Bi+ Men and Their Intimate Partners:

Sexual Identities, Intimate Relationships and Binegativity

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Abstract

Bisexual men stand at a distinct intersection of stigmatisation, and binegativity is a unique social problem distinct from homophobia. This thesis scopes the breadth of binegativity and its various forms, developing a typology and exploring plural understandings of bisexuality. Drawing on 17 semi-structured interviews with bi+ men and their partners (25 participants overall), experiences of binegativity are explored, with romantic relationships analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Despite no explicit questions about prejudice, all participants reported experiencing binegativity, often unakin to homophobia, both implicitly and explicitly, the latter as threats or acts of violence from strangers. In contrast, implicit binegativity denies bisexuality's existence, and was displayed by close family, whose understanding of bisexuality was overshadowed by stereotypes, and participants were burdened undoing misunderstanding through education. Romantic relationships were sites of safety, positivity and growth, with identities being explored and developed, mutual understandings reached and experimentation outside of monogamous, heteronormative and patriarchal relationship structures negotiated. Some participants relayed that their partner choice was in some way shaped by heteronormative family expectations. Identities were often expressed plurally, with participants often expressing at least two sexual identity labels simultaneously, some of them contextually used over others. I conclude that bisexual+ people suffer epistemic injustices which exclude them from articulations of LGBTQ equality and same-sex marriage debates which emphasise monosexuality, sameness to heterosexuality and fixity. I suggest that education is a possible avenue away from binegativity, along with everyday articulations of bisexuality that challenge a status quo characterised by binary thinking about gender and sexuality.

Chapter 1: A Personal and Political Introduction

This thesis is about complicated men. Not archetypal men, nor men who live by the monomyth of hegemonic masculinity. They are men who both defy stereotypes and live in the shadow of them. Men who are not solitary, but who construct a degree of their selves in dialogue with their intimate partners. This thesis began from a conflict; a conflict between my own experience as a bisexual man and a piece of academic literature on bisexual men, at the time (and as far as I know at the time of writing) the largest existing qualitative empirical study of bisexual men (Anderson & McCormack, 2016). This introduction will reflexively examine my own experiences as a bisexual man and discuss salient political contexts for the thesis. The latter is necessarily broad and covers the status of LGBTQ people in global and European politics, with a particular focus on the United Kingdom. What follows is a review of the relevant literature that examines bisexuality as an identity, drawing on intersectionality theory, linking sexual identities with binegativity, and the literature about bisexual people's relationships (including consensual non-monogamy). I conclude with a comprehensive critique of Anderson and McCormack's (2016) work, inclusive masculinity theory (Anderson, 2009; 2018), which is contrasted with Connell's (2020) theory of hegemonic masculinity, relating these to the study of bisexual men and their social location within the gender order. This literature review will then anchor and reflect each of the findings chapters, focusing on identities, prejudice and relationships. The methodology chapter lays out my approach to interpretative phenomenological analysis which I used to gather and analyse the data, as well as outlining the practical aspects of the project. The discussion and conclusion will reflect on the aforementioned findings chapters and attempt to synthesise thematic elements together, focussing on the contributions to understanding prejudice generally, binegativity specifically, and the intimate relationships that bisexual men maintain, including how these relationally affect their identities, and which social forces complicate their own understanding of themselves as bisexual men. This thesis concludes with a discussion of bisexual men's masculinities, the redundancy of inclusive masculinity theory for understanding them (Anderson, 2009; 2018), discussing the lack of social location this provides in a context of enduring binegativity.

Personal Reflections

Unlike a lot of personal queer histories that I have heard, I did not know I was different while I was growing up. I was raised by a single mother who did not hold prejudiced views of queerness, even if her idea of it only extended to being lesbian or gay. I remember the first time I encountered any representation outside of heterosexuality. My mum was watching TV, and I saw two men in bed together, affectionately embracing each other, one was curling a lock of the other man's hair around his finger. I asked my mum why those men were doing that. "They are gay, and they love each other" she replied, and that was that. This was no earth-shattering moment for me, it was simply new information that I assimilated into my worldview. Some people are gay. I also remember the first time that I heard that being gay was not normal, and was something that some people found contemptable. I was at a music festival with some friends as a young teenager and my friend pointed out two men going into a shower cubicle together. I shrugged at this incident, but my friend was disgusted at my lack of umbrage. He turned to another friend and said "He thinks it's okay!" I was unaware of other young men's homophobia. The same friend would later cease all contact with me for a few years when I came out to him as bisexual.

I don't remember learning about bisexuality – it just seems to be something that I became aware of through cultural osmosis. In school, I was not out as bisexual or gay but received homophobic bullying nonetheless. I didn't like that other people could sense who I was, even if I was probably unsure myself at the time. When I was younger, I lived in a strange experiential paradox between places. I grew up in Swansea, South Wales in the early 2000s. Section 28, a law introduced at the height of the AIDS crisis banning the promotion of homosexuality was repealed six years into my schooling, and whilst I would like to claim that I was part of the post-Section 28 generation, its effects were persistent long after its repeal (Greenland & Nunney, 2008). I certainly didn't experience the benefit of its revocation during my school years. Institutionally, my school made no mention of LGBTQ issues curricular or extracurricular, and there was no sex education which discussed being LGBTQ. Socially, I knew of one openly gay pupil, and later in my schooling, an openly gay teacher joined the school.

I would visit my father in Brighton during every school holiday. Brighton was a different world compared to Swansea. I can recall the bus route to my

grandparents' flat which drove up St James' Street, home to gay and lesbian bars, sex shops, men holding hands with men, and women holding hands with women. My late grandmother, a gregarious actor and comedienne, epitomised the joyous acceptance that radiated from Brighton's queer culture. Although not queer herself, she embraced and accepted everyone around her. When I came out to my cousin, he cited that I was her grandson, so it only made sense. Not only was being queer accepted in Brighton, it was celebrated. When I was younger, I desperately wanted to move to Brighton, which in my mind had become an idealised liberal utopia. This cognitively cemented the importance of place and sexuality. Brighton seemed to be the future, and Wales seemed to be stuck in the past in terms of attitudes towards sexual minorities. This dichotomous view is false, but nevertheless left its impact upon my thinking.

As I got older, and particularly when I moved away to university, circumstances changed for me. I met other bisexual people; I had my first mature, long-term relationship. It would be months into the relationship before I came out to my girlfriend at university, which I did so in concert with my flatmate, who was a bisexual woman. This was a moment of solidarity where we were collectively accepted by our flatmates, as we came out to them all over the course of one day. I came out to my girlfriend individually, but this joint enterprise between myself and my flatmate and the accepting environment that was created by our flatmates may have subsequently prevented my ex-partner expressing her feelings about my bisexuality more candidly from the beginning. Although my ex-partner wasn't negative about my coming out as bisexual, we never discussed my sexuality, and I always sensed some ambivalence on her part. I came out to my other friends at university, but they would constantly erase my sexuality and referred to me as gay, despite me having a girlfriend. If they did this purely to annoy me, it worked.

The point of these reflections is to highlight that place, time, silence and erasure all had an effect on my experience as a bisexual man. Yes, the presence of homophobia had a part to play in my life, but so did the absence of any available discourses on bisexuality. Not knowing about myself and my sexuality left a mark on my existence as much as other people presuming my sexuality for me (either homosexuality of heterosexuality). In short, my experience of bisexuality cannot purely be explained in terms of homophobia, there are

lacunas in representation, discourse and social understandings which complicated my experience of my own sexuality, and resulted in me living with ambiguity.

Part of my impetus of applying for funding of this project was that, up until 2017 my avenue into the study of sexuality had been through my undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations on asexuality (Lawton, 2015; 2017), a newly emergent sexual identity. As a bisexual (not asexual) man, I had always felt a slight discomfort in my position as one of the few researchers of asexuality in the UK. I had been invited to give academic and lay talks on the subject, where I felt like I was speaking as an advocate for a marginalised group, and a little like I was speaking on their behalf. Moreover, asexual people would come to the talks and would ask me about asexuality, which I always emphasised was something that I was also trying to understand, and therefore should not be assumed an expert. After completing my Master's dissertation on asexuality, I felt incapable of formulating a third project in the same field. My attention turned inward and therefore towards bisexuality. I found that bisexuality and asexuality share similarly marginal and occluded statuses as sexualities, both were unsure of their place within the LGBTQ milieu, (Canning, 2015; McLean, 2008), faced invisibility and erasure (Barker et al., 2012; MacNeela & Murphy, 2015), and bisexual and asexual people alike were viewed as undesirable partners (Armstrong & Reissing, 2014; Edge et al., 2021). It was these notions that led me to develop this project's proposal. Partially out of the necessity to familiarise myself with a new literature, but also to satisfy my own curiosity about what was being written about bisexual men like me, I opened a book, *The Changing Dynamics of Bisexual Men's Lives* (Anderson and McCormack, 2016). I was disappointed that the work illuminated so little of my personal experiences and seemed to be alien to the period that I was living through – the age of Trump, Brexit, and the trans rights 'debate' (Jones, 2018, Curtis, 2020). It was this collision of personal and intellectual curiosity with political concern that bore this thesis into being. My critique of Anderson and McCormack's (2016) work will be discussed in greater detail as the concluding section of the literature review. I will now briefly survey contemporary LGBTQ politics to provide some essential context to the subsequent empirical inquiry.

Contemporary LGBTQ Politics

The subjectivities of LGBTQ individuals and communities are shaped by power relations, both broadly in terms of the politics that operates through the nation-states that they live in, as well as through the more intimate power relations within communities and localities that shape everyday life. Power also operates at a global level, and in our increasingly globalised world, political discourses are shaped internationally (e.g., through human rights regimes) as well as within the nation-state. This power inevitably shapes the lives of the people who participated in this project. Broader political events have radically altered both the political reality and as a result the everyday lives of sexual citizens in the 21st century.

Before the millennium political sociologists had noted a rise in the success of European far-right political parties (Veugelers, 1999), and these forces have come to a head in recent years. In 2016, the unexpected 'leave' result of the referendum on the UK's membership in the European Union (Brexit) and, shortly after, the election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States of America, heralded the commencement of a new right-wing populist age in the Global North. The election of Jair Bolsonaro as President of Brazil in January 2019 confirmed this trend as not one limited to the Global North. Bolsonaro's election campaign weaponised fake news characterising LGBTQ persons (along with feminists, Black, and indigenous persons) as child abusers (Chagas-Bastos, 2019, p. 95), a typical fascistic technique of defamation of 'undesirables' causing social ills. For example, in the US, Bailey (2022, p. 35) has highlighted that LGBTQ+ teachers have been defamed as 'groomers' by Right Wing groups, "a term generally used to refer to pedophiles who endear themselves to their potential victims, to make the claim that these teachers are 'grooming' their students into an ideology that promotes and encourages being gay or transgender". Trump's presidency has been characterised as 'rolling back' LGBTQ rights enshrined by Barack Obama's administration (Moreau, 2018). These major players should not be considered the first, nor the only neofascist forces at work in the 21st century. Vladimir Putin's Russia has seen a sustained attack on LGBTQ people over the decades of his authoritarian administration (Buyantueva, 2017), which has also allowed persecution of LGBTQ people in Chechnya (Prilutskaya, 2019). The most recent threat to LGBTQ rights comes from the narrow victory of the populist Law and Justice party in Poland

(Humphreys, 2020), which has led to the establishment of LGBT ideology-free zones, a strange echo of Section 28 of the Local Government Act (Ploszka, 2022) and a reflection of neoliberal ideology's special economic zones (Zuk et al., 2021). Hungarian politicians have also embraced far-right populism and enacted anti-LGBTQ legislation (RFE/RL, 2021). In Turkey, the Erdoğan ministry has attacked LGBTQ rights, in concert with a wider European turn towards right-wing populism opposed directly "to issues related to reproductive policies and abortion, violence against women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) rights and gay marriages, gender mainstreaming and sex education at schools as well as antidiscrimination policies." (Eslen-Ziya, 2020, p. 1). Whilst over 30 countries and territories have decriminalised homosexuality since 2001, 54 UN member states remain opposed to LGBTQ rights as of 2011 (Worsnip, 2008). Despite the recent ousting of figures like Trump and Bolsanaro, they have significantly changed the political and legal landscape not simply of the nation-states over which they once presided but of global politics. Many scholars have noted the transnationalism of the contemporary Right (Albanese and Del Hierro, 2016; Berthezène & Vinel, 2017; Clifford, 2012; Macrine & Edling, 2021; Mammone, 2015). These trends are mirrored in the United Kingdom, where the stance towards LGBTQ issues (particularly trans issues) of a succession of Conservative prime ministers and their governments has grown increasingly hostile.

Boris Johnson's election as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom later in 2019 established that right-wing populism had been embraced by the political elite in the UK. Johnson's cabinet contained a significant number of ministers who voted against same-sex marriage in England and Wales, and later Northern Ireland (Quinn et al., 2019). Johnson's Equalities Minister Kemi Badenoch has been described by Tory backbenchers as "dismissive" of LGBTQ rights and actively disbelieving of structural racism (Allegretti, 2021). Gay conversion therapy remains legal in the UK despite evidence attesting to its harmfulness and the Tory government's proposal to ban it four years ago, with some academics accusing the government of failing to publish a report on the subject (Maurice, 2021). The some-time prime minister Liz Truss, previously Minister for Women and Equalities in 2020, said then that the Government would enforce barriers to children seeking hormone and gender affirming care (Breslow, 2021,

p. 577). With Rishi Sunak's inauguration as prime minister, his government has struck down a bill by the Scottish government that would allow trans people to self-identify as their gender without medical intervention (Humphrey, 2022). Sunak has also personally in interviews expressed opinions hostile to trans women (Persson, 2023), and made jokes publicly at their expense to his MPs (Walker, 2023).

This political landscape translates to difficult social experiences for LGBTQ people in Britain. Over the last 10 years, the proportion of reported hate crime related to sexual orientation in Scotland has increased from 11% to 29%; in the most recent year alone the number of charges reported with a sexual orientation aggravation increased by 5%, with year-on-year increases in such charges (except 2014–15) (Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service, 2021). Overall recorded hate crimes in England and Wales increased from around 40,000 cases in 2012–13 to over 105,000 in 2019–2020, specific sexual orientation hate crimes increased 19% from 2018–19 to 2019–20 and represents the biggest increase in any of the strands of recorded hate crime (Home Office, 2020). In England and Wales following the EU referendum, reported and recorded hate crime increased (Corcoran and Smith, 2016, p. 17). It should be noted that The Office for National Statistics have stated that increases in recent years in police recording of violence against the person and public order offences have been driven more by improvements in police recording procedures than by overall increases in hate crime (O'Neill, 2017, p. 1). Furthermore, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) states that overall hate crime has fallen 38% in the last decade, with a 67% decrease in sexual orientation hate crimes reported (Home Office, 2020). These figures are estimates, and therefore may not reflect actual figures, additionally the samples are not independent and combine two surveys' estimates, meaning statistical significance cannot be determined from each. However, this does not detract from the reality of the hate crimes experienced by LGBTQ persons or other minority groups. Just because the picture is clearer does not mean that the picture is any less ugly. O'Neill (2017, p. 4) goes on to state that:

> Although improvements in police recording has continued to be a factor over the last year [2016–17], part of the increase since 2015/16 is due to a

> genuine increase in hate crime, particularly around the time of the EU Referendum in June 2016.

It is unclear how Brexit is related to hate crimes against LGBTQ people, but the statistics tell us that in England and Wales that there was a sharp increase in sexual orientation and transgender hate crimes reported in 2016–17 compared with 2015–16 (O'Neill, 2017, p. 7). Adding to these findings, a Stonewall report (Bachmann and Gooch, 2017) found that one in five LGBTQ people in Britain have experienced a hate crime or incident in the last 12 months, up by 16% (LGB people) since 2013. Three in 10 LGBTQ people surveyed avoid certain streets because of their sexual orientation, more than a third don't feel comfortable holding hands with a partner in public, and one in 10 have experienced online hate. One in six LGBTQ people experienced discrimination in a café, restaurant, bar or nightclub; one in 10 faced housing discrimination; similar levels experienced discrimination at live sporting events; three in 10 who visited faith services were discriminated against there. The reality of these statistics points to a climate where things are not straightforwardly socially improving for LGBTQ people, despite holding increased rights to marry and adopt children, they still endure public abuse and violence because of who they are. Taken together, these findings, the political climate that I have described is one that increasingly contests LGBTQ+ existence.

The research literature on the specific experiences of bisexual people show us that they face unique challenges, including discrimination from the lesbian and gay communities (double discrimination; Barker et al., 2012) as well as society at large (Monro, 2015) which privileges heteronormativity (heterosexuality as normal) and monosexism (being attracted to one gender). Large scale attitudinal studies in the US have shown that bisexual people in general face worse attitudes towards them than homosexual people, and bisexual men, paradoxically, face less favourable social attitudes than bisexual women when rated by heterosexual men (Herek, 2002; Steffens & Wagner, 2004; Helms & Waters, 2016, Dodge, et al., 2016) which is unusual given the enduringly patriarchal context of societies in the Global North. Global North. This may be explained by the argument that, rather than mobilising normative homophobic standards that disparage both female and male homosexuality, women's homosexuality is viewed significantly more favourably (although still

not favourably in general) due to the fetishization of women's attraction to other women by straight men, who view this as a kind of erotic performance for men rather than as an authentic expression of women's sexuality (Yost & Thomas, 2012). Hayfield (2021, p. 46) highlights that women's bisexuality is often viewed as an attention seeking strategy for women to attract men; this is reflected in popular media, particularly with celebrities enacting this kind of sexual performance as bisexual chic (Storr, 1998). Hayfield (2021, p. 46) highlights that women's bisexuality is often viewed as an attention seeking strategy for women to attract men, and has been described in media, particularly with celebrities enacting this kind of sexual performance as bisexual chic (Storr, 1998). Hayfield's (2021) participants sought to distance their identities from these bisexual chic representations. This was a pressure that was commonly felt amongst young bisexual women (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013).

Aims of The Present Study

This thesis documents bisexual men and their partners' experiences of relationships, identities, and prejudice in the social context of increasingly contested LGBTQ rights in Britain. I seek to complicate the picture of bisexual men's experiences and relationships provided by Anderson & McCormack (2016). This thesis seeks to answer the threefold question: what are bisexual men's experiences of prejudice, their own sexuality, and their intimate relationships like in Britain today? Additionally, how does their bisexuality influence the intimate social relationships that they maintain?

Firstly, I address the issue of the plurality of definitions of bisexuality, discussing questions of bisexual identity and other sexual identities adjacent to or overlapping with bisexuality. I then go on to outline a typology of binegativity, surveying the wide range of forms of prejudice and discrimination that are brought to bear on bisexual people's lived experiences. I subsequently outline my methodological approach, which is informed by interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2009) and allows me to negotiate my own experiences as a bisexual man in relation to the participants' experiences. I interviewed 17 bisexual+ men (an umbrella term encompassing bisexual, queer and pansexual identities), as well as 8 partners, living in Scotland, Wales and England. In my findings sections I firstly explore the participants' experiences of

bisexuality as an identity, what this means to them, what related terms (pansexual, bi+, queer) they use or eschew for what reasons, and the intersections between their sexual identities and their other identities. Secondly, I explore the impact of their bisexuality on the varied (not limited to romantic) relationships that they maintain. I also look at the various forms that bisexual relationships can take (monogamous and non-monogamous). Thirdly, I focus on experiences of prejudice and discrimination and incidents of homophobia and binegativity, including misunderstandings and misinterpretations of their sexuality. This final findings chapter also includes some of the gendered differences in binegativity. Finally, I conclude my thesis by summing up the broad and complex picture from my research, which highlights the positivity experienced by bi+ people in relationships with those of a similar sexual identity, but also encompasses their fears and experiences of prejudice and discrimination within family relationships. I query romantic relationships, so fruitful as a site of identity development for bisexual men, speculating on what might happen when these relationships break down and what is at stake of being lost. I attempt to connect the experiences of my participants with the wider socio-political forces I discuss in this introduction.

It is my aim to fill the significant gap in empirical research about bisexual men which adheres to guidelines for writing about and researching bisexuality published by Barker et al. (2012): treating bisexual men as a heterogeneous group in their own right, not lumping them in with LGBTQ people or gay men as they regularly are, which often amounts to epistemic injustices about knowledge produced on bisexual people in general and bi men in particular (Yoshino, 1999). There is a lack of critical sociological studies that interrogate bisexuality and masculinity in a social context. Extant literature about bisexuality and masculinity either tends towards the critical but theoretical (Layton, 2000; Steinman, 2011; Fogel, 2006) or the empirical but lacking in a critical theory of society and homophobia (Anderson & McCormack, 2016). Other researchers have tended to empirically centre other people's perceptions of bisexual men (e.g. Flanders & Hatfield, 2013), as in Pallotta-Chiarolli's (2016) critical and empirical account *Bi Men By Women*, where the researcher interviewed the women partners of bisexual men but not bisexual men themselves, or larger scale studies which do not disentangle bisexual men nor their experience from gay

men (Wilson et al., 2010; Moskowitz & Hart, 2011) in contravention of the Barker et al. (2012) guidelines.

The present study aims to compliment the notable work of Palotta-Chiarolli (2016) in their investigation of bisexual men's relationships, adding the experiences of both bisexual men and their partners (regardless of gender) to the empirical account. This thesis will argue that relationships are a site of binegativity, but also identity development, complimenting the findings of Palotta-Chiarolli (2016). This study also identifies with the aims of Monro (2015), who provided an empirical account of bisexual men and women, including trans and genderqueer bisexual people, agreeing that "[b]isexuality raises important issues concerning identity construction and its social and political ramifications" and analysing key aspects of bisexual people's lives (Monro, 2015, pp. 2–3). I aim to advance Monro's critical sociological and intersectional analysis with an account that foregrounds the unique challenges that are faced by bisexual men and their partners within a British context, especially given that so much of the literature on bisexual men takes the US as its focus. Given that I estimate the total number of bisexual men who have participated in qualitative studies exclusively on bisexual men exclusively totals less than 50, I hope that my study adds further empirical evidence to the existence of bisexual men which is still called in to question by some academic researchers (Rieger et al., 2005) and further illuminates the existence of binegativity, which is argued to be in decline (Anderson & McCormack, 2016; Ripley et al., 2011).

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Conceptualising Bisexuality and Theorising Binegativity

Introduction

This chapter establishes many of the major themes and the literatures on which the findings of this study will rest on. Firstly, it problematises how bisexuality is variously defined, specifically, how bisexuality is defined as a sexual identity, and its relationship to other similar identity categories such as pansexuality and queer. This will help to delimit the boundaries of this thesis's enquiry into bisexuality. Secondly, the chapter develops a typology of binegativity, doing so in order to disentangle homophobia and biphobia and thus counter Anderson & McCormack's (2016) claims that homophobia is declining and therefore biphobia is similarly a waning force in bisexual men's lives. It will also serve to lay a template for *a priori* themes in the prejudice findings chapter (Chapter 6). Lastly it will examine the literature around intimacy and relationships, looking at the gaps in the literature, building a case for the specific study of bisexual men's relationships from bisexual men's own perspective. There will also be a discussion of bi men's masculinities within the framework of Connell's (2020) framework of hegemonic masculinity, which will be contrasted favourably against a critical examination of Anderson & McCormack's (2016) study of bisexual men.

Conceptualising Bisexuality & Bisexual Identity

Any phenomenon under study first requires definition. This poses a problem with bisexuality because it can be defined in such myriad ways by the people who identify as bisexual, as well as those who do not. Defining bisexuality poses the broader question of how to define sexuality. The label LGBTQ can be sometimes critically examined in the same way that Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) can be – that is, as a category of analysis. Very rarely do people define *themselves* as LGBTQ; more often they identify as lesbian or gay or bisexual *etc*. Defining oneself as *part* of the LGBTQ community is sometimes how people define themselves, others simply use queer as a category of practice. Sexuality can be understood in terms of three dimensions, some of which may overlap (see Figure 1).

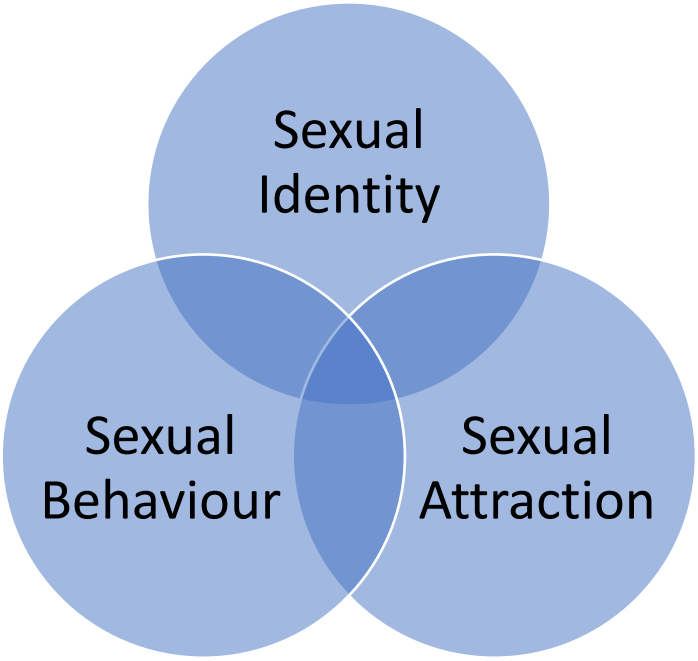

Figure 1 Sexuality defined as three overlapping dimensions, adapted from Van Houdenhove et al. (2015)

The first is *sexual attraction*, i.e., we can define a sexuality by who people are sexually attracted to. The second is *sexual identity*, which is people's subjective definition of their own sexuality. The third is *sexual behaviour*, who people actually engage in sexual acts with. As stated before two or three of these dimensions may overlap, for example, one may not have engaged in any sexual behaviour with people of more than one gender, but be attracted to more than one gender and identify as bisexual. Likewise, one might be sexually attracted to more than one gender, and have engaged in sexual behaviour with multiple people of more than one gender, but not sexually identify as bisexual. There are also people who engage in sexual behaviour with people of more than one gender, and define themselves as bisexual, such as in Meek (2015, p. 144) where because a participant was married to a woman but engaged in same-sex sexual behaviour he defined himself as bisexual. Experiencing all three dimensions (identity, behaviour, and attraction) does not mean that a person is 'more' bisexual than another, it is just merely another way of defining bisexuality, and one should be inclusive of those people who only conform to one of the dimensions of sexuality, or even reject the bisexuality label altogether. However, this is controversial when applied to sexual behaviour only, as defining people who have sex with people of more than one gender cannot necessarily be

said to be bisexual, particularly when applied to people who do *not* identify as bisexual, such as the category often used in health literature: men who have sex with men and women (MSMW) (e.g., Shadaker, et al., 2017). Many people have sexual attraction towards, or have sex with more than one gender, but do not identify as bisexual. The health literature identifies such a group as men who have sex with men (MSM), which is a categorical grouping of people that originated out of the AIDS crisis, and captured necessary information about a group who did not self-identify as either gay or bisexual. Such a group of people (men or women) might be termed behaviourally bisexual. Steinman (2011) advocates for the inclusion of non-bisexual identifying (behaviourally bisexual) people, so as to provide a more rounded research agenda featuring more demographics, as well as providing the object of analysis to shift from identity to bisexual behaviour more broadly. As identity is crucial to my understanding of bisexuality in this study and will be a chief axis to explore participants' experiences, I will not be including behaviourally bisexual people in this study. In my call for participants, I ask that participants who identify as bisexual come forward to be interviewed (see Appendix 1). I don't think this necessarily excludes men who have sex with men and women, nor men who are attracted to men and women from coming forward and participating in this study because of the anonymous nature of the study, although it does make it less likely.

There are missing aspects to this three-dimensional model, however. There have been attempts to catalogue many (if not all extant) aspects of sexuality into a single theoretical model (van Anders, 2015), but this has had mixed results, obfuscating issues of social justice and power that dog sexuality (Lerum and Dworkin, 2016), as well as having little impact on how people outside academia think about gender and sexuality (one of the instructional videos of Sexual Configurations Theory has only around 300 views on youtube.com), despite being a well developed theory. Returning to Figure 1, desire and affect are largely left out of the Van Houdenhove et al. model (2015) and should not be conflated with attraction, which is similar to sexual orientation in that it implies a directionality to desire.

I use LGBTQ as a category of analysis throughout this thesis. Bisexuality is deceptively but notoriously difficult to define. Hemmings (2002) writes that bisexuality has a range of seemingly contradictory meanings; "so many

definitions of [bisexuality] proliferate in twentieth-century [*sic*] U.K. and U.S. culture that merely disentangling one meaning from another is problematic." (Hemmings, 2002, p. 22). Monro (2015, p. 9) cites Fox's observation that sexual attraction towards people of different genders has existed throughout history and across many cultures. In Western understandings of sexuality, historically, bisexuality was defined as akin to hermaphroditism, literally two-sexed, or as the simultaneous presence of masculine and feminine traits, as well as sexual attraction to both men and women (Bowie, as cited in Hemmings, 2002, p. 22). Similarly, MacDowell (as cited in Monro, Hines, & Osborne, 2017, p. 3) states that bisexuality has been defined as 'a combination of male/female, masculine/feminine, or heterosexual/homosexual – [these] have different histories, [but] they are far from distinct.' The latter definition of bisexuality being a combination of heterosexual and homosexual, whilst too crude to warrant adoption, does highlight that bisexuality is a distinct identity rather than being two separate identities in one. Historically, bisexuality has not just been applied to the sexuality of a person, but the sex and/or gender of a person as well.

Monro (2015, pp. 12–13) argues that these three definitions of bisexuality – as both male and female, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual – were forged from socio-political developments in three major axes: structural dynamics linked to industrialisation and capitalism; imperialism, colonialism and racial inequality; and science. The first axis shows that society became more rigidly structured, as industrial capitalism demanded increased social specialisation and categorisation, which led to the development of the oppositional and binary sexualities of heterosexual and homosexual. This is echoed by Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2000, p. 5) who write that "desiring-machines are binary machines, obeying a binary law or set of rules governing associations: one machine is always coupled with another". This means that bodies, people (desiring machines) including bisexual people are governed by binary laws that are set and reinforced by governmental institutions, and capitalist institutions (other machines). Foucault (1976/1998) argues that sexuality and its categorisation has its roots in governmentality and social control through the advent of statistics and technology of powers used to govern populations. The second axis highlights that the development of the categories

of ‘male’, ‘female’, ‘homosexual’, and ‘heterosexual’ were intertwined with the development of other categories like ‘race’. McWhorter (2004) documents how race and sex were categories that were produced through intersecting 18th and 19th Century discourses of governmentality. Likewise, Foucault (1976/1998, p. 118) notes that “the medicine of perversions and the programs of eugenics were the two great innovations in the technology of sex of the second half of the nineteenth century” and “an entire social practice, which took an exasperated but coherent form of a state-directed racism, furnished this technology of sex with a formidable power and far-reaching consequences” (p. 119). Colonising countries sought to regulate and categorise not just land, but identities, and assert that non-heterosexual and non-white others constituted an inferior group who could be subordinated by White colonisers. Some sexualities were coded as savage, whilst heterosexuality was imposed as civilised. The third axis of science demonstrates how bisexuality and other sexual categories were developed in an imperialist context which sought to create hierarchical categories, which justified both patriarchal and racial superiority, and it was in this context that the categories of bisexuality et al. were forged. Klesse (2011) also critiques bisexuality as a Western conceptualisation of sexuality and cautions that it is not a universal nor global concept. Monro (2015, p. 2) adds to this critique, arguing that ‘Western attachment to ‘fixing and naming’ sexual orientations and identities can marginalise or erase other ways of doing things’. Furthermore, Hemmings (2007) argues that bisexuality is either absent, inscribed as potential or behaviour, rather than identity in transnational sexuality studies. The author also comments that transnational sexuality studies reproduces bisexuality’s historical role as facilitator of Western sexual oppositions, also facilitating colonial distinctions between cultures as sexually civilised or sexually primitive.

Two different discourses on sexuality emerged at the start of the 20th century, one sexological, and the other psychoanalytic (Evans, 2003). In 1905, Havelock Ellis, a sexologist (as cited in Fox, 1996, p. 5) defined three categories of sexuality that remain dominant today – heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality. Obradors-Campos (2011) states that due to heterosexism, bisexuality as a term did not originate from bisexuals themselves but from clinical discourse, and that 19th sexologists like Ellis created a language of the perverse (Obradors-Campos, 2011, p. 214). Homosexuality was defined as perversity in

this discourse, however, bisexuality, except from its taxonomic category was erased. We can define this earlier instance of bisexuality as a category of analysis (imposed upon bisexual people), rather than a category of practice used by such people themselves (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). Conversely, psychoanalysis, founded by Freud, rather than asserting as sexologists claimed that sexuality had its roots in Darwinian evolution, which posited bisexuality as an earlier (more primitive form) of sexuality, supposedly found in earlier humans being less sexually dimorphic (more hermaphroditic) (Evans, 2003, p. 95), posited that sexuality was culturally ingrained. This psychoanalytic discourse still posited bisexuality as pre-cultural, but rejected sexological explanations of biology. Monro (2015, p. 14) also highlights that Freud argued that bisexuality was the original form of sexuality. This is repeated in Stekel's work (as cited in Monro, 2015, p. 15). This claim that bisexuality is the innate sexuality, and that a person either gravitates towards heterosexual or homosexual is a false but quite common definition found in the psychoanalytic literature. Freud defined bisexuality as polymorphous perversity, where bisexuality is the natural state of infants, but is grown out of through psychosexual development by adopting (if this development is regular, according to Freud) into heterosexuality. Thus, bisexuality in adulthood is, according to Freud, a fixation, the adult is neurotically stuck at an infantile stage of psychosexual development. Despite both seeing bisexuality as innate, either developed out of, or clinically treated, psychoanalysis still determined that bisexuality, like homosexuality, was a perversion. However, some early sexologists such as Ulrichs and Hirschfeld (who were themselves gay) argued that because of homosexuality's innateness, such people should be able to love free of medical and psychiatric intervention (Evans, 2003, p. 95), whilst using a sexological scientific discourse to argue this.

In terms of contemporary definitions, Fox (1996) defines bisexuality as 'sexual attraction toward or sexual behaviour with persons of both genders'. This definition, whilst including both attraction and behaviour (albeit dichotomously) assumes that there are only two genders, and may exclude contemporary definitions of bisexuality which are inclusive of trans realities. However, it is possible that the participants of this study will define bisexuality in a binary way, which does not mean that their identities are outmoded. One must be careful of not erasing those identities which seem outdated, but which

are still an important part of that person's lived experience, and are not invalidated. Klesse (2011, p. 230) writes that a classical definition of bisexuality is a person who is attracted to 'both' men and women arguing that this definition sustains bisexuality as a middle ground between homosexuality and heterosexuality, or a state of 'mixedness' of the two to varying degrees, to which he cites the work of Kinsey and Klein. Klesse (2011, p. 230) goes on to discuss more contemporary definitions of bisexuality which are complicated by the resistance of the gender binary, and are inclusive of trans people, highlighting definitions of bisexuality such as "desire that does not limit itself to the eroticization of one gender; or […] desire that does not discriminate in terms of either gender or the morphology of the sexed body." (Klesse, 2011, p. 230). This is similar to a participant's definition of his own bisexuality in Toft and Yip's (2018, p. 238), who states that "gender is not a barrier to physical attraction." Perhaps the most complete definition in terms of contemporary sexual politics comes from Rust (as cited in Monro et al., 2017, p. 3): "[Bisexual] as an adjective to refer to sex acts and attractions to same-sex and other-sex persons, and as a noun to mean people who have these attractions." The term 'other-sex persons' is a clear avoidance of trans-exclusion, and a laudable attempt. However, using the term 'sex' as opposed to gender is slightly problematic, as it relies too much on the body and biology as a defining characteristic of gender. Barker et al. (2012) in *The Bisexuality Report* provide perhaps a definitive set of meanings of bisexuality. Generally referring to bisexuality as 'having attraction to more than one gender' (Barker et al., 2012, p. 11). They go on to define a range of meanings which may fall under the definition of bisexuality.

People who see themselves as attracted to 'both men and women'.

People who are mostly attracted to one gender but recognize that this is not exclusive.

People who experience their sexual identities as fluid and changeable over time.

People who see their attraction as 'regardless of gender' (other aspects of people are more important in determining who they are attracted to).

> People who dispute the idea that there are only two genders and that people are attracted to one, the other, or both.
>
> (Barker et al., 2012, p. 11)

To me these definitions cover almost all bases of what bisexuality can be, including fluidity, varying degrees of sexuality, attraction regardless of gender, questioning the gender binary, as well as less cutting-edge definitions ('both men and women'). There is also the issue of bisexuality as it relates to self-identification. Halperin (2009) demonstrates that there are at least 13 ways of defining bisexuality, some of which, whilst appearing symmetrical or identical are complicated when focussed through different lenses of lived experience, in particular gendered experience. As we have seen, bisexuality can have many meanings that vary depending on the historical context, as well as the lived experience of the individual. Obradors-Campos (2011, p. 210) highlights the variety of experiences that colour bisexual folk:

> Like monosexuals, bisexual people have different experiences depending on their gender, race, age, religion, social status, cultural, economic or social capital including whether they live in big cities or small villages. They also may live with a same-sex partner, some are single, others live with an opposite sex partner, monogamously, or in polyamorous relationships.

The above quote reflects my ambitions as a researcher in this project to capture as much variation in experience, and the markers that define that experience, as possible. Lived experience is the most important factor when discussing sexuality, and sexual identity. Therefore, this study does not aim to adopt one all-encompassing definition of bisexuality by which participants will have to adhere. Instead, participants will be asked to describe how they define bisexuality, both as their own sexuality and as a sexuality more generally.

In this study, I will focus on individuals who identify as bisexual, as the experience of that identity will be the focal point of the study. Additionally, I do not believe that labelling certain people as bisexual against their will would be helpful in this study, nor do I think it is justified for researchers to define other people's identities for them. This position chimes with Klesse's (2011, p. 231)

own, who states that other people's identities should be respected, and that it is questionable to attempt to claim people as bisexual if they do not themselves.

Bisexual Identities

Identity is a thorny issue, which often snags researchers trying to understand it. We can examine bisexuality as both a category of practice and a category of analysis (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). As a category of analysis, bisexuality emerged out of 19th Century sexological discourses in the West, particularly as a result of English and German sexological classifications. As a category of practice, bisexuality is more complex, and cannot be easily untangled from its analytical roots and impositions. This is because bisexuality emerged on to the Western cultural stage in the midst of the AIDS crisis in the 1970s. In this way, bisexuality is highly culturally constructed and, while evidence of sexuality with more than one gender has been shown in a variety of cultures and histories, one should not universalise these as bisexual (Monro, 2015). However, as Rust (2000a, p. 34) notes "the same cultural and historical factors that make [bisexuality] conceivable at this moment, in this time and place, also make it inconceivable," referring to creation of distinct lesbian, gay and heterosexual sexual identities. Furthermore, Hayfield (2021, Chapter 3) highlights that bisexual identity tends to be discussed in a context where social forces about its marginalisation are also situated.

Hayfield (2021, Chapter 4) argues that the visual aspects of sexual identity have been overlooked by researchers of sexuality, and these visual signifiers are often important for gay and lesbian individuals, but often elude bisexual people. This is essential to understanding a major social problem facing bi+ individuals and communities: that of invisibility. Bisexual people have failed to establish a distinct, widely identifiable visual culture or personal signifiers which demarcate their bisexual identity. This was especially true for the participants of Hayfield et al. (2013, as cited in Hayfield, 2021) when it came to the way that they dressed, comparatively to lesbians and gay men. I have argued that the binary categories of visible and invisible need to be complicated for bisexual people, through a framework called bisexual camouflage, where bisexual people strategically and imperfectly must manage their own visibility as queer (Lawton, 2020). Bisexual visual culture does exist, but Hayfield (2021, p.

69–70) highlights that talk seems to be more important to some bi people in the everyday than visual markers of identity, a point which echoes Maliepaard's (2015) claim about bisexual spaces being discursively constructed through everyday linguistic practices rather than tangible physical spaces. Still, there is a pre-occupation with the visual that much research focuses on, rather than the everyday discursive practices that bi+ people articulate their identities through. This thesis will focus on this kind of reflexive discussion of bi identities, what bisexuality means for the participants involved and for their relationships. Still, the common visual aspects of appearance have been useful for gay and lesbian communities to foster a sense of belonging (Hayfield, 2021), these aspects seem absent from bisexual culture and may hamper community building efforts and the general visibility of bisexual people.

In terms of contemporary Black Feminist thought, intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991) has had much theoretical purchase in reframing how a multitude of identity categories held simultaneously by a subject can lead to unique forms of oppression. In its earliest theoretical form, intersectionality was used by Black Feminists to understand how social forces act to discriminate and oppress women of colour who occupy a unique social position (Crenshaw, 1991). This developed from black feminist social movements directly (Combahee River Collective, 1978). It is the synthesis of an opposition to "multiple binaries… oppositional difference and objectification… within intersecting oppressions" (Hill Collins, 2009, p. 79) that makes Black feminist intersectional theory a powerful tool for the examination of prejudice and discrimination. Intersectionality also allows us to see more clearly "the complex interstructuring [sic.] of patriarchal dominations inscribed *within* women and in the relationships of dominance and subordination *between* women." (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992, as cited in Osbourne, 2015, p. 136, original author's emphasis). The importance of being able to examine both intragroup as well as intersubjective prejudices coupled with an understanding that patriarchal power can operate through a subject regardless of their oppressed status makes intersectionality a powerful tool.

McCall (2005) notes the complexity of intersectionality itself as a methodology, but also states that by using intersectionality we can capture some of the complexity of social life. She described three applications of

intersectional theory: anticategorical, a deconstruction of analytic categories, eschewing fixed notions of both subjects and structures; intercategorical, a provisional adoption of analytic categories to conceptualise relationships between social inequalities; intracategorical which interrogates the boundaries between social categories, whilst maintaining a critical stance towards them. Monro (2015) argues that intracategorical intersectionality is useful for the examination of bisexuality, drawing on McCall's (2005) work, as it can examine the ways that bisexual people can face multiple discrimination, and also the ways in which bisexuality as a sexual identity does not fit Western definitions of sexuality and gender. This thesis uses an approach which is intracategorical, where I will interrogate the definitions of bisexuality, especially as they pertain to participants' definitions of bisexuality, whilst simultaneously maintaining a critical stance towards these categories. In the latter chapter on identity (Chapter 4), this critical stance is reflected by participants themselves when discussing bisexuality, pansexuality and queer as an identity category. By not presuming a unitary, homogenous subject that uniformly experiences prejudice in the same way, we can begin to expand our notions of prejudice and its multifariousness.

The concept of intersectionality has found much purchase in sexuality studies (Taylor et al., 2010), and in broader societal discussions of sexual politics. Monro (2015) highlights that intersectionality is a current, useful, political tool for addressing complexity in the struggle for social justice, and the representation of bisexual experience in research. The inextricability of identity from prejudice foregrounded by intersectional theory from the very beginning, such as Crenshaw (1991, p. 1242) who highlights that identity and a politics based around certain identities (e.g. Black and LGBTQ collective political struggle) has been simultaneously a source of strength, community and intellectual development, whilst simultaneously conflating or ignoring intragroup differences. Crenshaw (1991, p. 1296) argues that intersectionality can also play a mediating role between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics, serving as an anchor where identity endures as a site of resistance. This complicates the subjective experience of prejudice, but also emphasises the plurality of structural forces and discriminatory discourses that coalesce around the subject to marginalise them. Intersectional theory

foregrounds the identities of the individual situated in society at the intersections of multiple structural oppressive forces. Intersectionality is a powerful analytic tool in the study of bisexuality, as it can demonstrate, for example, how the forces of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and the constraints of masculinity can serve to oppress bisexual subjects. Erel et al. (2010, p. 73) have criticised the absences of a proper analysis of race from queer theory, which promises to radically "uncover pervasive forms of power, not only around sexuality, but also around 'race'", yet has historically failed to deliver. Equally, the authors also criticise intersectionality as a concept which has tended to epistemologically erase both European anti-racist feminist struggles and theory of the 80s and 90s, and exclude sexuality and transgender as categories of analysis. In a different critique, Dean (2010) concludes that, despite intersectionality's weaknesses in that it can sometimes by the "multipli[cation] of identity categories end up reproducing a particular social standpoint that must assert and privilege some set of identity categories over others" (p. 123), intersectionality can offer us insight into formerly invisible yet ubiquitous categories, by viewing heterosexuality in a similar way to viewing whiteness, as a taken-for-granted, normative identity, or even as a non-identity, we can begin to examine its effects.

Monro (2015) highlights the difference between marked and unmarked difference when applying intersectionality theory to her own empirical study of bisexual people in India and in the UK. As bisexuals have the option of staying closeted, 'the structuring of their experience will be more subtle, including […] self-censorship and the mental health difficulties that may result from being socially erased' (Monro, 2015, pp. 59–60). From their research data, Monro (2015) found that the intersection of disability, gender (including trans and nonbinary issues) with bisexuality in the organised bisexual community was apparent as a point of awareness from their participant observation at BiCon. Participants shared that they believed such communities were not acute to the issues of class and age in such spaces however, despite many participants being aware of intersectionality as a concept.

Related to the concept of sexual identity is authenticity: how do we present ourselves as authentic sexual agents? This question is especially pertinent to bisexual people whose sexual authenticity is routinely questioned.

Harbin (2011, p. 78) argues that sexual authenticity involves "two main aspects, taking up sexual identifications as our ownmost and giving accounts of them to and with others." Taking up sexual identifications is a complex process and one which takes place in a 21st century arena where sexual identity labels seem more expansive and numerous than ever. Not only do sexual identity categories appear more numerous, but also the fluidity between which people move between or beyond categories appears more prevalent in the current moment (Katz-Wise & Todd, 2022). Herek (1996, as cited in Goldberg, 2007, p. 119) argues that coming out fulfils the psychological need for authenticity in one's sexual identity. Hayfield (2021) shows that many of the barriers to bisexual people's identities recognition as a true identity were discourses which constructed bisexuality as temporary or confused, further highlighting the emergence of bisexuality in a highly contested epistemological space in everyday interactions, which Hayfield's (2021) participants elucidated. Wandrey et al. (2015, as cited in Hayfield, 2021, p. 56) showed in their study that some younger bisexual women adopted alternative sexual identity labels in order to avoid binegativity, which calls in to question how authentic expression of bisexuality can be in such an epistemologically hostile and contested everyday space against bisexuality. However, coming out and proclaiming a fixed sexual identity seems at odds with queer expressions of sexuality that often elude categorisation, revel in ambiguity. The participants of Hayfield's (2021, p. 74) study whilst stressing the lack of a bisexual visual appearance culture also lauded this in granting freedom to express their authentic selves. Furthermore, sexual identities are expansive and fulfil multiple purposes. Galupo et al. (2017) found that bisexual, pansexual and queer people often use multiple labels (or an explicit lack of them) to describe their sexual identities, using them to make distinctions about the types of attraction they experience, define their sexual identities with explicit use of both binary and nonbinary language, as well as in ways that transcended identity altogether.

Pansexuality, Queer, and Bi+

Klesse (2011, p. 231) highlights that bisexuality may be subdivided into further categories such as bi-curious, and Rust (2000a) points out that many bisexual identified people do not identify with the bisexual label exclusively; in their extensive empirical survey, Rust (2000a) found that many bisexual people

also identified with other sexual identity labels, such as lesbian, gay, pansexual, pansensual, polysexual, amisexual and queer. This finding was reflected in Hayfield and Křížová's (2021) study, which found that multiple identity terms were used by bi and pansexual people in carefully considered and nuanced ways that were often context-dependent, with bisexuality being deployed to wider less queer-specific audiences, whereas pansexuality was viewed as both more niche, more descriptive and more personal to some participants who mainly deployed this with friends or within LGBTQ enclaves. It is also important to note that bisexuality is not necessarily the same as biromanticism, and in the landscape of contemporary sexual politics, some people are choosing to define their sexuality more specifically to include their romantic attraction (Nicholson, 2015), with this romantic attraction being variously defined as similar or different to their sexual identity.

There is an emerging debate about the veracity of bisexuality as a sexual identity label in the 21st Century with its own sexual-political zeitgeist. There have been debates within the LGBTQ community regarding whether bisexuality is transphobic, as the terminology 'bi' seemingly reaffirms the gender binary (Joyner, 2016; Obradors-Campos, 2011), leading to the adoption of pansexual as a better alternative for bisexuality, which does not have such a problematic etymology. Elizabeth (2013) confirms that transsexual identities have been influential in creating the pansexual label, and argues that pansexuality is disruptive of sexual binarism. Empirically, bisexuality is defined similarly to pansexuality by both bi and pan people (Flanders et al., 2017), and pansexual identified people's sexual behaviour is often similar to bisexual peoples (Morandini et al., 2017). Similarly, Hayfield & Křížová (2021) found that there were often blurred lines between bisexuality and pansexuality as a sexual identity, often their participants engaged in strategic uses of both bi and pan as labels and descriptors, but often the use of each was complex and sometimes contradictory because of their context-dependent nature, with some participants emphasising the distinct elements of each label, whereas others stressed the similarities.

