Published in final edited form as:

Cult Health Sex. 2014 April ; 16(4): 351–365. doi:10.1080/13691058.2014.887779.

Conceptions of Privacy and the Non-disclosure of Same-Sex Behaviour Among Behaviourally-Bisexual Men in Heterosexual Relationships

Eric W. Schrimshaw^{a,*}, Martin J. Downing Jr.^b, Daniel J. Cohn^c, and Karolynn Siegel^a

^aDepartment of Sociomedical Sciences, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, New York, USA

^bNational Development and Research Institutes, Inc., New York, USA

^cDepartment of Public Health Sciences, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York, USA

Abstract

Little attention has been paid to why some behaviourally-bisexual men (i.e., men who have sex with both men and women) choose not to disclose their same-sex behaviour. Using Communication Privacy Management theory (Petronio 2002), we report on the ways these men conceptualise their same-sex behaviour as private and thus feel justified in not disclosing it to family, friends, and female partners. In-depth interviews were conducted with an ethnically diverse sample of 203 non-disclosing behaviourally-bisexual men in New York City. The men offered a number of privacy rules to justify their non-disclosure, including: 1) their same-sex behaviours were their own business and nobody else's; 2) others had no reason to know; 3) the topic of sexual behaviour was too personal; 4) they were private people in general; and 5) it was inappropriate to discuss same-sex behaviour in many contexts. Some privacy rules were used more often to justify non-disclosure to friends and family than to female partners. These findings provide insights into the reasons for non-disclosure among behaviourally-bisexual men, offer support for and extend CPM theory for the management of sexual information, and offer insights into the importance of privacy for the design and delivery of health promotion services for this population.

Keywords

Bisexuality; men; disclosure; privacy; communication; USA

Considerable research attention has been paid to the lives of behaviourally-bisexual men (i.e., men who have sex with men and women), especially on the role they may play in the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) to their female sexual partners (Bowers et al. 2011; Jeffries and Dodge 2007; Mercer et al. 2009; Siegel et al. 2008; Zule et al. 2009). Of particular concern are men who do not disclose their same-sex behaviours to their female sexual partners because non-disclosing men are more likely to

*Corresponding author: es458@columbia.edu.

engage sexual risk behaviours with these partners than those who disclose (Kalichman et al. 1998; Mimiaga et al. 2009; Stokes et al. 1996; Zule et al. 2009). Behaviourally-bisexual men are less likely than gay men to disclose their sexual orientation to others (Stokes, Venable, and McKirnan 1997; Wheeler et al. 2008). Several studies have estimated that 67%–85% of behaviourally-bisexual men do not disclose their same-sex behaviour to their female sexual partners (Agyemang, Wallace, and Liebman 2008; Kalichman et al. 1998; Weatherburn et al. 1998). Furthermore, in a recent study 59% of behaviourally-bisexual men who had not disclosed to their female partners also had no friends or family members who knew of their bisexuality; and this concealment was associated with lower social support and poorer mental health (Schrimshaw et al. 2013b). Despite this, little research has examined why some choose not to disclose their same-sex behaviours to others (Benoit and Koken 2012; Malebranche et al. 2010). Thus, the current study sought to examine factors that contribute to non-disclosure among behaviourally-bisexual men.

One factor that may contribute to non-disclosure of same-sex behaviours is the way behaviourally-bisexual men perceive what constitutes private information. Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory offers a framework for understanding what types of information are considered private and the rules individuals follow to regulate their private information (Petronio 2002). It has three main assumptions regarding information ownership and control: 1) that a dialectical tension exists between the desire to disclose and conceal private information; 2) individuals perceive themselves as having ownership of their private information; and 3) individuals use a system of privacy rules to create and maintain boundaries around their private information. CPM theory includes further principles regarding how private information is managed following disclosure (i.e., co-ownership of information, boundary management, and boundary turbulence). Although considerable research has examined the post-disclosure information management aspects of CPM theory (see Petronio 2010 for a review), far less has addressed the information ownership and control aspects that occur prior to (or in the absence of) disclosure. Thus, here we focus on the information ownership and control strategies offered by behaviourally-bisexual men in order to better understand why they choose not to disclose information about their same-sex behaviour.

Consistent with CPM theory, the desire for privacy has been documented as important to understanding the disclosure of sexual information within a variety of different contexts including serving as a barrier to safer sex communication (Kosenko 2011) and the disclosure of accurate sexual histories to a physician (Lewis, Matheson, and Brimacombe 2011) and to sexual partners (Nichols, 2012). Indeed, information about sexual behaviours has been found to be the most private kind of information and the least likely to be discussed with others, even with family and friends (Afifi and Caughlin 2006; Golish and Caughlin 2002). However, only recently has the issue of privacy been addressed within the context of behaviourally-bisexual men (Muñoz-Laboy et al. 2009; Operario, Smith, and Kegeles 2008; Severson et al. 2013). These studies reported that privacy issues, including viewing the topic of sexuality as a private, personal issue and the cultural importance of keeping sexual matters private as reasons for non-disclosure of their same-sex behaviours (Muñoz-Laboy et al. 2009; Operario et al. 2008) or not identifying as bisexual (Severson et al. 2013). Although this research identified the desire to maintain privacy as a key factor in the

decision to not disclose, it did not provide an in-depth examination of the meaning of privacy to behaviourally-bisexual men, nor did it identify specific ways in which privacy rules guide disclosure decision-making. Thus, the current report addressed the role of privacy in behaviourally-bisexual men's decision making guided by CPM theory.

