workplaces in a way that they were not on a daily basis. Participants *wanted* to talk about this tremendously significant change in American law but were silenced by the organization’s silencing of sexuality and privileging of heterosexual voice, even when heterosexual-identified participants wanted to have these conversations. This experience caused participants with various sexual identities, including heterosexuality, to begin to call into question how the construct of heteronormativity functioned in their workplaces in ways that had not previously been evident. Most important, they began questioning the organization and its control. The implication is that, though participants in this dissertation did not revolt

against oppressive organizational silencing, organizations should create a space for employees to have these conversations.

It should also be noted that organizations are at risk when they create new spaces for changing sexual “norms” in their workplaces. Participants consistently described finding ways of connecting with one another through conversations about sex or sexuality, regardless of how explicit or benign those conversations or actions might have been. While on the one hand organizations benefit from the sense of camaraderie that employees develop when they participate in this cultural norm, they are also at risk of breaking that camaraderie or sense of shared purpose should they change that norm. Also, by creating a separate space for employees to talk about sex and sexuality, organizations are at risk for disrupting the workplace norm in ways that have not been done before. Organizations will have to consider the needs of their employees as well as their own resources and structure should as they begin to shift with socially changing sexual “norms.”

Finally, and again related, it is time for organizations to begin taking a more nuanced approach to how sexuality functions within workplace contexts. Who has control over implementing and regulating these policies is crucial for organizations. Jamie, who spoke with me for nearly three hours, told me in detail about her experiences with sexual harassment in her workplace and the physical, emotional, and monetary tolls it had caused her. Though her organization did have a sexual harassment policy in place, this participant described being verbally and physically harassed by all authority figures in her organization, including her (female) immediate supervisor, the singular (male) human resources coordinator, and to a lesser extent by two of her co-workers (gender/sex unidentified by the participant). Though this participant desperately wanted to quit her job, she was unable to do so because of the limited number of employers looking for her specific skill set, the small size of her city, and the

amount of income she needed to earn to support her daughter and herself. Because she had no one to report this behavior to without the threat of becoming targeted, harassed, and possibly losing her job and subsequently her source of income, the participant tearfully told me she simply took the abuse on a daily basis while dreading going to work each day.

Though this participant's experiences were extreme, they draw attention to the fact that policies as well as those who have the organizationally-granted power to regulate and apply them must be considered when constructing and implementing them. Presumably, the sexual harassment policy on the books was intended to protect employees from harassing behavior, though I cannot say for certain. However, had this participant had access to other individuals with the authority to apply policies or a way to report harassment anonymously to a higher authority without the threat of retaliation, it is possible her workplace experience would have improved.

Re-Eroticization and Co-Sexuality. The interconnection of abuses of power and sex(uality) in workplace settings has long been recognized in organizational studies (e.g., Burrell, 1984; Fleming, 2007). In practice, sex has been actively framed as irrational, distracting, and destructive to workplace efficiency and individual wellbeing since the first formal hierarchal organizations, in the form of religious institutions, were constituted (Burrell, 1984). Organizational scholarship also paints sex and sexuality as negative, coercive, and problematic with an overwhelming amount of scholarship focusing on destructive sexual practices like sexual harassment or sexual discrimination (e.g., Gherardi, 1995). Participants in this dissertation internalized this taken-for-granted about the inappropriateness of sex and sexuality at work, speaking *exclusively* in terms of how they avoided, shut down, or struggled to negotiate these conversations and behaviors. No participant suggested that sex or sexuality in the workplace was healthy, beneficial, or constructive to their work environment; all

participants spoke in terms of sex and sexuality in work sites being something one simply *does not* engage with.

The concept of re-eroticization challenges the idea that sex and sexuality are always harmful to workplace environments. In his foundational piece arguing that sexuality should be given theoretical importance in organizational studies, Burrell (1984) primarily frames re-eroticization as a form of resistance from the desexualization of

work; because sexuality is so heavily controlled in organizations, employees use sex and sexuality as an act of deviance to break the rules and resist control. Ultimately, sex and sexuality are *never* fully removable from organizational settings, despite the ongoing arguments about how and why doing so is an “obvious” organizational best practice (Sullivan, 2014).

