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Bi+ Identity Visibility and Well-Being in the Context of Romantic Relationships

Emma L. McGorray¹, Eli J. Finkel^{1, 2}, and Brian A. Feinstein³

¹Department of Psychology, Northwestern University

²Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University

³Department of Psychology, Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science

Bi+ people—those who are attracted to multiple gender groups and who use labels such as bisexual, pansexual, queer, or fluid—encounter challenges related to making their identities visible and experience reduced well-being relative to their gay/lesbian and heterosexual peers. In a sample of 450 bi+ participants, we pursue two primary goals. First, we investigate whether the subjective feeling that one's bi+ identity is invisible is associated with lower well-being among bi+ individuals. Second, we identify circumstances under which bi+ people experience lower versus higher subjective identity invisibility, focusing on the influential role of romantic relationships. We find that subjective visibility is positively associated with well-being, particularly for individuals whose bi+ identities are central to them. Relationship factors supporting a sense of perceived visibility included being in a same-gender relationship and having a gay, lesbian, or bi+ partner. This study contributes to efforts to identify conditions that promote bi+ people's well-being and highlights the importance of attending to the relationship dynamics of bi+ people, an understudied population.

Public Significance Statement

Bi+ people—those who are attracted to multiple gender groups and who use labels such as bisexual, pansexual, queer, or fluid—encounter challenges related to making their identities visible and experience reduced well-being relative to their gay/lesbian and heterosexual peers. In this study, we find that feelings of bi+ identity visibility are positively associated with well-being, particularly for those whose bi+ identities are important to them, and that individuals with gay, lesbian, or bi+ partners experience a greater sense of visibility than do those with heterosexual partners.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, bisexual, close relationships, identity, visibility

Supplemental materials: <https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000628.supp>

According to recent Gallup polls, more than half of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) adults in the United States identify as bisexual (Jones, 2022). Though these estimates suggest that bisexual people make up the largest proportion of the U.S. LGBT population, bi+ people—people who are attracted to members of more than one gender group and who use identity labels such as bisexual, pansexual, fluid, or queer—report feeling that their identities are invisible (e.g., Ross et al., 2010). For example, they struggle to identify distinct visual appearances that would communicate their

bisexuality to others (Hayfield, 2013; Nelson, 2020) and actively engage in strategies to make their identities known (Davila et al., 2019). Yet even when their identities *are* known to others, bi+ people may feel a sense of identity invisibility if others fail to truly believe or acknowledge those identities, as when they contend with people making inaccurate assumptions about their sexual orientation based on the gender of their romantic partner or when they deal with harmful perceptions of bisexuality as a temporary or illegitimate identity (e.g., Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Flanders et al., 2015, 2016; Garr-Schultz & Gardner, 2019). In sum, people experience *subjective identity visibility* when they feel that their identity is not just known to others but is believed and acknowledged for what it truly is, and bi+ people face barriers to achieving this sense of visibility.

These reduced feelings of visibility may partially explain why many bi+ people experience poor well-being, as other researchers have speculated (Ross et al., 2018). If that is the case, helping bi+ people thrive requires insight into the conditions linked to higher versus lower visibility. In the present study, we examine feelings of subjective bi+ identity visibility, focusing on the context of romantic relationships, a major domain in which bi+ people encounter identity-relevant challenges. For example, when a bi+ person is in

Emma L. McGorray  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5761-7501>

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Emma L. McGorray, Department of Psychology, Northwestern University, Swift Hall, 2029 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60201, United States. Email: emma.mcgorray@u.northwestern.edu

a romantic relationship, their bi+ identity often becomes invisible (e.g., a man is likely to be perceived as heterosexual if he is in a relationship with a woman but as gay if he is in a relationship with a man; e.g., Ochs, 1996). In addition, bi+ people have described pressure from romantic partners to stop identifying as bi+ once they are in a relationship (Feinstein et al., 2018). Given that bi+ people face unique challenges related to visibility when they are in relationships, it is particularly important to examine factors related to visibility and well-being in this context. To that end, the goals of the current study were to investigate the link between subjective bi+ identity visibility and well-being and to explore relationship features that may support or undermine one's sense of bi+ visibility.

Previous work on bi+ visibility has discussed visibility in a variety of ways. In some works, scholars focus their analysis on the representation of bisexuality in media, legal discourses, and dominant culture (i.e., the visibility or invisibility of bisexuality and the quality of bisexuality's depictions in these contexts; e.g., Ross et al., 2018). In other work, scholars focus their analysis on the ways people individually navigate the visibility of their identities (e.g., examining the strategies bi+ people use to make their identities known; Davila et al., 2019). While we believe that both levels of analysis contribute to the understanding of bi+ people's experiences, we focus our analysis on the individual level—on people's subjective experiences of whether their bi+ identities are visible.