CPM theory posits that individuals believe they own information about themselves, and therefore have the right to control whether it is shared with others (Petronio 2002). Despite this central assumption, we could identify no research that documents the ownership of personal information, including with regard to sexuality. However, other privacy rules have been identified. For example, individuals view some topics, particularly sexual ones, as inappropriate for discussion with family members (Golish and Caughlin 2002; Guerrero and Afifi 1995) and opposite-sex friends (Afifi and Guerrero 1998). This is consistent with recent findings that behaviourally-bisexual men believed it was culturally inappropriate to disclose topics such as same-sex behaviour (Muñoz-Laboy et al. 2009; Operario et al. 2008). Finally, studies have found that some individuals do not disclose sexual information due to the perceived lack of an appropriately private time and place (Gorbach et al. 2004; Jensen et al. 2005; Smith and Niedermeyer 2009). Despite this evidence, Petronio (2010) has called for more research to further document and expand the types of privacy rules used.

CPM theory also suggests that the relationship with the potential target of disclosure (e.g., friends, family members, or a spouse/sexual partner) will influence decisions about sharing private information (Petronio 2002). Specifically, individuals should be more likely to share private information with those with whom they have closer, more intimate relationships (e.g., a spouse) relative to those with whom they are less close (e.g., friends). Research on disclosure of HIV serostatus appears to confirm CPM theory in that disclosure is more likely to occur to spouses/lovers than to parents and siblings, and that parents are more likely to be told than extended family and friends (Derlega et al. 2004; Greene and Serovich 1996; Serovich and Greene 1993). Indeed, privacy is mentioned as a reason for non-disclosure of HIV status to friends more often than it is for non-disclosure to family or intimate partners (Derlega et al. 2004). In contrast, however, research on disclosure of sexual orientation by lesbian and gay youths suggests that friends are often among the first persons to whom they "come out", rather than family (e.g., Beals and Peplau 2006; Rosario, Schrimshaw, and Hunter 2009). Likewise, most behaviourally-bisexual men do not disclose their same-sex behaviour to wives, girlfriends, or other female sexual partners (Agyemang et al. 2008; Kalichman et al. 1998; Weatherburn et al. 1998). Thus, it remains unclear whether CPM theory is supported in the context of disclosure of sexual orientation.

Given the importance of understanding why some behaviourally-bisexual men do not disclose their same-sex behaviour to the design and delivery of health promotion services for this population, the current study examined the reasons such men offered for non-disclosure. Specifically, we explored participants' conceptualisations of same-sex behaviour as private and the privacy management rules they used to justify non-disclosure of this information to friends, family members, and female partners. Further, we examined if privacy management rules differ for these different targets of disclosure.

Method

Participants

This report is based on an ethnically diverse sample of 203 behaviourally-bisexual men. To be eligible, men had to: 1) be 18 years of age or older; 2) not identify as gay; 3) report anal or oral sex with a man in the past year; 4) report vaginal, anal, or oral sex in the past year with a woman to whom (at the time) they were married or had a relationship lasting three months or longer; 5) not have disclosed their same-sex behaviour to any past year female sexual partners; and 6) reside in the New York City area. Sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

The study aimed to examine bisexual men “on the down low,” a subgroup of bisexual men who live outwardly heterosexual lives and do not disclose their same-sex behaviours. Bisexual men in a relationship with a female partner are less likely than men who are not in a relationship to disclose to their same-sex behaviour to friends, family, as well as female partners (Kalichman et al. 1998; Stokes et al. 1996). Thus, to best represent these men and to increase the level of non-disclosure in the sample, we focused on men in a relationship (or who had recently been in one) with a woman and who had not disclosed to any of these partners. No constraints were placed on the level of emotional commitment of their relationship with a woman; thus men were included if they reported a regular sexual (but not necessarily romantic) relationship with a woman.

Procedure

Procedures for this study received approval by the Columbia University Medical Center Institutional Review Board. Using a targeted sampling approach (Watters and Biernacki, 1989), men were recruited through venues (10%), Internet websites (57%), print advertisements (19%), and non-participant friend referrals (14%). For venue recruitment, male recruiters approached every man who entered a venue (e.g., gay bar, park, LGB organisation) to give them a card containing study information. For Internet recruitment, study information was posted to Craigslist.org - an online bulletin board that includes a section for personal ads. Study ads were also placed in a free, daily newspaper with a general readership. Recruitment materials stated that we were looking to interview men who had sex with both men and women and whose female partners did not know. When possible, we provided the study website address for more information and a telephone number to call to be screened for eligibility. A fuller description of recruitment procedures has been provided elsewhere (Schrimshaw et al. 2013b).

A total of 685 men were screened for study eligibility. Of these, 324 were eligible, willing to participate, and scheduled for interviews. Eligible men were invited to the researchers' offices to complete an informed consent, a brief interviewer-administered questionnaire to confirm their eligibility, and a set of quantitative measures administered via ACASI. Following this, men participated in a semi-structured focused interview (Merton, Fiske, and Kendall 1990). Interviews were conducted between August 2007 and March 2010. Participants received USD 75 in cash. Eighty-eight (27%) failed to appear for their interviews and were not able to be rescheduled, resulting in 236 completed interviews.