Though Burrell (1984) argues that hypothetically allowing sex and sexuality back into the work environment could arguably break the “taboo” of sex or sexuality, others are more reticent to embrace re-eroticization as a ubiquitous good. For example, Fleming (2007) explored organizations in which sex and sexuality are encouraged to be openly discussed or embodied through personal dress or grooming choices such as hairstyles, piercings, and tattoos. In a re-eroticized work site, sex and sexuality became co-opted by the organization and made to function as a control mechanism; employees described the organization feeling hypersexualized and like they were being deviant if they *did not* talk about or flaunt their sex or sexuality in the workplace. Other employees described their sexuality being co-opted and sold to customers as part of their job, which made some very uncomfortable and seek alternative employment.

However, Fleming’s (2007) study explores re-eroticization in a single site: a call center. It is unclear how these practices could work in different workplace cultures or sites whose employees do mechanical, medical, educational, or other types of work. Further, from the dearth of research on re-eroticization and work, it appears that incorporating re-eroticization into workplace cultures, to date, has not been developed in nuanced ways through policies and practices in most work sites. Indeed, Fleming’s (2007) description of the call center he explored reveals a simplistic take on re-

eroticization: the organization simply made sex a *required* part of workplace culture, rather than a *disallowed* part of that culture. Rather than creating spaces for sex and sexuality to be discussed and embodied in the worksite, the organization simply flipped how sex and sexuality were talked about. In this way, re-eroticization became an obvious locus of control.

Co-sexuality, put in conversation with re-eroticization, could help explore and develop re-eroticization in a more complex and nuanced way that could benefit both organizations and employees as well. First, any conversation or practice related to sex or sexuality is fundamentally an act of power. Regardless of what is being discussed or how it is communicated (e.g., processes of individual or group identity work, social organization, hierarchies of behavior best practices), communicating sex and sexuality is fundamentally an act of power (Foucault, 1978/1990). Sex and sexuality can thus absolutely be destructive to workplace practices: sexual harassment, sexual violence, and sexism are all harmful and thus re-eroticization should be treated with great reflexivity, caution, and care. Because it is *impossible* to fully desexualize a workplace, incorporating policies and practices that embrace or make space for, sex and sexuality, is inherently useful and has the potential to encourage employee identification with the organization (Sullivan, 2014). Though the process and central tenets of co-sexuality would not change in an organization that embraced re-eroticization, these same tenets could provide a framework for exploring how re-eroticization impacts a worksite.

First, following co-sexuality, any workplace that embraces re-eroticization in practice would likely alter the construct of “normal” sexuality. Simply put, instead of the repressed, desexualized organizational standard found in the worksites of participants in

this dissertation, the sexual “norm” would potentially be re-constructed. Second, the boundaries for acceptable language choices and embodied behaviors (e.g., dress, hairstyle, etc.) would likely shift. The organizational struggle (e.g., Fleming & Spicer, 2008) over how and why these boundaries are constructed could affect how policies and workplace practices are constructed and maintained (LeGreco, 2012). Finally, the push- pull process of co-sexuality would reveal how and if re-eroticization functions as implemented in specific worksites. Though this is an abstract presentation of potential contributions of putting re-eroticization and co-sexuality in conversation, I believe there are rich opportunities to both explore and put re-eroticized practices in place using these central arguments.

Limitations & Strengths

Like any scholarly endeavor, this dissertation project has limitations that affect my analysis as well as the implications that can be drawn from the data. The primary limitation is a product of participant recruitment: though this project speaks to Midwestern sexual norms, participants were primarily from the states of Missouri, Illinois, and Kansas. Though participants working in Oklahoma, Nebraska, Ohio, and Iowa were all present in the data, the states of Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin were not. Because of the predominance of perspectives from south-central Midwestern states, it is possible that the sexual norms described by and communicatively negotiated by participants could be more nuanced or further developed. It is also possible that co-sexuality, the process by which people construct, maintain, and organize around the sexual norm could be further developed with additional perspectives from participants working in these states. Some participants told

me that they believed the Midwest was a unique area of the country because it has a wide variety of populations, political environments, and organizational norms that could potentially be significantly different from their own. I encourage future scholars to continue looking at how cultural norms in different geographical regions (Kuhn, 2006). affect how sex and sexuality are constructed, maintained, pulled toward, and pushed away from.