Recent debates about the difference between bisexuality and pansexuality within the LGBTQ community have been argued by advocates to be less important than solidarity within the LGBTQ community, and that bisexuality

being a transphobic label is a myth, with many people adopting the label bi+ to encompass trans persons into their sexual orientation (Doyle, 2019). Hayfield (2020, p. 7) argues that some definitions of pansexuality emerged as a sexual identity and label as much as from queer theory and a desire to "[deconstruct] traditional ideas about sexual desires, activities and identities", but that for most people identifying with the label pansexuality represents attraction to all genders or regardless of gender. So far, no research papers have explicitly examined the bi+ label. Elizabeth (2013) notes the lag between theory and emerging definitions of sexual identity within communities. Although authors and plurisexual individuals alike have concluded that few differences exist between bisexual and pansexual, this study will include both bisexual and pansexual participants as it is important to explore these terms and their subjective meanings.

There is much debate around the concepts of bisexuality and queer. Queer theory has been argued to not engage productively with bisexuality (Callis, 2009; Monro, 2015), and is seen by some to assimilate and erase bisexuality, while for others, queer as an identity can be used alongside bisexuality (Barker et al., 2009). Other authors have taken a different approach to bisexuality and queer theory, considering a dialogue that can occur between the two positions. Hemmings (2002, p. 21) sees bisexuality not only as a sexual identity, but an ontological/epistemological position from which to address and critique current feminist and queer studies. Toft & Yip (2018, p. 246) consider queer theory's potential for understanding bisexuality, stating that the lived experiences of bisexuals compel us to problematize, destabilize and rethink the dualistic and hierarchical conception of human sexuality and gender. However, Steinman (2011) cautions that bisexual people may not be seeking to transform society through their sexuality.

Barker et al. (2009, p. 376) see the challenge for bisexuals as one which means continuing to "engage creatively with the tension between identity politics and queer theory perspectives", emphasizing the constraints of bisexual language, and cautioning activists to be careful about who may be excluded by it. What Barker et al. (2009) refer to when they speak of the tension between identity politics and queer theory is that traditional identity politics posits that one first forms an identity (in this case, bisexuality) and rallies behind this

identity for political solidarity, community and for the achievement of political goals and the establishments for rights for that identity. What queer theory seeks to achieve is a little more subtle, in that it sees identity labels themselves as a form of constraint which is inherent in all categorical thinking, and it is sexual categories that we should be aiming to deconstruct and remake. Spivak (as cited in Eide, 2016) cautions that deconstruction cannot be the basis for political action, where some kind of shared positionality should be the starting point to rally around, and that we should use essentialism strategically to minimise apparent differences between groups of people (e.g. women) to fight for political goals as a practical measure. Butler (2007) however, highlights how queerness through transgressive acts can be its own political struggle, and by creating gender trouble, one can call in to question masculine hegemony and heterosexist power. Queer is a useful term for solidarity between all sexual minorities (and beyond), but it does not capture the specificities of bisexual experience, nor the particular forms of oppression that come with binegativity, in particular discrimination from within the lesbian and gay communities. So, it seems that both words are useful in different ways.

Callis (2009) attempts to write bisexuality into classic queer theory texts from Butler and Foucault, from which it is sorely absent. Firstly, Callis (2009) uses concepts from Foucault's *History of Sexuality* to explain why bisexuality has developed more slowly as an identity label and community than the lesbian and gay movements, which is because there existed no medical discourse (bisexuality was assimilated into homosexuality), no scientifically granted truth, nor any reverse discourse on bisexuality. Callis (2009) then reviews Butler's work *Gender Trouble*, into which she infuses bisexuality, highlighting the lack of ability to perform bisexuality, and also the ways in which bisexuality troubles the binaries of sex, gender and sexuality. This is an extremely valuable point to make, as bisexuality cannot be performed recognizably without the presence of multiple simultaneous partners, be this sexually or romantically, and bisexuals are therefore made culturally unintelligible due to this lack of ability to perform their sexuality in cultures or subcultures which reject non-monogamies where both compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) and compulsory monogamy (Emens, 2004) are the norm. This point chimes with Kinsey (as cited in Hemmings, 2002, p. 23) who states that bisexuality is often defined in terms of

attraction to others, revealing little about the individual's own identity. However, in praise of the ephemerality of bisexuality, Obrados-Campos (2011, p. 208) writes that 'by not establishing a rigid and fixated idea of bisexuality, the mainstream culture also offers room for freedom, possibilities, and development for bisexual people no other sexual orientation is allowed or entitled to, at least to the same degree.' Whether bisexuality is a queer identity is still subject to much debate, and is ultimately variable from individual to individual.

This study therefore sees that queer theory and bisexuality can have a productive dialogue, but that ultimately, whether bisexuality is a queer identity or not is up to the participant to decide. This debate however, is not the focus of this thesis, but this is not to say that it will not be discussed further if participants pose and engage with the argument. This thesis embraces pluralistic definitions of bisexuality which are subject-centred, that is it seeks to use definitions that are presented by the participants, without seeing that certain definitions are more or less valid than others. This includes people who might otherwise fit the definition of bisexuality, but refuse to define their sexuality altogether. I would allow participants to be ambivalent in their definitions of bisexuality, and also its relationship to pansexuality and queer(ness). My own choice to use the bisexual label, to construct a sexual identity around this, my ambivalence towards queer as a term which defines me and as a political strategy, and my choice to chose bisexual rather than pansexual should be noted, as I do not wish to privilege my thoughts and feelings round these labels. Participants experiences must come first, even if they are necessarily filtered through my interpretations.

A Typology of Binegativity

Homophobia

One of the key roots of binegativity is homophobia, insofar as it is not that the bisexual person's heterosexual relationships/attraction that are often stigmatised, but their homosexual desire (Monro, 2015). Bisexual people are still very much subject to homophobia (Barker et al., 2012). Barker et al. (2012, p. 18) give a very detailed and nuanced description:

> Homophobia consists of negative attitudes towards those with 'same-gender' attractions and relationships, expressed as anger, disgust, fear, or other negative emotions. It includes hate crimes, workplace discrimination, the use of the word 'gay' as an insult, and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes of LGB people. Institutionalised homophobia is where whole structures, organisations or societies are homophobic.

Two key theorists of sexual prejudice are Adam (1998) and Herek (2004), who both discuss and critique the concept of homophobia. Adam (1998, p. 387) criticises the "disciplinary insularity" of conceptualisations of this kind of prejudice, and stresses that theorising about prejudice must address structure, discourse, and experience equally, criticising previous theorising for only addressing one of these aspects. This framework could be applied to sociological theorising in general, and one which has similarly been considered by sociologists of sexuality and feminists since (*cf*. Plummer, 2000; Jackson, 2006). Adam (1998) goes on to unpack common terms that are used to conceptualise sexual prejudice, arguing that *homophobia* as a term implies a psychological, individualistic analysis, a problem that is to be treated with either therapy or education. Ultimately, the term homophobia implies the fault of the individual and speaks nothing of the society in which the individual is situated.

Herek (2004) also critiques the term, and provides an historical account of its usage. *Homophobia* was coined by psychiatrist George Weinberg in the late 1960s. In the germinal publication to use the term, Weinberg claimed that not only is homophobia a fear of homosexuality, but also noted that it may be internalised by homosexuals themselves, and also used to describe prejudice against homosexuals. Herek (2004) argues that the idea of homophobia as a fear (given its etymological root) is problematic. Herek (2004) elaborates that Weinberg's intention was not to create a diagnostic category with the invention of the term homophobia, and that no evidence supports the notion that homophobia should be equated with specific phobias. In this instance, Herek uses the psychological discourse of positivism to debunk the myth of homophobia as fear – a myth that psychological theorising itself created. Herek argues that homophobia has been rhetorically and clinically been used by some to describe a psychopathology, and in doing so individualises the problem, isolating it from the

broader culture in which homophobia is generated from. Herek (2004) concludes that whilst homophobia has been and continues to be a very useful political tool for highlighting prejudice against sexual minorities, a more nuanced vocabulary is needed to understand the problem of oppression in psychological, social, and cultural terms. Oppression of non-heterosexual minorities is as much a problem of shared cultural epistemologies, which "define sexuality, demarcate social groupings based on it, and assign value to those groups and their members" (Herek, 2004, p. 14). This shared knowledge is expressed through the ideology of society's structures, institutions, and power relations, which is then internalised by individuals. Their attitudes and actions do not simply reproduce these power relations, but may reinforce, express, or even challenge these dominant cultural ideologies.

The similarities of the two theorists are surely apparent in their conclusions, despite differences in their methods of critique. Both stress a need for a plurality of perspectives involving social structures, power relations, and the individual experience to be synthesised in theorising about prejudice. Both are concerned with the epistemology of the concept of homophobia, and the rejection of notions that homophobia is a psychiatric disorder of any kind. Both the psychologist and the sociologist here offer socio-cultural explanations of sexual prejudice. Herek (2007) therefore argues that, as homophobia's causes are socio-cultural, he advocates replacing the term with the broader, sexual prejudice, which he claims removes homophobia as an androcentric term, which often ignores lesbians and bisexuals. This may be true to an extent, but neglects the fact that the perpetrators of homophobia in its most extreme forms are men. Herek's (2002) own research shows that heterosexual men less favourably view bisexual men than heterosexual women do. Herek (2007) critiques the etymology of homophobia, as being a fear, but we should carefully consider homophobia's root causes before quickly shelving the term. The term is rooted in the psychological, but this needn't be problematic.

When considering the causes of homophobia, we need to consider what specific aspects about homosexuality is fearful for typical cisgendered men. I argue that there are two aspects to this fear: physical and symbolic. The physical fear of being penetrated, and the symbolic fear of being submissive which is associated with the physical act of penetration. Although controversial,

Dworkin's (2007) conception of penetration as violation is prescient when considering the meaning of penetration for men, particularly in the context of hegemonic masculinity. Particularly Dworkin's description of the body as inviolate (Dworkin, 1997, as cited in Cameron, 2017, p. 4) can be applied to the cisgendered male body which is often viewed this way in terms of hegemonic masculinity. As Connell (2005, p. 45) states, the '[male] body sets limits to action', in this case homosexual action. Heterosexual men realise that homosexuality is a possibility, but one that they are afraid of, because, according to this conception, homosexuality puts men in the traditional sexual and social position of a woman: passive and submissive. As the Medieval poet Alain de Lille puts it "the active sex shudders in disgrace as it sees itself degenerate into the passive sex" (as cited in Brzyski, 2014, p. 8). Thus, the homosexual act of anal sex transfigures men into women by placing them in their sexual position: that of the submissive, passive sexual receptacle. Heterosexual men are used to a hegemonic sexual position as well as a social one, as such they are not accustomed to being the receptive (associated with submission) rather than the active, dominant sexual partner, which is psychologically fearful for them, according to the hegemonic masculine code. As Bersani, drawing on Mackinnon, argues (1987, p. 222) there is a heterosexual association of anal sex with self-annihilation, in this case, the annihilation of masculinity itself. The association of homosexuality with being the anally receptive sexual partner is also found in so-called Latin bisexuality, where men are only considered gay if they are the anally receptive sexual partner. This shows that the actual and symbolic sexual position of the man is important in determining what is sexually and socially acceptable. Homophobia is also tied to misogyny, it is the fear of, adopting the traditional, submissive social and sexual role of a woman. There are many stereotypes surrounding gay men, that include the effeminate, camp man, who has mannerisms similar to a woman. Clearly this has important implications for masculinity, if homosexuality is perceived as a simulacrum of femininity; gay men are therefore viewed as gender traitors by heterosexual men, particularly those who adhere to hegemonic forms of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Men who are adherents of hegemonic masculinity see gay men as subordinate, and will therefore discriminate against them. This is not to say that these are the only meanings

associated with homophobia, nor does it mean that homophobia doesn't have socio-cultural origins, merely that we should not altogether dismiss the psychological aspect of homophobia as it is useful for understanding sexual prejudice against men who have sexual attraction towards men, including bisexual men.

Binegativity

The term biphobia was coined by Coleman (1987), loaning the etymological root of homophobia to mean a fear of and therefore hatred of bisexuals. Weiss (2004), like Herek, rejects a psychological component of biphobia, stating that conflicts arise because of historical, social and political differences, not psychological phenomena, or irrational fears, however. Biphobia is distinct from homophobia, and refers to negative attitudes, behaviours and structures specifically directed towards anyone who is attracted to more than one gender, and is perpetuated by common representations of bisexual people (Barker et al., 2012, p. 19). Barker et al. (2012) discuss common forms of biphobia, including bisexual denial, invisibility, exclusion, marginalisation, and negative stereotypes. Whilst other members of the LGBTQ community experience some of these problems, some are very specific to bisexual people. Barker et al. (2012, p. 20) quote a participant who experienced people telling them that bisexuality is 'just a phase'. This is a common assumption that bisexuality is a transitional identity, which is used as a gateway to other sexualities. However, the quoted participant stated that they had identified as gay before they identified as bisexual, and that it turned out that being gay was more of a phase (Barker et al., 2012, p. 20). This quote both challenges incorrect assumptions about bisexuality, and highlights that sexual identity can be fluid. Barker et al. (2012) also point to evidence that biphobia occurs in the context of schools, in the workplace, and in sport.

There is a wealth of attitudinal research about bisexuality in the US, including the development of scales to measure antipathy towards bisexual people (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999; Mulick & Wright Jr., 2002). These scales measured anti-bisexual attitudes reflecting participants beliefs in bisexuality's sexual orientation instability, sexual irresponsibility, participants' interpersonal hostility, intolerance, negative affect, cognitions,

and behaviours towards bisexual people (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999; Mulick & Wright Jr., 2002). Eliason (1997, as cited in Israel and Mohr, 2004) conducted a survey which included 23 stereotypes describing common stereotypes about bisexuality, finding that participants expressed more disapproval and disgust towards bisexual men, compared with gay men, lesbian women and bisexual women, and over three quarters expressed that it was very or somewhat unlikely that they would have a sexual relationship with a bisexual partner. This highlights that bisexual men are at the apex of stigma in comparison with their other LGB peers, and that bisexuals in general are viewed as less desirable partners. Dodge et al. (2016) found, in a nationally representative sample of the US population, that female participants were more positive than male participants in their attitudes towards bisexuals, and all participants attitudes were generally more positive towards bisexual women than bisexual men, with the researchers concluding that there is a general lack of positive attitudes toward bisexual individuals among the general population of adults in the US. Again, in a large sample of heterosexual US adults, Herek (2002) found that attitude ratings were lower towards bisexual men than bisexual women and for all other groups assessed including religious, racial, ethnic and political groups, except injecting drug users. In Herek's (2002) study, more negative attitudes were associated with higher age, less education, lower income, residence in the South and rural areas, higher religiosity, political conservativism traditional values regarding gender and sexual behaviour, authoritarianism, and a lack of contact with gay women or lesbians. Similarly to the Dodge et al. (2016) study, white heterosexual women expressed significantly more favourable attitudes towards bisexuals than other women and heterosexual men. Heterosexual women also rated bisexuals significantly less favourably than they rated homosexuals regardless of gender, whereas heterosexual men rated males less favourably than females, regardless of whether the person was bisexual or homosexual. Despite Herek's (2002) study being conducted earlier than Dodge et al.'s (2016), it yielded similar results, suggesting that negative attitudes towards bisexual people in the US have endured. However, McCormack, Anderson and Adams (2014) provide evidence to the contrary, suggesting that life is getting easier for younger generations of bisexual men. In a qualitative exploration of bisexual men coming out, McCormack et al. (2014)

found a cohort effect for US bisexual men coming out; younger men overwhelmingly described more positive coming out stories that older men, who described more stereotypical views and prejudiced behaviour. The researchers explain this effect as resulting from a lessening in cultural homophobia as well as shifting ideas about what masculinity can exist as.

Hertlein, Hartwell, and Munns (2016) studied attitudes towards bisexual people by sexual orientation and gender, and also asked bisexual participants to describe their experiences of being stigmatized. Hertlein et al. (2016) found significant differences between participants' attitudes towards bisexuals in terms of participant sexual orientation, but no differences between genders, contradicting previous findings showing that women are more favourable to bisexuals than men are. Heterosexuals were, unsurprisingly, more likely to hold negative attitudes towards bisexual people than lesbian, gay or bisexual people. Moreover, bisexual people reported feeling most stigmatized by heterosexuals. Contrarily, Yost and Thomas (2012) found that women equally accepted bisexual men and women, whereas men were less accepting of bisexual men than women, the latter finding was partially explained by the eroticisation of female same-sex sexuality. Participants also described male bisexuals negatively, labelling them as gender non-conforming, as 'really gay', whereas participants described female bisexuals as positively, as sexy and 'really heterosexual'. This study demonstrates that bisexual men are often more negatively evaluated than bisexual women, and are deemed less desirable.

Israel & Mohr (2004, p. 131) demonstrate that whilst some similarities exist between biphobia and homophobia exist, there are also significant differences, 'many negative attitudes about bisexuality are fuelled by questions about the legitimacy of bisexuality and the trustworthiness of bisexual individuals.' The researchers review the early literature on attitudes towards bisexual people. They cite Rust's (1993, as cited in Israel & Mohr, 2004) study which looked at lesbians' attitudes towards bisexual women; participants believed that bisexuality was more likely than lesbianism to be a transitional identity, bisexual women were more likely to than lesbian women to deny their true sexuality, bisexual women had a greater desire and ability to pass as heterosexual than lesbians, and bisexual women's personal loyalty to friends was more questionable than their political trustworthiness. In an interesting study,

Beach et al. (2019) focussed on meta-perceptions of bisexual people, that is, bisexual people's perceptions of how they are perceived. In a large, nationally representative sample of the US, bisexual respondents indicated that they thought people perceived bisexuals as confused, incapable of monogamy, promiscuous, and possessing an unstable sexuality. Perceptions of bisexual people have the potential to impact bisexual people's mental health; Friedman et al. (2014) highlight the many mental and physical health disparities that exist between bisexual men and women compared with lesbians and gays, as well as providing more support for negative attitudes towards bisexual people existing in both heterosexual and homosexual populations. Notably, there was no research that I could find that looked at attitudes towards trans or nonbinary bisexual people.

Whilst there is a wealth of research demonstrating the existence of biphobia in both the general, the heterosexual, as well as the lesbian and gay communities, few studies have considered the UK population. No nationally representative study in the UK has considered attitudes towards bisexuals. Whilst the US and Australian research shown here is of high quality, its transferability to the UK population should not be done lightly. Although America and the UK share some similarities in culture, their cultures are not identical, and may differ in important ways with regards to bisexuality, such as religiosity, which we know is an important variable when predicting anti-bisexual attitudes (Herek, 2002; Mohr and Rochlen, 1999). Given the different religious compositions of the UK and US (ONS, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2019), this is just one reason why we should be wary of applying US findings to UK issues. There urgently needs to be more work – both quantitative and qualitative – which seeks to study and improve the lives of bisexual people in the UK.

Just as some scholars reject the term homophobia as being a problematic term, some scholars also have similar issues with biphobia as a term, often opting for more nuanced terms such as binegativity (Barker et al., 2012). Obradors-Campos (2011) deconstructs the concept of biphobia from postmodern critical standpoint. The author states that just as the term bisexuality can have vague and unreliable meanings, the term biphobia is also one that can cause confusion. Obradors-Campos (2011, p. 208) states that the typical structural oppression that bisexuals face is rooted in gender binarism – "the ontological

position that determines […] the way we perceive and understand genders". The author then claims that most Western societies implicitly have ontological or epistemological positions that endorse gender binaries, and that these are the roots of discomfort that people feel about bisexuals. I do not believe that this is the catchall reason that bisexuals are perceived negatively in western societies, I also think that monogamy has a big part to play in this, and the perception of bisexuality as an inherently non-monogamous orientation is another barrier to acceptance in society. Obradors-Campos (2011) does acknowledge this to an extent, albeit not explicitly, stating that biphobia spreads via symbolic power, binaries and essentialised assumptions. The author continues, claiming that biphobia is embedded in the everyday experiences of bisexual people, and affects their understanding of their own subjectivity.

Obradors-Campos (2011, p. 216) distinguishes between oppression and discrimination in the context of sexualities. Discrimination describes unfair power relations between non-heterosexual persons and heterosexuals, and is often used by bureaucratic institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to refer to ad hoc acts of discrimination by individuals, which downplays the embedded, structural oppression that sexual minorities face, which often take symbolic and indirect forms. The writer cites Iris Marion Young's (in Obradors-Campos, 2011, p. 216) five faces of oppression: 'exploitation,' 'cultural imperialism,' 'powerlessness,' 'violence' and 'marginalization', and adds 'heteronomy,' 'alienation' and 'stigma' in the context of biphobia, and explains each in turn. For example, one form of oppression faced by bisexuals is marginalisation as they are often excluded from decision making processes in LGBTQ organisations. Obrados-Campos (2011) notes that ILGA World (the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) has no bisexual secretariat, whereas they do have transgender and women's secretariats. Additionally, the author points to bisexual women's exclusion from lesbian groups, and bisexual people's general from exclusion/marginalisation at pride parades. Bisexual people are also alienated from LGBTQ organisations, who often have little bisexual subculture within them. A lack of autonomy over the direction of broader LGBTQ politics is demonstrated by the author's experience in drafting a bisexual activism agenda within the Danish LGBTQ union, which they felt was instrumentalised by bigger LGBTQ groups, leaving the bisexual

agenda with little autonomy. Obrados-Campos highlights the many subtler forms of oppression that are faced systematically by bisexual people within LGBTQ organisations which has hampered bisexual-specific social progress, and in broader society where it is rooted in common discourses of gender binarism and heterosexism.

Not all researchers argue that biphobia and homophobia are as important as they have previously been in the lives of bisexuals. Ripley et al. (2011), drawing on six research projects of Eric Anderson and Mark McCormack, argue that a sea change is occurring in Western societies, with a liberalisation of attitudes towards sex, and that they have become far more tolerant of non-heterosexuals. They point to research showing that traditionally masculine spaces such as sports are becoming more inclusive of sexuality as a marker of positive change. They state that bisexual discrimination is a product of a very conservative period of history. Most of the research that the authors cite is conducted with sports teams in the UK and USA, and while their findings are encouraging for their lack of homophobia, they are certainly not indicative of young, straight men's attitudes in general. However, population-based studies with representative samples demonstrate that there are still prevailing biphobic attitudes in the general population of the US, as has already been demonstrated in the earlier part of this literature review. In other research, the authors cite the fact that younger bisexual men indicated that they had experienced little homophobia or biphobia, as well as older men describing less biphobia in recent years as a positive change in society. The researchers gathered participants for this study in an unusual way, literally standing on a street corner and saying "bisexual men, we are paying 40 dollars [or 20 pounds] for academic research." (Ripley et al., 2011, p. 202). This intentionally biased the sample, as the researchers stated that they wanted participants who were open to at least one family member or friend about their sexuality who self-identified as bisexual. There was also, however, the implicit inclusion criterion of people who were happy to be identified as bisexual in a public setting by approaching the researchers. Clearly, the people who chose to participate were very comfortable with being bisexual. It is doubtful that they represent the majority of bisexual men, or of people in general – I doubt most people would feel confident to be called out by your sexuality in public and respond. The research is also

somewhat outdated in terms of the current political climate in the countries that it gathered participants from. Increasingly, the US and UK are seeing the rise of right-wing populism, which is anti-LGBTQ in sentiment, and is flavouring social attitudes, normalising discrimination. This research was conducted before this sea change occurred, and resultantly paints an optimistic picture of the future for gay and bisexual men. This political climate may have influenced the recent decline in attitudes towards same-sex relationships in Britain, which was recorded as declining between 2017 and 2018, albeit only slightly, yet being the first downward shift in public opinion since 1987 (Curtis et al., 2019, p. 112). However, it is important not to discount any positive experiences that are enjoyed by bisexual people. As such, the questions asked at the interview stage of this project will not be leading in discussing prejudice and discrimination, but instead will be framed in a neutral way, allowing participants to bring up issues that they deem relevant, positive or negative.

Double Discrimination. One specific and important issue that bisexual people face is double discrimination, in that they are discriminated against both by heterosexual people and by lesbian and gay people. Barker et al. (2012, p. 21) lists examples of this kind of prejudice: both groups can be suspicious of bisexual partners, assume that bi people will be a threat to their relationships, as well as some lesbian and gay people feeling threatened if they have any ‘other gender’ attraction, facing a difficult prospect of a second coming-out if they identify as bi. Barker et al. (2012, p. 21) also point out that some people feel like bisexuality muddies the water and calls in to question the basis for which they have fought for rights. Barker et al. (2012, p. 21) also highlight that biphobia takes various institutional forms, including bisexuals fighting to be allowed to take part in pride marches, being relegated to the back of them, or having no bisexual people on the stage alongside lesbian, gay and trans people. Another example the researchers provide is that some gay clubs used to have gay-only door policies. Still, bi people often feel excluded from LGBTQ groups. Barker et al. (2012, p. 21) quote one such voice who stated that they keep ‘getting stick’ for being bi at a local gay club, with other women saying they were ‘letting the side down’, or that were not ‘gold star’ for sleeping with men. They had also been deterred from going to a local LGBTQ support group stating that it was ‘not LGBTQ, it’s LG’ (Barker et al., 2012, p. 21).

Further empirical research also supports the existence of the double discrimination of bisexual people; Mulick and Wright Jr. (2002) found that biphobia exists in both homosexual and heterosexual populations in their quantitative study. Additionally, Friedman et al. (2014) found that lesbian and gay participants, when compared to bisexual participants had significantly higher bi-negative attitudes, showing that a double discrimination does exist. In a qualitative exploration of antibisexual attitudes, McLean (2008) looked at bisexual men and women's perceptions and interactions with the gay and lesbian communities. Many participants in the study were not active in the gay/lesbian community, as they believed that they would be rejected or discriminated against because they were bisexual. Those who did participate in the community often hid their bisexual identities out of fear. McLean's (2008) research highlights the problem of double discrimination that bisexual folk face, being forced to hide their identities and essentially being closeted within a community that has faced similar discrimination from heteronormative society. McLean's (2008) Australian-based research, in conjunction with the other UK and US studies aforementioned also highlights that double discrimination seems to be an international problem, occurring in many parts of the Anglophone diaspora. Weiss (2004) examines biphobia within the US LGBT community, stating that bisexuals are often actively rejected from gay and lesbian communities. In demarcating the GL from BT communities, some lesbian and gay people feel that bisexuals are detrimental to the social and political acceptance of gays and lesbians, and Weiss (2004) dispels the notion of the LGBT community as a monolithic entity. Weiss (2004) explains that, just as straight people's narrow ideas of what sexuality is oppressed lesbian and gays, so, in turn, do lesbian and gays' narrow attitudes oppress bisexual and transgender folk, highlighting that many lesbian and gay people view bisexuals as 'having their cake and eating it' with regards to enjoying same-sex sexuality, but ultimately avoiding its prejudices. Weiss (2004) cites Hutchins, who states that "Gay political groups often protest that there are no 'bisexual issues,' that bisexual rights are subsumed under gay rights, and that bisexuals will be liberated and accepted fully once gay rights are won." This, however, is not true, as bisexuals are often discriminated against for being bisexual and who upset dichotomies in a polarised world. Weiss (2004) provides an example of a pride march where the

addition of a B (representing bisexual) to GL pride was so controversial that it was excluded from the subsequent year's pride. Weiss (2004) argues that bisexuals have been historically disparaged by the lesbian and gay communities because of their ability to "pass" as straight, which violated monosexist ideas that homosexuality was an organic orientation only towards the same sex. Similarly, as some bisexual people embraced polyamory as a different way to do relationships, this violated gay political accommodationist philosophy of being "just like you", i.e., similar to straight people in monogamous relationships. The language adopted by gay and lesbian activists to describe sexuality also highlights how these politics are articulated:

> the term "sexual orientation" implies that one is oriented in a particular sexual direction by a force or forces outside the will of the individual. It stands in direct opposition to the term "sexual preference," which implies that sexuality is a matter of choice. When bisexuals, lesbians, gays and heterosexuals are placed under the rubric of "sexual preference," sexual choices are represented. When placed under the rubric of "sexual orientation," then bisexuality stands out as a failure of orientation or a dual orientation, a product of confusion, promiscuity or indecision. (Weiss, 2004, p. 33)

Furthermore, Weier (2020) highlights the spatial aspects of double discrimination; bisexual people are excluded from both gay and straight spaces because of the pervasiveness of the sexuality binary between homosexuality and heterosexuality in such spaces, which bisexuality troubles and is therefore excluded from. As Weier (2020, p. 1320) notes, because bisexuality embraces a nonbinary (not gay/straight) subjectivity "bisexuals' experiences in gay and heterosexual spaces can be unlike those of other sexualities," and are therefore "entangled in the queer unwanted figure, as people who are part of the formation of gay space, yet face homonormative policing" (Weier, 2020, p. 1321). The tangible spatial aspect to inclusion highlights that bisexual exclusion from both straight and gay people is not simply discursive or political, but has real consequences to bisexual people's lives who if actively excluded from spaces can face dire social consequences from loneliness (Mereish et al., 2017).

Community. In a Scottish report for the Equality Network, Rankin, Morton, and Bell (2015) found that around half of the 510 bisexual people they surveyed did not feel part of a bisexual community at all. This highlights the problem that most bisexuals do not engage in a community of their own. The qualitative responses from the report indicate that some weren't even aware of the existence of a bisexual community, and others felt that they experienced biphobia from LGBTQ groups they were a part of. Others reported that they only had contact with a virtual, online bisexual community. Most participants only felt marginally a part of an LGBTQ community. This highlights the lack of visibility or presence of an established bisexual community, at least in Scotland. Rust (2000b) provides an in-depth look at bisexual men's sense of a bisexual community, in her study of over 900 mainly US participants. Feelings of isolation and lack of community were very prevalent among bisexual men, nearly a third of 171 respondents answered that there is no bisexual community. One participant stated that they had never met another person who identified as bisexual. Others stated that bisexual groups that they had attended turned out to be more gay/lesbian orientated. More participants did, however, identify that something exists, but were unsure whether to call it a community. Rust (2000b, p. 61) writes that:

> Those who conclude that bisexuals do not qualify as a community argued that existing bisexual organizations and networks are too small, weak, or otherwise not well developed or free-standing enough to meet the requirements for a community. Some commented that people are ''trying'' to form bisexual organizations and community, implying that these efforts had been somewhat less than fully successful. Others described existing bisexual organizations, networks, or events, and shared their reservations about calling these resources a community.

Others objected to bisexual community on political grounds stating that "separatism is so confining" or that the "it's ghettoizing" (Rust, 2000b, p. 66), whereas some expressed more interest in a queer or sexual freedom movement. Rust's extensive research highlights the complexity and multiplicity of experiences and perceptions of the bisexual community, what that community is like, and its relations to the gay, lesbian, and straight communities. Again, the variety of lived experience is an indicator of heterogeneity, and it seems as

though we cannot speak of a ‘bisexual community’ as a whole, but rather an existence of idealised communities in the minds of some, as well as tangible bisexual communities which are constantly in flux and subject to change, some in development, others waning.

The following passages now deconstruct constituent elements of biphobia and examine them in detail.

Bisexual Invisibility and Erasure. “Bi-invisibility refers to a lack of acknowledgment and ignoring of the clear evidence that bisexuals exist” (Miller et al. 2007, as cited in San Francisco Human Rights Commission, 2011, p. 1). Fox (as cited in Monro, 2015, p. 9) notes that bisexuality is often erased from anthropological and historical discussions about sexualities. Bisexuality is often rendered invisible. This stems from a practical consideration: aside from non-monogamy, there is no way to distinguish a bisexual person in a relationship from a gay person or a straight person in a relationship. Neither is there a way of distinguishing bisexuality as a recognisable social performance, as there is for gayness, for example, which is often associated with campness, which, although stereotypical and in no way represents the broad spectrum of the ways that that sexuality can be expressed socially, it does have some cultural recognition. Barker & Langdridge (2008, p. 390) highlight popular representations of fictional characters becoming attracted to a different gender than they were before is typically framed as a transition from straight to gay (or *vice versa*), rather than as bisexuality. Bisexual attraction is often portrayed as ‘just a phase’, or as one set of attractions being erased. The erasure and invisibility of bisexuality is not limited to popular media or discourse. Barker and Langdridge (2008) highlight that bisexuality is often erased in academic psychological contexts, highlighting a dearth in psychological textbooks of reliable research or discussion of bisexuality. Furthermore, Heath (2011) highlights the lack of serious discussion of bisexuality at a health conference, and in the literature on health in general. Furthermore, the health literature often lumps bisexual and gay men together which erases differences between the two groups or categorises ‘behaviourally’ bisexual men as men who have sex with men (MSM), a broad category that erases differences in health needs between other MSM and bisexual men. Likewise, Monro, Hines & Osborne (2017) found an absence of bisexuality research in sexualities scholarship from 1970–2015, however, they did specifically exclude

more specialist scholarship on bisexuality. Steinman (2011) points out that bisexual women make up two thirds of the authorship in the *Journal of Bisexuality*, showing that scholarship is still dominated by bisexual women, about bisexual women. Steinman (2011) also articulates that the majority of the work on gender and bisexuality has only referred to women, and there is much more that needs to be done on bisexuality, men and masculinity.

The San Francisco Human Rights Commission's LGBTQ advisory committee (2011) highlight the issue of bisexual invisibility in a report, which notes that the health of bisexual people is often troubled by invisibility and erasure, which also impacts at a structural level, funding for bi organisations and programmes. They highlight that whilst being the largest collective group within the LGBTQ community in the US, bisexual people are often the most marginalised. Often, the authors highlight, bisexual people are lumped in with data on lesbian and gay people, making conclusions drawn about bisexuals difficult and skewing data about lesbians and gay men. The report also cites many historical figures who are often labelled as gay or lesbian, erasing from their biographies common long-term relationships with opposite-sex partners, which leads to a dearth of bisexual role models. This historical erasure extends to activists as well: bi people are often accused of 'riding on the coattails' of trailblazing lesbian and gay activists, whereas in reality, bisexual people such as Brenda Howard, a bisexual woman, was a leader in Stonewall, an early activist movement (San Francisco Human Rights Commission, 2011, p. 5). Weiss (2004) also notes the difficulty in locating historical documents detailing bisexual history, and purports an invisibility in bi history. Oftentimes bisexuality appears only tokenistically in organisation titles and mission statements, but is not reflected in membership or operations. The report goes on to extensively survey evidence related to a link between biphobia and ill-health. The report also cites evidence of economic discrimination, with bisexual men earning 10–15% less than their heterosexual male counterparts, and bi women earning 11% less than heterosexual men. Furthermore, Steinman (2011) points to two absences: the lack of bisexual signifiers – the fact that a bisexual person or relationship cannot be pointed out, and therefore lacks clear definition unless viewed over a longer time scale – and the fact that there is no visual symbol representing bisexuality (although the bisexual flag does exist). Weiss (2004, p. 45) states that erasure

comes not only from the straight community but is part and parcel of double discrimination, that: “there was persistent pressure on bisexuals from the gay and lesbian community to relabel themselves as gay or lesbian and to engage in sexual activity exclusively with the same sex. It was asserted that no one was *really* [Author’s emphasis] bisexual.” All of this evidence demonstrates that bisexuals are erased in terms of their identities, their relationships and inability to demonstrate their sexuality, knowledge about bisexuality, their own history, and their history in terms of broader LGBTQ activism.

Monosexism. Barker et al. (2012, p. 19) talk about monosexual privilege as ‘the privilege experienced by those whose (stated) attraction is to only one gender’. Obradors-Campos (2011, p. 208) states that whilst some monosexuals who endorse sexual binarism conceive of sexuality as a choice between male or female, even bisexuals who similarly conceive as gender as binary see sexuality as a selection of male and female. Toft and Yip (2018, p. 234) define monosexism as a ‘cultural ideology, a set of institutional practices and individual attitudes that demand a person’s self-identification firmly and exclusively with one sexual identity. The researchers state that monosexism renders bisexuality problematic, and occurs within gay, straight and lesbian communities. They also state that it is tied very closely to the concept of compulsory monogamy – a social norm which posits that the only relationship that can make both partners authentically happy is a monogamous one. Monosexism ‘operates on, and perpetuates, the hegemony of the hetero/homo dichotomy.’ (Toft & Yip, 2018 p. 234), insisting that one is attracted to *either* the same *or* the opposite sex. Empirical accounts of monosexism showed that some bisexuals eschew gendered descriptions of their sexuality, instead opting for attraction regardless of gender or attraction to other qualities than gender (Toft & Yip, 2018). This demonstrates how bisexuality challenges monosexist notions of sexuality by its very definition for some. Roberts, Horne, and Hoyt (2015) also provide some accounts of bisexuals’ experiences with monosexism. Roberts et al. (2015) argue that monosexism reduces sexuality down to acceptable *versus* unacceptable sexuality, in a narrow, dualistic view, moreover reinforcing not only the gender binary (complimentary male/female), but also the heterosexual/homosexual binary as oppositional. This highlights the many ways that monosexuals – both

homosexual and heterosexual – express their privilege, but also their underlying assumptions about sexuality shine through and morph into prejudicial attitudes.

Heteronormativity and Heterosexism.

> Heterosexism is a worldview that perceives all aspects of social and personal existence in the light of a very concrete and comprehensive matrix (Butler, 1999), where one's political, social and personal life is organized and segregated based on one's sexual orientation or gender and the roles ascribed to them. (Obradors-Campos, 2011, p. 211).

Heterosexism divides people into men and women, who are understood as having different, complimentary, but opposite bodies and minds. Heterosexism is inextricably linked to gender binarism – one reinforces the other. Obradors-Campos (2011) cites Adrianne Rich's idea of compulsory sexuality as being the result of heterosexism, as the roles that men and women are duty bound to perform (including sexual roles) become naturalised. The author goes on to claim that heterosexism privileges men over women, as well as heterosexuals over non-heterosexuals, and both women and non-heterosexuals are inevitably relegated to the private sphere, whereas the public sphere is a space for, and designed by, cisgendered men. Obradors-Campos (2011) continues by stating that all states of the world promote heterosexism as a social institution and organising principle of society, highlighting that most people receive a heterosexual education. Nonheterosexual people are also unwitting perpetrators of heterosexism according to Obradors-Campos (2011), and may express internalised homophobia or biphobia. Such a heterosexist view would analyze a bisexual man's identity by saying "you are not bisexual, you are a gay man who has not yet reconciled with his gayness, who thinks he needs an out into the safety of the straight world." (Garber, as cited in Weiss, 2004). Israel & Mohr (2004, p. 120) state that 'One reality that lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals must all face is the fact that same-sex desire is viewed negatively by a large number of individuals and communities. Similar to lesbian women and gay men, bisexual individuals are targeted for prejudice and discrimination based on beliefs about the superiority of one pattern of loving (opposite-sex partners) over another (same-sex partners).'

Jackson (2006, p. 117) argues that heteronormative assumptions interconnect with the institutionalisation of heterosexuality and also shape the doing and being of heterosexual, as well as the shaping of and doing of other alternative sexualities, arguing further that sexuality is not reducible to the heterosexual-homosexual axis. Jackson (2006) argues that heterosexuality is not merely sexual, but a mode of being, and a range of performative actions. Heterosexuality's sexual and non-sexual practices define both what it constitutes, but also what it does not constitute and thus defines the perverse other (the homosexual, for example). Other scholars have argued that heterosexuality is an identity that constantly needs defending, and prejudice occurs because heterosexuals seek to marginalise other sexualities to preserve their own sexuality (Lunny, 2003), essentially an extension of social identity theory (Falomir-Pichastor & Hegarty, 2014). Jackson (2006, p. 117) argues that heteronormativity needs to be understood as defining normal ways of life, including gendered performances of heterosexuality. Marcia & Sommer (2019) trace the various definitions of heteronormativity which have been used across the academic literature over time, some analysing gender and sexuality together as heteronormative, whilst some argue for separate analysis. The authors define four distinct types of heteronormativity: heterosexist-heteronormativity (referring to sexuality), gendered-heteronormativity (patriarchal gendered norms), cisnormative-heteronormativity (gender and sexuality), and hegemonic-heteronormativity (hegemonic masculinity or idealized femininity). The first category, heterosexist-heteronormativity refers to Foucault's work, and is defined as the heterosexual's privilege in society. The second, gendered-heteronormativity, is drawn from Adrienne Rich's work, and focusses on how heteronormativity emerges through male/female social relations. The third term refers to Rubin's sex/gender system, and views heteronormativity as not merely the interaction of gender and sexuality, but where the individual falls within the social field of the sex/gender system. This form is particularly useful in trans discourse and understanding transphobia. The fourth category is drawn from Butler's work, and focusses on how heteronormativity lies within a set of constructed norms that reproduce each other within patriarchy. All four of these conceptualisations of heteronormativity could be applied to bisexuality, and reviewing the concepts are useful for understanding where to locate work within

a theoretical framework. It is also useful to understand how heteronormativity operates on bisexuality as it shows that common forces are at work to oppress bisexual, lesbian and gay people alike. It also shows that there are structural and institutional forces which operate against bisexuals, as well as interpersonal and social forces. Heteronormativity is show by these analyses to include expectations about gender as well as sexuality, which can help us to understand why bisexual men are often more looked down upon than bisexual women. Men's sexuality is shown, in a heteronormative frame to be agentic, it is done by men, whereas women's sexuality is *for* men, not *done by* women. Bisexuality in women, if viewed as a performance for men can be subsumed into this heteronormative notion, even if the act is homosexual. Men's bisexuality, on the other hand, is rejected because heteronormative sexuality depends on women, this sexuality is not for men, in the sense that it requires a man to be the sexual object of another man. This demonstrates how bisexuality in men, because it is a sexuality that sometimes objectifies men (and heteronormativity, as it's tied to hegemonic masculinity, can only view sexuality as objectification: as a man actively sexualising and objectifying a passive woman) which is unacceptable. Heteronormativity is a discourse which disallows women's agency, reifies fixed gender roles of passivity and receptivity to the sexual partner who is not a man. Two men engaging in sex, or anyone engaging in mutual sexual pleasure for that matter, defies the logic of heteronormativity.

Heteronormativity is a concept which is useful for understanding the burdens that are placed upon queer and bisexual relationships throughout the life course. Heteronormativity is an ideology that promotes gender conventionality, heterosexuality, and (crucially for this chapter) family traditionalism as the correct way for people to be (Ingraham, 1996, as cited in Oswald, Blume & Marks, 2005, p. 2). Oswald et al. (2005) articulate that heteronormativity reinforces three intersecting binaries: gender, sexuality and family, and highlight that people with identities and relationships which are more consistent with heteronormativity tend to be pulled closer to the core of family membership, whereas those who do not conform to heteronormative standards tend to be excluded or included in a way which obscures their not so heteronormative characteristics. Anderson & McCormack (2016, Chapter 10) explore heteronormativity in relation to bisexual men's relationships, finding

evidence of a cohort effect where older bisexual men idealised heteronormative relationships for their ability to produce children, and for a gendered preference for women in order to start a family. Bisexual people must negotiate monosexist and heterosexist assumptions within their families, particularly when coming out to family members (Scherrer et al., 2015). In terms of how heterosexism and heteronormativity can be combatted, Batsleer (2012) highlights the role of informal education in challenging and threatening a heteronormative status quo, drawing on youth work practice as a disrupting site. Education is further highlighted by Elia (2010), who calls for intervention in schools through more formal education routes as well as extra-curricular interventions (through the example of Gay-Straight Alliances), arguing that this will not only reduce binegativity, but also help to deconstruct binary and dichotomous thinking about sexuality and gender.

Bisexual Stereotypes. One of the most consistent explanations as to why bisexuality is stigmatised against is because of bisexual stereotypes. Bisexuality is often and wrongly argued to be a more unstable sexuality than heterosexuality or homosexuality by those who are not bisexual. Bronn (2001) found that, contrary to this incorrect assumption, many bisexual people solidly identify as bisexual over a long, stable period of their lives. Furthermore, Hubbard & de Visser (2015) found that bisexual people view bisexuality as significantly more stable than lesbian, gay, and heterosexual people. The researchers also examined essentialist beliefs in relation to attitudes to bisexuality, and found that more belief in discreteness (the idea that sexualities have clear and sharp boundaries) is an indicator of less favourable attitudes towards bisexuality. Klesse (2011, p. 232) writes that cinematic depictions of bisexuals (a key source of cultural representations) are as indecisive, instrumentalist, and objectifying in their approaches to relationships, frequently highlighting the threatening, insatiable and excessive character of bisexuals. In the 1980s, bisexual men were represented as threats to the heterosexual population of transmitting HIV. Similarly, Weiss (2004) cites Ochs, who states that within the LGBTQ community, bisexuals were seen as privileged as non-homosexuals and stereotyped as amoral hedonistic disease carriers and disrupters of families, indecisive and promiscuous. Bi people’s partners may be concerned that bisexual people may decide that they’re oriented towards someone of a different gender than them,

or that they desire non-monogamy. This is partially confirmed by the empirical research of Zivony & Lobel (2014), who found that, bisexual men were evaluated as more confused, untrustworthy, open to new experiences, as well as less inclined towards monogamous relationships and not as able to maintain a long-term relationship. The study also found that these stereotypes were often not acknowledged as such by participants. This highlights that stereotypes about bisexuals impact bisexuals' relationship prospects.

Capulet (2011) identifies the dissemination of bisexual stereotypes through celebrity culture and mass media. Capulet (2011) highlights the lack of media attention on celebrity bisexual men, which may impact a lack of bisexual role models for bi men. Bi female celebrities often attract more attention as they are portrayed as sex symbols for the consumption of men, and also reinforce bisexual stereotypes such as promiscuity, and hypersexuality. There is a problematic theme which emerges from the literature which shuns false 'negative' stereotypes about bisexuals as promiscuous. Whilst it is accurate to say that not all bisexuals are promiscuous, it is moralistic to assume that promiscuity is a bad thing, Bisexuals have sexual agency, and have the right to be 'promiscuous', to have multiple sexual partners. These stereotypes may be inaccurate regarding all bisexuals, but they should not be so readily deployed as oppositional when constructing a positive image of bisexual people, as this limits the plurality of bisexual representations and performances. The willingness to decry certain bisexual stereotypes as being negative speaks to an assimilationist sexual politics which seeks to adhere to strict sexual moralism where no bisexual can be sexually free. Bisexuals should not feel pressure to be 'well behaved' sexually, so as not to adhere to 'negative' stereotypes. While it is important to combat incorrect stereotypes which colour bisexuality, it does not mean that simultaneously we must be moralistic about sexuality or push the 'well behaved' bisexual as the idealised sexual citizen. Similarly, we should be careful to reject the stereotype that bisexuals desire nonmonogamy, as some bisexuals do, therefore we should not dismiss this is as a negative stereotype. There is much diversity amongst bisexuals, and whilst stereotypes do not necessarily reflect this, we must be cautious as to not further alienate bisexual people who do in some way fit the stereotypical mould of bisexuality. Instead, we must attack notions that sexuality and non-monogamy are negative things, and allow

hegemonic concepts of an idealised relationship to be criticised. My research will seek to explore how bisexual people in relationships negotiate these stereotypes which surround bisexuality, whether they evaluate their behaviour in terms of these stereotypes, and their relationship to these questions of how exactly a bisexual life can be lived in the face of these oppressive discourses.

Intimate Relationships in the Context of Biphobia

Before discussing bisexual relationships and their relationship with the broader social regimes of binegativity, it is first necessary to discuss how relationships and sexuality in general are framed within a wider context. Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Love* (2003) frames romantic and sexual relationships within a wider context of liquid modernity, consumer society and neoliberalism. Eroticism, for Bauman (2003, as cited in Best, 2019, p. 1097), has become a kind of seductive resource or commodity which is rooted in a discourse of consumerism. This liquifies once solid and secure life-long partnerships in to more insecure and frail human bonds precipitated by individualism and technological development, transforming courtship into a kind of commodified game (Hobbs et al., 2016). Here relationships are viewed in the context of neoliberalism, they are quantified and looked at through the lens of the market: dating has become a place of strategy, investment and risk. As relationships are viewed in this way, they become commodities in themselves which can be gambled with, sites of success, prestige, and ultimately become frailer, as one is constantly engaged in a marketplace where relationships can be traded up, of fulfilment being commodified. As Keskin-Kozat (2004, p. 495) writes: "individuals are no longer willing to bond with others, to relate to them for the sake of relating, to love them for their individual uniqueness; because doing so means foregoing the possibilities of finding a more satisfactory fulfilment." What this means for bisexual men's relationships then is more precarity, as certain characteristics are valued more in the dating scene, we will see that bisexuality means a liability for some potential partners of bisexual men, who crave fixity in an increasingly precarious liquid modern landscape of intimacy.