Bi+ Identity Visibility and Well-Being

Bisexual people are affected by adverse mental health outcomes (e.g., depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts) relative to heterosexual people, and often relative to gay and lesbian people as well (Ross et al., 2018; Salway et al., 2019). These disparities are likely multiply determined, but the sense that one's bi+ identity is invisible may be one important contributor. Broadly speaking, the conditions that characterize subjective identity visibility (i.e., feeling that one's identity is known, believed, and acknowledged by others) are also conditions that should, based on research in community and collegiate samples, promote greater well-being. For example, scholars have argued that feeling that one's partner validates, understands, and cares for them may be particularly important in promoting individual well-being (Reis, 2012). Others have argued that the feeling that people accept and validate one's understanding of who they are promotes authenticity (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018), which in turn is associated with greater well-being (Sutton, 2020). Conversely, experiences that undermine visibility, such as having one's identity denied by others, are associated with lower well-being and increased rates of depression among bi+ populations (Feinstein et al., 2019; Garr-Schultz & Gardner, 2019; Maimon et al., 2019).

Because the effects of identity-relevant experiences may depend on how important individuals' identities are to them (Major & O'Brien, 2005), visibility may be particularly strongly linked to well-being for those higher in identity centrality (i.e., the sense that a given identity is important; Settles, 2004). Bi+ individuals higher in identity centrality engage in more efforts to make their bi+ identities visible (Davila et al., 2019; Feinstein et al., 2021), suggesting that visibility may matter more to them. As such, those higher in bi+ identity centrality may reap particularly positive well-being benefits when they experience subjective identity visibility.

Identifying the circumstances in which bi+ people feel their identities are visible, then, may be key to understanding well-being,

especially for those high in bi+ identity centrality. Such an endeavor requires studying the distinct identity-relevant experiences bi+ people face and how those experiences relate to feelings of bi+ identity visibility. As we discuss next, bi+ people's romantic relationships are one essential context in which to do so.

Bi+ Visibility and Romantic Relationships

Bi+ people face unique identity-relevant challenges because of and within their relationships. Findings from a daily diary study suggest that many of the negative identity-relevant experiences bi+ people report occur at the interpersonal level, including in romantic contexts (Flanders et al., 2016). Both experiences within one's relationships and others' perceptions of those relationships may influence bi+ people's feelings of identity visibility, making their relationships an important focus for further research (e.g., Feinstein & Dyar, 2018), especially because sexual minority individuals' relationships are understudied (McGorray et al., in press). In the present article, we examine how experiences related to relationship status, relationship type, and romantic partner behaviors are linked to a sense of identity visibility.

Relationship Status and Type

For bi+ people, singlehood and partnership each brings their own challenges, as do different kinds of relationships. Some research suggests that relationship involvement is generally linked to worse well-being for bi+ people (Feinstein et al., 2016; Whitton et al., 2018), perhaps because of the invisibility some bi+ people feel within their relationships. For example, partnered bi+ people may face invisibilizing attitudes and identity denial as a result of being in a relationship or may experience pressure from their partners to stop identifying as bisexual (e.g., Feinstein et al., 2018, 2019; Ross et al., 2010). Unpartnered bi+ people, on the other hand, report potential partners not wanting to date them because of their sexual orientation (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014) or being disbelieved about or rejected on the basis of their identities (Li et al., 2013). These experiences may lead them to feel reduced visibility and engage in behaviors that further their invisibility, such as concealing their identities to avoid potential partners' bias.

Moreover, bi+ people face challenges in making their identities visible regardless of whether they are in a relationship perceived to be "same-gender" (e.g., a relationship between two men) or "mixed-gender" (e.g., a relationship between a man and a woman). For example, in a daily diary study, bisexual women in mixed-gender relationships expressed a desire to be seen as women attracted to women, while those in same-gender relationships expressed a desire to distinguish themselves from lesbians (Daly et al., 2018). While bi+ people in same-gender relationships tend to be more out about their identities than those in mixed-gender relationships (e.g., Dyar et al., 2014; Feinstein et al., in press), it is not clear whether these disclosures are accompanied by a sense of greater subjective identity visibility—the *feeling* that one's bi+ identity is known, believed, and acknowledged. We investigate this question, along with the question of whether partnered or single people experience greater visibility, in the present article.

Additionally, we examine how one's partner's sexual orientation is related to their subjective identity visibility. Existing research suggests that bi+ cisgender women's outness is related to the orientation

of their partners (Xavier Hall et al., 2021), with women reporting greater outness when in relationships with lesbian or bisexual partners (both men and women) than when in relationships with heterosexual men. However, research has not yet examined how subjective *visibility* is associated with partner orientation in a sample containing members of multiple gender groups. We take up this investigation in our work, specifically comparing the visibility experiences of those in same-gender relationships with bi+ partners, those in same-gender relationships with gay or lesbian partners, those in mixed-gender relationships with bi+ partners, and those in mixed-gender relationships with heterosexual partners.

Partner Behaviors

While some relationship types may be associated with greater visibility than others, in all kinds of relationships, bi+ people's partners may be able to engage in behaviors that support a sense of visibility. One partner behavior that may help to promote identity visibility is verification or affirmation of the bi+ partner's identity. People seek out self-verification, or confirmation of their own views of themselves, in order to maintain a stable and coherent sense of who they are (Swann & Buhrmester, 2003). For bi+ people, having a partner who views them in accordance with their bi+ identities may confirm their self-understanding and bolster their sense of bi+ visibility.