A second limitation to this dissertation is a product of study design. Because my only form of data collection was recruiting participants for individual interviews, my analysis relies solely on participants' memories and individual perceptions of their experiences. Though I planned to incorporate focus groups in my original study design for this dissertation project, IRB restrictions on recruitment and execution limited my ability to conduct focus groups in a timely manner. To continue developing co-sexuality, I plan to conduct focus groups as well as ethnographic observations of workplaces.

Participant diversity is a primary strength of this dissertation. Because I did not exclude any participant based on their type of work, gender identity, or sexual identity, I was able to recruit a diverse set of participants who provided a rich set of narratives and experiences. Though unintentional, there were an equal number of individuals who identified as heterosexual or straight, and sexual minorities who participated in this study. Additionally, I was able to speak with individuals who worked in a wide variety of job types and positions ranging from manufacturing and food service to creative web design and sales. Though these individuals worked for different organizations and subsequently worked under different rules, regulations, and norms, the fact that the push-pull of co-

sexuality was present in every participant narrative speaks to the shared experience of this process.

A second strength of this study is its inclusion of embodied communicative processes as part of the overarching process of co-sexuality. Organizational communication scholars and sexuality scholars (McDonald, 2014; Yep, 2013) have argued passionately for communication scholarship to explore more than just discourse and specifically for the inclusion of embodied processes as central to communicative processes. Co-sexuality is both a discursive and embodied process; how individuals talk about and enact their sexualities as well as perceive others' sexualities through discourse and body performance is crucial to how people push away from or pull toward sexual "norms."

Future Research

I am excited to see co-sexuality further developed and applied in contexts both in and outside of the workplace. There are three primary developments I would like to see emerge from this dissertation. First, I would like to explore the idea of the silenced self, in terms of voice, privilege, and language use. Second, I would like to see further explorations of how the ever-growing list of sexual identity categories, labels, and terminologies simultaneously work to empower and disempower marginalized groups. Finally, I would like to see how exploring different types of organizations (e.g., non-profit, part-time service work, office jobs, hospitals) with different kinds of sexual "norms" (e.g., homonormative; explicitly sexually diverse) affects or does not affect the tents of co-sexuality. I discuss this below.

First, a primary area of focus that I plan to further explore and develop is the idea of the silenced self. This idea emerged in a quote from Matt, a 32-year-old straight white male who worked in a manufacturing plant, describing an Asian coworker who did not speak English well but was rumored to provide sexual favors for paying coworkers. In this case, this individual did not have her own voice, but rather was spoken for, creating a silenced self. There are any number of ways in which a self can be silenced within the context of an organization: an employee speaking for a client (or vice versa), a manager speaking for an employee (or vice versa), a new employee unable to speak in terms of organizational jargon, etc. When others are spoken for, rather than having the agency to speak from their own perspective, individual agency to do identity work (e.g., Wieland, 2010) suffers; identity work is partially done for the silenced self. I hope to explore how silenced selves function within the context of the organization, and how processes of

Second, the vocabulary associated with sex and sexuality is growing rapidly, affecting how employees and their organizations think about and regulate behaviors and actions. Though it may seem that a growing vocabulary would allow sexual and gender minorities a more developed language to communicate about their social positions in (Orbe, 1998), what emerged in the data was a growing frustration from people of various sexual identities about the exclusionary way in which these new terms are used. Philip, the bisexual-identified African American bartender expressed this frustration very well when he told me “You have to be so, like, categorized in order to put a label on stuff. And it's like, for people...who claim to just want to be like everyone else, you sure do dissect yourself a lot. You know?” Instead of being exclusively positive, new vocabulary terms and identity categories are simultaneously beneficial and detrimental to human

sexuality. The moment something is labeled, the moment it can be imbued and regulated by acts of power (Foucault, 1978/1990).