Thirty-three men (14%) were excluded from analysis after providing interview data that contradicted their screening data and rendered them ineligible. This resulted in a final sample of 203 eligible men for analysis.

In the semi-structured interviews, men were asked about the extent to which they had disclosed their same-sex behaviour. Specifically, each was asked, “Is there anyone you have ever told that you have sex with men?” and “Is there anyone you would never tell that you have sex with men?” Interviewers probed for reasons why men had chosen to disclose or not disclose. Follow-up questions assessed the reasons for non-disclosure of same-sex behaviour to specific key individuals (i.e., female partners, family, and friends).

Data analysis

The interview transcripts were entered into ATLAS.ti for the purpose of thematic analysis (Boyatzis 1998). Based on the topics targeted in the interview guide and a reading of the transcribed interviews, two senior researchers created a codebook detailing the specific topics discussed in the interviews. Three new researchers read all of the interviews to label the sections of text that represented each of these topic codes. Additional codes were added throughout the coding process. Next, a research assistant extracted all sections of the coded text regarding reasons for non-disclosure of same-sex behaviours to identify the specific reasons offered by participants (e.g., wanting to maintain privacy). Next, two senior researchers read the text related to privacy to identify specific privacy management sub-themes described in this report. Agreement between the two researchers was obtained on which sub-themes were most prevalent and how to define the sub-themes. Direct quotations were selected that most clearly reflected the participants’ privacy management rules described in this report. In addition to demographic information, pseudonyms were assigned by the researchers for the purposes of this report.

Results

Consistent with the eligibility criteria, all participants reported that they had not told any of their female sexual partners about their same-sex behaviour. Relatively few men reported telling either (or both) a best male or female friend (34.5%) or either or both of their parents (12.3%). Indeed, 62.6% reported not having told any of these individuals. Furthermore, with regard to future intentions to tell, when asked if there was anyone they would “never tell,” 29% reported that they would never tell anyone. An additional 54% affirmed that they would never tell most individuals including their female partners, one or both parents, siblings, children, other family members, colleagues, or friends.

When asked why they would never tell others about their sex with men, a majority of men (58%) identified privacy as a major consideration. However, privacy was not the only reason for non-disclosure. Many men reported additional reasons including anticipation of negative emotional reactions, loss of relationship with their female partners, stigmatising and homophobic reactions, and the spread of rumors about their sexuality. Regardless of these potential consequences of disclosure, the majority contended that privacy alone was sufficient justification for not disclosing. Therefore, below we present a set of privacy rules, offered by the participants, that they used to justify non-disclosure.

It's my business and nobody else's

Men overwhelmingly indicated that all information regarding their same-sex behaviour belonged to them and therefore the decision to share it or not, was theirs alone. Although this reason was most often used to justify not telling their female partners and family members, it was also used to justify non-disclosure to all people. For example, James, a 30-year-old, bisexually-identified, African-American participant, remarked:

Interviewer: All right, is there anyone that you would never tell that you have sex with men?

Respondent: I would never tell anybody.

I: Alright. And why would you never tell anyone?

R: I just don't feel comfortable sharing that with anybody. That's my own personal thing right there. ...as far as my sexual, my sexuality, that's none of their business. It's nobody's business but mine.

Because men viewed this information as theirs, they felt that it was no one else's business. For example, Charles, a 28-year-old, heterosexually-identified, White participant stated, "I would just be like, well, it's none of your business and I don't know how you found out, but you shouldn't have been snooping."

Robert, a 29-year-old, bisexually-identified, White man alluded to an ownership structure that existed within his family regarding sexual information:

....in our family the tradition is your sex life is-belongs to you...Even as a straight person, um, my parents would never ask me if sex is good with my wife, how often we do it. So then suddenly why would I tell them if I have sex with men and if it's good or not.

Some men were less descriptive, but equally emphatic, that their same-sex sexual relationships were their own private business. This point is highlighted by Stephen, a 48-year-old, heterosexually-identified, Latino participant:

I: So is there anyone that you would never tell?

R: A lot of people, my brothers, my mother. A lot of people. I'm-friend of mine close, I don't tell my fucking business.

I: Why, why would you-

R: Because that's not their fucking business. It's my business.

Others have no reason to know

Another common privacy theme was that others had no reason to know about their same-sex behaviour. Participants discussed how there was no need for them to tell female partners, family, and friends because this information had no consequences for them. For example, Christopher, a 35-year-old, queer-identified, Asian participant stated:

You know, I also think that, you know, especially for people that you love or people that love you, I don't think they need to know everything about you. It's not required or necessary really.

Similarly, when asked why he would not tell his parents or friends that he has sex with men, Kevin, a 22-year-old, heterosexually-identified, White participant explained, "Because they have no reason to know it really. You know whatever I do doesn't affect them."

While men universally saw no reason to tell family and friends, some implicitly acknowledged that maintaining privacy had potential consequences for their female partners. Others, however, felt that even female partners had no reason to know and dismissed the potential risks this might pose. For example, Shawn, a 50-year-old, heterosexually-identified, White participant remarked about his female partners:

What they don't know won't hurt them. And if they say oh, have you ever had sex with guys, I'll say no, I have not. I'll lie my ass off.