Research Questions

In the present cross-sectional study, we investigate two broad research questions: (a) Is subjective bi+ visibility linked to greater well-being, particularly for those whose bi+ identities are central to them? and (b) Which relationship features—such as relationship status (single vs. partnered), relationship type (same-gender vs. mixed-gender), partner sexual orientation, and partner verification—are related to greater subjective bi+ visibility?

Method

The present research used a cross-sectional survey¹ of 450 bi+ people who were single, in a same-gender relationship, or in a mixed-gender relationship (see the online supplemental materials for additional details on how these categories were defined and determined). All exclusions are reported in the participants' section below, and the measures section provides information about the measures relevant to the present analyses. All study procedures were approved by the IRB. The data, analysis code, and a codebook containing all measures include in the survey are available at https://osf.io/mpf3tr/?view_only=57f23738675a485fa6447fcb95ba6bd0. This study was not preregistered.

Participants

Using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007), we performed a power analysis for linear regression with up to 10 tested predictors, an error probability of .05, power of 0.80, and small-to-medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.05$). Analyses revealed that a sample of 335 was required to detect an effect of that size with 0.80 power. To ensure that we would have sufficient power to test regression models in the entire sample and in the sample of only participants in relationships, we aimed to collect at least 335 bi+ individuals in relationships. We aimed to recruit an additional 120 single bi+ people. Our goal was for roughly half of

partnered participants to be in same-gender relationships and the other half to be in mixed-gender relationships. We recruited participants from Prolific in fall of 2020, receiving 556 complete submissions of our survey. To obtain our final sample, we excluded four participants whose responses indicated low data quality (e.g., nonsensical responses to open-ended questions); 24 who did not primarily identify with a label under the bi+ umbrella (in our study, "bisexual," "pansexual," "fluid," or "queer"); 24 who did not follow instructions when asked to indicate what identity label they wanted to see in questions throughout the survey; and 45 whose relationship type were self-described as "other" or were unknown, as we were particularly interested in comparisons among participants who were single, in same-gender relationships, and in mixed-gender relationships. We also excluded 28 participants who had multiple partners, since we asked participants to report on only a single partner in the study and did not capture all of the relevant information we might need to understand the relationship-relevant visibility experiences of those with multiple partners. All participants in the analytic sample reported that they were attracted to members of multiple gender groups.

These exclusions resulted in a final analytic sample of 450 participants with an average age of 26.2 ($SD = 6.6$ years). For partnered participants, relationship length ranged from one month to 20 years ($M = 3.7$ years, $SD = 3.6$ years). Additional sample characteristics are shown in Table 1, with a breakdown of the sample by gender and relationship type in Table 2.

Measures

Relationship Type

We asked participants whether they were in a relationship. If they responded in the affirmative, we asked them whether they were in a same-gender relationship, a mixed-gender relationship, or in another kind of relationship², and they selected which label best described them.

Subjective Bi+ Identity Visibility

We generated three items for the purpose of this survey to measure subjective bi+ identity visibility, the extent to which individuals feel that their bi+ identities are visible to and truly seen by others. Participants responded to these items ("In general, I feel that people know I am bi+"; "In general, I feel that people believe I am bi+"; "In general, I feel that people acknowledge my bi+ identity") on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A definition of bi+ was presented to participants earlier in the survey to ensure they understood our use of the term in this and other measures. Items

¹ We recontacted participants with a six-month follow-up assessment. However, only about a third of the analytic sample completed the follow-up, preventing us from conducting sufficiently powered, unbiased longitudinal analyses.

² Due to survey error, this question was not displayed to everyone. For participants with missing responses, we attempted to determine their relationship type based on their gender, their partner's gender, and their open-ended responses, which sometimes included mention of relationship type. When responses did not contain sufficient information to clarify participants' relationship type, we marked the data for the variable as missing. A thorough description of our coding process for this variable is available in the online supplemental materials.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Relationship type		
Same-gender	127	28.2
Mixed-gender	193	42.9
Single	130	28.9
Relationship type by partner orientation (among partnered participants)		
Mixed-gender relationship, bi+ partner	45	14.1
Mixed-gender relationship, heterosexual partner	144	45.0
Same-gender relationship, bi+ partner	72	22.5
Same-gender relationship, gay/lesbian partner	50	15.6
Another relationship type by partner orientation combination (e.g., partner is another orientation)	9	2.8
Primary sexual orientation label		
Bisexual	376	83.6
Pansexual	52	11.6
Queer	18	4.0
Fluid	4	0.9
Gender identity		
Man	104	23.1
Woman	308	68.4
Nonbinary	36	8.0
Another gender identity	2	0.4
Transgender status		
Self-identifies as transgender	43	9.6
Does not self-identify as transgender	403	89.6
Prefers not to answer	3	0.7
Another answer	1	0.2
Race/ethnicity		
Black	22	4.9
East Asian	19	4.2
Indian subcontinent	10	2.2
Latinx	30	6.7
Multiracial	48	10.7
Native American	2	0.4
Non-Latinx White	306	68.0
Pacific Islander	1	0.2
Southeast Asian	8	1.8
Another race	4	0.9

Note. Among participants who self-identified as transgender, 32.6% identified as men, 18.6% as women, and 48.8% as nonbinary.

were averaged to obtain a scale score, and the scale had excellent reliability ($\alpha = .91$). Higher scores reflect greater agreement that one's bi+ identity is visible to and truly seen by others.