The most salient component of the rapidly growing set of sexual identity categories and labels is that they affect how sex and sexuality are talked about. What is considered “normal” shifts as the vocabulary related to sex and sexuality changes, which ultimately affects the process of co-sexuality. For participants like Philip, as well as heterosexual or straight-identified participants who want to be inclusive and stand with sexual minorities, not having the

Finally, I would love to take the central tenets of co-sexuality (a fluid sexual center; discursive and embodied regulation around fluid sexual “norms;” and a simultaneous push-pull process toward and away from fluid sexual “norms”) into specific types of organizations to challenge and evolve the tenets of co-sexuality. Though I suspect the process of co-sexuality would be the same in part-time service work, non-profit work, or educational settings, I think participant narratives would vary vastly, potentially deepening and broadening how the tenets are conceptualized.

What I want to do first to challenge co-sexuality is to explore its central tenets in a homonormative (privileging homosexual relationships and the sense of rightness associated with doing so; e.g. LeMaster, 2015) organization and compare it to the data from this dissertation. I would be primarily interested in seeing if the three tenets of co-sexuality were visible in participants of various sexualities. In this case, my own language use and conceptualization of sexuality would have to shift: heterosexual participants would be “sexual minorities” and those described as sexual minorities in this dissertation would be classified as having “dominant” sexualities. However, I again

suspect that though the specifics and language of participant stories may change, the central tenets would still be present.

Concluding Thoughts

To my mind, the interconnectedness of biology and social constructionism that make up our understanding, performance, and regulation of sexual selves is fascinating and at the core of my scholarly identity. Of particular interest are the contradictory ways in which sex and sexuality seem to both enable and constrain us. Humans are sexual beings, with sexual identities, preferences, and beliefs that they bring with them into every social institution, including the workplace. The ability of humans to simultaneously recognize, negotiate, and perform their often conflicting sexual selves in highly regulated work spaces have real-world consequences, many of which were hinted at, but never explicitly stated, in this dissertation. The invisible regulatory boundary that is sexuality continues to be in flux, leaving me with a rich set of questions allowing me to continue to explore how lived experience intersects sex and sexuality. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to explore these questions.

Appendix 1: Demographic Questionnaire

What is your occupation and job title?

What is your age?

What is your race?

What is your sexuality?

What is your gender?

What is your social class status?

In what city and state do you live?

Appendix 2: Initial Interview Protocol

- 1) What is sexuality?
- 2) Describe the expected human sexuality.
- 3) What would not be “normal” human sexuality?
- 4) I see that you’ve identified as _____. What does this mean to you?
- 5) Tell me a little bit about your current or most recent job.
 - a. What did you do there?
 - b. What kind of organization was it?
- 6) How would your co-workers describe your sexuality?
 - a. How do you hide your sexuality?
 - b. How do you demonstrate your sexuality?
- 7) Can you identify your co-workers’ sexuality?
 - a. How?
- 8) How is/was sexuality talked about in your organization?
 - a. How often is sexuality talked about in your organization?
 - b. Tell me about a conversation about sex in the workplace.
- 9) What do you think normal human sexuality is in your organization’s perspective?
 - a. How do you know this?
- 10) Tell me about a time when you felt you could not talk about sex or sexuality in your workplace.
 - a. Why do you think this happened?

- b. Think back to previous organizational experiences – how was this experience similar or different from other organization’s regulations of sexuality?