Several men insisted that the reason they believed others had no need to know was because they viewed sex with a man as a casual encounter rather than a meaningful relationship. For instance, Thomas, a 33-year-old, bisexually-identified, White participant remarked:

Um, you know with guys it's more about the sex. So there's no reason to tell people anything that goes along with that. I'm not going to be sharing with my friends a good blow job story. You know, it's ah-it's not like I'm dating them.

A similar justification for maintaining privacy was offered when the relationship with a female partner was casual. For example, William, a 38-year-old, heterosexually-identified, White man contended there was no reason to disclose his sex with men to his current female partner because he did not see the relationship as having a future:

I think to me personally I think the only time you should really, really open up to someone like completely...for the most part it is if you're gonna establish a long-term relationship with that person, you know, whether it be sexual or, or marriage bound or whatever. You know, I mean I knew we were never gonna hit that point, so that's why, at least right now, I didn't think she needed to know.

Too personal a topic

Several participants felt their same-sex behaviour was simply too personal of a topic to share with others. Specifically, several men described that the topic of sexuality, and especially same-sex sexuality, was too personally revealing to discuss. For instance, Anthony, a 51-year old, heterosexually-identified, African-American participant explained:

I: And why would you never tell anyone?

R: That's too personal.

I: Do you ever think about your family finding out?

R: No.

I: And if one of them were to ask you, like say the person who you have the closest relationship with in your family, they would ask you if you also sleep with guys?

R: I wouldn't say, I wouldn't admit it... It's too personal.

I: You know, well, what about a good, close friends?

R: Too personal.

This privacy rule was typically used to justify non-disclosure to friends, family members, and acquaintances, rather than female partners. For example, Greg, a 22-year-old, bisexually-identified, Latino man reacted to the prospect of telling his friends:

I would be, it would be a brief moment of embarrassment, like oh shit, you know. Um, why? Because it's like that's personal, it's very personal, you know what I mean? That's a very personal thing, you know, when you're telling someone that, that you don't know what their response could be.

Although his parents already knew of his same-sex behaviour, Michael, a 30-year-old, bisexually-identified, African-American man felt that the topic was too private to share with more distant family members:

I: Do you ever think about them ["the rest of your family"] finding out?

R: Yeah. I don't want them to. I don't think they should know. It's personal. I think who we have sex is who you have sex with. I mean I don't ask who they have sex with.

I'm a private person anyway

For some participants, their inclination to keep private information to themselves extended beyond the topic of their same-sex behaviour. Rather, they wanted to keep all or many aspects of their lives private regardless of the topic. Indeed, they saw this as a general personality trait rather than specific to situation or topic. For example, when asked if he had ever told anyone about his sex with men, Jeff, a 54-year-old, bisexually-identified, White man told us:

R: No. I'm a very private person.

I: Okay. And why is that?

R: Uhh, because I like to keep my private life private. I've always been like that. It has nothing to do with the fact that I'm sleeping with a guy. It's got nothing to do with the fact that I'm sleeping with a woman. I just keep my private life private, you know... I'm a private person.

Similarly, Kenneth, a 32-year-old, bisexually-identified, African American reported when asked what he does to keep others from finding out about his same-sex behaviour:

I don't think I do anything, I mean I'm a very private person in general, so I don't know if that's considered-and I'm not very open about my sexual, um, relationships necessarily with anybody, other than-that like my own personal friends; from both sexes.

Some men described themselves as unwilling to volunteer this information, but would disclose if asked directly. For example, Paul, a 37-year-old, bisexually-identified, Latino participant told us:

Because I'm the type of personality that I wait for people to ask me things. But people that know that I told you about, they are people that ask me directly. I'm always telling them, you know, "This is what's going on" when they ask me directly. If they don't, I'm not one to volunteer information.

Inappropriate to discuss in many contexts

Maintaining privacy about one's same-sex behaviour was also contingent upon circumstance. Several participants indicated that it was inappropriate to discuss any information concerning their same-sex behaviour with certain people or in certain situations. Although we did not specifically inquire about co-workers, the workplace was spontaneously mentioned as a setting in which it was not appropriate to talk about their sexual relationships. For example, David, a 47-year-old, heterosexually-identified, White man, said:

Because I just don't think my personal life belongs in the workplace...and really I don't see where my personal life is of interest. ... My co-workers, everyone's so open-minded, it doesn't really make a difference. But I've never felt the need to make the statement because I just don't think it bodes well. I know my overall supervisor wouldn't be real proud that I divulged something like that.

Moreover, David also felt that within the context of an acquaintance, as opposed to a close friend, one's same-sex behaviour was not a suitable topic for discussion:

I think, like, when you're 40s, almost 50, you make acquaintances, but you don't really make best friends. So, I guess, just to sum that up, I don't really feel the need to really divulge a whole hell of a lot about myself to people, acquaintances, because that's all they're going to be are acquaintances.