Bi+ Identity Centrality

We presented participants with an adapted version of the identity centrality subscale of the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale (Mohr & Kendra, 2011). Consistent with prior

Table 2
Number of Participants by Gender and Relationship Type

Gender	Mixed-gender relationship	Same-gender relationship	Single	Total
Man	34	36	34	104
Woman	154	75	79	308
Nonbinary	5	15	16	36
Another gender identity	0	1	1	2
Total	193	127	130	450

research (e.g., Feinstein et al., 2021), our adaptation replaced references to LGB identities with references to participants' bi+ identities. Example items include "Being bi+ is a central part of my identity" and "Being bi+ is an important part of my life." Participants responded on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*. Scale reliability was excellent ($\alpha = .90$). Items were averaged to obtain a scale score, and higher scores reflect the greater agreement that one's bi+ identity is central to one's overall identity.

Outness

Participants responded to the item "I would say that I am open (out) as bi+," a one-item measure of outness that has been shown to perform equivalently to or better than longer outness measures (Wilkerson et al., 2016) and has been used in prior studies (e.g., Hart et al., 2017). They responded on a scale from 1 (*not at all open (out)*) to 5 (*open (out) to all or most people I know*). Higher scores reflect being out to more people in one's life.

Psychological Well-Being Composite

Participants completed three major measures of psychological well-being: the four-item global mental health scale (Hays et al., 2009; $\alpha = .81$; sample item: "In general, how would you rate your mental health, including your mood and your ability to think?"); the five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985; $\alpha = .91$; sample item: "I am satisfied with my life"); and a nine-item measure of depression (the PHQ-9) that asked participants how frequently they have experienced depressive symptoms (e.g., "Little interest or pleasure in doing things") in the past two weeks (Spitzer et al., 1999; $\alpha = .91$). We reverse scored PHQ-9 items before summing them to compute a total score so that greater values corresponded with lower depression (greater well-being). We standardized each of these measures—general mental health, satisfaction with life, and depression (reverse scored)—and averaged them to create a single composite measure of well-being, with greater scores corresponding to greater well-being. The reliability of this three-item composite was good ($\alpha = .85$).

Overall Verification From Partner

Using a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*, participants responded to a four-item measure of partner verification loosely adapted from Drigotas et al. (1999): "In general, my partner treats me in a way that acknowledges who I am"; "In general, my partner helps me express who I am"; "In general, my partner behaves in ways that recognize who I am"; and "In general, my partner sees me for who I am". Scale reliability was excellent ($\alpha = .94$). Items were averaged to obtain a scale score, and higher scores reflect greater perceived partner verification.

Bi+-Specific Verification From Partner

Participants responded to a measure designed to gauge the extent to which they felt that their partner engages in behaviors that affirm their bi+ identities. Again, the items were adapted from Drigotas et al. (1999) and used response scales from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. The four items were "My partner treats me in a way that acknowledges my bi+ identity"; "My partner helps me

express my bi+ identity”; “My partner behaves in ways that recognize my bi+ identity”; and “My partner sees me as a bi+ person.” Scale reliability was excellent ($\alpha = .93$). Items were averaged to obtain a scale score, and higher scores reflect greater perceived partner verification of one’s bi+ identity.

Partner Sexual Orientation

Participants were asked to select which of the following labels best describes their partner’s sexual orientation: straight, heterosexual; gay, lesbian; bisexual; queer; pansexual; fluid; asexual; unsure/questioning; or another sexual orientation. They were later asked whether their partner uses any other labels to describe their identity and were given the same response options. We categorized participants’ partners as bi+ if they used bisexual, pansexual, or fluid as their primary label, or used one of those labels in addition to the primary label queer. Two participants whose partners primarily used the label queer but also described themselves as gay were not classified as bi+, since it was unclear whether they were using those terms to describe a monosexual or bi+ identity.

Results

Except where otherwise noted, all effect sizes are reported as standardized regression coefficients. Correlations among all variables of interest can be seen in Table 3.

Part 1: Is Bi+ Visibility Associated With Well-Being?

We began by examining the links between bi+ visibility and well-being, using the well-being composite measure as our outcome. While outness and visibility are conceptually distinct, the constructs are related, such that outness may be a confounding variable influencing the relationships of interest in the analyses. As a result, we controlled for outness in the analyses presented here. Further justification for the use of outness as a control and analyses without this control variable can be seen in the online supplemental materials.³ Controlling for outness and relationship type, bi+ visibility was associated with greater well-being, $\beta = .15$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.27], $t = 2.45$, $p = .015$. Exploratory analyses revealed that associations between visibility and well-being were especially strong for those high in bi+ identity centrality. We regressed our composite well-being measure on bi+ visibility, bi+ centrality, and their interaction, controlling for outness and relationship type. Bi+ visibility significantly predicted well-being, $\beta = .17$, [0.05, 0.29], $t = 2.72$, $p = .007$, and there was a significant interaction between visibility and centrality, $\beta = .12$, [0.03, 0.21], $t = 2.69$, $p = .008$, such that visibility was more strongly associated with well-being for those one standard deviation above the mean on identity centrality, $\beta = .29$, [0.13, 0.45], $t = 3.65$, $p < .001$, than those one standard deviation below the mean, $\beta = .04$, [−0.10, 0.19], $t = 0.60$, $p = .552$. These results are depicted in Figure 1.