Sexual and romantic relationships are a primary site at which sexuality is performed, lived, and experienced. Binegativity impacts both bisexual people's ability to initiate and maintain relationships (Israel and Mohr, 2004), as such

maintaining stigmatised relationships depends on emotional and material support (Klesse, 2007, p. 83). Attitudes towards dating, having casual sex and entering a committed relationship with bisexual people varies by gender, with women reporting moderately high levels of insecurity towards bisexual men, increasing in terms of the level of commitment to the relationship (Armstrong & Reissing, 2014). This indicates that women (especially those who were intolerant towards and disbelieving of the stability of bisexuality as an orientation) are more insecure about having longer-term relationship commitments with bisexual men than heterosexual men. This study was carried out in Canada with a relatively large sample size of mostly undergraduate students (*N* = 720), but only assessed heterosexual people's attitudes towards romantic and sexual relationships with bisexuals. Similarly, Gleason et al. (2019) found in their study of gay men's, heterosexual men's and women's attitudes towards dating bisexuals that heterosexual women tended to view bisexual men as less sexually and romantically attractive and were less willing to date or have sex with bi men than straight men, whom they viewed as comparatively more masculine. Interestingly the researchers found that no differences between in gay men's ratings of attractiveness and masculinity/femininity between gay, straight, and bisexual men, despite the well documented existence of double discrimination faced by bisexuals within the LGBTQ community. In an extensive empirical study of 80 bisexual men and women, Toft & Yip (2018) identified two themes which the participants had to negotiate in their intimate relationships: monosexuality, being the tendency for sexualities to focus on one gender, and compulsory monogamy, a term developed from Adrienne Rich's (1980) compulsory heterosexuality – the idea that relationships should or must be monogamous as the necessary basis for intimate relationships, with all other relationship configurations disqualified from possibility or viability. Toft & Yip (2018, p. 239) highlight that bisexual people must negotiate many challenges in their intimate relationships, including the internalised, discursively constructed prejudices about the nature of bisexuality which some non-bisexual partners of bisexuals exhibit, and which question bisexuals' commitment to monogamy. Many of the participants in Toft & Yip's study refuted the notion that they had to be in relationships with both men and women to affirm their bisexuality, and many of the participants were in monogamous relationships. However, some engaged in

nonmonogamous relationships as well, which were no less intimate, providing ways to generate support and living out bisexuality in meaningful ways (Toft & Yip, p. 240).

It is important to highlight that many of the stereotypes that exist about bisexual people, and bisexual men, are fundamentally relational – they are predictions about how bisexual people interact with other people in sexual and romantic contexts. Due to stigma around their bisexual identity, some bisexual men choose to not initially disclose their sexuality to their partners (Klein & Schwartz, 2005). This can make coming out as bisexual whilst already in a committed relationship challenging, with enormous risk attached, particularly if married and/or co-parenting children together. Moreover, this reluctance can further contribute to the invisibility of bisexual people. Furthermore, there are structural constrains on bisexual relationships which do not mimic typical heterosexual relationships; Klesse (2010, p. 123) argues that heteronormative state practices and hegemonic cultural values only grant recognition and rights to relationships which follow the scripts provided by white middle class heterosexual coupledom. However, as Lahti cautions, relationships are not strictly governed solely by discourses which regulate conduct and formal structures, but also by psychological dimensions about what relationships should be like, and individual expectations (Hayfield & Lahti, 2017). Furthermore, conventional recognition of relationships by the state in the form of civil partnerships or marriage (these are the two options available to monogamous couples in Britain) have been questioned by bisexuals, particularly people who practice ethical non-monogamy. Some have proposed alternatives to state-sanctioned marriage/partnerships (Solot & Miller, 2001) which encompass more informal arrangements, including ones that are more equitable in terms of domestic labour, seeking less patriarchal family structures by life experiments with families of choice beyond the genealogical (Weeks et al., 2001). Not only are non-monogamous relationships enacted as alternatives to monogamous ways of being, they can also be sites of active resistance to highly normative state forms of sexual citizenship which emphasise LGBTQ+ sexuality as acceptable if it confirms to the sameness of monogamy that is shared in monosexist forms of gay and lesbian sexuality. Pérez Navarro (2017) argues that monogamy operates as a parallel regulating discourse to its judicial enforcement in marriage and

marriage-like institutions (e.g., civil partnership) which essentially forms an exclusionary form of sexual citizenship by delimiting the terms of LGBTQ+ people's intimate negotiations with the state. The author argues that such relationships need to be reimagined, not simply assimilated into the legal realm of sexual citizenship through inclusion. Thus, non-monogamous bisexual relationships can represent a destabilising force to the hegemony of monogamous, heteronormative institutions sanctioned by the state. As Santos (2019) argues, bisexuality and polyamory can find common ground for greater social and political recognition, especially given that both share a lack of legal and cultural recognition.

Three of the most extensive empirical surveys of bisexual people in relationships are the work of Hayfield (et al., 2018), Lahti (2019), and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2016). Lahti's (2019) innovative study looks at bisexual women and their partners longitudinally over 10 years. Examining 'relationship talk', that is the discourses relied upon and especially the contradictions between different participants' narratives regarding their relationships. Such discourses were often heteronormative, through participants negotiation with these discourses bisexual identity emerged as a 'weak' identity (Lahti, 2015), where the bisexual women in question did not easily gain a sense of being, as bisexuality evaporated within normative frames of relationship talk. Additionally, the negotiation of monogamy (most relationships examined were monogamous) had implications for both the relationship itself, as bisexuality troubled the stable notion of their relationships, but also complicated their sexual subjectivity and how that should be realised within the confines of their monogamous relationships. Highlighting the intertwined nature of bisexual relationships and identity, this research, whilst critical and of high quality, only focuses on bisexual women's relationships from their perspectives. Hayfield's research focused on 20 bisexual people (some of whom were trans, nonbinary/genderqueer) in the UK and their experiences of bisexual identity within and outside of relationships (Hayfield et al., 2018). They found that bi identities and relationships were often rendered invisible, whereas others explained that their relationships were often perceived as heterosexual/homosexual due to their monogamous configuration, some felt that their relationships were taking on an identity of their own, whereas some participants did not actually characterise their own relationships as bisexual.

The participants resisted stereotypical notions of bisexuality and to some extent defined their own identities in defiance of them. Some had not come out to their partners, whereas some had only tentatively addressed their bisexuality with their partner. Those who had come out sometimes had to educate their partners about the meaning of bisexuality for that relationship. Frequently current partners were talked about more favourably than previous partners. Hayfield et al. (2018) argue that "participants were engaged in a process of protecting their current partners from anticipated accusations of binegativity and actively working to present their ongoing relationship as positive". Pallotta-Chiarolli's work (2016) is one of the most extensive that has ever been pursued into bisexual men's relationships. A survey of 78 women who are bisexual men's partners and their experiences of their relationship, it is a landmark in the study of bisexual men in mixed-orientation relationships (MOREs), exploring what these relationships mean in holistic terms: the difficulties; loving bi men; how bisexuality was negotiated within the relationship, particularly after coming out. Pallotta-Chiarolli contrasts women's experiences of their partners coming out at the beginning of the relationship, with others who came out midway through and explores the implications of this for the relationship, including relationship breakdown. The book also includes institutional challenges for these relationships, including how these couples dealt with difficulties in accessing healthcare, as well negotiating family, and also the ways that bi men are represented in film. However, this book – as extensively as it explores its subject matter – is limited in its scope in the non-inclusion of bi men's direct experiences, which feels like something of a missed opportunity given the access that the researchers had. My own study is one that is interested in exploring the interplay of different partners' experiences of bisexuality from different perspectives, *i.e.* from more than just bi men's or their partners' experiences and beyond man/woman relationships.

These accounts, and indeed most of the literature, contrast somewhat with Anderson & McCormack's (2016) extensive survey of 90 bisexual men in the UK and USA. The researchers found a cohort effect whereby younger participants came out to their partners earlier and faced less stigma and hostility compared with older bisexual men. Their participants in general reported increased acceptance in their disclosure of bisexuality, with the majority reporting

acceptance from heterosexual women and some gay men, although some faced rejection from gay men. Some participants reported being reserved about telling their partners of their bisexuality, whilst others were upfront about it straight away. Bisexual men reported that their heterosexual women partners were often jealous and afraid that their desire for them was less than for men. Others stated that their partners disbelieved their bisexuality altogether. Men in the older cohort expressed the ability to have children as a component of choosing female partners as more desirable than younger participants did. Some of the older men's attitudes towards women as less desirable partners were rooted in the desire for polyamory and were partially fuelled by misogyny. These attitudes were not expressed by younger men. Their study sample also comprised of bisexual men who idealised monogamy by and large, with few desiring non-monogamy. The key finding of their research was that the bisexual men they interviewed lacked an overarching or hegemonic experience of relationships.

These studies collectively demonstrate that relationships which feature one or more bisexual partner require negotiation both within the relationships, managing a partner's expectations and perceptions of bisexuality, considering when and how to tell them about one's sexuality, and negotiating sociality and discourses about bisexuality together as partners in a world that is often hostile to bisexual people. The challenge for my study is how to discuss these challenges with my participants, including the bisexual men's partners. An earlier form of my design involved interviewing each partner separately which I thought might allow partners to speak more candidly about their views of bisexuality, including if they had changed once they had been in a relationship with a bisexual person. I opted out of this design as I became less interested in how individual perceptions of bisexuality changed through relationships (although I think this could still be potentially captured in joint interviewing) and instead opted to interrogate the shared understandings of bisexuality that arose within relationships – how did these evolve concurrently and in a shared ontology of the relationship. This approach I think better demonstrates how relationships function – people living their lives together, creating meaning together, sharing their struggles together.

Consensual (Ethical) Non-Monogamy and Bisexuality

“Where you find people that have a problem with bisexuality, I think you'll find people valuing monogamy." said a participant of Mohr & Rochlen’s (1999, p. 366) study. However, Weiss (2004, p. 34) highlights that polyamory (multipartner relations), pansexuality (openness to all forms of sexuality) and other forms of responsible nonmonogamy are ‘pioneered’ by some bisexuals; on the other hand, Davids & Lundquist (2017) contest that bisexual people engage in consensual non-monogamy at higher rates than other groups in their review of the literature. While bisexuality cannot be equated with polyamory and non-monogamy, if bisexuality were to be valued distinctly from gay and lesbian issues, this dimension would then need to be added to the current social debate about domestic partnership and same-gender marriages (Hutchins, 1996, p. 241). As one discussant points out, sexual monogamy and polygamy are not limited to bisexuals, but are issue for straight and gay couples as well (Klein & Schwartz, 2005, p. 182). The spectre of polyamory need not haunt bisexuals exclusively, and to pretend that polyamory is a bisexual issue alone is to ignore and homogenise monosexual relationships. Bisexuality brings non-monogamous modes of being to the surface, but it has always lingered in the shadows of all types of relationships, queer or otherwise. Monosexual may be a misnomer in and of itself, as if one’s sexuality has a single target. Often dating is a process of whittling down commitment to one person, but that does not mean that one’s attraction is singularly diminished. McLean (2004, as cited in Anderson & McCormack, 2016, pp. 62–63) highlights that even in relationships where non-monogamy is negotiated and accepted within the relationship, bisexual people are often ostracised from the outside of relationships by peers and other social acquaintances who tend to perceive non-monogamy (consensual or otherwise) as always negative; primary partners perceived pityingly for tolerating acts of perceived infidelity, despite honest negotiation within the relationship.

In the socio-legal sphere of marriage equality debates, because of bisexuality’s adjacency to polyamory, both were side-lined in US equality campaigns, as they could have been picked up by right-wing commentators using the ‘slippery slope’ rhetoric arguing that same-sex marriage would lead to multipartner marriages (Klesse, 2018a). This has robbed the US LGBTQ equality movement of a radical alternative to same-sex marriage which goes beyond the monogamous couple norm, not just affecting bisexuals but anyone practicing

non-monogamy. Pérez Navarro (2017) highlights the radicalism and destabilisation inherent in non-monogamous relationships configurations, arguing that monogamy is not only a component and requirement of state institutions which regulate intimacy (e.g. marriage and civil partnership), it also creates a cultural and 'meta-judicial' discourse whereby rights adjacent to sexual citizenship also hinge on the couple norm, such as immigration related rights, as well as the economic and legal protections offered exclusively to couples in monogamous relationships by the institutions of the state. Non-monogamous bisexualities trouble such institutions by questioning the singularity and primacy of one relationship over another, but such relationships are also troubled by the state. One bisexual participant reflected that marriage (etc.) 'impose[s] strict limits on the formal recognition of monogamous or non-monogamous partnerships, but that that is also the way the state sanctions certain kinship ties at the expense of excluding others' (Pérez Navarro, 2017, p. 446), rightly pointing out not only the exclusive and narrow view of partnership but also of kinship. Pérez Navarro (2017) however cautions against the tendency in LGBTQ rights discourse to turn to the state for recognition of non-monogamous relationships and rights therefore being afforded. Although they argue that such paths are unavoidable for some, encounters with the state are frequently ambivalent ones for LGBTQ people, and can lead to, rather than recognition for alternative modes of intimacy, mimicry of existing forms of culturally and legally sanctioned sexual citizenship. Similarly, Santos (2019) describes monogamy as a sociolegal expectation of intimate citizenship for LGBTQ people, suggesting that, given the mononormative underpinnings of this intimate citizenship, instead a relational citizenship should be advocated for. However, this involves, in contradistinction from Pérez Navarro (2017), engaging the state by stressing the primacy of non-monogamy for formal recognition and protection, yet maintaining the informal recognition of non-monogamous relationships in the social and identitarian spheres. On this question of whether the rights and recognition of non-monogamous relationships be enshrined in law, I side more with Pérez Navarro (2017), who highlights that state practices are always exclusionary. I, like the participants of Aviram's (2008) study on polyamorous activists, mistrust the law "as a tool for shaping identities and designing interpersonal relationships" (Aviram, 2008, p. 261). Looking at the different

scholar's arguments, I agree that whilst legal recognition of polyamorous relationships would not impinge on the rights of bisexual people in such arrangements and would be beneficial in some senses (as in Santos', 2019 assertions), it is unlikely that such relationships would be recognised without significant activist effort nor be recognised without the sidelining of other kinds of relationships. It is right to question why formal (i.e. legal) as well as informal or social recognition is a necessity for some scholars, given that some bisexual people in such arrangements remain sceptical (Aviram, 2008; Pérez Navarro, 2017). Additionally, I believe that such recognition always comes with a normative expectation because of the nature of bargaining with the state, which is why marriage equality debates and campaigns often took a sameness-emphasising assimilationist tone (Daum, 2020). Such expectations only serve to re-enshrine cultural norms around intimacy and beyond. Pérez Navarro (2017) highlights the interdependency that institutions like marriage place upon other socio-legal frameworks such as immigration status, due to the dependency of such institutions on fixed identities such as gender identity.

Non-monogamy presents a difficulty for bisexual people in particular because of the pervasive discourses which position bisexuals are necessarily non-monogamous (Klesse, 2007, p. 78. This can making negotiating both monogamy and non-monogamy difficult for bi+ people: on the one hand, potential partners may presume that bisexual people need to engage in more than one relationship at a time to actualise their bisexuality (Klesse, 2007, Chapter 4), and therefore view them incapable of monogamy (particularly bisexual men; Zivony & Lobel, 2014), but on the other, it can be difficult for bi+ people who *do* desire non-monogamy, as this involves negotiating and in some ways enacting bisexual stereotypes which equate bisexuality with non-monogamy. Negotiating non-monogamy as a bi person is not straightforward, as shown in McLean's (2004) study, but it was possible for many participants, who through honesty and communication about boundaries and tolerances were able to do this successfully. Contra to the stereotypes of deceitfulness, unfaithfulness and untrustworthiness that dog bisexual people, McLean (2004, p. 96) found that the bisexual people she interviewed demonstrated a sincere commitment to honesty, trust and communication. Outside of relationships, some bisexual people view the support they receive from the wider bisexual community as

essential for maintaining their non-monogamous relationship (Klesse, 2007). However, because of the common lack of a stable and tangible bisexual community (Hemmings, 2002), support may have to come from entirely within the relationship(s) they maintain. Furthermore, if non-monogamous bisexual people *do* have access to bisexual spaces beyond their own relationships, not everyone in those spaces may be supportive of non-monogamy. For example, at BICON, the largest gathering of bisexual people in the UK, Klesse (2007, p. 85) met Robert, who explained that he was wary of the bisexual community's promotion of non-monogamy, at what he felt was the expense of monogamy. This was echoed by a number of participants in Klesse's (2007) study, who stated that the bisexual community tended to favour non-monogamy over monogamy, and were judgemental towards those in monogamous partnerships. There is a fracture within the bisexual community, where "some want to reclaim promiscuity, others are at pains to prove that many bisexuals are happily monogamous" (Klesse, 2007, p. 86). This demonstrates that bisexual people are not a monolith when it comes to sexual politics, and the monogamy/non-monogamy debate is a point of, if not tension that a diversity of opinion.

Masculinities

This thesis takes the view that gender is both social (Lorber, 1991) and relational (Connell, 2020). It is a set of social relations in which power is inescapable (Connell, 1987), but I also acknowledge that power shapes certain gendered interactions more than others. Gender is also psychologically and reflexively constructed. As Foucault argues:

> identity is not simply imposed from above but is also actively determined by individuals through the deployment of 'practices' of the self. When this process of self-stylization becomes conscious, then the potential for a reflexive or ethical form of self-fashioning – an 'aesthetics of existence' – emerges. (Foucault, 1985, as cited in McNay, 1999, p. 96).

Masculinity then, is adjacent to a masculine gender identity, which is both social, relational, bearing power and reflexively constructed. Connell (1987) argues that masculinity functions to maintain the gender order – the hierarchical *status quo* between men and women, who are ordered in a certain way in most societies with men on top, and women in a subordinate position. Men have

patriarchal power over women both culturally and economically, and have the majority of the power in most societies. Connell argues that therefore, our state and society is structured to favour men. She proposes that:

> All societies have cultural accounts of gender, but not all have the concept 'masculinity'. In its modern usage the term assumes that *one's behaviour results from the type of person one is*. That is to say, an unmasculine person would behave differently: being peaceable rather than violent, conciliatory rather than dominating, hardly able to kick a football, uninterested in sexual conquest, and so forth. (Connell, 2020, p. 67, my emphasis).

In this quote, Connell is describing masculinity in essentialist terms in order to critique an essentialist view of masculinity: that is, one that naturalises toxic masculine behaviour as being the result of 'just being a man' and that those expressions of gender are natural and cannot be changed. Connell's theory of masculinity is one that seeks to denaturalised and de-essentialise gender and its associated characteristics, instead looking at how certain masculine characteristics afford certain men power in society.

Connell is a theorist who is influenced by Marx, and who often describes masculinity in Marxist terms. Borrowing the concept of hegemony, in the same way that Gramsci was seeking to explain how the bourgeoisie maintain cultural as well as economic power and superiority (cultural hegemony) over the working class, Connell asks how do men maintain their social dominance in society? Her reply was the theory of hegemonic masculinity.

Connell (2020) breaks down masculinities into certain types with varying relationships to power in the gender order of a particular society. Hegemonic masculinity is the ideal that a certain culture has of a masculinity that men can call upon when invoking their hegemonic (dominant) power over others in society (including other men). Some men embody this successfully, usually through performative displays: e.g. heavy drinking, fighting, sports/'lad' culture, sexist behaviour, hypersexuality, exaggerated heterosexuality, insistence on gender binary/strict roles. The second type is complicit masculinity; this is the behaviour of men who are not attempting to embody this type of masculinity, but who, by being silent or encouraging hegemonic

masculinity's performance and evocation, benefit in some way socially by the gender order being maintained. Their masculinity is authorised, but not hegemonic. Then there is subordinate masculinity, which is characterised by men who cannot invoke hegemonic masculinity and who are subordinated by it, and are therefore disqualified from masculinity. Historically this has been gay and bisexual men in mainstream society (Cheng, 1999). This also includes any men whose masculinities fall outside of hegemonic masculinity or are in direct opposition to it. These men occupy a marginal social position relative to complicit and hegemonic masculine men. As Connell (2020, p. 81) states, "these two types of relationship – hegemony, domination/subordination and complicity on the one hand, marginalization/authorization on the other – provide a framework in which we can analyse specific masculinities." To this original formulation, Connell (2020, p. 111) has recently added protest masculinities, which are defined as

> an exaggerated claim to the potency that European culture attaches to masculinity […] a claim to the gendered position of power, a pressured exaggeration (bashing gays, wild riding) of masculine conventions. The difference is that this is a collective practice and not something inside the person.

In addition to discussing protest masculinities, Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) expanded the original formulation of the theory, arguing that varying contexts produce difference forms of hegemonic masculinity, and placing a greater emphasis on multiplicity and intersectionality, as well as "recogni[sing] social struggles in which subordinated masculinities influence dominant forms" (p. 829). For example, the Gay Left in Britain have successfully fought for a less marginal position than previously experienced (Robinson, 2007), and crip theory has produced social movements which have challenged normative stereotypes about disabled men and women which have been influential in society (McRuer, 2006). This is argued in Connell & Messerschmidt's reformulation to account for a more complex gender hierarchy, showing that subordinated groups (such as gay men and women) have more agency than was previously acknowledged. There is also an emphasis on the varied geographies of masculinity in this revised formulation, with overlapping and contested local, regional and global forms of hegemonic masculinities. This was added to account for globalisation, and is

useful when thinking about how masculinity is negotiated in various spatial contexts: from the family (Peukert, 2019) to the imagined relation with the nation state and beyond (Elias, 2008). This is particularly useful when combing the perspectives to look at bisexual men across a variety of social contexts: whereas in heteronormative social contexts, bisexual men may be disqualified from hegemonic masculinity because of their same-sex attraction, in queer contexts, they may be ostracised because of their possession of some recuperated heterosexuality (McLean, 2008).

Connell's (1987; 2020) gender order theory and concept of hegemonic masculinity is comprehensive, and by far the most influential scholarly account of men and masculinities (Wedgewood, 2009). The advantages of the theory lie in the wealth of empirical evidence which led not only to its original formulation, but also the vast empirical work that has subsequently been done using hegemonic masculinity as a basis (Messerschmidt & Messner, 2018). Moreover, Connell's work has had influence in applied practice, ranging from education and anti-violence work, to health and counselling settings (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). , Connell's extensive and comprehensive work draws on both feminist traditions, Marxism and sociological theory to explain how masculinities operate to reify the patriarchal gender order in society. Rarely is Connell described as a transfeminist researcher, which I feel is a subject position that should be taken into account when reading her extensive work on masculinity and patriarchy, especially given the scholar's own insistence of her transfeminist leftist perspective (Connell, 2012). Too often, Connell and her social theory is written about simplistically as a sociologist of gender, which is an underrepresentation of her rich intersectional point of view, which I argue lends in part (alongside her extensive scholarship and robust empirical research) a certain critical eye to gender in everyday life. Connell's (2005) emphasis on relationality is highly influential on my own. In the same way that Connell views gender in terms of the relationship and dynamics between men and women, so to do I view bisexuality, particularly bisexual identity, as emerging relationally from both everyday, intimate and discursive interactions with other people and concepts. Overall, the initial theory's robustness and its authors' willingness to respond to criticisms and be flexible in its reformulation makes it a highly influential and powerful one.

On the surface Eric Anderson's (2009) Inclusive Masculinity Theory shares many semblances with Connell's (2020): both are data-driven, sociological theories of masculinity. However, as I will argue, in comparison, Anderson's (2009) theory lacks explanatory power and has some troubling undergirding assumptions. Masculinity is undoubtably changing, which is the basis of Inclusive Masculinity Theory – an assumption that I agree with. However, this does not mean that homophobia nor the oppression of women by men is necessarily decreasing, which are issues that I contest with Anderson (2009). Initially developed in sport and fraternal settings where Anderson argued homophobia was decreasing, it seeks to explain men's newfound emotional openness, 'increased peer tactility' (i.e., that some men embrace each other publically now), a softening of gender codes, as well as close friendships based on emotional disclosure (Anderson & McCormack, 2018, p. 547). Undergirding this theory is the claim that homophobia and biphobia are declining in western societies (Ripley et al., 2011). Specifically, Anderson & McCormack (2018) argue that there is a decline in homohysteria – what they define as the fear of being socially perceived as gay (p. 548). Inclusive masculinity is thus the result of decreasing homohysteria which spans across western societies according to the authors.

Like their critics, I concur that this claim of declining homophobia is "actively dangerous" (de Boise, 2015, p. 334). Context matters when discussing homophobia; I agree that whilst certain contexts may show lessening homohysteria, this does not necessarily connect to the fact that homophobia is still prevalent in certain important social contexts that LGBTQ+ people must navigate in society. Anderson & McCormack (2018, p. 554) turn this logic on its head, stating that "empirical examples sometimes remain in this local context. They are not related back to broader sociological debates that recognize legal change, decreasing attitudinal homophobia, individualization, the rise of the Internet and greater visibility of sexual minorities." This argues that any counter-example to inclusive masculinity that shows homophobia in a certain local context is essentially anomalous, as it is not connected to the broader trend of declining homophobia. This treats western society as a monolith, where homophobia is largely an irrelevance, whilst ignoring national contexts in Europe where homophobia is prevalent (Moss, 2014; Mole, 2011; Mole et al., 2021; Mole,

2016; Renkin, 2009). Such a variety of homophobic contexts at a national level should not be treated as anomalies, but as a counter-discourse to the progressivism of equality, diversity and human rights that was prevalent in the early 2000s. Furthermore, Anderson & McCormack (2018) argue that inclusive masculinity is not predicated on a rejection of the feminine, includes a softening of gender roles, and an embrace of activities once coded as feminine. Their research does not account for the politicisation of gender-nonconforming activities, such as drag performance, which has seen a sustained moral panic in the UK and US lasting multiple years (Ellis, 2022). Anderson et al. do not understand that the denigration and fear of femininity (femmephobia) remains "a regulatory power within LGBTQ+ communities and society at large, as well as how femininity itself operates as a target in their experiences of gender policing and discrimination" (Hoskin, 2019, p. 686).

In addition to these criticisms, Anderson has a tendency to cite himself and other researchers who share his paradigm; his theory only really accounts for men's relationships with other men of roughly equal status, saying little about how masculinity mediates men's interactions with women (O'Neill, 2015), nor from an intersectional point of view. Waling (2019) concurs, and argues that feminist theory is often left out of theorising like Anderson's in regards to men and masculinities, where feminism is often deployed tokenistically. Furthermore, Anderson's account of masculinity is ahistorical, viewing the current political moment for LGBTQ+ people as a post-AIDS and post-rights era, not one where LGBTQ+ rights are increasingly contested in the contexts where they claim homophobia is decreasing (Encarnación, 2020; Cammaerts, 2022; Salminen, 2022). This is particularly egregious in the case of bisexual men, who must bear the legacy of AIDS stigma today, with many negative stereotypes about bisexual men being a hangover from the AIDS crisis (Ritchie, 2020). The evidence that Anderson cites to support his view that masculinity is changing has been contested. Anderson co-authored a research project where interviews with young Czech men in their rural village revealed surprisingly relaxed attitudes about gay men, and examples of inclusive masculinity (Chvatík et al., 2022). However, Šimková (2019) shows that hegemonic masculinity was actually more apparent in Czech men's vlogs than American vlogs, whereas the latter showed more instances of inclusive masculinities. Thus, even the empirical basis of his

inclusive masculinity theory may be biased by Anderson's researcher status, as when masculinity was displayed organically through vlogs, rather than discussed in interviews, showing the opposite of what Anderson was arguing. This certainly shows that the geographical distribution of inclusive masculinities should not be universalised throughout the Western world.

Where then do bisexual men's experiences sit within each of these frameworks, and which is the best for developing a critical account of these experiences? In Connell's (2020) framework, bisexual men are disqualified from the full merits of hegemonic masculinity because of their proximity to same-sex sexuality; gay and bisexual men occupy a subordinate position in Connell's (1987) original formulation of hegemonic masculinity, at the bottom of the gender order hierarchy. Empirically speaking, there have been few studies of exclusively bisexual men (as in, not alongside gay men) and hegemonic masculinity. Sheff (2006) examined bisexual men's social position within polyamorous communities, finding that bisexual men were socially located below bisexual women; bisexual men in those communities were often hesitant or cautious in revealing their bisexuality. This shows that even in 'liberal' sexual settings, bisexual men are devalued, and positioned subordinately, albeit not in relation to hegemonic masculinity at the top: traditionally masculine men reported feeling more alienated in polyamorous spaces. However, the valuation and even fetishisation of women's sexuality in the polyamorous communities that were examined revealed an undercurrent of hegemonic masculinity that objectified women's sexuality fetishistically. In contrast, Kendall's (2000) study of masculine performances in the online forum BlueSky, found that rather than exhibiting a subordinate position, some male bisexual members engaged in 'jokes and conversations depicting women as sexual objects as well as in other forms of BlueSky banter connected to the performance of masculinity' (p. 263), which situates these men at least supporting hegemonic masculinity and being complicit in its reproduction, with their bisexuality accepted within the group. What these two examples serve to illustrate is that hegemonic masculinity is highly context dependant, and typically is enforced through the objectification of women. In some settings bisexual men were excluded, in others, their homosocial environs enabled them to engage in hegemonic masculine practices that enabled their social viability. This shows that hegemonic masculinity as a

concept is flexible and good at describing multiple contexts. Inclusive masculinity theory, by contrast, does nothing to socially situate the subjects with which it describes. Inclusive masculinity theory is descriptive of the behaviour that men now perform: rejecting homophobia, including gay peers, emotional intimacy and physical tactility with other male friends, recognising bisexuality as legitimate, embracing historically feminine things, eschewing violence and bullying (Anderson & McCormack, 2018). This only describes, and does not critically examine men's place in society. This also says little about bisexual men beyond that they are now included by young inclusively masculine men, saying little about other contexts. In Morris et al. (2014) examination of the positive experiences of bi male adolescents, the biggest factor in positive coming out experiences was the inclusiveness of the schools and sixth forms they attended: surely illustrating the highly context dependent nature of inclusive masculinity. Even in these supposedly inclusive settings, two out of the 15 participants still reported negative experiences. Overall, inclusive masculinity theory does little to socially locate bisexual men within its framework, merely describing acceptance for them as an accessory to an uncritical description of masculinity.

In conclusion, I have argued that Connell's (2020) theory of hegemonic masculinity has shown more theoretical purchase in explaining men's masculinities in a time of increasingly contested LGBTQ+ rights globally, something that Anderson's theory of inclusive masculinity actively contests. Therefore, it is this theory that I will be taking forward as an explanatory framework not necessarily for understanding bi+ men's masculinity specifically, but for understanding where their social location fits within a social context of binegativity. This is in keeping with the relational approach that Connell (2020) emphasises, one which keeps a close focus on power differentials within, as well as between, groups. Anderson's work on inclusive masculinity, however, requires further examination and critique, as its application in the largest empirical qualitative study of bisexual men leads to unsatisfactory conclusions and similarly dangerous assumptions.

A Critique of Anderson and McCormack (2016)

In the introduction to their work *The Changing Dynamics of Bisexual Men's Lives*, Anderson and McCormack (2016) make the claim that societal attitudes towards bisexuality are largely correlated with attitudes towards homosexuality. Although this is evidenced by Anderson and McCormack's interpretation of their qualitative data (McCormack et al., 2014; Anderson, et al., 2015), we must treat homophobia and biphobia as related but separate phenomena. Homophobia, and it's alleged decline by the authors, cannot alone explain biphobia. Whilst the authors acknowledge features of biphobia, including double discrimination from lesbian, gay and straight communities, and monosexism in society, they are fundamentally interested in how declining homophobia affects the lives of bisexual men, and not how biphobia operates and affects their lives. This misunderstands key issues which affect bisexual people's lives, and crucially prevents them from building solidarity with lesbian and gay communities. I have often experienced alienation in queer spaces, either being misread as gay, or not feeling queer enough to feel a sense of belonging.

Another claim the authors make is that homophobia and biphobia are experienced differently by different generations. Whilst the researchers take a cohort approach, looking at different generational cohorts of men, and their experiences in different epochs of varying homohysteria – the pervasive cultural fear of being read as homosexual (Anderson, 2011, p. 87) – the authors fail to recognise the historically enduring stereotypes of bisexual men (unfaithful, necessarily polyamorous, hypersexual) as a product of the homohysteria of the 1980s AIDS crisis and it's resultant media reportage (Miller, 2001; Ritchie, 2021). Furthermore, the authors discuss their qualitative findings in quantitative terms, referring to trends within their data which is limited in terms of sample size. The researchers typically ignore outliers, which complicate their narrative about homophobia and its declining impact. My own experience as a person who grew up in the 2000s and experienced a lot of homophobia (binegativity would come later in my experiences in adulthood) would count me as an outlier in Anderson and McCormack's (2016) study, which found that the majority of the younger part of their sample experienced more positivity around their bisexuality, due to their experience of less homophobia. However, my mostly negative experience was clearly informed as much by place as it was by time. I am an outlier in that

respect too, although I grew up in a semi-urban environment, I experienced more homophobia than Anderson and McCormack's younger cohort. Anderson and McCormack's (2016) participants who grew up in the 21st century demonstrated similar experiences across rural and urban environments.

One of the most questionable claims that Anderson and McCormack (2016, p. 65) make is, despite citing a wealth of quantitative and qualitative evidence demonstrating the significantly poorer mental and physical health of bisexual people compared with heterosexual people, the researchers question the veracity of these studies, citing one dissenting study that demonstrates that 'mostly heterosexual' and bisexual people have similar health outcomes, despite the authors of the original study stating that 'compared to bisexuals, [mostly heterosexual people] generally reported fewer health issues and risk behaviours' (Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2014, p. 437). The researchers reject minority stress theory, a commonly used framework for understanding health disparities in LGBTQ populations (Rich et al., 2020), citing a range of personality and biological factors (such as higher sex drive) which may cause the discrepancy in bisexual's generally worse health outcomes compared with heterosexuals. This is hypocritical when the researchers state that they are using a sociological (and thus anti-essentialist) explanation rather than a sociological paradigm for understanding bisexual experience. Additionally, their citation of dissenting evidence regarding the thesis that bisexual people have worse mental and physical health than heterosexuals contrasts with their own focus on evidence which supports their thesis regarding the decline of homophobia, and a refusal to engage with evidence to the contrary. It is unclear how this evidence undermines the researchers' thesis about declining homophobia and a search for alternative explanations of the poorer mental and physical health of bisexuals if we accept that biphobia and homophobia are distinct social problems affecting bisexuals separately to lesbians and gays, unless we view homophobia as the sole oppressive social force which acts upon bisexual people, as the authors seem to do. What can be taken from this is that, even if homophobia is declining and so too is the health of bisexual people, it is clear that homophobia is not the only social force which is being brought to bear on bisexual people.

Sampling Strategy

Many of the positive aspects of bisexual experiences reported by Anderson and McCormack's (2016) cohort could be attributable to sampling bias. The researchers used an unusual strategy for recruitment in that they took to the streets of large metropolitan cities (New York, London and Los Angeles) to directly recruit bisexual men, and deliberately eschewed community and activist groups, as well as snowball sampling. There are some issues with how this may have affected their study. Firstly, participants who volunteer for sexuality studies have been shown to have more positive attitudes towards sexuality and less guilt than non-volunteers (Strassberg & Lowe, 1995). Particularly this form of volunteer sampling may have involved bisexual people with high degrees of self-confidence and comfort around their sexuality. Given how often bisexuality is misrepresented in mainstream culture (Barker et al., 2008), I would not know what to make of someone approaching me on the street seeking bisexual men for a study, which this is especially true of sexual minority individuals who are often mistrustful of academics. Furthermore, the researchers gave a $40 (around £30) financial reward for participation (Anderson, et al., 2013, p. 233). This reward certainly incentivised participation, but also offering $40 to people on the streets of Los Angeles, London and New York could lead to a misrepresentative sample, perhaps widening the pool of participants to include people who might not have ordinarily identified as bisexual (e.g. gay-identified but with previous sexual experience of women, 'mostly heterosexual people/heteroflexible people) in order to claim the financial reward. There is no way to tell if this was the case, but if it was it weakens the applicability of the findings to strictly bisexual men. These groups (mostly heterosexual/heteroflexible) could face lower levels of sexual prejudice compared to bisexual people, as they identify more strongly, and their relationships better reflect heterosexuality than bisexuality. Furthermore, Anderson and McCormack targeted some gay-specific areas of each city (Anderson et al., 2013, p. 233), rather than solely 'neutral' areas (some of which they also included), which further complicates their sample, as it could potentially contain self-identified gay men who once identified as bisexual or gay men with a sexual history with women as well as men. This, and the fact they recruited based on conversations with gay men in gay spaces who directed them to bisexual men (Anderson *et al*, 2013, p. 233) could impact their findings.

This is particularly true if their research sample were men who were recruited from cited where bisexuality was openly accepted by an extant LGBTQ community, something that bisexual men have been shown to be often excluded from (McLean, 2008).

The Dialectics of Homohysteria

Time is constructed in a very simplistic fashion in Anderson and McCormack's (2016) study. Time is problematic for bisexual people, who are often characterised as being in a transitionary stage of psychosexual development (Diamond, 2008). Age often stands in for time, which itself often stands in for progress in Anderson and McCormack's (2016) account. Anderson and McCormack (2016, Chapter 7) found a dichotomous distinction between younger and older cohorts in their research, where younger people in the study found bisexual identification easier than older cohorts. This is evidenced by the researchers through the older participant's lack of understanding of their bisexual desire until adulthood, whereas younger participants were more aware of their bisexuality earlier on. This construction of certainty is problematic, and belies assumptions the researchers have about human sexuality, where certainty about one's bisexuality is valued as 'good', with no discussion of fluidity despite a later discussion in the chapter (Anderson and McCormack, 2016, Chapter 7) which downplays the importance of identity categories for the bisexual people interviewed. Diamond (2008) in a longitudinal study of bisexual women highlights that the model of fluidity is supported in her data, as well as the model of a third orientation (after homosexuality and heterosexuality), which seems to be the underlying aim of the researchers for their data to support. This is shown by their comparison of the age of the first awareness of sexuality with data from gay men. This suggests that the researchers are attempting to situate a 'realisation' of bisexuality in early childhood to an essentialist 'born this way' model of sexuality rather than situating sexuality as a processual development that changes and evolves throughout the lifecourse (*i.e.*, a symbolic interactionist approach).

Dialectics is absent from McCormack & Anderson's (2014) work. I concur with Storr (1999, p. 310) who states: "I remain suspicious of 'progress' in general and of bisexual progress in particular." It is crucial to understand history not as a

straight line of upwards momentum (Enlightenment) but as a dialectical process which has a thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The thesis of our current Western history was Fukuyama's (2006) hypothesis regarding the end of history and liberal democracy as the final form of government. The antithesis (the contemporary historicised period) is characterised the re-emergence of right-wing authoritarianism (fascism), a backlash against the Third Way, liberal politics of the millennium, whilst in some places retaining and in others resisting (e.g.,Trump's *America First* programme) globalisation and neoliberalism. This hypothesis has been called The End of The End of History (Chugrov, 2015; Hochuli et al., 2021; Li, 2010), where Francis Fukuyama's (2006) work *The End of History and the Last Man* can be seen as failed as his thesis on the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the establishment of liberal democracy as the final form of government was rebuffed by the re-emergence of right-wing populist authoritarianism throughout the globe. Fukuyama was as incorrect as he claimed Marx to be, and he did not anticipate the wider context in which my thesis takes place – a period of far-right backlash against liberal democracy. It remains unclear whether the (neo)liberalism of the end of the millennium precipitated the rise of fascism, as some claim (Zizek, 2017; Martel, 2019; Patnaik, 2020), or is the dialectal pendulum swing of historical and political forces *à la* Hegel. Regardless, the global context of this backlash (not limited to the Global North) that shapes the lives of the participants in this study takes place cannot be seen in isolation of the UK alone.

The concept of homohysteria, despite its flaws, is a malleable and useful one, and can be leant to a dialectical understanding of history. Cultures become more or less homohysteric over time due to the socio-political zeitgeist. Homohysteria *was* in decline, as McCormack and Anderson (2014) note; now it is on the rise again, I would argue, but in a different form. Anderson and McCormack's (2014) historical outlook on sexual politics seems to be what Weeks (2007, p. 4) terms a "sort of Whig interpretation of sexual history. A belie[f] in the transformation as automatic or inevitable. A journey from the darkness of sexual repression to sexual freedom". Right-wing populist viewpoints, contrarily, promote a certain view of history and contemporary political discourse, one that Weeks (2007, p. 5) describes as 'declinist' – lamenting the present as awful, whilst comparing today with an imagined past golden age of faith, stability and

family values. They are not merely racist, but sexist, ableist and homophobic as well, privileging a peculiar White supremacist form of masculinity. My view is not exactly the same as Weeks' (2007), who argues that progress has been made and changes have been substantively won, despite remaining power differentials and global inequalities. This is broadly the same outlook as mine, but rather than characterising substantive changes as positive developments or highlighting negative continuities, what I wish to bring to the fore are the paradoxes and contradictions of contemporary sexual politics, rather than the good or bad aspects, which should both be rightly acknowledged.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the problems with defining sexuality as an object of study, and examined bisexuality's conceptualisation in particular. This has led me to adopt an approach to recruitment which is participant-led, and privileges participants own interpretations of what bisexuality (and associated identities) is. Sexuality is highly personal yet socially situated and shaped by the nature of experience as well as discursive constructions. As such, data will be collected on how participants understand bisexuality, both their own and discursively, with the question of self-identity and self-definition left open to participants as I am interested in exploring how these meanings are debated and resolved in the context of social and political relationships. Pre-defining such criteria from the outset risks closing that opportunity to analyse their social construction. Binegativity as a unique social problem was surveyed, critically discussing its components and associated phenomena.

Monosexism is a significant cause of binegativity, which mediates interactions between heterosexuals, gays, lesbians and bisexuals, given the former three groups are monosexual and do not share a similar outlook to sexuality, whereas bisexuality is less limited when it comes to gender. Invisibility is another unique aspect of binegativity and is reinforced through monogamy as a prevailing cultural norm. The lack of bisexual representation in media and culture has led to a dearth of social understandings of bisexuality. Bisexual people in monogamous relationships see their sexuality erased, whereas bisexual people engaged in non-monogamy are considered deviant and confirming 'negative' stereotypes about bisexuals. Binegativity is underpinned by a

widespread discourse that discriminates against nonmonogamy (compulsory monogamy). Taken together, these unique issues counter the claim that as homophobia decreases, so too will binegativity, as significant aspects of binegativity have little to do with homophobia and are often expressed by heterosexual and homosexual populations alike (monosexism; double discriminations). I have also argued that the politics of bisexuality therefore cannot afford to be assimilationist in nature, given that bisexuality is not similar to either heterosexuality or homosexuality, both of which are monosexual, nor should bisexuals seek to present themselves as, nor argue for representations of bisexuality that, are normative, desexualised, or necessarily monogamous (i.e., running counter to bisexual stereotypes that are deviant, hypersexual, and nonmonogamous). These aspects of biphobia not only affect the lives of bisexuals but shape the ways in which they can express themselves as individuals, form a coherent bisexual community, be accepted into gay, lesbian or wider LGBTQ social spaces, and form social, sexual and romantic relationships. Binegativity is a social problem, that is, it is a problem which affects almost all aspects of a bisexual person's social life. Such a problem must be interrogated, particularly given the discourse amongst other sexual minorities that bisexuals simply aren't discriminated against. This chapter will be used as a framework for interpreting the experiences of bisexual+ participants identities in the first findings chapter, prejudice that face participants in this thesis's second findings chapter, and the relationships (both intimate and familial) that participants maintain.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This study aims to look at the experiences of bisexual men and their partners in the context of intimate relationships. This includes romantic and familial relationships. Whilst previous research has looked at bisexual men's female partners' perspectives on bisexual men and their relationships (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2016), this thesis brings together bisexual men's experiences of relationships with their partners, and will explore the diversity that exists in terms of bisexual men's partners, or different relationship configurations that exist (i.e. non-monogamy). Therefore, this project has the following central research questions:

How do bisexual men understand their bisexuality?

How does bisexuality affect bisexual men's intimate relationships?

How is binegativity experienced by bisexual men and their partners?

This chapter is organised by first introducing the research design, and methods of data collection, rationalising their particular usage (respectively, a qualitative approach, IPA and semi-structured interviews), providing an overview of the information that's needed to sufficiently answer the research question, and then going on to provide a description of the research participants, sample and site of the research. The chapter then proceeds to discuss data collection methods, how that data will be analysed and synthesised, then moving to provide an account of the ethical considerations I have taken as a researcher, assessing the quality of project in terms of issues of trustworthiness, and finally discussing the limitations of the study, as well as providing a summary of the chapter. Throughout the chapter I use first-person point of view to emphasise the decisions being made as deliberate, conscious, and reflexive in keeping with the methodology of interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

Research Design

This research is qualitative by design and philosophy. I had initially considered a mixed methods approach, as I was influenced by surveys of attitudes towards

bisexual people in the UK (e.g. Herek, 2002, Helms & Waters, 2016), virtually all extant attitudinal research has been conducted in the USA. However, these articles lack a person-centred approach that I believe is necessary when working with marginalised groups (Jacobs et al., 2017), who may feel a sense of powerlessness. Thus, I aim to empower bisexual people through knowledge co-creation in person-centred in-depth interviews (Sandvik & McCormack, 2018), given that they are a group that faces epistemic injustice (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Yoshino, 1999). Although there is potential for exploring community and solidarity thorough other methods such as focus groups, which have been taken up by feminist researchers (Wilkinson, 1999) seeking to redress power imbalances in research scenarios (Wilkinson, 1998), given the alienation of bisexual people from communities (McLean, 2008), and with the focus on relationships rather than community, I opted for a dual interview technique that included partners, recognising that the participants understandings of their relationships are co-constructed (Taylor & de Vocht, 2011), and therefore their partners perspectives are a necessary part of this construction, warranting inclusion in the research process. I feel that the epistemic power imbalance that has faced bisexual people could not be redressed though quantitative research, which seems only to diagnose the problem and the prevalence of binegativity, and not allowing bisexual people to speak in their own words about the difficulties they face when moving through the social world. Additionally, I believe that quantitative research reduces experience not to individual voices which can be counted, but to numbers and tendencies within data that erase people entirely in to averages and trends; instead I aim to avoid this quantitative reductionism (Verschuren, 2001) by allowing participants the space and time to tell their stories (Plummer, 1994), creating a holistic framework for examining bisexual experiences which doesn't centre one event or experience, but a whole person's multiple experience.

The overall research methodology used is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a methodology pioneered in qualitative psychology, but now frequently used throughout the social sciences. This methodology is useful for synthesising the experiences of participants with the interpretative experience of the researcher. Smith *et al* (2009, p. 1) define IPA as "a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how

people make sense of their major life experiences". Smith et al. (2009) then go on to define three theoretical axes that IPA is founded upon: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. IPA is phenomenological because it deals with experience – phenomenology being the philosophical study of essential experience. Phenomenology as a branch of philosophy was developed extensively by the thinkers Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1956). Husserl advocated going back to things themselves, that is examining the phenomenological and experiential content of our consciousness that we usually take for granted. Experience belongs to oneself alone, as it's tied to our body, and we therefore cannot experience another's experience. Husserl's (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 12) phenomenology involved a deep insight into one's own experience, rigorously identifying experience's essential qualities so that these experiences might transcend their context, and thus can be described to others. Relationships are highly intersubjective, whilst it is important not to view each viewpoint as identical, a lot of people's experiences of relationships are interpretative of each other's experiences, perceptions, and emotions, and exist in a context which cannot be wholly isolated from each other. Furthermore, IPA can capture the diversity between and within identity categories such as the LGBTQ+ community, understand the tensions between these multiple identities, give voice to the variety of interpretations given to a phenomenon (such as stigma or relationships) within the communities, and yet treat each interpretation with a significant amount of value through IPA's ideography (Chan & Boyd Farmer, 2017, p. 295). Given that the bisexual community is a diverse group within a diverse group (i.e. the LGBTQ+ community) IPA is well suited to capture this diversity and heterogeneity whilst respecting individuals with these groups' perspectives.

However, Husserl's phenomenology would be later criticised by Heidegger as too abstract; Husserl highlights reflection, but also reduction, and this to me is where his account of experience is too narrow and essentialising. I have little interest in removing experiences from context and reducing people's experiences down to a basic essence. Husserl's abstract account and Merleau-Ponty's highly individual account of phenomenology can be contrasted with Heidegger's worldly phenomenology, where meaning emerges from relationships between the self and others – both object and subject. Heidegger (as cited in

Smith et al., 2009, p. 16) questions any knowledge outside of an interpretative stance, based on the real world, whilst highlighting the difference between what is *possible* and what is *meaningful*, stressing the world and the person in context. Heidegger discusses the quality of being-with, and that personhood is afforded by others. Overall, Heidegger's phenomenology explores intersubjectivity – the shared, overlapping and relational nature of our engagement with the world. This is important in terms of the phenomenology of relationships, as the world is intersubjective, and is more resonant in this project than the phenomenologies of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. For me, like Heidegger, our encounter with the world and others is the most important way that we experience it. We cannot ignore the embodied nature of this encounter, but rather integrate it into a highly intersubjective experience of the world.

