

Sexuality non-disclosure and concealment as functional:

A qualitative study of multi-gender attracted men and non-binary people

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GBQ+ COMMUNITY PERIODIC SURVEY

Background & Methods

- Straight-identifying MSM priority population, but always challenging to directly recruit.¹⁻³
- Bi+ men's specific experiences often less visible in studies focused on gay/bi men.⁴
- Changing social norms; disclosure / 'coming out' / concealment as complicated social processes.⁵

Research question:

1. How do bi+ and straight MSM negotiate disclosure and concealment of sexual identity and behaviour?

Methods:

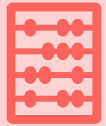
- Straight MSM and bi+ men participating in the National MSM Survey (2024; CI James MacGibbon) invited to participate in semi-structured interviews, Oct 2024 – Feb 2025.

¹ Newman et al. 2018. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*. ² Persson et al. 2019. *Men and Masculinities*.

³ Ooi et al. 2022. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*. ⁴ Feinstein & Dodge. 2020. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

⁵ Davis & Manderson. 2014. *Disclosure in Health and Illness*. Routledge.

Sample



N=33. Ages 19-71 (*median*=36). Most born in Australia (*n*=24)
Diverse in gender (*n*=26 cis men, *n*=7 trans, incl. trans men and non-binary)
Diverse in sexual orientation labels (*n*=26 bisexual, *n*=8 pansexual, *n*=3 straight)



Iteratively developed four categories of sexuality discretion (high, moderate, less, not discreet).
Importance of discretion / who they have disclosed to (if at all).
This analysis focuses on participants with high/moderate discretion.



n=15 'moderate' or 'high' discretion. Older cohort (*median*=49).
Less gender diverse (*n*=14 cis men, *n*=1 transitioning).
Sexual orientation labels (*n*=11 bisexual, *n*=1 pansexual, *n*=3 straight).

Key ideas regarding disclosure

‘Highly discreet’ (n=6)

Discretion absolute priority; almost no one / only select person knows about sexuality.

- Discretion managed in various ways across different social domains (home, family, friends, workplace).
- Not wanting to disrupt family life.
- Preserving a straight-passing / normative married life.
- Sex with other men as compartmentalised.

‘Moderately discreet’ (n=9)

Discretion important. Some domains of life where people know (inner circle of friends/family)

Complicated situations

“Who am I as a person? So, **on the outside, married, two kids, professional, very successful, have everything that a typical Brady family should be seen to have.** We tick all those requirements, and on the outside, that's what you see. Inside, **I have many demons and I'm fighting many battles, and one of them is, I guess, my sexuality.**”

(Rob, bisexual/gay, 50s, Major City NSW, ‘highly discreet’)

“I mean my kids were really incredibly supportive of me. **I couldn't have wanted for a better acceptance from them, and that was actually very important.**”

(David, bisexual cis man, 60s, Inner Regional NSW, ‘moderately discreet’)

Transgressing norms of married life

“I don't think anyone needs to know. We've discussed it, my wife and I. I think it's different if you are married because there are other considerations and judgements that people will make. here's two things: **“What do you mean you're bisexual? Does that mean you're having sex with men? Oh, but you're married. What does that mean?”** [...] I mean I just think our kids would struggle with that. With swinging. It goes back to the whole society and the norms. What is normal?”

(Jason, bisexual cis man, 50s, Inner Regional Queensland, 'highly discreet')

To people I don't know, I'd probably just introduce myself as a straight married man. I've been married for only up to 11 years. My wife knows I'm bisexual. I've probably only half a dozen friends that know I'm bisexual.

(Deon, bisexual cis man, 30s, Major City VIC, 'moderately discreet')

Compartmentalised sex

“I'd say that I'm closeted bisexual. Like **my wife nor really anyone else around me in my life have any idea. It's been an extremely rare occasion, casual thing that has gone on, I guess, say 22 years now.** Just casual male sexual encounters really.”

(Adam, straight/bisexual cis man, 40s, Inner Regional NSW, ‘highly discreet’)

“Strangely enough, I don't see playing with guys as being unfaithful. **I know it's irrational, but I would regard seeing another woman outside of a sex worker as being unfaithful.** It's odd, I know it's odd. That's what I feel. With a sex worker, it's **completely transactional as it is with most of the guys.** I'm not there to have an emotional relationship with them.”

(Marc, straight/bisexual cis man, 60s, Major City NSW, ‘highly discreet’)

Discussion

- Social and political context shaping attitudes towards sexuality continue to change:
 - Compulsory heterosexuality.
 - Biphobia and homophobia.
 - Expectations about normative relationship structures.
- Complicating 'coming out' narratives.
- Discretion and concealment *functional* for maintaining privacy, preserving relationships, and protecting social roles in public life.
- Effectively engaging this population requires sensitivity to the complexity of disclosure, concealment, and the desire for discretion.

Former West Coast player Mitch Brown becomes first AFL player to come out as bisexual

- Brown says he hopes coming out publicly will help others feel seen
- 36-year-old played 94 games for the Eagles between 2007 and 2016



▶ Mitch Brown has become the first player in AFL history, past or present, to come out as bisexual.
Photograph: Paul Kane/Getty Images

¹ Newman et al. 2018. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*. ² Persson et al. 2019. *Men and Masculinities*.

³ Klein et al. 2015. *Journal of Homosexuality*. ⁴ Schuyler et al. 2021. *Journal of Bisexuality*.

Authorship, funding, and disclosures

Authorship

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