Lastly, some men described how their relationship with one or both parents made it an inappropriate (or uncomfortable) context in which to share such private details about their sex life. This was particularly true for one participant, John, a 32-year-old, heterosexually-identified, White man who related:

...apparently my mum thought I was gonna tell her. Um, so when I turned like at 16 years old to 15 and a half or whatever, and I hadn't come to her talking about girls, she asked me if I was getting it. And I asked her, why would you-why would you think that? She said because you've never told me about having sex, or you've never asked me about sex. You're my fucking mum, you know. Of course I haven't.

Discussion

Despite interest in behaviourally-bisexual men and the potential health consequences of non-disclosure (e.g., Mimiaga et al. 2009; Operario et al. 2008, Schrimshaw et al. 2013b; Stokes et al. 1996), little research exists on their reasons for not disclosing to friends, families, or

female partners (Benoit & Koken, 2012; Malebranche et al. 2010). Using the framework of CPM theory (Petronio, 2002), we examined how these men's notions of privacy influenced their decisions to not disclose their same-sex behaviours. Our findings support the application of CPM theory within this population, finding support for some of the privacy rules identified in past research. However, we also identified additional rules not previously reported.

Implications for CPM Theory

Consistent with CPM theory, most participants believed they owned their sexual information and had a right to control access to it. This principle was best captured with the theme "It's my business and nobody else's." Many also used this rule to justify their withholding information about their sexual behaviour from female partners, friends, and family members. This finding is consistent with that of Gorbach and colleagues (2004) who found that HIV-positive MSM were unlikely to disclose their serostatus to sexual partners when they perceived this information as "nobody's business" (513). Although studies have noted the importance individuals assign to keeping sexual information private (Afifi and Caughlin 2006; Lewis et al. 2011; Nichols 2012), we know of no other study that has documented this principle of ownership with respect to sexual information.

Another privacy theme identified was, "others have no reason to know." Men offering this rationale argued that because the information had no implications for others, they had no reservations about withholding it. Although many used this privacy rule to justify non-disclosure to friends and family members, fewer used it to justify non-disclosure to female partners, realising that there were potential health consequences for them. This privacy rule about the lack of consequences has not been explicitly suggested by CPM theory. However, more recent models (Afifi and Steuber 2009; Greene 2009) do consider the perceived relevance of the information to others as important to understanding the decision to disclose. Consequently, this finding offers empirical support for these models within the context of sexual information and suggests an expansion of the potential set of privacy rules.

Additionally, some men who reported others have "no reason to know" justified their position by referring to the nature of their relationship with their male or female partner. Consistent with CPM theory, when their relationships with female partners were viewed as fleeting and devoid of any emotional investment, men felt no obligation to share information about their same-sex behaviour with these women. We also found that when men viewed same-sex relationships as casual and purely physical, they saw no reason to discuss them with others. This latter finding offers a potential extension of CPM theory suggesting that the level of closeness with both the target of disclosure and with those about whom they would make a disclosure are both critical factors.

Another privacy theme offered for non-disclosure was that same-sex behaviour was "too personal a topic" to discuss. This rationale was usually offered in relation to not telling friends and family rather than female partners. Implicit in this theme was that some men viewed sexual behaviour, with men or women, as too private to discuss with others. Several participants suggested that the kind of information (i.e., sexual behaviour), rather than the specific content (i.e., same-sex behaviour), accounted for their non-disclosure. This finding

is consistent with CPM theory and is consistent with those of past research, which has documented the taboo nature of discussing sexual topics with others (Golish and Caughlin 2002; Guerrero and Afifi 1995; Afifi and Guerrero 1998). Further, our findings reinforce those of past research (Muñoz-Laboy et al. 2009; Operario et al. 2008) who also found that behaviourally-bisexual men viewed same-sex behaviour as a topic that was inappropriate for open discussion.

Some participants referred to their own personalities when explaining why they did not disclose, saying, “I’m a private person.” They suggested that their predisposition to keep virtually all information about themselves private influenced their decision not to tell, rather than the specific nature of the information. Little previous research has found that a private personality or a propensity to conceal personal information regardless of the topic served as a privacy rule. However, this finding does support Petronio’s (2002) suggestion that different individuals exercise different levels of control over their private information with some maintaining thicker boundaries and others more transparent boundaries.

A final privacy rule in the men’s interviews was that same-sex behaviour was “inappropriate to discuss in many contexts.” Men contended that a discussion of same-sex behaviour was unacceptable in certain physical and relationship contexts. Many men spontaneously mentioned that they felt one’s private life should be kept separate from one’s work life as well as from people who were merely acquaintances. Others described how parental relationships were similarly not an appropriate context in which to discuss sexual topics. These findings were consistent with both Altman’s (1975) conception of the importance of the setting as influencing willingness to disclose (and relevant empirical work, e.g., Jensen et al. 2005; Smith and Niedermeyer 2009), and Petronio’s (2002) suggestion that disclosure is contingent upon the relationship context.