Part 2: Which Relationship Features Are Associated With a Greater Sense of Bi+ Visibility?

Relationship Status and Type

We assessed whether participants’ sense that their bi+ identities were visible differed by their relationship type (single, in a same-

gender relationship, or in a mixed-gender relationship) by regressing visibility on relationship type, controlling for outness. We set our planned orthogonal contrasts to compare (a) participants in same-gender relationships to participants in mixed-gender relationships and (b) single participants to partnered participants. Results revealed that (a) participants in same-gender relationships felt a greater sense of bi+ visibility than did participants in mixed-gender relationships, $\beta = .27$, 95% CI [0.10, 0.44], $t = 3.07$, $p = .002$, and (b) single and partnered participants did not differ in their sense of visibility, $\beta = .08$, [−0.08, 0.24], $t = 1.03$, $p = .303$. The estimated marginal mean visibility values, calculated using the emmeans package in R (Lenth, 2022), from this model can be seen in Table 4. While our analyses focused on planned contrasts, pairwise comparisons between groups can be seen in Table S13 in the online supplemental materials.

Partner’s Sexual Orientation

To develop a deeper sense of what might explain these differences in visibility between relationship types, we next explored whether visibility differed based on one’s partner’s sexual orientation. For this analysis, we subsetted the data to just those participants in relationships and excluded participants whose partners used labels other than heterosexual, gay/lesbian, or bi+. This involved excluding participants whose partners were asexual ($n = 1$), demisexual ($n = 1$), unsure/questioning ($n = 4$), or queer ($n = 2$). We also excluded one participant who reported that they were in mixed-gender relationships but their partner was gay/lesbian. We categorized the remaining sample into four groups: (a) mixed-gender relationship with a bi+ partner, (b) mixed-gender relationship with a heterosexual partner, (c) same-gender relationship with a bi+ partner, and (d) same-gender relationship with a gay/lesbian partner (Table 4).

We set up our planned orthogonal contrasts so that we could examine three questions related to partner sexual orientation and relationship type: (a) Do participants with heterosexual partners feel less visible than participants with bi+ or gay/lesbian partners?; (b) Do participants in mixed-gender relationships with bi+ partners feel less visible than those in same-gender relationships?; and (c) Do participants in same-gender relationships differ in visibility depending on whether their partner is bi+ versus gay/lesbian? We regressed visibility on these contrasts, controlling for outness. The results of our analysis are depicted in Table 5, along with a brief description of each contrast.

As shown in Table 5, participants in mixed-gender relationships with heterosexual partners felt significantly less visible than those in the other relationship types (i.e., those with nonheterosexual partners). However, participants with bi+ partners in mixed-gender relationships did not differ in their sense of visibility from participants in same-gender relationships, nor did participants in same-gender relationships with bi+ versus gay/lesbian partners. In other words, those with bi+ partners in mixed-gender relationships felt no less visible than those in same-gender relationships, suggesting that having a gay/lesbian or bi+ (vs. heterosexual) partner, regardless of

³ In their review of an earlier version of this article, reviewers suggested we control for relationship satisfaction; we discuss in the online supplemental materials why we did not choose to control for this variable but present the requested analyses in the online supplemental materials for the sake of transparency.

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations With Confidence Intervals

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Bi+ visibility	4.06	1.63					
2. Bi+ centrality	3.45	1.24	.29*** [0.20, 0.37]				
3. Bi+ outness	3.31	1.25	.65*** [0.59, 0.70]	.34*** [0.26, 0.42]			
4. Well-being composite	0.00	0.88	.15*** [0.06, 0.24]	.01 [-0.08, 0.11]	.11* [0.02, 0.20]		
5. Overall verification from partner	6.05	1.10	.26*** [0.15, 0.36]	.07 [-0.04, 0.18]	.16* [0.05, 0.26]	.26*** [0.16, 0.36]	
6. Bi+-specific verification from partner	5.51	1.36	.35*** [0.26, 0.45]	.40*** [0.31, 0.49]	.31*** [0.20, 0.40]	.13* [0.02, 0.23]	.46*** [0.37, 0.54]

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

relationship type, is associated with greater visibility. The estimated marginal mean visibility values for each partner orientation/relationship type combination can be seen in Table 4.