For Merleau-Ponty (1956, p. 59), phenomenology was simultaneously "a transcendental philosophy which suspends our spontaneous natural affirmations in order to understand them, but it is also a philosophy for which the world is always "already there" as an inalienable presence which precedes reflection." To me, this definition is about understanding that we must look upon the world around us and the life-worlds of others from a point of naïveté, and, as much as possible, suspending our own, as well as common sense understandings of such phenomena. The first definition regarding transcendence has also influenced the practice in phenomenology of *epoche* or bracketing, that is the putting aside of one's own experience as a researcher, interpreter and, most importantly a person with a history rich in experiences, in order allow the subjectivity of the experience of participants to unfold unfettered. Merleau-Ponty posited that existence is embodied; we experience ourselves as different from the world, our sense of self is holistic, and that we are body-subjects – body as a means of communicating with the world (Merleau-Ponty, as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 18). Merleau-Ponty states that we establish difference through perception of other people.

The phenomenology contained within my approach here is empiricist but not positivist, and interpretative rather than essentialist. My approach believes in the validity and primacy of supporting my thesis with evidence, and the evidence I most privilege is experiential evidence. This is not because I believe that there is some essence or primordiality to that experience which I seek to

uncover, but because I believe that experience is our most direct encounter with the world, *i.e.*, it is the most real thing that we can use to make claims about the world. This seems contrary to an emphasis on interpretation, but it is not, as I view experience as both an immediate encounter with the world, but also an immediately mediated encounter through interpretation. As people experience the world, so too do they interpret the world. Thus, the world becomes real through our interpretative encounter with it. This is particularly true of the social world, as the highly performative nature of social interaction (Goffman, 1969) coupled with the fundamental unknowability of other people's embodied experiences and lead us by necessity to an interpretative understanding of the social. Therefore I privilege an interpretative strain of phenomenology. By contrast, Husserl's conception of phenomenology was strongly positivist (Adorno, 1940; Sinha, 1963; Lee, 2008), and *epoche* was seen as a way of overcoming subjectivity. I see *epoche* and bracketing, rather than practices to ensure objectivity, as tools which attempt to disentangle individuals' experiences, and as a way to counterbalance power inequities of the research situation and analysis (Gregory, 2019).

IPA is also hermeneutic, in that it examines participants interpretations of their experiences. Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation. For hermeneutic philosophers such as Heidegger and Gadamer, 'interpretation is a foundational mode of Being and that to live a life *is* to interpret' (Eatough & Smith, 2017, pp. 198). However, much of hermeneutics is grounded not in the interpretation of experience, but with the interpretation of texts. Schleiermacher (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 22) notes that there is something unique about the techniques and intentions of a particular writer, and this creates a particular form of meaning on the text they produce. Meaning is available for the interpretations of the reader, but also the context in which the text is produced is important. Schleiermacher claims that we may understand texts better than the author. In data analyses, this means that our analysis might offer meaningful insights which exceed and subsume the explicit claims of our participants. However, this is a problematic statement, flying in the face of the notion that the participant is the best expert on themselves (Brinkmann, 2014), and perpetuating unequal power relations between researcher and participant. Whilst we should be confident in our interpretations as researchers, we are

never above our participants, and our research lacks credibility if we think that we do. As part of this project's insurance of quality control, my interpretations of their experiences will be 'member checked' by participants (see p. 121). Heidegger (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 25) postulates that the interpretation of phenomena cannot happen in isolation from one's own presuppositions, thus, we must be reflexive after interpreting a text. Gadamer (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 25) states that interpretation and texts influence meaning in a cyclical pattern. One must be aware of one's own biases, and allow stimulus to speak in its own voice, a viewpoint in accord with the philosophy of allowing participants to speak in their own voice. Gadamer highlights that understanding the meaning of the text is the priority. Smith et al. (2009, p. 27) detail what they term *the hermeneutic circle* – a dynamic relationship between part and the whole in order to understand the text. IPA demands an iterative understanding of data: one's understanding changes as one moves through the text. Ones focus will move from a particular case to a broader view of the data, and in doing so one's interpretation changes during the analytic process. Additionally, data analysis is detailed, thorough, and showing a systematic depth of analysis. In IPA, a particular phenomenon is understood from a particular perspective and context. One cannot isolate experience and subject from that context. There is also an awareness on my part as a researcher, just as my participants understandings and experiences have shaped them subjectively, so too will my interpretations of their experiences, and my relation of my own experience to their experience shape my own experience and therefore my subjectivity (Kain, 2005, p. 2). In short, I am not the same as I was before conducting these interviews, my subjectivity is altered by experience and interpretation of others' experiences. IPA does not exclude the researcher from the principle of hermeneutics, leading to what Smith et al. (2009, p. 3) term the 'double hermeneutic', which is the researcher trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their experiences. This highlights the highly interpretative nature of IPA and the researcher's role as interpreter of participants interpretations.

Finally, IPA is idiographic, in that it is concerned with individual cases and what their experiences are like, usually utilising small sample sizes as a result to build a uniquely detailed picture of each participant's life-world. In this study,

the particular cases that are sampled are snapshots of participants intersubjective life-worlds, each with a unique context and positionality. Their individual similarities and differences are explored in this study. This study is suited to using IPA because it is primarily concerned with the quality experience; what the experience of being a bisexual man is like; what the experience of being a bisexual man's partner in their relationship is like; what the experience of stigma is like. Likewise, the hermeneutic nature of IPA gives it good grounding to be used in this study. Not only will this study look at how the researcher's unique interpretation of the bisexual man's/their partner's interpretation of their experiences, given that the researcher is also a bisexual man, IPA is very well poised to look at the double hermeneutic of how each partner interprets their partner's interpretation of experiences. In particular, the ideographic nature of IPA makes it well suited to exploring LGBTQ+ experience; Chan & Boyd Farmer (2017, p. 287) argue that this gives voice and value to the nuances of marginalised groups (such as bisexuals) and treats each participant's narrative with value and meaning to concomitantly fulfil a more holistic understanding. Overall, the themes that this research project aims to explore – experience, identity, and shared life-worlds can only be properly explored using qualitative research.

The study was qualitative in design, using semi-structured interviews with bisexual men and their partners as the primary method of data collection. Initially, interview themes were formulated before data collection, which highlighted what content was needed in the interviews to answer the primary research question, but also what secondary themes would be explored from gaps in previous literature. Once these themes were formulated, participants were contacted through LGBT Scotland, or opportunistically through social media or my personal interview, and invited to interview. The interviews were then arranged, conducted, and recorded. Throughout the interviews, I aimed to be nondirective and ask open and neutrally worded questions, e.g. "What was school like for you".

In phenomenological interviews, bracketing or epoché is often used during interviews and data analysis. Giorgi (2011, p. 11) understands bracketing, in the context of IPA, as "the putting out of play concepts or ideas or experiences coming from sources other than the one being examined". Practically speaking

this means the researcher putting aside their knowledge, assumptions, and preconceptions in their interpretations of participants' experiences in order to get at their interpretations of their own experiences. Bednall (2006) discusses the practicalities of this practice, highlighting that it often lacks uniformity from study to study. Furthermore, Bednall (2006) discusses how bracketing functions differently depending on the stage of the research as it is being conducted (pre-empirical; collection; post-empirical/analytic), with points when the researcher allows the bracketed information that they hold to be reintegrated into the data. This fundamentally chimes with my Heideggerian view of interpretative phenomenology, in that one only views experience through the lens of interpretation. This influences my interviewing style, in that after a participant disclose an experience, I would follow up with a relevant piece of literature or a personal experience that I had, bracketing my thoughts and feelings for the initial disclosure and then reintegrating my knowledge back into the interview. I do not feel that this muddied or glossed over participants' experiences, on the contrary, they were interested and engaged with the similar experiences that I shared with them, which helped in another practical sense in that it built rapport with them. This may be an unorthodox approach in phenomenology, but I feel it is justified and does not cloud my interpretations of their experiences. Interpretation is inevitable in the interviews, and I would prefer to be transparent with my participants about prior knowledge that I have with their experiences. I feel that this technique was not beyond phenomenology, but honest and reflexive, deployed effectively. Bellamy et al. (2011) argue that self-disclosure about sexuality can be productive in discussion of sexuality, even when there is a difference between participants and interviewers in terms of sexuality and gender; in their study the shared experience of marginality engendered empathy and a more productive dialogue, helping to ease power imbalances inevitably caused in the research situation.

The data from the interview was then transcribed verbatim. The transcription process also allowed me to begin the data analysis process by taking notes as I transcribed. The formal analysis process involved detailed reading of the transcripts, line-by-line, taking notes on my initial impressions, focusing on the experiential claims, concerns and understandings of the participants (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79). I then identified themes emerging from

the experiential material, at first across single cases and then across multiple. Finally, I came up with a framework for the relationship between themes. I then gave a detailed narrative, guiding the reader through each theme, and lastly, the relationship between each of the themes. Throughout the analysis process, I kept a detailed, reflexive account of the relationship between myself as the researcher, the data that I am analysing, and my own preconceptions, knowledge and experience. Data collection and analysis was cyclical for me, as after conducting each interview, the interview themes would often be revised and amended. An example of this process is when I interviewed an older participant, having previously interviewed only young participants. After interviewing the older participant, I felt that questions regarding parents and school were not as appropriate to ask older participants, as these things were less relevant to older participants, causing me to revise my interview schedule.

IPA is an appropriate research methodology as it has been fruitfully employed in a wealth of studies about sexuality in general (Dewinter et al., 2017; Bennett et al., 2018; Porter et al., 2015; Chan & Boyd Farmer, 2017), but also in examination of bisexual and pansexual people's experiences (Xiang et al., 2023; Haylock, 2021; Quest, 2014; Tehara, 2020; Geonanga, 2018). Tehara's (2020) research shows that bisexual men's experiences can be analysed using IPA, and one that can be reflexively employed if the researcher is researching similar participants to themselves, as was the case in that study and in mine. Thus, epoche, bracketing and the hermeneutic approach that IPA affords the researcher was useful to researchers like myself who come to the data and the research with certain biases as an academic, but also as a political activist and as a bisexual person myself (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Studies into sexuality (and bisexuality) using IPA also demonstrate the compatibility of IPA with intersectionality (Semlyen et al., 2018; Beese & Tasker, 2022), which this study employs. The ability of IPA to survey specific experiences and to take in to account the multiple identities of participants who occupy a marginal position in society is a strength and one which attracted me to the paradigm, due to its accommodation of social identities as a research subject. Moreover, the ability of IPA to acknowledge that individuals are part of the social reality they inhabit, which views them as persons-in-context, as well as the methodological commitment to 'give voice to' an underrepresented and often-invisible group

such as bisexual people served as a rationale (Larkin et al., 2006). The quality of the data that IPA can provide about otherness and being othered, the development of one's bisexuality and the experience and difficulties in finding oneself as a bisexual man (Tehara, 2020) made me consider it as a research methodology that could fulfil my research aims with the richness that these questions and my participants deserved.

Data Collection

The sole data collection method that is used in the research design is semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are the typical, recommended format that data collection takes in IPA (Smith et al., 2009, p. 4). Furthermore, the interviews were usually conducted with both partners present, as a joint interview, but at other times the interview was either with the bisexual person or their partner(s) – although the latter approach was only taken once. This is not the same as focus groups, as the researcher took on a more active role, with a definite questions schedule. The interviews were semi-structured in that they were largely researcher-led rather than facilitated, and the interviews stuck to their interview schedule, but probed and elaborated in dialogue with the participants if they brought any themes to the interview that the researcher deemed worth following up on in relationship to the overall aims of the study. The researcher-led design of the interviews allowed some flexibility but erred on the side of the researcher in terms of the command of the interview topics to ensure that appropriate data was gathered, and to allow the participant structure in their explication of their experiences. This was in line with Galletta's (2013, p. 78) advice where semi-structured interviews should be 'structured to create openings for an unencumbered narrative on the part of the participant as well as more direct questions regarding the study focus'. The overall goal of this approach was to establish reciprocity in the interview situation, which I felt I achieved.

This study uses the joint interview technique, which is unusual for IPA studies, but is informed by Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2018), who has adapted the 'couple interview' (as they call it) for IPA. This study chooses not to refer to the interviews as couple interviews, as this assumes that partnerships are limited to two people, thus excluding polyamorous relationships. Instead 'joint interviews'

are the preferred term. Phenomenological studies have employed this technique in the past, and I was particularly drawn to Taylor & de Vocht's (2011) Heideggerian approach. The researchers found that joint interviews 'provide a window into the couple's world of shared experiences and meanings' (Taylor & de Vocht, 2011, p. 1584) and can also fill in each other's 'blind spots' in the interview but does have the potential to constrain individual narratives into a unified voice. Ultimately, I felt that narratives were not constrained in the joint interviews. In addition to conducting individual interviews, the joint interviews were undertaken not to exclude the voices of both partners in an effort to hand power back to participants who were being spoken about as well as spoken to in the interview situation. This was partially in response to Pallotta-Chiarolli's (2016) work which only interviewed the partners of bisexual men, but not bisexual men themselves. Given the difficulties bisexual people face in relationships, from negative stereotypes (Spalding & Peplau, 1997) to invisibility (Hartman-Linck, 2014) I felt it was important for bisexual people to represent themselves as bisexual within their partnerships, especially in the knowledge-making exercise of the research interview. The decision to interview partners together or apart was left up to interviewees themselves, however, I acknowledge that this poses certain methodological and analytic challenges because of the different interactional settings that these cause (Heaphy & Einarsdottir, 2013). The choice to either interview the partner of the bisexual person or the person themselves if only one was available was an ethical decision; if one partner had disclosed something about another partner that they did not like in one interview and that partner later read it, it might cause conflict, and therefore this was avoided using the aforementioned strategy. A few of the interviews were conducted remotely, sometimes over the phone, sometimes over video-calling services (Zoom or Skype). One interview was a hybrid, with one partner being interviewed over the phone whilst simultaneously the other was in the room with me. This was a largely a practical consideration, and I asked participants how they wanted to conduct the interviews. I wanted to ensure that participants weren't inconvenienced by the interviews, and they were sent participant information sheets before the interview detailing how much time they would have to commit. I also wanted to offer participants the

most comfortable interview environment, a method and place where they could talk confidentially and honestly about their experiences.

The interviews were typical of semi-structured interviews, a question schedule was devised and implemented, whilst some questions were asked in the moment of the interview or were dropped form the schedule in the interview. Points of specific interest were followed up with further questions, whilst I chose sometimes to exclude questions if participants indicated that they did not want to be asked those questions, or if I deemed them irrelevant to the specific interview. Effort was made to not bias the participants into talking about stigma or prejudice they had experienced, in keeping with the phenomenological tradition of the interviews. For example, the title of the study on participant information sheets was amended to 'Bisexual Men's Relationships', and there was no explicit mention of prejudice or discrimination in the questions asked to participants. Rather, I sought to let the participants speak about their experiences more organically; bringing them up if they felt it relevant. Not only was this in keeping with the phenomenological approach of IPA, foregrounding the participants' experiences, it was also an ethical consideration: I did not want to force participants in to talking about painful or uncomfortable experiences they had had and risk psychologically harming them in the process, which would run counter to a key principle of the British Sociological Association's (2017) *Statement of Ethical Practice*. Potential follow-up questions were revised from interview to interview, and I asked certain questions based on my intuition and judgement of the specific interview situation, i.e., if I deemed one question appropriate in one context, I would not necessarily ask it in another, and judge each situation as unique. I decided to stop recruiting participants once completing my 17th interview, as I felt strongly that I had reached saturation at this point. To this day, I do not remember much of the interview, as it so clearly repeated the themes I had hear from other participants.

The interviews were recorded using an Olympus Dictaphone, the device was kept on my person until the audio files of the interview were transferred on to a password-protected computer. The recording device was then kept in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Glasgow, which I, the researcher, had exclusive access to. As soon as files were copied to the computer, they were

then deleted from the recording device. The computer audio files were then kept under file names corresponding to the pseudonyms of the participants. The document containing the key to decrypting participants names from pseudonyms were kept in a secure file which was password encrypted. Saving data so that I could reverse-identify it was important, as if any participant wished that their research data be withdrawn from the study, I could identify their data using the pseudonym key and remove their data appropriately, thus ensuring their right to withdraw. Once data was transcribed into text files, these were saved to my personal University of Glasgow password protected document cloud OneDrive. This ensure that the participants' data was kept safe and secure, ensuring their privacy and confidentiality.

Research Participants

Recruitment & Research Site

Participants were recruited using LGBT Scotland's list of organisations (link currently unavailable), which contains links to local LGBTQ groups, as well as LGBTQ groups catering to specific demographics (e.g. religious groups, parents of LGBTQ people). This is website is simply a directory of LGBT organisations in Scotland, and not a singular organisation, so did not require specific permissions to access. The particular usage of LGBT Scotland – a broad list of groups from across cities, towns, villages, the Highlands, and islands of Scotland – to address an imbalance in the focus of previous research that has only looked at metropolitan-dwelling bisexual men of major world cities (Anderson & McCormack, 2016), and had overlooked rural-dwellers, as well as those from smaller towns and cities. LGBT Scotland have a specific list of local groups, which, by including rural-dwelling participants, may elucidate urban-rural differences in their experiences as bisexual. I aimed to recruit participants from across Scotland, but also included scope to go beyond Scotland into other parts of the UK in case I did not find enough participants as a contingency plan. Scotland's usage as the site of my research was twofold: firstly, it was the most convenient site for me as a researcher, because that is where I am based. Secondly, Scotland comprises some of the most marked differences in terms of the contrast between urban and rural spaces, it contains some of the most

densely populated places in the UK (for instance, Glasgow), but also some of the most remote rural areas, such as the Highlands and Islands (e.g., Highland LGBT Forum).

Whilst the majority of the sample came from Scotland, in order to recruit an adequate number of people, I looked outside of Scotland to garner the rest of the sample. Recruitment from beyond Scotland was also a result of snowball sampling, where organisations shared my recruitment poster (see Appendix A), which were thereon shared by other organisations. The remainder of the participants came from England and Wales. None resided in Northern Ireland. Differences in cultures and policy contexts exist between these three countries, for example, Scotland has a different education and legal system, Wales has some devolved powers, but the policy context for LGBTQ+ persons is not markedly different between England and Wales, but I did foresee some cultural differences. This was based on my own upbringing, being raised between the liberal South of England, and the less progressive South of Wales. Additionally, there are key regional differences to be aware of in all countries, the difference in context between Glasgow and the Highlands, the North and South of England, the North and South of Wales. Each locality must be treated on its own terms, and I was careful to home in on the local spaces that participants inhabited at present, as well as those places that they remember from growing up. Both would inform their experiences as a sexual minority person, and I was careful to not be presumptuous regarding the stereotypes of these places or biased by any existing feelings I had towards them.

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling is employed in this study, meaning that bisexual men and their partners were chosen specifically because of their experiences. Some participants were referred by gatekeeper organisations through LGBT Scotland, some through opportunity sampling through my own contacts, and some gathered by snowballing from other participants. In a second round of sampling, after the resources from LGBT Scotland were exhausted, I opted to use social media, to varying degrees of success. I set up two social media accounts: one Facebook account, and a Twitter account. I posted information (see Appendix A) about the project including inclusion/exclusion criteria and contact information

(participants could contact the project through a dedicated email address: bimenresearch@gmail.com). Twitter yielded far more participants than the Facebook page, because of the ease of being able to 'retweet' information about the project, and I was able to follow people who were openly bisexual in their Twitter bio, as well various LGBTQ organisations and academics/practitioners working with LGBTQ people. The dedicated email account set up for the project was also an asset, both in terms of practicality and ethics. It enabled me to contact all participants to arrange interviews and share participant information sheets, and maintain contact after data collection ended, so that I could clarify details with them such as preferred pronouns, or pseudonyms. It maintained and consolidated all the correspondence I had with my participants so they could contact me easily with any problems they had, for example if they wanted to withdraw their data, as well as maintain their confidentiality. Another boon of using this email was the data was transcribed I could send participants their transcripts so they could engage in member checking (see the credibility section below), and also offered a way for all of their contact information to be destroyed at a point in time after the project (information on data retention will be discussed in later in the ethical considerations section).

The group of participants gathered for the study is consistent with IPA's usually small sample size: 17 cases gathered with 25 participants overall. One thing that was not so consistent with IPA was that I did not set out to gather a homogenous sample. Usually IPA aims for a homogenous sample of participants (Smith et al., 2009, p. 49), which was to the most extent fulfilled by the primary aim of the study, which was to capture the experiences of bisexual men and their partners. In this study, I aimed to gather participants who varied in two important respects: urban-rural location, and relationship configuration, that latter meaning that I desired to have a range of different kind of relationships represented, including same-sex relationships, different-sex relationships, and non-monogamous relationships. I was successful in terms of gathering participants in a different range of relationships, but unsuccessful in terms of gathering participants from varying urban/rural locales – most lived in urban centres. I feel, however, that I do have enough participants in different

relationship configurations to make comparisons between different groups, as roughly half of participants are monogamous/non-monogamous.

Research Sample

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Ppt #	Case #	Pseudonym	Age	Sexual Identity	Gender Identity	Relationship	Location
1		1.Walter	23	Bisexual	Cisgender man	Single	Scotland
2		2.Wasp	21	Bisexual	Cisgender man	Monogamous	Scotland
3		3.a42	42	Bisexual/Pansexual. Bi+	Agender, assigned male at birth	Swinging, female partner	North of England
4	4a.	Sven	22	Bisexual	Cisgender man	Monogamous	Scotland
5	4b.	Magic	19	Bisexual	Cisgender man		Scotland
6	5.	Mike	30	Bisexual	Transgender man	Polyamorous	Scotland
7	6a.	Ellie	25	Bisexual	Genderqueer woman	Monogamous	Scotland
8	6b.	Alex	21	Bisexual	Kind of Male		Scotland
9	7a.	Sasha	24	Bisexual	Cisgender woman	Monogamous	Midlands
10	7b.	Sergei	24	Bisexual	Cisgender man		Midlands
11	8a.	Nichola	34	Bisexual	Cisgender woman	Open, but not yet seeing other people.	Scotland
12	8b.	Paul	38	Bisexual	Cisgender man		Scotland

13	9.	Jack	27	Bisexual/Queer	Cisgender man	Monogamous	Scotland
14	10.	Hannah	23	Bisexual	Cisgender woman	Single	Wales
15	11a.	Xander	27	Bisexual	Cisgender man	Open, X has a long term male partner.	Scotland
16	11b.	Kitty		Bisexual	Cisgender woman	K has no other partners yet.	Scotland
17	12.	Terry	25	Bisexual	Cisgender man	Monogamous	London
18	13.	Elliot	28	Bisexual/Queer	Transgender man	Monogamous	Scotland
19	14a.	Tom	24	Queer; Pansexual/Bisexual	Cisgender man	T only partnered with C, but C has many partners.	England
20	14b.	Cat	29	Pansexual	Transgender woman		England
21	15.	Owen	36	Bisexual	Cisgender man	Monogamous	Wales
22	16a.	Isaac	26	Bisexual; Queer	Cisgender man	Open	South England
23	16b.	Johny	39	Bisexual; Homosexual	Cisgender man		South England
24	17a.	Simon	32	Queer; Pansexual/Bisexual.	Cisgender man	Non-monogamous.	England
25	17b.	Kaylee	33	Bisexual; Pansexual.	Cisgender woman		England

Note. *N* = 25. Participants were on average 28 years old (*SD* = 6.3), but there was missing age data from one participant.

Table 1 shows demographic information about participants. 25 participants were interviewed altogether. Cases were formed based on participants relationships to one another, of which there were 17 overall. 17 interviews were conducted – both participants in each case were interviewed together, although some cases contained single interviewees, both in the sense of relationship status and as a person. No case exceeded two people, despite the relationships of non-monogamous participants often containing more than two persons. I did not interview multiple partners of a person, as participants did not consent to further follow-up interviews. It is of much interest to note that all but one of my participants were in partnerships (both monogamous and non-monogamous) where all partners identified as bisexual or pansexual. All participants described the impact that bisexuality had on their relationship as either neutral or positive. None described it as negative. I was unable to interview a lone partner of a bisexual man. The only partner of a bisexual man who identified as heterosexual declined to be interviewed, but was happy for her partner to take part. The partnerships displayed a mix between monogamous and non-monogamous partnerships, as well as partners who were in different-gendered relationships compared to similar-gendered relationships. Three participants were trans, one participant identified as genderqueer, and one as agender, despite presenting as a cisgendered man, and acknowledged this as much. The mean age of participants was 28 (N=24, one person gave no age, ranging between 19 and 42 years old). Most participants identified as bisexual, male/a man, cisgender, and were in a non-monogamous relationship. 17 men, six women, one agender person, and one genderqueer person were interviewed.

I acknowledge that the demographic information presented here is limited in a number of ways. Location of interview is noted, however, this is limited to region of the United Kingdom, all participants that were interviewed dwelled in metropolitan urban areas. This limits the analysis, as I initially was curious about the effect that place has on both sexual identity and acceptance, following the work of Hemmings (2002) and Bowes-Catton (et al., 2011; 2021), who have explored these themes in detail. Additionally, I found that Anderson & McCormack's (2016) treatment of place in their study to be lacking, as they interviewed men in large metropolitan areas in the US and UK (Los Angeles, New York, and London). Their claim to be inclusive of rural-dwellers in their

recruitment seemed flimsy, as despite the site of their research taking place in cities, they claimed that rural dwellers visit cities, although their recruitment yielded no data on the experiences of bisexual men who live in rural areas. Despite my efforts to recruit through the internet and support groups that included the Scottish islands and Highlands, I did not find any willing participants who currently dwelled in rural areas. Many of the participants were internal migrants within the UK, but many also remained within the country they were born in in the UK, whilst moving from their place of birth. Only one participant wasn't born in the UK: Cat, and one had previously lived abroad (Jack), which had informed his sexual identity development, although this was too limited a case to discuss in much detail. Future researchers should attempt to gather and recruit participants by venturing to communities themselves in order to seek participants. The internet, whilst a powerful tool, was not enough to reach rural-dwelling participants for me, and I regret that their voices cannot be heard in this thesis. Purposive sampling of rural areas should have been employed, and I was wrong to assume this theme would emerge organically in the research process through participant interviews.

Figure 2

Various Sexual Identities of Participants Shown Proportionally

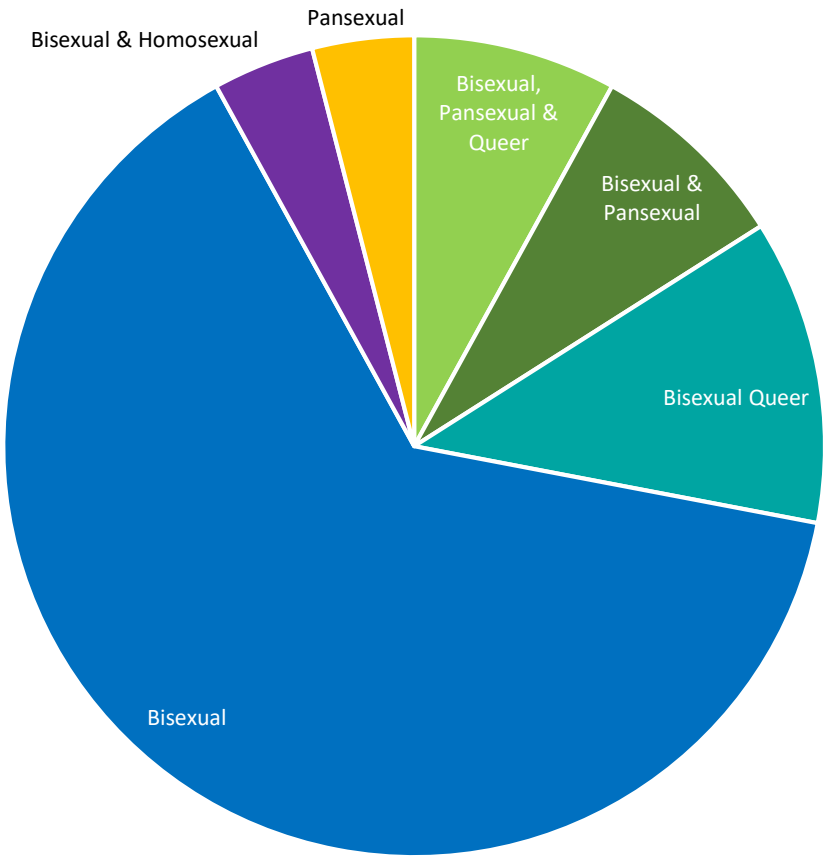

Figure 2 shows the proportion of the various sexual identities that participants described themselves as. The majority simply identified as bisexual, but many used compound labels with pansexual, queer, and homosexual. Each label was used differently for participants, and they explained further the different contexts in which they used different labels, and the relationships between each one.

One of the most interesting demographics about this sample is that most participants (48%[1]) are in non-monogamous relationships. This is interesting in light of the the political claim that bisexual people should cooperate with non-monogamous/polyamorous communities not to reject non-monogamy as having

[1] Two participants were single, which is why this percentage is not the majority of participants, but instead constitutes the largest group.

nothing to do with bisexuality, but to campaign to reject compulsory monogamy in all relationships (Mint, undated). Older participants in my study favoured non-monogamy which challenges the assumption that the young tend towards the more radical, non-monogamous forms of relationships (e.g., Mosthof, 2016; Salami, 2014; Witt, 2016).

Despite the desire and explicit inclusion criteria on posters advertising the research to people of colour (see Appendix A), only two of my participants are not white, and the intersection of bisexuality, race and ethnicity remains grossly underexplored (Muñoz-Laboy, 2019) in research on bisexual men in particular, only having been explored in relation to the down-low lifestyle and HIV aids (Heath & Goggin, 2009). Race was an absence in this research, and I accept that I did not do a good enough job at the recruitment stage, I failed to find responsive BAME bisexual groups to recruit with, nor did I consult any LGBTQ BAME groups on my recruitment strategy, which I regret. I also left out any explicit discussion of race in my interview schedule, due to my sensitivity that asking about race would amount to categorising participants, despite the fact that intersectionality remains part of my theoretical framework for analysis. I discuss this further in the section *Critically Interrogating (My) Whiteness* in the limitations of this study section later in this chapter.

Overview of Information Needed

Contextual Information

The contextual information gleaned from the participants in this study had to do with how accepting they find their place of residence in terms of their sexuality. This included talking to participants to ask if they feel safe expressing their identity to others in their neighbourhood or community, and asking them if there is any sort of LGBTQ community in their vicinity that they can readily access. Themes about community, neighbourhood, place and space were explored in the interviews, which provided good contextual information as to what kind of environment participants are lived in with regards to their sexuality. I will also ask them to give historical context to their experiences, what their life was like growing up in the school/town that they did and how this impacted them. It is also necessary to provide essential context to rawer experiential data about being bisexual and invite participants to recount past

experiences which may still impact them in the present in terms of self-perceptions and framing of their identity in a social context. In this way, my aim is to use IPA not as a way to access 'pure experience' as earlier phenomenologists such as Husserl were, but to see these experiences as just as embedded in social contexts as they are in the participants' as well as my own interpretations. This contextual information also provided an additive counterpoint to the earlier discussed framework of intersectionality, which privileges identity and oppression (Nash, 2008), rather than experiential social context.

Demographic Information

Early in the interview process, I asked for demographic information from the participants. This included the age, gender identity, and sexual identity of the participants, as well as gender differences within the relationship. I also asked them where they come from, and record their partners' gender identity and sexual identity (if interviewed without their partner present). I recorded any other demographic information of note that might be relevant from an intersectional point of view. This information is useful for comparing experiences between cases. Previous research has shown a cohort effect for age and bisexual men's experiences in relationships (Anderson et al., 2015), whereas other variables have yet to be explored. The gender identity of participants is particularly salient, as a trans man's experiences are likely to be markedly different than a cisgender man's experiences of sexuality and gender. Gender is the lens through which most view sexuality, and therefore it is important for framing participants experiences. Masculinity, and particularly hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987) often work to constrain men's self-expression, in particular any expression of sexuality which deviates from heterosexuality, casting all other forms of masculinity as subordinate and inferior. This will impact men's self-perceptions, and additionally will allow me to compare partnerships which are different-gendered and same-gendered.

Perceptual Information

Perceptual information refers to the majority of the information that is transmitted by the participants during the interview process. In this study, the perceptual information that the participants will proffer is their experiences of

what it is like to be bisexual in a relationship, and the impact their sexuality has upon that relationship, and how that relationship is socially perceived, both positively and negatively. It is this particular perceptual information that will allow the research questions to be answered. I also enquired as to participants own experiences of their identity, how they came to that identity and their experiences of bisexuality. I also focussed on participants general life experiences, of school and family. Of the participants who were parents, I asked how their sexuality intersected with parenthood. Overall, this information gave me insight into participants' experiences, which is central to the methodology of IPA. School, family, and other information regarding early life of the participants inform me about their development as a person, how they came to their identity, how that identity was socially received, or why they chose not to reveal it. Their experiences gleaned as perceptual information aided in understanding their life-worlds at present and how they came to be.

Data Analysis & Synthesis

The data was analysed using the computer assisted qualitative analysis software (CADQAS) NVivo 12. Data was transcribed from audio recordings partially by the researcher and partially by a professional audio transcription service. The collected dataset was both rich and large by the standards of an IPA study, with Smith et al. (2009, p. 51) recommending only four to 10 interviews for PhD projects, my study contained 17 and contained multiple perspectives (including the partners of the participants). No interview lasted under 30 minutes, and some interviews were over an hour and a half long. Given that I did not transcribe the majority of the interviews personally because of time constraints, the first step involved readed and re-read each transcript. I made notes in NVivo as I read the transcripts. I then re-read each transcript and my notes, coding both notes and text into themes. I tried to replicate the layout recommended by Smith et al. (2009) to conduct IPA with the transcript in a left margin, my notes in a middle margin, and the themes in the rightmost margin to be able to view the hermeneutic interplay between each piece of text, emphasising the dialectical relationship between interviewer and participant perspectives and interpretations. When coding the transcript, it was helpful to review the audio recording of the interview to better recall the atmosphere of the interview and the stress that participants put upon each word. I amended

transcripts to include vocal stresses, italicising stressed words. The notes I took reflected my own interpretations of myself at the time interviewing, including when I unbracketed, which was noted in my annotations. Reading some transcripts recalled my memories of the interviews, which I believe to be valuable, particularly when it came to the unspoken atmosphere of the interviews in itself. The interview with Xander was a perfect example of this. The long silences and difficulty (but not reluctance) he had in discussing his own experiences as a bi man have remained with me. These memories of the interviews, particularly this one remind me of the ineffability of certain moments, and the ways in which our text-focused approach to social research is sometimes redundant. The role of memory in data analysis serves to highlight the interpretative role of the interviewer even more so, as I am acutely aware that my memories are themselves interpretations of the events, and ones that I reconstruct and re-interpret as I recall them.

The process of writing up my data analysis into my findings chapters was a difficult one, as I had so many extensive notes on so many themes and such a wealth of rich data. I simply could not examine all of the interviews within the thesis, so made the decision to focus on 10 cases in particular for two reasons: I felt the data produced in these cases contained themes which cut across all of the interviews, but also that they contained rich data which was not present in anywhere else in the set but that was nonetheless illuminating for the research question as well as in their own right. For my prejudice chapter, I selected themes which fit in with the framework that I developed in the second part of my literature review, but also expanded upon these themes and allowed some themes to emerge and reported those, such as the gendered differences in binegativity. This chapter was taxing to write up due to the emotional stories that were recounted by participants, and I took on some of the emotionality of the material. I came to terms with this by reaffirming my commitment to the project as a valuable piece of social research in documenting the difficult aspects of bi+ people's lives. Other chapters were more loosely defined, with central questions such as 'how do you define bisexuality?' and 'how does bisexuality impact your relationship' forming central questions which participants were explored. The sub themes that these questions generated emerged from these discussions.

Ethical Considerations

A range of potential ethical issues were dealt with in this qualitative study. Firstly, the issue of informed consent to participate is an ethical problem common in all research involving human participants. Informed consent involves the research participants being fully aware of the nature and the purpose of the research they are participating in, and what obligations will be put upon them during this research. This was dealt with in the usual way: participants were asked to read an information sheet which described the study and what it entailed, written in plain language. Participants also read and sign a consent form which detailed their consent to participate and be recorded, before taking part. The participants also recorded giving their verbal consent, as well as their consent to be recorded. The key issue of this study was not directly informing participants that a major theme of the study was sexual prejudice. In this case, it is an example of balancing two ethical issues, informed consent and protecting participants from harm, as by probing participants about their experiences of prejudice, this may have caused them to recall unpleasant or even harmful memories of events where they had experienced discrimination. Although the research question demands that participants' experiences of prejudice be explored, this was done at the participants' own discretion; participants were invited to broadly talk about the experiences of their relationship, and not asked directly about prejudice or discrimination. This strategy was used to protect participants from harm, to embolden them as stakeholders in the research with power to control the interview situation, and to keep to the methodology that phenomenology assumes (i.e., focussing on participants' unfettered recollections, not being biased by the researcher).

The second major ethical issue that was dealt with in this study was appropriately safeguarding participants from harm. This study dealt with potentially sensitive and emotional issues for the participants, which could bring with them possible psychological distress. Therefore, as previously mentioned, questions tended to be broad and open-ended, allowing participants to inform the researcher on topics they felt were relevant to their relationships. When talking about difficult subject matter, and participants were noticeably

beginning to show signs of any distress, my protocol as a researcher was to ask if they would like a break from the interview and offer to turn off the recording devices. If they did wish to have a break, before continuing I would ask them if they would like to continue and reassuring them of their right to withdraw from the interview at any time, including their withdrawal of their data at a later point. If any interviewee had become distressed during the interview, I would firstly remain with that person until their distress had diminished, then I would offer them a list of contacts to various organisations (this would depend on what specific subject made them distressed) and after the fact report the event to my supervisory team. None of the participants showed any signs of distress during the interviews, but it was important to keep this protocol in place and to have appropriate measures for withdrawing their data. It should be noted that this study was approved by the University of Glasgow's College of Social Science Ethics Committee. Additionally, participants retained their information sheets, which contained details of contacts to the ethics officer for the College of Social Science at the University of Glasgow, giving them a line of contact to report any potential misconduct by the researcher, further safeguarding the participants from harm.

Another central ethical issue that was addressed in this study was the participants' confidentiality. The key themes of this project are sexuality and relationships, which are ostensibly private matters. Disclosing information around these often very personal topics is an important and valuable contribution that participants make, and it is a privilege that researchers have access to said information, and one that is not taken likely by myself. In order for participants to be reassured that their confidentiality was safeguarded, firstly, participants were assured that they cannot be personally identified from the data that appears in the final thesis. I informed them that participant names were be replaced by pseudonyms when identified in the thesis. Furthermore, any data files belonging to the participants were identified with participant pseudonyms, not their real names. Only I have access to a document that allows pseudonyms to be matched to participants real identities, which is essential because participants data must be identified if they wish to withdraw their data before the thesis is submitted. Furthermore, any locations, places or other details that could be used to identify participants is be replaced by general

descriptions. As detailed in the previous section, any personal and research data held will be stored securely, password protected if stored digitally, or stored in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Glasgow if any data is printed out in a physical copy. This data is solely accessed by the researcher throughout the project and will be destroyed at the project's completion. Participants will also be informed of the limits of confidentiality, as once the thesis is submitted, they will be informed that no quotes will be able to be withdrawn from the manuscript, and that supervisors will have access to any quoted data from transcripts in the form of written chapter drafts. Moreover, if participants disclose that they plan on hurting themselves or others in the interview, they will have to be referred to the relevant authorities, thus forfeiting their confidentiality. Overall, however, the twin strategies of de-identifying participants' data and storing that data securely will be used to ensure participants' confidentiality.

Issues of Credibility

Credibility refers to the researcher accurately representing participants' experiences of the subject under study. The participants in this study are bisexual men, and as the researcher, I feel I should declare my positionality and potential bias as I too am a bisexual man. As a bisexual man, I have certain experiences and hold certain perceptions which are likely to bias my interpretation of participants' experiences, rather, I have the potential to foreground certain experiences and side-line others. For example, I came up with the theme of this study because I have experienced sexual prejudice, and as a result, prejudice is the focus of the study itself. Both my reading around bisexual relationships, and my changing understandings of being in a relationship have altered the way that the research question and methods chosen have been formulated, and this is not necessarily a bad thing. My experiences as a bisexual man can inform the study, as well as bias it. However, one must be careful that one's experiences do not overshadow that of the participants', and colour perceptions too drastically. For example, just because I have experiences prejudice and discrimination as a result of my sexuality, it doesn't mean that my participants have, and I must be weary to include positive experiences, as well

as negative or even ambivalent ones. The more open-ended, phenomenological nature of the interview questions will aid this, but also I will be keeping field notes to keep in check my perceptions and experiences around the interviews. Altogether this should help to aid the credibility of the study.

Another point that reinforces the credibility of this study is my repeated and substantial involvement in the field. I conducted 17 interviews, 11 of which were conducted in person, the rest either over Skype or telephone. In a few instances the interviews took me far from home, visiting in large English cities and returning home the same day. This allowed me to reflect on the interview that had just taken place and get a feel for the context and environments the participants lived in, further allowing me access to their life worlds beyond second-hand description. A good example of this when I interviewed the agender participant in their home. I met their partner, children and saw a snapshot of what home life and family was for them. I also successfully engaged with potential participants via social media. Using Twitter not only was fruitful for recruitment, but was a shared platform that my participants and I engaged with jointly.

Another strategy to ensure credibility in this study was the use of triangulation – the use of multiple data sources to effectively answer the research question from different perspectives. Whilst this study did use a similar method throughout (semi-structured interviews), this method was used in three different ways: firstly, both partners were interviewed together using a joint interview technique; secondly, individuals from partnerships were interviewed; lastly, single individuals were interviewed. This provided a powerful method of triangulating different perspectives on the research question at hand: partners', individuals', and singletons', an example of data source triangulation (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006).

Finally, 'member checking' was used to ensure the credibility of the research. Member checking is a process by which participants review transcripts of the research interviews to establish whether they accurately reflect the phenomenon at hand. Krefting (1991, p. 219) writes that 'this strategy of revealing research materials to the informants ensures that the researcher has accurately translated the informants' viewpoints into data. Assessment to see if

the data make sense through member checking decreases the chances of misrepresentation.' In this study, participants reviewed their own transcripts to ensure that they accurately reflected their own perceptions of their experiences of bisexuality and sexual prejudice.

Issues of Dependability

Dependability is the qualitative cognate to reliability, referring to the transparency with which the research is conducted and the accurate detailing of procedures that were used to collect and analyse the data. My data was collected by contacting LGBTQ organisations in Scotland and asking them to distribute a poster with information about the project and contact information (a dedicated email for the project). Subsequently, I set up two social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter) and distributed the same poster through my pages on each site. Participants contacted the email address I provided and we arranged an interview. The interviews were semi-structured and took place in a place of the participants' choosing, sometimes over the phone or video call. The interviews were recorded and stored as audio files on my computer. I then transcribed some of the data, whilst a private transcription company transcribed the rest. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and some identifying information about the participants (e.g. name; location) was redacted from the interviews.

Once all the transcripts were completed, I read each transcript line by line and took notes on my initial impressions, focusing on the experiential claims, concerns and understandings of the participants (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79). I then identify themes emerging from the experiential material, at first across single cases and then across multiple. The gap here being bridged by the themes was between bisexual men participants, their partners, and then across the multiple cases. Finally, I came up with a framework for the relationship between themes. I then give a detailed narrative, guiding the reader through each theme, and lastly, the relationship between each theme. Throughout the analysis process, I kept a detailed, reflexive account of the relationship between myself as the researcher, the data that I am analysing, and my own preconceptions, knowledge and experience. This is an audit trail which details how I arrived at my conclusions and interpretations of the data. The data that I

create as well as my transcripts will be available through the ESRC, as I have to provide public access to my interview data. This enhances dependability, as other researchers are able to scrutinize my data.

Issues of Transferability

Transferability refers not to the generalisation of the findings of the research to other samples (as in representational quantitative research), but to the transferability of the participants experiences to other contexts, and similar participants who may be experiencing the same phenomena. In this context, bisexual people often face certain unique forms of discrimination such as invisibility and erasure (Barker & Langdridge, 2008), or microaggressions (Sarno & Wright, 2013). It is important for transferability's sake that these experiences are documented in a detailed way, in order to be related to other contexts and future research. The research attempted in its geographical coverage to survey a wider array of participants living in different locales: participants were interviewed in a variety of contexts across Great Britain (see the location column in Table 1). However, this location data may mask the plurality of the geographical contexts which the participants had experienced. Many participants expressed that they had lived in multiple different places within the UK (and some abroad), so they were able to reflect on differences in place. For example, Terry grew up in a Welsh town, studied in the South of England and lived in London, so was able to reflect on these different contexts. It was my aim that the research be broadly grounded in a UK context. This, however, was not achieved fully, given that no participants came from Northern Ireland this research should not be applied there. Northern Ireland has a separate historical and political context from the rest of the UK that makes equating any LGBTQ+ experiences from people living in Britain invalid and incomparable (Breitenbach, 2004). One way in which this research is applicable to multiple contexts is its documentation of prejudice against bisexual people. This empirical investigation was structured based on a literature review from multiple English-speaking contexts, including US, European and UK scholarship. The fact that the concepts analysed in this literature are shown in the UK shows that the concept of binegativity is similarly expressed across multiple English-speaking contexts, showing that in this regard the research is transferable. However, the social forces that are converging against LGBTQ+ rights in Europe are not always the

same as those in the US (Valentine et al., 2013), with the strength of the Religious Right in the US leading to a turn towards social conservativism, in the UK there is more of an emphasis on political conservativism which is less dependent on religion (Waites, 2000) but still comes to bear upon the lives of bisexual people in the UK (Watson, 2014), so transferability in this regard is limited.

Reflections on my Positionality

It's not unusual for researchers to negotiate their positionality as researchers of a particular group, particularly if they are outsiders to that group. What's more, neither is it unusual to find yourself studying a group in which you have some emotional or identitiarian stake in (i.e. insider status). This section takes an intersectional look at my identities as a researcher, a bisexual man, and a white middle-class person, and attempts to use this to deconstruct my insider-outsider status (Couture et al., 2012). Researchers have begun to deconstruct the binaries of the insider versus outsider perspectives when conducting qualitative research (Bukamal, 2022), with some arguing for a space in between, where the researcher can occupy both an insider and outsider status, taking advantage of both positionalities (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). This was case for myself, an insider in that I shared a similar sexual identity to my bisexual, pansexual and queer participants, but an outsider in that I was a researcher, with specific academic knowledge about bisexuality and sociology. The insider/outsider status that I had to negotiate as a bi person creating knowledge with bi people through academic research was further complicated by the fact that many bisexual people engage with such research, and have taken up academic concepts such as intersectionality (Monro, 2015, Chapter 3), not to mention that bisexual activists outside the academy have contributed to knowledge about bisexuality (e.g. Barker et al., 2012, Eisner, 2013, Serano, 2013). However, this does not mean that the playing field was automatically level in terms of the power dynamics that operated within the knowledge production of this thesis. Whilst I made attempts for participants to collaborate beyond the data collection process of this thesis in the form of member checking (Motulsky, 2021), where I send a copy of the thesis to them for commentary, which I received: adjusting the thesis accordingly before the *viva voce*.

However, I am the one writing the thesis, interpreting the participants' data albeit with some of their input. This is to emphasise the inevitable power imbalance that academic research creates, even when studies are designed to reduce it, the knowledge that is created is housed within the disciplinary power relations of the academic field itself. This is highlighted by Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009, p. 280) who argue that there is an 'incongruity between the micro-ethics of equality in the research relationship and the macrosetting of dominance and authority'. In other words, despite my genuine desire to co-produce the knowledge as a bisexual insider with other bisexuals, the institutional authority that is afforded by the academy in validating that knowledge comes from my outsider status as an academic researcher.