Implications for HIV-Prevention and Other Health Promotion Programmes

These findings have potential importance in understanding the health and well-being of behaviourally-bisexual men. Non-disclosure to female partners is associated with more sexual risk behaviour with female partners (e.g., Kalichman et al. 1998; Stokes et al. 1996; Zule et al. 2009) and can result in behaviourally-bisexual men not being aware of or having access to safer sex information and HIV-testing resources that are targeted to openly gay or bisexual men (e.g., Goldbaum et al. 1998). This has led some researchers to suggest that there is a need to target non-disclosing behaviourally-bisexual men for HIV prevention services (e.g., Mercer et al. 2009; Siegel et al. 2008; Stokes et al. 1996). Research has also documented that concealment of same-sex behaviour can result in limited sources of social support and poorer mental health (Schrimshaw et al. 2013b). Therefore, there may be an important need for services and programmes that promote psychological well-being and reduce substance use among some behaviourally-bisexual men. Yet, regardless of whether they target HIV risk, HIV testing, mental health, or substance use, for these programmes to be effective they must be designed in a way that is sensitive to their privacy concerns. Failing to do so may result in programme nonattendance and subsequently not receiving the resources and information that they may need.

Consistent with past research (Benoit et al. 2012; Dodge et al. 2012; Operario et al. 2008), our findings suggest that safeguards to privacy will be a critical concern for service engagement among behaviourally-bisexual men. For example, a desire for privacy may be a barrier to the use of services that require men to disclose (explicitly or implicitly) their same-sex behaviour to others (e.g. safer-sex support groups, group-based sexual counseling, or sexual health education classes). Rather, non-disclosing behaviourally-bisexual men may prefer one-on-one services, or Internet- and mobile-based e-health services, which are less likely to compromise their privacy.

Similarly, these findings also have implications for the locations where programmes may be delivered. Earlier research has suggested that when looking for sexual partners, non-disclosing men avoid locations that might suggest to others that they are gay or bisexual (e.g., gay bars; Schrimshaw, Downing, and Siegel 2013a). Together with our privacy findings, this suggests that they may be unwilling to obtain HIV testing, safer-sex education, or other programmes in gay-identified locations. Rather, non-disclosing behaviourally-bisexual men may prefer a place that is open to men of all sexual orientations or one that is not known for health services so as to better maintain their privacy when entering or leaving.

Finally, given the importance of privacy for these men, our findings suggest that non-disclosing behaviourally-bisexual men may be unresponsive to materials (e.g., pamphlets, websites) that explicitly state that they are designed for gay or bisexual men. They may view such materials as a cue to others that they are not completely heterosexual. Likewise, advertisements that promote programmes to bisexual men may be unacceptable as they too may compromise privacy. Rather, they may prefer prevention materials designed for men of all sexual orientations. For example, a safer sex pamphlet for men that addresses both sex with women and sex with men would not only be appropriate for bisexual men, but could be given to gay and heterosexual men. As such, it would be less likely to threaten the privacy desires of non-disclosing behaviourally-bisexual men. The ability to modify existing programmes to address the a variety of sexual orientations could result in a single set of materials and programmes that would not need to be tailored for specific groups, thereby making the most of scarce HIV prevention resources.

Limitations

Despite the importance of these findings, limitations of this research must be acknowledged. First, the sample was composed of men who self-referred to the study who are likely more self-accepting and open about their bisexual behaviour than potentially eligible men who did not participate. Further, the sample focused on a specific subgroup of non-disclosing, behaviourally-bisexual men. Thus the findings may not generalise to openly bisexual men. However, it is within non-disclosing men that privacy concerns will be most prominent. Third, the findings address the role of privacy in the non-disclosure of same-sex behaviour, rather than sexual identity. This is because many behaviourally-bisexual men self-identify as heterosexual and therefore do not hold a bisexual identity to disclose. As such, privacy may serve a somewhat different role for identity non-disclosure. Finally, because the eligibility criteria required that participants not have disclosed their same-sex behaviour to their female partners of the past year, we could not examine under what conditions these men might have

chosen to disclose to these women. Therefore, our data do not speak to all aspects of CPM theory, such as information co-ownership and boundary turbulence (Petronio 2002).

Conclusions

Although this study provides evidence of the role of CPM theory for understanding behaviourally-bisexual men's reasons for non-disclosure, it should not be concluded that privacy was the only reason offered for non-disclosure given that same-sex behaviour, especially given that bisexual behaviour is still viewed negatively by many in society (Heath and Goggin 2009; Herek 2002). However, our findings suggest that privacy is a critical consideration for a majority of non-disclosing behaviourally-bisexual men. As one of the few studies to examine the experiences and perspectives of these men, and especially one of the first to address their potential reasons for non-disclosure, these findings suggest the importance of privacy considerations for the design and implementation of health services and interventions for this population.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by a grant from National Institute of Mental Health (R01-MH076680) to Karolynn Siegel. Martin Downing was supported by a postdoctoral fellowship in Behavioral Sciences Training in Drug Abuse Research sponsored by Public Health Solutions and National Development and Research Institutes, Inc. with funding from National Institute on Drug Abuse (T32-DA007233). Daniel Cohn was supported by an internship stipend provided by the Gwen M. Greene Career and Internship Center at the University of Rochester. The ideas and opinions presented here are those of the authors and not necessarily of the funding sources.