Bi+-Specific Verification From Partner

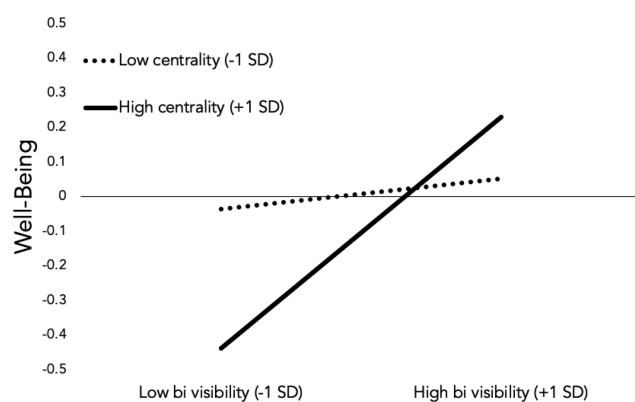
We next explored whether having a partner who verifies and affirms one's bi+ identity is associated with a greater sense of visibility. We regressed bi+ visibility on bi+-specific verification from partner; relationship type (same- vs. mixed-gender); overall verification from partner; and outness, with the last three variables included in the model as controls. Bi+-specific verification was associated with greater bi+ visibility, albeit with a borderline p -value, $\beta = .10$, 95% CI [0.0002, 0.190], $t = 1.97$, $p = .049$.

We next replaced the relationship type variable with the four-category variable we used when exploring the role of partner orientation. In this model, bi+-specific verification was not associated with visibility, $\beta = .07$, 95% CI [-0.03, 0.17], $t = 1.36$, $p = .174$. Combined with the p -value barely under .05 in the previous model, these results do not provide strong evidence that having a partner who engages in the verification of one's bi+ identity is associated with a greater sense of visibility. As a result, we do not incorporate bi+-specific verification in the following integrative model.

Moderated Mediation. Given the links we found between (a) relationship type and visibility and (b) visibility and well-being, with the latter moderated by identity centrality, we used the R "process" function (Hayes, 2017) to test a moderated mediation model among partnered participants, depicted in panel A of Figure 2. This model examined whether being in a same-gender (vs. mixed-gender) relationship was associated with well-being through greater bi+ visibility, with the link between visibility and well-being moderated by identity centrality. The index of moderated mediation significantly differed from 0, index = -0.02, bootstrap CI [-0.05, -0.002], with evidence for a significant indirect effect of relationship type on well-being through bi+ visibility when identity centrality is high (+1 SD) but not when it is low (-1 SD).

A similar pattern emerged when we examined whether being in a mixed-gender relationship with a non-heterosexual versus heterosexual partner was associated with greater well-being through visibility (see panel B of Figure 2). In other words, being in a same-gender relationship and having a nonheterosexual partner were generally associated with greater bi+ visibility, which was in turn associated with greater well-being for those high in identity centrality. Although mediational results from cross-sectional data must be viewed as tentative, these findings provide preliminary evidence for this pattern.

Figure 1
Predicted Well-Being by Bi+ Visibility and Bi+ Identity Centrality



Note. All variables are standardized, with a one-unit increase corresponding to an increase by one standard deviation.

Table 4
Estimated Marginal Mean Subjective Bi+ Identity Visibility by Relationship Type and Partner Orientation for Models Controlling for Outness

Relationship type	<i>n</i>	Unstandardized bi+ visibility <i>M</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Standardized bi+ visibility <i>M</i> (<i>SE</i>)
Relationship type			
Mixed-gender relationship	193	3.84 (0.09)	-0.14 (0.05)
Same-gender relationship	127	4.27 (0.11)	0.13 (0.07)
Single	130	4.19 (0.11)	0.08 (0.07)
Relationship type/partner orientation			
Mixed-gender relationship, heterosexual partner	144	3.81 (0.10)	-0.15 (0.06)
Mixed-gender relationship, bi+ partner	45	4.46 (0.18)	0.24 (0.11)
Same-gender relationship, gay/lesbian partner	50	4.35 (0.17)	0.18 (0.10)
Same-gender relationship, bi+ partner	72	4.46 (0.14)	0.25 (0.09)

Table 5
Regression Results Predicting Bi+ Visibility From Relationship Type/Partner Orientation, Controlling for Outness

Parameter	β [95% CI]	<i>p</i>
Intercept	0.039 [−0.05, 0.13]	.409
Contrast 1: Mixed-gender, heterosexual partner versus other relationship types	0.375 [0.21, 0.54]	<.001
Contrast 2: Mixed-gender, bi+ partner versus same-gender partner (bi+ or gay/lesbian)	0.034 [−0.22, 0.29]	.794
Contrast 3: Same-gender, bi+ partner versus same-gender gay/lesbian partner	−0.069 [−0.34, 0.20]	.615
Bi+ outness	0.668 [0.58, 0.75]	<.001

Note. Contrast 1 was coded so that “mixed-gender, heterosexual partner” = $-3/4$, while the other three groups were coded as $1/4$. Contrast 2 was coded so that “mixed-gender, bi+ partner” = $2/3$, while “same-gender, bi+ partner” = $-1/3$ and “same-gender, gay/lesbian partner” = $-1/3$. Contrast 3 was coded so that “same-gender, bi+ partner” = $-1/2$ and “same-gender, gay/lesbian partner” = $1/2$.