This however, it not to say that it was purely my status as outsider (researcher) that shaped the design of the project, there were many times when my bisexuality shaped aspects of it. Similarly to Hayfield and Huxley (2015), my insider status as a bi person influenced many aspects of the project: from research design, communicating my insider/outsider status to my participants, as well as recruitment data collection and analysis. In terms of the research design, my relationship status changed an early design decision from my initial idea to interview each partner separately, and it was after my own experiences of feeling validated as a bisexual man in my relationship with my partner that I began to re-evaluate this approach (Lawton, 2021). It was in tandem with encountering research that looked at bisexual men's relationships holistically (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2016) that chose to pivot my research design and interview partners together. This shows the dialectical relationship between researcher and bisexual identities that led to a more fully reflexive research design. A further example regarding communicating my insider status as bisexual was that I was aware of how coming out or disclosure of my bisexual identity could have an influence on the interviews and the data they produced. I did this in every case, mostly to establish rapport with participants and to be transparent, although this did vary in the stage of the interview: I let the disclosure occur organically in the conversation, it was not part of my interview schedule. Knowing when to disclose my bisexuality was essentially a reflexive process of unbracketing (Fischer, 2009): I was careful to choose my moment, attentive that disclosing my identity would have an effect on the rest of the interview. This

disclosure undoubtedly had an effect; I was careful to stick to my question schedule and to not exclude basic questions (e.g. about how one defines bisexuality), attentive that disclosure of my sexual identity could engage a tacit 'shared understanding' whereby participants chose not to disclose information about their experiences or identity because they presumed that I already had this information because I research bisexuality and/or am bisexual myself. This required careful negotiation, and clarification was important to compensate this: I ensured that I asked participants to clarify their meanings if I felt they were omitting information because of a presumed mutual understanding.

Furthermore, it is not just my insider-outsider status as a bisexual researcher that should be interrogated, my status as a queer and bisexual man should be interrogated, as these do not necessarily confer upon me insider status from a communitarian standpoint. My relationship with both the bisexual and the LGBTQ communities is a complex one. In some ways, relationships to such communities can be considered as an imagined relationship to an imagined community (Winer, 2022). As a person in an ostensibly 'heterosexual' monogamous relationship, I feel slightly dislocated from queer spaces because of my partnership status. Whilst I have bisexual and queer identified friends, I don't interact with them as part of an LGBTQ or bisexual community. Likewise, my relationships with my participants emerged, not as a relationship with members of a community, but as one with individuals and partners, some of whom had access to other LGBTQ and/or bisexual people, which some of them described as communities. Despite the fact that I recruited through some organisations, few participants identified themselves as part of the communities that they were recruited through. Even when representatives of organisations spoke to me, I still felt like I was having conversations with and doing research with individuals, rather than on communities. This may be finding in itself, and could be interpreted as a dislocation that my participants felt from a bisexual community, but I feel as though my own feelings of not being queer, not occupying or frequenting LGBTQ spaces may be a better explanation for the individualised nature of this research. I did attempt to contact and receive help from bisexual organisations such as Scottish Bi Net in the research process, but ultimately this examination was a study of bisexual individuals and their partners moving through heterosexual, but occasionally queer social worlds perhaps

because of my own feelings of alienation from a larger bisexual or LGBTQ community.

Although my gender corresponded to many of my participants who were also bisexual men, this does not tacitly presume that there were broadly equal power relations between myself and the men I worked with: Connell's (2020) notion of hegemonic masculinity reminds us that gender identities and expressions *within* men are not given equal treatment within society. Although one could argue that the men that I interviewed shared with me a relatively subordinate position in the gender order (being bisexual men, disqualified from hegemonic masculinity), the relationality of masculinity relies upon it social negotiation and re-negotiation in any given social interaction (Messerschmidt, 2019), particularly between men who will always bear different relationships to hegemonic masculinity given its cultural (and subcultural) relativity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). What this meant for my relationship with participants in terms of my gender was a careful negotiation through rapport building during which I was careful to eschew or to not evoke any hallmarks of hegemonic masculine behaviour. This is difficult for me, as I embody certain aspects of hegemonic masculinity which prefigure my relationship with people: my shaved head, beard, large proportions, and altogether cisgendered body demarcate me as a masculine man. Therefore, my gendered interactions with participants were as much about undoing hegemonic masculinity (Duncanson, 2015) through my gestures and speech as it was about not performing in a stereotypically masculine way. Unusually, I didn't feel as much of a presence of my gender in interactions with both partners present, despite the fact that some partners were women and this obviously affects the gendered dynamics. I think that the presence of partners changed the power dynamics at play during the interviews, and it was apparent that the solidarity of having them their demonstrated the safety that this afford, as the individual interviews highlighted the more vulnerable sides of the male participants. Furthermore, the interactions I had with my trans, agender and genderqueer participants were shaped by my positionality as a cis man. Rogers and Brown (2023) argue that, despite criticisms, an insider perspective is not essential for conducting research with and producing knowledge about trans and non-binary people, drawing on a similar deconstructionist intersectional approach that I adopt here, arguing that

we ‘do not experience single-issue lives’ (Rogers & Brown, 2023, p. 4). With that being said, my cis status and the research design I adopted as a result of this did shape my interactions with the trans participants I interviewed. I think my decision to ask about gender identity as a rapport building, ‘demographic’ question at the start of the interviews actually had the opposite effect with my trans participants. I noticed that these interviews rapport was not established as quickly with cis participants, and I think me asking ‘what is your gender identity?’ at the start: an innocuous question to a cis person, but a potentially sensitive one to a trans person (Maragh-Bass et al., 2017; Holzberg et al., 2017), who often have to renegotiate themselves as their true gender in social interactions. Furthermore, the quick, closed, checkbox-style administration of this question foreclosed the opportunity for a richer examination of gender, as participants tended to answer in very brief terms (e.g. ‘a man’). Although, this richer discussion did emerge further on in different contexts in the interview, I should have been more attentive to this; although rapport was subsequently established in the interviews, again, a process of embodied reflexivity whilst in the interview situation, negotiated through my own performances as a masculine researcher was required in these scenarios. I concur with Rogers & Brown (2023) that critical ethical reflexivity is essential to research processes involving marginalised groups such as trans people. By employing epistemic humility, acknowledging that my knowledge as a researcher is always partial, in concert with a critical commitment to reflexivity and ethical conduct: examining whether my notions of gender (for example) are normative, examining how my social, political and cultural beliefs enter the research. I hope that the deconstructive intersectional framework that I adopted here has furthered these reflexive goals in this section and the next subsection on race and class.

Race and a Critical Interrogation of (My) Whiteness

Categories of practice/analysis (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000) or axes of oppression/identity (Crenshaw, 1991) are not only important for understanding the lived experience of bisexual men, but also for understanding how prejudice operates politically. The great intervention of Black Feminism in intersectional feminist theory is that the self (that is, identity) is both oppressed and empowered. By viewing identities as caught in a nexus of oppressive structural barriers and yet unique, intersectional feminist theory troubles the binary

articulation of categories of practice and categories of analysis by viewing the self as both fractured by structural oppression (Black; woman) and as defiantly unified (a Black woman). Here, I understand identity to not necessarily as something which is always reflexively constructed by the individual (*à la* Giddens, 1991), but sometimes as a social construction which is imposed on individuals, akin to a process of racialisation (Murji & Solomos, 2005), although it should be noted that this chapter does not look in detail at race as an analytic category of identity, as reflections on this were absent from the participants, who were mostly white (see Chapter 4, Research Sample), and rarely reflected on their race. This perhaps indicated a taken-for-granted attitude towards their race; the invisibility of whiteness that 'does not speak its own name', a mirage of unmarked whiteness (Frankenberg, 2020) which should be interrogated.

Whiteness is, like gender, 'a relational category, one that is coconstructed [sic] with class and gender': I am a white, middle-class man, and these social identities interrelate. My racial identity is different from the white working class transmasculine man that I interviewed, Mike, whose experience is constituted from a far more marginal social location than my own. Frankenberg reminds us that '[t]his coconstruction is, however, fundamentally asymmetrical, for the term "whiteness" signals production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage.' (Frankenberg, 1993, pp. 236–237). I admit that my practical (i.e. methodological and phenomenological) ignorance of whiteness as normativity was a reflexive failure on my part as a white researcher, particularly when discussing these issues with the two people of colour who were participants, a fact that in itself points to flaws in my recruitment procedures. Even thinking about my whiteness: an undeniably inalienable aspect of my identity, as a dominating social category, and one which is an inescapable social fact, creates discomfort in me. I like to think of myself as one who strives for equity in my relationships both personal and professional, and to view certain relationships as fundamentally inequitable feels wrong or incorrect to me as it naturalises racial hierarchies as inevitable, despite taking a critical view of whiteness. Surely such racial categories are social constructions, and therefore can be radically and critically deconstructed even if fundamental human difference cannot. However, though individuals strive to think of themselves as

‘good’; ‘fair’; ‘just’ or ‘ethical’, the fundamental social structure of UK systems such as the education system are systemically failing, enabling racism to perpetuate (Miller, 2021), creating stigma which perpetuate social inequalities (Tyler, 2020), and thus such fragility, ego defence or white guilt (McLaren and Torres, 1999) on my own part is just that: an individualisation of structural problem perpetuated by white people denying their part in a social and societal problem.

Power is something which can only be imperfectly measured, and therefore care is required from researchers when describing and interpreting power dynamics in interview situations. I felt that I could not adequately establish rapport with the people of colour I interviewed as a white person by asking them about the intersection of their race and bisexuality – I was reluctant to ‘bring race into the room’, so to speak, and in doing so, I inadvertently marginalised the subject and also participants’ experiences as persons of colour, for which I am regretful. I felt that any discussion of race would have been an imposition, which is simply untrue. A highly hermeneutic and phenomenological method such as IPA requires careful bracketing which when over-cautiously used (as in my case) can lead to errors of omission or neglect rather than elliptical experiential data. My interpretative positionality as a white middle-class researcher, with relative power afforded to me symbolically by my institution, particularly a knowledge institution conferring ‘expert’ status. This further highlights the necessity of reflexive and intersectional research practice: my failing here was not viewing myself in an intersectional way as closely as I viewed my participants, and a full consideration of the structural forces that afford me racial privilege, but also a personal failure to reflect on my reluctance to even bring up the topic of race, and the luxury that I have as a white man to not experience racialisation or have my actions as a professional viewed through the lens of my whiteness.

My nationality also has a part to play in my participants’ encounters with me through our interviews together. I speak with a Southern English accent close to but not Received Pronunciation, a class signifier that denotes belonging to a middle-class (or poshness for a lack of a better term). Englishness has become a potent political force in recent years, brandished by the political Right as a form of identity politics, and with a certain strain of nationalism attached to it

(Aughey, 2013). This is salient given the site of my study – Britain, which is constituted of various national and regional identities: Scotland (The Borders, The Central Belt, the Highlands and the Islands), Wales (Welsh-speaking North and English-speaking South), and England (myriad). British is a label that I have pragmatically ascribed to myself, given that I was born in the South of England, grew up in the South of Wales, and currently reside in Scotland; as an adult I have spent in excess of five years living in each of these countries. Scottish and Welsh national identities are sometimes defined in opposition to Englishness, especially in Scotland post-Brexit, where markedly differing results restoked political ambitions of Scottish Nationalists for a second independence referendum. As Giles and Middleton (2003, p. 6) highlight the plurality and fluidity of national identities, but also how approximately close to power national identity is when it is discursively deployed:

> The construction of a monolithic national identity is never complete: it is constantly disrupted by supplementary, competing or radically alternative versions of Englishness [Scottishness etc]. These may simply be assimilated by the dominant discourse; some may become oppositional and others may occasion adaptation in the prevailing versions of a given year.

The fact that I grew up in Wales afforded greater rapport with Welsh participants (of whom there were 2), but my accent and nationality may have been a barrier to rapport building with Scottish participants.

Limitations of the Study

As in all qualitative enquiry, this study and its findings are limited to the small group of bisexual men and their partners that it was conducted with. Qualitative studies cannot be, and do not attempt to be, generalisable to other, wider populations. Although, this study can be said to highlight some problems that bisexual men face in their relationships as a result of biphobia, and that may resonate beyond this group of participants, and to the bisexual community. However, this piece of research is clearly not mean to be an exhaustive catalogue of the experiences of prejudice and discrimination faced by bisexual men. I believe that, whilst including trans participants in the study was useful to provide a plurality of experiences, their divergent experience and perception of

gender caused them to view sexuality in a very different way to the cisgender participants, and really the trans participants alone warranted their own study. However, it is important to include the trans participants in this cohort of bi men because trans men are men, they provide a different outlook from most and experience their masculinity in a unique way. I do feel however, that they have a very different experience from the otherwise largely homogenous sample, which causes me as a researcher to isolate their experience from larger bisexual men's experience.

Another issue is the selection of self-identified bisexual and pansexual men. I explicitly used the words bisexual and pansexual in participant recruitment, highlighting these identities rather than the more ambiguous but highly medicalised term 'men who have sex with men and women' (Choi et al., 2004). This led to a largely self-identified sample of bisexual/pansexual men who had adopted their identities and who were not closeted. Part of the experience of sexual identity is the closet, particularly in the case of biphobia, if I had used the different language of 'men who have sex with men and women', I may have had more participants come forward who were closeted. This term is, however, highly problematic, as it is exclusionary of trans folk, and has a highly medicalised history, stemming from research on HIV/AIDs. Still, I missed out on a certain cohort of bisexual men because of the language that I used, which was more concerned with sexual identity than closeted folk, an presumed a certain level of self-knowledge that the participants had.

Another limitation of this study is that, while it did have triangulation of data sources, it did not utilize any triangulation of methods. The study interviewed bisexual men, both partnered and single, as well as the partners of bisexual men, but relied exclusively on semi-structured interviews. Triangulation is a useful way to ensure the credibility of a study as 'by combining multiple [...] methods [...] researchers can make substantial strides in overcoming the skepticism that greets singular methods, lone analysts, and single-perspective theories or models.' (Patton, 1999, p. 1193). This study is limited because it only used a single method, and thus cannot confirm consistency across different research perspectives.

Another limitation was my researcher bias as a bisexual, cisgender man. While this fact was not hidden from participants, it may have led them to make presumptions about me which meant that they assumed I had a level of familiarity with certain issues or experiences of being bisexual, and thus neglected to tell me what may have otherwise been valuable information or insights. Self-disclosure can be an important tool for a research to establish rapport, show respect for the participants and validate the participants' stories (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007), but it is a double-edged sword which can lead to participant reactivity. I had to be careful to not appear like a coloniser or outsider who is seeking intimate knowledge of the 'other', which is a problem that plagues anthropologists, but simultaneously gather as much data in an unbiased way as possible. I believe that people did disclose differently after I disclosed my bisexuality (which I did in all interviews), but I believe that this was more positive than it was negative, helping to put participants at ease and 'level the playing field' as Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) put it, creating a more balanced power dynamic in the interviews.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have described the rationale for my research approach as a qualitative study: mainly that as this study aimed to capture some of the experiences of bisexual men and their partners of both relationships and how prejudice affects those relationships, a qualitative, and in particular a phenomenological, research approach was taken. The research sample consisted of 25 people, subdivided in to 17 cases, 15 of which were partnered. Roughly half of the sample were in non-monogamous relationships. The sample was drawn from my personal network, contacts with LGBTQ organisations made through LGBT Scotland, and Twitter. I then described the type of information needed to answer the research question, namely contextual (their neighbourhood, locality, and community, including social community, *i.e.* LGBTQ community), demographic (age, sexual identity, ethnicity, relationship configuration), and perceptual information (the data from the participants gleaned from the interviews; their experiences of being bisexual men; their experiences of being discriminated against). I then went on to describe the

design of this study, which was an interview-based study with three data sources: bisexual men and their partners (interviewed together), bisexual men *or* their partners (interviewed solely), or interviews with single bisexual men. The theoretical basis for these methods being selected was from IPA, and semi-structured interviews are recommended as the primary method of data collection in IPA, and they were chosen as semi-structured interviews allow flexibility between participants maintaining some stake and freedom in the interview process – highlighting experiences that they feel are important – and the researcher maintaining focus on the research question. I analysed the data line-by-line from verbatim transcripts of the interviews, focusing on experiential data. I then compiled themes across individual cases, then partners cases, and finally across all the cases. I the wrote a narrative explaining each theme and their interrelation to one another, all the while paying attention and recording how I interpreted the data, keeping my knowledge, experiences and perceptions in check. I highlighted the major ethical issues in this study: protecting participants from harm, ensuring participants' confidentiality, and informed consent, as well as how these were dealt with in this study. I then went on to highlight the issues of trustworthiness of this study, and how credibility, dependability, and transferability were afforded in this study through member checking, maintaining an audit trail, thick description, peer debriefing, triangulation, and substantial involvement in the field. Finally, I discussed some of the limitations of this study, including the lack of generalisability (which is true of most qualitative research), and the lack of triangulation of data methods.

Chapter 4: Findings: Identities

Introduction

"Is bisexuality a 'third kind' of sexual identity, between or beyond homosexuality and heterosexuality? Or is it something that puts in question the very concept of sexual identity in the first place?" (Garber, as cited in Hemmings, 2002, p. 100)

Table 2

Superordinate and Subordinate Themes Generated from Identity

Identities				
Bi/Pan/Queer		Bisexuality & Gender Identity	Honesty as Authenticity	Bisexuality & Faith Identities
Bisexuality, Pansexuality and Etymological Transphobia	Bi and Queer			
	Not Straight			

This chapter looks at participants' intersecting identities, focusing on how their bisexual/pansexual/queer identities intersect with other identities, namely gender identities (especially trans identities), bisexual identities relating to similar sexual identities and faith identities. I also examine the question of authenticity in identities, and how participants articulated their sexual identities as authentic and honest, countering stereotypes about bisexual people are deceptive. This is in line with a queer theoretical approach, which insists that other aspects of identity are as significant in the formation of the sexual self as sex and gender (Hemmings, 2002, p. 110). Coupled with this approach is my acknowledgement of the complexity of the intersectionality of identity categories, for which I used McCall's (2005, p. 1772) suggested framework of intracategorical intersectionality, which simultaneously 'acknowledges the stable and even durable relationships that social categories represent at any given point in time, [whilst] also maintain[ing] a critical stance toward categories'. In keeping with this framework is my ontological view of the self and of time. The self and identity are interlinked. Individuals are singular entities, despite acting in a multiplicity of social roles, identity positions, which, while reflexive (Giddens, 1991), compartmentalizable (e.g., closeted/out), performative and context-dependent (Goffman, 1963), are nevertheless singular entities because of the quality of their experience. Our perception of experience is fundamentally singular, and relatively continuous. One doesn't experience the social world multiply, and cannot experience multiple lived experiences at once,

despite the many ‘lives’ that they may live or social roles that they inhabit and perform, the reality of experiencing the world is from a singular point of view. Furthermore, life is not lived episodically, but rather continuously, as we experience our lives not as having breaks but as consciousness broken only by sleep. This is akin to the symbolic interactionist view of the self, which is both an unfinished perpetual reflexive project: a self that is constantly experiencing and reflecting on and thus interpreting that experience. In short, I am taking a monist and holist view of the self which emphasises that the self is singular and experientially continuous, but that multiple identity categories (of analysis) subdivide, quantify and atomise the selves of the marginalised rather than viewing them humanistically and therefore holistically, which is both a tactic of marginalising structures and institutions, and a symptom of late capitalist modernity (Bauman, 2000). To view the self, experience and identity with McCall’s (2005) version of intracategorical intersectionality thus humanises and complicates the identities of the participants that I am interpreting by recognising their unique and multiplicitous yet unified subjectivity.

I also understand sexual identity as having a social function, as a label through which people can establish mutual understanding; this may develop into a political banner around which various people can rally in order to be recognised as sexual citizens and campaign for rights. However, I also believe that the extent to which someone is free to construct their own subjective identity varies depending on how marginalised a person is within a particular society. It is often assumed that individuals are free to construct identities in any manner that they choose, however, this assumes that individuals necessarily possess the resources (time and knowledge) to develop and describe their own identities. As bisexuals are often thought as a group which are marginalised both by broader heteronormative society as well as lesbian and gay subcultures, there is a tension between assumptive, societal definitions of bisexuality, and individualised meanings of bisexuality which are constructed in resistance to dominant social (mis)understandings of bisexuality. The negative assumptions that abound around bisexuality also might lead to people eschewing bisexual identity altogether (as in Yip and Page’s 2020 study), accepting different labels (such as pansexual/queer) or even no sexual identity label at all.

The research question that this chapter addresses is how is bisexuality understood by participants? There is an emphasis in this chapter both on the plurality of meanings of bisexuality, but also on how identities are socially constructed, focussing on the tension between how groups and sexual politics define identities and how identities are also used subjectively and why certain identities are adopted over others, such as why people chose to identify as bisexual despite the newer existence of pansexuality, or why a participant might choose to identify as both. The contested meaning of sexual identities is explored in depth in the first part of this chapter. This chapter contributes to the ongoing broader research question of how bisexuality is experienced and interpreted both individually and relationally.

Bi/Pan/Queer: Defining Sexual Identities, Boundaries and Intersections.

Bisexuality is often noted to have a variety of contested meanings; as Hemmings (2002, p. 22) notes "So many definitions of [bisexuality] proliferate in twentieth-century U.K. and U.S. culture that merely disentangling one meaning from another is problematic." This section focusses less on cultural understandings of bisexuality, and more on individual respondents' notions of what their own bisexuality means and how they describe and interpret their sexual identities. This section utilises Galupo et al. (2017) as a partial framework to organise the respondent themes, as they chime very much with the bisexual, pansexual and queer respondents data that were given. Participants were asked how they defined their sexual identities and gave varying responses. This was not seen as problematic, as they were attempting to describe themselves rather than making broader claims about how bisexuality is culturally understood, but some did delve into the politics of what bisexuality meant. Some gave uncomplicated responses: bisexuality was defined by some as simply attraction to both men and women. For others, like Isaac (a 26 year old bisexual and queer man), "bisexuality means the potential to be attracted to […] people of more than one gender." These responses often related attraction to gender or as in some way dependent on gender. These definitions chime with Galupo's et al. (2017) research which found that bisexual people used both binary and nonbinary language when discussing bisexuality. Others unpacked the term, its

meanings and its relation to other labels and identities. Galupo et al. (2017) emphasised that many bisexual, pansexual and queer individuals often describe their sexuality using multiple labels, which was the case for many of the participants. Often bisexuality was related to pansexuality.

> Alex: I suppose like I identify as bisexual but also like the idea of being pansexual I guess. […] and just the idea but like kind of gender doesn't really come into play when, in terms of kind of romantic or sexual interest in a person. It's just, uh, it's that person interesting romantically or sexually? Or not, basically.
>
> Interview: Yeah. How about you [Ellie]?
>
> Ellie: […] yeah same when I kind of first heard of pansexual as opposed to bisexual I felt like it maybe described […] what my sexuality was more. But, at the same time, […] bisexual, like, it's not -because there's 'bi' it doesn't have to necessarily imply binary, and […] I really like the idea that we can just […], define it as we want for ourselves. So yeah for myself I just say it's being, yeah attracted to people like regardless of gender?

Here pansexual denoted that gender wasn't a factor in attraction or that it was a kind of person-centred attraction; Alex makes a distinction between pansexual and bisexual, as he identifies as bisexual, but enjoys the idea of gender not factoring in to attraction. This highlights the choice offered in sexual identity labels, and the freedom in knowing about related sexual identities to one's own that offers new possibilities for one's own attraction. Ellie's response highlights the malleability of these sexual identities, rejecting any binarism in bi, and essentially remaking her bisexuality as regardless of gender.

This was similarly reflected in another account; An anonymous agender participant gave an in-depth analysis of the relation between the two terms, which went further than incorporating bisexuality and pansexuality's shared meaning:

> [sighs] That's a difficult question because I think there's the definition I always had in my head which was liking men and women, which is sort of historical, and then, with more knowledge of um, you know, other

> genders, and personally being more pansexual if we use the modern use- […]
>
> To me bi included it [pansexuality], it was people that weren't restricted to liking their own gender, or liking the other gender, they liked potentially all genders, in varying levels, so for me bisexuality as a term fitted, it's that sort of Kinsey scale which sort of fits in with the binary, but actually, loads of people who didn't fit into the binary, actually, if you're in the middle area, actually that fitted in quite well. It only seemed a challenge for those who were straight or gay. So, to me it wasn't a problem. And I didn't like the use of the term pansexual originally, but over time I have seen the use of it change, so now it is sort of a recognition that you like your own gender, you like the other gender, and you like potentially other genders. And I think one of the things that's changed my mind slightly is that my wife is bi, but she very much likes male men and feminine/female women. She's less into non-binary. Um, and therefore considers herself bi, not pan. She considers me bi *and* pan. And I see pan as a sub-set of bi. So I see use of the bi plus label, at least that helps keep it all as a common group. 'Cause, y'know, the trouble with these identity and labels, they change meaning over time. And often with different social groups may have a strong meaning- And therefore, y'know, I wouldn't object to someone saying 'I'm pan, I'm not bi' I would wonder how, and what their meaning of bi is.

Change over time is a theme that re-emerges time and again throughout the participants discussion of the sexual identity labels that apply to them and their experience of their sexual identity in general. This shifting meanings of bisexuality and pansexuality change both over time, with experience and through relational interaction with their partner. The participant opens with the basic ‘historical’ definition of bisexuality: liking men and women. As the participant experienced people with more diverse genders, bisexuality’s meaning opened up for him. This demonstrates how inextricably gendered understandings of the world inform more than our understanding of gender itself, but shape how we can think about sexuality, including our own sexuality.

This is shown by the participant who explains that pansexuality is about their attraction to people regardless of gender, and how actually gender diversity, not fixity is what shapes their pansexual attraction.

The participant's journey to including pansexual as an identity label was a social and relational process, his wife's bisexuality informed his own sexuality. He identifies as bi and pan because he is open to being attracted to people whose gender falls outside the masculine/feminine dichotomy, which his wife is not. Clearly his encounter with concepts and people which are beyond binary genders has influenced his decision to identify as pansexual as well as bi. The distinction has something to do with the ways in which sexuality is thought about in relation to gender, with pansexuality being the updated identity which seems more trans and non-binary inclusive etymologically. More than this being a more politically correct identity, inclusive of different genders beyond male and female, it is a label which is truer to the participant's own attractions, which seems more important to them. Additionally, I think there is a desire on the part of the participant by accepting both identities – pan and bi – to not alienate themselves from either camps of people if such people are exclusive groups (which they are not necessarily). Rather than drop the bi label in favour of a label which is just as good in terms of reflecting their personal attraction (pansexual), the participant seems to be making a political statement in that bisexuality is not mutually exclusive from pansexuality, that it is similarly trans-inclusive, and that people can hold both identities simultaneously, they are not identities which are held in conflict with one another.

Furthermore, the participant highlights the importance of groups defining what something is. Meanings are not always arrived at individually, there is clearly a societal understanding of what certain things are, such as bisexuality, which is generally understood as a social category of person that is attracted to both men and women. It is doubtful that someone stopped on the street in the UK would not know what bisexuality was (McCormack, 2014 did not report this when he did just that), even if they contested whether it was possible to be bisexual. Pansexuality and bisexuality are, for the participant, relatively synonymous. For others, they are distinct. Identity construction as form of social construction is apparent in the way that the participant talks about different groups having different meanings and definitions for identity labels like bi and

pan. The desire to interrogate those different meanings shows how knowledge about what identities mean differ from group to group. However, what the participant stresses is the importance of solidarity that bi+ brings as a label, as it ‘keeps it altogether as a group’. All of this highlights that identifying as bisexual, pansexual, bi+ is a fluid process that changes over time, both semantically and personally, as well as a social and relational process.

Bisexuality, Pansexuality and Etymological Transphobia. A few participants brought up the contention that bisexuality faces as a potentially transphobic term. These accusations were often strongly rebuffed by participants and such rebuttals emerged organically when discussing the definitions of bisexuality, indicating that the definitions of bisexuality are somewhat contested, if not in actual dialogue with the trans community, then at least in the participants imagined contact with a wider LGBTQ milieu which clearly played a part in their self-identity (Phillips, 2002). These debates were often related to the difference between bisexuality and pansexuality. One participant elaborated on their change of attitude to pansexuality as a label that they had grown to identify with and why this was:

> And, I think in the early days of pansexual a lot of the use of the term seemed rather anti-bi. It was a, often a, you know, ‘bisexual: that's transphobic’ *et cetera*, I thought 'It's not'. But looking at some of the, some of the statements of identity and perhaps some of the YouTubers and the discussion around pansexuality it's probably a better fit and I'm getting more comfortable with the term.

This interestingly shows how the definitions of pansexuality have changed, and as a collective identity has broadened its focus, or at least how the participants attitudes towards bisexuality have changed, which has been informed by encounters with a broader cultural understanding of pansexuality through YouTube and other fora. It also shows how sexual identity terms like pansexual can emerge dialectically through a contestation of seemingly older identity terms like bisexual. The broader LGBTQ+ community’s representation and

interaction through YouTube also serves to highlight the making of their self-identity as an engaged discussion with issues through contact with the wider community, but that this is not exactly a dialogic process, it's accessed asymmetrically through user-provided content, and in a way contact that is parasocial and spectated in terms of the debates that are going on or the opinions that are being expressed. This serves to emphasise that yes, these processes are social processes in coming to sexual identity, but that the medium through which community is accessed is that of audience and viewer, rather than relational dialogue here. These are what Waggoner (2022) described as imagined interactions, which highlight the ephemeral relationships that queer people have in the 21st Century with the queer community.

The participant goes on to give a strong rebuttal to the accusation of transphobia as regards the term bisexuality:

> I think the accusations of transphobia annoyed me in the early days partly because I thought 'Well, most bi people aren't.' And secondly, by accusing them of being transphobic because supposedly they just like men or women, well, that's transphobic because it's saying that trans people aren't men or women. So, I can see it now that there's more talk about nonbinary orientations and nonbinary sort of genders. You can see where pan is becoming more of a stated preference; you like men, and women, and others. So, you know, I'm quite comfortable with that as a label but also feel that, you know, I work using the sort of bi colours. Because bi visibility is increasing, if you start using pan colours nobody even knows about it.

The participant makes an important point in that many trans people still identify as men or women, acknowledging that pansexuality may fit the gap in the etymology of bisexuality by being non-binary friendly. There is also a discussion of visibility. Bisexuality is often described as an invisible identity (Firestein, 1996) and visibility is one of the key issues which faces bisexual people (Yescavage & Alexander, 2000), particularly bisexual men (Steinman, 2000). The

participant is arguing that by switching to pansexual rather than bisexual, people may be discarding what little visibility bisexuality has. It is interesting to note that pansexuality is a more actively constructed sexual identity, which is explicit in its political inclusion of a broad spectrum of genders, unencumbered by the baggage of previous outdated definitions of bisexuality. However, pansexuality being the newer definition, does lack the wider social understandings of what it is, and is even subject to commonplace misunderstandings about what it means (Lapointe, 2017). Clearly there is a social implication that comes along with adopting a particular sexual identity: visibility being the key here. Do you adopt a more inclusive label, or w=one that is more easily recognised?

Owen, a 36–year-old bisexual man, also discussed the debates surrounding bisexuality being labelled transphobia and the supposed animosity between pansexual and bisexual people:

> …I know there's a lot of hot-takes and discussion online about bisexuality potentially being transphobic, I don't think it does unless you make it transphobic. And I think it- it's a real shame that um, there's a perceived animosity between bisexual and pansexual because I think those definitions are so intertwined and they're so similar. Um, I mean there probably are people who will exist within the bisexual spectrum and will only be attracted to people assigned male at birth or assigned female at birth and nothing in between. Um, because there's bound to be. But for me it definitely means attracted to one gender- Regardless of how they present, or how they were assigned at birth. Uh, so, in terms of like semantic argument there's probably pansexual is more of an appropriate term? But personally for me it's a- I dunno, it's a term that resonates more, it's a term that has existed for longer, it's a term that has more attached to it and needs to continue to exist as a term. Not to, um, invalidate, uh, pansexual at all. But yeah, bisexual is the one that strikes all the right chords for me in terms of how I feel about it and- yeah, just to get back to the point- my definition for me is attracted to more than one gender.

Similarly to the previous participant, Owen favours bisexuality because of its perceived enduring usage compared to pansexuality, and, whilst not altogether dismissing the idea that some people might use bisexuality in a transphobic way, certainly rebuffs the idea that the term is inherently transphobic. He also sees bisexuality and pansexuality as very closely linked in their definitions, which concurs with similar findings of larger studies of pansexual-identified people (Belous and Bauman, 2017), although it should be acknowledged that this is by no means a universal consensus, this is still an ongoing debate between bisexual and pansexual people. Owen stresses that bisexuality is only transphobic if one makes it so, highlighting the active and ongoing definition and redefinition of the term, stressing personal agency in how we define things for ourselves, rather than group social constructions of terms. At the end of the day, Owen sees identification as bisexual as personal preference, stating that it simply resonates with him more, being hesitant to disavow bisexuality, stressing the active changing of its meaning by individuals. Owen acknowledges pansexuality's semantic superiority to bisexuality, but chooses bisexuality anyway. Terms that are more familiar to people are probably more likely to be adopted by people, and this seems to be the case with Owen. Owen's highly individualised notions of identity might be contrasted with Jack's explicitly inclusive and context-dependant usage of queer as we will see later on. The desire to be politically or etymological more 'correct' matters less to Owen than how a word makes him feel, how it resonates with him personally, how it 'strikes a chord', as he puts it. This shows that despite bisexuality's contestation as an inclusive term, still people simply identify with it for personal reasons ('feeling right') as well as political ones (visibility).

In summary, the term bisexual is contested in a number of ways. The prejudicial or normative view is that bisexuality either doesn't exist or that it means something that it doesn't (necessarily polyamorous, promiscuous, unfaithful). From the more progressive camp, bisexuality has been critiqued at the etymological level for seemingly reaffirming the gender binary, and thus excluding transgender and non-binary people, a claim that is refuted by bisexual participants here and also the wider bisexual community (see below). Bisexuality for the participants was important as a term that was more culturally intelligible and politically visible, as well as a term that affectively 'felt right' for them, a

more phenomenological explanation of why the terms was adopted as an identity, and it seems as affect has an important role to play. Rather than bisexuality being historically contingent in its definition, or associated with a particular community, the meanings of bisexuality were constructed individualistically, and not adopted uncritically, with an ear to contemporary debates within sexual and gender politics. Rather than a rejection of bisexuality in favour of pansexuality, some participants felt that the identity should not be abandoned but reconstructed alongside this newer sexual identity. Taken together, the sexual identity of bisexuality is not adopted outside of the sexual politics that surround it, even if one adopts the identity and rejects certain politics (mis)understandings about what bisexuality means. Participants negotiated their own use and interpretation of the bisexual and pansexual labels, some discussing it with partners and sharing different understandings, others engaging with community debates around the term, and others still adopting labels because they felt right to them. The shifting meanings of labels over time and the contested nature of bisexuality in general highlights the fluid way in which these terms are used and re-interpreted by the participants. The shifting and contested nature of bisexual identity is used and articulated in a queer way: it is unstable, changing over time, but also, more than simply being a queer identity is being relationally negotiated with each social interaction.

Bi and Queer. Queer was another common identity discussed alongside bisexuality. Queerness often intersected with bisexual identity, and some participants also chose to define themselves in both ways. Elliot, a 28–year-old man identified as bi and queer and described his experience of his identities:

> Interviewer (I): So what is it that you mean when you talk about queer as being part of your identity?
>
> Elliot (E): Um, uh, that my attraction to people is... has a set of rules which arent defined by specifically being bi.
>
> I: And […] how would you define bisexuality?
>
> E: Being attracted to people of more than one gender.

Queer denotes a set of attractions for Elliot which fall outside gendered attraction. Although Elliot defines his attraction as following a set of rules, queer can encompass alternative forms of attraction, governed by attributes beyond gender, such as personality, practices, and more. For Elliot, queer describes a wider variety of attractions than simply bi. There is also an underlying idea that queer provides a freedom that labels like bi does not. This is also reminder that attractions are somewhat messy, people are attracted to others for many reasons and therefore queer can catch some of these attributes under its umbrella, whereas bisexuality, whilst its definition by some has grown to encompass more than ‘attraction to men and women’, is still a label that describes gendered attraction, whereas queer can be used in a way that eschews gender. As

Others used queer differently. The bisexual, pansexual and queer identified participants in Galupo et al. (2007) study also used these sexual identities as an explicit lack or rejection of labels. The aforementioned anonymous participant discusses how an acquaintance of his uses queer as a kind of non-label, and also discusses the messiness of attraction and desire that people possess:

> Yeah because identities can be restrictive. I know someone who always used to identify as gay. And he- he still predominantly is. But he then, for the first time ever, got into a relationship with a woman. He'd never really found 'em attractive. And he ended up marrying her, it lasted a while, they split up but managed to remain friendly. But he said he never fancied a woman. But it was a completely fulfilling relationship. See? Now doesn't use a term, if questioned he describes himself as queer, that's it. Because he says he doesn't feel really bisexual even though he probably is because he's not generally attracted to women but he's not exclusively attracted to men.

Sexual identities provide a grounding for one’s overall sexuality in that they can provide a firm basis for knowing who you are, and thus sexual expression or

sexual behaviour is an expression of personhood rather than something which is trepidatious or experimental. However, they can also be restrictive when lived experience contradicts them. The participant's interpretation of his acquaintance's sexual identity shows that contradictions can arise, and sexuality can be fluid for some. This fluidity of sexual desire can be subversive, as Gamson (1995, pp. 399–400) writes:

> the presence of people with ambiguous sexual desires potentially subverts the notion of naturally fixed sexual orientations […] inclusion of […] bisexual people can require not simply an expansion of an identity, but a subversion of it. This is the deepest difficulty queerness raises.

Placing limitations upon oneself and one's sexuality can have negative consequences, because we are capable of surprising ourselves with our encounters and experiences. In this way, the participant's friend described himself as queer because his experience and attraction contradicted his identity as someone who never fancied women. Feeling something that we did not expect can challenge us when identities draw the boundaries of affect that we are used to. Sexual attractions can arise unexpectedly as we move through the social world, and the way we interpret ourselves can close or open ourselves to these varying sexual attractions. Queer as a non-label of sorts, used distinctively from bisexual by the participant's acquaintance, is an identity which can hold limitless possibility. By using queer as an anti-label, one resists defining oneself by their attractions, or by specify their attraction at all, which is what most sexual orientations rely on – a statement that one is attracted to one gender or more than one. There is a privacy and a solidarity to using queer as a descriptor, one is saying 'I am not heterosexual', but they are not limiting themselves to disclosing specifically what/whom they like, there is an inherent ambiguity to queer which some may find attractive to use as a self-definition. This ambiguity extends itself in solidarity with myriad other queer people, be they queer in their sexual attraction (lesbian, gay or bisexual), sexual practices (e.g. BDSM) or gender (transgender, nonbinary). Queer as a non-label in this context means that it was used as a 'I am not' statement rather than an 'I am statement'. Queer didn't mean 'other' in this context, in my analysis of its usage, it simply meant 'not heterosexual'. Often eschewing heterosexuality, the dominant form of (especially masculine) sexuality can demarcate oneself as other, which some

have chosen as an identity to reclaim from its pejorative sense, this is widely understood. However, I don't think that this is the way that this man is using queer, I think it's being used to essentially negatively define what he is and what his sexuality is like. He is saying 'I am not heterosexual', rather than a positive definition of 'I am bisexual'. I don't believe that he is saying 'I am not normal' by defining himself as queer, I think he is simply making a claim about himself that he is not straight, whether that entails a restriction in terms of the gender he is attracted to, whether gender is important to his attraction, whether his sexuality involves alternative sexual practices (like BDSM), or whether his relationships do not involve traditional heterosexual gender roles and dynamics, including monogamous partnership configurations.

Whilst queer was used non-politically in the above context, other people chose to use queer to politicise their sexual identity. Jack, a 27–year old bi and queer man discusses queer as political and affirmative, whereas queer was used previously to negate one's straightness:

> Jack (J): Queer I understand to have particular political connotation in terms of […] owning and embracing one's difference. Societally marked difference. […] fighting for one's rights and volition in that context. […] with the link to the bi thing it sometimes, some people do feel a bit funny about bi because it has 'bi' in it. And so sometimes I'll use queer if I think that is a more... will read as more inclusive to who I'm talking to I suppose.

Interviewer (I): So are there contexts that you would use queer and not bi then?

> J: I think so. Yeah. […] if I know, for example, well for example if I'm talking... say, um, my nonbinary ex. I think, doesn't really like... bi per se. So I consider myself queer in that context. Um... Uh, so yeah I might use it in that context.
>
> I: Mmm. Yeah. Yeah, so to be more inclusive of people but also use it as like a political connotation to be queer as well.

> J: Yeah. And to me thats kind of the main thrust of it. I mean, if anything, I wouldn't really- don't want to use it in the inclusive sense because I think that's a bit of a... 's a bit of a cheat almost. It's kind of, it's um, it's using, yeah, it's using what I think is uh, an explicit political sort of value um - rallying identity, to kind of slip in and have -and make my conversations more comfortable in different contexts.

Jack gives a very clear definition of queer here, he notes the political usage of the identity, embracing society's demarcated difference and fighting for rights based on this ownership of one's otherness. He is clear that it is not inherent otherness nor difference, but social discrimination that others and differentiates queer people. Queer was also used by Jack as a kind of social courtesy to represent one's identity as inclusive in particular spaces. Identity in this context can be viewed as a kind of phenomenological and relational tool that is pragmatically used to negotiate a certain space, governed by its own social rules and logic. Bisexuality was viewed as an inappropriate identity to openly hold in some spaces, with an implication that bisexuality is not a politically correct identity to hold in certain queer spaces. This chimes with Hayfield & Křížová's (2021) findings, where the often multiple sexual identities of bisexual and pansexual people were deployed in a context-dependent way. Queer identity seems to offer more solidarity than bi identity in this case, which speaks to an underlying question about where bi features in the LGBTQ+ community. This is a wider debate about inclusivity with LGBTQ spaces and communities; trans issues are increasingly highlighted, and there is a wilful intent to be trans-inclusive in a lot of queer spaces. Jack's queer identity is highly temporal and spatial, as highlighted by his quote; it seems that his bisexual identity is more central because, rather than him abandoning it in certain spaces, he chooses to foreground another identity instead, almost masking one identity with another. This isn't to say Jack is being disingenuous about his queer identity, rather that certain spaces disallow him to express his identity as bisexual. Jack's ability to read the room here shows that queer can be understood as a social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1985), as he fears infringing on trans and non-binary peers by identifying as bi, thus compromising his in-group status by causing offence by suggesting the existence of a gender

binary by using a bisexual identity. Interestingly, there is no instance that Jack brings up where he feels bisexual would be the more appropriate term within a space, perhaps highlighting the lack of bisexual exclusive spaces. Queer is therefore simultaneously a sexual, social, inclusive and political identity. Bisexuality, also is a highly relational term when used as a descriptive identity, as it is contested in queer spaces. Again, this highlights that sexual identity labels like bi and queer have a political consequence to them and are social identities that must be negotiated within LGBTQ+ cultural spaces and encounters.

Returning to the idea of heterosexuality as an identity which is eschewed, but not necessarily countered by adopting another identity, Jack discusses his identity development. I was curious why he chose to first consider himself as bisexual when he experienced similar-gendered attraction. Sometimes, same-gendered attraction can provoke identity displacement, a compromising of one's straight identity which relies on a lack of homosexual desire. When first encountering their homosexual desire, some participants' first instinct was to speculate that they were gay. Instead we see in Jack's interview an accommodation of both desires in his instant speculation that he might be bisexual:

> Interviewer: …why didn't that really make you question your identity? […] I mean what were you feeling really then? You know, having this straight identity but kind of having a major crush on you know, a man?
>
> Jack: Mmm. Um, it's hard to say, I suppose... I suppose I... I probably- what I probably did is I probably flirted with the idea of being bi. In those sort of pre-Montreal days. But the- the instances where it showed itself in one or two crushes did not outweigh my gen- I mean, even today I still have a uh- attraction to women is- becomes more ready to me I suppose. […] I don't think about it in terms of ratios and percentages but um, so I guess at that point before Montreal just a- those particular instances just didn't outweigh my general sets of experiences. So I -it wasn't enough to, at that point, to say that um, I'm not straight. And I guess also it was one of the key things I think that happened in Montreal was that it um, it

> formed itself into a relationship. It took the next step. And once that, y'know, that, that, you're moving then from sort of internal thoughts and feelings into actions and ways you're expressing yourself in se- at least semi-public life. So at that point it's sort of um, it's much harder to um, think of yourself as straight, because actually the way you're socially responded to is no longer- no longer resembles anything like straightness.

Jack's response is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, he discusses going to Montreal, a place for him that represented experimentation with different ways of being. Montreal was clearly demarcated as an important place and time for Jack, he talks about things in terms of 'pre-' and 'post-Montreal'. Jack later describes Montreal as "one of the gayest cities on the planet […] such a queer city… in a way that *no* British city is". Such places, far from home, offer space to conduct life experiments and live in a way that is totally new and liberating. This is not so much *re*-inventing oneself as it is *inventing* oneself through what Weeks et al. describe as 'practices of freedom': (Weeks et al., 2001, p. 199) "By engaging in practices of freedom the non-heterosexuals […] lives and personal narratives […] not only challenge the givens of the heterosexual assumption, but also invent new ways of living that can influence available possibilities for thinking and doing." Jack's representation of himself became queer perhaps before he himself recognised his queerness. He talks of his self-representation no longer being that of straightness, but almost in a way in which he is playing catch up with himself, which counters notions of the self which is reflexively constructed (Giddens, 1991). Jack's queer self here was being constructed for him, and he barely has enough time to actually reflect on this process, because it was already happening. His queer identity was being made for him, simply because he was living it and being socially and affirmatively treated as queer, not because he is reflexively and solitarily constructing his identity. Secondly, Jack's lived experience of his 'not straight' identity becomes a reality when he embarks on a relationship outside heterosexuality, and speaks to how identities are socially constructed for us, when you are treated, as Jack says, in a way that 'no longer resembles straightness'. Jack identifies this difference in how he is treated as value-neutral, in that he does not ascribe this as people treating him more or less favourably but simply as treating him differently. This possibly

speaks to the queer spaces he inhabited when he was in Montreal, which he describes as having a particular quality of "North American urban queerness that is more visible, and louder, and… more infectious". This would imply then that the spaces were wild, accepting, and unabashed, not merely open spaces in terms of sexuality, but more overt and in your face than that, prouder. Overall, Jack's quotes come together to demonstrate how a queer identity can be fostered through experimentation and positive social construction, encouragement by one's peers to embrace a non-heterosexual way of being in a markedly queer space. Jack's self-identity emerged through immersive living and social practice. Being as doing.

To summarise this section, we can see that bisexuality, pansexuality and queer sit within a contested nexus of meanings that vary over time and space. Jack's reluctance to use bi as an identifier in social settings, echoes the anonymous participant's understandings of pansexual changing across time. There was a commonality to the way that these identities were described: firstly, they were discussed as fluid, unstable and not fixed identities which were not fixed in time nor space. The participants did not tend to discuss their bisexuality as a fixed identity that they had always had. Secondly, the participants spoke of their identities as relational: Jack was reluctant to openly adopt a bisexual identity because it did not have the same inclusive connotations as queer, whereas the. Queer had connotations of liberty and was used as a (non) identity which defied the boundaries set by their other identities: it had the added effect of expanding upon their other sexual identity labels, delimiting them whilst retaining labels that 'felt right' to them. The labels were discussed in terms of how they fit in with the wider LGBTQ+ social milieu, either in a discursive sense or a tangible social sense. It was clearly important to defend the label bi from its perceived etymological transphobia, which both Owen, the anonymous participant and Jack discussed. None of the labels discussed were discussed in the same sense as gay or straight identities, which are often discussed in firm, uncontested ways (Waites, 2005). Rather, the findings across cases highlight the social construction of these identities, how they are renegotiated through encounters with intimate partners who share a similar identity, through community, and through personal reflexivity.

Bisexuality and Gender Identity

Out of all of the participants, two men were assigned female at birth, one woman was assigned male at birth, one identified as agender, and the rest identified as cisgendered or mostly male/female. Hemmings (2002, p. 99) notes that bisexuality and transgenderism tend to be discussed in a discursively or abstractly similar way, but does not speak of the experiential similarities that occur between/within bisexual and transgender subjects. Often, the trans participants that I spoke to had initially assumed that bisexuality was a 'default' sexual orientation when they were growing up, tacitly assuming that everyone was bi. These are two accounts of the men I spoke to regarding the first time they knew they were bisexual:

Interviewer (I): …can you tell me about the first time you knew you were bisexual?

Mike (M): It's not so much that I knew I was bi so much as I learned that not everyone was. […] If you know what I mean?

I: Yeah! That's really interesting.

M: Um, I guess it was just when I was like in my late teens. I don't really remember exactly when, I- just sort've slowly occurred to me that- People weren't, it wasn't, that wasn't what everyone felt, so, and I was like 'Oh, okay'. Gonna have to deal with that I s'pose. [laughs]

This is very similar to Elliot's experience:

Interviewer: …can you tell me about the first time that you knew you were bisexual?