References

- Afifi T, Steuber K. The revelation risk model (RRM): Factors that predict the revelation of secrets and the strategies used to reveal them. *Communication Monographs*. 2009; 76(2):144–176.
- Afifi WA, Caughlin JP. A close look at revealing secrets and some consequences that follow. *Communication Research*. 2006; 33(6):467–488.
- Afifi WA, Guerrero LK. Some things are better left unsaid II: Topic avoidance in friendships. *Communication Quarterly*. 1998; 46(3):231–249.
- Agyemang S, Wallace BC, Liebman RE. An exploratory Internet study of Black men on the down low: Potential factors related to non-disclosure to female partners and inconsistent condom use for Black men who have sex with men and women (MSMW). *Journal of Equity in Health*. 2008; 1(1): 79–97.
- Altman, I. *Environment and Social Behavior: Privacy, Personal Space, Territory, and Crowding*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth; 1975.
- Beals KP, Peplau LA. Disclosure patterns within social networks of gay men and lesbians. *Journal of Homosexuality*. 2006; 51(2):101–120. [PubMed: 16901869]
- Benoit E, Koken JA. Perspectives on substance use and disclosure among behaviorally bisexual Black men with female primary partners. *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Use*. 2012; 11(4):294–317.
- Benoit E, Pass M, Randolph D, Murray D, Downing MJ Jr. Reaching and engaging non-gay identified, non-disclosing Black men who have sex with both men and women. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. 2012; 14(9):975–990.
- Bowers JR, Branson CM, Fletcher J, Reback CJ. Differences in substance use and sexual partnering between men who have sex with men, men who have sex with men and women and transgender women. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. 2011; 13(6):629–642.
- Boyatzis, RE. *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; 1998.

- Derlega VJ, Winstead BA, Greene K, Serovich J, Elwood WN. Reasons for HIV disclosure/non-disclosure in close relationships: Testing a model of HIV-disclosure decision making. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*. 2004; 23(6):747–767.
- Dodge B, Schnarrs PW, Goncalves G, Malebranche D, Martinez O, Reece M, Rhodes SD, Van Der Pol B, Nix R, Fortenberry JD. The significance of privacy and trust in providing health-related services to behaviorally bisexual men in the United States. *AIDS Education and Prevention*. 2012; 24(3):242–256. [PubMed: 22676463]
- Golish TD, Caughlin JP. I'd rather not talk about it: Adolescents' and young adults' use of topic avoidance in stepfamilies. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*. 2002; 30(1):78–106.
- Goldbaum G, Purdue T, Wolitski R, Rietmeijer C, Hedrich A, Wood R, Frishbein M. AIDS Community Demonstration Projects. Differences in risk behavior and sources of AIDS information among gay, bisexual, and straight-identified men who have sex with men. *AIDS and Behavior*. 1998; 2(1):13–21.
- Gorbach PM, Galea JT, Amani B, Shin A, Celum C, Kerndt P, Golden MR. Don't ask, don't tell: Patterns of HIV disclosure among HIV positive men who have sex with men with recent STI practicing high risk behavior in Los Angeles and Seattle. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*. 2004; 80(6):512–517. [PubMed: 15572626]
- Greene K. An integrated model of health disclosure decision-making. In: Afifi, TD.; Afifi, WA., editors. *Uncertainty, Information Management, and Disclosure Decisions: Theories and Applications*. New York: Rutledge; 2009. p. 226–253.
- Greene K, Serovich JM. Appropriateness of disclosure of HIV testing information: The perspective of PLWAs. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*. 1996; 24(1):50–65. [PubMed: 11660546]
- Guerrero LK, Afifi WA. Some things are better left unsaid: Topic avoidance in family relationships. *Communication Quarterly*. 1995; 43(3):276–296.
- Heath J, Goggin K. Attitudes toward male homosexuality, bisexuality, and the down low lifestyle: Demographic differences and HIV implications. *Journal of Bisexuality*. 2009; 9(1):17–31.
- Herek GM. Heterosexuals' attitudes toward bisexual men and women in the United States. *Journal of Sex Research*. 2002; 39(4):264–274. [PubMed: 12545409]
- Jeffries WL IV, Dodge B. Male bisexuality and condom use at last sexual encounter: Results from a national survey. *Journal of Sex Research*. 2007; 44(3):278–289. [PubMed: 17879171]
- Jensen TK, Gulbrandsen W, Mossige S, Reichelt S, Tjersland OA. Reporting possible sexual abuse: A qualitative study on children's perspectives and the context for disclosure. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. 2005; 29(12):1395–1413. [PubMed: 16293304]
- Kalichman SC, Roffman RA, Picciano JF, Bolan M. Risk for HIV infection among bisexual men seeking HIV prevention services and risks posed to their female partners. *Health Psychology*. 1998; 17(4):320–327. [PubMed: 9697941]
- Kosenko KA. The safer sex communication of transgender adults: Processes and problems. *Journal of Communication*. 2011; 61(3):476–495.
- Lewis CC, Matheson DH, Brimacombe CAE. Factors influencing patient disclosure to physicians in birth control clinics: An application of the communication privacy management theory. *Health Communication*. 2011; 26(6):502–511. [PubMed: 21462018]
- Malebranche DJ, Arriola KJ, Jenkins TR, Dauria E, Patel SN. Exploring the “bisexual bridge”: A qualitative study of risk behavior and disclosure of same-sex behavior among Black bisexual men. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2010; 100(1):159–164. [PubMed: 19910348]
- Mercer CH, Hart GJ, Johnson AM, Cassell JA. Behaviourally bisexual men as a bridge population for HIV and sexually transmitted infections? Evidence from a national probability survey. *International Journal of STD & AIDS*. 2009; 20(2):87–94. [PubMed: 19182053]
- Merton, RK.; Fiske, M.; Kendall, PL. *The Focused Interview: A Manual of Problems and Procedures*. 2. New York: Free Press; 1990.
- Mimiaga MJ, Reisner SL, Cranston K, Isenberg D, Bright D, Daffin G, Bland S, Driscoll MA, VanDerwarker R, Vega B, Mayer KH. Sexual mixing patterns and partner characteristics of Black MSM in Massachusetts at increased risk for HIV infection and transmission. *Journal of Urban Health*. 2009; 86(4):602–623. [PubMed: 19466554]