Discussion

In the present study, we examined the topic of subjective bi+ identity visibility, the sense that one’s individual bi+ identity is known, believed, and acknowledged by others. Specifically, we examined the association between visibility and well-being and the relationship-relevant factors linked to a sense of visibility. Consistent with our expectations, we found a positive cross-sectional relationship between visibility and well-being, and this association was especially strong for those high in bi+ identity centrality. Our exploration of the factors linked to visibility revealed that people tended to experience a greater sense of bi+ identity visibility when in same-gender rather than mixed-gender relationships and when their partners were gay/lesbian or bi+ rather than heterosexual. Having a partner who verified one’s bi+ identity was not robustly linked to greater bi+ visibility, suggesting further work is needed to identify partner behaviors that consistently contribute to a sense of visibility, along with contributors to bi+ visibility from outside the romantic context (e.g., involvement in the LGBTQ+ community; supportive overall social networks).

Consistent with suggestions that feelings of invisibility may be one contributor to bi+ people’s low well-being (e.g., Ross et al., 2018), these results suggest that visibility is an important factor to consider when attempting to understand bi+ people’s well-being. However, we also found that the link between visibility and well-being was moderated by bi+ identity centrality, occurring among those particularly high (but not those particularly low) in centrality. This suggests that visibility is not uniformly accompanied by greater well-being and may not be an important or desirable experience for all bi+ people. For those whose bi+ identities are less central, for example, visibility may be less important to them and therefore less consequential to well-being. Additionally, visibility has the potential to *worsen* well-being outcomes if the visibility of one’s identity is linked to identity-based discrimination or increased scrutiny (hypervisibility; Buchanan & Settles, 2019). Visibility of bisexuality in the media can be fraught and is by no means an unmitigated good (Johnson, 2016), and the same may be the case for subjective feelings of bi+ visibility. Future work should further explore the boundary conditions of the link between visibility and well-being,

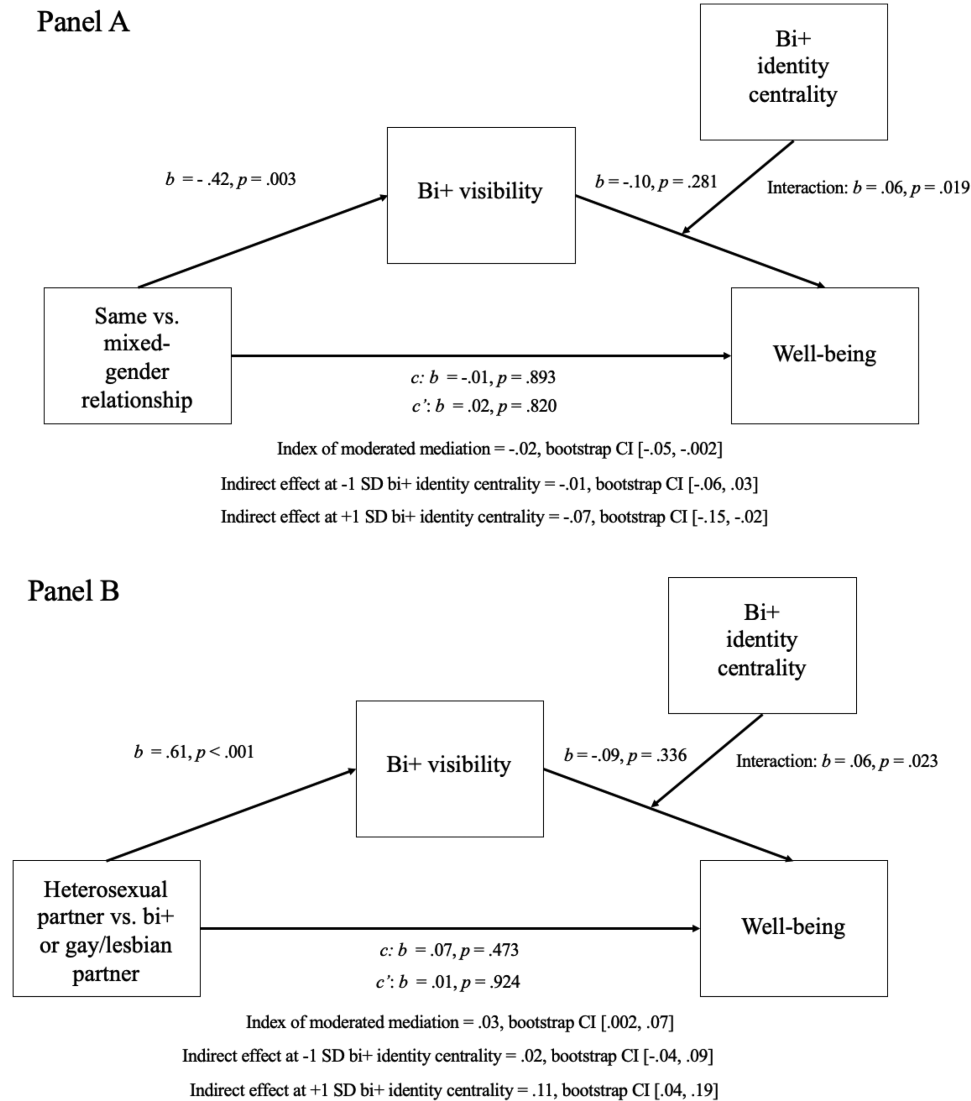
including by examining how visibility may be linked to negative experiences.