Elliot: The first time that I knew that I was bi was when I was 13. Um I think that I've always known that I was bi. Because I didn't understand that people weren't bi. […] I had a boyfriend when I was 14 really. 15. And I was talking about him fancying boys um because he thought I was a girl at the time. And […] he was like 'No, I don't fancy boys.' So then I was like

> 'What?! Of course you do!'. First of all because I, my understanding of gender didn't really work in any kind of like assigned-gender-at-birth way. […] So I was like 'Oh, okay, well I'm... Right, of course'. […] I just think I just kind of, always, it's been my assumed default.

This was a common experience for trans participants and speaks to their unique standpoint regarding gender. Elliot explicitly connects his view of bisexuality as his default sexual orientation and his view of gender as something that is not assigned at birth. Bisexuality as a default orientation for the trans participants I spoke with contrasts with the idea of discovering one's sexual orientation through psychosocial encounter and/or reflexivity (e.g. Cass, 1979) that is common in accounts of the ways that non-heterosexual identities are constructed (the very idea that a non-heterosexual identity must be constructed and cultivated is something that is commonly described). Sexual identity is often discussed in terms of 'developmental milestones', and it is claimed that 'sexual identity formation takes time because many LGB youths go through a period of sexual questioning, experimentation, and conflict before assuming and consistently self-identifying as LGB.' (Rosario et al., 2006, p. 47). Indeed, Hemmings (2002, p. 111) writes that both bisexuality and transgenderism challenge the "linear progress of sexual narrative". The experiences of these participants contradicts that, as their bisexuality was just *there* at the start, a phenomenological and metaphysical reality. The idea of sexuality, not as something that is encountered outside of the self and subsequently negotiated within, but as something which is internal and fixed before any experience shapes it, is more common to how heterosexuality is described, particularly in essentialist discourses about sexuality which posit heterosexuality as innate, normal and natural, and any deviation as exactly that – a deviation from the norm, an aberration. Paradoxically, these participants viewing bisexuality as their default sexuality counters this heteronormative essentialist discourse, because it shows that heterosexuality is something that is not always innate within us, bisexuality (or any sexuality for that matter) can be just as original, demonstrating that this is not how everyone starts out, some people with a different outlook on gender view bisexuality as a default.

This demonstrates that a trans way of being can impact how bisexuality is understood. These participants did not talk about assuming everyone as bisexual in the same way that statement is often used to dismiss bisexuality, they have a genuine and unique outlook that challenges a heteronormative understanding of how sexual orientation operates. Moreover, these passages demonstrate the importance of the experiential over the culturally normative when it comes to negotiating sexual identity. Here, participants experiential understandings of their own bisexuality superseded cultural discourses of heterosexuality as natural or innate. The experiential primacy of bisexuality challenges the supremacy of heterosexuality. It is important to note however that just because bisexuality is experienced first does not mean that these accounts reaffirm any kind of essentialist discourse about sexuality. The interview data makes no claims about the source of the participant's bisexuality, merely that it is the first thing that is there, but does not imply naturalness, merely a primacy of experience. The participants do not necessarily view these experiences as being imperative, instead discussing them in a matter-of-fact way, as something that taken for granted for them, often in the same way that heterosexuality is discussed by heterosexual people, where their sexuality is taken-for-granted, and not viewed as a form of identity at all, more of a fact about themselves. However, heterosexuality is not marginalised, and once these participants realised that their outlook was not universal, had to contend with being different, being forced to reflexively recontextualise their sexuality at the point when they realised their bisexuality was not universal. In summary, this shows how experience can come before any cultural understandings of one's own gender and sexuality, and run counter to essentialist narratives of how sexuality is formed.

Honesty as Authenticity

Honesty was a recurring motif in participants' experiences. Weeks (1987, p. 31) has highlighted the seeming paradox at the heart of sexual identity:

> We are increasingly aware, theoretically, historically, even politically that 'sexuality' is about flux and change, that what we deems as 'sexual' is as

> much a product of language and culture as of ‘nature’. Yet we constantly strive to fix it, stabilize it, say who we are through the telling of our sex.

However, questions of authentic sexual identity need not be rooted in an essentialist understanding of sexuality. Think of a house, a comfortable home that one constructs for oneself, sexual identity is like this house, individually constructed but comparable to others like it, perhaps even borrowing the ideas of others in its construction, but still definably one’s own. The fact that it was constructed bears little relevance to how at home one feels in it, in fact one’s active participation in the construction probably results in feeling *more* at home within its walls. Even if one’s sexual identity is constructed for us to some extent, we still have agency as individuals to change the meanings of that identity to make it more suitable for oneself. I again turn to the phenomenological and the affective; these participants experienced the telling of their sexual identities in a social context as the realisation of those identities as authentic. Furthermore, identities needn’t be fixed in order to mean something to those who hold them. As was evident in the previous section, the contestation of bisexual identities in the current climate of sexual politics highlighted the affectual aspects of identities that ‘just feel right’ to some people. This model of identity which is iterative is perfectly in line with symbolic interactionist understandings of personal identity, which is processual, perpetually unfinished and constantly changing, as well as relational (Scott and Dawson, 2015). Just as identity is negotiated, so too is sexuality a product of negotiation, struggle and human agency (Weeks, 2017, p. 31).

The kind of authenticity the participants experience here is relational, honesty to others about themselves. The desire to be authentic about their sexuality as a part of their lives drove many to come out. This is supported by Herek’s (1996, as cited in Golderberg, 2007, p. 119) assertion that sexual minorities often come out because of psychological need for authenticity. For some this authenticity was related to a motivation not to lie to the people they were closest to (*e.g.* family and friends). An agender participant discussed their forcible closeting in the army in relation to a gay colleague they knew: “So he couldn't even be honest, at least I could be honest about half of my life.” This is not simply honesty about their sexuality, but honesty about their identity, honesty about life itself. Honesty as self-authenticity. Conversely, silence was a

form of dishonesty; *not* speaking was lying. Sphen, a 19–year-old bisexual man, discussed his motivations and circumstances for coming out to his mother:

> Sphen (S): I was back home […] just visiting, and you'd [Magic, his partner] called me. […] everybody upstairs was sleeping, my little brother was downstairs and I was still like a secret at this point so I just went outside to take the call. […] it was like past midnight so it was quite late. So it was like, unusual to be out here, and my mum came down the stairs looking for me, saw me outside, saw I was on the phone and was like 'oh okay, don't worry don't worry' and then went back upstairs.
>
> Magic (M): Mmm
>
> S: […] and then the next day […] I woke up and I could hear she was downstairs and I knew that would have seemed suspicious and I didn't wanna lie, I'd never wanted to lie about it, I just, in my mind they hadn't asked so that's why I hadn't said anything.
>
> Interviewer (I): Yeah
>
> S: […] when I told her, I said 'Oh I'm, I'm in a relationship. Ehm, and his name's [Magic].' Which in hindsight probably was quite a dramatic way of breaking it.
>
> M: [laughs]
>
> S: […] She's told me many times that that was not a very good way to break the news.

Sphen strongly tells us that he never wanted to lie about this sexuality or who he was seeing. Reinforcing the point he repeats himself and makes it very clear. His desire for honesty seems equally for the sake of his partner as it does to maintain an honest dialogue with his mum. Telling the truth about one's identity to others was pivotal, if you care about the people you love the most, honesty is the truest expression of that care, even if you and the person you tell that to are unprepared for the revelation. This echoes Herek's (2002) claim that coming

out is a necessity for authenticity in many LGBTQ people, which seems to mirror's their experience. In that respect, there is a spontaneity to Sphen (and as we will see Magic's) coming out, in which they force themselves to be honest, out of a fear of being a dishonest or inauthentic person. Similarly, Magic's experience with his sister, when confronted with questions about his sexuality, hinged on a desire to be honest:

> Magic (M): …my sister just openly came out with it and she was like 'are you bi?'. And like you said, I'd never wanted to lie about it.
>
> Interviewer (I): Yeah
>
> M: So I was like 'Yes. I am.' And that was to my mum and sister, and my sister was over the moon when I, ehm, told her. And my mum, my mum has recently, I've spoken to her more about it. Well, so then, I'd never spoken to my dad about it.
>
> I: Mmhm
>
> M: Until [Sven] came in' the picture.
>
> I: Right, yeah.
>
> M: And then that, and I'd never spoken to my mums since that day about it, and then obviously I was like mum, dad, I need to tell you somethin' like, I have a boyfriend. And my dad was surprisingly completely fine with it. I was shocked. My dad's similar to his dad [Sphen's]. Not in the old-fashioned sense but in the sense of, our relationship. We'd never really have like that kind of feelings-to-feelings relationship.

Magic's honest revelation about his sexuality was only prompted by a direct question, which is not to say that he was being dishonest about his sexuality beforehand, but that he chose to reveal his bisexuality reactively rather than actively. He certainly didn't closet himself, but let other people interpret him as they would unless challenged. This is one aspect of how people might choose to come out, not as a major event but as a question which is answered in passing,

not as a huge revelation which is announced to the whole family. This echoes Steinman's (2011) argument that some people do not seek to change society through their bisexuality. This reflects Magic's views about how a person's sexuality should be represented, not as a defining characteristic of oneself, not something which is reducible to the whole of their being. There is also a longing for a post-political identity in this, Magic simply wants his sexuality not to count in people's evaluations of him as a person. Later in the interview he claims that sexual preference should be treated as though it is simply another minor facet of one's personality equivalent to what sports one like to plays. Magic's coming out was staggered and fragmented, as he answered his sister's question first, and then, once engaged in a relationship with Sphen, another man, he felt as though he had to tell his father. Weeks et al. (2001, p. 199) put forward the idea that inauthenticity, in this case lying, means "a passivity before life, waiting for a fate that will overwhelm us. Authenticity, on the other hand, signifies a willingness to take hold of the present possibilities and to anticipate the future bravely and positively, as something we have the ability to make." Magic and Sphen[2] are the truest representation of this authentic way of being, having bravely come out because they fell in love with each other. Some of the other participants had only pursued relationships which were ostensibly 'heterosexual' (even if both parties were both bisexual). This is not to say that these relationships were less authentic, however. Many participants had stated that they would come out to their families and other close social circle if a non-heterosexual relationship emerged, but Magic and Sphen enacted this and dealt with the realities of the situation. Magic and Sphen realise this possibility as an authentic life decision the two make which is prompted by their relationship. Coming out for Magic and Sphen was a way of enacting authenticity (Nielsen & Alderson, 2014), meaning that in the highly heteronormative context of the family, coming out was a way of fighting for one's identity, but also as a means of maintaining an authentic connection with the family: it was an authenticity about the self, as well as with the family, a way to navigate one's identity within the social context of the family.

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[2] The participants chose their pseudonyms after Sphen and Magic, a same-sex penguin couple who nested an egg at Sea Life Sydney Aquarium.

Honesty as a theme also emerged in a different family context. One participant discussed being honest about his and his partner's bisexuality with their two young children. The same participant had previously ascribed his parents sexually liberal attitudes (they were swingers) to his lack of internalised homophobia. I was interested in how their bisexuality figured in fatherhood:

> …you've gotta choose age-appropriateness. But when they know, you know we're not gunna have it; we leave bi pride flags lying around. We're not closed about it. So I think when it becomes an appropriate age - they'll have not known differently. We're always careful never to- we don't lie to the kids about things like that. We always try and set age-appropriate for uncomfortable truths and we don't try and dress it up so much. […] We're always honest with all of our kids about how they are around bisexual and all sorts of other issues.

The participant's desire to educate their children about bisexuality and other issues speaks to a desire to change how conversations about sexuality are had. There is a desire to somewhat normalise difference for them, they state that their goal is for them growing up to not know any different, or to not see their parents' sexuality as unusual or strange. This difference in actively shaping how their children understand sexuality as a concept is miles away from the burden of having to educate family members that will be referenced in the next chapter, and heralds an optimistic future where different sexualities, family arrangement and other pluralities and diversities figure in other social and familial dynamics. This active and open approach to sexuality, particularly a kind of informal sex and relationships education is a response to the participant's parents' own attitudes about sexuality, which were liberal but passive, as they "didn't feel they could say anything" and "they wanted to leave it to society to tell me what to do". Not wanting to be closeted but being age-appropriate with active education and openness about what sexuality is, including their own sexuality was at the heart of this participant's approach to parenting about this topic. This chimes with two themes present in Goldberg's (2007) study of lesbian, gay and bisexual parents disclosing their sexuality to

their children: there was a desire to come out as a form of education and activism, which is clear in this quote particularly in regards to age-appropriateness, but also there is a desire not to lie to their children, which was a common theme with the Goldberg (2007) study, where parents were intolerant of dishonesty because it had shaped their childhoods as queer people. Although, this contrasts with the participant's own childhood, which he says was fairly open, there was still a strong desire not to lie or be closed about their sexuality with their children.

On the other side of things, ambiguity about presenting one's sexuality was a feature of Terry's experience. He discusses why he has never explicitly come out to his close friends at home:

> Interviewer (I): Would you say that bisexuality is more a part of your private life than it is a part of your public life then?
>
> Terry (T): Um. I dunno, that's a quite a big uh question because […] I think it would be more present in my social life […] at the moment […] I'm completely open to it in my private life. But in my social life […] I never really bothered coming out to like, my close friends, assuming that they kind of knew. There's this […] lack of clarity that I haven't actually addressed. Um, there's [inaudible] I just can't, I'm not ever open but I don't really talk about things like sexual I think [inaudible]. with them, but to be hon- if they ask me about my sexuality I would an- you know just answer them honestly and talk about it. But it'd not ever come up as like a subject. Um, to be addressed.
>
> I: And it's not something you've ever felt you want to bring up necessarily.
>
> T: Um, no. I much prefer bringing it up with like uh newer people just 'cause it's, you know, it's quite easy. […] 'Cause there's no kind of social-like a lack of clarity on someone's social judgement of people? Uh even though that I know that I'm very close with my friends, and they wouldn't care at all if I was bisexual. Or, you know, they wouldn't have a negative viewpoint on it. Um, yeah I just, just haven't really done it.
>
> I: You just haven't, yeah, really addressed it with them.

> T: Yeah but in terms of new social life I'm very much I'm just completely open to be honest as soon as I've […] gotten to know someone I'll be like 'Yeah!'.

It is interesting how ambiguity characterises some of Terry's older friendships which he maintains in his hometown, whereas in newer friendships he is more open about his sexuality. Ambiguity in this sense was not the antithesis of truthfulness, it was an alternative to the stark honesty that Magic and Sphen presented. Similarly to them, however, Terry states that he would come out if directly questioned about it. Terry makes no indication that his friends' silence on the matter or implied knowledge about his sexuality is anything but acceptance. To him he knows they would not view him differently. However, there is an ambiguity around their silence, why haven't they brought it up? Why hasn't Terry formally come out to them? Could it be that there is some kind of discomfort that lurks in their silence? There could also be a gendered dimension to this, as his close hometown friends are men, whereas he doesn't describe his newer friendship group, which may be more gender diverse. This may be important, as hegemonic masculinity constrains the type of speech and action that men can take, violations of hegemonic masculinity may cost Terry social capital. What may be more likely though is that Terry has some kind of reluctance to display to his older friends that he has changed, or to reveal a previously hidden truth about himself to them. Terry could have some internalised biphobia around this, but all of these interpretations are speculative, and there is a great degree of ambiguity about Terry's motivations for not discussing his sexuality with his oldest friends. I don't feel that this comes from a queer desire not to be categorised though, as he is comfortable being open with the new people he meets.

Terry's insistence on his sexuality being very separate from his identity is quite different to Magic and Sphen's rejection of their bisexualities as a core party of their being. It seems that Terry wants little to do with sexuality beyond the realm of the sexual, he appears bisexual but heteroromantic in a certain respect. Like Magic and Sphen, he doesn't want to be judged purely by his sexuality, but unlike them, he rejects the community aspects of his sexuality as

well, seeing little in common with his LGBTQ peers. Magic and Sphen accept the solidarity of their sports team which have a certain LGBTQ contingent. There is a lingering question as to why Terry is more open about his sexuality with newer social circles. Location seems important to this decision. Similarly to Jack, once away from home perhaps Terry has become more engaged with his sexuality and felt freer to explore it more openly as a social, public aspect of his life. It seems that Terry's hometown might be clouded in stigma for him and represent a place which simply is not as accepting as where he is now (Terry moved to Brighton, and now lives in London). It could be that home represents misunderstanding, as his family have misunderstood his sexuality, his mother in particular seems to have understood his sexuality largely from stereotypes around bisexuality. It seems paradoxical that new people who he knows less about (presumably) would be privileged to knowledge about him than people who he grew up with and he knows what their views are, which are positive towards LGBTQ folk. His older friendships may just simply be not the kind of relationship where intimate details about one's life are revealed and discussed. Terry's experiences provide an interesting counterpoint Magic and Sphen's which stress honesty as a crucial part of the ethics of their sexuality, whereas Terry's sexual identity languishes in ambiguity with those friends who he is closest with.

Bisexuality and Faith Identities

Participants discussed issues of faith and bisexuality both in terms of their relationships and personally. Sphen talks about his relationship with his mother and her journey to accepting his sexuality after he had come out to her:

> She's really […] strong Christian. […] but then a few days later [after he came out] she called me and she was in tears, apparently she hadn't, she couldn't sleep or eat properly, she was so shocked by this news and was really struggling with it. […] So that was, that was really upsetting for me […] since then it's kind of been a back and forth, me tryna explain it to her, her trying to battle between wanting me to be happy but it goes against what she believes in and stuff like that.

> […] So it was difficult, she, very very recently, apparently has had a massive turnaround. She's saying like 'oh like I was thinking about it a lot'. I've spoken to a lot of her like Christian friends and she's prayed about it and she's actually, d'you know like I think she said 'oh well God wouldn't judge you so I shouldn't either' and all that so we're, I think we're meeting her soon for a big dinner and drinks in a couple of weeks.

Sphen's mother's journey from shocked despair to acceptance demonstrates one of the ways that acceptance of non-heterosexuality can be reconciled with a personal re-evaluation of theology. Her Christian faith was in conflict with her desire for her son's happiness. This internal struggle gave way to a decision about judgement, and who holds that right. Ultimately, Sphen's mother decided that only God can judge her son, and God wouldn't judge Sphen for his relationship, and she should follow his example. In this, Sphen's mother takes responsibility for her imperfect feelings of judgement towards her son and his partner, and compares them to the ideal judgement of God. The will of God is key in these times of identity conflict for people who hold ordinarily oppositional religious and sexual identities. Sphen's mother's Christian identity wasn't in conflict with her sexual identity, but her maternal desire to see her son happy. For those who do hold these dual identities, the will of God is equally as important. Sphen's partner, Magic, is also a Christian. He describes the reconciliation of his Christian faith with his sexuality as "one of the hardest things". Magic discusses the interplay between his faith and his sexuality:

> I became a Christan at 16 […] but I'd always of course had like homosexual thoughts by that point […] and I always struggled with that a lot as well. […] the whole time going through having homosexual thoughts back when that was being a Christian, like my faith was actually huge for me, […] in the sense of like, I know that the way I am is the way God's made me. That's what I strongly believe. I don't believe that what I'm doing is, offends Him or hurts Him- at all. […] so that was never a worry for me as such. It was because there are obviously very controversial thoughts about it in the Bible, so there was, that was always it, and it is understandable

> when I hear people who obviously have a very different opinion on it and- and I completely get it. It can be quite hard because I know what God thinks, I know how God feels. But that as well is the more important thing."

Knowing, not that God will *forgive* him, but that God *approves* of him and loves him, despite the messages that the Bible contains, is central to Magic's faith. He knows that God made him the way that he is and has absolute faith in God's design. Magic's phrasing here is also notable: 'having homosexual thoughts' is a particular and incidental way of saying that he is attracted to men. Magic's journey here is from having to being: being a Born-Again Christian who is '*having* homosexual thoughts' to *being* bisexual and being Christian. Bisexuality is fully integrated into his self-concept along with his Christian identity. One might even say that his bisexuality is incorporated into his Christian identity, interpreted as another product of God's creation and will. Similar to other qualitative accounts of bisexuality and Christianity, Magic 'reshaped [his] faith to be more inclusive of bisexuality and re-imagined [his] sexuality to fit with [his] religious faith.' (Toft, 2014, p. 546). Magic radically redefines his knowledge of faith which goes beyond established doctrinal interpretations of the Bible and instead emphasises his personal relationship with God, a kind of knowing through being rather than knowing through reading. In doing this, he re-imagines his sexuality not as a product of himself, but as a product of God's design, realigning his sexual self as wholly within his faith and produced by his creator. This contrasted with many of the participants in Toft's (2014) study who often chose to de-sexualize themselves and their bisexuality in order to accommodate their faith, there was nothing in Magic's account which suggested any kind of 'dilution' of his sexuality, as Toft (2014, p. 557) puts it, to accommodate for his spirituality. Magic and Sphen. Families are disappointed, faiths are challenged, but there is a hopefulness to their story, a hope of shared understanding around the dinner table as they break bread together.

Whilst some chose to re-evaluate their religious outlook due to revelations about sexuality, others, such as Jack took this a step further, and distanced themselves from a faith that they once strongly a part of and found other homes

for their spirituality in different denominations. After initially abandoning his parents' strictly orthodox Christianity, which he states was due to reasons other than a conflict with his sexuality, whilst acknowledging that there was 'pervasive homophobia' in the church community that he was raised, Jack went on to accept 'sort of a spirituality'. This spirituality rejected God, but recouped some meditative or ritualistic aspects of faith:

> I quite like going to um, choral evensong. You know, at uh, Anglican or Episcopalian churches, um. Which is a lovely, pleasant thing to do, exactly, and I kind of, just get that kind of sort of calm. I sort of- yeah, that kind of calm, meditative attitude. Incidentally, um, Anglicanism is a denomination fairly distant/distinct from where I came from. So, there's not really - I wouldn't really consider a link there at all. (Jack, 27, Bisexual, Queer man).

This newfound, more mediatative form of spiritual practice is a complete re-engagement with faith so distinct from his strict 'Evangelical fundamentalist' upbringing. It is also an example of a personalisation of faith, which is often separate to the institutional dogmas of a church, and is consistent with some bisexual Christians accounts (Shipley and Young, 2020). It also represents a phenomenon seen in contemporary Christian worship among bisexual people, that of the 'Bible Buffet' (Wilson, as cited in Toft, 2020, p. 90), where selective aspects of faith are incorporated in to personal spirituality, whereas others are not taken up. Here, Jack has kept the quiet meditation and calming music of choral evensong, whilst rejecting deific belief and the often-institutional homophobia of the Christian church.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to convey some of the key themes that arose when participants discussed their bisexual identities, including what people mean by bisexuality, how this relates to other sexual identities (pansexual and queer), what it is like to hold these identities simultaneously,

and how participants differentiate their identities from other similar sexual identities, especially pansexuality. There was also a discussion about how sexual identities may be socially constructed but experienced with deep authenticity, especially in their relationality with others. There was also a consideration of how their meanings can change over time, and how certain identities bear a political meaning to participants. I also looked at how being trans impacted one's way of experiencing gender and therefore impacted one's bisexuality. I have also looked at how honesty about their sexual identity was important as a form of authenticity about oneself, especially being honest and authentic to those close in one's social circle, particularly parents and close friends. Coming out was especially seen as a way of being one's authentic self in a social context which their identity was perhaps contested. Finally, I discussed participants' faith identities, how these are made sense of and reconciled with their sexuality, and how their bisexuality was received by people who had faith that were close to them. What these findings show is the immense degree of complexity that bisexual identities can take on, not just for participants, but when they are exposed to a wider social group. Relational conveyance of these identities was so varied, some chose not to convey their identities overtly, leaving them as being ambiguously read by some close to them, others chose specifically to identify as bisexual over pansexual because of the perceived improvements in visibility. One glimpsed a future of how bisexuality might be conveyed generation to generation in educating and parenting in one participants account. Overall, these findings show a great range of diversity within bisexual subjectivities, how people live their experiences of their identities and develop them is diverse and eschews easy, uniform explanation. However, what this findings section does show is the degree to which bisexual identities are actively constructed and contested in a political context which acknowledges gender diversity, and defends bisexuality from accusations of trans and nonbinary exclusion, but also which vary over time and space in their meanings and application of sexual identities. These subjectivities also challenge essentialist discourses in that they show how participants and their peers construct sexual identities and what they mean, as a way to contest social understanding of bisexuality less from a heteronormative space, but against insider perspectives of bisexuality as binary. The findings highlight how

identities are constructed relationally in contested social and political spaces within a variety of discourses, which seek to affirm trans identities or protect durable ideas about the family. In summary, and in answer to the research question of how bisexuality was understood by the participants, bisexuality was understood as a sexual identity in a context of multiple competing sexual identities that were relational in their development, often affective in their adoption, and political in their deployment: changing across different spatial and temporal contexts, with some identities (such as queer and pansexual) being deployed in certain contexts where bisexuality was seen as being non-inclusive.

Chapter 5: Findings: Prejudice & Discrimination

Table 3

Superordinate and Subordinate Themes Relating to Prejudice

Prejudice	
Homophobia	Binegativity
Homophobia and place	Monosexism
Institutional Homophobia	Double discrimination
	Attention seeking
	Bierasure & Invisibility
	Stereotypes

A primary theme found across all the data was prejudice and discrimination. This theme emerged despite my deliberate decision to exclude explicit questions around prejudice and discrimination in the interview schedule. This was both a phenomenological and ethical strategy, ensuring that participants weren't pressured into reliving possibly traumatic events, and also to allow their experiences to emerge without the explicit prompts of the researcher influencing them. This demonstrates that prejudice and discrimination is still a significant factor of experience for these bi+ participants and their partners. The typology developed in the literature review will be used to help explain certain experiences, but this chapter will also highlight emerging themes which are linked to complex experiences of prejudice and discrimination, along with participants' experiences of eluding these issues. I discuss participants' experiences in relation to my own in order to shed light on my interpretations of their interpretation of their experiences, an essential part of the double hermeneutic of IPA (Chan & Boyd Farmer, 2017). This chapter serves to reinforce the claims of bisexual people who experience prejudice and discrimination and add to the empirical evidence which documents these forms of binegativity, especially given the pervasive denial of bisexuality and prejudice against it (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014), and also that certain overtures proclaim the declining significance of binegativity in the lives of bisexual men (Ripley et al., 2011; Anderson & McCormack, 2016). I also intend, in this chapter, to document the variety of forms that prejudice and discrimination against bi+ men and their partners takes, how they are experienced and

interpreted by the participants, and how this relates to the understanding of binegativity in academic literature. In this chapter I will begin by discussing participants interpretations of their experiences of homophobia, then I will discuss their experiences of binegativity and the myriad forms that this takes for the participants.

Homophobia

The binegative experiences of the participants often had its roots in homophobia. As Monro (2015) points out, it is the same-gendered desire/behaviour of bisexual people which is stigmatised, not 'heterosexual' desire (although we will see later that, in certain contexts, this can also be the case for bisexual people). Due to the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2007), many bi+ men are understood as gay, and targeted as such for homophobic abuse. The most extreme example found was Alex's experience of "having stones thrown at [him] a couple of times" when in Manchester (notable for Canal Street – the centre of the city's gay village). Alex had also experienced people shouting homophobic slurs at him in the street multiple times in different unspecified places. These events remind one that, as Connell (198⁷ pp. 297–298) states, "Physical or economic violence backs up a dominant cultural pattern (for example beating up 'perverts'). […] The connection between hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal violence is close, though not simple." The dominant pattern here being homophobia. Alex and his partner Ellie recall a time when they were confronted with homophobia in the street:

> Ellie (E): You actually have had that [people shouting homophobic things] from skipping [*i.e*. hopping from one foot to the other]
>
> Alex (A): Oh, yeah! That's true. I forgot about that. [laughs]
>
> E: -and you were holding hands with me, so.
>
> A: Yeah [laughs]
>
> […]

> E: Yeah I feel like you- yeah definitely like just walking down the street with you, even like, holding your hand I've like, heard you getting heckled, like, quite a few times now, and like I don't really get bothered that much.
>
> A: Really? Oh.
>
> E: Yeah. But like from France I'm like used to being heckled in the street like almost on a daily basis as a woman.

There was, seemingly paradoxically, a lot of laughter from myself and the participants when this incident was brought up. To a queer audience, this incident was absurd. It is notable that the verbal abuse was described as 'heckling', a term usually reserved for audience interruptions to stand-up comedy routines, perhaps highlighting the performativity not only of Alex skipping whilst holding Ellie's hand, but of the homophobic utterances themselves. The outwardly heterosexual act of a man and woman holding hands was not enough to protect Alex from public homophobic abuse, and clearly recalled the everyday sexism that Ellie had experienced as a woman in France. This recalled to me Connell's (2020) notion of hegemonic masculinity as an identity that must be defended at all times, and harkened back to my aim of examining through this research the discourses that govern the acceptable conduct of men in Britain today (see the conclusion of chapter 2); it seemed to me that Alex's experiences involved attempts by other men (I am assuming these heckles came from men, but the participants do not make this clear) to reify their own masculinity by queering and thus subordinating another man's masculinity. As Connell & Messerschmidt (2005, p. 839) argue, gender is made though homophobic speech and harassment of this kind that is inflicted here. Skipping was a violation of hegemonic masculinity in this case and was the act that demarcated Alex's masculinity as subordinate and was resultantly othered. Ellie mentions that, despite holding hands, she bore witness to Alex being subject to homophobic heckling on multiple occasions, highlighting that Alex is often read by homophobes not as straight but as queer, not as Ellie's boyfriend, but as a gay companion (it is unclear and in my opinion doubtful that Alex is read by the anonymous hecklers as a bi man). This complicates the notion that

bi men are invisible in different-gendered couplings. If Alex's queerness is visible to those bigoted against it, then he is not safe from bigotry even in what might outwardly appear as a straight coupling. If Alex exhibits behaviour that strays too far from hegemonic masculinity, he is disqualified from masculinity altogether and ridiculed. This is similar to the notion that I put forward called bisexual camouflage (Lawton, 2020), which holds that bisexual invisibility is sometimes strategic because it imperfectly cloaks one from discrimination. However, I call this camouflage because it is imperfect, as was the case with Alex, whose gendered display did not match his apparent gender, and thus was subject to violence. What this incident shows is that homophobia both plays a part in the lives of bisexual men (and their partners), and that it is still not erased from the public sphere in Britain today.

Homophobia and place. Incidents of homophobia were often tied to place. Isaac and Johny, a non-monogamous couple, discussed safety in public places in the context of homophobia:

> Johny (J): I think we're quite lucky to live in Brighton. [Inaudible] It's quite a relaxed place to live. If you wanted to sort of walk around with your arm around someone of the same sex as you, I would feel more comfortable doing that here than I would in a lot of other places. We don't do much of that anyway really.
>
> Isaac (I): I mean-
>
> J: You're scared of being attacked.
>
> I: I am. […] I don't necessarily agree. […] 'Cause we *have* been shouted at – once, in Brighton. In Kemptown.
>
> J: Have we?
>
> I: Yeah. And-
>
> J: I think they were mental and shouting at everyone though.
>
> I: Yeah, but they were shouting homophobic shit. Don't you remember?
>
> J: When was that?

> I: That was like the first year that we were together. We were walking along by the beach. […] I'm very wary of PDA [public displays of affection] with another man. […] Just because I… I am scared. Of getting attacked.

Their contrasting views and memory of the incident are framed very separately in this excerpt. Johny was surprised to recall the incident, a minor issue for him and one he writes off as undirected towards them. Isaac then corrects him, stating that it was a targeted homophobic attack. Isaac is fearful of being attacked in what some call the gay capital of Britain (*London Evening Standard*, 2004). These two excepts highlight that despite a place's ostensibly gay-friendly reputation (Manchester and Brighton), participants had still experienced homophobic incidents there. To hear a young bisexual man state that he is fearful and self-restricting in the type of affection he shows for another man is disturbing, especially in the city that I grew up in that always felt like a haven for queer folk. Isaac and Johny's contrasting experiences of the same event can be explained through an intersectional lens. Johny is older and identifies as bisexual/homosexual; Isaac is Jewish and identifies as bisexual/queer. These differential axes of identity and oppression might illuminate Isaac's heightened fear of being attacked in this instance, possessing multiple identities that are marginalised (being Jewish and queer) could be the reason that Isaac fears attacks. What both Isaac and Johny as well as Alex and Ellie's experiences show us is that men are willing to engage in open acts of homophobic aggression, which can only serve to underline the perpetrators' sense of masculinity which views gayness as a threat. Sergei (24–year-old bisexual man) hypothesises that religion must be the cause of people's hatred towards the LGBTQ community in terms of the area he lives:

> Sergei: I think it's religion. A lot of people 'round here are religious; there's a mosque just down the road.
>
> Sacha: Big church too.
>
> Sergei: I think it all stems from religion. […] I was never religious, I wasn't baptised or anything like that. […] when I was in high school I skipped a

> Friday and went to a wedding in Wales and I saw one of the teachers there […] and she was there with her girlfriend. And it was, it wasn't even a thought, and the first thing I said to her was 'aren't you supposed to be at school?' she said the same to me.
>
> Sacha: [laughs]
>
> Sergei: She was just walking with her girlfriend, and that was, that was it. […] my family are also very... they vote UKIP if they can. They're not accepting people. […] They're just prejudiced. And that was never taught into me, so I feel it's got to be religion.

Here Sergei compares the generational divide in the difference in attitudes between himself and his parents. He starts off by talking about the fact that, given that they live in an area with a highly religious population, the people of that area are less likely to be accepting of LGBTQ folk. He goes on to discuss the fact that his parents presumed religious upbringing is the cause of their animosity towards LGBTQ folk. There are clear links between religion, age and politics when he discusses his parents drastically different views; Sergei connects their political support for the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), their presumed religious upbringing and implicitly their age with their prejudiced views against LGBTQ people. Again, as in Sergei's previous discussion of his workplace, he downplays the bigotry expressed by others as not a serious expression of hatred but as more simplistic prejudice. He explains that as his upbringing was completely irreligious, therefore he was not instructed to be prejudiced against LGBTQ people. This conversational turn reflects Sergei attempting to connect the vague feeling of a place as being homophobic/anti-LGBTQ with his own personal experience. He sees no other explanation for why people would be prejudiced against LGBTQ people, and places religion as a central cause. There is an implicit assumption that a homophobic place might a place with a religious population. Brighton and Manchester are not thought to be places with large religious populations, but are perceived as more tolerant, despite the participants' own experiences with intolerance there. The persons who carried out these public acts of bigotry, these 'calls to order' as Bourdieu (1977, p. 14–15) describes them, were notably unknown to the participants.

They were as anonymous as any other passer-by. The experiences described further will deal with different kind of social relations – relations that are more intimate, more knowing and if characterised by prejudice and discrimination, often more illuminating about how others view bisexuality.

When describing their sexuality in terms of the place of nationality or cultural identity was an axis that showed some distinctions: Scotland, England and Wales (the three nations wherein participants originated) possess distinct cultures, and rural-urban distinctions were apparent within the data related to local communities and cultures to which some felt alienated, and some felt welcomed. Place was often a proxy for whiteness, particularly when describing where people grew up. Multiculturalism (or lack thereof) was often noted when describing hometowns or places hostile to LGBTQ folks: for example, Wasp described their hometown as 'conservative' and Owen made similar remarks when discussing a negative experience related to his sexual identity being disclosed to a local community. Owen, a white bisexual man, discussed his experiences as in a previous relationship with a woman (whom he had been for several years whose family lived a rural Welsh village, who, in a petty act of post-break up revenge outed him to the entire local community there when she found out he was bisexual on discovering his current partner's online description of Owen as a bisexual man in a blog post. The tightness of the social order here and the homogeneity of the people and their beliefs in these kind of local places were emphasised by the participants. Relative cultural friendliness/hostility towards LGBTQ people was discussed and compared within and outwith the UK: Scottish cities such as Edinburgh being viewed as relatively LGBTQ friendly compared with England generally, or Jack's comparison of growing up in England but finding a sense of liberation as a queer-identified bisexual man when living in Canada. Foreign soil was fertile for Jack's development of his sexual identity much in the same way that other participants described university (exclusively positively).

Positive higher education contrasted heavily with school experiences, the latter of which were often characterised by homophobic bullying (if not directed at the participants then witnessed and reinforced second-hand) and ostracism. This demonstrates the importance of sexual identities being constructed proximately far from one's home, but also that such experiences of sexual

freedom or freedom to explore and reflect upon one's sexuality in an open social setting such as university was a privilege usually afforded by social class – although education level was not outright asked as a demographic question, rather it was gleaned through conversation so as not to presume a certain life course trajectory. Markedly, very few participants discussed being open about their bisexuality or pansexuality at school: their sexuality usually emerged as a sexual identity thereafter and therefore did not exist in a concrete social identity. Walter marked the end of his school years by individually coming out to everyone one-by-one at a party celebrating the end of Higher exams, and therefore the completion of secondary education, surely indicating a break with the potentially hostile/homophobic social environment of school.

Institutional homophobia. Institutional homophobia was also discussed, mainly within workplace settings. Whilst no outright institutional homophobia was reported by participants, some did discuss the subtleties of negotiating organisations as a bi person. Sergei, a 24–year-old bisexual man discussed his experience in a small community-driven business:

> Sasha [partner of Sergei]: 'Cause you are in quite a small office as well, there's no HR department. […] You *are* HR.
>
> Sergei: I usually am. We've had a few clients recently that've come […] we've got a new couple, a Mrs and Mrs partnership. […] I feel like if they went to our main person at the top, he's in his sixties. I don't know how he's react to having a sit-down meeting with them. And even the guy that's 30, I don't know how he'd sit down and have a meeting with them without treating them differently. So I don't know if I'm gonna end up doing that meeting. Because I know I'd be a lot more sensitive to something like that.
>
> Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. So there is kind of homophobic attitudes within your work?
>
> Sergei: I can't tell. Well in our line of work, if that happens it could be the end of the place. Because that's the kind of thing that doesn't go well in a community-driven business.
>
> Interviewer: No, no. But you feel like there might be?

Sergei: It could be […]

Sergei's discussion highlights that within a small organisation, it can be difficult to tell whether your colleagues are inclusive of LGBTQ issues or not. There is a certain ambivalence on the issues that is telling in terms of a lack of outright inclusion, and a general lack of sensitivity. The issue for the firm that Sergei works for would be damage to the company's reputation in terms of clientele, for employees this is a very different story. Sergei later elaborates that his bosses are more likely to be racist – which they quickly qualify to mean racially insensitive – than homophobic *per se*. The description of the quality of discrimination within Sergei's work as insensitivity rather than 'actual' racism/homophobia is a kind of downplaying of these attitudes. This experience is similar to a participant who identifies as agender, pansexual and bisexual. They are a manager at a large organisation, and were discussing the interview process as someone who hires others:

Participant (P): So I think along those lines and have to adjust it, there's be other people who wouldn't think about it and would just would have a bit of judgement. And I understand that some people see it as not only a bit wrong but as a mortal sin. […] if you've got a panel of fairly conservative, y'know, Christian or Muslim people, their natural view is 'that person is doing something immoral and wrong'. A lot of the people can overcome that and judge it fairly. But there's always gonna be that element.

Interviewer: Yeah. So have you, have you personally encountered anyone at the [organisation] who is like, um, that you've noticed is like quite discriminating against LGBT people?

P: Not at the [organisation], no. I haven't experienced anything at the [organisation]. I mean I know from speaking to other people that other people have. I mean I've seen other people act in a, y'know, a gender-biased way at times. But not in a, not in a sort of homophobic or biphobic way.

The participant's empathetic understanding of others here shines through, there are clear intersections between religious identity, professional identity and sexuality. Particularly, the participant highlights the tension that often exists between the rights of LGBTQ people and the beliefs of those following Abrahamic religions. There is also the issue of institutional sexism here which the participant connects to the question of 'conservative' interview panels. It's disheartening that the participant sees these issues as enduring and inevitable - "There's always gonna be that element". Whilst their experience has been discrimination free, they highlight that they know LGBT discrimination is present at their institution; whilst identifying as agender, the participant's otherwise privileged position of being white and appearing outwardly as a man (the participant states that they "typically follow male norms") may account for them not facing discrimination at their workplace, particularly given the comparatively negative experiences of women and other LGBTQ colleagues at his organisation.

The same participant had been in the army and also faced institutional homophobia there, perhaps the most extreme example of such a context that there is within all the data. They had enlisted at a time when it was illegal for gays and lesbians to serve in the British army[3]. They talked about having to hide their sexuality whilst in the army:

> It was difficult, I think it's that constant having to watch what you say, so I almost got caught out one time when someone was dropped the question randomly if I've ever done anything with guys. And there was a couple of people around and […] I almost got caught out then.

The experience of constantly having to be on your guard is tiring. This quote illustrates that despite the hugely repressive atmosphere, conversations about sexuality would happen, maybe as a way to call out other's masculinities as being subordinate. The participant goes on to contrast their experience with a gay man's experience:

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[3] Lesbians and gays have been allowed to openly serve in the British Army since 2000.

> I mean it was easier being bi, because I know from speaking to [a] friend of mine, because he was gay, his whole life was being hidden. So he couldn't even be honest, at least I could be honest about half of my life. […] I could talk about the women I was dating and whatever and I could date women, it was just one half of it was being repressed.

The participant connects life, sexuality and truth in this quote. Being unable to live in a free and honest way is unimaginably cruel, the enforced closeting of his gay colleague must have been impossible to live with and psychologically highly damaging. The participant later elaborated that this person had subsequently met "the love of his life" and was living happily together with him. In comparing his experiences with a gay man, we can see that bisexuality is sometimes a relatively privileged position in this homophobic context of this total institution (Goffman, 1961).

What this section shows is that homophobia was something that the bisexual men who were interviewed (and in some case their partners) had to deal with, in terms of their everyday lives (i.e. walking down the street; Alex & Ellie, Isaac & Johny), in terms of the places that people inhabited (Sergei & Sacha; Wasp; Owen), and the institutions that they had to navigate (the Agender Participant; Sergei). It seemed that bisexual men here did not benefit from the supposed decline homophobia that Anderson & McCormack (2016) argue is taking place in Britain, and the incidents taking place in supposedly gay-friendly metropoles only serves to challenge this narrative. Identity categories were important, faith was often linked with prejudices and biases against LGBTQ people, place was often tied to religion or politics, and age was often shown as a something that demarcated or predicted homophobic prejudice. There was also a deep ambivalence over the seriousness of homophobia when it was exhibited by colleagues from Sergei, which contrasted with the incidents faced by Isaac, Johny, Alex and Ellie. Overall, this section shows that homophobia is still an element in the lives of bisexual men in Britain today.

Binegativity

Despite the typology being laid out in the literature review which separates out different strands of binegativity in to respective components, participants' realities were rarely so discrete. The messy experiences of binegativity showed that many issues often overlapped for participants. They are laid out discretely here to partially reflect the structure of the literature review's typology of binegativity that was developed, however, it should be noted that many of the patterns of prejudice were multiple and overlapping: for example, Walter's experience which demonstrates both monosexism and some of the problems with bi invisibility.

Monosexism

Bi+ people are often understood from a monosexist position, meaning that their sexuality is understood within binary framework, either as straight or gay, by people who only experience sexual attraction to one gender. Therefore, Butler's (2007) concept of the heterosexual matrix is helpful for understanding monosexism. Walter, a 23–year-old bisexual man, discussed his experience as being read as gay when he worked in a gay bar: "…the thing with being bi is that most people just assume that you're gay or straight. Like that doesn't really bother me because I don't really care what other people say as long as *I* know." [his emphasis]. Walter disregards any assumptions that others make, implicitly or explicitly about his sexuality. As long as he is confident in his own sexuality, that's all that matters. This concreteness about his own identity affords him a resilience which allows him to weather monosexist assumptions. Context is also telling here, working in a gay bar made others presume he was gay, which seems a fair assumption to make, but this assumption betrays that such spaces are viewed as homogenous and are exclusively for gay people, rather than LGBTQ spaces. If these spaces were more diverse, these assumptions may not be so apparent. Walter's experience clearly echo Toft & Yip's (2018, p. 234) definition of monosexism as operating on and perpetuating the hegemony of the hetero/homo dichotomy, as his experience was being perceived either as straight or gay, and not as bi. Similarly, Magic discusses the fact that, because he is in a relationship with another man his friends "don't see it as being bi". He elaborates:

> I remember one of them said – I don't know if it was a joke or a comment about being gay, and I said 'well, I'm bi.' and they were like 'oh yeah, yeah' as if like 'oh yeah like okay I suppose that's the same thing if you want it to be or whatever'. […] But if I then started dating a girl, I don't know if they'd necessarily then see me as straight? I think that thing, maybe it's just the evidence, like 'oh you've been with a guy and a girl, you must be bi'. (Magic, 22–year-old bisexual man)

Firstly, this quote demonstrates that socially bisexuality is understood by his friends as synonymous with gayness and falsely equivocated as such. Secondly, Magic's hypothesising about the burden of proof for being bisexual leads him to suggest that he would also have to start dating a woman in order to 'evidence' his bisexuality and belies a monosexual logic. As Obrados-Campos (2011) notes, the idea that bisexuality is rooted in sexual binarism and calls for a selection of both male and female reaffirms a monosexual logic. This also posits that bisexuality either should be 'evidenced' as a pattern of variance between two binary gendered attractions over time, or having two partners of each gender, although Toft & Yip (2018) argue that this latter configuration is incompatible with the logic of monsexism, which also emphasises compulsory monogamy, especially in its idea of oneness – one partner, one gender. I remember having similar experiences in university, where my friends would often remark that I was gay, despite the fact for some of the years that they had known me, I had been in a relationship with a woman – the only relationship they had known me to have.

Double Discrimination

Many participants discussed discrimination they had faced from other sexual minority communities. Many of these experiences also involved monosexism. Magic, a 22–year-old bisexual man, states that "I've often said to [Sphen, his partner] that like, ehm, it's funny, even in the LGBT community I think that a lot of people who are gay or lesbian also don't see it […] I don't think it's a straight issue." Magic's experience highlights that prejudice and discrimination against bisexuality is not limited to straight people, the broader LGBT community is complicit in the erasure of bisexuality. LGBT's use as a

byword for lesbian and gay people is noteworthy here. Almost all the binegativity discussed in the interviews came from gay men, there was no data about the reactions of lesbians to bisexuals, although previous literature has shown binegative attitudes to exist within lesbian communities (e.g. Hemmings, 2013; Welzer-Lang, 2008). The aforementioned agender participant contrasted their experiences of serving in the army with discrimination from the gay community, stating that they were “surprised” by it, and “I think that made me suspicious of sharing my identity too much with people.” They went on to discuss an encounter they had had:

> One particular gay guy was very much of the opinion that bi people didn't exist. They were either straight men that were just greedy and couldn't get a shag elsewhere, or gay men that weren't confident enough to actually come out. And were still half in the closet. Which to me seems completely […] 'cause you're not gunna come out totally so therefore you're gunna be attacked by the straight and the gay community. I think most people are okay but, I didn't know many gay people at the time and it put me off a bit. (Agender participant, 42).

This recollected experience is one riddled with stereotypes regarding bi men: ‘greedy’, ‘unattractive’, ‘semi-closeted’, which chimes with Klesse’s (2011) examination of cultural representations of bisexuality. Such representations were similarly characterised by insatiability. There is also evidence of bierasure in the statements of the man who the participant was conversing with, an epistemic injustice denying the existence of bisexuality. It also highlights the gendered understanding of bisexuality, the man was clearly doubtful of the existence of bi men specifically. Whilst the participant takes apart the logic of the man’s argument, they also state the definite impact that these words had on them, ironically, encouraging them to be more closeted. The participants experiences are similar to the findings of McLean (2008), who found that despite their mixed feelings about the gay and lesbian communities bisexual people often participated in them, and some were often closeted as bi in those spaces, preferring to simply have others assume they held a similar sexual identity. Although this participant doesn’t state that this interaction took necessarily took place in a community context, we can maybe assume that they were not forthcoming about their bisexual identity and also had a complex experience of

the gay community from this interaction. What this interaction serves to highlight are the sometimes pervasive anti-bisexual attitudes which are candidly expressed by some gay men.

Elliot, a 28-year-old man, discusses a specific context where he feared exclusion from gay men. Elliot was part of an 'inclusive' rugby team. He discusses their attitudes to him dating as a bisexual man:

> And just like, yeah, just kind of -I just think they'd find it weird if say I turned up and I was like going on a date with a woman. […] or talking about fancying a woman, […] they'd be like 'What? Go away'. like, 'you're not part of our crew anymore.' […] Um, well they say weird like uh, what's the word? Body part-specific stuff. […] just cis assumptions basically, […] as well. I mean, they're lovely, but they are also biphobic. (Elliot, 28-year-old man)

This final sentence surely embodies the ambivalence that many bisexual people feel about their relationship with gay communities, echoing McLean's (2008) participants experiences. Elliot elaborated on this further:

> Interviewer (I): Have any of them been explicitly biphobic towards you? Or do you just imagine that they would be, like, knowing them well?
>
> Elliott (E): Oh, well just in conversations in which they are biphobic. […] well quite often I'm like 'I'm literally bi, and I'm sitting right here' and they're like '*Yeah*… but' y'know…'
>
> I: Again, there's that erasure.
>
> E: Yeah. And because I have a boyfriend, and go to gay dancing nights and make out with lots of boys, and in that space there's not the place to make out with girls or femme people. So they then are like 'Yeah, but you're functionally gay', basically.