- Muñoz-Laboy M, Yon Leau CJ, Sriram V, Weinstein HJ, Vasquez del Aquila E, Parker R. Bisexual desire and familism: Latino/a bisexual young men and women in New York City. *Culture, Health, & Sexuality*. 2009; 11(3):331–344.
- Nichols WL. Deception versus privacy management in discussions of sexual history. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*. 2012; 20(2):101–115.
- Operario D, Smith CD, Kegeles S. Social and psychological context for HIV risk in non-gay-identified African American men who have sex with men. *AIDS Education and Prevention*. 2008; 20(3): 347–359. [PubMed: 18673067]
- Petronio, S. *Boundaries of Privacy: Dialectics of Disclosure*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press; 2002.
- Petronio S. Communication privacy management theory: What do we know about family privacy regulation? *Journal of Family Theory & Review*. 2010; 2(3):175–196.
- Rosario M, Schrimshaw EW, Hunter J. Disclosure of sexual orientation and subsequent substance use and abuse among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths: Critical role of disclosure reactions. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*. 2009; 23(1):175–184. [PubMed: 19290704]
- Schrimshaw EW, Downing MJ Jr, Siegel K. Sexual venue selection and strategies for concealment of same-sex behavior among non-disclosing men who have sex with men and women. *Journal of Homosexuality*. 2013a; 60(1):120–145. [PubMed: 23241205]
- Schrimshaw EW, Siegel K, Downing MJ Jr, Parsons JT. Disclosure and concealment of sexual orientation and the mental health of non-gay-identified, behaviorally-bisexual men. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. 2013b; 81(1):141–153. [PubMed: 23276123]
- Serovich JM, Greene K. Perceptions of family boundaries: The case of disclosure of HIV testing information. *Family Relations*. 1993; 42(2):193–197.
- Severson N, Muñoz-Laboy M, Garcia J, Perry A, Wilson P, Parker R. Generational changed in the meanings of sex, sexual identity and stigma among Latino young and adult men. *Culture, Health, & Sexuality*. 2013; 15(7):804–818.
- Siegel K, Schrimshaw EW, Lekas HM, Parsons JT. Sexual behaviors of non-gay identified non-disclosing men who have sex with men and women. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. 2008; 37(5): 720–735. [PubMed: 18506616]
- Smith RA, Niedermeyer AJ. Keepers of the secret: Desires to conceal a family member's HIV-positive status in Namibia, Africa. *Health Communication*. 2009; 24(5):459–472. [PubMed: 19657828]
- Stokes JP, McKirnan DJ, Doll L, Burzette RG. Female partners of bisexual men: What they don't know might hurt them. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. 1996; 20(2):267–284.
- Stokes JP, Venable P, McKirnan DJ. Comparing gay and bisexual men on sexual behavior, condom use, and psychosocial variables related to HIV/AIDS. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. 1997; 26(4): 383–397. [PubMed: 9251836]
- Watters JK, Biernacki P. Targeted sampling: Options for the study of hidden populations. *Social Problems*. 1989; 36(4):416–430.
- Weatherburn P, Hickson F, Reid DS, Davies PM, Crosier A. Sexual HIV risk behaviour among men who have sex with both men and women. *AIDS Care*. 1998; 10(4):463–471. [PubMed: 9828966]
- Wheeler DP, Lauby JL, Liu K, Van Sluytman LG, Murrill C. A comparative analysis of sexual risk characteristics of black men who have sex with men or with men and women. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. 2008; 37(5):697–707. [PubMed: 18509753]
- Zule WA, Bobashev GV, Wechsberg WM, Costenbader EC, Coomes CM. Behaviorally bisexual men and their risk behaviors with men and women. *Journal of Urban Health*. 2009; 86(S1):S48–S62.

Table 1

Sample demographic characteristics (N = 203)

	%	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age (in years)			36.9	11.2
Race/Ethnicity				
Black	33%	68		
Latino	29%	59		
White	27%	54		
Asian	10%	20		
Native American	1%	2		
Education				
High School or less	31%	62		
Some College, Associates, or Technical School	33%	68		
College graduate or more	36%	73		
Current Relationship Status				
No Wife or Steady Girlfriend	25%	50		
Girlfriend, but not living together	53%	108		
Lives with Wife or Girlfriend	22%	45		
Sexual Identity				
Heterosexual	35%	71		
Bisexual	57%	115		
Other ^a	8%	17		

^aOther non-gay identities included "refusing to label oneself," "goes either way," "between bisexual and heterosexual," "curious," and "down low."