Our findings also highlight the importance of attending to the relationship context when attempting to understand bi+ people’s identity-related experiences, adding to work demonstrating that bi+ people who are in same-gender relationships or dating nonheterosexual partners are more “out” about their identities (e.g., Dyar et al., 2014; Feinstein et al., in press; Xavier Hall et al., 2021). Greater outness may be a contributor to greater visibility among those in same-gender relationships or in mixed-gender relationships with gay/lesbian or bi+ partners, but it is likely just one piece of the puzzle, as feelings of invisibility can occur even among people who are out about their identities. Being in a same-gender relationship and having a non-heterosexual partner may be associated with visibility-boosting experiences beyond outness, such as feeling more connected to the LGBTQ+ community and being embedded in a broader social network of people who readily affirm and acknowledge one’s bi+ identity. Bi+ people in relationships with partners outside of the LGBTQ+ community, on the other hand, may have fewer connections to people and environments that affirm and acknowledge their identities, which may contribute to reduced feelings of visibility. As research on bi+ people’s relationships continues, understanding the mechanisms linking partner gender and sexual orientation to identity-related experiences will be crucial to efforts to identify the conditions under which bi+ people thrive.

Based on our findings, we encourage clinicians working with bi+ populations to attend to bi+ individuals’ relationships and features of their partners when attempting to understand and promote bi+ well-being. In particular, it may be beneficial for clinicians to assess the extent to which a bi+ individual feels their identity is visible to others and the extent to which their bi+ identity is central to their overall sense of self. Doing so has the potential to facilitate the identification of bi+ individuals for whom visibility may be more important to well-being (i.e., for those who report greater identity centrality). In such cases, it may be valuable to work toward increasing visibility in an effort to increase well-being. This may be especially important for bi+ individuals in mixed-gender relationships, particularly those with heterosexual partners, given that they reported a lower sense of visibility than did those in same-gender relationships.

While our findings offer promising avenues for future research, a number of limitations constrain the inferences we can draw from this study. First, this study is cross-sectional and relies entirely on self-report data, meaning future work with longitudinal and experimental research designs will be necessary for drawing conclusions about the direction of the relationship between visibility and well-being. Second, approximately two-thirds of participants were non-Latinx White, and approximately two-thirds were women, the majority of whom were cisgender. There was also a greater relative proportion of women in mixed-gender (vs. same-gender) relationships. These demographics limit our ability to generalize our results to other groups, and future work is needed to more deeply understand how race and gender dynamics intersect with sexual orientation to produce particular kinds of identity visibility experiences in the relationship context. Third, because we focused on “same-gender” and “mixed-gender” relationships, more work is needed to understand the experiences of those who may classify their relationships outside of those labels, including nonbinary people partnered with other nonbinary people. Those who do not feel they fit neatly into either relationship category may face unique visibility challenges that

Figure 2
Moderated Mediation Model Linking Relationship Type to Well-Being Through Bi+ Visibility



Note. Coefficients presented here are unstandardized (as the process package for R does not provide standardized regression coefficients for models with moderators). In Panel A, same-gender was coded as 0 and mixed-gender was coded as 1; in Panel B, having a heterosexual partner was coded as 0 and having a bi+ or gay/lesbian partner was coded as 1. Outness was included as a covariate in this analysis.

deserve research attention, particularly gender minorities, who are at increased risk for poor psychological well-being (e.g., Fox et al., 2020). Fourth, participants with multiple partners may also have unique visibility experiences that were not illuminated in this study, as we did not include participants with multiple partners. Finally, individuals who use different labels under the bi+ umbrella (e.g., queer vs. bisexual) may experience identity processes differently (e.g., Mereish et al., 2017), a possibility in need of further research that was unexamined within our investigation.

Despite these limitations, the present study, which benefitted from a large sample of bi+ participants in different kinds of romantic relationships, contributes to the increasing—and essential—research

literature devoted to understanding the experiences of bi+ people. As we look forward, we hope to continue to contribute to conceptual refinement of bi+ identity visibility by building a comprehensive framework that captures a broad set of causes and consequences of bi+ identity visibility, within the relationship context and outside of it.

Conclusion

Despite making up the largest proportion of the LGBT+ population, bi+ people often report feeling invisible (e.g., Ross et al., 2010). In this study, we examined links between these feelings of

invisibility and well-being in the influential context of romantic relationships. Cross-sectionally, we found that feelings of visibility were positively linked to participants' well-being, particularly for those whose bi+ identities were central to them. Those in mixed-gender relationships—particularly those in relationships with heterosexual partners—felt a lower sense of visibility than did those in same-gender relationships. Although work remains to replicate and extend these results, this study suggests that attending to bi+ people's relationship dynamics in general—and how they relate to bi+ visibility in particular—may be one important part of understanding how to improve bi+ people's well-being.

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