These two quotes illustrate the erasure faced by bi men in gay spaces. Elliot's teammates understand his sexuality as 'functionally gay' because he has one male partner, demonstrating the myopia of monosexism that people experience when their sexuality is looked upon by others: only seeing the immediate present and never the longer-term pattern of attraction/sexual behaviour that extends into the past, seeing only the contemporary performance of sexuality. Elliot effectively censors himself both in terms of desire and discourse when in those spaces. At the gay dancing nights, he elaborates that it's a masculine-only space, with no room for feminine subjects of desire. Much like the agender participant's experience of limiting discussion or acknowledgement of aspects of their sexuality being talked about whilst they were in the army, Elliot limits what kind of sexual attractions/experiences he talks about with his teammates. He fears being caught out and excluded, despite the fact that his teammates know that he is bi. It demonstrates that his teammates do not believe that he is bi even if they know he describes himself as such, to them he remains functionally gay as long as he is in a relationship with a man. His in-group status is compromised if he chooses a to partner with a woman in future, possibly losing his friendships in the process. Weier's (2020) research is relevant here as it reveals the extent to which gay spaces, such as Elliott's team, are built upon a sexual binary. Elliot's teammates assertion that he is 'functionally' gay and Elliot's reticence to discuss his different-gendered desire betray a space which is firmly binary in its demarcation as a gay space, their instance on his sexuality being gay also reinforces this. It also highlights to the extent to which such a space is gendered as a 'masculine' space, which is further reinforced by Elliot's discomfort at their cisnormativity. This episode goes to show that such gay spaces are heavily reliant on both sexual binarism (gay/straight) and the gender binary.

Swingers are a less examined sexual subculture with binegative elements. The 42–year-old agender participant is a swinger, and discusses their experiences of being a bi man in this context and the changing dynamics of this:

> So I think mostly a lot of it seemed for a long time to be most or a significant number of women would play with other women. Almost all

> men wouldn't play with other men. But I've noticed an increase in the number of men who will. And I think, whether that's an increase in the number or whether some clubs, it's becoming more acceptable for men to play with other men. And not feel like they have to hide it in private rooms. So you often have sort of more public rooms, you'll have a couples' room, and you'll have private rooms where you can just shut the door. But I think for a long time it wouldn't be something you'd raise. So even on, there's a site called Fab Swingers, which for a lot of people is more like Facebook for swingers, you swap your profile name when you're at clubs. But people do also meet other people through it. And you know occasionally you get comments about, you know, 'we won't meet bi men', I think it's not a big problem. I mean I heard one joke which I thought was […] partly a joke but also said with feeling y'know because two women - who were obviously bisexual at some level- were playing around and they made some joke to the guy about, y'know, a man might play with you. […] But he said quite loud 'If there's any bi men in 'ere they get punched in the face!'. I thought that's not the sort of thing you should say when there are about eight couples in there. So, I think there's a small level of anti-bi feeling, but I think that's more historical. I think society's changing. I'd notice now that even in normal nights you might get a bit of playing around. There's the club local to us, I mean it's not a big thing, [on a particular date], they'll have a bi night. But I think it's that thing, they're starting it up, if they can get enough people going on what is usually a very quiet night it's worth doing. So I think that's probably helping the bi community.

This shows that things are beginning to improve for bisexual men within swinging communities, and that perhaps within this space, the sexual binary is beginning to erode (Weier, 2020). This quote paints the swinging community as (perhaps historically being) very male-dominated in terms of the types of sexual acts which were on display; very much for the male gaze, but contemporaneously there is a liberalisation of attitudes to male-male desire and sexual activity within this context. This may be an increased emphasis on individual sexual freedom rather than on collective heterocentric male desire. Sexual acts

between men are resultantly more common and less frowned upon. The participant's experience is a rare example of bi men being picked upon specifically as a target of prejudice and discrimination, in that particular case. Even if it was said in jest, there is an ambiguity to the man's threat that still has the function of excluding bisexual men specifically from the space, despite the participant's later reflections that these spaces were becoming more inclusive. This ambiguity is also highlighted in Weier's (2020, p. 1318) empirical findings, with a participant similarly being unable to decipher if something was said seriously or not: 'I don't know if they're being serious or if they're joking, but it happened.' This underscores that despite this ambiguousness to the language, the effect was still exclusionary, just as in the participant's experience.

Attention Seeking

One emergent theme was bisexuality being perceived as attention seeking behaviour, particularly among the female partners of bisexual men. A few participants talked about their experiences as young people in school. The participants were or knew about openly bisexual people. This openness was often labelled as 'attention seeking', sometimes by participants themselves. Hannah, a 23–year-old bisexual woman describes the internalised biphobia of thinking her own bisexuality as attention seeking: "during high school I felt that that wasn't the right thing to be wanting, or it was just like a silly idea or something… I was doing for attention, so I had a bit of self-loathing about it." Similarly, Ellie, a 25–year-old bisexual genderqueer woman, states that she was "afraid of was that people just thought that I was getting with girls for attention or something. But I think that people just thought that I was getting with people in general for attention". The charge of attention seeking was highly gendered, levelled only at female participants. Mike, a 30–year-old bisexual man discusses how his bisexuality was coded as attention seeking in different contexts. Firstly, he talks about how his bisexuality was read pre-transition:

> So, yeah I've dated a lot of people who just, who did think it was just put o for attention or whatever because they viewed me as a girl- so, bi girls just do that to get attention from straight men, right. (Mike, 30 year old bisexual man).

He then discusses how his bisexuality was medicalised:

> … you know when you're younger and being perceived as female... If you mention being bi to medical professionals – that's an attention-seeking personality disorder, instantly. Instantly. Attention-seeking personality disorder. But ones that are treating you as a man- and being 30 now is a big one – they're like 'Oh, well, that's, that's a real thing and we should respect it definitely.' and they have to drop all this bullshit that they put on you before because it's totally different. It's a totally different world.

The injustices that Mike has faced here, both generally and from medical professionals highlight the highly gendered understandings that people have about bisexuality – women's bisexuality is taken less seriously, written off as a sexual performance for the male gaze. Hayfield (2021) highlights that women's bisexuality is largely perceived as a sexual performance for the enticement of men. Alarie & Gaudet (2013, p. 199) claim that the belief that girls engage in bisexual practices to get men's attention is common, and highlight how 'contrary to male bisexuality, female bisexuality is thought of by many of our participants as a strategy for a girl to reaffirm her heterosexuality' because it is seen as seeking the sexual attention of men. In a medical context, bisexuality when coupled with trans identity is medicalised as a personality disorder. It was only once professionals had accepted his identity as a man that Mike was understood as a bisexual, when previously his sexuality was dismissed.

Bisexual Invisibility and Erasure

Erasure and invisibility are one of the most common social problems facing bi+ people. Bisexual people in relationships often have their bisexuality rendered invisible as people give credence only to what the relationship appears to them as, be this a gay, lesbian, or straight-appearing relationship. Owen, a 36–year-old bisexual man discusses his experiences in queer settings. For context, he was first talking about how it's easier for bi people in different

gendered couplings to negotiate public spaces. He then discusses how he negotiates queer spaces:

> It's great then when we go to these queer spaces and you can see them [other queer people], and have to not worry about that. But then it inverts on us, because even when we were at […] Pride Cymru a few weeks back and a friend of a friend […] who knows us and knows [Owen's partner] better than me, when they were leaving they were like 'Oh, okay, bye, um, later all you queers, and also Owen'. I was like 'What d'you mean?' he was like 'Well you're a straight man aren't you?' I was like 'Nooo'. And that was really weird then because that was the first time that someone -even though there's guna be people I work with and people that I know probably assume, that was the first time that someone had said to me 'Oh no, you are a straight person.' I was like 'Oh!' y'know actually I'm quite taken aback by that. And that was within like an acceptable queer space, so that definitely feeds into how we behave and how we present, and it's really, really interesting because there is a marked difference between what we do when we're in a space like pride to what we do when we're in a space like a restaurant. (Owen, 36–year-old bisexual man).

The fear of being read as straight limits Owen and his partner's full range of expressions towards each other in queer spaces. Owen notes that even within queer spaces there is a certain level of bierasure. The relative safety of invisibility as a bi person is very limiting within queer spaces, constraining the couple's self-expression of their relationship. Being invisible as a bisexual person meant that in a queer setting, because they were wrongly visible as a straight couple, they felt it was inappropriate or offensive to behave as they normally would as a couple.. The specific setting also harkens back to other research which shows the tenuous and often difficultly negotiated experience that Pride events can be fore bisexual people. McLean's (2008) study opens with a record of the difficulties that bisexual people faced when having to justify their participation at Sydney Lesbian & Gay Mardi Gras. The strained relationship that bisexual people have to Pride events is not isolated (Barker et al., 2012; Hemmings, 2002; Weiss, 2004) Pride events are often quite alienating for bisexual partnerships who appear to be straight because of bi invisibility. Terry,

a bisexual man who is in a relationship with a heterosexual woman discusses this alienation:

> Interviewer (I): …how would you say that your bisexuality impacts your current relationship?
>
> Terry (T): Not massively apart from like if I go to events such as Pride and stuff like that. Because we present as a straight couple. […] I just don't feel as comfortable going to things like that, 'cause I don't feel as much that I fit into that kind of group and I don't fully – my sexuality isn't at the forefront of my identity really.
>
> I: […] so you would go to Pride events but you would feel, that because of your current relationship being […] ostensibly a heterosexual one, at least on the surface, that you wouldn't feel as comfortable being at those events.
>
> T: Yeah, because you'd have to ask about my sexuality in order to find that out.

Terry highlights the issue of invisibility here all too well. He feels that one would have to get to know the couple before presuming their sexuality which appears to be straight. The advantage to monosexual couples is that there is an instantaneous recognition of who they are, whereas partnerships featuring bisexual people are rendered invisible in what might be otherwise construed as a straight/gay/lesbian coupling. Terry feels alienated from broader LGBTQ spaces, and this may have something to do with being read as straight producing the experience where he holds himself outside of being queer. If pride events are viewed as events which only celebrate same-gendered sexuality, then this excludes bisexual people. This echoes Weier's (2020) thesis that gay spaces are spaces constructed on a sexual binary. Both Terry and Owen's experiences lend credence to this idea: their bisexuality is rendered invisible by the pervasive sexual binary that is upheld in such spaces.

Stereotypes

Many participants mentioned bisexual stereotypes coming to bear on their experiences. One participant (agender, 42 years old) mentioned historic attitudes which constructed bisexual men as vectors of HIV/AIDS:

> -in the eighties there were some mention of bi men, but mostly because they were the ones who spread AIDS around. The people who'd caused all sorts of disease with/were straight people. But it wasn't sort of an accepted identity, so I never even thought of it as a term.

This was discussed as the only context the participant had heard of male bisexuality prior to engaging in any kind of informal education about/within the LGBTQ communities. The spectre of HIV/AIDs still leaves its mark on perceptions of bisexual men, particularly fuelled by negative media linkage of bisexuality to AIDS (Miller, 2001). The same participant discusses his anxiety about coming out as bisexual because of his dual identity as both a swinger and a bisexual man:

> If people knew I was bi and a swinger that would feed almost the negative implications the negative beliefs about bisexual people. That all of them […] will sleep with anyone, you can't trust them in a relationship, they'll cheat on their partner, they need to sleep with other people. […] just because I'm bi doesn't mean it's true. Some bi people are in monogamous relationships, and I felt like because the bi community was trying to counteract that image for a long time, I felt like I shouldn't be openly bi because I was feeding the negative stereotypes. And then someone explained to me, they understood why I believed that and they said 'no, the negative stereotype is that *all* bi people are like that.' […] it's about diversity. Just like not all straight people are in monogamous relationships, not all of them are swingers. So I think it was nice to hear that different perspective but I think perhaps now with far more programmes about bisexuality, far more programmes about swingers, it's becoming more mainstream -the knowledge about it. (Agender participant, 42 years old)

This passage shows the dilemma faced about being open about being bi and what that means as a representative of a community and an identity which is stigmatised against. This is initially quite inhibiting, they feel they cannot be open as a swinger because this will feed into negative stereotypes about bisexuality, but then they come to realise through a conversation that the bisexual community is diverse and what stereotypes actually mean in this context – that a certain people are all a certain way. Whether this is a change in the individual's perception of the bi community or a sea change from different approaches which embrace more radical diversity within its community is unclear. This demonstrates how difficult bisexual stereotypes are to negotiate for people who fall outside of monogamous norms or have alternative sexual practices – not wanting to reaffirm these stereotypes, but simultaneously simply trying to live authentically whilst enjoying chosen sexual practices.

Bisexual men as unfaithful partners was a common stereotype that was discussed. Hannah (a 23–year-old bisexual woman) mentions that she, because of a previous relationship had some anxieties around cheating, but also "it was like a not very nice fear to have to admit to because it's such a big stereotype". Similarly to the agender participant, there is a tension between lived experience and stereotypes, adding to the psychological distress of her anxieties. Trying to negotiate stereotypes was a difficult psychological, as well as political, thing to do. In terms of stereotypes about bisexual women, the assumption of infidelity operated on a much more dangerous level than for men. Kitty, a bisexual woman, discusses how stereotypes operated in a previous relationship:

> Um, yeah, so like, a little while after I came out, um, I dated this guy that was a lot older than me and he sort of reacted in that sort of stereotypical way that you hear about sometimes? Like, you know about um, bisexual women being at higher rates of domestic violence and stuff? Because there's a stereotype about cheating or what have you. He definitely reacted in that way, he started getting um like a bit controlling? (Kitty, bisexual woman)

This demonstrates the very real threat that faces bisexual women because of harmful stereotypes about bisexuals. She links the statistic of bisexual women being at higher rates of domestic abuse with her own experiences of a

controlling ex-partner. This statistic, that bisexual women are more likely to have experienced partner abuse than other sexual minority women, comes from a range of studies that show bisexual women in particular as at risk from intimate partner violence. The most widely publicised (North, 2013; Shearing, 2018) is the American government's Centre for Disease Prevention and Control's (CDC) (Walters, Chen & Breidling, 2013, p. 2) finding that bisexual women had a higher lifetime prevalence of experiencing rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner compared with heterosexual women and lesbians. Despite this report's study of US populations, similar findings have been recorded in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2018). Kitty's experience is a microcosm of the broader trend evident in the reports, harmful stereotypes coming to bear on bisexual women's safety.

Terry, a 25–year-old bisexual man, discussed some of the stereotypes that clouded his mother's understanding of his sexuality once he had come out, and how these had endured:

Interviewer (I): …Have you come across any stereotypes to do with being bisexual?

> Terry : Some, yeah, some present in my own family, some […] socially. […] my mother would, she's like accepting of […] when I was younger she asked me a couple of years ago if I was gay. And told me that it would be okay if I was, and I said that I wasn't because I wasn't gay. But that wasn't really the whole conversation, because I, I knew I was interested in like men, and another sex or gender. […] I didn't feel at the time ready to talk about it. When I got older and in my late teens I was talking to her about my sexuality, and told her I was bisexual and she was like 'Ah, okay. Yeah, that's cool.' but then talked about it as being a kind of transition phase, either to being like fully gay or being fully straight. As in, it was just […] an experiment […] when that's not how it was at all. Then over time that developed to her being like 'Oh, okay. Yeah, yeah you still say you're bisexual.' but there's some misunderstanding […] my mum recently spoke to be about um, being bisexual, she said 'Are you still bisexual?' and I asked her what she meant, and she was like 'Ah, well you're with your

> girlfriend.' And that was kind of an insinuation […] because I'm now with a woman, I'm no longer attracted to men. Or that because I'm still attracted to men then I can't be in a monogamous relationship.
>
> I: Do you think that's what the insinuation was then? That you can't be monogamous?
>
> T: Yeah… Well, no, rather than not being monogamous, more just a misunderstanding about how my attraction to other people works, like if I'm with someone then I immediately don't find something else attractive, or any of this attraction is there it doesn't mean that I must act on it.

The stereotypes discussed here are those which construct bisexuality as a transitory or experimental phase. This is a common trope which constructs bisexuality as a temporary developmental phase (Hayfield, 2021, p. 47), denying a true or concrete bisexual identity, and was also common to be deployed against Hayfield's (2021) participants, although it seems to be more a case of misunderstanding than maliciousness in Terry's mother's case. There is also the issue of misunderstanding attraction, which goes beyond stereotypes and speaks more to Terry's mother's limited monosexual experience, assuming that attraction to other genders is extinguished once in a relationship with a person of a particular gender. This also feeds in to the 'only have eyes for you' myth of romantic relationships, that, once in a relationship, you only find your partner attractive. This narrative is also linked to the concept of compulsory monogamy (Mint, 2009; Toft & Yip, 2018), which comes to bear on bisexuals especially given the popular conflation of bisexuality and nonmonogamy. Bisexuality is incorrectly assumed to demand nonmonogamy, which runs counter to hegemonic discourses on romantic love as a relationship between two people that endures for a lifetime. By conflating bisexuality with nonmonogamy, not only is bisexuality misunderstood, it is positioned counter to this romantic ideal. This renders bisexual people as incapable of monogamy and therefore unsuitable, undesirable partners,

Another feature of conversation was, seemingly paradoxically, the *lack* of stereotypes about bisexual people, and the difficulties that this lead to being

understood as a bisexual person. Sphen (19–year-old bisexual man) discusses his mother's reaction to him coming out:

> So my mum, keeps saying, it would have been easier if I was more camp as a child, because she could've prepared herself for it. She keeps saying this came completely out of the blue, and that's why she struggled with it a lot initially. 'Cause there was no kind of like... I wasn't 'acting bi' or anything before…
>
> (Sphen, 19–year-old bisexual man)

This highlights the difficulties people face from a lack of being able to be understood as bi, because no one understand what bi *looks* like, or how it is performed. Following from Butler's (2007) supposition that what is intelligible (*i.e.* what we can understand), we can accept, it seems that the lack of general understanding of what bisexuality is or how it is performed caused Sphen's mother to not be able to comprehend, and thus accept her son's sexual identity. Terry, a 25–year-old bisexual man, compared stereotypes of gay men and bisexual men:

> Terry (T): And there are you know stereotypical characteristics of especially men who are not heterosexual about being flamboyant or very […] open about their sexuality? Especially in terms of homosexual men, but for bisexual men I don't really see that as much, I dunno, I don't really see that as my identity.
>
> Interviewer: Yeah there's not really a stereotype for bisexual men is there? Of like, how you're meant to behave really.
>
> T: Yeah, yeah.

This again highlights the lack of understandings of what bisexuality is or should be like, and how that can be confusing to people coming to bisexuality as an identity. Overall, these experiences illustrate how stereotypes of bisexual man

are either invisible or negative, with no positive stereotypes mentioned by participants. Moreover, I have attempted to show how stereotypes must be negotiated, in terms of how partners deal with stereotypes (as in Hannah's case), but also how bisexual men themselves must negotiate negative stereotypes without reaffirming them can be difficult in the face of the binarism that stereotypes create: having to perform 'good' bisexuality which falls within the charmed circle of sexuality (Rubin, 1984). It is clear that stereotypes function to restrict bisexual existence, and pose a social obstacle which must be negotiated alongside homophobia, and other forms of binegativity, but which is distinct from it.

Conclusion

These experiences serve to highlight the messy, entangled, overlapping forms of oppression that bi+ people face. It was difficult to discuss monosexism, invisibility and erasure particularly given the interlinked nature of these issues and how they all come to bear on bisexual experiences. For example, in discussing the lack of stereotypes about bisexuality, as presence in Terry and Sphen's experiences, this also highlighted the invisibility of bisexuality. Space was also another aspect that was often highlighted in this chapter, the spaces and places people inhabited gave a distinct dimension to their experiences of prejudice and discrimination. From issues of safety to the problems of exclusion, the feeling of a place, event or institution was a feature mentioned often in the interviews. In particular, the ways that queer spaces were constructed as spaces that reaffirmed the homo/hetero binary (Weier, 2020) made for alienating experiences for bi people, as was evidenced in Elliot's and Owen's experiences. Gender is one prominent axis that highlighted the differential experiences of participants. Oppressions were often burdened in distinct ways depending on gender. Despite focussing mostly on bisexual men, bi+ women's experiences were discussed, highlighting the ways in which bisexuality is differentially viewed between genders. Trans participants experiences were particularly revealing, as some participants had experienced being read as both a bisexual man and a bisexual woman, and the issues each representation faced. In any

case, bisexuality was framed frivolously in women by others, whereas men's bisexuality was taken more seriously, but with more distain.

My interpretations of all participants' experiences are tentative, I acknowledge that I am not the arbiter of meaning and am working from the position of a double hermeneutic, interpreting their interpretations of experience. I am taking a view that no experience is 'pure' or unadulterated by interpretation, but hope that my interpretation does not overshadow participants'. The prioritisation of their remembrances as they understand them must come first, and that I believe is the job of the analyst. On a personal note, some of the experiences discussed in this chapter were difficult to analyse because of their emotionality. I found much of their experiences with prejudice and discrimination egregious, and reflecting on them was not an easy task. However, I hope that my experience of participants recollections serves to highlight their struggle for recognition and striving for a better existence.

Chapter 6: Findings: Relationships

This chapter looks at the different types of relationships that participants maintain, mainly focussing on relationships with intimate partners and family members, how these two social spheres interact with each other and with the bi+ participants themselves. The question of relationships and how bisexuality affects them is one of sociological and phenomenological importance. For the participants, relationships were a primary site of identity formation, while their identities flourished in present romantic relationships, their bisexual and pansexual identities were sometimes challenged in previous romantic relationships and currently in relationships with their family. Relationships with intimate partners formed a phenomenological space all its own, co-constructed with their partner. Relationships were a place of self-realisation, of identity conflict, and often complex emotions. The research question being addressed in this chapter is: how does bisexuality impact people's relationships? This question will serve to answer the ways in which sexuality is influenced through different relationships. Sexual and romantic relationships are a major site where sexuality happens, where it is realised and lived.

Table 4

Superordinate and Subordinate Themes Related to Relationships

Relationships		
Families and Intimate Partners: Negotiating Heteronormativity & Partner Choice	Families and Ex-Partners: The Burden of Education	Intimate partner relationships: The positive influence of bisexuality on partnerships.
		Non monogamous bisexual partnerships

The chapter discusses three major themes (outlined in Table 4): the burden of educating others about one's sexuality, the positivity that comes with having a partner with a similar sexual identity, and participants negotiation of heteronormativity including how this affects their partner choices. These themes are explored in-depth, contrasting with the previous chapter's covering of a broader breadth of experiences of prejudice and its myriad forms. A subordinate theme of bisexuality and non-monogamy is explored at the end of this chapter, which has a different aim than the stated research question. This theme is subordinately related to the theme about the positivity of bisexual people's intimate relationships with their partners (see Table 4), as consensual non-

monogamous relationships were discussed with the similar positivity and advantage that relationships with other bisexual people were. This theme was included to shed light on and to counter binegative assumptions about non-monogamy and bisexuality, politically demonstrating the lived experiences of some participants who live their lives in radically alternative ways, challenging discourses that monogamy is the only possible and achievable form of relationship.

Families and Intimate Partners: Negotiating Heteronormativity and Partner Choice

The types of partners that participants chose was an interesting question to explore, and was aligned with the research question of how bisexuality impacts people's relationships, particularly in the face of heteronormativity. On the surface, bisexual people have a lot of freedom in choosing a partner, but this choice is still made under heteronormativity, a force that privileges heterosexuality. I asked Terry whether he thought his partner choice (choosing to partner with a woman and not a person with a non-binary or male gender) was shaped by the pressure of social acceptance, and he was uncertain:

> Interviewer (I): ...d'you think the fact that you're not out to them [extended family, grandparents] impacts the kind of partners that you are comfortable having long term? Or do you think that you just tend to be more attracted to women?
>
> Terry (T): I dunno, it might unconsciously or subconsciously have an influence. But […] it hasn't ever felt like a direct influence of: 'Oh, I don't feel comfortable doing that because of their views, or not being out to them'. It's more just from the areas that I've worked in and my social life, I haven't really come into contact with as many- I come into contact with a lot of heterosexual identifying women or women who identify as homosexual. I think eight to 11 percent of my workforce are male. [Terry is a nurse]
>
> I: Yeah, you just simply don't come across as many men basically.

T: Yeah, and then in my social life, because I'm in a relationship, the people that I meet are, well, are we talking about not being in a relationship?

I: Yeah.

T: I think it's probably maybe I don't share the same interests as some men who may be interested in me. Or because they or I'd be interested in them, maybe I don't go to the same places. As I said I'm not really into the LGBT community. So I wouldn't really meet people through that unless it was a direct conversation.

I: It's just something I've been trying to cogitate over and think about really. You wonder, just in your own life, you wonder […] 'cause I'm not out to my extended family. You know, I'm not out to my grandparents or anything but they're still, I'd say a significant part of my life, and I would definitely want my partner to meet them.

T: Yeah

I: You wonder whether things kind of become a self-fulfilling prophecy of like 'well, if I was in a relationship with this person this would have to happen' [coming out] that would significantly alter certain relationships. So, you wonder whether it becomes this cycle. I dunno what you think about that.

T: Yeah. But I get what you're saying -I think there might be some level of that in terms of just thinking about it but I've never actively thought about that before.

Terry posits that he tends to form relationships with women essentially because they are the social group that he has most contact with, and that he doesn't choose male partners because he doesn't see himself as similar to other bisexual and gay men, so he frames his attraction and partner choice more opportunistically than he does affectively. Terry's explanations essentially chime with psychological explanations based on theories that proximity and similarity increase liking, and lead to relationships (Duck, 1998). My question to him was

whether the normative expectations of his family cause him to choose normative (different-gendered) partners. He has no definite answer for this and is sceptical if this is an active choice, positing that there maybe some unconscious decision, admitting that it's never something that he's considered. Typical narratives of love do not often frame falling in love as a rational choice, quite the counter. 'Love is blind' and cupid's arrow being aimless are common narratives of love. We describe love not as an active choice we make, but something we're stricken by, hence *falling* in love. However, the cultural logic of late capitalism, or liquid modernity as Bauman (2000) puts it, perverts love into a rational choice made by rational actors. Relationships take on the same language as finance: we invest in relationships, we gamble in leaving one relationship and starting another one from scratch, weighing up costs and benefits. Normativity, on some level, must shape partner choice, if not actual partner choice then perhaps the amount we invest in certain relationships that fall outside of heteronormativity, relationships that bisexual people know may have consequences to them, such as coming out or facing binegativity. As Bauman (2003, p. 55–56) states, 'there is always the possibility of blaming a mistaken choice, rather than an inability to live up to opportunities it offered, for the failure of the anticipated bliss to materialize. There is always a chance to abandon the road along which fulfilment was sought and to start again – even if the prospects look attractive, from scratch.' Heteronormativity certainly shapes social expectations by families of the kind of partner they expect their relations to have, regardless of how liberal or conservative members of that family are. Alex's describes his parents as liberal and accepting, but at the same time denying bisexuality's existence and placing heteronormative assumptions on his relationships centred around reproducing the heterosexual family:

> Alex (A): My family don't believe it exists, but they are quite accepting.
>
> Interviewer (I): Right, yeah.
>
> A: They wouldn't say it to my face. So my mum just tends to be like 'Oh yes, if you wanna be bisexual whatever, do what you want' and then would say to my sister 'Oh, but obviously it's not a real thing'. And everything like that. It's [*sic*] definitely stems a lot more from ignorance

than it does from kind of malice like they wouldn't hate somebody for identifying in that way they'd just refuse to accept it as something because they can't understand it themselves I suppose. It's frustrating I think, a lot of people have it worse I suppose. In that sort of a situation.

I: How do you think it would be if you were gay instead, would they, would that be an identity that they would kind of recognise and accept? Or would they treat it the same way do you think?

A: I think they'd recognise and accept it on a surface level. To be honest, I think they would struggle with it, I'm mainly talking about my mum here to be honest. My dad, I think he's towards the same sort of plane, but I think if I was gay he'd be like 'Okay. That's fine.' I think for my mum, I think it just kind of, she wants the kind of the picture that she has of the family that's coming next and everything like that. I remember she said to me once 'Okay if you want to be bi, you can be bi, but make sure the last one's a girl 'cause I want grandkids'. So I think if I was gay as much as she'd know that she has to accept it and as much as she like, her value, it would kind of coincide with her values of being as accepting as she can of people in the way that she is? I think she would be quite upset about it and like not very happy about it.

I: Because that meant like no grandchildren basically?

A: Yeah, that meant no grandchildren, that means that she wouldn't have that son that's brought this girl home and they're having a wedding, and they're getting married.

I: It just doesn't fit that narrative.

A: Exactly. Yeah. It feels limiting but at the same time I think I've done a good job of being like 'I'm sorry, but that narrative isn't necessarily what's going to happen there.' And I think a big help with that is my sister who she's straight but she's also very against the idea of kind of marriage as an institution and everything like that. So, she already knows that my sister's never gonna have that sort of typical family sort of a thing. So at least I'm not the primary focus. [laughs]

There are many expectations which burden Alex's bisexual existence here, the most salient being the expectation that he will have a family of his own, which Oswald et al. (2005) rightly categorise as a heteronormative expectation, particularly a 'normal' family with a mother and father at the centre. It's clear that his mother views a same-gendered relationship as a threat to her own desires to have grandchildren, which are unfounded, as two men have the same rights to be parents as a man and a woman, but she worries about this possibility of an unfulfilled expectation, of things not going to plan, as a nonconformity to a heteronormative sexual script (Gagnon & Simon, 1974). Here we see Alex's bisexuality as rupturing the normative life course. Alex is expected to choose a partner which guarantees he will follow an expected life route, a route which reproduces heteronormativity. It is important to understand that heteronormativity can be reproduced even in partnerships where both people are bisexual, as 'ending up' in a different-gendered couple with kids is a kind of reproduction of this norm. We can therefore see how heteronormativity is not reliant on people's sexual orientation, additionally through Alex's sister's rejection of having children. Alex's parents are described as accepting, but what do they really accept about Alex's sexuality other than it being a personal choice? They are hesitant to accept the implications that his sexuality might bring to bear upon their normative expectations of their son's life. Bisexuality here, in many ways represents a tension in the reproduction of heteronormativity, because bisexuality is essentially unresolved and unresolvable in the minds of others. Alex might have kids, he might not, he might choose to partner with a man, he might not. His mother constructs a narrative end point, a false resolution to this tension – ending up with a woman, having children, as if this is a last act he will ever perform in his romantic and sexual life, as if nothing else happens after that in one's life. This in turn is a reproduction of the heteronormative expectation that marriage is for life.

Partner choice is something that participants talk about in a way that harks back to the concept of sexual scripts (Gagnon and Simon, 1974): if people know what to expect from a partner there is little risk in choosing that partnership. Parents often have their own scripts which function as expectations about what they think their child's life will be like. Magic and Sphen, two bisexual men who are in a monogamous relationship, went off-script by choosing

a same-gendered partnership, to the dismay of Sphen's mother who was clearly unprepared for such a diversion from normativity:

> So my mum, keeps saying, it would have been easier if I was like, more camp as a child, because she could've prepared herself for it. She keeps saying this came completely out of the blue, and that's why she struggled with it a lot initially. 'Cause there was no kind of like... I wasn't 'acting bi' or anything before I'd... (Sphen, 19–year-old bisexual man).

The dramaturgical element is even more apparent in this quote – Sphen's mother was blindsided because of the lack of any queer performance from him. This also shows how, acting outside of stereotypes and tropes about how queer people should behave removes a lot of intelligibility from their sexuality. Overall, the way that partner choice is shaped by heteronormative expectations in parents is complex and represents two colliding social spheres, that of the intimate and the familial. As we have seen, there is enormous pressure on the participants here to conform to the most heteronormative version of their sexuality in their life course. In Alex's case, this was the expectation of being in a 'heterosexual' partnership, and therefore being able to start a family. As Klesse (2011, p. 236) notes and Alex's mother's disbelief about bisexuality reveals:

> the assumption that a bi identity cannot be more than a transitory phase or a temporary aberration often nurtures the hope among friends and kin with a more heteronormative mindset that the person in question will finally come to their senses and connect with their 'true' heterosexual desire.

This shows that heteronormative expectations are not simply shaped by ideas about the reproduction of the heterosexual family, but also rest on the ephemerality of bisexuality. Freedom was limited by normative expectations; whilst these choices may be made defiantly in the face of certain heteronormative expectations, these expectations are reinforced cumulatively, almost like a microaggression (Sarno & Wright, 2013; Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014), a small comment when viewed on its own is unexceptional, but the cumulative effect of such comments which reinforce a heteronormative discourse about how relationships should be, is one which is frustrating and alienating to live under. This related back to Alex's experience with his mother

wishing that he ‘ends up with a girl’ in order to have a family, something that seems impossible to do in a same-gender relationship according to his mother. We can see how these heteronormative expectations of wanting bi+ people to ‘end up’ in a ‘heterosexual’ relationship might undermine support that parents give to relationships which fall outside heteronormativity, which may be as subtle as not taking the relationship as seriously, or as overt as actively trying to undermine the relationship, although there was no evidence of this in the data I analysed.

Perhaps the definitive example of how heteronormative expectations influence partner choice is explained by Jack in his account. Jack, a 27–year old bisexual/queer man, discusses how his parents’ faith limits his ability to come out to them as bisexual, as well as colouring the relationship more generally with them, and unconsciously limiting his partner choices to suit their heteronormative expectations:

> Interviewer (I): …you mentioned that your parents’ faith has an impact on you coming out to them. Is that the chief reason or are there other reasons?
>
> J: That would be the primary reason. In so far as the faith is linked to the homophobia. Which it mostly is.
>
> I: Yeah. What's that like for you?
>
> J: […] I think had it in mind that I would- eventually any sort of relationship I had that was relevant to the family would be with a woman, and it would be fine, and that would be cool. And so I was pretty chill about it, and then I've increasingly become aware of the extent that it has had an impact on my relationship with my parents because I had become very – well to some extent I've always been quite acclimatised to keeping secrets from them. And this became a kind of a nucleus for like lots of other secrets, and before you know it, you're actually keeping a lot of things from your parents. And it's not as if like I'm estranged from my parents, I'm in regular contact […] I have what you would call a normal, easily imaginable relationship with one's parents, but with all this stuff

> that's just not shared. So I am very aware that actually I had this very kind of shadow of a relationship with them, and that actually felt very difficult once I became aware of that. […] I came to realise that I had made choices in my life based on the need to not be out to my parents, for example, my decision to pursue a relationship with a woman was linked to that, and I became aware that had actually been a limiting thing on me, and been, in a sense, a choice not made with full freedom. And that has had an ongoing impact and it's something that I'm kind of working through. It's something that I'm working through with my girlfriend, and it's […] more damaging than I'd appreciated.

Jack's transition in his way of thinking about his bisexuality from irrelevance to importance mirrors a cumulative build-up of secrecy around his parents. The journey from thinking that coming out doesn't matter to the realisation that this hasn't just affected his relationship with his parents, but his ability to pursue relationships which are not heteronormative. This is a theme that recurs throughout participants experiences: the deprioritisation of partnerships that fall outside heteronormativity. It can also be a form of self-censorship which pervades the experience of bisexual identity when the person is not out as bisexual, which leads to negative consequences for the individual (Monro, 2015, p. 59). It is the internalisation of binegativity to the point where it limits the relationships that one pursues, placing limits on one's own freedom because of the social constraints of others. Jack's account echoes the older cohort in Anderson & McCormack's (2016) study, who chose to prioritise relationships with women over men. However, there is a difference as Jack would be counted as a member of the younger cohort in their study, and therefore be considered an outlier, throwing in to question the narrative interpretation of that study's data.

The possibility, not for happiness, because every relationship relayed here was ostensibly a happy one, but of an authenticity of decision making, being able to be true to oneself is the source of conflict here. Jack realises that the choices he's made have been influenced by something extrinsic to him, be that societal heteronormativity, or the homophobia of his Christian family. There is a sense of dread in Jack's account that the choices he has made are not a free as

he initially believed, and that this has been damaging, to his relationships and to himself. To realise that we are not as free in our decisions as we imagine we are is a realisation that Jack comes to starkly, but one from which he clearly wants to grow from, citing the reparatory process he is going through with himself and his partner. The structure of the Christian family is imposing itself upon Jack's experience. Jack clearly relates homophobia and Christianity here. The political choice, as Jack puts it, is to break his silence and come out, is bridge that he is considering crossing, even if it means the possibility of damaging his relationship with his parents. Jack's choice here seems to be as much an ethical choice as it is a political one, a cessation of a cycle which perpetuates the silence within the family with regards to sexualities that fall outside of heteronormativity. To come out would be to challenge his families homophobic views which he regards as wrong (the ethical) and also to be recognised as a queer person more broadly in his life, being more authentic with his self-representation (the political). As such, coming out for Jack would challenge the heteronormativity of his family and would amount to both a personal and political act (Wang, 2007).

Familial relationships were complicated even further when a partnership was revealed to have other queer elements besides bisexuality/pansexuality within them. Or rather, to discuss that that individual was bi/pan, to come out, one would have to discuss to many of those other queer elements which were a part of their relationships with their intimate partner, often to family members with very heteronormative outlooks. This is most apparent in Tom and Cat's relationship. Tom is a 24–year-old man queer/pansexual man; Cat is a 29–year-old pansexual woman. Tom discusses his experience in telling his mother about his relationship with Cat, and resultantly his own sexuality:

> Tom (T): Another big thing that my mum focussed on is that fact that [Cat] is trans. So essentially my mum found out in one fell swoop that: One, [Cat] was polyamorous and married. Two, [Cat] was trans. And also then because my mum inferred from [Cat] being trans that I was therefore gay, and that was a thing! I had to explain to my mum: a) why being attracted to a trans woman doesn't automatically make me, as a man, gay. I also then had to explain that, coincidentally, I *am* also attracted to

> men, but that has nothing to do with my attraction to [Cat]! [laughs] So I had to come out in order to essentially explain that and to kind of put my mum on the right track, which she's still not really- she is 'loosely' accepting, but very much in the sense of she wishes me well, but she doesn't really like me talking about anything to do with me being pan[sexual] and [Cat] being trans. […] That was a *big* clusterfuck, to be honest! [laughs]

Interviewer (I): …why do you think that your mum's reaction was the way it was?

> T: I would say because she had always assumed that I was straight, my mum's whole life has been very heteronormative, in the sense that she's never had any friends, as far as I am aware of, who are openly not straight. And while I wouldn't necessarily say that my mum is malicious, but my mum is very much guilty of like casual homophobia. So all the way through my childhood, the fact that as a kid and as a teenager I never had even passing casual, pretend relationships or anything. But my mum always presumed that I would always find a girl who was right for me! And then when I finally get into a relationship with a woman, my mum's like 'Actually, no! The goalposts have moved. This isn't the 'right' kind of relationship!' So yeah, ignorance, I would say, is why and I have attempted to talk to my mum about stuff and educate her on stuff, and as I said, she's not malicious about any of it.

Tom's experience here sums up many themes which recur throughout this chapter; he comes into conflict with idealised, heteronormative expectations that his closest family has about how they believe his life should be lived. Heteronormativity and the family have overall been themes that resonate profoundly in this section – much of heteronormative expectation rested on the participant 'ending up' in a 'heterosexual relationship', usually from families and usually in order to reproduce families. Additionally, coming out is not a singular event here, but is a process; Tom describes attempting to educate his mother about these issues because she is ignorant of them. The queer elements are compounded leading to a deluge of issues that his mother knows nothing

about, but all of which are essential for her to understand his son's sexuality and his relationship. This is another recurring theme: the burden of education.

Families and Ex-Partners: The Burden of Education

Often, coming out as bisexual entailed not just opening up about one's sexuality to confidantes, but also the burden of educating people about what bisexuality means – what it is and what it's not, given the epistemic erasure of bisexuality relative to homosexuality (Yoshino, 1999). Terry describes the frustration he felt at having to educate his mother about bisexuality in order for her to understand his sexuality:

> Interviewer (I): …how does that make you feel really? When your being open with somebody and they are misunderstanding you. Was that difficult?
>
> Terry (T): It's frustrating. It's not too difficult 'cause my mother doesn't have distain for how I identify or have a negative opinion of it apart from misunderstanding about it, about how it works. So it just frustrates me in terms of having to explain it, or having to *repeatedly* explain it, different parts of it, rather than her being interested enough to look it up, or kind of try and find out more about it. It's more on me to be able to teach her about it. Which is, it makes sense at the end of the day because it's a non-within-the-norm sexual identity I s'pose.
>
> I: But you feel there's some kind of […] labour in having to educate her about what bisexuality is exactly, or what *your* bisexuality is.
>
> T: Yeah, I think there is, and it's something that I've avoided just because it seems like it's gonna be a bit of a difficult labour in terms of getting someone to understand in that way. I said earlier about my parents being very accepting and open to people who are homosexual, and people who are of nonbinary genders and things like that. But at the same time […] bisexuality hasn't been a topic.

The lack of knowledge about bisexuality that Terry's mother has access to makes coming out and talking about bisexuality all the more arduous a task. Terry clearly does not want to have to do the work of describing to her what bisexuality is and what it is not. The gaps in Terry's mother's understanding clearly lead to a less open relationship, for a son being less forthcoming to his mother about his sexuality, despite her liberal views. It is clear that Terry's mother's lack of understanding is rooted in a pervasive invisibility of knowledge about bisexuality: in this way it can be viewed as an epistemological problem (Yoshino, 1999). Many scholars have pointed to a lack of bisexual knowledge across areas of health (Heath, 2011), psychology (Barker & Langdridge, 2008) and sexuality research (Monro et al., 2017). However, Terry's mother's absence of knowledge about bisexuality is discursive rather than academic. The causes of a lack of popular discursive knowledge about bisexuality is cumulative, however, as bisexuality has been (sometime purposely) erased from LGBTQ political movements (San Francisco Human Rights Commission, 2011) and history (Weiss, 2004). Taken together with the erasure of knowledge about bisexuality, and with false stereotypes about bisexuals pervasive in the media (Barker & Langdridge, 2008), we can see the result in Terry's mum's ignorance of bisexuality.

Likewise, Tom, a 24–year-old queer pansexual man expresses his frustration, not at his mother's lack of understanding, but her refusal to change her heteronormative (which was his own characterisation of her) worldview:

> I have attempted to talk to my mum about stuff and educate her on stuff, and as I said, she's not malicious about any of it […] she just doesn't really get it? But also doesn't choose to try and educate herself or better herself. Which is actually one of the things I hate most about her? She is content in ignorance because she has her own world and she likes to stick to that.

This passivity, to not try to reach beyond one's worldview, to not actively pursue knowledge about alternative sexualities drives Tom's frustration. Tom has to be tolerant of his mother's lack of understanding in order to educate her, but this is difficult when she is perhaps wilfully ignorant, and he must weather her misunderstandings, but in doing so may suffer because of this, encouraging potentially prejudiced views. He states that he has attempted to talk to her

about these issues which affect her understanding, perhaps implying that this has been somewhat unsuccessful, and that if only she would take the initiative, she might learn about these things more successfully. More that simple ignorance of bisexuality as a result of bi erasure, Tom's mother's lack if understanding seems to be rooted in both heteronormativity, monosexism and cisnormativity – the latter because Tom's partner Cat is a trans woman. All three forces are rooted in binary thinking (Obrados-Campos, 2011), which is difficult to challenge (Schiwy, 2007) and which Tom's mother seems reluctant to embrace. This is not simply education on the facts of bisexuality, but a plea to reframe how one thinks about gender and sexuality altogether. It is clear that this burden of education colours Tom's relationship with his mum very markedly, even hatefully. The burden of education is a kind of emotional labour, a pedagogy of necessity which is carried out reluctantly and at the expense of deteriorating the relationship, despite this being an act which is attempting to foster better understanding. This therefore highlights the highly contradictory and paradoxical nature of this kind of emotional work.

The expectation that it is on the queer person to explain themselves rather than a person learning new things and perhaps expanding their worldview is damaging to social relationships, not just familial ones. The lack of opportunity to educate someone about bisexuality caused animosity from an ex-partner in Owen's case:

> She [ex-partner] found out [that he was bisexual], because my [current] partner also writes and creates a lot of personal zines. One of those she writes about her sexuality and she was writing about meeting me, so, meeting someone else who's bisexual, I don't know how but the content from that ended up being shared to my ex, who was like 'Oh my god, I can't believe you've been lying to me all these years about your sexuality' and was threatening to like -to out me to family and friends. […] I'm sure if we'd stayed together, in time there could have been more of a teaching exercise and more understanding but, there definitely wasn't.

In this case, Owen's previous relationship had been difficult, and having moved on to a different relationship, one which was open about bisexuality caused his previous partner to accuse him of lying about his sexuality, their previous relationship being undermined as a result. His ex-partner, he makes clear, comes from a small village in Wales and threatened to out him to that rural community. He regrets not being given the opportunity to educate his ex-partner about his sexuality, but the relationship ended before this opportunity arose. Owen's lack of education of his previous partner about his bisexuality caused huge animosity between them. This is not to say that any blame lies with Owen for not doing so, he has the right to not open up about his sexuality if he doesn't feel comfortable to do so. This passage demonstrates the importance of education, particularly informal education, about bisexuality (Batsleer, 2012), about generally understanding what it is, and the consequences of misunderstanding for bisexual people's experiences. It also highlights Owen's own views about education being a route out of binegativity, and that he views his ex's binegativity that was not inevitable but preventable. This is a position that Owen shares with other bi authors such as Elia (2010) who calls for comprehensive education about bisexuality in schools both within the curriculum and beyond it, arguing that this has beneficent effects beyond simply helping to . The area in which Owen lived was also an important factor to consider, such a tight-knit community where ostracism could end social life altogether for Owen, potentially damaging relationships with family and friends if he is outed. Misconceptions about bisexuality clearly impacts bisexual people's relationships negatively in Owen's experience.

Overall, this section has shown three things, that, firstly, knowledge about bisexuality being erased and invisibilized through practices has a cumulative effect of discursively erasing bisexuality from popular consciousness about sexuality in general. This lack of general understandings of bisexuality in comparison with lesbian and gay identities creates a double burden on bisexual people not only coming out but having to use their coming out as an educational moment to both dispel misconceptions of bisexuality perpetuated in harmful media and fill the gaps in knowledge from which bisexuality has been erased. Secondly, it has also been shown that bisexuality rests on a different set of assumptions to lesbian and gay identities beyond the sexual and gender binary

that is perpetuated by monosexism and cisnormativity, which shows why education about it is additionally necessary for those coming out. Finally, this section shows the importance of education for challenging binegativity and binary thinking, both of which are necessary for bisexuality to be properly understood.

Intimate Partner Relationships: The Positive Influence of Bisexuality on Partnerships.

Bisexuality was often a shared experience and identity in the partnerships that participants described. Almost all the bisexual men interviewed in this study had a partner who was also bisexual or a similar identity. Only one participant, Terry was in a relationship with a heterosexual person. This makes this one of the few studies which looks almost exclusively at bisexual-bisexual relationships: previous studies have looked at mixed orientation relationships, rather than same orientation ones in the context of bisexuality (Anderson & McCormack, 2016; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2016). When asked how participants viewed the impact of bisexuality on their current relationship, they overwhelmingly talked about positive influences. This positivity echoed Anderson & McCormack's (2016) findings on bisexual people's relationships: participants in their study reported increased personal acceptance of their sexuality from their partners. However, this was attributed not to the relationships themselves, but to the unique sampling strategy that the researchers employed (which I have already critiqued in Chapter 3). I was more interested in how these spaces created the conditions for positivity. Owen, a 36–year-old bisexual man, spoke about his own and his partner's shared bisexuality as orienting and situating within the broader LGBTQ community:

> I think it [bisexuality] definitely impacts it [their relationship] positively in terms of making us aware of who we are and where we are in the community. So, we're both activists within the LGBTQ field. So we'll go to Pride Cymru or go to Swansea pride. Well, we even went to Llanelli pride. It's positive in that sense because, I think we end up feeding off each

> other's energy a bit, because we both know we're in that community we can both have the conversations about things and they directly relate to us. So it's not, 'I'm supporting my partner in something that *she* wants to do and she's not supporting something *I* want to do'; it's both relevant to us. So it definitely helps increase our bond in terms of having a shared space and shared mentality in that sense. We're also quite close to a lot of our queer friends. I haven't really thought about it before. I was looking through your documents [I sent him copy of the interview schedule] and you ask that, but it's definitely been an overall positive experience. Because it helps bring us together. We've got a shared bond, but also it helps us because then outwardly you could just argue we're a straight-facing couple. So we're aware of that, in terms of privilege within the space. And I think that helps us and has definitely been – me more so than [partner] because she's been in it and aware of it in the community longer. But it's helped me to come to terms with it [bisexuality] more and also be more open about it and also makes us want to do more for the community.