Appendix 3:Participants

Name	Job	Age	Race	Gender	Sexuality	Class	Education	State
Allen	W	29	White	Male	Heterosexual	Working class	B.A.	MO
AmethystB		30	White	Female	Bisexual	Raised upper middle class; currently poor	college	MO
Amy	W	34	African American	Woman	Heterosexual	Middle	Doctorate	KS
Ashley	W	27	White/Caucasian	Transwoman	Pansexual	Middle	B.A.	MO
Callie	W	31	Caucasian	Female/Woman	Pansexual	Working class	B.A.	MO
Evan	B	32	European mutt, white	Male	Heterosexual, only have sexual and sexually romantic feelings towards women.	Lower-middle	B.A.	MO
Hallie	W	31	Caucasian American	Woman	Female (pansexual-identified in interview)	Middle class; economic class is upper lower or lower middle	B.A.	MO
Jack	B	34	Caucasian	Male	Heterosexual	Lower-middle	B.A.	MO

Name	Job	Age	Race	Gender	Sexuality	Class	Education	State
Jamie	W	31	White	Female	Heterosexual, accepting of all. I'm comfortable with my sexuality at home as far as sexual feelings go, but I don't bring it up or flaunt it at work.	Middle class: homeowner, married, no kids, cat.	Some graduate school	KS
Jasmine	B	41	White	Woman	Straight	Middle	B.S.	KS
Jazz	W	32	African American	Female	Heterosexual	Poor/ working class	M.A.	MO/ NJ
Jenny	W	27	White	Female	Pansexual	Middle class	BFA	MO
Jeremy	W	22	Caucasian	Cisgender male	Homosexual	Middle	B.A.	MO
Jim	B	26	White	Male	Straight	Upper middle	B.S.	MO
Jill	B	45	White-ish. White, I guess.	Female	Heterosexual	Middle	Some college	IL
Kelly	W	29	White	Female	Heterosexual	Middle class	B.A.	MO
Keri	W	28	White	Woman	Bisexual	Upper; currently poor	Master's; almost PhD	IL

Name	Job	Age	Race	Gender	Sexuality	Class	Education	State
Kim	W	22	White, though I look Latina	Smack dab in the middle of the continuum, but identify as female	Pansexual	Upper	B.A.	MO
Lucy	B	30	Caucasian	Female	Heterosexual	Middle	College graduate	MO
Jody	W	30	Caucasian	Female	I classify myself as bisexual however I have only ever dated one woman and I am engaged to a man. Even if I wasn't engaged I highly doubt I would ever have a serious relationship with a woman, however I do find women attractive.	I am not sure of the technical definition but I guess I would classify myself/family as middle class. If I have to be more specific I would say lower middle class.	B.S.	MO
Matt	B	32	Caucasian	Male	Heterosexual	Lower-middle	Some college	MO
Mike	B	33	Caucasian	Male	Bisexual	Lower-middle	Associates	MO

Name	Job	Age	Race	Gender	Sexuality	Class	Education	State
Mimi	W	45	White-ish...I'm Jewish, so I don't really identify as Caucasian... but I sure do have White privilege. So, I guess I'm white.	Fem.	Hetero-flexible	Middle	PhD	MO
Nate	W	30	White/Caucasian	Male	Heterosexual	Old American Middle Class	Bachelor's with advanced training	MO
Pete	B	27	White	Male	Straight	Middle	B.A.	MO
Philip	B	34	African American	Male	Bisexual	Lower-middle	College	MO
Rina	W	64	Caucasian	Female	Heterosexual	Middle class	MDiv	NE
Sandra	B	35	White	Female	Bisexual	Poor	Some college	OH
Sara	W	25	White	Cisgender woman, "tomboy"	Bisexual	Young professional	B.A.	MO
Scott	W	54	White, non-Hispanic	Male	Gay	Professional class	Doctorate	MO

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VITA

Cristin A. Compton (B.A., Drury University; M.A., Missouri State University) is fascinated by how human interactions and identity performances are communicatively organized. The unspoken rules and regulations of interaction unique to each co-constructed context enable and constrain how human beings understand each other and how they understand themselves. Identities are not fixed, but rather must be malleable and flexible to negotiate changing social norms and rules. These contextual rules affect identity performances a variety of ways. Her research has focused on how identities are managed in specific contexts such as how sexual and gender identities are managed in changing American workplaces, how specific performances of femininity are normalized at female-only rock camps, as well as how people identify with contested and often undefined concepts such as “non-GMO” or “all-natural” when describing their purchasing identities. For her future research, Cristin hopes to continue developing theoretical frameworks to explore how intersectional identities are constructed, performed, and shift in a variety of communicative contexts.