This common grounding that Owen talks about helps him find a place within an LGBTQ community which is often difficult to navigate for bi+ folk. There is a real sense that he knows who he is more in terms of his bisexuality because of his partnership, and the access that his partnership gives him to LGBTQ spaces. Going from a previously bad relationship where he did not talk about his bisexuality with his partner to a more open and honest space within an intimate partnership and, beyond that, to a broader, supportive community of LGBTQ people, has been liberating for Owen. The mutual benefit each partner receives from these spaces is emphasised here, but more than this Owen discusses feeding off each other's energy, a shared invigorating force, going beyond intellectual understanding to experiential understanding when described in this way. In contrast to Hayfield et al. (2018), this identity work situated them within a community and of a shared stake in that community with their partner rather than as a defence mechanism against binegativity. The relationship was built as a positive space for identity and relationship development for positive reasons, rather than defensive ones, although no doubt this positivity helped

each partner to weather the storm of binegativity, Owen did not concpetualise the relationship in these terms. Also, their shared sexuality allows both of them to have a leading role when discussing LGBTQ issues in queer spaces: it is not simply supporting a partner in their identity, these discussion matter to both of them and they both feel they can have a seat at the table and a voice in these conversations. Anderson & McCormack (2016) only discussed the positive aspects of bisexual relationships in terms of increased personal acceptance, but their participants said nothing about enhanced interactions with a bisexual or LGBTQ community (as was in Owen's case), probably because none of their participants felt particularly close to a sexual community.

Other participants described a shared camaraderie with their partner in having a similar sexuality. Tom and Cat both identify as pansexual, and discuss what it means to have a shared sexual identity:

> Tom (T): For me, I think I find it reassuring, because in [Cat] I know that I have someone who can empathise with me in any difficulties I might have really, with my own sexuality. Obviously she's never really suppressed it in the same way that I have. If I'm correct?
>
> Cat: Yeah.
>
> T: That has helped a lot because she has helped me to accept myself a lot more. She's told me that my feelings of being an imposter around how my sexuality fluctuates really aren't – that's not how it is. That I am valid in how I feel about my own sexuality. So, for me it is enormously comforting, and I know that I can always talk to [Cat] about my sexuality, and that she'll understand on some level at least.

There is a solidarity in Cat's mutual understanding of Tom's sexuality, a solidarity with the hardships faced because of having a marginalised sexual identity. She understands his sexuality as being existing despite its fluidity, and has definitely aided him in accepting himself. Comfort is a word that resonates through this quote, particularly viewing partnerships as a shelter from a social world wrought with misunderstanding. Tom contrasts his former repression of his

sexuality with Cat's openness, and this demonstrates that when you find someone who holds a similar identity, they can open your eyes to different modes of experience, and give one the possibility of experiencing of your sexuality in an unfettered, freer way. This finding chimes more with the findings of Hayfield et al. (2018), as Tom's sexuality was affirmed by the relationship in spite of binegativity, however, rather than the relationship offering a defence from external binegativity, instead the relationship and his partner's experience offered a counterpoint to internalised binegativity (Sarno et al., 2020), or 'imposter syndrome' as Tom put it. Meeting people with similar identities but different experiences, regardless of whether they are potential partners, allows us to see how we might be able to live our lives in a different way. As with Owen's experience, partnership with a person of a similar sexual identity is a route to self-acceptance.

Alex and Ellie's experience expands on the previously described benefits and details all the ways that bisexuality positively impacts their lives together:

> Interviewer (I): What kind of impact would you say your bisexuality has on your relationship?
>
> Ellie (E): I think for me it's a really big plus […] I see it as potential for mutual understanding and closeness and shared experience. Which is pretty exciting.
>
> I: How about you [Alex:] how do you think it impacts your relationship?
>
> Alex (A): I think it's really good too. I think the ability to be able to see every perspective for both people in the same way is really nice. It's something I really enjoy in our relationship especially is the fact that we can kind of ogle over the same person. [laughs]
>
> E: That does like help a lot with like jealousy, if I think when both of us are just not very jealous people, and in any case don't want to indulge in it but it definitely helps as well. That we can just […] share the same attraction.

A: […] it really removes any sort of unknown muddiness. We both have the freedom and a complete lack of limitation, and we're both aware of each other's lack of limitation, and I think that's really, really good.

E: Yeah I think it definitely removes […] any fear of being misunderstood? Well I guess obviously you can still both […] identify as bisexual and maybe have like different experiences. But I think in this case I felt like we just seemed to experience bisexuality in quite similar ways. So that's really nice. I find that also in terms of gender expression, also a really liberating, positive thing: I can sometimes want to be pretty femme or pretty boyish. And knowing that I'm with a partner who will be really into either, honestly. And obviously that doesn't have to come with a bisexual partner but it's really nice, for example, I got my hair cut short for the first time, and it was so much more dykey than I thought it was gonna be. With my previous long term relationship it was with a guy, I maybe would've worried a little bit that maybe he wouldn't have liked it. And I sent pictures to [Alex] and he was so excited about it. I think just in terms of being able to borrow clothes from each other or both being interested in queer in different aspects of our relationship even in terms of gender dynamics and the way it can affect *many* areas of our lives. Even being able to talk about domestic labour […] it feels like there's more common ground to actually talk about that kind of stuff. I guess in terms of sexual experiences as well, there's more scope to play around and feel comfortable?

A: There is definitely, on the idea of gender expression. Being with somebody who's bisexual has really helped me kind of go down that and express myself much more in that way. Because I think something that affects every man regardless of kind of identity or sexuality or anything like that is like his sense of masculinity? And I think it just seems to help for me, I've questioned and challenged my previous sense of masculinity for a few years but I've not to this degree been able to overcome it and be able to express myself a lot more. Maybe it's just particularly [Ellie] being very open. But also it's what comes around of the community and culture of queerness and everything like that. I suppose I feel like I've been brought into quite a bit. It's very liberating.

The benefits Alex and Ellie describe here are as seemingly boundless as the freedom they feel having the shared experience of bisexuality in their relationship. Bisexuality breaks down many of the limitations for them that partners often encounter in relationships – jealousy, misunderstanding, feeling limited both personally and sexually. Jealousy is mitigated because the couple share in similar attractions, demolishing the heteronormative (fictive) notion that attractions should solely be directed towards one's partner at all times. They describe their shared attractions in highly affective ways – often as the same feeling that both of them possess. This shared experiential quality shows the breaking down of barriers between partners, allowing them to immediately experience things, not just in the same way, but as one entity almost. The finding that they 'check out other people together' is not unique to bisexual research within or outwith this study, Anderson & McCormack (2016) describe a similar finding from their own study, where one of their participants, Colin, describes checking out other guys with his wife (p. 142). This shows not only that partners accept the identarian aspect of their sexuality, but also share and revel in the affective aspects of it too. There is a true sense of liberty and joy that bisexuality brings to their relationship. The latter part of the quote demonstrates the liberation of each partner from gendered expectations of the other, allowing them a freer gendered experience. There is a queer deconstruction that Alex and Ellie live where we see a breakdown of norms and the joy that brings. This is maybe an idealised presentation of bisexuality, but it does demonstrate that there is a freedom in living in this alternative way – freedom from normative, masculine expectation within a relationship, sexual liberation, the deconstruction of gender roles, allowing each person to drift along the spectrum of gender without fear that this defies the other person's attraction. The couple even highlight that domestic labour is something which can be talked about more openly and arranged more equitably. They are careful not to ascribe every positive aspect to bisexuality however, and in many ways they are lucky to 'experience sexuality in the same way' or 'have a partner that is so open'. This exciting description of the potentials that bisexuality can offer relationships is at the very least a joyous, liberated record of two people's positive experience.

Alex and Ellie's discussion of shared attraction to others, and an openness about sexual desire for others outside the relationship isn't simply a fun facet of bisexual partnerships, it can be a way to dissolve jealousy and ultimately lead to a better mutual understanding. This was certainly the case with Tom and Cat's relationship, where their discussion of mutual attractions to others outside the relationship has fostered Tom's ability to be comfortable with his own attraction to men:

> Interviewer: …how would you say that pansexuality influences or impacts your relationship?
>
> Cat: I guess we can always talk about attractions to celebrities and stuff, on TV and stuff, and we don't really have to take into account -well, is that person attracted to that one or not? [laughs]
>
> Tom: Yeah, it's been discussing mutual attractions which has been interesting for me, because obviously in the wake of me and [Cat] getting together, I've also been more comfortable talking about being attracted to other men. And as I get more accustomed to that discussing our mutual attractions has been a really great vehicle for me to be more comfortable with that. Even down to things like, there's been times we've walked down the road and [Cat] has commented on an attractive builder, and I've just been able to say like 'Yeah! He is hot!'. [laughs] Like, it's things like that I've enjoyed as a way to actually vocalise my sexuality, rather than internalising this constantly, and expressing it.

The final part of this passage is highly illuminating. Sexual attraction is often thought of as something internal and personal, but in Tom's case the 'vocalisation' of his sexuality (i.e. talking about it), opening up his sexual identity in a dialogue with his partner, has been an enormous boon to his development and acceptance of his own sexuality, and something that is not a solemn rumination, but an active and enjoyable thing to do. Rather than bisexuality disappearing in relationship talk (Lahti, 2015), bisexuality was actually enacted in this relationship talk. Discussing sexual attractions with

partners transforms the process of self-discovery into something fun. Identity development, particularly sexual identity development is often constructed as a hero's journey where the protagonist must pass through conflict and crisis, trial and tribulation in order to learn and grow as a person, but this needn't be the case. Sometimes sexual identity development, learning to accept one's own sexual attractions, can be as fun as it is self-actualising. It's important to note that discussing sexual attraction to people other than one's partner was a feature of participants relationships almost universally in the people I spoke to. It was often brought up in a jokey context, but it does illuminate that this kind of talk has an important purpose and function in bisexual relationships.

More importantly, accounts such as Tom's which were common in the dataset, demonstrate that sexual identity development happened for the participants, not in the highly individualistic way that it is often conceptualised within the literature, as a monomyth or hero's journey that one person comes to alone in as a resolution to some inner conflict (e.g. Cass, 1979), but here we see the process as highly relational and social. The experiences I have described in this chapter clearly show that bisexuality as an identity is something that is articulated through social relationships with one's partner. Relationships here are sites of freedom through which, by varying articulations, performance, and experimentation, participants construct their bisexual selves in comfort and pleasure. Uniquely, the social construction of bisexuality as demonstrated in accounts such a Tom's were not constructed at the macrosocial level – often when we refer to the social construction of sexuality we refer to it at the level of the cultural or the linguistic (DeLamater and Hyde, 1998). Here we see a far more intimate and microsocial account of the construction of bisexual identity within romantic relationships. This highlights a more dialogic approach to identity construction that can lead to highly nuanced and unique understandings of one's sexual self. This account therefore has more in common with interactionist accounts of sexuality (e.g. Plummer, 1975). The account also goes beyond what has been recorded in the literature, Hayfield et al. (2018), Lahti (2015) and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2016) all describe complex and contested identity formation and uneven acceptance within relationships in their study. Even within Anderson & McCormack's study (2016), one that posits a decline in binegativity on a cultural level, caveated its findings about bisexuality with lingering bisexual

burden and heteronormativity in the older of their two cohorts. The findings of the present study were virtually universally positive about bisexual relationships. I think this is due to most of the participants being in relationships with other bisexual people. The advantage of this was that often, whilst participants could negotiate their bisexuality together (as in Alex and Ellie's and Magic & Sphen's case), usually one participant had a more established bisexual identity (usually a female partner in a male/female relationship) that established firm group for bisexual men to negotiate within the relationship (as was the case in Tom & Cat's relationship). Overall, relationships were sites of unbridled positivity for the participants.

Non-monogamous bisexual partnerships

Half of the participants who were interviewed were in non-monogamous relationships. This section is a brief reflection on experiences of non-monogamy as experienced by bisexual participants. This deviates slightly from the research question, but I feel that these records are important to include, especially given the demonization of bisexuals and non-monogamy in general that underpins binegativity. Additionally, some of the partnerships negotiated non-monogamous relationships as a result of one (or more) partner's bisexuality, as was the case for Xander & Kitty, for example. Xander came out as bisexual within his relationship to Kitty, a cisgender woman, and this had prompted discussions about his relationship needs and not being out in other relationships, and his lack of any relationship or sexual experiences with other men. This led to them opening up their relationship in order for Xander to experience same-sex relations, but it was only from within a relationship with another bisexual person that Xander felt comfortable exploring and actualising his bisexuality through a non-monogamous relationship, further highlighting the way that relationships can form sites of experimentation and flexibility for bisexual men like Xander. Demonstrating that bisexual people can engage in healthy and happy non-monogamous relationships is also an important step in the deconstruction of binegativity. My goal in this section is not to cherry pick the positive experiences of non-monogamy that participants have although; incidentally, participants did not relay any negative experiences they had had with non-monogamy. Many participants expressed that, whilst they were currently in a monogamous coupling or had been, their relationship was not closed in the traditional sense

of monogamy. Owen states that potentially opening up his relationship is something that he and his partner are considering:

> Interviewer (I): …and you've said that your relationship is 'monogamous for now'?
>
> Owen (O): Yep.
>
> I: So you foresee that you could open up your relationship? Is that something that you have talked about with your partner before? Or…?
>
> O: Yeah it's something we're discussing at the moment. Driven by my partner's bisexuality actually, so she feels a little bit like she- 'cause she came out late she's missed on some formative experiences and she's only had like three long-term relationships in her entire life so she wants to just open up the relationship, just for a short spell of time. Just 'cause she's very experiential driven. Because she hasn't done these things, she wants to do them while she can. So that's the conversations we're having, and taking things very slowly. So we don't identify as that label at the moment. Because it's not that accurate or appropriate. But it's something that could happen within the next year, but even if it does I don't see it as lasting a particularly long time.

This open ended 'monogamous for now' approach to relationships is one that characterised a few of the participants' relationships, an inactive or dormant non-monogamy demonstrates the freedom that participants were finding in exploring new ways of expressing their sexuality from a place of consent, communication and negotiation. I interpret Owen's relaying that his partner wants to 'do [non-monogamy] while she can' as demonstrating that she has found a relationship in which she feels her partner would support her opening up the relationship for a brief time. This may also relate to the passage of time, perhaps if they are considering starting a family, she may feel that non-monogamy is inappropriate once they have children. The short-term nature of the proposed opening of the relationship is also notable, as it is presumed that once Owen's partner has experienced what she has previously missed out on,

they will close the relationship again. It seems that sexual exploration, rather than experiencing different types of relationships, seems to be the experiential focus of the potential open window of their relationship, and one which is similar to Xander & Kitty's experience.

This optional non-monogamy is particularly pertinent for bisexual people, who may have, as is in Owen and his partner's experience, felt as though they have not been able to experience the full range of their own sexuality before entering into a partnership which has actually been fruitful in helping them to develop their sexual self-concept. This might appear as a kind of doubling-back, in that participants are seeking to catch up on something previously missed out on (as Owen puts it) but is better viewed as another ongoing development of their sexual personhood. This chimes with something Klesse (2007) points out, in that there is some research suggesting that identity problems are pronounced in the lives of bisexual people who do not engage in same-sex relationships (p. 78). Clearly, it was important for Owen's partner to explore her bisexual identity through pursuing same-sex relationships. However, as also emphasised by one of Klesse's (2007) participants, there was not the view in the participants who did open up their relationship, that this was necessary to 'qualify' one's bisexuality; indeed half of the participants I interviewed were in monogamous relationships, and of the participants who did engage in non-monogamous relationships, none of these viewed them as necessary for bisexuality in general, only that it was a relationship configuration that suited their particularly partnership and/or identity needs.

Xander, a 27–year-old bisexual man, describes his relationship with Kitty, a bisexual woman, as 'some sort of open relationship at the beginning. But I don't think it was ever actually acted upon' until he met a man who he began a relationship with later on into his relationship with Kitty. This demonstrates how relationships can be open from the outset but remain monogamous until a partner decided to act upon a prior understanding of the relationship as non-monogamous. Others were currently in open polyamorous relationships. Mike, a 30–year-old bisexual man, anecdotally tells that "most of the poly people that I know are bi, but I have found that a lot." He discusses his current polyamorous relationships:

> Mike (M): I mean, with my long-term relationship it's just really stable, we know everything about each other. And love each other completely. And it's just a really solid basis to have your life around, essentially. 'Cause we work so well like that. But then with other people it's more like, […] there's this sort of newer relationship, that guy I'm dating, there's no way I could live with him. Like, obviously I still love 'im completely. And I love going out together and doing stuff together. And being together, but oh my god no! [laughs] And it's nice to be able to have both. And to know that they are friends, and know each other. Like my partner's other boyfriend […] it's a long-distance thing, so most of the time they talk, on Discord or emailing and chatting, but they talk every day, and he comes to visit sometimes, and that's when they get to spend most of their time together. But he gets to have that relationship while also having a solid home relationship.
>
> Interviewer: It must make the long-distance easier.
>
> M: Yeah! And obviously I'm friends with him too, 'cause you end up really close friends as well 'cause you have to know everything about each other. 'Cause otherwise things can go really bad really fast. So, yeah, it's just nice. It works for us. That's all you can really ask for isn't it?

This is a very positive experience of polyamory, and runs counter to many discourses of polyamory as an unstable and chaotic relationship form. Mike has been in his long-term primary relationship for eight years. Mike's multiple relationships foster intimacy between all parties, not merely sexual intimacy but a clear bond of friendship. Mike uses words like 'solid' and 'stable' to describe his primary relationship, which seems to serve as an anchor for exploring his other relationships. These experiences, taken together counter binegative discourses which present bisexuals as untrustworthy partners prone to cheating (Klesse, 2011), and discourses on polyamory as difficult or even impossible to maintain (Haritaworn et al., 2006). By contrast, as especially summarised in Mike's quote, bisexual non-monogamies grant each partner a deeper

understanding, as well as fulfilling some experiential or identitarian deficit which can be enacted in non-monogamous relationships, as was the case with both Owen and his partner and Xannder and Kitty's relationship. Non-monogamous partnerships were important for bisexual people that were interviewed because they granted the freedom to explore and experiment with bisexuality, but also, that bisexuality afforded the flexibility by not limiting desire purely to one's partner in the first place, which may have more easily opened up the possibility for non-monogamy in the first place. Many partners earlier, such as Alex and Ellie commented on the lack of jealousy in bisexual relationships, which could have led to the increased possibility for nonexclusive relationships in some cases.

Conclusion

The three core themes that this chapter discusses show how participants' social relationships are impacted by bisexuality, in both positive and negative ways. Participants discussed the overwhelmingly positive impact they felt sharing a similar sexual identity had on their relationships. They discussed the difficulties in negotiating the often highly heteronormative expectations of parents, expectations settling down with an opposite sex partner and beginning a family, for example. They talked as well about the burden of having to educate their close social connections about what bisexuality was, alluding to a wider cultural misunderstanding about what bisexuality is and means. It was interesting that heteronormative expectations were experienced regardless of how outwardly 'liberal' parental figures seemed to be. There are undoubtedly negative aspects to bi+ people's relationships, however my participants only wished to share their positive experiences. These contrasted with the more complex picture that has been documented (Hayfield et al., 2018; Lahti, 2019; Pallotta-Charolli, 2016) even by Anderson & McCormack (2016), who found more cases of open disclosure of bisexuality in younger cohorts, which were often met with acceptance, the picture that emerges of romantic relationships here that emerges is a wholly positive one. This was true whether or not their partner was present at the interview, participants were equally forthcoming in solo and dual interviews. Relationships were often places of exploration and self-discovery for

participants, shared experiential spaces of joy and understanding, of solace and comfort. The bi and pan participants spoke here about learning more about their sexuality through their relationships, engaging with their identities and attractions through their partners and without monosexual restrictions. Their stories show how their sexual identities were developed dialogically within the phenomenologically safety of their intimate relationships. I think this positivity can be attributed to the fact that many partners were also bisexual, as even in Anderson & McCormack's (2016) study, which takes an overall positive tone about the social situation of bisexual men, there was still some evidence of remaining bisexual burden. This was not so in this study, and I attribute this difference to the similarity of participants to their partners, whereas in Anderson & McComack's study (2016) the bisexual men they interviewed tended to be partnered with people who were not bisexual. Although often participants faced challenges from family members with a limited/heteronormative understanding, and whilst these relationships were important, they were not framed as importantly as relationships with intimate partners, and having to educate parents and negotiate heteronormative attitudes did little to disrupt this cohort's sense of who they are. This then has implications for single bisexual people, who are often viewed unfavourably by both other sexual minorities and straights in terms of dating (Armstrong & Reissing, 2014; Gleeson, Vencill & Sprankle, 2018), as relationships with others (especially other bisexual people) were framed with such importance by the participants. Finding other bisexual partners may be difficult, given the lack of general visibility of bisexuality, and the increased likelihood that people will not telegraph their bisexuality in dating contexts because of the less-than-favourable attitudes that people (gay or straight) take to bisexual people, especially bisexual men (Gleeson et al., 2018). Given the importance of accepting relationships for bisexual men and their identities, it is clear that relationship discrimination against bisexual men doesn't simply deny the possibility of love to bisexual men, but of a chance to develop and have their identity and themselves accepted by others, which often enabled a sense of self acceptance (as was the case in Tom's experience). This chapter also demonstrates different social spheres colliding and how disruptive this can be to all parties involved. When bisexual individuals and/or their partners do not fit a heteronormative mould, then there is often conflict and

disappointment on all sides, both from families' lack of understanding, and from the burden that their bisexual members have to take on by explaining themselves, their sexuality, and sometimes the nature of their relationships or what transgender means. Overall, the research question of how bisexuality impacted relationships was a complex one to answer: positive in terms of intimate relationships providing a space for identity development and exploration (sometimes in nonmonogamous contexts), whereas family relationships were characterised by a burden of education and negotiated heteronormativity.

Chapter 7: Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that prejudice and discrimination remain a central feature of bisexual experience. This is despite prominent authors in the field claiming that homophobia and binegativity are waning forces in the lives of bisexual men (Ripley et al., 2011; Anderson & McCormack, 2016). Crucially, binegativity was experienced and understood differently from homophobia: another point that contrasts with Anderson & McCormack's (2016) research, with their claims of declining homophobia impacting the lives of bisexual men positively. There were still barriers to bisexual men being understood as bisexual in my study, notably from parents, who despite their values (liberal or conservative) often misunderstood bisexuality, and discursively enforced heteronormativity. This also placed a burden on the relationships participants had with their parents. This burden was exacerbated by parents who expressed hostile views about non-normative gender/sexuality, or who held antagonistic religious views in relation to homosexuality. I do not concur with Anderson & McCormack's (2016, p. 51) analysis that 'biphobia is particularly focussed on behaviours rather than identity': my study shows that what bisexual people struggle with are misconceptions which mean that they are unable to be recognised as who they are. Binegativity is fuelled by epistemic injustice (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014; Iacono, 2017) rather than by outright animosity, as so much of sexuality is conceptualised in binary terms. This was evidenced in spaces where a homo/heterosexual binary was presumed and reinforced. The instances of outright hostility that were experienced by the bi+ people in the sample were often anonymous instances of speech or violence in which the subjects were presumed to be gay rather than bisexual. This highlights the intersection of a misunderstood epistemology of bisexuality, which in hateful terms can only be understood as queerness (in the derogatory sense) coupled with animosity towards that queerness. In contrast, specific sexual prejudice faced by participants for being bisexual was highly personal. Participants described misunderstandings, misconstrual, derogatory comments (often rooted in stereotypes) and even in some cases verbal threats which were specific to bisexual men. This also emphasises the relative social acceptability of binegativity compared with the anonymous and public abuse of homophobic

comments experienced. People seemed unafraid of being outright biphobic, even to some bisexual people's face, even in close social proximity to them.

There is a distinction between implicit and explicit binegativity in the empirical data that can be drawn here. The implicit form of binegativity involves the denial or erasure of bisexual identity (e.g., where someone is presumed to be 'really' gay or that bisexuality is a transitionary phase). This was more apparent in discussions with participants families, or with lesbian and gay people. This form of binegativity is predicated on committing epistemic injustices against bisexuality, denying its existence. This is contrasted with the explicit binegativity which targets bisexual people because they are bisexual, and somewhat recognises bisexuality as a real phenomenon, but one which is dangerous or worth persecuting because it threatens heterosexuality or masculinity, as in the cases where violence was committed or threatened against the participants. This is much more aligned with homophobia, because it is the muddying of heterosexuality with elements of homosexuality, or the mere act of homosexuality which is demonised here, whereas with implicit binegativity is not dependent on discourses of homophobia, but is aligned more with monosexism or heteronormativity. Beneath one discourse is more fascistic denigration of the act of being with the same sex or with both sexes, whereas the implicit form relies on a discourse of binarism, where one is either straight or gay, and sexuality is not fluid. There is an element in both which treats sexuality and gender as static, and only one gender should be adhered to, but the insistence on heterosexuality as the only form of acceptable sexuality is present only in the explicit form. Whatever the shape, cause or form, binegativity has clear effects on bisexual people, their health and their psychological well-being.

Bisexual+ people represent a diverse group, with intersecting, often multiply labelled identities, including queer and pansexual as related terms frequently used to describe how people understand themselves. Research has shown that diverse plurisexual experiences are defined in myriad ways, but are sometimes similarly defined between bisexual and pansexual people (Flanders et al., 2017). Bisexuality is often defined heterogeneously by both researchers (Halperin, 2009) and bisexual subjects, as it was in my study. Previous research has also questioned the usefulness of bisexuality being discussed as an umbrella term (Flanders, 2017), with some defining it in binary terms and others not so. In

my study I percieved no transphobia by those defining bisexuality in binary terms and I believed participants who insisted that they were not transphobic, although this definition did subtly and arguably erase non-binary genders. One of my participants mentioned 'bi+' as an umbrella term, and the term was uncontentiously discussed during their interview. Most of my participants did not discuss bisexuality as an umbrella term, preferring to discuss their own relationship to the label, as well as political discussions on the relationship between bisexuality and trans people. The discussion of my respondents suggested, it seemed to me, that the term bisexual identities – despite the potentially problematic way in which the word incorporates a binary conception of gender – can be used, asserted and claimed in ways that seek to undermine that binary, or to open up identities beyond it.

The relationship between bisexual identity, binegativity and intimate relationships cannot be easily disentangled. To identify as bisexual, and to come out, opens oneself to binegativity. For some participants, such as Owen, who was maliciously outed by his ex-partner, this choice was removed, to others, such as Magic and Sven, it was a deliberate choice, although this was articulated in terms where there motivation was to be honest about themselves and their relationship. 'Patterns of outness' were traced across participants' experience, one could not say any were fully 'out' as bisexual, nor closeted.

Whilst intersectionality is a good framework for highlighting the experience of those at margins of multiple identities, identity categories themselves should not become the object of analysis, but rather should signpost us to experience. Ultimately intersectionality should always aim to be intracategorical in its analysis (McCall, 2005) maintaining a critical stance towards categories but using them when analytically necessary for producing a detailed account of experience. Identities are not relevant in and of themselves, but social and individual understanding are what make them worthy of analysis. Similarly, a focus on experience without an acknowledgement of the identity categories that can structurally define and limit that experience is also incomplete. The dialectical relationship between phenomenology and intersectionality can give appropriate insights, and goes some way to methodologically resolving (that is to say practically, rather than theoretically)

the problematic of structure and agency, and offers a subject-centred realisation of the sociological imagination.

The romantic relationships that were documented in this study were articulated as sites of identity development, safety, personal experimentation and exploration. Around half of the partnerships were non-monogamous, either practising or potentially. Such relationships were not non-monogamous from the outset, some had expected that the relationship would be when initiating it, whilst others, such as Xander and Kitty's for example became so, with Xander, feeling accepted as a bisexual man by his bisexual partner Kitty, encouraged to pursue a relationship with a man. His partner Kitty was not actively pursuing other relationships, but comfortable that this could be negotiated with Xander should she meet someone she liked. This kind of narrative and negotiation in the relationships was common, not just to the other participants in my study, but in keeping with what has been reported in previous research: Anderson & McCormack (2016, p. 62, citing Hartman-Linck, 2014 & McLean, 2011) highlight that bisexual couples put more time and effort into negotiating their relationship type in order to come to a sexual arrangement that suits them. To borrow the words of Christian Klesse (2010, p. 128), my research chimes with contemporary research on bisexual relationships showing "a diverse, innovative and satisfying relationship culture created by bisexuals and their intimate and sexual partners".

The family as a social structure loomed large over many of the experiences of the participants, both in terms of their relationships and in terms of prejudice. Second-wave feminist critiques of the family are, it seems, still relevant, particularly around the critique of individualism and the family, where individualism and self-reliance are, in actuality, a reliance upon the family unit. Given the extent to which bisexual identity and relationships were shaped by families, this thesis' findings trouble claims about the so-called the 'family of individuals', i.e., the decline of a traditional family unit based on kinship, replaced by the desires of individuals to jointly enter a relationship for its own sake (Giddens, 1992, as cited in de Singly, 2021, p. 28). Families were enduring sites of tensions around bisexuality and the negotiation of relationships with intimate romantic partners. Often these social relationships (with partners and with families) were positioned by participants in contrast with each other.

Where current romantic relationships were sources of validation, familial ones were often sites of misunderstanding. This was not always the case, as some participants spoke of surprise at their family's acceptance of their sexuality, but these tended to come from more peripheral familial relations (e.g., grandparents), where their sexuality was accepted but not interrogated, which seems to have often been the case for the participants' relationships with parents. Family was a primary site through which the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) and heteronormativity was articulated, either through the parental desire for grandchildren (which parents saw similar-gendered relationships as incompatible with), parents' faith/spirituality, or in vaguer uncertainties about parents' acceptance of participants sexuality that, in a range of ways, shaped participants relationships. Often the heteronormativity of families was articulated through implicit binegativity towards participants, and seemed to be articulated in the anxiety around the family's reproduction, i.e., having children, which was assumed to be threatened if choosing a partner of the same gender.

In summary, this thesis has shown that some forms of implicit binegativity are not dependent on homophobia, challenging Anderson & McCormack's (2016; Ripley *et al.*, 2011) claims about the decline of homophobia being correlated with a decline in homohysteria relating to bi men. On the contrary, bisexual men encountered explicit binegativity focussed on their bisexuality, despite the research design employed which did not include researcher-led questions on binegativity. This binegativity manifested itself in different social spheres, with public acts of explicit binegativity involving people unknown to the participants being reported, whereas people closer to the participants displayed more implicit biphobia which was related to epistemic injustices around bisexuality. The discourse of heteronormativity surrounded participants relationships with their close families, and this impacted participants' choice of partner to reflect more heteronormative expectations in some cases, sometimes in an implicit way, in other ways explicitly because the participants wanted children. Romantic relationships were shown to be fruitful sites of identity development in this study, and therefore discrimination against bisexual men on the grounds of relationships that has been shown both in participants experiences with ex-partners and in the previous literature (Armstrong & Reissing, 2014) can prevent

bisexual men from fully realising their sexual identities. In other ways, participants sexual identities as bisexual were contested on the grounds of trans inclusivity, however, participants often defended the shifting meaning of bisexuality either by adopting additional sexual identity labels (such as pansexual or queer), or by stating that the label simply fit them, and did not necessarily have to reify binary notions of gender. Therefore, bisexuality is a contested identity in many ways: implicitly denied as an existing sexuality through epistemic injustices, monosexism and heteronormativity, contested as being an inclusive enough label in an era where trans issues take centre stage within LGBTQ+ politics, and explicitly threatening to the gender order through acts of explicit masculine violence in some cases.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. In terms of the sample collected and the amount of time dedicated in the first literature review arguing for an intersectional framework for understanding prejudice (including racial discrimination), only two out of 25 participants were people of colour. The unique experiences of bisexual people of colour remain a vastly underexplored topic (particularly Black bisexual men outside of a health research paradigm, Morgan et al., 2018) could not be interrogated as much as I wanted to given the specific composition of the sample which I worked with. Despite my advertisement (see Appendix A) welcoming 'people of different backgrounds, races and ethnicities to share their experiences' more could have been done in my sampling strategy and recruitment to invite participation from people of colour. Additionally, I should have been more flexible in my questions, adapting the semi-structured format to be more responsive to the unique identity intersections that my participants experienced, tailoring individual questions to clearly important identities. Racism and sexual prejudice are intertwined, particularly when looking through an intersectional lens, and it was an oversight that this was not more keenly interrogated within the empirical aspects of this study.

The study also initially hoped to capture some differences in bisexual+ people's experiences of living in rural versus urban areas, but all of my sample turned out to be presently living in urban or suburban areas. This was despite

pursuing rural LGBTQ organisations for recruitment. Some of those with whom I spoke had experiences of rural areas, but there was ultimately not enough data for a proper comparison to take place. Urban-rural differences are understudied with regards to sexuality, and it is unclear how geographical space shapes social attitudes, particularly with regards to bisexual+ individuals. There was some context-dependent alienation felt by some participants – at Pride parades with their different-gendered partners; in 'conservative', close-knit, or rural communities. I felt there was not enough data to draw any clear conclusions, and as no participants currently inhabited rural areas, it would not have been appropriate to do so without supporting data.

Furthermore, the relationship between masculinity and bisexuality was not as fully explored as it could have been in this study. Although I analysed some of my participants' experiences of prejudice through the lens of Connell's (2005) hegemonic masculinity framework (particularly in regards to explicit binegativity), in not asking explicit questions about masculinity, bisexuality and their connection in the interviews, I missed an opportunity to explore this intersection in greater detail with participants. This is a missed opportunity for understanding the relationship between two key forces that inevitably shape the lives of bisexual men. I was cautious about which themes to include in the question schedule, as I did not want to prompt participants to disclose prejudicial experiences explicitly, and I was concerned that by asking about masculinity that this would prompt and thus structure their discussions, particularly of internalised homo/biphobia. I feel I was perhaps overly cautious in not wanting to influence participants' recollections of experiences, or in my desire to avoid framing those experiences in a certain way. Masculinity is a paradigm as much as it is a phenomenon, and I did not want my interpretations as a researcher to be coloured by a single paradigm.

This shows the limitations of phenomenology which seeks to privilege the experiences of participants and to allow these to direct the discussion, rather than centring the concerns of the researcher. As such, many important topics have not been explored in this thesis, as they were absent from the data, including sexual citizenship, bisexual people's relationship to the state and to capitalism. Monro (2015) has explored each of these in detail, and advocated for a materialist conceptualisation of sexuality, which is a novel and interesting

approach. Balancing the theoretical and political concerns of our time (e.g., late stage capitalism, marketisation of LGBTQ spaces) is difficult when participants voice concerns about other areas, particularly just the everyday experience of negotiating sociality as a bisexual person. It is thus difficult to say whether these issues are too broad or disconcerting for our participants as to be central to their experiences, but perhaps this was because they simply weren't asked, or participants did not feel as though these issues were prescient or connected to their sexuality. Regardless, these are topics which have been addressed elsewhere, and we cannot dismiss their importance, nor try to shoehorn them into analysis which centralises bisexual people's actual experiences. Instead, this thesis sought to ground the everyday experiences of the participants in the contemporary socio-political currents of the United Kingdom, an aim which I think I have achieved, despite not tying these to more explicit structural concerns, it has revealed the myriad ways in which binegativity operates to shape the lives of bisexual people.

Implications & Future Directions

I will discuss two sets of implications of my work. The first are pragmatic and the second conceptual. I think it is necessary to have practical, concrete actionable goals as a result of research, as well abstract, theoretical conclusions. As I have argued that the problems facing bisexuals are epistemological, it is only logical that I suggest that education as a solution to binegativity as a social problem. Elia (2010) sets out an ambitious agenda for including education on bisexuality in schools both within and outwith the curriculum, not simply limiting the subject to a passing mention in sex and relationship education. I concur with them that school-based interventions are an appropriate and effective strategy for challenging binegativity. Time for Inclusive Education (TIE), a Scottish, student-led pressure group have been effective in advocating for real change in Scottish government policy on LGBTQ education, demonstrating the power of grassroots activism. This kind of intervention would ensure that no sexual minority group is left behind, absent from the conversation on sex and relationships.

Different forms of sociality should be explored within the context of sexual and gender studies. Whilst I have argued that relationships are a primary

site of sexual identity in this study, too underexplored are intragroup and extragroup friendships between LGBTQ individuals. Too often such friendships, which are the building blocks of solidarity between and across social movements, are not thoroughly empirically reported. Parenthood as a bisexual person is another sphere of relatively underexplored research. Goldberg et al. (2019) explores sexuality and sexual identity in the first year of parenthood for plurisexual (bi/pan, etc.) women who are partnered with men, finding that whilst they continued to hold their sexual identities, the salience of these identities diminished over time, with their participants describing their identities as private with public assumptions of heterosexuality. Only one of my participants had children, so parenting as a bisexual was only discussed in their interview, centred around the appropriate disclosure of bisexual identities as a parent. For that participant at least, the salience of their sexual identity had not seemingly diminished nor was it seen as a private matter. As my research as shown, the family can present a contentious area of sociality for bisexuals as it sits at the juncture of the public and private spheres (Watson, 2014, as cited in Anderson & McCormack, 2016, p. 52) and is often a site which serves to reinforce heteronormative expectations. Given this, parenting as a bisexual father would be a particularly fruitful area of research, as there is little research to date on how bisexual men deal with occupying a social position which is archetypical of masculinity whilst at the same time, having a sexuality which is incongruent with the stipulations of that masculinity. Pallotta-Chiarolli (2016, Chapter 10) discusses bisexual fatherhood from the point of view of the men's partner's; highlighting the extent of "self-interrogation and problematization for parents who are borderdwellers between a parental philosophy of raising their children with a broader understanding of sexuality, family, and relationships; and parental protection" (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2016, p. 293). In other words, parents must balance disclosure about their bisexuality to their children with the knowledge that openness and being out as bisexual can potentially lead to increased secondhand stigmatisation for their children, who will have to negotiate the heteronormativity of school and other spaces that they inhabit.

The implications of this study for the legal status of bisexuals is complex. Whilst some partnerships were monogamous, around half were not. Some analysts have called for the legal recognition of more than one relationship

(Goldfarb, 2020), although, I would argue that the state should not be the most important factor in recognising relationships, if all relationships were not legally recognised there would be no possibility for the state to recognise and therefore privilege one relationship over another. Although there is a full recognition of gay marriage, as well as heterosexual marriage, and recently a change in the law has allowed civil partnerships to be extended to same-gendered couples, there is little legal recognition for bisexual people once they enter into a legally recognised relationship with a partner, no way to enshrine their sexuality as a part of that relationship. Monogamous legal recognitions of relationships are all that exist. Given a context in which the state does play such a significant role in defining or recognising certain kinds of relationship it seems important that relationships involving more than one partner should be legally recognised in some sense. Relationships that involve more than one partner should be allowed to exist, and there should be a practical way to legally recognise them.

The experiences of bi+ transgender people has rarely been explored empirically. I am proud to say that some bi+ trans experiences are represented in this study, but there is an urgent need to explore these specific intersectional experiences. There should be less focus on what most people are or how most people feel, as this can create a kind of ‘tyranny of the majority’ if it comes to define a research agenda. There should be more sexualities research focussed on people on the margins, but not simply because they are marginalised, as this risks viewing such experience through a lens of victimhood positing the researcher as a kind of epistemological saviour. Allowing such sexual minority people a voice to articulate their experience through any means (not simply as participants of a study) including art, culture, literature and beyond can only empower.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The genesis of this thesis was sparked by a disjuncture which I felt between, on the one hand, my own experiences as a bisexual man and my sociological understanding of the social and political world around me, and, on the other hand, the claims made by Anderson & McCormack's (2016) about the decline of the relevance of sexual prejudice in the lives of bisexual men and LGBTQ+ people in general. Unfortunately, I feel somewhat vindicated in my claim that sexual prejudice against LGBTQ people is more complex that the picture that is presented in the researchers' book, particularly in relation to the emerging scholarship on the connection between resurgent far-right politics in Europe and its implications for gender and sexuality (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018; Möser et al., 2022). It seems that the lives of bisexual people in Britain cannot be disentangled from wider discourses on gender and sexuality, as – for example – many participants spoke about their bisexuality in relation to trans issues, and some were trans themselves. I fear that the hostile environment that has been created for trans people in the UK since 2017 (Pearce et al., 2020) and the weaponizing of anti-trans sentiments are being used as to attack LGBTQ people who fall outside the matrix of homonormativity. More generally though, many of the bisexualities that participants described were contingent on gender (rather than sex), which further demonstrates this entanglement.

I set out in this thesis to capture some of the experiences of bisexual people living in Britain, their social lives and relationships. I have achieved my aim, capturing a diversity of experiences, many marred by prejudice and discrimination, and many equally characterised by growth, experimentation, and supportive relationships. Other close relationships were fraught with misunderstandings. My intention was not to show how bad conditions are for bi+ people, but to complicate the notion that things can only get better for LGBTQ people. I am satisfied that a nuanced and diverse picture of bisexualities and binegativity has emerged. Progress has been made towards equal rights for LGBTQ persons in recent years, but we should remain vigilant that concerns from bisexual and transgender voices are not overlooked or overshadowed within the alphabet soup; we must be able to representatively articulate our concerns with a seat around the table, and have an equal voice in developing alternative visions in the future landscape of sexualities and their intersections.

This thesis has revealed that bisexual identities emerge in a contested political space; concerns about gender politics were at the forefront of the claims the participants made about their identities, and especially contemporary transgender politics, of which there was an acute awareness and solidarity, with a sincere desire towards inclusivity. Bisexuality was often considered adjacent to other similar identity labels, such as pansexuality and queer, but this relationship was not harmonious for all participants. Some considered pansexual and queer to be more inclusive and political labels, whereas others considered bisexuality to be more intelligible or argued that it simply 'felt right' for them and their sexual identity. Bi masculinities were not hegemonic in their social location within the gender order (Connell, 1987), nor were they wholly explained by inclusive masculinity theory. Rather, they fit within a framework of hegemonic masculinity better than within that of inclusive masculinity theory. In other words, I feel that hegemonic masculinity, as a theory, continues to offer the most compelling account of the social and gendered landscape which bisexual men need to navigate, given that their sexuality positions them in what remains a subordinate social location. I argue that this is the case due the enduring prevalence of homohysteria around bisexual men's interactions with other men. This was evident in the way that some participants suffered violence (e.g., having stones thrown at them or being shouted at in the street) or faced the threat of violence (being threatened to be punched if they were bisexual). Whilst bisexual men did stand, in themselves, as examples of inclusive masculinity (Anderson, 2009), seeking more egalitarian relationships, and rejecting homophobia, the social world in which they inhabited outside their relationships with their partners could be hostile and still somewhat dominated by hegemonic masculinity.

The explicit binegativity faced by bisexual is contrasted with the more implicit double discrimination faced by some participants. This complicates the notion of a simple correlation between homophobia and binegativity, as some participants faced rejection or the fear of it from LGBTQ+ people and places, some of which was based on masculinism. The thesis also counters the claim that declining homophobia correlates with a reduction in binegativity (in the British context at least), as is claimed in Anderson & McCormack (2016) and elsewhere (Ripley et al., 2011). By examining the theory around binegativity and comparing

this with the empirical data that was gleaned, one can see that homophobia is experienced distinctly from biphobia, and that bisexual men were not immune from either. These documentations of experience were revealed despite no explicit questions being asked regarding prejudice. This thesis reveals that prejudice towards LGBTQ+ people in general and bisexual people specifically is multifaceted: a complex mixture of social, spatial and epistemological discrimination. Bisexual people were shown to be socially excluded from or unwelcome in certain LGBTQ spaces (e.g., Pride) in this study, and sometimes had to contend with disbelief from other sexual minorities in relation to their bisexuality. Relationships therefore emerged in a context where bisexuality was largely misunderstood by family members, even if they were more familiar with lesbian and gay identities and their meanings. The prejudice experienced in terms of binegativity was sometimes rooted in homophobia, but other times was rooted in epistemic injustice. Given the pervasive and enduring lack of cultural understanding about bisexuality, the erasure of bisexuality from popular (Yoshino, 2000) as well as academic knowledge (Monro et al., 2017) has had consequences in terms of discursive misunderstandings and has created specific lacunas in respect of bisexuality. This was demonstrated in ex-partners and family members' (mis)understandings of bisexuality. Misunderstandings or fears of it by parents caused some participants to feel a burden of education in correcting these assumptions are false discourses that there families took up. It was burdensome for participants because the discourses they had to unpick were not always limited to bisexuality, but also to ideas about gender as well in some cases, and some were resentful that they had to become advocates for understanding and that the parents themselves weren't willing to do their own research and learning about bisexuality.

Additionally, however, intimate relationships emerged as sources of strength and solidarity: many participants chose to partner with other bisexual people, who shared an epistemological understanding and experience of bisexuality. This fostered acceptance, but also the development of fully realised bisexual identities. Relationships were sites of experimentation and solace for bisexual men. Particularly those with partners who were bisexual women, who had typically come to their identities earlier, helped to foster self-acceptance of bisexual identity of bisexual men. It is notable that bisexual women's identities

tended to be more established. Many authors have pointed to the fact that bisexual women are viewed more positively than bisexual men (e.g. Herek, 2004), and perhaps this difference in social attitudes allowed them to establish their identities at an earlier age, which in turn then enabled their bisexual male partners to come to their identities as their relationships developed in tandem. This relational process of bisexual identity development is a novel finding within the empirical data, as relationships have long been a difficult arena for bisexual people in general. Around half of the participants were practicing some form of ethical non-monogamy, which was complex to negotiate but worked to fulfil each partner's relationship needs. Some participants spoke of the desire for ethical non-monogamy being related to their bisexuality, which at least one participant found contentious or controversial, given the pervasive stereotypes around bisexual people being necessarily non-monogamous (McLean, 2004). Others expressed gratitude for their partners being open and jointly practicing this life experiment with them, given that some people had come out later in life and whilst in a relationship; their desire for more than one gendered partner was fulfilled through non-monogamy which they had not previously practiced whilst closeted or in other relationships.

The issues that affect bisexual people are problems of knowledge and discourse. According to the experiences of the participants documented in this study, many false, draconian stereotypes exist about bisexual people. These stereotypes can be barriers to living the life that they desire, but all of the participants who I had interviewed had found ways in their intimate relationships to negotiate with their partners and arrive at fulfilling relationships with them. Given that binegativity is a barrier to finding and negotiating a relationship as a bisexual person, and given the importance which relationships can have in developing a sexual identity, relationships are of paramount importance to bisexual people, and their denial can lead to the foreclosure of a bisexual identity. As relationships must be managed between the public and private spheres, many partnerships struggled with the weight of parental heteronormative expectations, which affected partners' gender choice for some, and seemed to persist regardless of parents understanding of lesbian and gay identities. The burden of educating family members expressed by participants

was a theme that further supports the notion that knowledge about bisexuality is key to reducing binegativity.

As binegativity can affect the freedom of people to be themselves and enact their sexual identities, knowledge and awareness of bisexuality is a political problem as well. Given that visibility about bisexuality has been hampered by misunderstanding of what it is, the lack of a clear and distinct bisexual visual culture which has also hampered community building efforts (Hayfield, 2020), we must rely on collective knowledge about bisexuality to make it intelligible. As Maliepaard (2015) argues, it is through talk that we can demarcate bisexual spaces and enact identities, and thus this should be the political struggle that bisexual people must engage with, both within LGBTQ+ spaces and beyond. The challenge for all bisexual people who want to make themselves visible is to articulate bisexuality without reproducing the normative expectations of what sexuality, and sexual citizenship should be – one that expands on the rights and freedoms of people without smoothing off the edges of radicalism. The changing landscape of LGBTQ+ politics must not only allow for diverse modes of existence and for people to live with difference, it must also challenge binary ways of thinking and foreground forms of knowledge that embrace sexual identity as fluid, in ways that do not equate it analytically or politically with heterosexuality. This must involve developing an understanding of sexual identity and culture which is challenging to the status quo and which embraces different kind of practices, knowledges and ways of being.

Appendices

Appendix A: The Advertisement used for Participant Recruitment

Bi+ Men:

I want to talk to you!

I'm a PhD student who wants to talk to other bisexual men about their experiences of relationships.

I want to interview bisexual men and their partners about their experiences for a research project.

This study is inclusive of people who:

- Identify as bisexual, pansexual, or other related sexual identities.
- Identify as a man (or masculine of centre) regardless of their gender assigned at birth.
- Are in any kind of relationship, be that monogamous, polyamorous, open relationship, or beyond.

This study welcomes people of different backgrounds, races, and ethnicities to share their experiences.

You must be:

- Aged 18 or over.
- Living in the UK.
- Available to be interviewed either with your partner or by yourself.
- Available for an hour to two hours.

If you want to get in touch for more information or to participate:

Email: bimenresearch@gmail.com

University of Glasgow

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